September 2003

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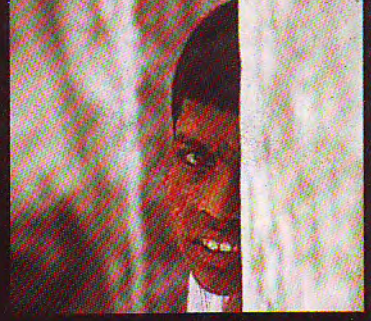

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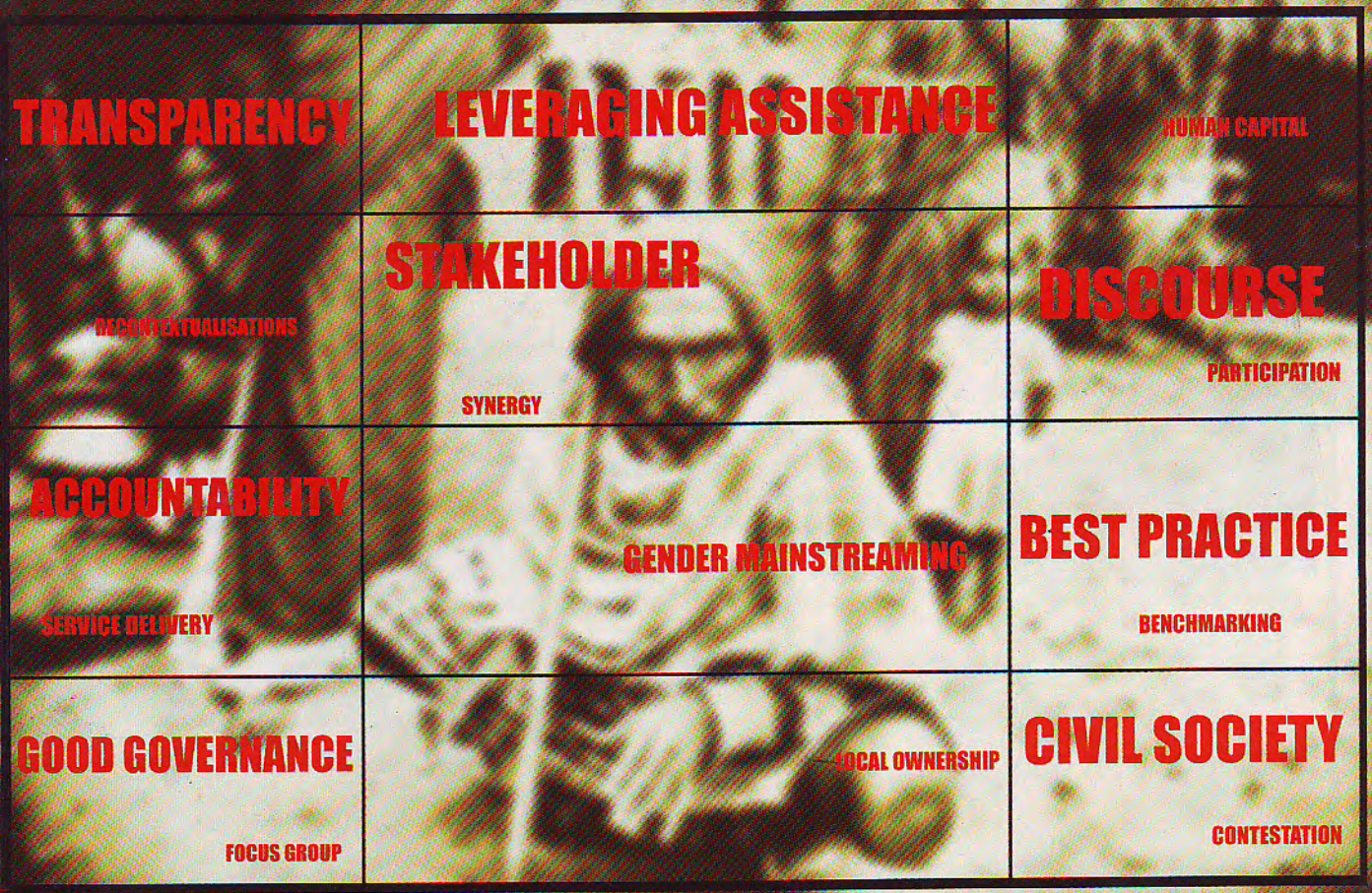

A resting place for the imagination?
My enemy, my brother, my neighbour
More on river linking

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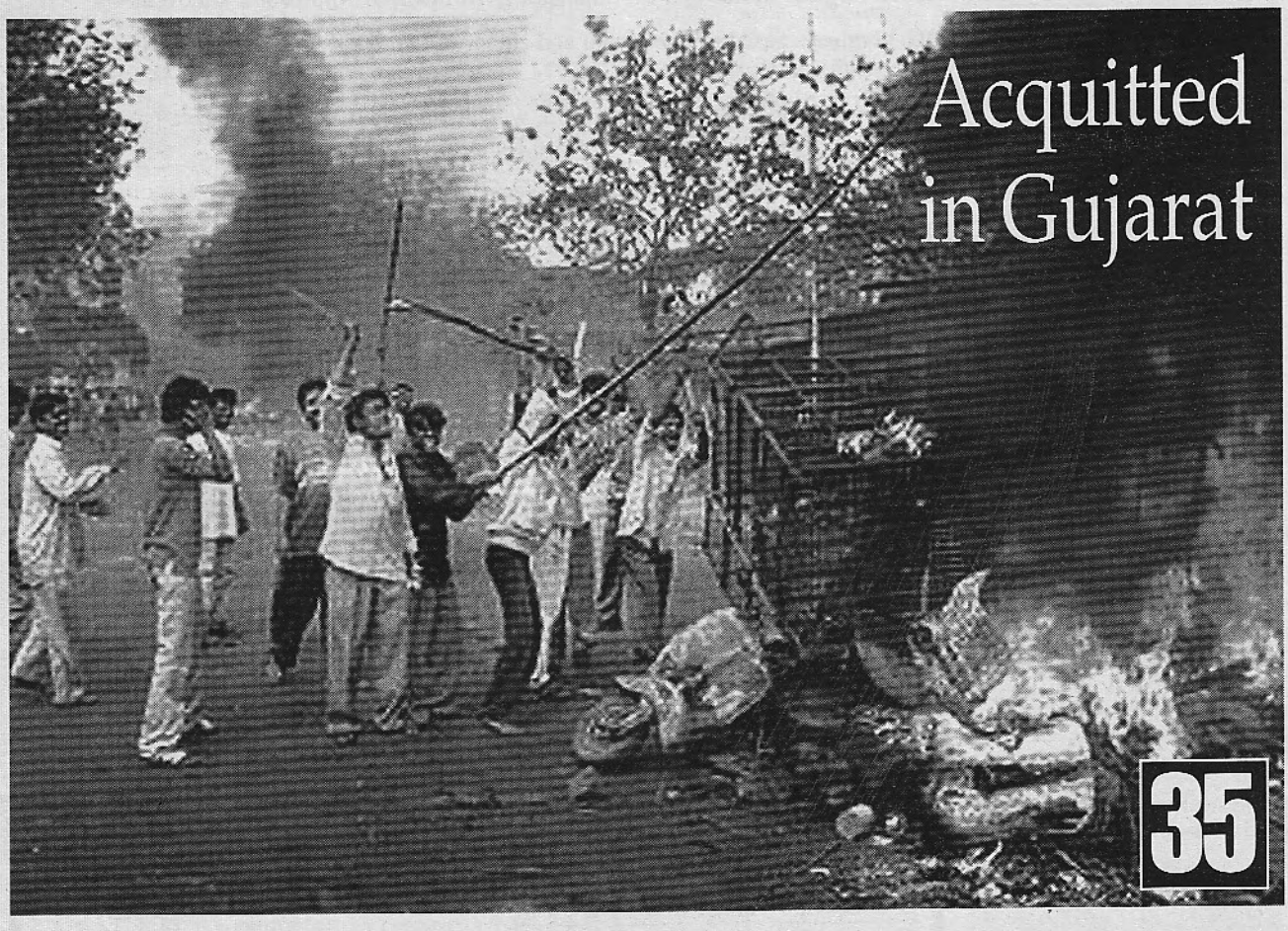

Acquitted in Gujarat

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Chhetria Patrakar is absconding and the editors are still in search of him.

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Exaggerated Fears on "Linking Rivers"

THE HUE and cry in certain quarters with regard to the idea of "inter-linking" some rivers to meet the challenges of burgeoning population, increasing water stress and the possibility of climate change appears to be both exaggerated and premature. That the proposal should excite curiosity and interest and raise questions that demand answers is unexceptionable. The official language of discourse may possibly have conveyed a false impression and needs to be corrected. However, any ideological objection to the proposition at the very threshold would be mistaken. The brouhaha essentially appears to be the product of a powerful muddle, with some critics, like the jesting Pilate, asking "what is Truth", but not waiting for an answer.

The facts need to be clearly understood for a start. First and foremost, the proposal for the "inter-linking of rivers" (ILR) is a concept and not a "project", let alone a mammoth monolithic project to be completed within a decade of its commencement with a notional price tag of INR 560,000 crore. Nor has it been conceived in secrecy and sprung as a surprise on an unsuspecting public. On the contrary, openness and transparency have been promised and wide consultations programmed with the concerned governments and all levels of civil society.

Some background is necessary. The great eastern India famine of 1966-67 led the then Irrigation Minister, Dr KL Rao, a technocrat, to present a back-of-the-envelope proposal for a Ganga-Cauvery Link from a point below Patna. This was set aside as unviable on account of the large energy requirement to lift water across high ridges. There followed a scheme put forward in 1977 by an aviator, Captain Dastur, for a lateral Himalayan canal from the Ravi to the Brahmaputra along a constant 400-metre contour interconnected with a Garland Canal girdling peninsular India. This was rejected as techno-economically infeasible and environmentally unsound. However, the idea of moving water from surplus to deficit areas survived.

The Central Water Commission, the technical arm of what is now India's Ministry of Water Resources, presented a more viable National Water Perspective in 1980. This concept paper was then handed over to a newly created National Water Development Agency (NWDA), in 1982, with a mandate to develop it further. The NWDA, thereupon, commenced a series of surveys, studies and investigations in consultation with the concerned states. Progress was reported through annual reports that were in the public domain.

The NWDA took a 40 year perspective of demographic changes, urbanisation, industrialisation and other development parameters to make a long-range forecast of requirements, matching these with water balance studies in over 200 basins and sub-basins, potential diversion points and storage sites. Having mapped the likely deficit and surplus sub-basins, examined several alternatives and conducted a number of pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, it listed 30 promising inter-basin transfer links.

The broad outlines were known. This writer referred to the NWDA's work in books published as far back as 1990 and 1994 (*Waters of Hope*, Oxford IBH and *Winning the Future*, Konark). Specific storages and intra-basin transfers with reference to Manibhadra (Mahanadi), Inchampalli and Pollavaram (Godavari), were in fact hotly debated over the years and found mention at seminars, lectures and in professional circles. A possible Sun-Koshi (Bhutan)-Teesta-Mahananda-Farakka link (since stalled on environmental grounds) was referred to at the signing of the 1996 Ganga water sharing treaty and effusively welcomed by Bangladesh as a potential source of augmenting the lean season flows of the Ganga. .

Of the 30 inter-basin water transfer projects proposed, nine are independent links from A (surplus basin) to B (deficit basin). The remaining 21 are more complex interdependent links that in combination make up a few major inter-basin transfer systems. Of the total, 16 are peninsular links and 14 Himalayan. Broad costs and benefits were also estimated. Some 3700 MW would be required to lift water across major watershed ridges and by no more than 116 metres. The additional water stored and diverted could irrigate 35 million hectares (m/ha), largely in water-stressed and drought-prone regions, 10 m/ha of this through groundwater. The energy dividend was placed at 34,000 MW. The storages would provide a considerable flood cushion and some of the link canals could permit inland navigation.

If all the 30 links were taken up, NWDA estimated that the task could be completed within 35 years of the commencement of construction at a notional cost of INR 560,000 crore at 2002 prices.

Misinformed rhetoric

It is necessary to dispel the impression that the ILR concept is being exclusively driven by a judicial decree. The sequence of events is that the standoff between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu on the sharing of Cauvery waters led a public interest litigant to petition the Supreme Court to the effect that the NDWA's proposals might yield a solution. The Court commended the idea to the Government as 'obiter' and the Centre promptly responded by appointing a Task Force. If the Court suggested implementation of ILR by 2016, it did so only to warn against procrastination and impart a sense of urgency to the problem.

The transfer of water over long distances and even across basins is neither a wild nor novel idea. It has been done the world over and certainly in India over the centuries. China's Grand Canal, Roman aqueducts and water channels laboriously burrowed through

miles of mountain to tap springs and snowmelt in Iran and elsewhere are well known. In more recent times, the Periyar, that flows west into the Arabian Sea, was in 1985 diverted eastwards through the High Ranges of what is now Kerala, in order to replenish the Vaigai river in Tamil Nadu. The famous Periyar Game Sanctuary was a by-product of that enterprise. The great Indus and Ganga canals built over 100 years ago constitute an elaborate inter-basin network. The Krishna-Cuddapah (Pennar basin) Canal and the Telegu Ganga canal to supply drinking water to Chennai are other examples.

More ambitiously, the Indira Gandhi Nahar (IGN) or Rajasthan Canal carries over eight million acre feet of Ravi and Beas waters through the Bhakra system to irrigate a swathe of land along the western edge of Rajasthan's Thar desert. The IGN supplies drinking water to over 10 million people and, despite certain problems, has been a tremendous boon. (see *Winning the Future*). The Sardar Sarovar Project carries Narmada waters across seven basins to the arid areas of North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch. Though still incomplete, it truly proved a lifeline for millions during the last two years of successive drought.

As earlier mentioned, ILR is not a "project". The terms of reference of the Task Force require it to bring about a consensus among the concerned states (which have expressed divergent views about the NWDA's studies and proposals) and provide guidance on norms of appraisal for individual links. The recipient and the donor states have very different perceptions of what is feasible and desirable, as is the case between the upper and lower riparian, worldwide. The Task Force will prioritise different components for the preparation of detailed project reports and look into all aspects of economic viability, socio-economic and environmental impacts, resettlement plans and the international dimensions involved. It has been asked to propose a suitable organisational structure for subsequent project implementation and to consider various modalities for funding.

The Task Force is reviewing critically the recommended links and it is possible that some of them may be re-aligned, telescoped or even dropped. The states have their own master plans for water resource development and established priorities and political commitments. Divergent views will have to be reconciled and compromises made. There could be tradeoffs. Win-win solutions will have to be found. The Himalayan component will entail delicate diplomatic negotiations with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. It is only after this elaborate exercise is completed that specific projects will emerge to then move forward at their own pace, as circumstances dictate.

If a target date of 2016 has been mentioned for achieving the "goal", this is to urge expedition more than meet a given deadline. To expect closure by 2016 would be unrealistic. NWDA estimated a time span of 35 years. Actual implementation could well take longer, being conditioned by political and technological changes and other exigencies. The Prime Minister of India hinted at what might happen in his August 15 address to the nation. He said that two links would be prioritised during 2003-04. These will be from among the simpler, independent links. Their detailed project reports (DPRs) could be completed within the next two years. During and following this phase, there will need to be widespread consultations, not least with civil society, through public hearings, and concerned stakeholders, and mandatory clearances secured. ILR is therefore best seen as a dynamic concept, a work in progress.

Myopic worries

Some would argue that small is beautiful and it should not be assumed that ILR is the solution to India's water problems. Small may certainly be beautiful but not necessarily sufficient or cost-effective. Traditional water conservation methods or small water harvesting structures are vulnerable to irregular rainfall or prolonged drought when most required. If the rain does not fall, there is little or nothing to harvest. Further, if all rain is harvested *in situ*, at least some smaller, rain-fed streams could run dry. Large dams are also water harvesting structures, except that they tap a larger catchment. Dams essentially store the monsoon and redistribute it through canal networks over space and time. Carry-over storage offers insurance by evening out fluctuations in rainfall over good and bad years. ILR carries this principle further through inter-basin transfers. Aversion of distress migration is a crying need.

This is not to denigrate micro- and mini-means of moisture conservation through rainwater and roof top harvesting, groundwater recharge, dug wells, ponds and tanks, check bunds, de-silting of water bodies, contour bunding, improved tillage practices, watershed management, afforestation and anything else. There is nothing to prevent individuals, communities and NGOs from taking up such schemes. Indeed, the Central and State governments have increasingly been propagating such programmes and supporting them with hundreds and thousands of crores of funding. The budgetary allocations and micro-credit and bank finance for such works are on the increase. Rooftop and rainwater harvesting are being assisted and subsidised in urban areas. A Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Groundwater (2002) envisages recharge of over 36,000 million cubic metre (m cu m) of monsoon runoff through construction of four million roof top rain water harvesting structures. INR 175 crore have been budgeted for the Tenth Plan. A pittance? The amounts committed across the board add up to a handsome total. Of course, more can be done. But that can be said of everything.

According to some critics, ILR will largely benefit better-endowed areas while rain fed regions remain marginalised. This is not true. The larger part of the 35 m/ha of additional irrigation envisaged by the NWDA would be in dry farming regions. Compared to the vast area still under raid-fed crops, this additionality could

be described as "marginal". But only cynics will see it that way.

While, watershed management programmes have been sustained over many years, substantial areas still require treatment. A study prepared for the Planning Commission has estimated that a further INR 77,000 crore is needed to complete the job and contain time and cost overruns. Together with the INR 80,000 crore required to complete ongoing water resource projects, this order of funding must be found in order to ensure social justice and a greater measure of regional equity.

What of supply and demand management? Water was for long treated as a free good and not as it should be—as an economic good that must be paid for, at least to the extent of meeting the operational and maintenance costs of the delivery system. This wisdom is now dawning and is reflected in the slow yet steady implementation of water and power reforms. Volumetric pricing of supplies to water user associations, rotational watering of crops, improved tillage practices, lining of canals, conjunctive use to control the water table, improved water-use efficiency, crop planning and technological improvements such as sprinkler and drip irrigation are gaining ground.

Groundwater depletion has led to arsenic, fluoride and other categories of contamination and seawater ingress in coastal belts. Chemical use in agriculture and public health care is being more stringently monitored to ensure that toxic elements do not enter the food chain. Bio-fertilisers and integrated pest management are being encouraged to mitigate toxicity in irrigation return flows. The reclamation of saline and waterlogged lands is being taken in hand through treatment and better lateral and vertical drainage, together with the prevention of soil degradation in the first place. These are all long drawn processes. But a start has been made. Crop diversification is also gaining ground with new rotations that mitigate micro-nutrient soil depletion and help maintain soil health.

One of the most critical aspects of ILR, as of other large water resource projects, will be the resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) of those displaced or otherwise affected. Past policies predicated on land for land have not worked too well and certainly have no future. Where is the land? It is a false promise for the most part and, together with the prohibition of resettlement on degraded forest lands, has little justification. Social and cultural networks are disrupted if R&R is mandated in distant areas of the command or elsewhere in very different agro-climatic conditions and amid resentful host communities.

Land for land may be an option where land is easily available. But land is only a synonym for income, employment and security. The alternative is to provide income generation and employment opportunities, more or less *in situ*, at a higher contour, above the level of the newly created reservoir. This can be done through area development and re-training of project-affected persons during the six to eight year gestation period before the dam begins to fill.

Missing the wood for the tree

Look at any dam site. It is invariably in the hills, most often in remote and sequestered areas that have remained backward and isolated because of their inaccessibility. This very often compels the communities living there to lead uncertain lives on the basis of ecologically unsound subsistence farming. The access road and other infrastructure necessary to build a storage dam and appurtenant works at once ensures connectivity and market access and releases these communities from food insecurity as they can now switch to more productive and ecologically friendly occupations. Horticulture, herb cultivation, vegetable gardening and a new pattern of hill agriculture and livestock rearing become possible, with grain being supplied from the plains.

Such area development and the provision of a basic needs programme could absorb project affected persons in situ, in gainful employment without social trauma. Eco-tourism, pisciculture and afforestation would offer additional avenues of employment. In fact, the entire project influence area in the upper catchment could be brought within this framework of socio-economic development based on new land use patterns, so that they too feel that they are stakeholders in the water resource project in question and lend it their willing support. Money should not be a constraint as even today there are a number of uncoordinated state-sponsored hill development and poverty alleviation schemes that could be integrated to provide synergy.

The displacement of tribal communities poses special problems. The headwaters of many of the country's rivers and a preponderant part of its mineral wealth and bio-diversity lie within tribal homelands. These areas cannot be treated as virtual reservations and it simply cannot be assumed that the simple communities inhabiting them can remain outside the development process. There is a tendency to romanticise tribal life. Certainly the culture, arts and crafts and certain communitarian practices of the tribal people need to be encouraged and preserved, but not poverty and subsistence livelihoods, including living on the margin as hunter-gatherers in some cases. They too have a right to better life choices. The answer lies in making them partners in the development of their own natural resources and using this to leverage their lives.

Whether tribal communities or otherwise, thousands of residents of remote hills, valleys and forests are compelled to live off the environment and/or migrate seasonally or permanently. This migration is not because of large dams or other projects but because of lack of development. Villagers in Garhwal and west and far west Nepal, for instance, have emptied into the plains in search of work and better opportunities. The social, and more especially the unequal gender burden, implicit in this pattern of demographic erosion

and the seasonal migration of tribals such as from the Narmada valley, entails a cruel human cost. The distress migration of Malthusian refugees is unacceptable. Surely then, planned displacement with assured rehabilitation represents a development opportunity as against involuntary displacement which is a lottery that not too many win.

Worried about foreign affairs ?

The international aspects of ILR obviously require reassurance to both upper and lower riparians, that their interests will be fully safeguarded. Neither Nepal nor Bhutan or Bangladesh should or need feel that they are being shortchanged. The Ganga water accord of 1977 called on both sides to present proposals to augment lean season flows at Farakka. India argued in favour of augmentation from the Brahmaputra, which carries 28 per cent of the country's overall river runoff, whereas Bangladesh proposed the construction of seven high dams in Nepal. These included large storages on the Mahakali (Pancheshwar), Sapta Kosi (Barakshetra ??), Karnali (Chisapani) and at other sites, all of which have before and since been the subject of negotiations between India and Nepal.

Bangladesh is by and large assured of a stipulated quantum of dry season flows below Farakka under the terms of the 1996 Ganges Treaty. However, ILR will augment lean season availability in the Ganga from which Bangladesh could well bargain for a share. Dhaka had earlier expressed particular interest in the Sapta Kosi project as this is well placed to provide augmentation and flood moderation, as well as possible navigation to the sea, on which Nepal is keen.

In turn, Nepal's proclaimed desire to harness its techno-economically viable 42,000 MW hydro potential fits in with the Himalayan component of India's ILR. The principles of cost-benefit sharing and allocation of dam costs between different uses (irrigation, flood moderation, energy) have been broadly set out in the Mahakali Treaty and can be negotiated on mutually acceptable terms. Nepal has its own preferences and priorities, which must of course be taken into account. It may use all the water it requires, but regulated releases that have beneficial downstream uses in India will naturally command a price.

In sum, there is no real conflict of interest between India's ideas about ILR and the vital interests of Nepal, Bhutan or Bangladesh. Open and frank consultations would help remove lurking fears and misunderstandings—of which there are many. Indeed, an exchange of notes between all these countries on their long range water perspectives would probably reveal a high degree of commonality and a coincidence of mutual interest. Joint monitoring and management of certain facilities and the development, for instance, of a four-country energy grid or navigation protocol could be contemplated.

Some of the arguments against ILR are no more than objections to large dams and irrigation that have been amply rehearsed in the past. ILR by itself changes little. Obviously best practices must be followed all along the line—and improved upon and tailored to any special condition that might prevail.

The notion that ILR does violence to nature and changes geography is exaggerated and appears to suggest that nature is unchanging. On the contrary, nature is ever changing. The Himalaya is still growing and being washed down to the sea to build new lands in coastal Bangladesh. The Teesta once flowed into the Ganga but shifted course to join the Brahmaputra after a great earthquake some centuries ago. The derelict Old Brahmaputra still rounds the Garo Hills and flows east via Mymensingh to join the Meghna, whereas the New Brahmaputra or Jamuna flows due south to meet the Ganga and merge into the Padma. The entire lower Ganga is moving eastwards from the apex of its delta at Farakka. This first left the Bhagirathi high and dry and has done the same to the Gorai that serves southwest Bangladesh. Similarly, the story of civilisation is replete with examples of man's efforts to change nature. Improvidence and arrogance will be punished. But those who have acted wisely and with caution have prospered. The Suez and Panama Canals serve mankind.

ILR was not conceived as an employment strategy. But its construction will certainly generate very considerable employment and income and have a large multiplier effect. The Quadrilateral and Rural Road Projects are illustrative. They have created some hundreds of thousands of jobs, both directly and indirectly, and given a fillip to the construction industry (steel, cement and earth moving and construction equipment). The surge in the construction equipment market has brought in foreign collaboration and investment. India is becoming an exporter of construction equipment and accessories and a base for supplying the wider Asian market.

ILR may be expected to yield an even wider range of spin-offs. Pump-priming the economy is not a fanciful idea. Massive water resource projects were among the more potent instrumentalities used by Franklin D Roosevelt to get the US economy back on its feet during the dust bowl years after the great depression. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was only one of a series of large land and water projects taken up by the US Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers. China's western development offers a more recent case study with the South East Asian and East Asian financial crisis being countered by taking up huge infrastructural projects in the hitherto neglected western region. .

The economics of misinformation

What of the cost? INR 560,000 crore (to take the NWDA price tag for purposes of argument), is a notional figure. The payoff on earlier projects and avoided costs of flood and drought impacts will not merely service the debt but could provide investment funds for subsequent links. The magnitude of overall funding required appears daunting. On the other hand, Indian bank

deposits total some INR 400,000 crore and are reported to be growing at around 17 per cent per annum. Thus juxtaposed, the problem does not appear quite so formidable despite many other calls on investment funds. There will have to be recourse to innovative methods of fund mobilisation and cost recovery. Carbon trading could be available within given parameters for certain projects. Bhutan is reportedly contemplating exploring this option. Foreign investment may be available, especially for power projects. Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank are also in the process of reviewing their lending policy in favour of funding water resource and other high-risk high-reward infrastructural projects in the developing world. This is part of their commitment to poverty alleviation.

Demand management could also be influenced through regulated water markets that put a premium on conservation and water use-efficiency. A policy framework will need to be carefully worked out to ensure that rich states or powerful interests do not buy out the weak and needy. Modern technology also permits significant time and cost savings in the survey, planning, design and execution of large, complex projects. Satellite imagery through high resolution remote sensing provides a powerful and versatile tool for this purpose. Alternatives can be studied and sensitivity analyses and optimisation studies conducted with remarkable speed and accuracy through computerised simulation models. These techniques have been refined and are at the service of ILR.

There is need to devise ways of reconciling political and administrative interests within the territorial boundaries of states with the very different configuration of river basins and the people of a natural resource region that do not conform to political boundaries. The Indian Constitution provides for "river boards" but none has ever been established. It might perhaps be possible to encourage the formation of river basin parliaments or maha-panchayats in which representatives of civil society living within natural resource regions such as a river basin can interact and work together across political and administrative boundaries. A river parliament has been set up on a small resuscitated stream, the Arvi in Alwar district, by the Tarun Bharat Sangh under the leadership of Rajendra Singh. On a larger scale, something like this is being attempted by civil society in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in an ad hoc manner to resolve the bitter Cauvery dispute by getting farmers from the contesting states to sit together and seek a rational solution. Such efforts must be applauded and invite possible replication through the establishment of what might initially be informal consultative structures, first within sub-basins and then networking upwards. In Europe, France has legislated river parliaments.

As mentioned at the start, the language of discourse has been misleading. Firstly, ILR is obviously not an end in itself but a means to an end. It suggests a certain methodology. The ultimate objective is to give impetus to poverty alleviation, social justice, regional and gender equity and the greening of India or *Hindustan Hariyali*. The purpose is to enhance national water security for a projected population of 1600-1800 million over the next six to eight decades in the face of looming uncertainties with climate change through regional cooperation and multiple partnerships. It is not too early to begin.

ILR does not exclude or compete with any other means of achieving this objective. It is predicated on a holistic and integrated approach towards (land and) water conservation and supply and demand management. The Task Force has not been charged with micro and mini programmes that have the same goal, as this would have stretched its remit too far. However, this does not mean that such programmes are not being undertaken or coordinated by other agencies at many levels of federal governance. They should certainly be further encouraged and adequately funded.

In a sense ILR is at the apex of a hierarchy of activities that need to be integrated in order to ensure synergy. By its very dynamics and potential, ILR will stimulate and make sustainable a variety of mini- and micro-efforts that would not be viable otherwise. One example will suffice. The much maligned Sardar Sarovar canals will recharge tens of thousands of wells and fill village ponds and depressions en route. This is already beginning to happen. The water it spreads, over arid lands will also enable farmers to grow millions of trees and road side and canal-side plantations that will compensate many hundred-fold for the green cover lost to submergence and project works.

India is too big and too great a country to be entrapped by small minds. It represents a sixth of mankind and is the world's fourth largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. However, to its shame and disgrace it remains desperately poor and backward. It needs to pull itself up by its bootstraps. By doing so it will not only redeem the promise of its unmet "tryst with destiny", but could transform all South Asia by becoming an engine of enlightened growth and regional cooperation in a partnership for progress.

ILR is not "frighteningly grandiose", a "misapplied vision", "extravagantly stupid" "annihilatingly wrong", a case of putting the "cart before the horse", a "subcontinental fiasco", "a flood of nonsense", a "dangerous delusion" or a case of "hydro-hubris". All this from critics in just one issue of *Himal*. They should think again.

***BG Verghese**, New Delhi*

Need for caution

BG VERGHESE is an old friend whom I hold in high regard. We worked closely together for many years, but our paths began to diverge some time ago, and today we are far apart on certain matters. It is that profound difference between us, and not merely a disagreement

on a particular project, that is reflected in his rejoinder. Most of the points that he makes had been anticipated and dealt with in my article, and a detailed response by me to his arguments would entail a repetition of much of what I have already said. That would be an unwarranted infliction on the readers of *Himal*. Leaving aside the justifications for the project such as 'drought and floods', 'power generation', etc, which have already been dealt with in my article, I shall confine myself to making a few minimal and necessary observations with reference to some of the crucial points made by Verghese.

(1) *"The hue and cry in certain quarters with regard to the idea of inter-linking some rivers...."; "The brouhaha essentially appears to be the product of a powerful muddle, with some critics, like the jesting Pilate, asking what is Truth but not waiting for an answer"; "India is too big and too great a country to be entrapped by small minds."*

The names of the 58 signatories to the Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India cannot be reproduced here, but they include Dr RN Athavale, hydrogeologist and formerly with the National Geophysical Research Institute; Dr A Vaidyanathan, economist and former Member of the Planning Commission; Professor Jayanta Bandyopadhyay of IIM Calcutta; Dr Vandana Shiva of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology; Dr Amita Baviskar, sociologist; Shekhar Singh, environmentalist; Sanjoy Hazarika, well-known journalist and writer on matters relating to the Northeast; Harsh Mander, formerly of the IAS, now an activist ; and as many as five former Secretaries to the Government of India, apart from myself (Ajit Mozoomdar, VB Eswaran, R Rajamani, KC Sivaramakrishnan, NC Saxena). This is merely an illustrative list; no deliberate selection is intended. Are these the "small minds", the "jesting Pilates" or the "cynics" that Verghese is referring to? Does he have their concerns in mind when he uses dismissive phrases such as "hue and cry" or "brouhaha"? And does the "powerful muddle" lie in their questions and criticisms, or in the river-linking 'concept' (to use Verghese's word) and his exposition of it? I shall leave this to the readers' judgment.

(2) *"The linking of rivers and long-distance water transfers are not new ideas, but old ones of which instances already exist here and elsewhere; and they have done much good."* (This is not an actual quotation but a paraphrase and encapsulation of one of Verghese's points.)

Yes, indeed, there are instances, but to say that they have done much good is to beg the question. Confining ourselves to Indian cases, are we sure that Periyar and Parambikulam Aliyar were 'good' projects? That is not what people in Kerala think; and they are strongly opposed to the proposed Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link. The Rajasthan Canal Project is considered by many to have been a bad mistake, but it has been built, and so it makes sense to put it to such use as we can. Similarly, Sardar Sarovar was not necessarily the right answer to Gujarat's problems, but because it had already been built to a considerable height it made sense to use its waters for water-scarce areas in the recent drought. (Incidentally, Verghese refers to the Sardar Sarovar waters filling aquifers and depressions. This was not envisaged in the project; it had been suggested in 1993 as a modification of the project but that suggestion was summarily dismissed. It is now apparently found acceptable.) I am surprised that Verghese mentions Telugu Ganga: it has not been a resounding success.

These instances prove nothing. Were these the best options available? Were there other options? No one considered these questions, and they cannot now be answered. Has any proper *ex post* re-appraisal ever been done to ascertain whether the investment decision in respect of a given project was sound or has turned out to have been erroneous? In the case of old projects, say, Periyar, Mettur, Bhakra Nangal, and so on, were Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies, as we now understand them, or resettlement/rehabilitation plans (again, as we now understand them) undertaken? All that we can say is that these projects exist and have done some good; the question whether they also did some or much harm and whether the good outweighed the harm or *vice versa* simply cannot be answered at this stage. (Incidentally, Verghese refers to the "famous Periyar Game Sanctuary" as a by-product of the project. That is an odd thing to say. First the project violently disrupts the habitats and movement routes of wildlife (one doubts whether the kind of wildlife impact studies that are now mandated were carried out in the last century when this project was conceived); then some measures of mitigation are undertaken; and the sanctuary is then claimed to be a benefit arising from the project! Does anyone know the extent of distress that the project caused to wildlife?

(3) *"(The project) has (not) been conceived in secrecy and sprung as a surprise on an unsuspecting public."*

I am afraid it was. I wish to add nothing to what I have already said on this subject in the paragraph headed "Sudden Emergence" in my article.

(4) *"First and foremost, the proposal for 'Inter-Linking of Rivers' (ILR) is a concept and not a project".*

This has been Verghese's most valuable contribution to the defence of the project, and Suresh Prabhu has gratefully picked it up. My objection is precisely to the 'concept' of linking of Indian rivers. As my point has not been understood by some (I am not referring to Verghese), let me re-state it. The objection is not to a big project *per se*, or to river-linking *per se*, but to the *a priori* proposition (which Verghese refers to as a 'concept') that the rivers of India must be linked. If the point of departure had been the needs and problems of a particular area, and if an examination of possibilities indicated that water would need to be brought from outside, and if that in turn led to the postulation of a big dam or the linking of two rivers, one would have to look at the proposal in detail and not rule it out on general grounds. However, the general proposition that

the rivers of India must be linked seems to me ill-conceived. This, in fact, is the 'powerful muddle' that has many Indian minds in its grip.

