November 2003

HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