(5) *"It will not be rushed through hastily but will be implemented slowly over thirty years or more. The Supreme Court's desire that it should be done within ten years was not a direction but was merely intended to induce a sense of urgency."* (This again is not a quotation but an encapsulation.)

As I have pointed out, there is a strong ambiguity here. Whatever the Supreme Court intended (the pronouncement was clearly not an *obiter dictum* as stated by Verghese), and I do not wish to comment on that aspect here, its observations have in fact been taken as a direction by the Government of India. If Verghese's explanation is correct, what prevented the government from explaining to the Supreme Court (and to the people of India) that this was not a project but a concept consisting of some thirty projects; that each will have to be prepared and processed separately; that much work remained to be done; that not all the links might prove environmentally acceptable or economically feasible; that (assuming all the links pass muster, that the necessary political consensus is achieved and that the financial resources can be found) the whole project or cluster of projects would take at least 30 years; and that this time frame cannot be accelerated? Far from doing so, the Prime Minister announced that the project would be undertaken "on a war footing", and the country (and the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha) clearly understood this to be a massive undertaking. (Suresh Prabhu has been saying that the funds needed would be of the order, not of USD 120 billion, but USD 200 billion.) As I have said earlier, there is some obfuscation here. Does the government have a `mega' project in mind or not? Can Verghese, as a member of the Task Force, persuade the Government to come out with a clear statement?

(6) *"Some would argue that small is beautiful..."*

This is a caricature of my (and some other critics') position. The point is not that small is beautiful (it may not always be so) but that big is dangerous and must be undertaken with the greatest care, and if possible, as a last option, or as the only or best option in some cases.

(7) *"The notion that ILR does violence to nature and changes geography is exaggerated and appears to suggest that nature is unchanging. On the contrary, nature is ever changing."*

No one is simplistically arguing that nature should not be interfered with. Everything that we do has its impact on nature; and that includes local rainwater-harvesting. However, the proposed river-linking project will be a major intervention in nature, and the greatest possible care needs to be taken to ensure that it will not have serious adverse consequences. It is not for the critics to prove this. It is for those who wish to undertake a major intervention in nature to establish that it is necessary and unavoidable; that alternatives are not available or are distinctly inferior; that the harm (environmental and human) the intervention will cause is not of an unacceptable kind or degree, and will be much more than offset by the good that the project will bring; that the claimed benefits are well established and warrant the intervention; and so on. I am not mentioning the techno-economic and financial aspects here.

(8) *"In a sense ILR is at the apex of a hierarchy of activities that need to be integrated in order to ensure synergy".*

Is this Verghese's wishful thinking or does the Government of India seriously think along these lines?

(9) *"ILR is not "frighteningly grandiose", a "misapplied vision", "extravagantly stupid" "annihilatingly wrong", a case of putting the "cart before the horse", a "subcontinental fiasco", "a flood of nonsense", a "dangerous delusion" or a case of "hydro-hubris". All this from critics in just one issue of "Himal". They should think again."*

Not all those phrases are mine, and I would have avoided some (eg, "subcontinental fiasco"), but broadly speaking, the caution that they convey is needed. I will certainly 'think again' and I am sure that the other two authors will do so too, but will Verghese do so? Will the government do so? I doubt it.

There are many other points that need to be made. In fact, I have difficulties with every paragraph in Verghese's rejoinder. However, I must content myself with this selective response.

***Ramaswamy R Iyer**, New Delhi*

Verghese in denial

"EXAGGERATED FEARS on Linking Rivers" is significant as it comes from BG Verghese, a member of the Government of India (GOI) appointed Task Force on River Linking.

One fundamental issue that has been raised by the critics of the India Government's river linking proposals is, do we need it at all and if yes, then for what needs and benefits? (It must be clarified that there is a fundamental difference between needs and benefits. Fulfilment of needs could be included in benefits, but all projected benefits by a protagonist may not be called needs.) The second important issue that would follow is: does river linking provide the optimal solution for achieving the projected needs and benefits, and if so how? Verghese in his response has refused to address either of these fundamental questions, other than informing us arrogantly that our population and water stress is increasing (we did not know this before?) and that river linking is also necessary for meeting the challenges of climate change (no elaboration). Perhaps he should have been a little less arrogant when the future of millions of people is involved. The people of India deserve to be given clear and convincing answers to the most fundamental questions raised in response to the river linking proposals.

Another important issue raised by the *Himal* arti-

cles was that National Water Development Agency (NWDA), after 21 years of existence has not made public any of the hundreds of reports, including the pre-feasibility study of 30 proposed links, the feasibility study of eight links, the hundreds of water balance studies of any of the river basins, sub-basins, storage sites or diversions. The Task Force, after more than eight months in existence, has done no better. We are told to remain satisfied with the crumbs of information that appear in NWDA annual reports. Verghese, who has supported the government's big dam agenda for a long time, may or may not have been privy to the NWDA. But he certainly reads and sounds like an apologist for the present-day government.

Target practise?

Verghese's response is mostly made up of statements and assertions that are either irrelevant or have no connection with ground reality. A few examples will suffice. He refers to one specific link—the Sun Koshi (Bhutan)-Teesta-Mahananda-Farakka link. If official pronouncements are to be believed, this link was never even on the agenda! In another incorrect statement, Verghese asserts that Narmada waters have been carried to arid areas of North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch for the last two years by the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP)! The fact is that whatever small amount of water is being carried to whatever small part of the arid belt of Gujarat, is being conveyed through pumps and pipes. But if Narmada's waters are being taken across by pumps and pipes to the arid regions of Gujarat, that could have been done many decades earlier and there certainly was no need for the SSP to enable this. The facts of the case are evidently not sacrosanct for Verghese, as his book, *Winning the Future* so clearly demonstrates.

The polemics that Verghese indulges in on the issue of displacement and resettlement and the government's past deeds and misdeeds, have no credibility. It is puzzling that he has not realised this after so many years of rigorous criticism that his writings routinely and regularly evoke. Even the most ardent supporters of such projects, working in the government, agree that they have done nothing right on this front. The question is, if a just resettlement is not possible, then does the government have any right to displace people and heap injustice on them? And if a just resettlement is possible, then let the government prove it by doing justice to the millions of people who have been displaced in the past before taking up further projects that involve displacement. The derelictions of the past negate all the assurances that are being held out for the future, Verghese would know that. The people displaced by the Bhakra-Nangal project are still to be resettled. This is not just the claim of anti-dam activists but an admission of the chief minister of the concerned state—Himachal Pradesh. Verghese's account of how the local people prosper when a dam is built in their region is actually no longer even a fairy tale. It is denial of a horror story.

It is nobody's case that nature is unchangeable. By putting forward such assertions in his 'behalfisms', Verghese has tried to misrepresent critics of the government's proposal. Of a piece with this stratagem is his statement about "road-side and canal-side plantations that will compensate for the green cover lost to submergence". If such statements are made in good faith they betray a monumental ignorance of the issues involved. Such ignorance does not befit an intellectual who claims to discuss issues on their merits. It is understandable if arrogant and ignorant politicians, like Chimanbhai Patel, the former Gujarat chief minister, could subscribe to this view. It is incomprehensible that Verghese should descend to such a level.

Phrases like "to leverage their (tribals') lives" that Verghese resorts to reveals his mindset. His assertion that all tribal and residents of remote hills, valleys and forests are compelled to migrate even in the ordinary course is far from the truth. As a matter of fact, wherever natural resources in their areas have not been snatched away or not destroyed in the name of development, they do not migrate. There are numerous examples of this. Neither is the destruction of their resource base the most prudent or ethical path to development. Even from within the perspective of development there are much better options available.

Verghese's logic would have been comical had the consequences of it not been so tragic. He objects to small rivers drying up because of local rainwater harvesting (this actually does not happen, but let us concede his argument for the present), but clearly has no qualms about endorsing the death warrant on hundreds of kilometres of major rivers. He asserts that the bulk of the 35 million hectares of land that will be brought under additional irrigation will be in dry farming regions, but refuses to identify which areas these are! And he will not answer the question as to why local water systems should not *first* be developed in these regions before attempting extravagant solutions. Hundreds of examples across the country, including in Gujarat and Rajasthan have shown that real drought proofing can be achieved by local water systems, including watershed development, groundwater recharge, water harvesting and so on. In such areas, not only has migration stopped, additionally, those who had migrated earlier have in fact returned. If this is indeed the case, and when we have not assessed or realised the potential of local water systems in even one basin or sub-basin of India, how can Verghese jump to the conclusion that river linking is a necessary, sufficient or even admissible option?

Foot-in-mouth

The hollowness of Verghese's defence of the indefensible is most evident from his assertions about the benefits of the proposals. The river linking map makes it clear just how wrong his claim is that most of the areas to be benefited lie in the rain-fed belt. A closer look at it shows this to be a travesty. For example, the Par-Tapi-

Narmada link is to transfer water to areas in Vadodara and Bharuch that are already fully irrigated. In this context, the claim of the NWDA that the water so freed from the SSP will be given to north Gujarat areas is meaningless because there are no plans to achieve this objective. Likewise, Verghese's statement, "The energy dividend was placed at 34 000 MW" is wrong because this 34 000 MW, if it is at all the correct figure, is only the installed capacity and that too the gross figure. If the net of the power to be consumed in construction and operation of the proposal is factored in, the project is likely to be a net consumer of energy.

Verghese's objection that local efforts at water conservation may not be sufficient or cost-effective begs several questions. Sufficient for whom? Cost effective for whom? As Som Pal, Member of India's Planning Commission, has repeatedly demonstrated, the costs of local systems are less expensive than that of large systems by orders of a quantum magnitude. As the late Anil Agarwal showed, in fact local systems are more efficient in water harvesting in low rainfall years and areas. Localities where water harvesting and management through local systems has been going on for years did not feel the distress in the last drought and even in the earlier drought of 2000. Instead of taking such facts into account, Verghese reassures readers with his enlightening wisdom that large dams are also water-harvesting structures. What is one to do with such logic?

On the long list of costs of inaction on various options listed at the end of my own article, Verghese has not cared to provide answers to most questions. Instead he tries to equate demand and supply side management with reforms and in doing so he is either trying to mislead everyone or does not want to understand these issues. His assertion that "ILR is at the apex of a hierarchy of activities" only confirms the worst fears.

Finally, though, I do agree with one of Verghese's statements, that: "Improvidence and arrogance will be punished". But I cannot quite bring myself to share his optimism. The trouble is that, as with the World Bank's "high-risk high-reward" strategy, predictably supported by Verghese, the risks and punishments are all borne by the poorest and the weakest while the rewards are all reserved for the powerful group of contractors, equipment suppliers, financiers, engineers, bureaucrats and politicians. And the even graver problem is that the decisions are all being taken by the latter group without even giving the most basic information or right of say to the former.

***Himanshu Thakkar**, New Delhi*

Arrogance is Transparency

AS A MEMBER of the government's Task Force, BG Verghese should have provided better insight into the rationale for the Interlinking of Rivers. Instead, he, like others in the Task Force, confirms that 'arrogance' is the only selling point for a 'concept' at this stage. It is being reiterated time and again by the Task Force that it will be 'open' and 'transparent'. However, it is another matter that the even the pre-feasibility reports, supposedly ready for some six or eight possible river links, have yet to be made public. No apparent reason has been assigned for this secrecy, but it is clear that such may be the case for feasibility reports and the detailed project reports also, as and when they are ready. So much for openness and transparency.

Verghese wonders why the critics ask like Pilate "...what is Truth" but do not wait for an answer. The fact of the matter is that there is hardly any 'truth'. All that we seem to learn is a cover-up for a priori proposition. Else, why is the Task Force not able to respond to the criticism on account of ecological, technical, fiscal, social and economic aspects for almost a year now? On the contrary, the 'concept' has been hyped as a panacea to all the problems without even ascertaining the 'demand for water'. I'm glad Verghese mentions that river linking is a 'concept' and not a 'project' (there has been confusion on this matter) because then all that he has said may be 'conceptually clear' but 'factually inadequate'. For a concept that is likely to alter the geography of the country, we demand more hard facts than the rhetoric of concepts!

Using popular notions about the Indira Gandhi Canal project, Verghese counts on its success in greening the desert, as an argument in favour of river linking vis-a-vis equitable water distribution across water-stressed regions. Verghese must get his facts right! The project has yet to meet its target of covering its projected command area of ten lakh hectares, but has already rendered 246,000 (nearly 25 per cent of the command area) hectares waterlogged and salinised. Further, irrigation in the desert has brought about serious discrepancies in the farming pattern leading to the exclusion of small and marginal farmers. In effect, it will be useful if the Task Force could unfold the 'truth' from some of the so-called successful projects.

Clearly, this river linking 'concept' is a ploy to woo the electorates in the next general elections. If this is not the case, why is the Task Force not even discussing the reported rejection of the river interlinking by Kerala and serious opposition on it from Bangladesh, to name just two instances. All that the critics are demanding is a well-informed debate on the issue, something which the government and the Task Force have conveniently avoided till date. Can we expect the Magsaysay Award recipient, BG Verghese, to come forward to initiate a public debate on the subject? Will he stand up to this challenge!

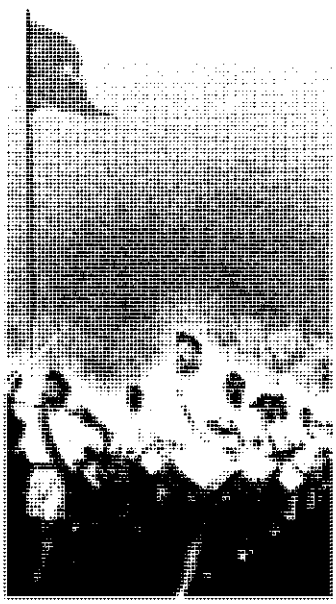
***Sudhirendar Sharma**, New Delhi*

INDIA

MYTHOLOGY OF BRAVERY

CONTROVERSY ERUPTED on the floor of the lower house of the Indian parliament, during the debate on the no-confidence motion against the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi. The storm centred on the claims that Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had written letters of apology to Indira Gandhi during the state of national Emergency which she imposed in 1975. The spokesperson of the BJP has termed this allegation "the biggest lie of the year". The Lok Sabha Speaker, Manohar Joshi is reportedly examining the contents of a letter, purportedly written by Vajpayee, which the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh sought to read out in the Lok Sabha during the debate on the no-confidence motion.

Whatever may be the outcome of the inquiry into the veracity of the said letter, one thing is certain: the not-so-glorious role of the Sangh Parivar and its affiliated organisations during the Emergency has once again come under the scanner. Today, the Sangh Parivar may want to project the impression that it led the democratic upsurge during "India's Second Freedom Struggle" (as the anti-emergency struggle is called in Sangh literature), it may wax eloquent about the way thousands of its activists were interned by the Indira Gandhi regime, but that will not hide the fact that its leaders were found wanting during the crucial period in India's modern history .



While this period is frequently invoked in political debate, scholars of Indian history have not found it fit to examine it more thoroughly. Discussions about the Emergency normally gravitate towards Indira Gandhi's authoritarian personality and the damage she wrought on democratic institutions. This personification of the darkest period in Indian democracy can only lead to a blind alley and the socio-economic factors that precipitated this conjuncture and the real role of the various organisations remain uninvestigated. The result is that forces like the Sangh Parivar have been able to construct a mythology of their putative bravery during that tumultuous period.

The internal emergency clamped by the Indira Gandhi regime on 25 June 1975 was the immediate reaction to an impending crisis brought on by an adverse decision of the Supreme Court of India and growing mass discontent. The suspension of democratic rights and the clampdown on the press were accompanied by the internment of thousands of people belonging to different political and social formations. Most of the leading opposition figures were also put behind bars. Of the 145,000 people put behind bars during the Emergency, quite a few belonged to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliated organisations as well.

It is also a fact that, the declaration of emergency gave rise to an underground resistance which was joined in by various shades of opinion. But to what extent did the Sangh Parivar participate in this resistance? It may appear incomprehensible to a lay-person that while the activists of the Sangh Parivar were in jail, its leaders equivocated to a degree that does not sit well with their claims to glory. Tapan Basu, Pradip Datta, Sumit Sarkar and others, in their publication *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, highlight the behaviour of the top RSS leadership. According to them, "RSS attitudes under the emergency revealed a curious duality, reminiscent of the 1948-49 days". While the RSS was banned and Sangh supremo Balasaheb Deoras was put behind bars, he like Golwalkar in 1948-49, "...quickly opened channels of communication with the Emergency regime, writing fairly ingratiating letters to Indira Gandhi in August and November 1975 that promised cooperation for lifting a ban [on RSS]. He tried to persuade Vinobha Bhave to mediate between the RSS and the government, and sought also the good offices of Sanjay Gandhi".

Bapurao Moghe, in an article in the RSS newspaper *Panchajanya* of 24 July1977, had also acknowledged that such letters had been written by the Sangh supremo. Lawyer and political commentator AG Noorani in his book *The RSS and the BJP*, says that these letters "[w]ere placed on the table of the Maharashtra Assembly on October 18, 1977". Noorani adds, "He wrote to the prime minister, first, on August 22 congratulating

her on her speech on Independence Day ("balanced and befitting to the occasion") and begged her to lift the ban on the RSS. He next congratulated her "as five judges of the Supreme Court have upheld the validity of your election (November 11, 1975)". It may be added that though Indira Gandhi had won the case, this victory was not based on the merits of evidence but by an interpretation of the law which had been constitutionally amended and given retrospective effect.

Indira Gandhi ?

In his letters to Indira Gandhi, Deoras pleaded for the release of RSS detainus and the lifting of the ban on his organisation. He also sought to convince the prime minister that the RSS "has no connection with the movements" in Bihar and Gujarat (which were also catalysts in the declaration of the Emergency). Deoras invariably ended these letters by offering the services of "lakhs of RSS volunteers....for the national upliftment (government as well as non-government)". In these letters, the Sangh's chief showed concern with the RSS alone and made no clemency petition on behalf of the other political organisations. To save his organisation from the onslaught of an autocratic regime, he was ready to declare that if the ban were lifted, his men would be at the service of the regime. He did not seek the release of all detenus. Most significantly, he at no point asked Indira Gandhi to lift the Emergency. It seems the only problem which the RSS leader had with the Emergency was what it did to his organisation.

When Indira Gandhi refused to budge from her stand, Deoras shot off another letter on 16 July 1976, in which he congratulated her on her "...efforts to improve relations with Pakistan and China" and also declared that she had been given misleading information about his organisation. What remains to be investigated was whether some sort of agreement was reached between Balasaheb Deoras and Indira Gandhi through the mediatory efforts of the likes of the social worker, Vinobha Bhave. Whatever the outcome of such an investigation, one fact is indeed undeniable—RSS workers were given clear instructions from the top that they give an undertaking of 'good behaviour' to secure their release from jail. The undertaking in effect said, "Shri-detenu...class-prison agrees on affidavit that in case of my release I shall not do anything, which is detrimental to internal security and public peace... I shall not do anything prejudicial to the present emergency" (*Sanghachi Dhongbaji*, Baba Adhav, 1977). According to Baba Adhav, Deoras had himself acknowledged at a press conference in New Delhi that he had written two letters to Indira Gandhi. Madhu Limaye, a towering figure of the Indian socialist movement who spent 19 months in three jails which happened to be in RSS areas, also reported that he knew of the letters of apology by RSS detenus.

Blowing the whistle

It is understandable that the Hindutva brigade which has built its world-view around the twin concepts of "bravery and cowardice" would like to forget these past episodes, when instead of demonstrating uncompromising defiance, it had preferred to equivocate. They know well that if that is not done, the whole edifice of Hindutva politics, which sustains itself on the myths of its unblemished and selfless politics, will have a great deal of trouble retaining its white wash. But public history is difficult to suppress altogether and has a disconcerting habit of resurfacing at awkward political moments. The Sangh Parivar is always riding the moral high horse, but that cannot prevent a searching scrutiny of its various nefarious compromises as well as the untruths with which it varnishes its own past.

Considering that the RSS apologies are more or less well known to many other detenus of the Emergency, it will be an excessive demand on human credulity to deny that Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a senior leader of the then Jan Sangh, who takes great pains to flaunt on his sleeve his Sangh lineage, was ignorant of the events that transpired within the Parivar and between it and the Emergency regime. The veracity of the letter purportedly written by Vajpayee will of course have to be confirmed. But the present prime minister of India was, in a political and ethical sense, very much a signatory to the false image of probity the Sangh has created when it comes to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

–Subhash Gatade

To save his organisation from the onslaught of the Emergency, the RSS chief was ready to declare that if the ban against his organisation were lifted, his men would be at the service of the regime.

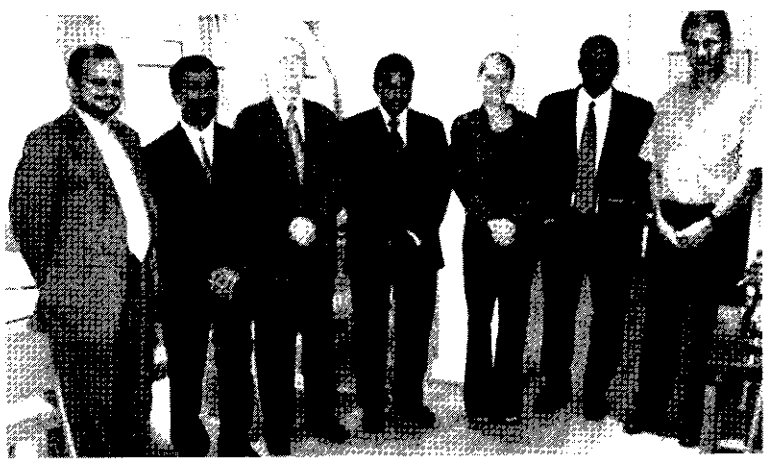
SRI LANKA

CONDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP

FOR A while, in a disconcerting five month period from April to last month, it seemed that the Sri Lankan peace miracle might be in danger of breaking down. In April 2003, the LTTE suspended peace talks with the Sri Lankan government. They also boycotted the important donor conference that took place in Tokyo that month. For the first time, the LTTE also strongly criticised the government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe for trying to deny the Tamil people their just rights.

However, more recently the LTTE appears to be reconsidering its strategy. There appears to be a serious effort being made on the part of the LTTE to reach an understanding with the government. The core of the LTTE's continuing partnership with the government is its preference for dealing with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe rather than with the opposition political parties that are led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The fortnight that has followed the Paris meeting, at which the LTTE's constitutional committee finalised its deliberations, has hardly generated any negative news worthy of attention. The main news items pertain to the LTTE's flouting of rulings by the international monitors regarding the setting up of its camp (or camps) in government-controlled territory in Trincomalee. The LTTE claims that these camps are in territory they have controlled in the past. The photographs of a camp carried in the news media do not indicate any militarily significant construction.



The new team, sans Balasingham.

The area in the Trincomalee district where the highlighted LTTE camp has been set up is in contested multi-ethnic territory. The three communities of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese are equally represented in terms of numbers in the district. Recent months have seen an increase in tension between the Muslims and Tamils in particular, with violence against the Muslims by the LTTE. It is possible that the LTTE's determination is to stake a Tamil claim to that part of the east, as part of the Tamil-Muslim rivalry for land, rather than being an LTTE-government military rivalry.

On the other hand, the continuing refusal of the LTTE to vacate its position in Trincomalee is being exploited by the opposition political parties to the maximum. The opposition parties cannot be faulted for making the LTTE's defiance of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission an issue. The LTTE's refusal to heed repeated rulings of the international monitors causes anxiety amongst the general population and erodes the possibility of the LTTE gaining the international legitimacy that it seeks.

Despite the outstanding issue of the Trincomalee camp, the sense of crisis in the relationship between the government and LTTE that seemed so acute in April, just prior to the Tokyo donor conference, and in the weeks that followed, appears to have receded. With the conclusion of the Paris meeting, the peace process has reached a new stage of consolidation. There appears to be a regaining of the government-LTTE partnership in the peace process. But on this occasion it is with a difference.

New partnership

In the five-month period between September 2002 and February 2003, before the LTTE suspended peace talks with the government, the notion of a government-LTTE partnership was boldly presented at consecutive rounds of peace talks held under the glare of international publicity. Professor GL Peiris and Dr Anton Balasingham, leading the two negotiating teams, were flamboyant in demonstrating their mutual understanding and meeting of minds. But now the partnership has taken a more covert turn. It is carried out rationally and in a more confidential manner by the real powers behind the scenes, meaning the very

BALASINGHAM'S SPIRIT

The spirit of the man who was not present at the Paris meeting needs to be recalled by the LTTE. The absence of the LTTE's most renowned theoretician in Paris may have been due to his ill health. But it could also be due to some of the actions and stances he took during the period of peace talks in Thailand. At a time when it looks as if he will no longer dominate the political scene on behalf of the LTTE, due credit needs to be paid to Dr Anton Balasingham, who virtually single handedly broke the deadlock that separated the government and LTTE's positions earlier.

After the consolidation of the demand for total separation in the militant movements in the early 1980s, the biggest problem in arriving at a negotiated settlement was to find a meeting point between the concepts of Tamil Eelam and Sri Lanka. The inability of the two sides to bridge the gap prevented a framework for negotiations being developed. Whatever was put forward by Tamil parties, including the famous Thimpu principles, was seen as another form of the Tamil Eelam demand. By the end of the 1990s, however, witnessing the unceasing cycles of violence in Sri Lanka, key members of the international community, including the United States, India and the European Union had stated that the solution to the Sri Lankan conflict had to be within a united Sri Lanka. What was missing, however, was the LTTE's own readiness to publicly accept the concept of a united Sri Lanka. Indeed, such a renunciation seemed impossible with the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, having told his cadre to shoot him if he ever gave up on Tamil Eelam.

In this context, Dr Balasingham's public statements regarding the parameters of a political solution made at the peace talks in Thailand broke the main barrier to a negotiated settlement. At those talks he said that the LTTE's demand for Tamil Eelam did not belong to the conventional category of a separate state. Next he went on to commit the LTTE to seek a federal solution. With the government's acceptance of this position, the most fundamental issue of Sri Lanka's post-independence history was resolved. If the great Tamil democratic leader SJV Chelvanayakam is remembered as the father of the federal concept in Sri Lanka, LTTE theoretician, Dr Anton Balasingham will be remembered as paving the way for a negotiated settlement based on the federal concept. If not for Dr Balasingham's concession, the opponents of the peace process would have been better able to generate fear within the Sinhalese people that the LTTE was really striving for a separate state through the peace process.

Today's inability of the opposition parties to agitate the Sinhalese masses by rousing in them the fear of Tamil separatism is at least partly due to Dr Balasingham's forthright acceptance of federalism. The resolution of conflicts in a sustainable manner requires that each side thinks about the other's difficulties and aspirations, and not only one's own. The Paris meeting can be described as 'successful' or 'positive' only and only when, it inspires the Colombo government and other political parties to take further steps towards realising the real aspirations of all people in Sri Lanka – the yearning for peace and an end to violence. △

top government and LTTE leaderships.

The core of the renewed partnership between the government and LTTE is the latter's preference for dealing with a government headed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinge. The alternative of a government that would bring the opposition political parties back to power is anathema to virtually the whole of the Tamil polity, including the LTTE. When questioned as to why the opposition is so out of favour with them, the vast majority of Tamil people would say that the period of the PA government was the worst in terms of the savagery of war.

Both the Tamil people and LTTE have bitter memories of the so-called "war for peace" launched by the PA government when the peace talks of 1995 collapsed. It was the LTTE which broke those peace talks. But the severity of the government's military response led to the destruction of much of the north and east, where the Tamils live as an overall majority. Public opinion surveys carried out in Jaffna reveal that the people have little or no confidence in the opposition political parties. The LTTE is undoubtedly cognisant of this fact.

The failure of the JVP's pro-war "long march" and its inability to form an alliance with the PA is likely to take the opposition-generated political pressure off the government. As a result, the current peace process is also likely to be more secure. But President Chandrika Kumaratunga's constitutionally mandated power to either sack the government or dissolve Parliament at her discretion remains a tremendous threat both to the government and to the peace process as it is currently taking place. The LTTE know this as much

The core of the renewed partnership between the government and LTTE is the latter's preference for dealing with Ranil Wickremesinge's government

as anyone else.

The LTTE today has sufficient political acumen to be aware that in dealing with the government they have to be careful not to push it too hard, and thereby fatally weaken it. They cannot risk the government falling and being replaced by the opposition. The PA's position is that the ceasefire agreement is unduly favourable to the LTTE and they will renegotiate it if they come back to power. The JVP's position is even more extreme. It is that the ceasefire agreement should be entirely abrogated and the Norwegian facilitators should be sent home. Such a course of action as called for by the JVP would certainly deal a death blow to the peace process. The fact that the PA has refused to agree to these JVP conditions for forming an electoral alliance is the latest positive news for the peace process.

The JVP's position is that the ceasefire agreement should be entirely abrogated and the Norwegian facilitators should be sent home

Alternative Mechanism

It is significant that the meeting of the LTTE's constitutional affairs committee in Paris last month was not used by the organisation to attack or discredit the government. There is no doubt that the LTTE's experts who met in Paris would have come up with a maximum demand for the envisaged interim administration. The document has now been taken to the Wanni to be approved by the LTTE's top leadership. It may even be further strengthened and maximised there.

But the important question is not the quantum of powers demanded in the LTTE document that finally emerges. The important question is whether the LTTE will insist that the government should accept its document right now as a pre-condition for restarting the peace talks. If keeping the government in power is an objective of the LTTE, it will not make such a demand. It will not seek to force the government to deliver a maximal interim administrative structure to them at this time. What is more likely is that the LTTE will publicise its position, and seek to rally longer term support among the Tamil people and international community for it.

It can be believed that the LTTE knows what any other astute student of politics knows. This is that the government has neither the two-thirds majority in Parliament nor the Presidential powers to grant an interim administration with real federal powers. It will be counter productive for the LTTE to seek to put the government into an impossible situation which will only help the opposition parties and opponents of the peace process. It was this realisation that stopped the LTTE's negotiating team, with Dr Balasingham at the helm, from demanding an interim administration at the very first round of peace talks in September 2002. This same realisation is likely to stop the LTTE again.

Peace process requires that the LTTE should be a willing partner in the peace process. There can be no peace in Sri Lanka without a willing and wholly participative LTTE. It was the former government that demonstrated conclusively to the people of Sri Lanka and to the international community that there was no possibility of making peace in Sri Lanka without the LTTE's participation. This is the most important lesson that the government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is upholding. This is also why the government and LTTE can continue to be partners in the peace process, albeit without flaunting it. △

–Jehan Perera

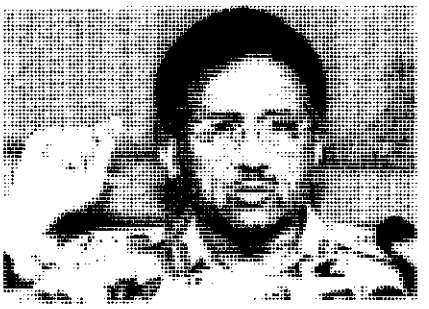
PAKISTAN

HAPHAZARD DEVOLUTION

The concept of devolution of powers to the grass-roots was floated under the Musharraf regime in late 1999. The framework for the devolution plan was placed before sections of the intelligentsia at the initiative of the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), a body made up of the President-General's hand picked appointees. Consultations with various influential constituencies of society — politicians, media and civil society — commenced soon thereafter. At the end of this process, the Local Government Ordinance 2001 was promulgated, which contemplated community participation mechanisms through multi-stage elections to multi-tiered local bodies. The new administrative reforms lead to the creation of three levels of local government: unions, *tehsils* and districts, a chain of new offices created mainly to facilitate "transparency" to and "participation" of the general public.

It is quite evident that the new system has not delivered what it promised. There are many reasons for the inefficient delivery of public service under this decentralised mechanism. The most important among these is the ambiguous rules of procedure that have been put in place. The local government system has created a fragile and weak relationship between the provincial and the district tiers. Responsibilities and functions are not clearly assigned though it attempts to administratively detach the district from the provincial government. By involving the central government in district administration, the plan ironically hits provincial autonomy by ensuring a constant tension between the federal and the provincial governments. The latter keeps complaining of shortfall of 'effective' powers of government while the former grumbles that their autonomy under the devolution plan is 'ineffective', thanks to their respective upper tiers. An example is the tension between Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) government and the district authorities, which was so serious that President Musharraf had to intervene personally to save the system from a possible collapse. Although, in letter, the devolution plan says that local governments shall work within the provincial framework, yet provinces feel that devolution has further reduced the already meagre level of autonomy that they were enjoying.

Functionally, persons exercising authority at the district-level now are unwilling to allow public participation in the decision-making. Differences of this kind -- between elected representatives and executive officials -- only add to the confusion. All decisions are being taken by the district, tehsil/town/union *nazims*, who are bypassing the elected councils, which are supposed to take up all important issues under the Local Government Ordinance. Due to the imprecise nature of the rules, tensions periodically crop up in the relations between the district nazims and District Coordination Officers (DCOs) and between nazims and District Police Officers (DPOs). Highhandedness on the part of the police also continues unabated, and the nazims feel helpless to help alleviate the police-related problems of the people. The elected councillors, on the other hand, have been complaining that their proposals or even suggestions in most matters, including the process of budget-making, which is undertaken by another part of the bureaucracy at the district-level, are not given any importance. In most districts, the system has come to a standstill. It would not be an exaggeration to say that things are running on an ad hoc basis.



Rationing democracy

Whither democracy?

Even the 'democratic' component of these arrangements is suspect. The elections are to be held in a 'party less' atmosphere, with only vetted and "morally sound" candidates being allowed to contest, while those with declared party affiliations are debarred. This paternalistic formula is mired in controversy. Further, though it is believed that the devolution process has reduced the absolute powers that the civil bureaucracy enjoyed under the previous system, the tensions between nazims and the district officers looking after various departments, has increased. This is due to the fact that the latter are recruited by provincial governments and the districts have no say in their hiring and firing. The fact that some officials with chronic 'bad' reputation are still serving in the district governments only adds to the tension. If the reform was motivated by the need to introduce system-level changes, to overcome systemic inefficiencies and inadequacies, the process has been neutralised by the inability to foster 'responsible' behaviour among officiating individuals. Will a change in the administrative apparatus make any difference if the people at the helms of affairs are not sincere enough to make things happen? The NRB has failed to bring about a change in the attitude of the persons involved in the provision of services to the people under the new system.

The devolution plan also includes the creation of Community Citizen Boards (CCBs), designed as voluntary organisations with official recognition through registration, to activate citizen participation and community empowerment. The spirit behind CCBs was to mobilise resources at the local level, make the local governments more responsive to citizens' priorities and cater to governance issues. The strategy is proposed to

Though the devolution process has reduced the powers of the civil bureaucracy, the tensions between nazims and the district officers looking after various departments, has increased

be implemented through the Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment (DTCE). The CCBs were envisaged to present community development projects for local council cost sharing. They were expected to mobilise one-fifth of the budgetary costs for improvement of service delivery towards public facilities or for the management of new development initiatives and the remaining four-fifth was to be matched by the local government.

These twin roles of the CCBs--as development partners and simultaneously watchdogs of the administrative process--involves an inherent conflict. The twenty-to-eighty ratio in partnerships could actually intensify power struggles as there is a genuine fear of the local elite securing an administrative stranglehold. The other problem is that in many areas such boards have not actually been constituted, and hence the money allocated to CCBs cannot be spent as there is no provision to let local governments use these unspent funds. There are procedural difficulties too, as existing civil society organisations are compelled to get themselves registered afresh under new names as CCBs. Such organisations are of the view that they should be granted the status of CCBs without being forced to go through such procedural rituals.

The twin roles of the CCBs–as development partners and simultaneously watchdogs of the administrative process–involves an inherent conflict

Financial 'woes'

Fiscal decentralisation is another thorny issue that affects relations between the provincial and district governments. There is no uniformity in pattern, as different systems prevail in the different provinces. For example, in the Punjab province, district allocations are one-line items in the provincial budget and not many tiers are involved in fiscal transfers. On the other hand, in Sindh, not only is the Accountant General's office involved in disbursing the payments allocated by the provincial government, but also, the allocations come under specified heads of accounts which make it difficult for the districts to utilise funds. In neither case is the district raising resources locally, leaving the newly formed district governments heavily dependent upon federal transfers. This arrangement is also a source of tension as districts complain of delays in payments due to procedural bottlenecks. There is no denying that in the interest of more effective governance district governments should have more local tax handles available to them. One possibility is that a portion from the General Sales Tax (GST) revenue being handed over to district authorities. This option will guarantee some degree of fiscal autonomy for local governments.

Under the devolution programme, local governments have also been vested with the responsibility for developmental work. Functioning democracies expect parliamentarians to be engaged in legislation as well as to play the role of genuine stakeholders in the development process. Some parliamentarians are of the view that with the devolution of this responsibility they may not be able retain their seats in the assembly as, five years down the line, they will not have tangible achievements on the basis of which to persuade their constituents to vote for them again. This obviously presents a dilemma. One way out is to allocate direct discretionary grants to parliamentarians. But this may have the counter-productive effect of ruining the devolution programme and rendering local governments redundant. Clearly, some way will have to be found to tackle this knotty situation. Ideally, since the Local Government Ordinance provides for CCBs and other district development committees, parliamentarians could be included in these bodies so that they do not feel excluded from the process.

There is also an 'international' facet to this devolution plan. It would appear that the donors present in the country have a lot of interest in the process of devolution. The UNDP supported the devolution process at its inception and is still involved in providing technical support to the NRB. With the theme of its forthcoming World Development Report "Making Services Work for Poor People", the World Bank is also interested in supporting the devolution process with financial and technical assistance. Other donor agencies too have shown a similar interest in the devolution of power to the grass-root level. If donors are genuinely eager and committed to support devolution, they should negotiate grants to the government that have the approval of concerned parliamentary sub-committees as part of the democratic process. At present, donors strike deals directly with individual departments. One instance of this is the Asian Development

Bank negotiating a technical assistance (TA) loan for the forestry sector in the North West Frontier Province. More widespread consultations with and approval of a wider set of representative institutions is necessary because loans and grants have long-term obligations and repercussions and this sort of dialogue at the parliamentary level will give broader ownership to the process.

If the devolution plan is to work well, there has to be an effective regulatory mechanism. The National Reconstruction Bureau could evolve as a local government regulatory authority, since its primary function is to oversee the devolution programme. There are, in any case, sector-specific regulatory authorities, such as the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), to impose 'checks and balances' and look after the interests of consumers. In a similar fashion, a reconfigured NRB could look after the interest of the people, as local governments discharge the main civic services (health, education, water supply and sanitation) in the public domain. The functions of this authority could be such that it has a monitoring, research and evaluation department, based on participatory research methods. Since the devolution process is essentially concerned with social engineering, persons with appropriate academic qualification in the social sciences could be deputed to the proposed office. The local government regulatory body could be designed on the pattern of other sector-specific regulatory authorities with the capacity for necessary research. This body should also have a provision for public hearings, as in the case of the NEPRA, which will give the people the opportunity to hold local governments accountable.

The proposed local government regulatory authority should engage in rigorous research on the devolution process, establish service delivery benchmarks for which no data are currently available and ensure mechanisms for assessing the performance of local governments. Had there been benchmarks available, it would have been possible to comment on the performance of the local governments regarding the difference they have made in service delivery in various fields. The research department could also learn from other countries which are experimenting with innovative ideas. At present the devolution process has not gone all the way, having stopped at the district level. Powers of local government have not been devolved to the tehsil and union council tiers. If the government is serious about devolving power, it should go to the lowest tier, that is, the village level, where there can be greater participation and involvement of the public.

–Sajid Kazmi

INDIA

COMFORTABLY NUMB

THE CURE is part of the cause in this case; as Dalits avail themselves of the advantages of reservation in India, and awareness of rights increases, the status quo of inter-caste relations in villages faces severe challenges. Increased violence, and increased reporting of incidents of violence, is a natural product. Although Dalit groups have had great success in gaining publicity for their cause, they have consistently failed to hold the Indian government to the standards of existing national and international legislation. There is, in fact, a law in place to fight the violence being visited upon Dalits, but it suffers from neglect.

In 1989, the Government of India passed the Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA), which delineates specific crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as "atrocities," and describes strategies and prescribes punishments to counter these acts. The Act attempts to curb and punish violence against Dalits through three broad means. Firstly, it identifies what acts constitute "atrocities." These include both particular incidents of harm and humi-liation such as the forced consumption of noxious substances, as well as the systemic violence faced by many Dalits, especially in rural areas. Such systemic violence includes forced labour, denial of access to water and other public amenities, and sexual abuse of Dalit women. Secondly, the Act calls upon all the states to convert an existing sessions court in each district into a special

court to try cases registered under the POA. Thirdly, the Act creates provisions for states to declare areas with high levels of caste violence to be "atrocity-prone" and to appoint qualified officers to monitor and maintain law and order.

Unlike its predecessor, the 1955 Civil Rights Act, which only concerned itself with superficial humiliations such as verbal abuse of the lower castes, the POA was a tacit acknowledgement by the government that caste relations are defined by violence, both incidental and systemic. The POA gives Dalits vital ammunition in the form of legal redress for this violence.

Although the POA is a powerful and precise weapon on paper, in practice the Act has suffered from a near-complete failure in implementation. Ironically, the primary obstacles to implementation are the primary enforcers of the Act—the lowest rungs of the police and bureaucracy that form the primary node of interaction between state and society in the rural areas. Policemen have displayed a consistent unwillingness to register offences under the act. This reluctance stems partially from ignorance. According to a 1999 study, nearly a quarter of those government officials charged with enforcing the Act are unaware of its existence.

Although the Prevention of Atrocities Act is a powerful weapon on paper, in practice it has suffered from a near-complete failure in implementation

In most cases, unwillingness to file a First Information Report (FIR) under the Act comes from caste-bias. Upper caste policemen are reluctant to file cases against fellow caste-members be-cause of the severity of the penalties imposed by the Act; most offences are non-bailable and carry minimum punishments of five years imprison-ment. Hard work by human rights defenders has slowly begun to de-crease this problem. Nevertheless, the staggering scope of the problem demands government intervention before cases can be properly regis-tered under the Act.

A bigger obstacle faces victims who actually manage to lodge a complaint. Failure to follow through with cases is alarmingly apparent at the lowest echelons of the judicial system. The statistics speak for themselves: out of 147,000 POA cases pending in the courts in 1998, only 31,011 were brought to trial. Such delay is endemic to the Indian judicial system. Although the POA mandated the creation of special courts precisely to circumvent this problem, only two states have created separate special courts in accordance with the law. In other states, existing sessions courts have been desig-nated special courts, while still being asked to process their usual caseloads. Since many different Acts require the creation of special courts, such sessions courts are often overloaded with a number of different kinds of "priority" cases, virtually guaranteeing that none of these cases receive the attention they are mandated to receive.

Even if cases make it to trial, the POA also suffers from abysmal rates of conviction. Out of the 31,011 cases tried under the POA in 1998, only a paltry 1,677 instances or 5.4 percent resulted in a conviction and 29,334 ended in acquittal. Compare this to the conviction rate in cases tried under the Indian Penal Code: in 1999, 39.4 percent of cases ended in a conviction and in 2000, 41.8 percent. Judicial delay is just one cause of this low conviction rate; the time lapse between the case being registered and the trial means that witnesses who are often poor and face intimidation in the interim, turn hostile and the case becomes too weak for a conviction. The long wait also results in many plaintiffs losing interest. Judicial bias against Dalits is rampant and unchecked, and court decisions frequently bear the mark of such bias.

Misguided movements

So why has there not been more public outcry about the dismal failings of the POA? Within the government, inefficient monitoring systems have prevented effective action from being taken. Although not statutorily mandated to do so, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (NCSCST) monitors the implementation of the Act. The NCSCST only reports to the central government, although it primarily monitors compliance with the POA in the states. The NCSCST has state offices that report to it, but those are vastly understaffed and only have an advisory relationship to the state legislatures. Such a monitoring system depends on the central government's commitment to Dalit rights for enforcement of the NCSCST's recommendations. The sorry record of the POA is ample evidence that this commitment is lacking.

The structural flaws of the monitoring system have instead led to a lot of futile finger-pointing about the failures of the POA. For example, in 1998, the NCSCST recommended that states conduct awareness programmes through NGOs about the Act for citizens and government officials. In its reply to this recommendation, the central government placed the responsibility for organising awareness programmes with the states. However, there was no indication that the recommendation would be referred to the states, nor was there any provision for follow-up between the central government and the states. Such instances of passing the buck are not exceptional; most of the recommendations, particularly those relating to land reform laws and establishment of special courts, are referred to the states without any provision for follow-up.

The NCSCST is also hobbled by its mandate. Its chairman is not authorised to release funds. Repeated requests from the NCSCST to the central government to increase its funding and staff are either ignored or deflected to various state agencies and then ignored. Similarly, the Commission can also receive and investigate complaints under its powers as a civil court, but cannot enforce its findings because it is not a criminal court. The NCSCST is virtually powerless as a result, and cannot carry out its responsibilities as the monitoring body of the POA.

Outside of the government, the steadily growing movement of NGOs also seems to be misguided. Rather than holding India to its existing legislative commitments to Dalits in the POA, the leading Dalit voices push pie-in-the-sky agendas. The re-commendations at the end of the bleak "Black Paper" released by the National Campaign for Dalit Hu-man Rights, include such absurd-ities as taxing corporations in order to fund Dalit programmes and allocating 20 percent of the GDP of the country in order to fund programmes meant specifically for Dalit welfare-- recommendations that underscore what is already in the laws (Article 16 of the Indian Constitution specifically which grants the State the power to reserve government employment placements for members of castes that are not adequately represented in particular fields, The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules of 1995, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993 (1993 Act), among others). Mandating the creation of special courts and the recruitment of a minimum percentage of Dalits in all local police forces, lose their weight in the midst of such impractical recommendations.

Worse yet, the recommendations of the Dalit groups seem to be taken more seriously than the recommendations of government bodies. The Bhopal Declaration of January 2002, a set of demands issued at the end of a conference of Dalit rights groups, included a demand for "a system of collective punishment... as oppres-sors enjoy community support and protection and escape the law". Such a measure clearly circumvents the concept of individual rights that is the basis of the Indian justice system. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh's zeal in implementing such extra-legal measures is likely to result in a backlash against Dalit rights.

The Prevention of Atrocities Act is a powerful piece of legislation. If only the many voices professing to be working on behalf of the Dalits of India could work effectively to make sure that the Central Government were held to its promises. △

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Out of the 31,011 cases tried under the POA in 1998, only a paltry 1,677 instances resulted in conviction while 29,334 ended in acquittal

In Search of the 'Authentic' Diasporic Subject

A Resting Place for the Imagination?

Although people of Indian origin have been present in South Africa since 1860, they are still objects of suspicion in the 'new' South Africa. In many quarters they are accused of exploiting Africans and having collaborated with apartheid. In a climate of increasing hostility, some Indians are asserting their links to India and claiming membership of an Indian diasporic community. The legitimacy of this 'disaporic identity' has been questioned by scholars since they do not conform to any authentic criteria of diaspora. Against this, it could be argued that searching for diasporic authenticity in narratives of the past is a red herring that blinds us to the politics of the present.

by ***Parvati Raman***

In the last twenty years, as patterns of migration continue to disperse growing numbers of people across the world, the idea of the disapora has become increasingly common in the social sciences. Utilised initially as a predominantly 'neutral' term to describe the dispersal of people from a homeland, it was largely drawn from the historical precedent of Jewish communities, a varied and complex phenomenon, which changed in character through time and space. Although they were not always explicit, certain assumptions were embedded in the idea of diaspora, which related back to "the Jewish experience". These assumptions were that a diaspora was born of suffering and loss, contained a desire a return to a "homeland", and that this dispersed population was, potentially, radical in character, a subaltern in the midst of dominant political structures. These assumptions were powerfully reiterated when the notion was applied to the forced migration of enslaved Africans, who, in the process of enslavement, were not only denied their history but also faced alienation, brutalisation and racism in their new 'home'. African American scholars helped write Africans back into history, and in the process, inscribed a sense of belongmg to an African diaspora, through the shared experience of enslavement, and dislocation from a place of origin with common cultural codes, helping create an ethos of an authentic, pan-African identity. WEB Dubois and Booker T Washington are amongst those associated with the creation of "Black Studies" in the United States, and, via the Harlem Negro Renaissance Movement, helped spawn the idea of "negritude" amongst writers such as Aime Cesaire and Leopold Sengor in the Francophone world , where all those of "negro descent" shared certain distinct characteristics.

These assumptions were also emphasised in a different way when "diaspora" came to be conceived in a sense that disrupted ideas of essentialised, national identity. In Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall recontextualised the notion of diaspora, locating it in the experience of colonialism, and contributed to an alternative reading of the constitution of collective identity. This innovative analysis tried to incorporate complex colonial histories and subvert dominant narratives of the nation state, where many of those who had migrated to Britain in the recent past found themselves "erased" from British history. In this instance, rather than pointing to an essential "pan-Africanness", the focus shifted instead to hybrid narratives constructed from the fabric of slavery, displacement and racism, as a necessary counterweight to marginalisation in British society. Diaspora thus marked a different sense of belonging, extending beyond, but also within, the borders of the nation state. (Gilroy has come to find the term diaspora problematic, and suggests the idea of "outernationalism" as a better way of understanding identifications beyond the borders of the nation state.) The idea of diaspora was interpreted as a subversive mode of identification, which challenged notions of absolute states of being. In this form, it was also a part of the shift to anti-essentialist analysis in the wake of postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of Enlightenment thought and the modernist project, after the "critical events" of 1968. This conceptualisation of diaspora also intersected with, but was not identical to, the wider project of postcolonialism and ideas of hybridity. For anthropologists stuck in a

moment of theoretical paralysis, where "the gaze" had turned back on themselves, diaspora studies seemed to offer a way out of the "crisis of representation" suffered in the wake of critiques that increasingly drew a caricature of a discipline determined by its colonial past, shaped by Eurocentric presuppositions, and theorised through such treacherous notions as "truth" and "objectivity".

Diasporic promiscuity

Diaspora studies generated a batch of new journals, which sometimes also centred on theoretical concerns that attempted to break free of "Eurocentric" perspectives on modernity and culture. *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies* was launched in 1991. From its inception, various attempts were made to create an academic template for the study of "diaspora" as the term was also increasingly used for people involved in voluntary migrations in search of work or in pursuit of trade. Since migration is a central aspect of human history, it is not surprising that the concept seemed appropriate for a growing number of populations around the world. Indicating that things might be heading for a diasporic free-for-all, where the idea was being used in several ways at the same time, in the first edition of *Diaspora*, the anthropologist William Safran outlined who could lay claim to diasporic identity. Safran returned to the "Jewish experience" as the authoritative reference point for authenticity. Critical of sociologist, Robin Cohen's rejection of this model, and citing it as an anti-Zionist stance, Safran presented qualifying factors for diasporic legitimacy. Central to this conception is the idea of a desire to return to a literal homeland.

> Diaspora is increasingly everywhere, and nearly everyone, it seems, is suddenly disaporic

Critically collating his own overview of the term, James Clifford suggested that Safran's conception was too narrow, and developed the notion of diaspora to express a state of being in later modernity, built around his metaphor of "travel". Through an analysis of Gilroy's book, *Black Atlantic*, Clifford restored a sense of ambiguity to the concept, where the idea of "dwelling in displacement" retrieved some of its earlier anti-essentialist ambitions. Here, connection to a literal homeland was not a prerequisite, but could also be an imagining. In conjunction with a useful discussion of the ambiguities of the Jewish experience, Clifford presents us with a more nuanced approach to "tracking", rather than "policing' diaspora". However, there are still problems with Clifford's description. In particular, he paints a heavily romanticised notion of the concept. According to Clifford, even "chauvinistic agendas" amongst diasporic communities are merely "weapons of the (relatively) weak'. In this particular reading, diaspora is filled with the potential of the dissident outsider. Interpretations of the diasporic have subsequently veered between the "checklist" approach and an anti-essentialist paradigm, with various shades of interpretation in between. Given this history, it is self-evident that diaspora studies have become a contested terrain.

In more recent times, diaspora is increasingly everywhere, and nearly everyone, it seems, is suddenly disaporic in some sense. Significantly, the concept has been taken up by transnational communities themselves and used as a form of self-description. This is hardly surprising, as attempts to analyse the diaspora have in themselves helped create self-consciously diasporic communities. In certain academic quarters, this has caused some degree of discomfort, not least because this self-ascription has often been tied to a politics of the right. Recently, for example, in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) have actively supported the idea of a diasporic nation for their own political purposes, only too aware of its potency in building an international network of support. In this new phase of disaporic promiscuity, a backlash was inevitable. Conferences and academic journals are full of renewed debates on the need to re-think diaspora. This new challenge has taken the form of a two-pronged attack, whose roots go back to earlier concerns. The first stance suggests that the term had become so thinly stretched that it had lost all analytic capacity. The second critique of the now 'omnipresent' diaspora is to question whether the term is, in fact, appropriate for some of the communities that use it to describe themselves. This argument suggests that if the Jewish precedent is still to mean anything, (suffering, displacement, loss of homeland), that, above all, it is rendered meaningless when appropriated by a "new privileged, mobile, post-national corporate class", the benificaries of the postcolonial world. Thomas Blom Hansen in the essay "Diasporic Dispositions" (*Himal*, 2002) levels the same criticism at contemporary Indian South Africans.

Hansen returns to the Jewish template. Noting that Indians in South Africa come from two different sets of migrations, the first consisting of indentured labourers, the second made up of "passenger Indians" (so-called because they paid for their own passage on the boat), who were mainly higher caste Gujurati traders and merchants, he contends that it is indentured labourers and their offspring who, because of forced migration and loss of homeland, conform to the real diasporic experience, and hence can lay claim to such an identity. (To that extent his argument is congruent with the perspective of a growing body of work that attempts to situate indentured Indians in the same diasporic template as that of displaced Jews and Africans.) However, Hansen suggests that their links to a 'homeland', and reinscriptions of 'ancient cultural traditions' were

limited, and subsequently, they initially had no real experience of being a part of a diaspora. He considers that Indian South Africans "developed their own identity, tied to South Africa, and disentangled from the Subcontinent, but they were also separated from the worlds of India by differences of perception, moral conduct, expectations and notions of self". In addition, he suggests that because of this history, the affluent Indian business community who now use the term to describe themselves, cannot truly be a diaspora; it is, rather, a recent invention, and a cover for the creation of business and cultural links. Hansen suggests (and I would agree) that turning their gaze to India is mainly a way of making sense of their present predicament in South Africa, where despite their long-term presence and the attempts of many to Indians to "keep their heads down", they are still widely regarded as outsiders, and caricatured as "exploitative shopkeepers". (Winnie Mandela famously voiced this sentiment during her testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.)

The implication in Hansen's article is that this claim to "diasporic identity" contradicts the true spirit of the term, which lies in the Jewish precedent, against which diasporic authenticity is to be measured. As with many of the writers cited above, Hansen's argument suggests that there is a foundational diasporic subject, born of loss and suffering, radical by nature, and in constant contact with a centre, or "home" through which the experiences of the diasporic periphery are negotiated. Indeed, one of his most insistent criticisms against the use of the term for Indian South Africans, (and other international Indian populations) is their "problematic" relationship with "home", ie that they do not really "know" India. He argues that many Indians, searching for upward mobility, define themselves as "modern", and see much of India as the antithesis of this, a place of dirt and chaos. In addition, those who have visited "home" through "roots tourism" and returned with positive responses, were, according to Hansen, seeing India through rose-tinted orientalist glasses, building romantic visions of peaceful village life as a spiritual haven. It is a no-win situation, and he suggests that this "problematic" relationship with home is also true of others in the "so-called' South Asian diaspora".

Hansen cites the growth of literature on diaspora since the 1990s, where the term "transmits a certain sense of shared destiny and predicament, but also an inherent will to preservation and celebration of the ancestral culture, and an equally inherent impulse towards forging and maintaining links with other migrant groups as well as the 'old' country". But he considers that this relates to the experience of 1950s and 60s labour and post-war white collar migration, most significantly because Pakistan and India only became nation-states in 1947. He argues that it was only people who subsequently migrated from the Subcontinent who had really formulated a "national affiliation and identity, and many were well-educated people from higher castes identifying themselves with a generalised 'great' tradition of Hinduism and Islam". He states that "what is objectionable is the attempt in the writings by such migrants to impose on the 'first generation' of indentured immigrants the sentiments and modes of connecting to the homeland characteristic of the recent generations of Subcontinental migrants". Hansen suggests that for early indentured labourers there was a "...relative lack of any clear 'disaporic commitment' or identification with the 'motherland'...", and most of them did not want to 'go home'. To "forge and maintain links with one's place of origin was not only difficult" it was also not desirable.

The contingent diaspora

This essay has a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it suggests that there is an alternative reading of the experience of early Indian migrants to South Africa, where the idea of India and 'homeland' were important components of who they were, for both the offspring of indentured workers and the so-called merchant class. That this form of identity took place some 50 years and more before Indian independence, and at a time when it was extremely hard for many Indians to maintain direct contact with 'home' makes this all the more remarkable. The Indian identity in South Africa was strongly influenced by the growth of the nationalist movement in India, which helped formulate ideas of Indian subjectivity, and an association with 'others' in scattered geographical locations. Central to this was the concept of India as the 'motherland' to which all Indians were connected.

> Diasporic consciousness is created at certain moments in time because of a confluence of circumstances

The emergence of the idea of an Indian national identity as a part of the political project of Indian nationhood that was taking place in India in the late 19th and early 20th century became an important constituent of early identity formation in South Africa. National identity does not spring from the moment of independence onwards, but is formed in the process of political struggle itself, through which appropriate cultural and political codes and ideas of subjectivity are articulated. The growth of the independence movement had an enormous influence on Indians in South Africa, both in terms of their own formulations of identity, and in the ways that they fought for political recognition there. In addition, during his stay in South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th century, Gandhi self-consciously set out to create a "new kind of Indian" built on the idea of an

ancient Indian cultural heritage. In formulating his idea of passive resistance in South Africa, Gandhi imagined a type of Indian political subjectivity that was intimately connected to India as the 'homeland'. Moreover, from the turn of the century, many of the sons and daughters of indentured workers were equally anxious to associate themselves with the ideology of Indian nationalism, and many saw India as their spiritual home.

To argue thus is not to suggest that this constitutes a template for Indian diasporic identity, but rather, that this particular expression of diaspora was a consequence of a complex set of historical circumstances. Migration in itself does not give rise to diasporic identification. Diasporic consciousness is, rather, created at certain moments in time because of a confluence of circumstances. A diaspora is characterised by the historical contingency of its 'moment', and tends to manifest itself at times of 'need'. The 'truths' of any form of diasporic identity emerge for multiple historical reasons. If we change the register of our questions, it is not so much what diaspora 'is', but rather, what diaspora 'does' that is of interest. Diasporas are not homogeneous in terms of class (or in this case caste) or political orientation. Diasporas will, therefore, sometimes also change in the ways in which they articulate themselves, as well as their alignment to a wider politics. In that sense there is no foundational diasporic subject, and that they have no pre-determined radical character. My intention is not to prove Hansen wrong by claiming that the early experience of Indian South Africans *was* truly diasporic, (although, ironically, they seem to conform to many of his pre-requisites), but that the search for diasporic authenticity itself is misguided.

Trying to locate a diaspora either through a checklist, or from an anti-essentialist paradigm, are both flawed projects, coloured by a nostalgia for a romantic, 'radical' subject, born of loss and suffering. That the concept of diaspora is informed by those two great wounds that run through the body of modernity which refuse to heal, slavery and the holocaust, makes this particular nostalgia especially potent. Further, the measure of Jewish diasporic authenticity is itself inherently problematic, reducing a complex and diverse experience, evoked in support of both left and right wing politics, to a one-dimensional model of suffering and displacement. At the core of this, the idea of 'homeland' and 'Jewishness' is highly ambivalent. For two thousand years, the Jewish homeland has been a spiritual imagining, unlocated in a physical space.

It was only with the emergence of the Zionist movement in the early 20th century that the idea of a physical nation state became the 'homeland', and at various times, it was suggested that this might be located in either Uganda or Ethiopia. Many orthodox Jews will still argue that the state of Israel is blasphemous in its physical form, and radical Jews grew increasingly disenchanted with the ring-wing orientation of Zionism and the state of Israel during the 20th century. The relationship with homeland for the Jewish diaspora is thus far from straightforward, and suggests that diaspora often conjures up a much more complex connection with the idea of 'homeland', a relationship which can be both 'real' or imagined and ambivalent. Furthermore, the diasporic 'centre' itself can change. For instance, as some scholars have pointed out, for many Muslims in South Africa, their 'diasporic centre' has shifted to Mecca. Therefore, instead of searching for authenticity, we should look to why diasporic identifications arise at particular historical junctures. For, this is precisely about human beings 'making sense of their predicament', conjoined with the power of narratives of dispersal, loss and suffering, which call for some form of political compensation. Exploring some aspects of the relationship between Indian South Africans and 'home' in the first half of the 20th century will help illustrate this.

> All Indians were seen as 'coolies' or as the 'Asiatic menace', signifying ideas of disease, economic competition, and struggles over social space

A new kind of Indian

In 1860, the SS *Truro* docked in Natal Bay with 342 'coolies' on board. The 'home' that these indentured workers had left was a long way from being a nation, and the workers themselves were a heterogeneous group, differentiated by caste, region, religion and language. The migration of indentured workers continued until 1911, and they were also joined by 'voluntary' Indian migrants. In the main, these were higher-caste Gujarati traders and merchants. These early migrants have usually been envisaged as two distinct groups, but it is dangerous to pose too much of a dichotomy between 'indentured workers' on the one hand and 'merchants' on the other. Once freed from their contracts, many indentured workers went into industrial production, but also became white-collar workers and small-scale traders. They did not form a homogenous class or group.

The 'merchant' part of the population also included many small-scale traders who lived a precarious existence, as well as a host of Indians who had come over to fill menial positions in various Indian businesses. Rich merchants often became the patrons of ex-indentured workers who wanted to go into business, and were the landlords and employers of other Indians, building a complex web of exploitation and interdependence. Moreover, in matters of political representation, South African government bodies soon began to try and disenfranchise all Indians, (despite the protests of the wealthier upper castes). In wider society, all Indians

were seen as 'coolies' or as the 'Asiatic menace', a term which encompassed ideas of disease, economic competition, and struggles over social space. Given these factors, Indians were largely thrown back on themselves, and had little choice but to form some loose sense of 'community', however fragile and contentious that might have been at times. 'Community' had to be invoked for political ends, as well as for structures of self-help, such as establishing schools, where state provision was woefully inadequate. This self-identification was reinforced by state policies that repeatedly tried to segregate Indians into certain 'locations'. Indians were the first group in South Africa to be subjected to segregationist measures. Because of these factors, from early on, there was a development of some sense of 'Indianness', although this was contested and differently experienced in various parts of the community. However, important aspects of this 'Indianness' took root through a dialogue with events in India.

In India, as a nation-wide organisation, the Indian National Congress, began to form and give political leadership to an emergent 'Indian nation'. Concurrent with a series of political demands from the British state, there was the development of a discourse that tried to create a 'national feeling' from the diverse populations of the Sub-continent. One part of this complex process was the notion of India as the 'motherland', bearer of an ancient cultural tradition, where the dignity and honour of the nation had to be upheld. These concepts were soon taken up by political leaders in South Africa, as a part of their own development of Indian subjectivity. But, at the turn of the century, Indians in South Africa also became important to Indian politicians in India, who were trying to find a voice in the international political arena. Indian disenfranchisement in South Africa soon became seen as "an affront to the whole [Indian] nation", a part of a discourse of nationalism invoked through the concept of a motherland, which represented the dignity of 'Indianness'. This 'Indianness' took on an increasingly international flavour, as the Congress was asked to intervene on behalf of Indians in Canada, Australia and Mauritius, as well as South Africa. This heralded the beginnings of a strong relationship between Indian political leaders in South Africa and those in India, as India was increasingly asked to support the fight for rights within South Africa. The treatment of Indians in South Africa soon became tied to the wider question of Indian independence. By the 1940s, India repeatedly took up the question of Indian South Africans at international for, much to the annoyance of the British government.

This relationship had important consequences for the forms of political organisations that were set up in South Africa, both for the 'merchant elite' and the 'colonial-born' sons and daughters of indentured workers. It also helped formulate ideas of Indian political and social subjectivity. Although Gandhi's role in South Africa has been somewhat overplayed, most often presented as the 'great man' who came to the rescue of South Africa's downtrodden Indian masses, he nevertheless made important contributions to the idea of 'Indianness', in South Africa, and helped establish continued links with the 'homeland' after his return to India. Even radical Indian political activists, whose constituency was the working class, appropriated Gandhian discourses of 'Indianness' and evoked them in order to mobilise political activity. On his arrival in South Africa, Gandhi quickly discovered that high-caste Indians were not immune from the derogatory stereotype of 'coolie' and he soon became known as the 'coolie lawyer'. His caste status counted for little, as he was subjected to a series of humiliations, including being kicked and punched and thrown off a train. Gandhi set up the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. Largely modelled on the Indian National Congress, its main purpose initially was to "keep India alive to Indian South Africans but to keep India informed of the situation in South Africa as well". He famously formulated many of the tenets of his philosophy whilst in South Africa, where the shock he received by his treatment there, and the lack of success through conventional political methods, precipitated him to rethink his early commitment to Indians gaining rights as subjects of the Empire through constitutional means. He began to formulate a politics that presented itself as being based on a specifically Indian character, a character that was quintessential, no matter where one found oneself in the world. Gandhi developed his philosophy from very eclectic influences, but it became increasingly understood as specifically pertaining to an 'Indian character'. Part of his inspiration for this came from his association with Jewish migrants.

Indians in South Africa became important to politicians in India trying to find a voice in the international arena

Early on during his stay in South Africa, Gandhi began to draw comparisons with the Jewish experience, and considered that Jews were "soulmates in suffering" with Indians. As he observed, "In South Africa I was surrounded by Jews. My attitude to Jews is one of great sympathy. They have got a wonderful sense of cohesion. That is to say wherever you find them there is a spirit of comradeship amongst them. Moreover, they are a people with a vision". Gandhi chose to see a similarity in the situation of Jewish people and Indians, and probably also realised the strength of its political appeal. He wanted to develop a similar collective identity for Indians in South Africa. In 1895, a year after the Natal Indian Congress was formed, he wrote in *The Indian Franchise*, "many times in the past the 'sons of India' were found

wanting and their civilisation was in great jeopardy, and yet, the ancient India is still living. The wonder of all wonders seems to be that the Indians, like the favoured nation of the Bible are irrepressible, in spite of centuries of oppression and bondage". Gandhi drew an analogy between the Jewish and Indian diasporas, which, in his eyes, were both denied justice. He saw it as the persecution of two races in exile.

This analogy became underlined in people's every day perceptions as well, partly because of the British colonial presence in the Subcontinent. For example, *The Times* of London compared the Indian 'locations' in South Africa with Jewish Ghettos. The Jewish liberals and socialists who Gandhi met were prepared to fight for the liberal-universalist values of fairplay, liberty and justice that were espoused by the guardians of Empire, and Gandhi saw the treatment of Indians within the Empire as similar to the treatment of Jewish people within the Christian world or, in more recent times, in the Russian Empire. To emphasise this, he wrote a comparative study of the Indian National Congress and the Russian Zemstvos, which were elected local self-government institutions. In his discussions with Jewish intellectuals in South Africa, there was much talk of the problems posed by unrepresented aliens within nation states or within the empire, who felt that they had split loyalties between their own people and their perceived place within the modern world. Many Jews in South Africa also had a keen desire to keep alive their own cultural traditions whilst fighting for universal rights of citizenship.

As he grew increasingly disillusioned with the possibility of gaining equality for Indians on the principle of imperial citizenship, Gandhi tried to construct an idea of 'comradeship' and collectivity amongst Indian South Africans in order to build an alternative political platform. He did this by drawing on notions of an ancient cultural heritage and a distinct Indian identity. This was increasingly articulated in terms of India as the 'motherland', and Indian subjectivity was viewed as being based on a non-violent, moral being. Despite the fact that his relationship with indentured workers was, at best, ambivalent and paternalistic, and grew increasingly romantic as his political philosophy developed, there is no doubt of his influence on many Indians in South Africa, an influence which grew after his return to India. Gandhi was at pains to include indentured workers in his conception of the 'motherland'. For instance, when a young indentured Tamil girl, Vallianma, who had been imprisoned during a major strike by Indians in 1913, died shortly after her release, she became one of the martyrs of a 'motherland' she had never known. Gandhi visited her on her deathbed and lamented:

> We mourn the loss of a noble daughter of India who did her simple duty without question and who has set an example of womanly fortitude, pride and virtue, that will, we are sure, not be lost upon the Indian community.

These sentiments were taken up by many South African Indian activists, including a considerable number who had never been to India. They helped engender these ideas in the wider community. Tamils such as Thambi Naidoo, who was prominent in the 1913 campaign, considered that he had "patriotism running through his veins" despite the fact that he was born in Mauritius and had been brought up in South Africa.

One of the most influential ways that Gandhi was to develop this idea of 'Indianness' was in the pages of *Indian Opinion*, a newspaper he started in 1903. As he grew increasingly disillusioned with constitutional politics and the idea of modernity in general, he began to formulate the concept of passive resistance, and imagine a 'new' form of politics. The communes that he set up, Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm, were seen as nurseries for the production of a new moral being. This called for a fundamental transformation of the self, a "creation of a new kind of human being, and a new kind of Indian". This conscious construction of subjectivity was, however, naturalised as it was generated in the community and developed into a Gandhian discourse, and was increasingly located in an Indian specificity. The elaboration of passive resistance was particularly significant as it was deemed to be the method of political struggle that was most appropriate to the 'Indian character' and these political debates on Indian subjectivity were developed in *Indian Opinion*. The paper was an important voice for the Indian community and helped shape the Indian popular imagination in South Africa. The paper continually emphasised a sense of Indianness, which was invoked through images of the 'Motherland' and pride in an ancient Indian tradition. This was constantly reiterated through articles about Indian history, politics, and religious texts. The paper's stated aims were:

> One of the ways that Gandhi developed the idea of 'Indianness' was in the *Indian Opinion*, a paper he started in 1903

> to voice the feelings of the Indian community, to remove the misunderstandings which had bred the prejudice of white settlers against Indians, to point out to Indians their faults and give them practical and moral guidance and a knowledge of the motherland and to promote harmony in Empire.

In all likelihood, Thomas Hansen would dismiss these factors because Gandhi was, for most of his time in South Africa, most closely aligned with the apparently 'non-diasporic' merchant elite. But his influence

on Indians in South Africa was a complex phenomenon. Also, articulations of identity are not developed in a vacuum, but are created, appropriated and translated in interaction with others. Workers and their offspring developed their sense of self not in isolation but through complex negotiations in shared social and political landscapes. In this process, ideas of connections with India were perpetuated in multiple ways, including through cultural and religious festivals, and the development of a political dialogue, which intersected with significant parts of Gandhi's political philosophy. Illustrative of this process was the observance of Muharram, which was an important factor in bringing a diverse group of workers together, as well as the newspapers started for the constituency of 'colonial-born' Indians, who, according to Hansen, were the true heirs of diasporic identity.

'Coolie' tomfoolery

The historian, Marina Carter has shown that indentured workers not only employed some degree of agency in the recruitment process in India, but that there was an understanding of themselves as a part of an international community of workers. Once in South Africa, if contacts with home were tenuous, there was nevertheless a constant stream of letters sent home through the "Coolie commissioner", which kept the idea of 'home' alive. If the initial waves of indentured workers did not sit around discussing their 'ancient cultural traditions' they certainly enacted cultural performances brought over from India, which were far more than forms of identity "encouraged by colonial authorities" as Hansen sees it. One example of this was the Muharram festival, which, although initially authorised by employers as the official "coolie holiday", soon became a thorn in the side of the authorities, and came to have a much larger significance to the workers themselves. The observance of Muharram, commemorating the martyrdom of Mohamed's grandson, Hussein, has a long history, and lies at the heart of split between Sunnis and Shiites on the nature of the "true heir" of the Prophet. In India the observance of Muharram, which consisted in the parading of coffins in the streets, self-flagellation and the tearing of clothes, was not only an assertion of Shiite identity but often assumed anti-colonial overtones, and became associated with voicing anti-British sentiment. For the participants, it came to represent a refusal to capitulate against overwhelming odds.

In South Africa, Muharram was transformed into a "carnivalesque" celebration of the heterogeneous indentured cultures that came to South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th century, a moment of contrived misrule and disorder. By taking over public space on the streets of Durban, indentured workers were able to temporarily disrupt the appalling conditions they faced in the everyday. It was also an important way of creating a common cultural ethos amongst a diverse population. An amalgam of northern and southern Indian traditions, accompanied by the copious consumption of *ganja* (cannabis) and alcohol, the "Coolie Christmas", as it came to be known, also served to reinforce white South African orientalist perceptions of Indians as a savage and heathen people, depraved in their practices and incapable of responsible behaviour. The colonial authorities soon "wanted to put a stop to this absurd annual Pagoda parading business about out streets [otherwise] we may expect shortly to have an army of these scull breaking fanatics taking charge of our borough", was how RC Alexander, the Police Superintendent of Durban put it. It was also a vehicle through which indentured workers inscribed notions of self-identification, a means to counteract the loss of self that resulted from the common ascription of 'coolie'. When faced with attempts by the authorities to clear 'coolies' from the streets, indentured workers were not afraid to challenge the authorities in question. On one instance when trouble broke out, Alexander noted:

> the police were ordered to charge and clear the area. The police then removed the pagoda to the coolie quarters, but were met with resistance in the streets and had to abandon the idea. To bring the British rule further into contempt, the coolies were permitted by the magistrates to complete their programme the next day. The coolies were triumphant, the police sullen.

By taking over public space on the streets of Durban, indentured workers were able to temporarily disrupt the appalling conditions they faced

In response, Alexander urged that "this festival tomfoolery be suppressed". This "tomfoolery" was, however, an significant example of the inscription of cultural codes, which delineated a common identity, if not equality, amongst indentured workers, translated onto South African soil from an 'ancient cultural heritage'. This in itself is of course not enough to suggest a wider identification of Indianness which transcended the borders of the South African state, but these instances of cultural reinscription have to be seen in conjunction with other factors, both in South Africa and internationally. The first of these was segregation, which began to affect Indians from the beginning of migration. By 1875, the Durban municipality tried to solve the problem of Indian 'penetration' into towns by suggesting separate Indian and African residential locations, outside of white residential areas, 'kaffir' and 'coolie' villages "remote from each other [where] coloured constables would probably have to be appointed specially to look after these villages". This was one of the first

attempts at group area segregation in a major South African city. For the next 70 years, there were continued efforts to implement these plans, with repeated endeavours to only sell plots of land to Indians on the urban periphery. In the language of the everyday, the 'Indian problem' became known as a "question of coolie habitation". 'Coolies' were equated with urban squalor and portrayed as a risk to public health, and building restrictions and sanitation codes (such as laws relating to the subdivision and overcrowding of social and commercial property) were used against Indians in an attempt to curtail their economic advancement, and restrict them to certain social spaces.

Links with the 'homeland'

These characterisations were applied to the whole Indian community, and this had important consequences. Certain localities became specifically Indian, and these landscapes became imbued with markers that were increasingly associated with the idea of an Indian identity. In particular, religious sites became important centres of cultural reaffirmation. The articulation of religion as a discursive field of Indian identity also involved inviting Indian religious figures to South Africa, which not only kept India alive in people's minds, but also had a much wider significance. Discussions about appropriate religious observances formed ways of imagining how to be 'Indian', and gave rise to a form of religious nationalism. Many of these dialogues can be traced through the pages of the Indian newspaper, *The African Chronicle*, where the sons and daughters of indentured labourers, the so-called 'colonial-born', began to find a voice to express their hopes and political ambitions.

Discussions about appropriate religious observances formed ways of imagining how to be 'Indian, and gave rise to a form of religious nationalism

That the evocation of the idea of India through the political press was not solely the domain of Gandhi and the merchant 'elite' is illustrated in the pages of *The African Chronicle*. PS Aiyar, originally a South Indian journalist, had published the *Indian World* briefly in 1898, and this was followed by the *Colonial Indian News* between 1901 and 1903. He started *The African Chronicle* in 1908. Squarely aimed at the 'colonial-born' sons and daughters of indentured workers, it set a precedent for the articulation of an Indian identity that drew from a similar pool of Indian nationalist imagery utilised by Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress, but this was combined with a strong sense of pride in their indentured ancestry, together with a powerful feeling of belonging in South Africa.

The early issues of *The African Chronicle* covered many religious issues which reflected the close relationship between religion and politics for a large section of the Indian community. These formed important links with home and were part of an attempt to re-establish a sense of religious authenticity in South Africa. There is also extensive coverage in the *Chronicle* of religious practices and the interpretation of religious texts, which became closely associated with an 'ancient cultural heritage'. These early newspapers paint a significant picture of how imaginings of India were rearticulated in South Africa. Older members of the community still had a first-hand memory of India at this time. One series of articles, titled "The Story of My Life", narrated the progress of a 'coolie' from when he was 'caught' in South India to his experiences in South Africa and gives an intensely evocative account of a South Indian village that probably came from personal experience. Narratives of this kind, together with religious dialogues, formed a language that was taking shape within the community, especially between the older and younger members. The latter had no direct experience of India, although it formed an important part of their self-definition. This was especially significant in counteracting their lowly position as 'coolies' or as the sons and daughters of 'coolies' in South Africa. Drawing on a discourse of an ancient religious and social tradition helped challenge their low status.

Other articles in Aiyar's papers indicate some of the wider social concerns of this section of the community. Women were urged to be 'progressive' and to further their education, and the formation of the Indian Women's Association received prominent coverage in the first issue. Judging from the list of its members, who are referred to as 'enlightened Indian ladies', this organisation was formed by the wives of Durban's politically active Tamil men. The association seemed widely concerned with the education of Tamil girls but also tackled issues such as the three pound annual tax of indentured workers from the 'woman's point of view". This attitude to women and the emphasis on education in *The African Chronicle*, which also noted that "sisters in the motherland" were being educated, formed part of a wider discourse that can be traced through the pages of the paper, advocating an ideal of the "modern citizen", formed through a colonial education, and with a belief in enlightenment notions of a civil society that invested its members with an individual responsibility, with democratic rights within the nation-state in return. It drew on more universal notions of freedom than the hierarchical ideas of 'civilisation' that had first inspired Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress, but it was also infused with a strong sense of Indian, and Tamil national pride. In talking of the struggle of the passive resisters in South Africa in 1908, the *Chronicle* declared: "they have been standing shoulder to shoulder to fight for a cause that effects [sic] them deeply, but they are (also) fighting for the honour and freedom of

their nation. This is a national cause". The nation they are referring to is India. The evocation of an 'ancient cultural tradition' was thus tied to very modern aspirations.

This concern with a 'national cause' was underlined by the extensive coverage of Indian politics and the reproduction of stories from Indian newspapers in the *Chronicle*. In 1908, there was much interest in 'extremists' who were challenging the conservative Indian National Congress between 1907 and 1909, the same 'extremists' who had in part spurred Gandhi's writing of *Hind Swaraj*, the seminal text that outlined his ideas of an Indian tradition that was the antithesis to modernity, and first produced in a question and answer format in the pages of *Indian Opinion*. In the *Chronicle*, articles like "Anarchism in India" discussed the value of non-constitutional methods of political action, and the tactics of violence in the independence struggle. These helped formulate ideas of Indian subjectivity. There was an inherent rejection of violence, which was represented as being against the "Indian character", followed by the sentiment that "nationalism does not and can not mean a violent departure from the inherited traditions of obedience and respect for elders and self discipline and self restraint".

For the writers in *The African Chronicle*, the "Asiatic question" in South Africa had "transformed itself into one of the greatest international questions that the imperial government has been called upon to solve". Quoting approvingly from the *London Times*, one article states "the Indian government and Indians believed that it is in South Africa that the question of their status must be determined". The status of India as a nation and the status of Indians in South Africa had become inexorably intertwined. In an article urging Indians not to "beg" for rights in South Africa, the paper declares, "The only remedy lies in aspiring for national independence". In another article extolling the virtues of the mother tongue, the paper declares: "the vedic doors are open to all mankind; India is the motherland and common heritage of all Indians".

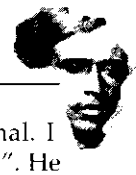
The early political press that was set up in South Africa was a particularly important vector for 'imagining India', and had a strong commitment to 'keeping alive' a 'celebration of ancestral culture', as well as a strong identification with an Indian nationalist cause. Amongst 'colonial-borns', there was the complex articulation of a sense of South African belonging, and pride in their indentured roots, as well as a strong identification with a burgeoning sense of Indian nationalism; a sense of belonging and not belonging which often characterises the diaspora. It was an identification that grew as the idea of India itself developed, as a part of an international narrative of what constituted the Indian nation, as well as Indian subjectivity itself.

Indian nationalism

Radical Indian politicians also drew heavily from this dialogue. In the 1930s and 40s, as the idea of a nation was increasingly taking shape in India, 'colonial born' activists in South Africa were busy creating a diaspora politics, informed by a sense of moral duty, and modern aspirations of statehood and citizenship. The interwoven character of Indian social, religious, and political life meant that these articulations of Indian subjectivity were experienced at multiple points in the nexus of community. To protect their position as young South African Indian professionals, many of 'colonial-born' and radical politicians challenged the compromising politics of the merchant class and asked for more decisive measures from the South African state so that Indian job security would be protected. This section of the Indian community had been badly affected by the United Party's 'civilised labour' policy in the 1920s, (of reserving certain skilled and semi-skilled jobs for white workers) and by the 1940s their urban residential status was also being challenged. Their struggles over urban space in the 1940s began a contest over citizenship and belonging which continued until the 1960s. Colonial-born Indians constructed their 'Indianness' in an ambiguous fashion which reflected their marginal position in society, where marginality also often spurred an alignment with a radical politics. However, the political discourse which they developed was also laced with ideas of 'tradition' through Gandhi's cult of satyagraha. The internationalism that they championed was also powerfully informed by an interpretation of socialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and the fight against fascism. In the South African context, these influences framed their political struggle to gain rights of citizenship.

There was an inherent rejection of violence, which was represented as being against the "Indian character"

Gandhi acted on the South African Indian imagination in multiple ways. On his return to India, Gandhi started to develop an international reputation for his political philosophy and in South Africa, there was a feeling of personal involvement in the 'production' of Gandhi as anti-colonial messenger. Other Indian politicians also loomed large in the Indian South African imagination. In the 1920s, 30s and 40s, the Indian press in South Africa was filled with news of the Indian national independence movement, and there was a palpable idolisation of Indian national heroes, through which many Indians in South Africa felt a part of an international Indian political community. At a time of increasing disenfranchisement of Indians in South Africa, as well as social and economic marginalisation, this association with India helped them make sense of



who they were. Even radical Indian politicians increasingly addressed the Indian 'community' in terms of an Indian identity tied to notions of the 'motherland' and 'national honour', inspired as they had been by the political writings of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, and the prestige of Indian independence. It is also important to put this in the context of growing fascism in Europe and the build-up to the Second World War, when anti-colonialism and anti-fascism became conjoined in a particularly powerful dialogue of liberation and internationalism.

Fatima Meer, the veteran activists and academic recalls this identification with Indian national heroes:

We became very involved with the Indian liberation movement in India, and Nehru and Gandhi were very great figures—they really loomed as superbeings, you know, they could do no wrong. It wasn't just a simple kind of heroism. They were marvellous people, wonderful people, and they were involved in this whole liberation of India, and my father was constantly writing about that struggle- -so we had a sense of goodness, and we had a sense of righteousness and we had a sense of freedom..the thing to do in life was to fight for one's freedom.

Many of the people that interviewed during fieldwork in South Africa spoke of how they had become politicised through events in India. Yusuf Dadoo, a prominent member of the Communist Party of South Africa, emerged as a particularly powerful example of a South African Indian radical, who, influenced by Gandhi (this was somewhat ironic, given Gandhi's own deep dislike of socialist and communist ideology) and the Indian nationalist movement, expressed strong ties with the 'homeland'. As with many second and third generation Indians, Yusuf Dadoo's childhood was heavily influenced by his family's tales of life in India, which seemed to contrast sharply with his experience of being Indian in South Africa. While still at school, Dadoo went to several meetings organised by Gandhi's former South African allies on Indian issues, and listened to people speak of the need to support the INC in its fight for independence. In 1921, because of the severe inadequacies of educational provision for Indian South African children, Dadoo's family sent him to Aligarh in India to finish his schooling.

Once there, and during his time in London and Edinburgh where he studied to become a doctor, he was further influenced by Indian nationalist politics. However, like many other Indian South Africans, who had romantic images of an India that they had created from a distance, on his arrival, Dadoo became somewhat disillusioned. Coming to his village in the rainy season, he was to observe glumly, "This place is full of mud and water. And it looks so grim and dismal. I don't think India is the paradise I thought it to be". He soon observed that India itself was rife with caste discrimination and glaring inequalities between rich and poor. His sentiments were to be echoed by many South African Indians who returned 'home' to try and find the India they had conceived in their imaginations. (Many of the younger political Indian South Africans I met during fieldwork had undertaken 'roots' tourism, and returned to India to visit their villages of origin, and most of them were highly ambivalent about their Indian experiences.) However, far from being some indication of a 'bogus diasporic' identity, this ambivalence in relation to the motherland in this period was a recurring, and important component of 'being Indian' in South Africa. It was a "resting place for the imagination" in times of hostility and exclusion. This is also reflected in the Indian press at this time. On the one hand, there was a glorification of India and its political leaders. On the other, whenever there was increased government legislation threatening Indians with repatriation, as was frequent in the 1930s and 40s, imaginings of India began to change quite dramatically. Echoing the reaction of the young Dadoo and his first experience of India, a memorable picture in a Natal Indian newspaper, *The Leader*, depicted a windswept village hut during the monsoon in India with the caption "Do you want to be sent home to this?"

> Colonial-born Indians constructed their 'Indianness' in an ambiguous fashion which reflected their marginal position in society

The shifting gaze

By the 1940s, Indians in South Africa were facing a host of government legislation, which affected both their housing and work. In particular, there were attempts to prise them out of sectors where, as petty entrepreneurs, they provided services, which were as yet not established by state structures. In competition with both whites and Africans for jobs, social space and services, Indians also became the target of intense hostility at this time. Indian activists launched another passive resistance campaign from 1946 until 1948 against the Ghetto Act, which tried to limit Indian ownership of property. Passive resistance, as interpreted by radicals at this time was a reformulation of Gandhian ideas. Gandhi's philosophy was retranslated and woven into notions of universal democratic rights that fed into a social democratic, anti-fascist tradition of left politics in the 1940s in South Africa, a politics that Jewish activists were also an important part of. Through trade union organisations, many Indian workers took part in the campaign. The themes that Dadoo used to address Indians during this period are telling. In a leaflet issued in 1946, Dadoo outlined the main points of the campaign, invoking India, Gandhi, and the 1913 strike:

It must not be forgotten that the Indian people are sons and daughters of a country with a proud and cultural heritage (sic). Their ancient motherland is the bearer of a tradition of civilisation as old as any in the world?.Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the first Passive Resistance struggle was launched in South Africa in 1906. It lasted for eight years and ended in a victory. The Indian people cherish the memory of the heroes and martyrs, the many noble deeds and sacrifice and bravery, of that struggle. Whilst serving imprisonment, a young girl of only 16 contracted a fatal fever. She died within a few days of her release. Her name was Valliama R. Munuswami Mudliar.

Dadoo was recalling the young girl who was transformed into a martyr and a symbol of passive resistance by Gandhi. In another statement, Dadoo declared:

It is for the removal of the difficulties of the Indian community and for the upholding of the honour of Indians that we have launched this campaign. We consider this inhuman Act derogatory to the honour and dignity of the Indian community as a whole and to the Indian nation.

By this time, Dadoo had become a transnational Indian political hero. In South Africa, in the 'vast majority of Indian homes, every one carried a photo of Dadoo', and he had also achieved a very high profile in India. Promoted as "Gandhi's favorite son", who also had the ear of Nehru, Dadoo appealed to a wide social and political constituency. Dadoo's image, seen as a badge of Indian South African identity, also transcended the boundaries of the politically active. He had come to symbolise the spirit of the Indian nation for Indian South Africans, and a particular formulation of 'Indianness' in South Africa. This rather intense relationship with India began to mean little to workers from the mid-1940s. Appeals to Indian honour and dignity did not address the crucial social problems they faced in their everyday lives, and there was an increasing rupture between workers and Indian political leaders. From this same time, Indian radical leadership began to talk less of "the glory of the Indian nation" and more of South African belonging as a part of the Congress Alliance.

The notion of the 'motherland', became a symbol of 'Indianness', evoked by the radical intelligentsia as well as other sections of the Indian community

However, from Gandhi onwards, if not before, a complex interaction with India helped constitute the political and social identity of Indians in South Africa. In particular the notion of the 'motherland', became a potent symbol of 'Indianness' and was evoked by the young radical intelligentsia as well as other sections of the Indian community. These "diasporic notions" were not confined to indentured labourers and their offspring, but were developed as a part of a complex language of belonging by various sectors of the community, with different political affiliations. At times, political agendas overlapped sufficiently to instigate joint action. At other moments, the concept of 'Indianness' became more of a contested terrain. This 'Indianness' also helped shape new cultural and political discourses in the context of South Africa. Gandhian ideas of power and social action were re-appropriated and re-represented, and became a crucial part of emergent concepts of what it meant to be an Indian political subject, and of subjectivity itself. For a diaspora community fighting multiple displacements, the configuration of an essentialised identity, or a "temporary closure", became a vital strategy in their struggle to locate themselves in the political and social worlds that they wished to inhabit, and invoking 'Indianness' became one way of doing that. It was given added resonance through the anti-colonial struggle of the Indian nation, the idea of the potential of 'progressive' nationalism common among the left at the time, as well as the fight against fascism, all of which helped generate a powerful sense of international belonging. And the attachment to the Indian nation state was far more than a whimsical fantasy. It was a conscious, and powerful, political strategy at a crucial moment of realignment in international politics. That moment passed, starkly illustrating that diasporic identifications are fuelled by contradiction, and bear the seeds of their own negation. Many forms of contact with India continued during the apartheid era, but there was less of a sense of an international 'Indianism' in South Africa for a time; many working class Indians were more concerned with building permanent homes in South Africa, and those radicals who were active in the liberation movement were keen to stress a sense of South African belonging first and foremost. So the issue now, is why have some Indian South Africans turned their gaze towards India once more?

Return of the native

Many Indians came to occupy a place between Africans and whites in the South African political economy. Whilst the majority of Indians have remained amongst the poorer members of society, a significant number have nevertheless gained positions of relative advantage over Africans. Some have gone into small businesses and also employ Africans. A small percentage has also consolidated itself as a very successful business community. But despite trying to be 'model citizens', in many circles, Indians have still not been accepted in the 'New' South Africa. Although most Indians are working class, Indians have been conflated into a group characterised as racist exploiters of the apartheid era, and collaborators with the apartheid state. This is not helped by the wide-spread

racist views held by significant sections of the Indian population, a racism which has to some extent been filtered through caste ideology. These perceptions of Indians are illustrated by the controversy sparked by a song written by playwright Mbongeni Ngema in 2002 entitled "AmaNdiya", which means 'Indian' in Zulu. In the lyrics, Indians are accused of taking over Durban, exploiting Africans, and voting for white political parties. Ngema urges 'strong men' to stand up to Indians. In "AmanNdiya" he states that "the reason we are faced with hardship and poverty is because everything was taken by the Indians, but they turn around and exploit us. Our people are busy buying from Indian shops" and Indians are "abusive to black people, being more racist than whites". "These views are expressed by Black Africans throughout the country, from taxi stands to soccer matches".

The song created much heated public debate in South Africa, which was perhaps more about who 'belonged' and was committed to the 'new South Africa'. The fall-out was also reported in *The Times of India*, where "people of Indian origin" were said to be "livid" about being accused of "exploiting Africans and benefiting from apartheid", stating that Indians "demanded an apology". The song is indicative of the wide-spread hostility that many Indians face in their daily lives, who are in the main bemused by these reactions. The fear in the Indian community is fuelled by the memory of events such as the Durban Riots in 1949, where African hostility spilled over into physical violence against Indians and their property, as well as the fate of Indians in East Africa post-independence. But many Indians consider that they have made significant contributions to building up South Africa, whilst there has always been a small minority who have been active in the country's liberation movement. It has forced much of the community to become more inward looking, and seek other ways of making sense of who they are. For some, religion has provided a means, and this has fuelled both an assertion of Muslim and Hindu identity. For many Muslims, their 'centre' has become Mecca, whilst others are erasing their Indian identity and claiming to be "Arabs from the Gujurat" as Hansen has pointed out. For some Hindus, India has become strongly identified as a spiritual homeland. Within this groups, especially those belonging to the affluent business community, are consciously asserting themselves as "diasporic Indians", and, as Hansen illustrates effectively, have formed alliances with the VHP and BJP.

> "Our people are busy buying from Indian shops and Indians are abusive to black people, being more racist than whites"

However, this particular diasporic identification is, perhaps, something new, the result of a different set of historical circumstances. One of the weaknesses in Hansen's argument is his use of a 'potted history', which supposedly gives us a teleological explanation of the present. But emergent diasporic identifications can be new articulations, whose immanence relies partly on a very different set of circumstances, rather than the resuscitation of dormant modes of identification. The new diasporic consciousness amongst Indians in South Africa has been facilitated by the creation of an Indian diasporic 'community' in other parts of the world, providing some Indian South Africans with a language, and networks into, a certain sense of 'Indianness'. These communal associations are the new creations of a globalised economic and social order, which nevetheless have powerful affiliations to the nation-state. That these identifications should try and legitimise themselves through creating dialogues of suffering, victimhood, and cultural authenticity is, surely, all too familiar. The point here is their allegiance to the VHP, not their diasporic credentials.

At the same time, a number of radical activists are denying their Indian identity, possibly as a way of stating their commitment to the new South Africa. For instance, adding to the debate on AmaNdiya, Devan Pillay, a sociologist at the University of the Witswatersrand and political activist in the ANC, has stated that he considered himself "an African engaged in a struggle for social equality and non-racialism in South Africa, Africa and the world". South African Indians are thus responding in different ways to their present predicament, and if anything, any loose sense of community seems (once more) to be splitting on lines of religion, regional origin, or political orientation. From the mid-1990s, a number of Saturday language schools have been set up to "keep children in touch with their Indian heritage but it is increasingly a heritage that is specifically Tamil, or Muslim or Hindu". Questioning whether one form of making sense of who they are is more authentic than another seems to miss the point.

As for "not really knowing India", where South African Indians have become the hapless dupes of an orientalist discourse, it is also the case that the idealisation of 'village life' is not confined to Indians in the diaspora, but was an important strand of the development of Indian national identity by none other than Gandhi, amongst others. And when it comes to an embarrassment about dirt and chaos, surely this has been a central obsession of middle-class and upper caste Indians in India for some considerable time. Many of these same Indians also consider themselves to be very 'modern' indeed. Perhaps they do not 'know' India either? If it is now a truism that all identity is constructed, any articulation of identity is going to look 'fake' when placed under the microscope. When you get too close, the artifice becomes all too apparent. Are some forms of

artifice allowed to go unquestioned when tied to our wider nostalgias and what is deemed to be an acceptable politics? This seems to be an inadequate way of judging the politics of a given situation. Whilst dismantling 'authenticity' can be a useful means of challenging certain political programmes, as Hansen has effectively illustrated in his work on the BJP, we need to consider why certain kinds of identifications can become so appealing at certain moments in time, rather than whether one is more 'authentic' than the other.

From economy to culture

The splintering of Indian South African identity in contemporary South Africa may well be a symptom of the political discourses and economic strategies adopted by the post-apartheid state. Identities that were negotiated in various complex ways during apartheid have continued to be valorised through the aegis of 'cultural diversity' under the banner of the 'rainbow nation'. An aspect of this is the consolidation of liberal restructuring programmes that have singularly failed to equitably redistribute resources, and the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. The ideological 'supplement' to this is the celebration, and, supposedly, respect, of difference, where many in the African National Congress and its allies in the South African Communist Party seem to have largely abandoned the politics of class for the politics of multiculturalism. A commitment to multiculturalism is written into the constitution, and can be seen as a part of the move to a new identity politics, which has accompanied the naturalisation of the liberal democratic state. As the philosopher and cultural critic, Slavoj Zizek has observed, the new politics is not necessarily a politics of emancipation, but rather something that papers over the further extension of globalisation and its negative effects. In the name of celebrating difference and diversity, there is really "a will to mastery" whose project is the subordination and continued exploitation of the South, "and all of those who continue to be oppressed by capitalism". According to Zizek, it is an end of politics, the post-politics of dispossession by multinational states: "there is a danger that issues of economic exploitation are converted into problems of cultural tolerance". If the 'new South Africa' is 'non-racial' because of the defeat of apartheid, then racial difference has been replaced by cultural difference, which is understood on almost the same terms as biological ideas of race. Difference is emphasised at the expense of any sense of universality, which in turn has encouraged blaming the 'culture' of different groups for varying degrees of economic success or failure, inclusion or exclusion. Zizek suggests that multiculturalism involves both a renunciation of other possibilities, and an acceptance of the status quo, which brings not only an ideological closure, but a naturalisation of global capitalism. Cultural diversity thus becomes a part of a liberal discourse which promotes the construction of cultural difference under the guise of tolerance, where exclusion and marginalisation is no longer the effect of racism, but of cultural itself. In this climate, we can see the proliferation of narratives of 'difference', each embedded in their own idea of 'authenticity'.

If some Indians have yet again been driven to look beyond the borders of South Africa to make sense of who they are, this time around, they have different political affiliations, and are negotiating with very different forms of Indian nationalism than those articulated in the first half of the 20th century. The India that currently provides a "resting place for the imagination" is not the India envisaged in 1947. Would it be legitimate to argue that one form of Indian nationalism is more 'authentic' than the other, or is it more relevant to ask what are the material consequences of certain types of political action under the umbrella of nationalism as a political project? In this context, the politics of the post-colonial world seems "to be spawning (its) own neo-nationalist responses" which are increasingly embedded in the politics of the right. If, in previous times, diaspora could be associated with a wandering which was defined in part through its relationship to a spiritual homeland, in the contemporary world, diaspora has become increasingly defined by its relationship to the nation state, of being within and without borders. That Zionism began to express itself as a movement of national liberation, which could be resolved through the establishment of a nation state, was not a pre-given, but a product of a certain historical moment. This should also serve as a stark reminder that there is no guarantee that any 'true heirs' of loss and suffering will fight for projects of universal emancipation. If, in the first half of the twentieth century, the realisation of the nation state in the fight against colonialism left some potential for its alignment with a progressive politics, that moment is well and truly passed. However, post-colonial neo-nationalisms also serve to illustrate, that despite globalisation, the nation-state is still a powerful mediator of international politics.

Post-colonial neo-nationalisms illustrate that despite globalisation the nation-state is still a powerful force

As so many of our 'radical subjects' have been unceremoniously shooed of the centre stage of history, perhaps the search for diasporic legitimacy is really about finding a resting place for our own imaginations. However, in conclusion, perhaps the Jewish experience can provide a template for the idea of diaspora after all, if it is conceived as a complex phenomenon, an immanence which sometimes crystallises, and then dissolves; where homeland has been a spiritual imagining as well as a material place, where the idea of diaspora has been utilised for radical as well as reactionary political agendas.

The judge, the prosecutor and Best Bakery

The verdict is out and it inspires no confidence, either in the police or in the judiciary.

by ***Biraj Swain and Somnath Vatsa***

In one of the most gruesome incidents of the post-Godhra carnage in Gujarat, 14 people were burnt to death on 1 March 2002, in a bakery in Baroda city, two hours drive from Ahmedabad. Two separate First Information Reports (FIRs) were lodged with the city police, one on the day of the incident by one Raizkhan Amin Mohammed Pathan and another on 4 March by Zahira Sheikh. Amidst much controversy and allegations of bias and abuse of authority, the police collected evidence for the trial, which was conducted at the Baroda Fast Track Court No 1, set up to deal with riot-related cases. On 27 June 2003, after 44 days of trial, the Baroda court acquitted all the 21 accused. It took 15 months for the Fast Track Court to deny justice to the victims. The court, incidentally, was set up with the active support of the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, who is also a Member of Parliament representing Gujarat. While letting the accused go scot-free, additional magistrate and presiding judge, Justice HU Mahida, was kind enough to observe, "The Best Bakery massacre is a blot on the cultural city of Baroda".

This trial will be remembered for long, and not just because of Justice Mahida's incisive and diverting analysis of issues altogether irrelevant to the case at hand, nor even because all the accused were set free. There are many other reasons why it will go down in history, and none of them offers any reassurance about the conduct of the Indian police and the judiciary. Among the scandalous aspects of the trial were that the witnesses for the prosecution were subjected to intimidation and that the police was negligent in its investigation. Amazingly, the Public Prosecutor (PP) Raghuvir Pandya, who led the case, had fought an election on a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket.

The trial

The statistics pertaining to the trial are alarming. Of the 120 witnesses listed by the investigating authorities, more than one third failed to depose. Of the 73 who did depose more than half, 41, 'turned hostile'.

And, of the 32 who stuck to their original statements during the deposition, six were doctors from Sayaji Rao Hospital who did the post mortem and the remaining 26 were police officials.

It was, therefore, a classic concoction, where the civilian witnesses, including the complainant and star witness, Zahira Sheikh, turned hostile. Irrespective of whether the witnesses were under duress or not, the judge did not find such numbers suspicious and worth at least an adjournment, if not more. That the Public Prosecutor too did not ask for an adjournment and seek more time from the court reinforces the judge's avowed stand that, "The courts actually are courts of evidence and not courts of justice".

The failure of the Public Prosecutor to point out the consistency in the statements of Zahira Sheikh, time and again, over a period of 14 months and her sudden and dramatic retraction during her deposition to the court, clearly indicates his dual role as the "defence counsel" and raises questions about what exactly Pandya's 'brief' was. It must be noted that there was minimal interaction between the PP and the star witness prior to and during the trial to the extent that on the day of her testimony, Zahira Sheikh had to struggle to even identify 'her lawyer'.

A question that remains unanswered is why the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was applied in the Godhra case but not in the Best Bakery case. The police have arrested more than a 100 people under POTA, in connection with the former case. What was so seditious about the Godhra train carnage that was not in the Best Bakery case? This differential invocation of POTA has been criticised by many civil liberties groups as a reflection of the state and the investigating authorities' proclivity to use the levers of the law for implementing their political game plan and stigmatising a certain community. The reason why POTA assumes significance here is that it provides full

Godhra Train Carnage:	59 dead	60 arrested (POTA invoked)	10 released on bail
Naroda Patiya:	91 dead	54 arrested	51 released on bail
Gulberg Society:	42 dead	28 arrested	21 released on bail
Sardarpura:	38 dead	32 arrested	all released on bail

protection to witnesses. This protection was so desperately needed and yet so wilfully denied to the witnesses of the Best Bakery massacre and all other riot related cases.

As civil liberties and human rights groups have acknowledged, punishing mob violence involves a great many procedural and substantive issues. But these obstacles should not be a smoke screen to cover the dereliction of the legal mechanism. There can be no denying the fact that the legal system does not function independently of the social, political and institutional environment in which it exists. This is a major reason for the procedural diligence or a lack of it, in particular cases. As the Congress leader and Supreme Court advocate, Kapil Sibal puts it, "A credible legal system requires upright investigators, independent public prosecutors, and judges of impeccable integrity who inspire confidence. But, sensitive investigations, especially in cases of mob violence, with political overtones, are often guided by considerations other than upholding the rule of law. Investigators with pre-determined objectives are handpicked by the government. Investigators, obliged by law to prosecute the accused, proceed instead to ensure their acquittal. The victim of crime also becomes a victim at the hands of the investigator".

In Gujarat, the office of the Public Prosecutor has been politicised no end, and the roster of PPs, right from the Chief Prosecutor downwards, and even the most minor riot-related case, has been handed over to lawyers with saffron affiliations. As the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the post-Babri Masjid demolition riots in Bombay have amply demonstrated, in most instances, public prosecutors in cases involving mob violence are wedded less to the vindication of the majesty of law and more to the ideological commitment of their political patrons. The state chooses not to recognise the guilt of the accused and the judge is reduced to being a helpless spectator to witness after witness turning hostile. If the past is any indicator, then the present mess was only to have been expected.

The lapses in the filing of the FIRs, is an index of how the process of justice has been compromised in the cases arising from the riots in Gujarat. The process of investigation into any offence is set in motion by the recording of an FIR under section 154 (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (CrPC). According to the Supreme Court,

"It [FIR] is an extremely vital and valuable piece of evidence for the purpose of corroborating the oral evidence adduced at the trial and can hardly be over-estimated from the standpoint of the accused. In any criminal trial the FIR unquestionably plays a pivotal role".

As Vrinda Grover, legal scholar and an advocate fighting on behalf of the 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims says, "Lacunae, discrepancies and contradictions in the document would impinge upon the investigation as well as gravely affect the trial and its final outcome".

In the Best Bakery case, Zahira Sheikh filed a complaint naming all the accused. She was however, not given a copy of the FIR by the police, in violation of Section 154 (2) of the CrPC. On 3 March 2002, she went to the police station and found that the FIR registered by the police was false, as it stated that the victims were burnt in their sleep.

For the registration of FIRs, victims of the Gujarat killing had to turn towards the same police force which had, at best, been an indifferent bystander and at worst had instigated or actively colluded in the killing and looting of Muslims. What the victims got, *inter alia*, were nameless FIRs which were factually incorrect and incomplete. In certain instances they were filed by the police themselves to pre-empt any complaints from the accused/victims. In addition, the police delayed the presentation of the FIRs to the magistrate (which, though not illegal, gives enough leeway to tamper with and fabricate evidence) and also refused to give the accused and victims copies of the report.

The investigation

Nine days after Fast Track Court No 1 delivered its judgement, Shehrunnissa Sheikh, Zaheera Sheikh's mother, whose husband was among the 12 killed in the attack on the bakery, said, "Trembling with fear, I lied in court". The reasons for this public confession are not far to seek. To cite just one reason, the officer in charge of the investigation of the Best Bakery case was Inspector PP Kanani of the Department of Crime Branch, who has been repeatedly named for his involvement in the brutal harassment of Muslims in a number of areas in Baroda city (Taiwada, Bawamaanpura, Memon Colony and Panigate), during the carnage.

Litres of ink can be spent in writing about the inefficiencies and malafide intentions of investigators, but the listing of a few of the most glaring discrepancies will suffice by way of illustration. The police failed to carry out an identification parade of the accused. They delayed in recording the statements of informants and witnesses. There was a conscious and deliberate attempt to shield mob leaders and chief instigators who have been repeatedly named by informants. Police intentionally ignored corroborative material, which in fact could amount to concealment of evidence, such as video footage of the carnage, post mortem reports, witness statements, and so on. There was no proactive attempt by investigators and the police to stay in touch with, record

the threat perceptions of, and reassure and protect witnesses, as a result of which they were abandoned and at the mercy of the perpetrators. And the authorities failed prepare a site plan that essentially describes and illustrates in detail the scene and the sequence of events, which is useful during the trial stage.

The Best Bakery case, thus, was just a replay of the cases relating to other politically significant riots of the past, with a new set of actors. Almost two decades ago, the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission, enquiring into the anti-Sikh violence of 1984, noted similar lapses and dereliction of duty on the part of the police. The commission had rightly warned that shoddy police investigation might prejudice the trials even before they began. The commission noted,

When oral reports were recorded they were not taken down verbatim and brief statements dropping out the allegations against the police or other officials and men in position were written.

Apprehending this subversion of legal procedure, civil liberties groups had petitioned the Supreme Court of India, seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the carnage-related cases. Revealing yet another example of travesty of justice in India, the cases in Gujarat have been 'fast-tracked', but that petition with the apex court is still pending a decision, and is today for all practical purposes redundant. It was not without reason that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had recommended that 12 of the cases, including the Best Bakery case, be handed over to CBI for investigation. Some of the other cases are:

None of the carnage cases in Gujarat has been handed over to the CBI and the Best Bakery investigation and verdict is perhaps a foretaste of what may well be in store for the other cases involving a much larger scale of killings. From the pattern of official conduct, right from the day of the violence to the subsequent sins of omission and commission, it is obvious that the conditions were systematically created to ensure that the cases fall apart in court. The outcome was expected.

The judgement

However, what surpasses all this in irony is the judgement itself. There is of course little that a judge can do if the investigation has been so shoddy that the case cannot stand. But that does not excuse impropriety in the judgement itself. In the 24-page over-wrought judgement, Justice Mahida has no doubt lambasted the investigation because "not an iota of evidence was found against the accused" which allowed the real culprits to go "scot-free". But he did not stop at this. Instead, in a 64-paragraph judgement, he took it upon himself to spend more than 20 paragraphs to pontificate on history and sociology. The judgement makes an excursus into the British policy of divide and rule, before taking a detour into the policy of reservation for minorities. It then proceeds towards other *obiter dicta*. The judgement is riddled with gratuitous statements, observations and speculations with little immediate relevance to the case. In fact, only eight pages out of 24 are devoted to establishing a context and rationale for violence.

It will be useful to cite a few of the observations made by the learned judge on various matters:

- The policy of industrialisation, following the example of Soviet Union, helped create conditions for communal riots.
- ...keeping vote banks in view, the frequent yoke of reservations has been troublesome for the country...it is a reality that because of reservations, violent riots keep breaking out.
- The disputed happenings were a reaction to the Godhra episode, but the enduring and everlasting cause for communal riots is the enduring policy of divide and rule of the British.
- When police arrive on the scene of a riot, they arrest curious bystanders, with the result that prosecution is riding a dead horse, which can never pass the finishing post.
- At the time of the Mahabharata, great men like Bhisma Pitamaha and Dhronacharya had sided with unrighteousness, only so that the country may not be divided.
- The Aryan people came into this country from the North Polar area. Muslims came from Persia and with Ghazni, and Parsis from Iran.
- It needs to be said that if one's identity and loyalty do not lie toward one's land, *one is likely to be destroyed.*
- The word *Dharma Nirapeksha* (or secularism) has come to connote freedom without rules. Freedom without rules means licentiousness.

Clearly, the judge was not just whiling away time in making such remarks, which though irrelevant to the case itself are entirely in keeping with a particular politically prominent view of India, its history and its people. When judges choose to use the bench for preaching the politics of their patrons, the judgements are scarcely going to be erudite from the point of view of jurisprudence. Predictably, Justice Mahida seemed to be blaming the British for not being able to carry the trial further. According to him,

The British started the judicial system based on circumstantial evidence where the court is just an umpire. So, conviction depends on the authenticity of the evidence, and even if 100 criminals go scot-free not a single innocent shall be punished. It is for the government to find out the actual culprits and not the court. The courts actually are courts of evidence and not courts of justice.

The civic response

The investigators, the prosecutors and the judge failed the victims. But what did civil society do all the while. It is pertinent to note that 11 days after the judgement, Zahira

Sheikh said, "There was no one with us. Even our own people did not stand by us".

There is certainly a feeling of helplessness, which has slowly but surely crept into the minds of a large number of the victims and witnesses. Civil society needs to be alive to this feeling and take steps to rebuild the confidence lost due to a persistent persecution by the state. One crucial factor that needs to be recognised is that witnesses do not constitute a homogenous group. Differential socio-economic background is a major determinant in perspective and patterns of behaviour among witnesses. There have been reports about internal disputes even within the families of witnesses. As a result they have conflicting expectations from civic groups which intervene in such matters.

Civil society, no doubt, played a commendable role in relief and rehabilitation during the Gujarat riots, but rehabilitation does not end with material support. It is a far more comprehensive idea that involves imparting a sense of safety and security. To that extent, ensuring justice is a *sine qua non* of rehabilitation. The failure of law, compounded by the failure of justice, has made this task doubly difficult. The struggle has been and will continue to be long and arduous in the face of the persistent efforts of the state to annihilate whatever little spaces that citizens have to voice their concerns and claim their rights.

In a sense, the Best Bakery verdict exemplifies the inadequacies of civic engagement in the investigative and trial process. The formal right to equality before the law can have any substantive meaning, only if, civil society can find ways to neutralise the legal effects of social inequality and state-sponsored discrimination. According to former bureaucrat and social activist Harsh Mander, "The Best Bakery acquittal is the proper time for reflection, to put corrective measures in place before it becomes a pattern. Should miscarriage of justice go unchallenged? The challenge is as big as the Emergency".

There are many issues regarding the enforcement of law and the administration of justice that needs to be addressed in the public sphere. There are state-instituted anomalies in the legal process that need to be rectified urgently, if, justice is not to be irredeemably compromised. To cite a case in point, while the public prosecutor for the Godhra case is remunerated at the rate of INR 7000 per appearance, the majority of the public prosecutors in the riot-related cases receive a relatively modest INR 400 per day. The fact that this differential remuneration has not yet become an issue of concern speaks volumes about the emphasis that the civil society places on justice.

It is obvious that the conditions were systematically created to ensure that the cases fall apart in court. The outcome was expected

On other issues connected with the issue of justice, while there have been forceful interventions, these are not characterised by unanimity of opinion or consensus. Thus, even as one school of thought subscribes to the view the government should be pressurised into seeking an appeal against the verdict, Rohit Prajapati of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), Baroda, is inclined to be more cautious and has a counterview. He argues, "The state government is not interested in appeal in the first place. They will resort to technicalities like *waiting for the government pleader's report* till the time lapses. However, more contentious is the fact that appealing would mean that the current judgement is being accepted and then appealed against. But we do not accept the judgement in the first place. Besides that will have a dangerous precedence. We want a retrial and that should be preferably outside Gujarat".

Social activist and senior journalist, Kirit Bhatt is trying to inspire the lawyers in Baroda to seize the opportunity and take up riot cases for launching a movement for civil liberties and human rights. Bhatt, who was deeply involved in the struggle during the 1975-77 Emergency, also feels that there is a possibility of re-trial outside Gujarat. In his view, the case for re-trial outside the state is backed by precedence. The 'Baroda dynamite case', initiated during the Emergency, was tried in Delhi, the CBI justifying the action on the ground that even though the site of the incident was Baroda, the case had national ramifications.

Meanwhile, civil society perceptions have taken a new post-Best Bakery turn. Activists feel that its greatest strength so far has been its greatest weakness too. A blind faith in the law informed their agenda of action and intervention. After the June acquittals, the confidence of the activists in the legal system has been shaken. However, at this juncture, they face a constraint in publicly deriding the process because of the sensitivity to victims and witnesses, especially in the context of Narendra Modi's re-election as the chief minister of the state. Under these circumstances, the only hope in an otherwise politically hopeless situation is the remote possibility of redress by the courts. That said, the peace and rights groups can be criticised for their silence and lack of foresight on matters such as the large-scale illegal detention of minorities and the lack of protection to the witnesses, which characterised the investigations and hence determined the outcome of the trial.

And all these flaws are compounded by the fact that the struggle is unequal. While the state is concerted, systematic and persistent in its persecution, civic groups have been rather individualistic, scattered and infrequent. Such a re-

sponse presents an apology for a struggle when opposed by state repression.

Of the other institutions of civil society, the media has not quite lived up to expectations. PUCL's Rohit Prajapati also blames the lack of a good team of activist lawyers at the local level for the outcome. According to him, "When the dice is so heavily loaded against the victims and almost the entire legal fraternity at the local level, right from the public prosecutor, police investigator till the MLA are involved, the only way justice could be meted out is if the media plays a bigger role". There is some merit to this observation. After all, the Supreme Court did take notice of media reports-of starvation deaths all over India to extend the Food For Work period from June 30 to September 30. While Best Bakery did manage to get the media attention and did stir the national psyche, there are many more cases in rural Godhra (such as Pawagarh, Kinjiri, Lunawada), Ramol (suburban Ahmedabad), among others. Under such circumstances, it is important to travel to the interiors, capture the voices of victims of violence, build alliances, work out a coordinated strategy, highlight them nationally and internationally and lower the threshold of tolerance for such gruesome acts

The polity

Among the most prominent defaulters have been the political parties. The Congress, the main opposition party has been surprisingly inactive in the city of Baroda. During the period leading up the trial, the Congress did not raise any questions as regarding the manner in which the investigations were being conducted. In fact, the BJP's Madhu Shrivastava, the sitting member of the state's legislative assembly from the Waghodia constituency where the bakery is situated, has been accused of intimidating the witnesses and has for a close cousin, Chandrakant Shrivastava, the current Congress Corporator. The party has been disappointingly tepid in its response. After the judgement was delivered, all that the Congress did was to call for an appeal against the decision and issue a statement condemning the outcome. The left parties too restricted themselves to expressing their disappointment in this "test case" of legal enforcement. None of the Gujarat branches of these national parties have held even a single meeting or demonstration against the judgement. Other than the *de rigueur* expression of disappointment and press releases, there has been nothing from political parties at the national level. In fact, the Congress is widely reported to be debating the dividends of dyeing itself saffron for the upcoming general elections. It may also be restrained by its own tainted past, particularly the 1984 Sikh persecution which was not very different from Narendra Modi's handiwork.

Meanwhile, the preponderance of national heavyweights elected from Gujarat in the central ministries dealing with domestic affairs is unparalleled. Besides the Law Minister Arun Jaitley, there is the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister LK Advani, who represents the Gandhinagar parliamentary constituency, which partly covers Ahmedabad city. Haren Pathak, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs (ie Advani's second-in-command in the Home Ministry) is also a member of parliament from Gujarat. The extent to which executive power can be brought to bear on the process of investigation and justice cannot be underestimated, especially since when there is such an urgent need to protect one of the BJP's most important state governments.

The concrete steps

What eventually happens to the Best Bakery verdict will, for the present, remain one of the imponderables of the Indian system of justice. But in the meanwhile, civil liberties groups, as the lobby most committed to the ends of justice, need to ensure that a repetition of this farce is minimised to the extent possible. The concrete steps that could be taken towards this end are:

1. Work towards bridging the wide gulf that the law has created between the prosecution and the investigators and act as conduit between them for exchange of relevant information.
2. Advocacy for establishment of a statutory witness protection programme on the lines laid out in Section 30 of POTA and the UN Handbook for Victims of Abuse of State Power, 1985.
3. Advocacy for de-linking the bodies responsible for maintenance of law and order and investigation.
4. Campaign for special public prosecutors. Even though the government is unlikely to give in to this demand easily, it is important to raise it and maintain the pressure through media advocacy.
5. Identify private prosecutors in necessary cases who will assist public prosecutors (though at the latter's discretion). They could play an important role in pointing out the procedural and strategic flaw of the PPs and also create necessary documentation so as to provide a copy of the suggestions to the concerned magistrates as well.
6. Campaign for transferring cases out of Gujarat, wherever necessary, by moving the Supreme Court. Minimally, cases that are being tried in blatantly partial courts need to be transferred internally within the state of Gujarat to different not-so-partial courts.
7. In cases where witnesses are turning hostile the Public Prosecutors need to be reminded about the utility of Section 154 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.
8. Cases need to be classified as per their severity (where it has not been done) and allocated to lawyers depending upon their proven competence.
9. Criminal courts need to be reminded that justice is the larger objective and evidence apprecia-

tion is merely a step towards this goal.

10. Questioning the discriminatory invocation of POTA as part of the process of challenging the legitimacy of the act per se.

There are lessons to be learnt from the few groups that have done exemplary work in confidence building among witnesses. They are handling more than 18 riot-related cases in rural Godhra and not a single one of their witnesses has turned hostile. The key to such confidence, as one of the activist puts it, is the need,"...to be a part of the family of the witnesses, share their joys and sorrows. That is the only way enough confidence could be instilled to make the witnesses and the victims come out with the truth".

The victims of the carnage are nowhere near the end of the battle. They encounter difficulties every day. The state has found innovative ways to discriminate against them, be it in the form of withholding municipal conveniences such as electric connections or through electoral injustice, such as exclusions from voters' lists. Before another similar investigation and consequent verdict erodes any residual confidence among the victims, trials in other cases need to start.

Trafficking, South Asia and Pakistan

by ***Shafqat Munir***

Employment is often seen to be empowering for women, and various agencies and individuals have advocated the unrestricted movement of women to enable them to find employment in other countries. In Nepal, for instance, where until recently women were debarred from going abroad to perform informal sector jobs, there was vociferous demand that women be given the freedom to migrate in the pursuit of a vocation. Ironically, as a recent study by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific highlights, such freedom of mobility often leads to servile forms of domination and abuse that rival and surpass the conditions of domestic servility at home. In many instances, women after migrating to foreign labour markets could either find themselves in the sex industry or become practically enslaved or bonded domestics in elite households. Illusions of emancipation and empowerment are best discarded where the question of female migrant labour is concerned.

This is not to suggest that the economic options provided by migration should be foreclosed. But we must address the issue without preconceived notions about its emancipatory potential and to focus instead on the regulatory aspects of the process. While the ethical attitude to female labour migration may vary, the inescapable fact is that migration of women in South Asia is burgeoning and is happening under a regime of globalisation which is not particularly benign in its attitude to labour, and even less so towards women.

As one of the most used and perhaps most abused terms of times, 'globalisation' refers to the transition towards a global community with common norms and institutional frameworks that facilitate international cooperation. Pitched as the next best thing to happen to the world after the United Nations, it promises the free flow of capital, technology, information and people. It is as well to remember that definitions that promise so much in principle, seldom live up to the expectations entertained of them. The flow of people has not become as free as the flow of capital has become. Barriers are being erected to the free movement of workers at a time when loss of livelihood both in the farm sector and in manufacture in the developing world has created an enormous reserve of labour.

For women, the pressure to find jobs outside one's community and country is strong, since the earlier means of sus tenance are shrinking

The process of globalisation has created industrial zones and huge business subdivisions that threaten food security and livelihood options, owing to the limited number of groups that benefit from the process. The pursuit of neo-liberal policies has resulted in the loss of jobs, 'casualisation' and 'contractualisation', and an inordinate and precipitate decline in the conditions and remuneration of wageworkers. Simultaneously, the insecure conditions of the workforce are a strong incentive for the creation of localised zones of production in favoured parts of the developing world to which labour seeks to migrate, as an escape from their own degraded conditions of living. For women, the pressure to find jobs outside one's community and country is especially strong since the earlier means of sustenance are shrinking. And this pressure to migrate has been building up at a time when gender bias and discrimination in opportunities in the global labour market has become

rather more pronounced. Under such circumstances, when the male workforce has lost its few privileges, it is unlikely that migrant women workers will find emancipation at the workplace.

The wages of traffic

The larger number of migrant women workers from South Asia find themselves trapped in a labour market that operates clandestinely and outside the law. Human trafficking is a well-established conduit of labour supply in the region, with an entrenched and effective system of providing women and child workers not only to the sex trade but also to other over ground sectors of the economy, which exploit their extreme vulnerability to ensure that wages are kept to the barest minimum. Globally, human trafficking has increased in scope and with an annual turnover of USD 7 to13 billion. Indeed, human trafficking is now the third largest trade around the world after drugs and weapons

Traffickers acquire their victims in a number of ways. Sometimes women are kidnapped outright in one country and taken forcibly to another. In other cases, victims are lured with job offers. At yet other times, the victims are enticed to migrate voluntarily with false promises of well-paying jobs in foreign countries as *au pairs*, models, dancers, domestic workers and so on. There are also numerous cases of women who are trapped into servitude through the promise of more lucrative marriage opportunities abroad. Information about these job and marriage opportunities is often advertised through local newspapers in the 'catchment areas' of such labour. In the case of recruitment for the sex trade, women are generally deceived into joining with offers of jobs like child-care, house-keeping or restaurant work.

In South Asia, major trafficking routes are known to exist between Pakistan and Bangladesh via India, between Nepal and India and Sri Lanka and different parts of India. There are said to be close to 160,000 Nepali women in Indian brothels. Trafficking to the Gulf countries takes place from Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Maldives, while Nepali girls also find their way to Hong Kong, Thailand and the West. As many as 200,000 Bangladeshi women have been trafficked to Pakistan in the last 10 years. Between 100 and 150 women are estimated to enter Pakistan illegally every day according to the Karachi based Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA), which supports victims of trafficking who cannot afford the expenses of litigation.

Temporary wives

Bangladeshi and Burmese women are kidnapped, married off to agents by unsuspecting parents, trafficked under false pretences, or otherwise enticed by prospects of a better life, into brothels in Pakistan. A Bengali or Burmese woman will be sold in Pakistan for USD 1,500 to 2,500, depending on age, looks, docility and virginity. Bangladeshis are estimated to make up 80 percent, and Burmese 14 percent of Karachi's undocumented immigrants. There are about 1,500 Bengali women in jail and about 200,000 women and children who have been sold into the slave trade, according to LHRLA. This is a grey market that Karachi's police use as a source for making money. For each woman or child 'sold', the police claim a 15 to 20 percent 'commission'. Border police and other law enforcement agencies are well aware of the trafficking through entry points into Pakistan like Lahore, Kasur, Bahawalpur, Chhor and Badin.

A Bengali or Burmese woman will be sold in Pakistan for USD 1,500 to 2,500, depending on age, looks, docility and virginity

On arrival, in Pakistan the girls are auctioned off to the highest bidder. The auctions are arranged primarily for three kinds of buyers: rich visiting Arabs (sheikhs, businessmen, visitors, state-financed medical and university students), the rich local gentry, and rural farmers. According to the Coalition Against Trafficking of Women – Asia Pacific (CATW-AP), a non-governmental organisation that promotes women's human rights, orphaned girls are sold as 'wives' to men who may resell them. Some Arabs stationed in Pakistan for short periods take "temporary wives", abandoning the women and resulting children, if any, afterwards. A farcical "nikah" (registered marriage) is conducted to legalise the temporary marriage and since the buyer actually marries the purchased woman, the enslavement has the appearance of being legal. When the time comes for the 'husband' to move, he either sells her to someone else, making a tidy profit, or keeps her in a brothel so that she becomes a permanent source of income. If the husband is a local farmer or businessman he also has the option of simply making the woman a labourer in the farm or a domestic worker to run the house.

In the last 26 years, the Government of Pakistan has established three commissions of inquiry into the sexual exploitation of women. However, successive regimes have failed to implement, in total, the recommendations of these commissions. With the passage of time, trafficking has become a more and more entrenched and institutionalised fact of life that is carried on with such impunity that there are few countervailing forces to restrain the exploitation of the victims. The police and the legal system only compound the victimisation of trafficked women, by treating them as criminals. When they are caught, the women are booked under Pakistan's controversial Hudood Ordinance, which criminalises *Zina*, defined by law as extra-marital sex.

Sex outside marriage is deemed to be a crime against the state.

The Hudood Ordinance defines Zina and *Zina-bil-jabr* on the basis of the assigned criminal punishment. Thus, there is Zina and Zina-bil-jabr which are liable to *Hadd* or punishment as ordained by the holy *Quran* or *Sunnah*. Then there is Zina and Zina-bil-jabr that are liable to *tazir*, that is, any punishment other then Hadd. The Hadd punishment is stoning to death, and the tazir punishment for Zina is up to ten years of imprisonment and whipping up to 30 lashes and/or a fine. The tazir punishment for Zina-bil-jabr is up to 25 years of imprisonment and whipping up to 30 lashes. These provisions are invoked against trafficked women, leaving them at the mercy of men and the law. Once taken into custody, most women are either charged under the Foreigners Act prohibiting illegal entry and/or incorrectly charged under the Zina section of the Hudood Ordinance. Either way, they have to spend long periods in prison. For illegal immigration, the sentence is four years, but many women end up serving three or four years extra, either waiting for trial or to clear immigration formalities.

For the arrested women and children, the process of getting justice is long and arduous. While in jail the victims do not have access to lawyers, while the brokers, with the aid of jail authorities, manage to see them regularly, harassing and directing threats at them. Confined in deplorable jail conditions where they are frequently abused and with no access to any other source of help, the women submit to the brokers' offers to get them released. Under duress and in sheer desperation, the women agree to the terms and conditions set by them. Once released, they are forced to comply with these conditions, since non-compliance will mean further encounters with law enforcement authorities because of the broker's threat to revoke bail. Further, social shame, fear and poverty force them to remain trapped by the tentacles of this trade, preventing them from returning to their country of origin.

Practical solutions

The issue of migration, trafficking and women's condition of work has received a great deal of attention in the South Asia seminar circuit, as manifested in the number of conferences and workshops that have been conducted and the reports that have been put out. While all this is no doubt very useful, all these activities have merely reduced the problem to the status of an abstract problem to be dealt with in ritualistic ways. It is imperative that governments of countries from where mass trafficking takes place, the recipient countries as well as the transit countries should, in conjunction with international, national and regional organisations, take up the issue in more concrete ways than they have done so far. The first step lies, always, with the government, since the laws need to be changed to ensure that the prevailing bias against the victims of trafficking is removed and stricter punitive measures and more efficient enforcement mechanisms are put in place to prosecute traffickers and their accomplices in the state machinery.

Illusions of emancipation and empowerment are best discarded where the question of female migrant labour is concerned

Trafficked women and children must be recognised as victims of trafficking and not as criminals. The provisions of the law must be changed to provide protection to them for offering testimony. This is the primary requirement for ensuring that the agents of trafficking are prosecuted. Additionally, ways have to be found to foot the costs of repatriating and rehabilitating the victims of trafficking. The current system of forced repatriation does not serve any purpose in the absence of rehabilitation since the victims, having no other option, simply fall prey to the trafficking cycle all over again. And in the case of victims unwilling to be repatriated, governments must provide at least temporary amnesty and help in rehabilitation, with the option of permanently legalising their status in the recipient country.

Most importantly, pending these long-term changes to prevent trafficking, governments may as well accept the reality of the situation and formulate clear guidelines on job-related contracts to prevent abuses and unfair practices against labour. In particular, it is necessary to declare illegal the current contracting practice of businesses and to support an increase in the social wage or non-wage benefits of workers. These should include social security, hospitalisation, pension plans, and so on. The need to ensure compliance with minimum labour standards and working conditions in special industrial zones (where the overwhelming majority of the workers are women) is also important. Laws and codes to monitor sexual harassment at the workplace and stricter sanctions for non-compliance need to be strictly put in place and where they already exist, it should be overhauled for quick and time bound relief.

Till such time as such basic reforms are introduced, it is more than likely that labour contractors, traffickers, brokers and their accomplices in the enforcement apparatus of the state will continue to rule the roost. In the process a greater impetus will be provided for organising more conferences and releasing more updated reports. Meanwhile, women from impoverished South Asian families will continue to provide the labour for the sweatshops and the sexshops of every boom town, that market-led globalisation spawns. △

Vernacular of our times

Recontextualising and Benchmarking the Participatory Discourse of the Service Delivery Stakeholder

by **Rahul Goswami**

Vocabularies of power surround the 'development' myth and reality. Coined and reinvented to support old structures and drive the adoption of new ones, they follow their own life cycles, occasionally find themselves hijacked, but are ignored only at one's peril.

Those who dominate, the late Winin Pereira had once said, have the advantage of being able to impose definitions. Pereira, a former Indian nuclear physicist and an ecologist until he died in 1999, had then referred to the Warli, an *adivasi* (indigenous) clan whose ancient homelands were in the region north of Mumbai. The Warli, he had said, can "read" a tree the way a good reader reads words, at a glance, in their entirety, not like a botanist, who plods from one letter to another like a neo-literate.

There is little left of the Warli *desh*. Since they had no use for the concept of ownership, they were swindled of their land by the overlords of the then Bombay Presidency, and swindled again by tribal development commissions. They never understood the language of development, particularly not when they were told plants and fish are 'resources' for human use, that insects are 'pests', that trees can become 'overmature' from a human-use perspective. These were the Warli's "gaia", earth-system. A 'development professional' and a Warli *adivasi* would find each other mutually unintelligible.

And so it is with economic change, which tends to be represented as an accumulation of processes without human or social agents, rendered with descriptions that are culturally sterile. There is not even an attempt to anthropomorphise them, although I suspect if there would be, the resulting creatures could take their place amongst the ranks of animated animals in Disney's Fantasia. Technologies, we are told, "emerge" in a magical way; new markets "open up", as if they were exotic tropical orchids suddenly discovered, and pleased to have been.

It can be a bewildering landscape for even the accomplished development road warriors who enlarge their ecological footprints with every transcontinental flight they take, as they dash from one more working group committee meeting to yet another seminar. For the more obtuse, dealing with "the establishment of new linkages between policy communities within the new institutional entities of governance includes new articulations and recontextualisations of discourses" is a matter of routine. The thickets of language can be as impenetrable as they are lush—the new rainforests of globalisation.

From such fecundity has emerged one of the most potent linguistic weapons in the armoury of globalisation. It is called "governance", and it leaves in the dust "best practice", "benchmarking" and the "focus group". It brings to discussions an authoritative legitimacy, the better with which to inform recalcitrant NGOs, overzealous journalists and scheming bureaucrats. Its institutionalisation has been swift.

Today, 'discourse'—a word that is as sophisticated as 'discussion' is callow— regularly contains phrases such as "governance without government" or "from government to governance". Civil society worries that governance is all too often the smoking gun that indicates the presence of concerted efforts to bypass sovereign control, to steadily cede control of social, political and economic systems to privateers. It is very much about power.

That is what Peter Marcuse, who teaches urban planning in the School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University, reminds us. "Two distinct aspects to the development of capitalist relations since 1970 are often lumped together under the rubric of globalisation: developments in technology and developments in the concentration of power".

Things are seldom what they seem in the landscape that is theoretical globalisation. Take that paragon of deception, 'governance'. It rarely means anything other than the diminishing of government. Similarly, 'labour' has been ripped away from the safekeeping of unions and turned into 'human capital'; 'free markets' are of course anything but; 'investment' is speculation wearing an altruistic mask; and 'reform' refers not to public sector spring-cleaning but untrammelled privatisation. Letter sorters in general post offices are called 'producer services'. What is left? The Ministry of Love?

"Their words, they don't believe in them at all," said Claude Alvares, of the Goa Foundation, an organisation that commands an intellectual influence and a real influence on the ground completely out of proportion to its size, and of the Other India Press, India's largest publisher of alternative titles. "They have polluted and

contaminated those words. Every three or four years, a new vocabulary of development emerges. Right now it is 'domain' and 'contestations' and 'deconstructions' ".

This sort of faux academic approach, more redolent of the globalisation bazaar than serious social inquiry, indicates more starkly every year that development research is still a fractured field. The lion's share of funding for such research is diverted towards concern with how international agencies can and should encourage 'development', and far too little makes its way to empirical studies of social change as it is taking place in a global environment in which the policy framework at the international level reduces the scope for manoeuvre at the national level.

The trouble is that many—like the "educated Indians" (as Ananda Coomaraswamy qualified with his footnote, "That is how victims of Indian education are described")—have tended to take the West for granted. The seeds are sown early, the Western schooling and university system is imitated and aspired to, and institutes design their departments, courses and even modes of evaluation according to such systems. Their codes become our codes—hence the 'discourse', 'contestation', 'site', 'imagined communities', 'constructed categories' and 'deconstruction'.

Waistbands and Déjà vu

> Hanif was in perfect control of the languages that mattered: sociological, socialistic, black-radical, anti-racist, demagogic, oratorical, and sermonic: the vocabularies of power.
>
> - *The Satanic Verses*

The eagerness to adopt has been exploited cunningly. Those with a droll sense of humour will note that, by and large, contemporary research in development has become a 'sub-contracting' activity—an info-tech nerd would call it business process outsourcing—where the financing bodies are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and large transnational corporations, all of which are interested in imposing a particular type of 'modernisation' on less developed societies. That the victims of 'modernisation' are a large part of the population, matters little—shareholder return is paramount.

"We have seen how the World Bank has changed," said Shripad Dharmadhikari of Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, which monitors, researches and analyses water and energy issues in the context of privatisation, and is located in Badwani, western Madhya Pradesh. "There is a great deal of talk about 'participation', 'transparency' and 'openness' on the one hand. On the other, 'rationalising tariff' when discussing projects is a most important component".

Invoking the 'poor' in an attempt to make privatisation sound palatable is now being done with an almost evangelical zeal. The glossy 'flagship' publications (and their online, downloadable versions, glutted with images, huge electronic files beyond the reach of those with simple dial-up connections in the countries of the South use 'poor' as an omnibus incantation—'how to make services work for the poor', 'extending services to the urban poor', 'leveraging assistance for the urban poor' and so on. Poor, however, remains a four-letter word.

It is, Dharmadhikari says, all very glib. That is indeed the characteristic of the new breed of privatisation's storm-troopers—it's not about the money we can leverage, you know, it's that we really, really care. "Privatisation for the poor can work if it's built in for the poor", a World Bank operative said at a recent workshop in India. Whatever can this mean? "It doesn't matter", says Dharmadhikari, "for on the ground, nothing has changed".

Change is a glacial entity in the Bretton Woods institutions, usually as abhorrent as a vacuum is to nature. Even so, in the face of the 'discourse' being wrested away from the World Bank it has been forced to change, as happened in 1991 with the independent review of the Sardar Sarovar project, the first in the Bank's history. Then as part of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Dharmadhikari was there, "On dams the change happened more slowly. Even their reaction to the Morse Report [as the independent review came to be called, after the review team leader] was within their orthodox framework—a reluctant change".

The problem remains the insistence on allowing the 'market' to provide guidance towards solutions, assuring 'governance' over the market, assuring 'accountability' of the 'service providers' for the 'stakeholders', and creating the 'space' needed by the 'poor' to make heard their 'voice'. The equation appears neat until one realises that it is hardly plausible that the market, which creates the enormous discrepancies in wealth and is thus the cause of poverty, is a likely candidate for poverty eradication. That is a paradigm however that is stubbornly resistant to change.

Successive editions of the *World Development Report*—one of the 'flagship' World Bank publications—have projected an air of Olympian concern, yet this is also the conceptual bottom-line they seek to reinforce. That is why a reading of the draft report for 2004 elicits both surprise and a feeling of *déjà vu*. Surprise because we had been informed that the World Bank approach had become more nuanced and sensitive on topics like the provision of public services. Déjà vu because it turns out that the tone and arguments are not new, and have been presented before as a part of the neoliberal agenda that drives Anglo-Saxon globalism.

Is there a primary idea running through the tract? If there is, it is simply that what the public sector does can almost always be done better by other providers; that trade unions and employees are generally regarded as obstacles to this process; that the poor will profit from a more market-oriented approach.

"There are few advantages to governments providing the service itself", advises the draft *World Develop-*

ment Report 2004. "The experience with service delivery, viewed through the lens of this Report's framework, suggests a constellation of solutions, each matching various characteristics of the service and the country or region. While no one size fits all, perhaps 12 sizes do. Even 12 may be too few, which is why some of the 'sizes' are adjustable, like waistbands".

Waistbands indeed. Are we all buying elastic undergarments here? There are times when the smooth glibness borders on the juvenile, but even so it can still be infuriating. One participant in the electronic discussion on the draft said she was "shocked" by such an approach. "Shall we remind ourselves", she pointed out, "that 95 percent of water service provision across the whole world is publicly provided still and will probably continue to do so in spite of the 'many privatisations, concessions and the like' in the past decade? Is the [Report's] agenda that of undermining publicly-run services?"

In fact, the semantic gymnastics to be found in the draft, and in other reports like it, are designed for a certain audience, and while that audience in some cases may include policy makers, bureaucrats and municipal officials—many of whom know already the layered meanings and implications—it is rather the NGOs and the media to whom it is addressed. It is designed to help them 'buy into' the process that takes globalisation as its motif, to underline its distinction from 'backward' and moribund national models, to assert the international movement of capital as the only possible alternative.

The market, which creates the enormous discrepancies in wealth and is thus the cause of poverty, is a likely candidate for poverty eradication

The Macaulay Minute

> And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
> They were, those people, a kind of solution.
> - Constantine Cavafy, *Waiting for the barbarians*

It is not all their fault, and that is the uncomfortable truth. "The new vocabulary is not the Bank's", said Bittu Sahgal, editor of the magazine, *Sanctuary*, and a member of the Indian Board for Wildlife. "It belongs to the NGOs that the Bank has purchased using consultancy fees, junkets and suchlike. This was of course part and parcel of the Bank's strategy, worked out a decade ago".

The rationale, Sahgal reasons, would have run something like this—the Indian government does not respect, or support NGOs. However, their voice is getting more powerful. The best strategy is to discredit the powerful NGOs, and those which we cannot discredit, we should "induce" to our way of thinking as that will leave us with more energy to fight those we can neither discredit nor buy.

It is a very different world from that of the 1960s, as Alvares reminds us. "Then, activists were politically astute, having gone through the experiences of the Vietnam War and Naxalbari. Today, if you are too radical in your language with the fiscal donors (you don't want to be seen only as a street guy), if you don't use the language of the ruling class, you get nothing. It is with interaction that the problem comes—when the Bank started putting NGOs on panels that is what happened".

But Coomaraswamy's "educated Indians" have been set up for co-option—and have been positioned as passively imprintable -- ever since Thomas Macaulay's grotesque 'Minute on Indian Education' in 1835, "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate... It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest..."

The Macaulay Minute became the definitive user manual for the spread of a British education in India; it was the ultimate pedagogical FAQ of the time, and it was ruthlessly colonialist in content, spirit and ambition. It set into motion the monstrosity that became Indian babudom. It was the precursor of the market-driven system that has now perfected a method of recruiting for its needs the brightest and the best, and after selection, to use such recruits against the interests of the rest. Haji Mohamed Idris, chairperson of Multiworld, a trust based in Malaysia that functions as an autonomous body dedicated to the nurturing and protection of the intellectual creativity of the peoples of the South, describes such a system as pitting thousands of aspirants in a vastly unequal race among themselves to literally fight, by means fair and foul, for the few places displayed as available for those who succeed.

The Warli would shake his head sadly at the pyrrhic quality of such success -- understood as a general conformity in all respects with the requirements of modern life, or the rituals of bourgeois civil society, the sacrifice of one's inherent right to question, to revolt, to dissent, to create, to be free. And this is called 'quality education'. Descriptive oxymorons are not unique to the development circus alone.

The circus has, annoyingly, not quite followed the plot. The South has been markedly less than enthusiastic about what is called "free market environmentalism" -- a term that has found its place in space and time but which is ontologically about as bizarre as the Pentagon's futures market in West Asian political instability. Its proponents are portraying this golem as the sav-

iour of our world's natural riches. Why then does one recall the terrible, twisted logic that once served as explanation in Vietnam -- in order to save the village we had to destroy it?

But if you'll only listen, we are told, you'll learn to understand that sustainable tariffs, pro-poor access points, subsidy slabs, free riders, the elimination of inefficiencies and resource rationalisation will give us clean water, enough food, employment, toilets and healthcare. If only. The assumption was that the greenness of the South would take both its hue and methods from the North -- the shadow of the Macaulay Minute is a long one, and for a time it was bolstered by the publishing phenomena that became the post-colonialist, post-Rushdie, post-liberalisation *mela* of Indian writing in English. Anything else -- like those troublesome Southerners, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Davison Budhoo -- would have revealed an India, and by extension a South, which the West finds discomfiting: menacingly disobedient, in-your-face, issuing a continuous challenge, wrestling with its own intractable laws.

Decolonisation and development: from the point of view of the donor agencies, the multilateral lending banks, from within the offices of the development experts, the two concepts cannot but be exclusive. New lexicographies invented to define economic and social growth are also designed to drive the wedge deeper between the two. The South, however, already has its own revolutionary vernacular, one whose roots lie in the powerful art of the Warli, those ur-Greens who read trees like books and whose perceptions instil a humility that 'development' has yet to learn. △

Mere dushman, mere bhai, mere humsai

(My enemy, my brother, my neighbour) – *Javed Akhtar*

by ***Shahvar Ali Khan***

I met Rahul and Amit during my first week at Trinity College. I can still remember those moments distinctly. Rahul was wearing the characteristic Sikh turban, and Amit was standing right next to him when I bumped into them in the middle of the main quad.

"Hi, I am Shahvar", I introduced myself.

"Are you from Bombay?" Rahul questioned, which I would discover later was his typically inquisitive, yet diplomatic style, mistaking me for another incoming freshman from his town.

"No I am from Lahore", I corrected him proudly, displaying the typical pride that *Lahoris* take in flaunting their citizenship.

"From Jamshedpur *yaar*", Amit acknowledged me nonchalantly, finally taking his hands out of his pocket. "Don't worry, you won't have heard about it", he quickly added, perceiving the confusion written on my face. "It's a rather small town in Bihar in the eastern part of India".

The conversation continued as the three of us strolled towards Mather Dining Hall. I don't exactly recollect the consequential scheme of events, but it is enough to say that this was not our last walk together to Mather. We became best friends. In fact, our 'trio' was so tight-knit that later on during my junior year I heard that some of our American peers and acquaintances suspected us of having a deeper relationship than what most people would call just 'best friends'!

That scepticism had its roots in cultural variance: men and women sticking together in their respective gangs is not the norm in most Western societies. Nevertheless, our friendship had another peculiar dimension: Rahul and Amit came from what most Pakistanis would regard the *dushman mulk*—India. Similar to most Pakistanis of my generation, I had been raised with stories of ruthless plunder, rape and murder that the Sikhs and Hindus had committed on the Muslims migrating to the Pakistani side of the border during the 1947 Partition of the Indian Subcontinent. The grief in my grandmother's tone when she would narrate the horrid, yet heroic, story of the three women of a family who had valiantly jumped into the well of their ancestral home in the border town of Batala, to evade a prospective rape by Sikh rioters, is still very vivid in my memory. Another popular anecdote starred one of my cousin's granduncles, who was killed by his very close Hindu childhood friend during a 1947 riot.

Though these stories did indeed affect me emotionally, strangely, I never developed the same bias against India that was so deeply ingrained in some of my fellow Pakistani compeers. The Partition stories that I grew up hearing were adequately balanced with my family's emphasis on broad learning and an intrinsic temperament of nonconformity. However, I think my elders did not anticipate the nature of dissent that I developed against the prevailing notions. What they thought would be *controlled* enlightenment turned out to be outright disagreement that bordered on antagonism against blind anti-Indian prejudices. Not to say that I was not nationalistic or patriotic; in fact I was extremely passionate about Pakistan. I was as charged up as my pals, if not more, during an India-Pakistan

cricket match. On other occasions, when privately discussing or using the Trinity podium to discuss international relations, I supported the Pakistan cause aggressively against India. However, since childhood, despite having only a vague idea of politics or history, I just could not identify with intolerant jingoism. My heart could not understand the logic of justifying spite for other fellow humans — and I didn't want to stop thinking from my heart.

First of all, even though I was a mere child when I heard the Partition 'saga', I could not believe that the atrocities could be one-sided. Secondly, considering the strong physical, social and cultural similarities between different communities, essentially Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, I refused to accept the widespread notion that there was something inherently wrong with Hindus and Sikhs, or in Hindu-Muslim amity. The result: I was declared a radical heretic, often admonished by my friends as pro-India or *Hindu lover!* It was true, but not in the manner my Pakistani brothers alleged. They just could not understand me. Verbal fights occasionally took dangerous twists when I was threatened, sometimes even by my best friends, with potential calls to the police for alleged treason. For them, this apparent 'love' for India simply meant 'hate' for Pakistan.

Although the reaction in my house was not as extreme, even my 'liberal' family could not exactly empathise with this 'heterodoxy', which for them was way outside the realms of political and cultural correctness. "Now all this is okay", my mother reacted teasingly one day, after I was finished with talking about the extent of cultural commonality between Pakistanis and Indians, as opposed to the deep-rooted 'Islamic' Middle Eastern ties that our press and state incessantly emphasized, "but now that you are going to the US, don't come back home with a Hindu girl!".

My mother very well knew that she did not need to emphasize this point. However heretic I might have been in my political and social beliefs, I always realised my responsibility as a member of my community and the limitations that accompanied it. I had a role to play in my society, which went beyond the individual in me. However, for me, not being allowed to marry someone outside the community, did not automatically translate into a repellent intolerance for the 'other'.

There was no doubt that I was indeed fascinated by this 'forbidden land' across the border. I remember the annual visits to the Wagah border, just 25 miles away from my house, on Independence Day, August 14. While most of the crowd, including my friends, chanted *"Hindustan Murdabaad"* (death to India), I was extremely inquisitive about the on goings on the other side of the border, which was also the land of my forefathers. The idea that rain in Lahore also meant showers in Amritsar, the twin city that was now India, or that both cities had so much more in common — especially in terms of our central Punjabi dialect — than with most other towns in Pakistan, was overwhelming. I envied a flock of crows that oblivious of visa requirements, flew towards the other side of the border.

■■■

"Ali, this is an order", Rahul was insisting, referring to me by the nickname I had been given at Trinity, "you have to take this".

"No way dude, are you kidding me?" was my first response. Although everyone knew that I habitually rejected any or anyone's suggestion at first, however, this time my "no" was meant in earnest.

"This is not fair at all", I protested. "Plus, I am not dying to go home".

"Ok, if you won't go home", now Rahul was trying to emotionally blackmail me, "I won't go either".

Rahul wanted to pay for my ticket to Pakistan. He knew that my on-campus jobs that semester were not sufficient for a twelve hundred dollar round-trip ticket. He knew how homesick I was; I had previously gone home during every break. Despite gnawing desperation for Lahore, I couldn't take such an enormous favour from my friend. Apart from the fact that the air-ticket was very costly, I knew that Rahul, unlike me, was an extremely diligent kid. He had meticulous work ethics and he saved every penny he could. In fact, much to all our friends' admiration, he often ended up sending money back home. Then how could I let him waste his hard-earned money for what seemed in comparison my immature whims?

"Yaar, pay it back whenever you have the money". Rahul insisted as if I was doing him a favour. "It's a done deal then". I didn't know what to say to him. The sincerity in his tone left me speechless.

It was anecdotes like these that I took back home with Rahul's ticket to Pakistan. I desperately wanted to tell my friends, in Pakistan, that they were wrong about our so-called *dushman* across the border. The reality of Rahul and Amit gave concrete shape to the ideals I had always defended. Unless there was some hidden 'truth' that had invariably evaded my perception, I frankly could not differentiate a Jahangir of Lahore from a Joginder of Delhi; or for that matter a Gulzar of Jhelum from a Hafeez of Jalandhar!

"Was it a Sikh or a Hindu here who helped out a Muslim in hard times?" I excitedly questioned Majid, my childhood Lahori buddy. "Or was it a friend, a *bhai*, who was there for me when I needed support?"

The height of my frustration knew no bounds when I heard Majid's response; but I should have known!

"You don't understand the Hindu backstabbing mentality", he firmly declared, as if he had met thousands in his lifetime. "This might hurt you, but you

will definitely see that happening eventually".

I was speechless again; just like I had been with Rahul a few weeks ago. However, to the contrary, this time it was due to this brash display of conceited ignorance, which for me almost bordered on innocence. How could I debate over beliefs that were a product of such simplistic, isolated and static perceptions? Was I fighting a lost battle?

I wanted to argue, but a resultant pessimism had engulfed my thoughts. I felt like a scientist who comes up with a new discovery, yearning for recognition, but is refused even simple acknowledgement. I was basically told to shut up, and I acquiesced. I didn't bother to tell Majid about the time when during my freshman year finals this Indian "Hindu", Amit, stayed awake all night teaching me economics, risking his own performance in an exam. Knowing my extraordinary deep sleep, he even woke me up for the *sehree* during Ramazan! How could I tell Majid that this "Sikh", Rahul's Sikh father, on his visit from "Hindu India", affectionately declared to his friends that 'Ali' was just like his son? Perhaps my utopian self was oblivious of the 'reality' I was urged to see through. Nonetheless, it was undoubtedly the unblemished trustworthiness of my Indian friends that I just could not fathom any "back stabbing ulterior motives".

After incessant but futile attempts at convincing Majid and Co. about the innocence of the *dushman* I had experienced first hand, I became somewhat immune to this failure. However, during every return flight to Trinity, I pledged that one-day I would go back home and emerge victorious in this battle against bigotry. Little did I know that I was destined to face another barrage of prejudice — this time though from a quarter that I expected it least from.

■■■

"Ali", Amit spoke out in a somewhat sarcastic manner at the dinner table at Mather, "so when are you enrolling for flight school dude?" I was completely taken aback.

9/11 had happened a few weeks ago, but none of us had said anything offensive to each other. In fact, Amit and Rahul had empathised with me as they realized that Muslims, in general, were being isolated and targeted throughout the world. Therefore, I could not understand Amit's unanticipated statement. Was there a deeper meaning behind what apparently seemed like a casual joke? Was this a delayed reaction to my ultra defensive stance against the U.S attack on Afghanistan? Was it being perceived as an 'extremist' Islamic view? Was my friend from the *hamsaya* country failing to differentiate between a fundamentalist and moderate Muslim view?

Moderate Muslims, like me, condemned the terrorist acts, but at the same time, maintained that the United States needed to review and rethink its lopsided foreign policy, which we thought was at the root of terrorism. If terrorism has to go, so must the neo-imperialism nurtured by generations of American policy-makers. Amit maintained similar anti-imperialist views. That is why I failed to understand his thinking behind his suggestion about flight school.

Perhaps there was no motive behind Amit's statement. Perhaps I was over-analyzing the situation. Though usually a compassionate, sensitive and peaceful individual, Amit would be the last person to provoke me in this manner.

"What's happening in cricket these days dude?" Rahul tried to distract us from the expected unpleasant situation. He may have seen the mixture of anguish and sense of betrayal in my eyes.

Playing this role of a peacemaker was not something unusual for Rahul. The poor guy was always trying to placate the heated political arguments that Amit and I indulged in umpteen times. Unlike Amit, who was equally patriotic and nationalistic about India as I was regarding Pakistan, Rahul had been detached from contentious political and historical discussions, a staple for Amit and me. I could never make out if Rahul's aloofness had more to do with his general apathy towards politics, or if he was always trying to be cautiously diplomatic with me, fearing that litigious comments from him could tarnish the unity of our 'trio'. I hoped the latter was not the case. Though it was true that Amit and I had indulged in heated debates over Pak-India issues, concurrently, we had been successful in differentiating between the 'personal' and the 'political.' When listening to Kishore Kumar or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, we were just friends sharing the pleasures of a common musical and literary culture, but when discussing Kashmir we would suddenly transform into the foreign ministers of our countries!

It may sound strange, but the fact was that both Amit and I respected each other's patriotism. Nationalism was a trait that we both held in very high regard as long as it did not border on jingoism. I guess it is almost similar to a soldier respecting another fighter from the 'other' country. I still have a strange nostalgia associated with the times when Rahul used to laugh away in the corner, on what he considered extremely childish overtures. Amit and I often boastfully claimed that though we were for peace between India and Pakistan, if we were to confront each other on opposite sides in time of war, neither would hesitate to shoot the other! I think our idealist vision for a peaceful future was sometimes checked by our patriotism, a hallmark of mainstream Pakistanis and Indians. In this regard, Amit and I were probably the same sort of people, just living in different countries. It was actually the love for our countries, rather than the hate for the 'other' that provided the impetus for our antagonistic debates.

Nonetheless, in spite of this occasional hostility there remained an unfailing sentiment of empathy for each other's arcane views and, more importantly, an underlying sense of frustration with the dirty political standoff between India and Pakistan. In fact, many a times the arguments would take on a positive trajectory, once the initial adrenaline level would fall and the discussion directed towards solution finding strategies. I still remember the day when Amit walked off from the college computer lab, in anger, after one of our characteristic heated arguments. To my surprise he came back after half an hour with a paper and pencil in hand and together we brainstormed for a 'South Asian Union' along the lines of the European Union!

However, on the particular day when the 'flying school' comment was made, Amit's tone was different. I could sense the stark difference in his facial expressions, but I tried nevertheless to laugh off the belligerent nature of his statement.

"I have sent in my admission applications and physical tests *yaar*", I tried to play along with the joke, as if Amit's inquiry was just part of the old game of words that we were used to playing. "Let's see if they let me fly!" On my way back to the dorm I kept shrugging off the incident as if it had not happened.

At other times, I tried to justify the comment as just a light-hearted quip on Amit's part. In reality, though, I was deeply hurt. Why had my 'Muslim' identity suddenly taken precedence against all other things I represented? Moreover, why was I associated with a fundamentalist group that I equally condemned? Islamic extremists and 'political Islam', in my view, had pushed back the Muslim world into the Dark Ages. And my *humsaya* friends had always been very much aware of my political ideology.

"What are your brothers going to do now?" a Nepali friend joined the bandwagon. "Did you get an e-mail from Bin?" he inquired with a sarcastic smile.

It was obviously a joke, but by now I had lost my patience. I got up to hit him, but Rahul intervened. The tension by now had really become exacerbated. What started out as discreet innuendoes transformed into personal attacks and stereotypes about each other's race and ethnicity.

"That is why people are scared of you guys", Amit commented later in the day when he heard from Rahul about what had happened with the Nepali friend. "These sudden outbursts prove that you people by nature are irrational, destructive and aggressively violent".

Amit was referring to the Muslims in general and Punjabi Muslims in particular: the age-old stereotype about Muslims and Hindus where the former were considered aggressive and emotional while the latter were generalised as rational and astute.

"You bastards are all freaking weakling vegetarian pussies and that's why you give logic so much importance!" I reacted in a manner that was totally in line with Amit's stereotype: "We are strong, open and 'in your face' type of people!" I cannot really analyze the extent of ignorance and intolerance in my reaction, but ironically I must have sounded as biased and inconsiderate as Majid back in Lahore, "We don't use all the 'planning' and 'back stabbing' tactics like you guys".

'Back stabbing'. Wow!

Recalling all that was said, I cannot believe that I had stooped so low. However, that was not the end. I had actually become highly sensitive, aggressive and intolerant to the point where I could not even take small jokes. I went on and on from deconstructing ancient Indian history to aggrandizing the 'diplomatic correctness' with which "Hindu" leaders, during the colonial era, had compromised with the British against their Muslim co-regionalists. Political gossips were now weapons for personal attacks. I accused Amit of supporting England, an ex-colonial power, during Pakistan-England cricket matches and he in turn indicted that Pakistanis don't even hesitate to sell their mother (land) when it comes to India, referring to the time when Pakistan allegedly gave away to China a chunk of land during the Indo-China War of 1962. Disparate issues and topics were being mixed to put the *dushman* down. No longer could Amit and I pinpoint the line that differentiated the 'foreign minister' and the 'friend.' It almost seemed as if it was not Amit and Ali anymore, but Majid and Majid talking to each other.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that Amit's biased remarks concerning the Punjabi Muslims were probably accurate to a certain extent. It is a known fact that most Punjabi Muslims are very emotional people. I remember someone telling me that during the India-Pakistan War of 1965 the Punjabis of Lahore went to the border with their hockey sticks! However, on the other hand these Punjabis are also the most candid and warm people, popular for their hospitality. Perhaps I did react in typically "Punjabi violent" manner. Probably, I was indeed a deeply hurt "irrational Punjabi Muslim!" Another more 'logical person' or prototypical 'Bihari Hindu' might have used a different defence mechanism; like complaining to the Dean of Students on grounds of racial abuse. However, from where I come, this would have been considered betraying a friend and hitting below the belt.

Therefore, even if Amit's sweeping proclamation typifying the Punjabi Muslims was not warranted at that particular moment, it did reflect the truth; well at least partially. I guess it should be realised that most stereotypes have some truth behind them. That is precisely the reason why they should be recognised and understood. It should not be used as a means to attack

other groups, but to face and respect those 'differences' that exist. 'Difference' does not have to mean 'conflict' and that's exactly what I realised after that hostile period within our 'trio'.

■■■

My 'friendly' ideals regarding the Indians had been tested under circumstances that helped me rediscover my amity towards India -- Indians. What had previously been sheer romanticism towards Pak-India comity, based on the conjecture that Indians and Pakistanis are historically and culturally homologous, was now a recognition of that 'difference' that is commonly, and wrongly, in my opinion, perceived as 'conflict.' The dispute with Amit and the blatant biases that emerged as a result, greatly facilitated in comprehending the blind hatred that was put into practice during and post Partition. The childhood stories of the Partition and the mysteries surrounding the widespread abhorrence; inquisitions that had previously eluded my thought processes, now started to make much more sense. Now I somewhat understood how the best of friends could have become the worst of enemies.

In an environment of excessive cultural similarities between the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent, when the reality of slight 'differences' hit home, both the groups, not anticipating the extent of dissent, felt deceived and hurt. The world can go against you, but nothing can hurt more if it is your own brother that suddenly opposes you. The feeling of betrayal that transpires afterwards is intolerable.

Here at Trinity, both Amit and I had similar anti-imperialist views when it came to the post-9/11 scenario, but I don't have any reservations in saying that being a Muslim I did indeed feel a kind of emotional solidarity towards the people of Afghanistan that Amit did not, and probably, could not feel. Moreover his logical approach, cool and somewhat detached, to the issue was in great contrast to my emotional and aggrieved rhetoric. The result was regrettable, but somewhat predictable. While he mistook me as a tacit sympathizer of the so-called 'terrorists', I misperceived his passivity as 'silent' approval for anti-Muslim actions.

Coming to think of it, both of us actually could not anticipate and realise that the intrinsic differences concerning such contentious issues can indeed exist between an Indian and a Pakistani. And that it was not only on Kashmir or 'India-Pakistan' where we diverge. 'Similar' is not equal to 'same' and more importantly, the idea that it is okay not to be 'same'. Apart from a shared regional ethnicity what puts a Hafeez from Jalandhar (now India) and a Gulzar from Jhelum (now Pakistan) in the 'same' bracket, is their service and patronage of one lingual heritage. However, Hafeez coined and identifies with a particular poem that is representative of a unique national ideology that Gulzar does not nourish. This makes them 'different.'

Cultural commonalties obviously exist, in abundance, between Indians and Pakistanis, but at the same time discrepancies cannot be evaded. They have to be confronted with candour, beyond 'we are all the same' mindset. In intellectual tradition the "meaning-making", of "reality", or "knowing" is encouraged, as cross categorical ways of understanding, where each reality is "true" from the perspective of the "other". We need to develop the maturity of respecting and owning the differences between communities and nations — a recognition of unique identities beyond the homogenous macro picture. There is no point in shying away from these 'contrarieties', otherwise there would always be an undercurrent ready to erupt to sweep away human comity and dignity. These differences need not lead to "Crush India" or "Crush Pakistan". These need not stand between Amit and me. The debate and friendship must go hand in hand. Third party mediation would also help! And in our case it came in the form of our peacemaker Rahul of course!

Although it took time, both Amit and I began discerning the reality of our 'difference.' What started of almost as a microcosm of the 1947 Partition, ended up with an implicit promise to celebrate the commonalties and the uncommon. No loud apologies or promises were made, but the writing on the wall seemed crisp and clear. We could not make the same mistakes as our forebears. We would not let another bloody partition take place.

Tum khush raho, abaad raho
Krishan Nagar raho, ya Allahabad raho!

■■■

Just recently Amit, Rahul and I have planned that one-day we would meet across the Wagah border. It would probably be our best bet to see each other since I will return home after graduation and visiting each other's country is not easy due to oft-tense political circumstances. It won't be difficult for me: I would take a forty-minute car ride from Lahore to the border, but Amit and Rahul would have to embark on long journeys to come to Indian Punjab, from Jamshedpur and Bombay.

No doubt that it would be great to see Rahul and Amit: *Mere Dushman, Mere Bhai, Mere Humsai.* However, come to think of it, the frustration of not being able to actually cross the barbed wires to embrace the people with whom you have shared everything in those four long years would be enervating. May be a shake hand across the huge gates separating India and Pakistan, with the permission of the Pakistani Rangers and the Indian Border Security Forces, would be possible. But would that be enough?

A tale of loot and plunder

Exploitation of natural resources by the rich and the powerful continues in Pakistan, creating resentment that is bound to burgeon into resistance.

by ***Aasim Sajjad Akhtar***

There is an assault underway on the natural resources of the world. The assault is spearheaded by multinational capital, which needs to consume more and more to be able to continue thriving. Capital has been on the rampage throughout history, but today it has surpassed all previous imaginable limits of resource capture and expansionism. The rationale is simple and circular—to continue generating profit, there is a need for resources.

The resource situation is most acute in the periphery where the ruling elite in post-colonial states are ever willing accomplices of profiteers from the core. Meanwhile, there is hardly a semblance of regulatory mechanisms to slow the onslaught. In Pakistan, land remains the most valuable resource, given the fact that the vast majority of citizens derive their livelihood either directly or indirectly from it. In recent years, the usurping of land by the state and its profit-making corporate cronies has reached incredible proportions, and it may well be argued that it is the increasingly visible struggle over land between the establishment and the people of the country that will have a heavy bearing on the political direction that Pakistan takes in years to come.

Compared to other countries in South Asia, including India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Pakistan has never wholly implemented a nationwide land redistribution policy. On record, there are three land reform legislations from 1958, 1973, and 1977. Unfortunately, the persistence of the nexus between the old feudal elite and the civil and military bureaucracy that developed at the early stages of the country's existence has ensured that land reform still remains a pipe dream. Urbanisation and out-migration, especially to West Asia, provided the majority rural population temporary avenues for alternative livelihoods through the 1980s. The situation since the beginning of the 1990s however, has been deteriorating rapidly.

The terms of trade for agricultural commodities have been worsening steadily for many decades now. However, the attack on rural livelihoods due to the increase in prices of agricultural inputs and reduction in subsidies and price supports is specific to the adjustment craze that was set in motion by the international financial institutions (IFIs) in the late 1970s. These phenomena have intensified over the past few years. Therefore, subsistence growers are being steadily pushed to the limit, with the adverse climatic conditions over the past couple of years only aggravating the situation.

Feudal apathy

Predictably, and in spite of the natural fragmentation of landholdings amongst traditional feudal families, land concentration has actually increased in recent years. While it is difficult to isolate the exact causes of this trend, the above-mentioned global market pressures on small and landless growers is at the root of the problem. Many subsistence growers have sold their land and migrated to urban centres or taken up contract work on someone else's land due to their inability to make ends meet.

In any case, there is now a new force encroaching, and one that official data often conveniently misses out on. The state is increasingly grabbing land, along with the state elite's own autonomous corporate entities. There is a fair bit of land in Pakistan that remains uncultivated (or under-cultivated), which in many areas is referred to as *shaamilaat*, or commons. Livestock rearing remains a significant source of income for many rural dwellers, as does low-cost, organic, rain-fed agriculture. In many cases, such activities take place on shaamilaat. Under the guise of "development" projects, a large amount of such land is being usurped by the state. This is done by conveniently assuming that shaamilaat land is state land. Therefore, when such land is acquired, the state does not even bother to account for the destruction of livelihood and eco-systems that takes place, let alone accommodate the losses that are inflicted on local communities. Official reports simply pontificate at length about the incredible economic growth and prosperity that will be the necessary outcome of the project. Meanwhile, a rather warped process of land allotments has been underway now for decades as part of such projects. The beneficiaries are civil and military officers, both serving and retired. Examples of this kind of rent-seeking activity are increas-

ing noticeably, and there is little to indicate that things are about to change.

One instance of a mega water project in which land resources are being ruthlessly exploited by the state elite is the Greater Thal Canal (GTC). This canal was conceived of as a flood carrier canal to irrigate otherwise uncultivated lands in four districts of the Siraiki belt in Punjab province. As it turns out, the entire province of Sindh has erupted in protest against the GTC because it will further divert water from downstream where the water problem is already acute. In addition, residents of the Siraiki area in which the canal is being built are being dispossessed of their lands through the use of colonial-period land acquisition laws without being given any commensurate compensation. The other quite prominent element of the whole affair (and what is more or less common knowledge) is that large chunks of land in the command area that will be irrigated will be allotted to army officers.

As in many cases similar to this one, Pervez Musharraf has personally asserted that the GTC will be built, despite the fact that such a decision is clearly undemocratic and against the wishes of those who will be directly affected by the project, a constituency that includes an entire province. Meanwhile, it is the army officers who are likely to end up with a large proportion of the hundreds and thousands of acres of land in the area on which indigenous people have established age-old livelihood systems that will be destroyed and forgotten It is also worth noting that in many cases where such large mega water projects are undertaken, huge tracts of fertile land are typically destroyed by seepage and flooding, and one has to wonder if even the narrowly defined economic benefits of such projects offset the irreversible economic losses. Social cost-benefit analysis remains a distant dream.

Sindh has erupted in protest against the GTC because it will further divert water from downstream, where the water problem is already acute

A so-called *Water Vision 2025* has been announced recently by policy makers in Pakistan, on the basis of which numerous mega water projects are being planned, designed, and constructed with the express objective of bringing uncultivated land under cultivation and thereby inducing economic growth and development. To whom this growth and development will cater is a question that is taboo in Pakistan. The army in particular is not fond of those who choose to dissent against what it regards as the supreme national interest. The real quandary will arise when there is simply no land left to acquire, or water left to irrigate the acquired lands. Eventually such a situation will come to pass and it remains a matter of speculation what new method of resource extraction will then be contrived by the ruling classes.

The "national interest" is very much tied to the "global interest" philosophy of the core countries. In Pakistan, an example of this is the plan for corporate agriculture farming. Through this initiative, the state will lease out unlimited tracts of state land to agribusiness firms to undertake large-scale capital-intensive agriculture. In this rush for hi-tech farming, there is little concern for the effect on small and landless growers, as well as the environmental impact on the land itself. It is a fact that the army has been propped up by the global financial elite over the past few years and it is only natural that reciprocity abounds in the relationship. The imperatives of global capitalism are such that undemocratic forces, such as the Pakistan army, are the most natural allies of multinational capital, with the losers being the people and their resources.

'Armed' Consultancies

The international financial institutions (IFIs) promote such mega projects, happily conceding massive cost overruns and graciously extending repayment schedules. Contracts for construction, transportation and a variety of other project-related activities are awarded to firms that suit the IFIs. Foreign consultants who charge astronomical private sector rates for their "expertise" are brought in, with the whole charade becoming so preposterous that even grievance complaints filed by the affected are dealt with by overpaid consultants from abroad without the slightest idea of local politics, history, and social norms. The capitalist food chain is thus completed.

Meanwhile, the army has become the primary player in the land-grabbing game in Pakistan. Cantonments have sprung up in all urban settlements, with most of the land for such cantonments previously catering to a much larger, often rural, population that directly derived its livelihood from the land. A perverse mentality within the army has seen the institution take over large tracts of land in what are loosely termed "border" areas, on the pretext that army installations in such areas are necessary to protect national security. Most of this land is utilised for the personal benefit of army officers rather than in the public interest. All influential groups including the civil and military bureaucracy, the feudal elite, and now the nouveau-riche industrial class, have subscribed to the state ideology which, in its essence, amounts to the doctrine of necessity. These elite alliances give the army the mandate it needs to carry on with land-grabbing activities. And the extent to which the army officers have gotten used to possession and control of land is exemplified by the flagrant use of force to suppress those who dispute the army's right to do so.

A high-profile example of the army's inability to comprehend dissent is found in its response to the

movement of landless tenants on state land in Punjab, which has been going on for over three years now in the city of Okara. In this case, the vast difference in power and access of the army versus other state actors is very obvious. The conflict with regard to the Okara military farms has received a great deal of attention, even though the movement has spread far and wide beyond Okara to farms that are not controlled by the military. It is the possibility that Okara could herald recognition amongst the general public, that the army is not unaccountable, that is worrying the generals. The Director-General of the elite paramilitary Pakistan Rangers, Major General Husain Mehdi—the man who has established the "peace" in Okara—has gone on record to say quite clearly that if the army gives up the land in Okara to landless tenants, what will stop all tenants in the country from rising up against their own landlords? If nothing else, this is a message to what remains of the old feudal elite to get its act together and understand the mutual interest which binds them and the army.

In much the same way that the forces of the establishment are grabbing land, the realms of water and forest resources have also increasingly been coming under attack. As in the case of land, these resources too have been plundered over an extended period of time without heed being paid to the consequences of unbridled profiteering. If anything, the intensity of the plunder has been on the rise. In the case of forest resources, most of which are found in the mountainous North West Frontier Province (NWFP) province, the state is employing the same neo-colonial methods of extraction, as in the above-mentioned cases of takeover of land.

Shaamilat forests constitute a large proportion of total forests from which local communities derive their livelihood. Needless to say, the dense forest reserves that exist (or at least did exist) in the mountainous part of the country are also amongst Pakistan's greatest ecological treasures. Unfortunately, the engagement of local communities with the state has only resulted in the virtual re-production of colonial classifications of forests such that the rights of the majority of local people have been almost completely eroded. Even royalties due to local communities under colonial laws are not granted to them.

In the coastal areas in the south, marine resources have been pillaged to the extent that estimates indicate that up to 80 percent of the fish stock on the 1800 kilometre-long coastline has been depleted. Natural deltas and creeks have dried up, with the real impact on the environment and livelihoods of local communities only likely to become apparent after some time has passed. All of this is an outcome of the fact that water resources are being diverted upstream to suit the needs of influential people who demand more water to pander to their self-interest, and the fact that foreign corporate deep-sea trawlers are being issued fishing licenses to wave their magic wand of destruction in Pakistan's coastal waters.

All in all, it is difficult to imagine that such a situation can persist indefinitely. There is now a serious crisis brewing in terms of natural resource abuse in Pakistan. While matters such as the blatant disregard of the Bush administration for the global environment have received wide publicity, the plunder of resources in countries like Pakistan are still not being recognised as the critical issues they are. There is very little in the way of serious political action and reflection on such issues. There should be, because it is the rapidity of such resource manipulation that will likely precipitate more and more response from threatened communities. It is a fact that only resistance to profiteering at the local level can precipitate the kind of unified global response that is required in the long-run to challenge the unsustainable production-consumption cycle that is at the heart of global capitalism. One wonders meanwhile, how long before nature starts to resist in its own, unfathomable way.

WTO and agriculture
The Great Trade Robbery and the neo-poor

by **Devinder Sharma**

As expected, the United States and the European Union have arrived at a new accord, just ahead of the fifth World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial meeting at Cancun from 10 to 14 September , which in letter and spirit lays out a detailed road map for what can be called the second phase of the "great trade robbery".

The new framework--a "common vision" rather than a detailed plan--is aimed at further destroying whatever remains of the strong foundations of food self-sufficiency in developing countries already wilting under the compound impact of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) which was reached in 1994 and which provided for the conversion from quantitative trade barriers to tariffs or tariff rate quotas, and for reductions in export subsidies and trade-distorting domestic support policies. For the small farmers and giant agribusiness alike in North America, Europe and the South Pacific, it will however be business as usual. Rich countries subsidise agribusiness by allowing them to buy very cheap, with the government then making up some of the differences with direct payment to the farmers.

Duke of Westminster

David Rockefeller

Ted Turner

The situation now borders on the absurd. The richest man in the United Kingdom, the Duke of Westminster, who owns about 55,000 hectares of farm estate, receives an average subsidy of 300,000 pound sterling as direct payments, and, in addition, gets 350,000 pounds a year for the 1,200 dairy cows he owns. In the US, recipients of agricultural subsidies in 2001 included David Rockefeller and Ted Turner. Little wonder then that the CNN has no time for the voice of the farm sector in developing countries.

It certainly is an unequal world, and perhaps the most debasing and demeaning of all the world's inequalities is the manner in which the cattle in the rich countries are pampered at the cost of several hundred million farmers in the developing world. It has now been worked out that the EU provides a daily subsidy of USD 2.7 per cow, and Japan provides three times more at USD 8, whereas half of India's 1000 million people live on less than USD 2 a day.

The complete impact on human lives—women and children in particular—and the resulting loss in livelihood security, and thereby the accelerated march towards hunger and destitution, cannot be easily quantified. Surging food imports have hit farm incomes, with severe employment effects in many developing countries. Unable to compete with cheap food imports, and in the absence of adequate protective measures, income and livelihood losses have hurt women and poor farmers the most. Farmers in the developing world seem to have become completely dispensable. They are the neo-poor.

Uncaring of the stark inequalities, the new agreement throws a stronger protective ring around the domestic producers in the richest trading block—the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Unmindful of the negative consequences inflicted with impunity, the knives are out once again to inflict more damage on the Third World. Cancun provides a perfect playground to arm-twist the developing countries into submission.

WTO : 'Progress' Report

An idea of what awaits the post-Cancun world can be gleaned from just a brief survey of the extent of exploitation that the WTO has already inflicted--through the first phase of trade robbery—on the poor and vulnerable ever since the Magna Carta for hunger, food insecurity and destitution was unleashed in January 1995. In the Philippines, agricultural export earnings were expected to increase by billions of pesos a year after 1994, generating 500,000 additional jobs a year in the

country. Instead, traditional exports such as coconut, abaca and sugar have lost markets. Corn production suffered significant negative growth between 1994 and 2000, partly because of the arrival of cheaper subsidised grains. With incomes falling, the agricultural sector lost an estimated 710,000 jobs during the period, and another 2 million by the year 2000.

Corn: Trade liberalisation has already exposed developing country farmers to ruinous competition, driving down prices, undermining rural wages and aggravating unemployment. In the Philippines, the opening up of the corn market in 1997 reduced corn prices by one-third. At that time, US corn growers were receiving USD 20,000 a year, on average, in subsidies, while Filipino farmers in Mindanao had average income levels of USD 365. Likewise, between 1993 and 2000, cheap corn imports from US into Mexico increased eighteen times, leading to accelerated migration from rural areas to urban centres.

Coffee: In Central America—Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua—the price of coffee beans has fallen to just 25 percent of its level in 1960, and the region lost an estimated USD 713 million in coffee revenues in 2001. In these countries, traditionally dependent upon coffee exports, over 170,000 jobs were lost the same year with the loss in wages computed at USD 140 million. The impact was also felt in sub-Saharan Africa, where Ethiopia and Uganda reported huge losses in export revenues. In 2000-01, Uganda exported roughly the same volume, but it earned the country USD 110 million, a steep drop from USD 433 million that it had notched five years earlier, in 1994-95. In Ethiopia, export revenues dropped from USD 257 million to USD 149 million between 1999 and 2000. Ironically, in January 2002, the EU and USD warned of increased poverty and food insecurity in Ethiopia, not realising that much of the fault rests with their own policies.

In Vietnam's Dak Lak province, farmers who were solely dependent upon coffee are now categorised as being in the 'pre-starvation' stage. In India, coffee plantations have laid off over 25 percent of the workers in the southern states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In Brazil, low coffee returns have resulted in increased unemployment and hunger. In Honduras, such has been the terrible impact that the World Food Programme reported in March 2002 that the coffee crisis, coupled with prevailing drought, had left some 30,000 farmers in the hunger trap, with hundreds of children so malnourished that they needed to be hospitalised. The rich subsidise their agriculture and dunp surpluses on the majority world, which is being fed the lie that poverty in the short-run will ensure long-term economic growth.

Cotton: In 2001, the 25,000 cotton growers in the United States received roughly USD 3.9 billion in subsidy payments, for producing a cotton crop that was worth only USD 3 billion at world market prices (One Arkansas cotton grower received as much as the combined annual earnings of 25,000 cotton farmers in Mali). Alone the US cotton subsidy is more than the gross domestic product of several African countries and three times the amount the US spends on aid to half a billion Africans living in poverty. In 2002, direct financial assistance by a number of exporting countries, including China, the European Union and the US, to the tune of 73 percent of the world cotton production, destroyed millions of livelihoods in West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad). India and Pakistan too have been forced to lower import duties, allowing a surge of cotton imports thereby pushing farmers out.

Dairy: In the dairy sector, the European Union's subsidised exports have hit the dairy industry in Brazil, Jamaica and India. Jamaican dairy producers have time and again spilt milk onto the streets, and the Indian dairy industry too has not been slow in complaining of export dumping. In 1999-2000, India imported over 130,000 tonnes of the EU's highly subsidised skimmed milk powder. This was the result of Euro 5 million export subsidies that were provided, approximately 10,000 times the annual income of a small-scale milk producer in India. The butter export subsidy paid by the EU, in the mean time, is currently at a five-year high and butter export refunds have risen to the equivalent of 60 percent of the EU market price. Consequently, butter oil import into India has grown at an average rate of 7.7 percent annually. This trend has already had a dampening effect on the price of ghee in the domestic market. Ironically, India is the biggest producer of milk in the world, and does not provide any subsidy for the dairy sector.

Indonesia was rated among the top ten exporters of rice before the WTO came into effect. Three years later, in 1998, Indonesia had emerged as the world's largest importer of rice. In India, the biggest producer of vegetables in the world, the import of vegetables has almost doubled in just one year--from INR 92.8 million in 2001-02 to INR 171 million in 2002-03. In Peru, food imports increased dramatically in the wake of liberalisation. There, food imports now account for 40 percent of the total national food consumption. Wheat import doubled in the 1990s, import of maize overtook domestic production, and milk import rose three times more than in the first half of the previous decade, play-

Cattle in the rich countries are pampered at the cost of several hundred million farmers in the developing world

ing havoc with Peruvian farmers

All this may seem shocking, but is merely a peep into the destruction wrought by the 'disagreement' on agriculture. Everyday, thousands of farmers and rural people in the majority world—without land and adequate livelihoods—constituting a reservoir of frustration and disaffection, trudge to the cities, their abject poverty contrasting vividly with the affluence of the urban centres. These are the victims—in fact, the first generation of the affected—of the great trade robbery.

Unequal Wars

Through a variety of instruments, rich countries have ensured complete protectionism. Trade policies, therefore, have remained highly discriminatory against the developing country farmers. Such is the extent of protection, that the benevolence the OECD exhibits through development aid to all countries—totalling USD 52 billion—pales before the monumental agricultural subsidies of USD 311 billion that these countries provided to their own agriculture in 2001. In reality, it goes far beyond giving with one hand and taking back with the other. Rich countries effectively use development aid to convince the domestic audiences of their generosity towards human suffering, in essence using aid as the human face for 'ambitious' one-way trade--from the OECD to the rest of the world.

The thrust of the ongoing negotiations is on piercing open the developing country markets to more subsidised exports

The AoA identifies three main categories of government support—trade-distorting support (amber box); support with no, or minimal, distorting effect (green box); and a category of direct payments under production-limiting programmes (blue box), which have come in handy for the rich countries to protect their subsidies to agriculture, and at the same time dump their surpluses all over the world. Considering that world commodity prices are far from adequate anywhere to provide a decent return, these subsidies are actually the cause of excessive supplies in the world markets, thus resulting in low prevailing world prices. Going a step further, the US is permitted under AoA to provide USD 363 million in export subsidies for wheat and wheat flour, and the EU is to limit it to USD 1.4 billion a year. At the same time, the US incurs annually USD 478 million under its Export Enhancement Programme (EEP), which is not being subjected to reduction commitments.

Given the provision of all these subsidies, agribusiness companies find it easy and economical to export. Export credits, used primarily by the US, and not counted as export subsidies, doubled in just one year to reach USD 5.9 billion in 1998. The export subsidies and credits are cornered by the food exporting companies. In the US, for instance, more than 80 percent of the corn exports is handled by three firms: Cargill, ADM and Zen Noh. The level of dumping, onto international global markets, by the US alone hovers around 40 percent for wheat, 30 percent for soybeans, 25 to 30 percent for corn and 57 percent for cotton. Further, each tonne of wheat and sugar that the United Kingdom sells on the international market is priced 40 to 60 percent lower than the cost of production.

The shocking levels of food dumping and its little understood but horrendous impact on the farming sector in the developing countries is the result of clever manipulations at the WTO. The US and EU were successful in ensuring that some subsidies--and that included direct payments—have little or no impact on production levels and so have little or no impact on trade. Using sophisticated models and taking advantage of the un-preparedness of developing country negotiators, they devised a complicated set of rules that deemed only 'amber box' subsidies as 'trade distorting' and therefore in urgent need of elimination. As it turned out, these were the type of subsidies that the poor countries were also using.

On the other hand, 'green box' and 'blue box' subsidies are the categories of farm support that only the rich countries have been providing, and which the developing countries are not in a position to afford. Subsequently, in July 2002, the US proposed significant cuts in 'trade distorting' domestic support for all products and trade partners, with a ceiling of 5 percent of the value of agricultural production for industrial countries and 10 percent for developing countries. This, however, does not mean that the US will make any major cuts in its farm subsidy support. The US Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, 2002, provides for USD 180 billion in agricultural subsidies for the next 10 years, with more than a third coming in the first three years.

The new EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform proposals that have been announced prior to the Cancun WTO Ministerial have also made no attempt to make radical changes in reduction commitments. Moving along the lines preferred by the US, CAP has shifted most of the 'blue box' subsidies to the 'green box'. European agriculture will continue to be subsidised to the tune of Euro 43 billion for another decade, and that amount will increase further when new members join the union. Both the US and EU have managed to juggle farm support from one box to another without making any significant commitments. This illusion is now being used to create another illusion of the sincerity of the rich towards 'free' trade, using it as a bargaining chip for seeking more market access from poor countries.

As if these massive subsidies are not enough, developed countries have used high tariffs to successfully block imports from developing countries. They have used special safeguards (SSG), used only by 38 rich coun-

tries so far, to restrict imports from developing countries. Developed countries took advantage of this flexibility by reserving the right to use the SSG for a large number of products. Canada reserves the right to use SSG for 150 tariff lines, the EU for 539 tariff lines, Japan for 121 tariff lines, the US for 189 tariff lines, and Switzerland for 961 tariff lines. On the other hand, only 22 developing countries can use SSG. The most vulnerable of the WTO members, whose trade in agricultural products take place under a tariff only regime, have been denied access to these instruments.

At the same time, these countries have managed to fulfil the technical requirements for tariff cuts under AoA without any meaningful reductions. Although the US, the EU, Japan and Canada maintain tariff peaks of 350 to 900 percent on food products such as sugar, rice, dairy products, meat, fruits, vegetables and fish, the thrust of the ongoing negotiations remain on piercing open the developing country markets to more subsidised exports.

Keeping the economic interests of the developed countries in mind, the chair of the agricultural negotiations and Hong Kong's trade ambassador Stuart Harbinson, had proposed a compromise formula that suggested the creation of two new instruments: 'special products' (SP) and 'special safeguard mechanisms'. For crops which are crucial for food security needs, the proposal is to put them in the SP category for which the tariff reduction should on an average be of 10 percent with a minimum reduction rate per tariff line of five percent. For the remaining products, tariff reduction should be between 25 to 40 percent. The US-EU proposal, however, does not make a mention of the 'special products'. The general feeling is that developing countries do require special safeguard measures that act as a partial protection rather than be allowed a more permanent feature of resorting to 'special products'.

For all practical purposes, the concept of 'strategic products' or 'special products' is merely a proxy for the 'development box', a proposal that will eventually turn out to be more damming if implemented. Moreover, the negotiations are going to be centred around the number of 'special products' that a country can claim. In other words, the debate will very conveniently shift from the more contentious issue of agricultural subsidies in the West. The AoA does not realise that production of crops and its imports into developing countries cannot be equated with industrial production. What the developing countries need is a trading system that recognises their specific needs of food security and rural development, based on the principle of production by the masses rather than production for the masses.

The hypocrisy of the developed countries has been echoed by the World Bank's Chief Economist, Nicholas Stern. Travelling through India recently, he denounced the subsidies paid by rich countries to their farmers as "sin ...on a very big scale" but warned India against any attempt to resist opening its markets. "Developing countries must remove their trade barriers regardless of what is happening in the developed countries". No wonder, while the negotiation continues and the developing countries are kept busy with diversionary tactics like 'special products', agricultural exports from the OECD countries continue to rise. Between 1970 and 2000, the EU's share in global agricultural exports increased from 28.1 percent to 42.7 percent. France increased its share from 5.7 percent to 8.1 percent, Germany from 2.6 percent to 5.9 percent and the United Kingdom from 2.7 percent to 4.1 percent.

Developing countries cannot afford to be silent spectators. If the industrialised countries can protect their agriculture, developing countries should not shy away from doing the same. Instead of succumbing to the pressure tactics that accompany the occasional olive branch of a 'development box' or 'special products' that helps in partially protecting agriculture, the entire effort should be to demand the abolition of agricultural subsidies in the OECD countries. A collective stand based on the following three planks is the only way forward for developing countries to protect agriculture.

Developing countries need a trading system that recognises their specific needs of food security and rural development.

- "Zero-tolerance" on agricultural subsidies: Developing countries should make it categorically clear that the negotiations will move ahead only when the subsidies (under all 'boxes') are removed. The AoA should wait till the subsidies in the West are grounded. Any agreement without the subsidies being removed will play havoc with developing country agriculture.
- Restoration of Quantitative Restrictions: Developing countries should demand restoration of quantitative restrictions (and special safeguard measures for those countries which did not follow the QR route). In fact, the removal of subsidies should be linked with the removal of quantitative restrictions. That alone will provide the necessary safeguard for developing country agriculture and food security.
- Multilateral Agreement against Hunger: Among the new issues to be introduced at Cancun, the developing countries need to strive for the inclusion of a multilateral agreement against hunger. This should be based on the guiding principle of the right to food and should form the basis for all future negotiations. Such a multilateral agreement would ensure that countries will have the right to take adequate safeguards if their commitment towards the WTO obligations leads to more hunger and poverty.

The urge to break the box

Glittering beautiful words
Weighed down by their grand meanings
A high-class crudity
Golden cobweb of lucidity
The two of us are enmeshed in it
Sometimes I write and you read
Sometimes you write and I read.
–Sundar Chand Thakur in, *"Buddhijibi Bimarsha ka Sarbhara Tuchchapan"*

THE BANALITY of intellectual exchange in South Asia is too stark to warrant a reflection. Yet, it is impossible not to lose your balance when faced with the spectacle of top dogs of the media defending territoriality at a talk-shop held in Kathmandu recently on 'Mapping Borders'. Forget extending the frontiers of knowledge, most of us seem to lack the courage of crossing boundaries – those ludicrous lines in the sand and on the mud that are meaningless without the context that we ourselves provide.

Territoriality, political control over space, is exercised in many ways; writing is one of them. By Benedict Anderson logic, it was 'print capitalism' (the printing press) that imagined a community and spread it as nationalism. By implication thereof, media-persons are as guilty of the excesses of national borders as their governments. If we are as poor at mapping borders as was seen during the Kathmandu meet, the spectre of more intense conflicts over boundaries is what lies in store for us all over South Asia.

It is incredible, but even journalists who treat every decision of their government with scepticism stop short of questioning boundaries that create and maintain the myth of inside and outside. "Bit by bit," Bill Clinton declared grandly in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 1997, "the information age is chipping away at the barriers – economic, political, and social – that once kept people locked in and ideas locked". Sadly, the debonair president of the United States of America could not have been more wrong. Each one of those barriers remain in place, all that has crumbled is the ability of almost every state to withstand the might of the US military and market, though not necessarily in that order everywhere.

Barbed-wire fences

The territorial state system that originated in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 gave rise to what scholars call "a state-centric account of spatiality". Such a conception of space is characterised by three geographical assumptions: (i) states have exclusive sovereign power over their territories; (ii) 'domestic' and 'foreign' are distinct realms; and (iii) the boundaries of state define the boundaries of a 'society'. Nowhere on earth, at any time in history, have these assumptions ever held true. To create this ideal has remained the project of every government in the world, leaving unending and devastating conflicts in the wake. The story is no different in South Asia.

A year after his call for "Direct Action" had vitiated the atmosphere of Hindu-Muslim amity forever, Mohammad Ali Jinnah had the temerity to suggest in his speech of 11 August 1947: "In course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of the individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state". Coming soon after of one of the most brutal ethnic cleansings in human history, the Quaid's words worked like salt rather than balm over the raw wounds of Partition. Not surprisingly, this statement of the Father of the Nation was never remembered during the entire period of the Islamisation of Pakistan, though the words do decorate the Parliament Hall in Islamabad.

The ideals of India's nationhood have not had a better fate. No sooner had the leadership of the Indian National Congress agreed in principle to partition the land along religious lines, they lost their strongest claim to legitimacy – the unity of the country. Gandhi had based his entire freedom movement on the coexistence of all religions – *Sarva dharma sama bhava* – and Partition snatched the very vocabulary of independence away from him; he could no longer swear by *Ram Rajya* without a lump in his throat. The task of imagining a post-Partition India fell on the frail shoulders of Jawaharlal Nehru.

To his credit, Nehru did try to burrow out from under the revisionist mindset as displayed in his magnum opus *The Discovery of India*. The title is misleading though, in that he uses the book to create the past rather than to discover it. But, he utterly failed to conceptualise Swami Vivekananda's idea of India as an entity with a Vedantic soul within an Islamic body.

Nehru had, after all, grown in the Westphalian tradition where the boundary between the sacred and the secular realms are sacrosanct. Despite his long association with Gandhi, he failed to realise that faith gives meaning and purpose to the wretched of the earth. He could have settled for institutional arrangements for dialogues between faiths and toleration of multiple beliefs, but his aim was higher – militant secularism – and so he fell deeper.

Successive leaders of the Indian National Congress after Nehru managed to keep religious zealots firmly out of the way. Away from the sanitising rays of the sun, that of public scrutiny. But of course, there was no

wishing away their hold on the people, and so Islamism and Hindutva developed in the shadows. Let alone Narendra Modi (the epitome of religious fascism), even Atal Behari Vajpayee (the public face of soft-Hindutva) lacks the ability to appreciate the political entity that Swami Vivekananda envisioned or Nehru imagined. That they are far removed from understanding the Mahatma's concept of *sarva dharma* goes without saying.

The ground reality in other South Asian 'nations' is not much different. The Durand Line that divides the Pashtuns has as little justification now as it had in 1893 when the King of Kabul and the colonial administration in India agreed to honour it. The Indo-Pakistan border is drawn in blood, and hundreds of thousands have died to keep it distinct, but it is getting blurred by the day since a vocal section of the population in both these countries have begun to question it – the last to join the queue is former Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav. In the history of a civilisation at least 8,000 years old, half a century is not all that long.

Bhutan, Burma, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are patterned after feudal territories under the control of tribal chiefs. In the system of beliefs that we have all incorporated into our beings, the land is sacred – the Mother Land – and to die for it is a higher honour than living by it. Granting autonomy to any component of the motherland is akin to vivisection, so the very thought is blasphemous. No wonder, there is little soul-searching among Bhutan's elites at the fate of Lhotsampas languishing in the refugee camps of Nepal, the Sinhalas take out 'anti-peace' rallies in Colombo, and Nepali politicians of every hue refuse to fashion an inclusive identity. The ideal of Nepali nationality continues to remain the unitary model (one language, one religion, one dress, one culture and one race), something that has already failed to hold in Sri Lanka and Bhutan.

Rather than questioning the logic of Pakistan, the creation of Bangladesh reaffirmed the rationale of Partition – since Bengalis could not live under Punjabi domination in 1971, the division along religious lines in 1947 that freed Muslims from Hindu domination was justified. Bangladesh, like Israel and Pakistan, is a country created according to the political theory of a country being a distinct identity of one language, one culture, one people and one 'society'. These three countries are *experimental states* – imagined into existence to fight the fear of another racial holocaust.

By their nature, states like Israel and Pakistan have to be violent – low intensity warfare in such societies is a safety valve that releases the pent-up hatred. They constantly need to fight the 'other' in order to keep the process of creating a 'self' on track. Foucault compares this process to the importance ritual human sacrifice has in tribal groups. However, despite its apparent homogeneity, Bangladesh is yet as away from being a 'natural society' as it was in 1971 – the universal character of Islam does not permit a political entity to establish an identity independent of the religion.

Like most post-colonial creations, the countries of South Asia are "nations in hope", to utilise the vivid expression of Rupert Emerson. It is for this very reason that our borders need heavy patrolling and there is a clamour to erect barbed-wire fences along the boundaries. People not sure of their own identity go to great lengths in order to create one for themselves. The scribes, as has been their wont throughout history, valorise those who die defending these meaningless lines in the sand that have no reason to exist save the whims of those who drew them. Millions of South Asians have died for the supposed sanctity of some arbitrary lines drawn whimsically by Messrs Durrand, McMahon, or Ochterlony. It has already been over 55 years since the British left, but their bitter legacy endures.

Unless the very fundamentals of imagining nationality are questioned, the so-called independence movements that are with us or are yet to be born in the far corners, would have little meaning and would be destined to repeat the mistakes of the independence movements of the past. For, of what use would be a Kashmir modelled after Bangladesh, in which the Pandits face the fate of the Biharis in Dhaka's camps? In all likelihood, every 'liberation' guerrilla group in the Northeast of India has the military junta of Burma as its ideal; if it weren't so, they would not be so intent in what can only be described as ethnic-cleansing. If Prabhakaran's Eelam would just be a Tamil parody of Sinhala-only Sri Lanka, there is no reason to champion such a flawed cause. Independence movements that model themselves on the 'recovery' of a nation state will only bring about more misery upon South Asia's suffering people.

The best course would have been to erase all artificial boundaries from South Asia. But, that is not likely to happen, to begin with, as long as the Hindutvawadis in New Delhi keep dreaming about their imperial *Akhand Bharat*. Curiously enough, the real extent of this imagination has been left open to keep everyone guessing. Modelling themselves after real empires – the Romans, British, and the present-day Americans – the votaries of virtual Akhand Bharat give more importance to the privileged *Pravasi Bhartiyas* than to the dispossessed living within India's existing boundaries. But, perhaps, that is inherent to the very nature of empire – it has to justify privileges in order to create more of it for the ruling class.

Breaking the box

Any discourse on border has to begin by questioning boundaries, not mapping them afresh. The concern for the disfranchised implies that there is no inside-outside perspective. The challenge is to remain outside of whatever is the 'inside' of the moment, be it bound by ideology, culture, religion, region, language, race, caste, class, gender, or the accident of birth.

The imagining has to begin afresh. The politicians will not do it, because the status quo benefits them most. Litterateurs could have done it, but most of them failed to

face the onslaught of television and have given up the pen in quiet desperation. The business community could have benefited from the integration of the Subcontinent, but all of them have found the easy way out of the predicament – they have aligned themselves with the global capital in whichever country they happen to operate.

Alas, the constituency that is for the weakening of borders within South Asia is also tbe most powerless – the poor, the disadvantaged, and the exploited of the region. Nobody is willing to stick his neck out for them. It is a thankless task, so everyone wants the media to do it. Unfortunately, the media in South Asia is little more than the tool of its ruling elite. This elite consists of the military, the market and the mandarins. But suppose, just for the sake of argument, if someone were reckless enough to question the senseless borders that encircle and bind us, where would she begin?

It is said that an intellectual starts by offering a description ("this is how the world is") and then proceeds to the normative proposition ("this is how the world should be"). A 'leader' then takes over from there and offers a prescription: "this is what needs to be done". From there, the imperative of "this is what must be done" is only a small hop that activists can easily take.

The way things are in South Asia,has been described to death – the Subcontinent is at the level of sub-Saharan Africa in terms of its Human Development Index. Its primary cause, arms race leading to alms race, has also been correctly identified by none other than the person who gave birth to the very idea of HDI – Dr Mehboob ul Haque. What the region lacks is a charismatic leader to stand up and say aloud – "these are the things that need to be done to establish the civilisational unity of South Asia".

But we are fortunate. No model needs to be imported for such a political project. The blurred 'open' boundary between India and Nepal can easily be the point of departure for the journey towards an integrated South Asia, in which all kinds of flows between the existing countries can proceed unhindered. The Nepal-India example dares us to recognise it as something that can be implemented in the other land borders of South Asia. But to dream the seemingly impossible dream, we must begin by coming out of the box of what Sundar Chand Thakur calls "the proletarian meanness of intellectual discourse". Perhaps this requires more courage than the actual exercise of erasing boundaries itself.

– CK Lal

An answer to the enmity-mongers

As the title suggests, the book sets out to expose the Indian and Pakistani elites' mindless preoccupation with the nuclear bomb. This might appear to be an over-exploited 'area' of discussion and debate—for issues of nuclearisation, disarmament and deterrence, have adorned the banners of many conferences and seminars. But the book makes the study particularly interesting in that it uses Game Theory and especially the game of Prisoner's Dilemma (PD) to enunciate the reasons for actors (ie politicians) to behave in the manner they do, something that, seemingly, fails the test of rationality for the gentry. The actors are clearly prisoners—but quite different from the ordinary ones. In Ramana and Reddy's study, they imprison themselves in the illusory nuclear weapon-based security thinking and throw away the key that could open up a non-nuclear future. Ironically enough, these prisoners earnestly think and believe that they are in the prison because of somebody else's mistakes.

A brief digression on PD would perhaps put things in perspective. The Game got its name from the following hypothetical situation: two criminals are arrested under the suspicion of having committed a crime together. However, the police do not have sufficient proof in order to have them convicted. The two prisoners are isolated from each other, and the police visit each of them separately and offer a deal: the one who squeals (turns informer)—will be freed. They cannot communicate with each other during the whole process of interrogation. If none of them accepts the offer, and both decide to deny either persons' involvement in the crime, both of them will get only a small punishment—because of lack of proof, in which case, they both gain. However, if one of them squeals, by confessing to the police, the defector will gain more, since he is freed and the one who remained silent, on the other hand, will receive the full punishment, since he did not help the police, and there is sufficient proof. If both squeal, they will both be punished, but less severely than if they had refused to talk.

The dilemma resides in the fact

Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream

MV Ramana and C Rammanohar Reddy (eds)
502 pp. Rs 575
New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2003.

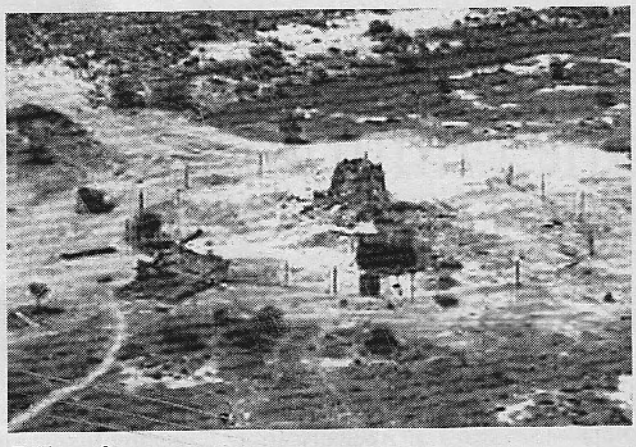
reviewed by
SP Udayakumar

that each prisoner has a choice between only two options—to squeal and save oneself or to deny that either did it—but cannot make a good decision without knowing what the other one will do. This is where the problem comes up. In very short/finite trials, the Game has shown that prisoners have mutual distrust for the other, and they would squeal. Infinitely iterated games, however, produce co-operative behaviour because the person knows that his squealing, would be punished by more defective behaviour in the next round and hence it is better to co-operate, in the long run. But, long term cooperation results only after the series of short term trials prove to the prisoners that it is safe to cooperate.

The PDG that Ramana and Reddy envisage in their neatly planned and well-argued book, with the help of the other contributors, is a brand by itself and deserves closer scrutiny for the profit of the whole discipline of political science. In their dreamy delirium, these two prisoners constantly see the other coming to get them or busy preparing to get them at a future date. So they keep devising strategies to counter the other party's present threat and/or future danger. Deploying the nuclear weapon is the penultimate insurance against such an eventuality. Again, two 'prisoners' trusting each other is unlikely in the short-run, hence either one loses and the other gains by defecting or both lose by blaming the other—the trust is not there and it becomes a Zero-Sum Game (ZSG). Iterated games would show co-operation, which would mean they deny either persons' involvement and end up with positive gains—Non Zero-Sum Game (NZSG). In *Nuclear Dream*, although these two prisoners see their nuclear rivalry as part of their larger ZSG military calculations (with a victor and a vanquished), they are uneasily aware that their nuclear game plan indeed makes their gamble a NZSG where both would be vanquished.

Understandably, these prisoners do not own up any responsibility for their predicament. They reason that their professed 'good' self is all for freedom and liberty but it is the evil 'other' that necessitates the present imprisonment. Any possible end to this imprisonment, according to this reasoning, depends solely on what the 'other' does. One's own omissions and commissions matter little. When this kind of self-abnegation is the rule of the game, the prisoners play their roles faithfully and the imprisonment continues forever. Theirs is a "non-cooperative" game played "cooperatively" with tacit understanding through inferred

Pokhran 1



Pokhran 2

communication.

Another crucial difference between the conventional PDG and the present case is that the accused are isolated from the society in the former case, but in the latter case the prisoners hold entire societies hostages. The former is a physical prison and the imprisoned have little power, whereas the latter is both a physical and psychological prison and the prisoners are rather powerful. Since the imprisonment in the nuclear case is not the consequence of a past crime but the effect of a future vision and program, the ethical and moral considerations of the prisoners become even more relevant.

One of the most significant manifestations of this self-imprisonment is, of course, readjusting the prisoner's socioeconomic-political values and interests to the prison reality that they have seriously internalised. Militarism, nationalistic jingoism, increased faith in violence, misplaced developmental notions and skewed priorities are just a few of these values and interests. Inevitably, these factors have a telling effect on the well-being of all and the overall health of the environment.

Quite interestingly, the Ramana and Reddy volume deals with all these four aspects of the nuclear PDG. The highly effective essays of eminent authors on the issues of strategy and external relations, science and ethics, politics and economics of nuclear weapons, and environment and health follow the scheme that has been delineated here. Kanti Bajpai elucidates clearly how "the image of a powerful, hostile and nuclear China has pushed India towards weaponisation", how that accelerated Pakistan's quest for nuclear bomb and how that intensified India's nuclear weapons programme. While Admiral Ramdas sees a lack of "political understanding" behind this paranoia, Zia Mian brings the inter-play of military fears and subcontinental history to our attention.

An amalgamation of this kind of fears and phobias expresses itself in the guise of nationalism ("for 2,500 years India has never invaded anybody"), scientism ("a triumph of Indian science and technology") or developmentalism ("it was a beautiful sight") as Amartya Sen points out, with the help of the statements that Abdul Kalam made after India's May 1998 tests. The technology that this mindset creates would inevitably be "mass murder technology" that is "completely decoupled from values" as illustrated by Amulya Reddy. Switching from 'cheap' power promises to greater

Chagai before and after the test

national security assertions, the nuclear establishment, as Ramana contends, has ensured continued funding. Since the strategic enclave, as much as the scientific community, in India seeks power through their claims of knowledge and expertise, they cannot escape responsibility for the impact of their actions on Indians, one-sixth of humanity.

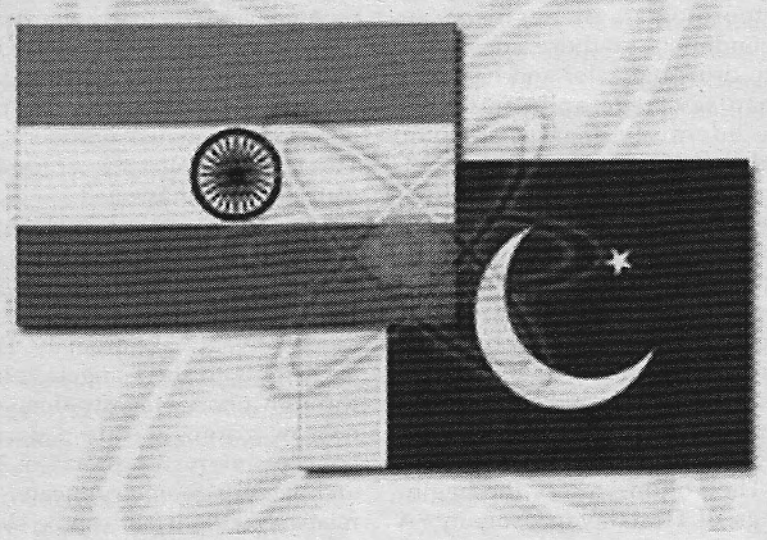
When the paranoid mindset reigns supreme without any ethical and moral considerations, the resultant socioeconomic-political values and interests would turn dreadful as well. While Jean Dreze establishes, in general terms, that militarism is the foremost obstacle to development and democracy in contemporary world, Krishna Ananth locates India's nuclear weaponisation in the "denominational nationalism, jingoism and majoritarianism", which has permeated the Indian political landscape quite pervasively. He resents the fact that contemporary Indian nationalism is not built on the democratic traditions that marked the anti-colonial struggle. Just as Ananth discusses the democratic deficit of weaponisation, Rammanohar Reddy points out the impact of weaponisation on development of the Indian society. He puts the full and total future costs of India's nuclear weapon programme at INR 70,000 to 80,000 crore (1998-99 prices) and compares this with the government allocations for specific social and economic sectors to paint a depressing picture.

An inevitable result of this kind of lopsided socioeconomic-political arrangement would be the disastrous impact on public health and the overall environment. MV Ramana and Surendra Gadekar rightly point out that that the health of the people and environment would be affected not just by the explosion of nuclear bombs but also by the very processes of manufacturing them and their testing. Nuclear power production is equally harmful. People who are worst affected by nuclearisation are the disempowered. The very planet earth and all life on it are also poised to be destroyed by nuclear weapons and power.

The task of "ordinary" Indians and Pakistanis is to educate the powerful "prisoners" in respective national societies and release them from their prisons

In May 2002, all the defence bodies were put on alert in India and it was announced that an integrated battlefield shelter had been developed, for the armed forces, to provide protection from nuclear as well as biological and chemical agents and to ensure retaliatory attacks. On 25 May, an Indian Defence Secretary, Yogendra Narain said that India would use nuclear weapons if Pakistan used them. On 31 May, the Pakistani ambassador to the United Nations in turn held out the nuclear threat. He said that they would use nuclear weapons even if India stuck to conventional weapons. As the "leaders" were playing so thoughtlessly with the lives and futures of some 1.4 billion people in the region taken as a whole, many Americans, Australians, Germans, French, British, and United Nations workers were leaving India and Pakistan in a hurry. On 28 May, American intelligence announced that some 12 million Indians and Pakistanis would be killed and up to seven million could be injured in a nuclear war between the two countries. These would just be the immediate casualties, and subsequent casualties could not even be assessed. The "ordinary" Indians and Pakistanis were reading the newspapers every morning to see what our fate was going to be.

Ramana and Reddy rightly point out that the battle between the weapon-supporters and weapon-opponents is a battle for the soul of India [and Pakistan] and the final choice that Indians and Pakistanis face is one "between education and catastrophe". The task of "ordinary" Indians and Pakistanis then is to educate the powerful "prisoners" in our respective national societies and release them from their prisons. The Ramana-Reddy volume is most definitely an important 'textbook' in such an educational and political endeavour. As the authors conclude, "the major casualty of the nuclear dream shared by India and Pakistan is peace". Nuclear weapons freeze the problems between the two countries, entrench the enmity-mongers on both sides, and prevent the possibilities for normalisation of relations. It would be befitting to leave it there. △

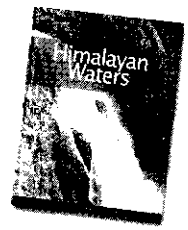


Bridging the gap in Himalayan waters

This is an excellent and beautifully illustrated handbook on everything anyone may want to know about Himalayan waters but is afraid to ask. Karakoram waters are also appropriately included for good measure. Both the author, Bhim Subba, and the publisher, Panos South Asia, Kathmandu, deserve much credit for bringing out this handsomely produced volume written for the lay person with graphs and charts that provide telling international and regional comparisons.

Water looms so large in our lives and is so elemental that most of us take it for granted. When the rains play truant or are excessive, causing drought or flood and erosion, or water is polluted or runs short of the competing needs of growing populations, bringing distress and conflict in its wake, it attracts notice. Yet, it is only in recent years that the issue of water and society has become a prime subject of study. Even now, however, in many parts of the developing world and certainly in South Asia, water tends to be studied as a discrete discipline, mostly by meteorologists or engineers or agronomists or those concerned with drinking water and health or urban sewerage and sanitation. The interdisciplinary or holistic study of water in relation to land, people and governance -- or hydropolitics, as it is sometimes called in the West as an academic discipline -- is still largely unknown in these parts. *Himalayan Waters*, like a few other efforts, notably by the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi, takes a bold step towards filling that gap. This is a real service.

The volume traces the beginnings of Himalayan orogeny. A clash of tectonic plates uplifted the land to give birth to the great rivers of South Asia. This started a vast (and still continuing) landfill or erosive debris that created the vast alluvial Indo-Gangetic Brahmaputra-Meghna plain and the Sunderbans, through which this huge water system empties into the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. The enormous volume of eroded material, ground down and funnelled into the ocean, has built a chain of underground



Himalayan Waters: Promise and Potential. Problems and Politics
by Bhim Subba,
Panos South Asia, 2001

reviewed by ***BG Verghese***

mountains, particularly the Bengal Fans that thrust far south into the Andaman Sea. The Himalaya-ocean interaction has in turn been parent to the annual monsoon saga. This elaborate interplay of forces is well told and illustrated.

The Himalaya is a geologically young mountain chain. Among its unique geographical features is the precipitous descent, the great "precedent" rivers make, from the Tibetan heights to the Gangetic plains through phenomenally deep and narrow gorges within a narrow band of intervening terrain. This architecture geometry means that relatively little water can be stored behind even very high Himalayan dams -- a cardinal difference between the South Asian situation and that prevailing in practically every other part of the world.

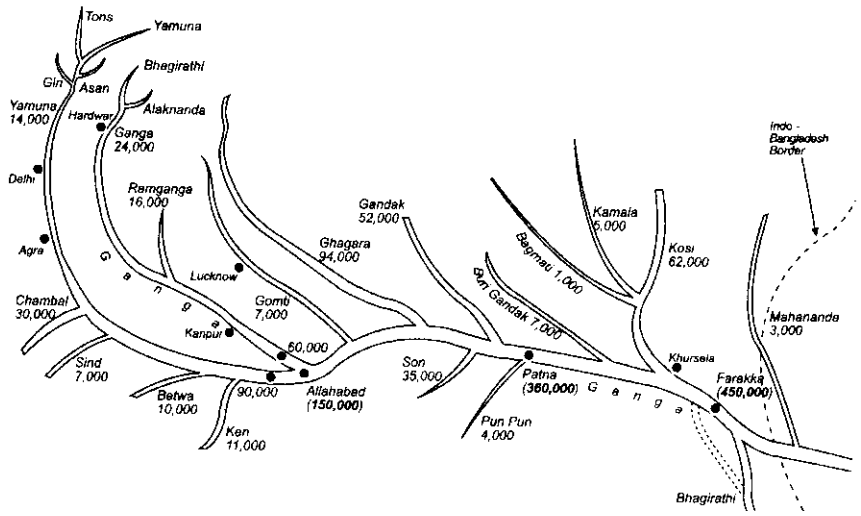
A few comparative statistics will suffice to tell how valley geometry impacts on potential regulating capabilities. The 226 metre high Bhakra Dam on the Sutlej stores no more than 9870 million cubic metres (m cu m) of water, whereas the 111 metre high Aswan High Dam boasts a reservoir capacity of 168,970 m cu m or over 16 times as much. Likewise, the 1218 m tall Kariba Dam on the Zambezi stores 160,336 m cu m of water as against the 13,690 m cu m stored behind the 143 m high Tarbela Dam on the Indus in Pakistan. The Hoover and Glen Canyon Dams, both on the Colorado in the US, are each able to store several times the annual discharge of the river. Put another way, the Kariba Dam had a reservoir capacity almost equal to that of all the high dams commissioned in the Indian subcontinent up to the year 2000. And India is among the greatest dam building countries in the world.

From physical to political

Author Subba has made a visible effort to maintain objectivity and balance in dealing with the very emotional issue of water disputes in South Asia. Though successful to a considerable extent, there are a few inadvertent statements that need review or elaboration. The Wulur Barrage, to which Pakistan objects, has not been built by India as stated and can therefore have caused no harm to that country on this count. On the other hand, the Tehri Dam is not in the early stages of construction as stated but, though delayed by litigation, is nearing completion. Further, the Tehri Dam design has been elaborately tested for seismic safety under worst-case conditions on more than one occasion and has been certified as totally safe. The scare stories repeated by some critics are without basis.

The Ganga River System-Annual Flows:

Average annual flows (in million cubic metres) of the Ganga and its tributaries



Bhutan has leveraged itself out of the poverty trap, thanks to the Chukha hydro project (336 MW, upgraded to 370 MW). Its capital cost was recovered within a few years and the returns from the project today account for the country's single largest source of revenue and have brought about a significant leap in per capita income. It is also not widely known that the Government of India is compelled to make substantial compensatory payments to certain Indian state electricity boards that must back down their hydro generation every monsoon in order to absorb Chukha power year-round as committed to Bhutan.

Again, the Farakka diversion is not the reason why south-west Bangladesh has been long starved of water. This is a stubborn misunderstanding. The problem was manifest even in the early 1950s, decades before the Farraka barrage was commissioned, and stemmed from geomorphologic changes resulting from a secular eastward shift in the entire Ganga system over the past 150 years. The Gorai outfall was gradually blocked with a massive silt plug. It is to cure this problem that a three-year Gorai resuscitation programme was taken up by Bangladesh immediately after the 1996 Ganges Treaty, with Dutch assistance, to dredge a deep channel through the blockage. The problem however persists on account of annual re-siltation. This has confirmed the Bangladesh belief that a permanent solution lies in constructing a Farakka-type barrage across the Ganges at Pangsha to pond the river and force water over the Gorai hump in order to revive its flow. Bangladesh has turned to India, among others, for assistance in this regard.

Likewise, ranking water resource officials from Bangladesh and India did jointly meet their Nepali counterpart in Kathmandu in 1986 to make the case for seven massive Himalayan storages to augment flows at Farakka sufficiently to meet the assumed requirements of both lower riparians. The discussions made no headway after the Royal Government's spokesman asked what was in any such arrangement for Nepal. Interests and priorities are perhaps more easily matched given tradeoffs across a broader spectrum.

Then again, while it is true that mistrust has plagued Indo-Nepal water relations, the fact is that both sides have benefited considerably from their limited cooperation. The pity is that the unrealised gains are ever so much greater. The Mahakali Treaty of 1996 sets out a number of cost-benefit sharing principles that are to apply across the board to all Indo-Nepal water projects. This being so, it should be possible to negotiate specific project agreements regarding reservoir operations, the pricing of power and the assessment of downstream benefits from regulated releases of water for irrigation, flood moderation and other tangible uses to mutual benefit. As the larger partner, India should be and is willing to adopt a liberal approach.

The opposition to big dams can neither be brushed aside nor accepted as an ideological veto. The multilateral funding agencies are coming to recognise that poverty alleviation in many desperately impoverished parts of the developing world does require the sensible harnessing of water resources, not excluding large dams. Rainwater and rooftop harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed management, improved efficiencies, demand management and the rest are a necessary but not by themselves a sufficient condition for satisfying compelling water requirements in all circumstances. Many parts of the world face increasing water stress and climate change poses new uncertainties.

That said, *Himalayan Waters* remains a valuable addition to the literature on the subject. Some pruning to accommodate sections on fish, health impacts, forests, navigation and the rich water-related civilisational and cultural heritage of South Asia, might be considered for future editions. The Mahakali Agreement is strangely missing in the texts of major treaties. These inclusions would enhance interest in the book.

Himal Association *proudly presents a selection of 43 films in the fourth edition of the festival of South Asian non-fiction films. Films will be screened over four days from 25 to 28 September, 2003 at the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari, Kathmandu. Films not in English are subtitled. Most filmmakers will be present at their screenings.*

Film South Asia '03

Festival of South Asian Documentaries

Aabar Ashibo Phire (Way Back Home) *(120 min)*
Calcutta, India, 2002, dir- Supriyo Sen
Reliving the Partition in the east

Aap Hamare Hai Kaun *(7 min)*
India, 2002, dir-Madhusree Dutta
Whatever happened to Gandhi's legacy?

Aftershocks: A Rough Guide to Democracy *(64 min)*
Gujarat, India, 2002, dir-Rakesh Sharma
An instance of corporate governance

Bheda ko Uun Jasto – In Search of a Song ... *(67 min)*
Nepal, 2003, dir-Kiran Krishna Shrestha
Following a tune to the mountains

Buru Sengal (The Fire Within) *(57 min)*
Jharkhand, India, 2002, dir-Shriprakash
Extracting coal, but at what cost?

Diverted to Delhi *(55 min)*
Delhi, India, 2002, dir-Greg Stitt
International call centres thrive in India

The 18th Elephant – 3 Monologues *(62 min)*
Kerala, India, 2003, dir-P. Balan
Elephants speak up against human atrocities

Ethrayum Yatha Bhagam (The Journey So Far) *(45 min)*
Kerala, India, 2003, dir-C V Sathyan
Life and times of a Malayalam poet

Godhra Tak: The Terror Trail *(60 min)*
Gujarat, India, 2003, dir-Shubradeep Chakravorty
Reconstruction of the train incident.

Hunting down Water *(32 min)*
India, 2003, dir-Sanjaya Barnela and Vasant Saberwal
The shortage and surplus of water

In Search of Zhang Zhung *(60 min)*
Nepal and Tibet, 2003, dir-Alex Gabbay
A journey to the cradle of Bon

Itihaas Jitneharu ko Laagi (History for Winners) *(67 min)*
Nepal, 2003, dir-Pranay Limbu
A singer who refuses to fight.

Jab'r Ki Shadi-Vilayat Mein (Forced Marriage-Abroad) *(12 min)*
Pakistan, 2003, dir – Beena Sarwar
Pakistani girls forced into marriage

Kathmandu Odyssey *(35 min)*
Nepal, 2003, dir-Shekhar Kharel
A poet recalls Kathmandu of the hippies

A Kind of Childhood *(50 min)*
Bangladesh, 2002, dir-Tareque and Catherine Masud
Young Idris on the streets of Dhaka

Looking for Kannan *(23 min)*
Sri Lanka, 2002, dir-Yasir Khan
An uneasy peace prevails

Made in India *(39 min)*
India, 2002, dir-Madhusree Dutta
Visual culture in contemporary India

Majma (Performance) *(54 min)*
Delhi, India, 2001, dir-Rahul Roy
Wrestling and sex on Delhi streets

Manjuben Truckdriver (Miss Manju Truckdriver) *(52 min)*
Gujarat, India, 2002, dir-Sherna Dastur
Dreams and aspirations of a lady at work

Mat (The Vote) *(60 min)*
Uttar Pradesh, India, 2003, dir-Pankaj Rishi Kumar
Democracy in action in UP

The Men in the Tree *(98 min)*
India, 2002, dir-Lalit Vachani
Fundamentalism revisited

Naata (The Bond) *(45 min)*
Bombay India, 2003, dir-K P Jayasankar and A Monteiro
Crisis of identity in modern India

A Night of Prophecy *(77 min)*
India, 2002, dir-Amar Kanwar
Poets in times and places of conflict

No. 556. 13th Lane, Kamathipura, Mumbai *(17 min)*
Bombay, India, 2002, dir-Sushmita Basnet
Raid on a Bombay brothel

Papa 2 *(24 min)*
Kashmir, India, 2002, dir-Gopal Menon
Trail of sorrow in the Valley.

Qabool Kuran Dhathi Hageegaiy (Unbelievable Realities) *(25 min)*
Maldives, 2002, dir- Ahmed Nazmi
Island rises against domestic violence

The Race *(16 min)*
Maharastra, India, 2003, dir-Raghav Dar
Urbanisation of culture in rural India

Resilient Rhythms *(64 min)*
India, 2002, dir- Gopal Menon
Dalits and the odds.

Restless Shores *(20 min)*
Tamil Nadu, India, 2003, dir- Noel Rajesh
Tamil fisherfolk compete with big trawlers

Sand and Water *(105 min)*
Bangladesh, 2002, dir-Shaheen Dill-Riaz
Life along the Jamuna

Searching For Saraswati *(62 min)*
Uttar Pradesh, India, 2003, dir-Sudheer Gupta
Folklore of the Kumbha mela

Shei Rater Kotha Bolte Eshechi (Tale of the Darkest Night) *(43 min)*
Bangladesh, 2001, dir-Kawsar Chowdhury
Pakistani army begins attack on East Pakistan

Sita's Family *(60 min)*
Delhi, India, 2003, dir-Saba Dewan
A Delhi journalist looks back on her life

The Story Tellers *(46 min)*
Delhi, India, 2003, dir-Gargi Sen
Translating literature from the vernacular

Swara – A Bridge over Troubled Water *(40 min)*
Pakistan, 2003, dir- Samar Minallah
'Girl sacrifice' in tribal Pakistan

Tell Them the Tree They Have Planted Has Now Grown *(58 min)*
Kashmir, India, 2002, dir- Ajay Raina
A Kashmiri Pandit returns 'home'

Terror's Children *(45 min)*
Pakistan/Afghanistan, 2003, dir-Sharmeen Obaid
Afghani children eke out a living in Karachi

Ujan Beye (Across The Tide) *(58 min)*
Calcutta, India, 2002, dir-Nirmalya Bondopadhyay
Revisiting Naxalite sites

The Unconscious *(19 min)*
Maharastra, India, 2003, dir-Manisha Dwivedi
A different kind of sexual identity

Vikas Bandook ki Naal Se (Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun) *(54 min)*
India, 2003, dir-Biju Toppo and Meghnath
For the sake of a larger good

War and Peace/Jang Aur Aman *(138 min)*
India/Paksitan, 2002, dir-Anand Patwardhan
The repercussions of going nuclear

Where Do I Go from Here *(45 min)*
India, 2002, dir-Yasmine Kidwai
The elderly look at their cheerless lives

Words on Water *(85 min)*
India, 2002 dir- Sanjaya Kak
An update on the Narmada movement

organised by
हिमाल एसोसिएसन
Himal Association

Tickets available from Friday, 12 September, 2003. For screening schedule and other details visit www.himalassociation.org/fsa

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Dynamics and Development of Highland Ecosystems
by Ek Raj Ojha
Walden Book House, Kathmandu, 1999 (first edition)
pp xxxv, 279 + 28(unnumbered), price not mentioned

In recent years, the study of hill ecologies has acquired great importance. In this study Ek Raj Ojha focuses on the highland ecosystem in the hills of far-western Nepal, more particularly in analysing the dynamics of ecosystems moulded by terrace farming. The book aims to determine the ways and means of improving the socio-economic as well as environmental conditions of people living in this region, as well as providing a model for similar areas. Emphasising the need for modern technology to supplement the revival of traditional indigenous knowledge, he Ojha underlines the need to fully understand particular ecosystems before any 'improvement' of the concerned ecosystem is undertaken.

The Reality of Aid 2002
Edited by Judith Randel, Tony German and Deborah Ewing
IBON Foundation Inc, Manila, 2002
pp xii + 262, price not mentioned
ISBN 971 8707 71 9

The annual report of The Reality of Aid, a not-for-profit initiative involving non-governmental organisations from the North and South, constitutes a 'progress report' on what the international community has been able to do, needs to do and needs to refrain from doing to ensure sustainable development in the less well off countries. With in-depth studies of NGOs and NGO coalitions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the OECD countries, it presents a nuanced range of perspectives on donor policies and practices and evaluates their success in terms what they have been able to deliver *vis a vis* their promises.

Culture, Gender and Ecology: Beyond Workerism
by M Nadarajah
Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1999
pp xviii + 341, INR 650
ISBN 81-7033-515-8

The book takes a critical look at the Marxist notion of historical materialism and attempts to rework the concept at the level of theory and ideas by re-examining the notion of communism. He provides well researched insights into the "impossibility of overcoming strife" and shows that it is difficult to sustain the claim that relations of production constitute the total social space. The book, subtly guided by Mao's critical notions, is about the strengthening and consolidation of the gains of the working class movement – something, the author, feels has not been articulated at the level of theory.

Resistance and the State: Nepalese Experiences
Edited by David Gellner
Social Science Press, New Delhi
pp xv + 383, INR 525
ISBN 81 87358 08 4

Nepal has witnessed protracted civil conflict that has affected different that has only recently begun attracting attention in scholarly circles. While most of monographs and edited volumes deal directly with the question of Maoist insurrection, this volumes attempts to conceptualise the conflict by bringing to bear a more explicit sociological and anthropological focus on the question of state and resistance. The contributors to this volume attempt to bring out the complex relationship between the modernising, developmentalist state, and the people it represents. Using ethnographic case studies to explore health-care programmes, forestry, national parks, political parties and ethnic revivalism – the book gives a graphic description of conflicts over the interpretation of history and also provides various perspectives on the Maoist insurgency that has affected Nepal since 1996. Useful resource for political scientists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists as well as the general reader.

A Kingdom Under Siege
Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003
by Deepak Thapa with Bandita Sijapati
the printhouse, Kathmandu
pp xv + 234, price not mentioned
ISBN 99933 59 07 6

The latest account of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, this book provides an overview of the movement and the political and socio-economic context within which the conflict arose and continues to play itself out. It describes the state's neglect of many of its citizens, the instabilities of the polity and the rise of radical left politics in the mid-western region of Nepal which is the heartland of the Maoists. Published during the second ceasefire in the eight-year old conflict, the author concludes that the only way to bring about a lasting peace is to build a state that is equally attentive to the interests of Nepal's diverse population groups.

Note to publishers: new titles can be sent to GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal. Books are mentioned in this section before they are sent for detailed review.

The chorus line

When they dance in the films—the beauteous heroine and her female cohort, try to drag your eyes away from the supple Aishwarya and look at her companions. One of the enduring cruelties of Bollywood and all its Subcontinental offsprings in the national and regional cinema has been the relegation of the 'ugly' into the ranks of the dancers in accompaniment.

The audience gets the message loud and clear, as do these professional artistes who are forced to gyrate in the background. Here is the heroine. She epitomises purity, beauty and sensuousness. Those are the backup dancers, the chorus line. They dance well, sometimes better than the leading lady, but they are not front-screen material. They are dark, have small eyes, long chins, faces that are too broad. They are short in the neck, or have kinky and oily hair.

These support dancers must never be allowed to steal the limelight from the leading lady. This is a tacit understanding in which the producer, director, leading lady, as well as the audience by the millions are complicit. Never should the natural attractiveness of a dancer in the background – perhaps her smile, perhaps her movements – divert the viewers' eyes from Aishwarya.

And so, firstly, tell them to cut the eye-contact with camera. The chorus line is simply to present secular, controlled smiles, but nothing that dazzles. Secondly, keep the camera off the ladies at the back, have them provide nothing more than a shimmering coordinated backdrop for the ivory-skinned heroine to frolic in front of.

It must be quite a feat for the chorus line to dance professionally, and yet not attract attention. It must also be rather demoralising, knowing that you are there because everyone knows you are unattractive according to the mores of the day. Nothing must detract from the queen bee being given her due – the dance movements, the attractive dress, the spotlight and the camera angles.

It is something we do particularly well in South Asia. Tell people to their face, or at the very least imply, that they are beneath par – in this case unattractive. The chorus line dancers know that they have been chosen because they have not the power to divert attention of the audience. And what of the producer and director? They know what they need to do — feed the audience a bevy of women, all of them nicely trussed but without the ability to divert the eyes from the heroine.

For more than eighty years, the producers and directors have been giving us the chorus line with ugly ducklings without them ever changing into long-necked – and *fair* – swans. It is their lot for the ducklings to know their station and stay there.

Is there a way out of this situation? I think so: sabotage and/or revolt.

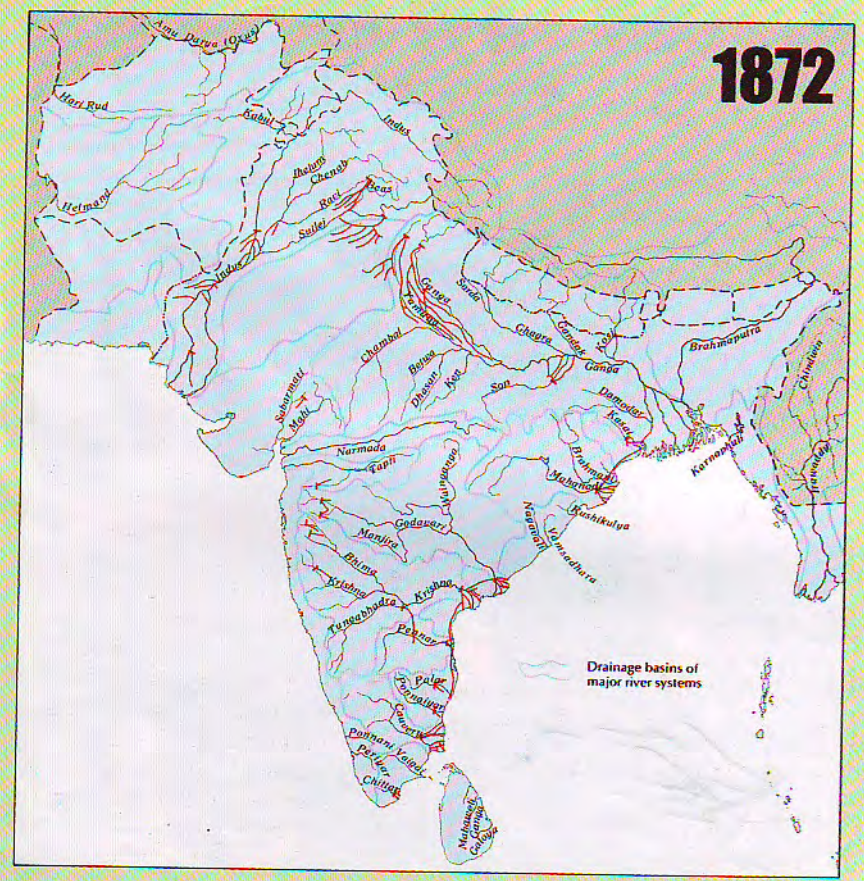
The next time they stage a song-and-dance number, perhaps the chorus line could go on strike? Or feign en masse diarrhoea. Or insist that the steps provided by the dance director are impossibly complicated. They can also try and ruin the script by directing dazzling come-hither-my-baby smiles at the camera and audience, the kind that would finish the career of the heroine there and then.

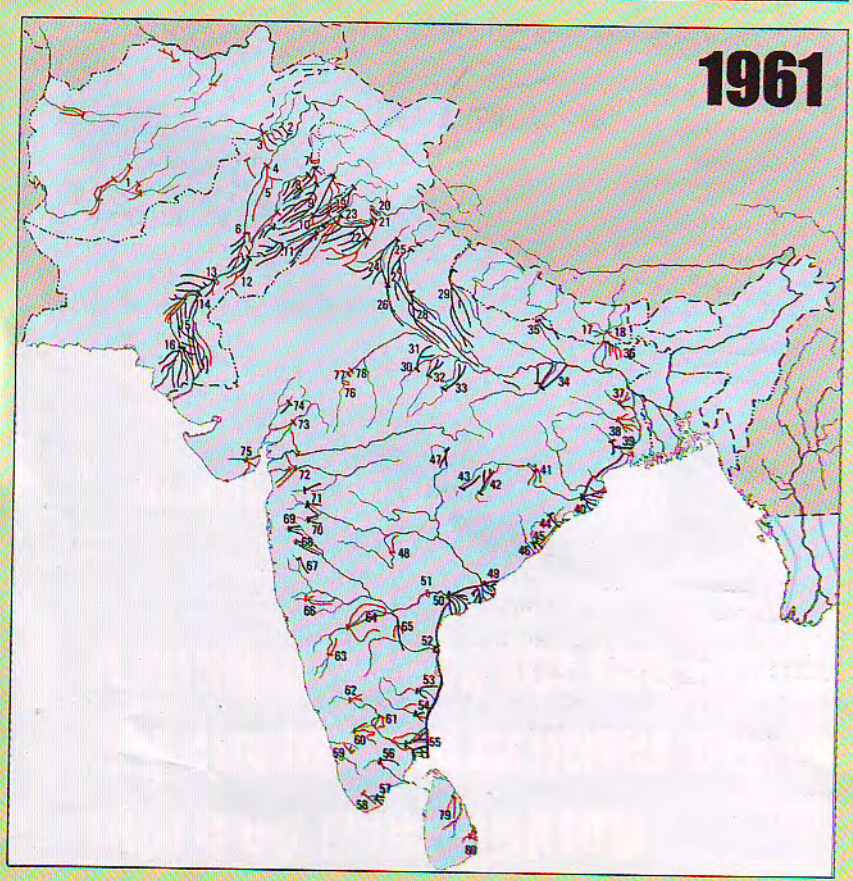
The best would be if the chorus girls were to set up a cooperative, which would then produce a film in which the darkest girl from the backmost in the chorus line would wrest the hero from Aishwarya. This lady would be a great dancer, mahogany dark, short-in-the-neck, a nose to do the Rani of Jhansi proud, thick waist, beady eyes, heavy eyebrows, muscular arms, and closely clipped nails. But boy can she dance!! Meanwhile, someone has slipped a couple of betel nuts into Aishwarya's dancing shoes so that she limps, stumbles and ruins each and every pirouette.

Given such a turn of event, Salman the hero looks at the ladies at the back and spots our dusky beauty of ample girth. Aishwarya weeps and wails but to no avail, it is no longer part of the script. The last song-and-dance has our new heroine – call her Surpanakha – doing a number on a Mauritius beach with a bevy of dancers completely out of focus in the background. But wait, what do I see, there at the very end of the line, the last dancer. Is this retribution at last? Yes! It is Aishwarya.

Kanak Dixit

GROWTH OF IRRIGATION CANAL NETWORK





Rivers

Canals

Dams or barrages

Dams or barrages under construction

Key to 1961 map

Major Irrigation systems, Barrages and Anicuts

AFGHANISTAN

1. Helmand Valley

PAKISTAN

2. Warsak Irrigation Project
3. Jinnah Dam
4. Thal Irrigation Project
5. Taunsa Barrage
6. Mangla Dam
7. Jhelum Canals
8. Chenab Canals
9. Bari Doab Canals
10. Sutlej Canals
11. Panjnad Canals
12. Gudu Barrage
13. Sukkur Barrage
14. Sindh Canals
15. Ghulam Mohammed Dam

NEPAL

17. Chandra Canal
18. Kosi Canal (Nepal Branch)

INDIA

19. Upper Bari Doab Canals
20. Bhakra Dam
21. Nangal Barrage
22. Sirhind Canals
23. Harike Barrage
24. Western Yamuna Canals
25. Eastern Yamuna Canal
26. Agra Canal
27. Upper Ganga Canal
28. Lower Ganga Canal
29. Sarda Canals
30. Mata Tila Dam
31. Betwa Canals
32. Dhasan Canals
33. Ken Canals
34. Son Canals
35. Triveni Canal
36. Kosi Canals
37. Mayurakshi Canals
38. Damodar Canals
39. Kasai Canal
40. Mahanadi Delta Canals
41. Hirakud Dam
42. Mahanadi Canals
43. Tandula Canal
44. Rushikulya Canal
45. Vamsadhara Canal
46. Nagavali Canal
47. Wainganga Canal
48. Nizamsagar Dam
49. Godavari Delta Canals
50. Krishna Delta Canals
51. Nagarjuna Sagar Reservoir
52. Penner Canals
53. Palar Canals
54. Tiukkoyilur Anicut
55. Cauvery Delta Canals
56. Periyar Canals
57. Srivaikuntam Canals
58. Manimuthar Reservoir
59. Mallampuzha Canals
60. Lower Bhavani Canals
61. Mettur Dam
62. Krishnaraja Sagar Canals
63. Bhadra Anicut
64. Tungabhadra Canals
65. Kurnool-Cuddapah Canals
66. Ghatprabha Canals
67. Krishna Canal
68. Nira Canals
69. Mutha Canals
70. Pravara Canals
71. Godavari Canals
72. Kakarpara Canals
73. Mahi Canals
74. Hathmati Canal
75. Shetranji Canals
76. Gandhi Sagar Dam
77. Ranapratap Sagar Dam
78. Kotah Barrage

Sri Lanka

79. Mahaweli Ganga Project
80. Gal Oya Project

MAP FROM, A HISTORICAL ATLAS OF SOUTH ASIA, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW YORK, 1992.


NEPAL'S NO. 1
MARK OF QUALITY
GORAKHKALI
Tyres
Tyre: GORKHKALI
Size: 6.15-13-4PR
Uses: Car/Taxi
Tyre: CABY - 2
Size: 6.00-12-4PR
Uses: Car/Taxi
Tyre: GK GOLD
Size: 10.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck
Tyre: GK TYRE
Size: 9.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck
Tyre: GK YETI TOUCH LUG
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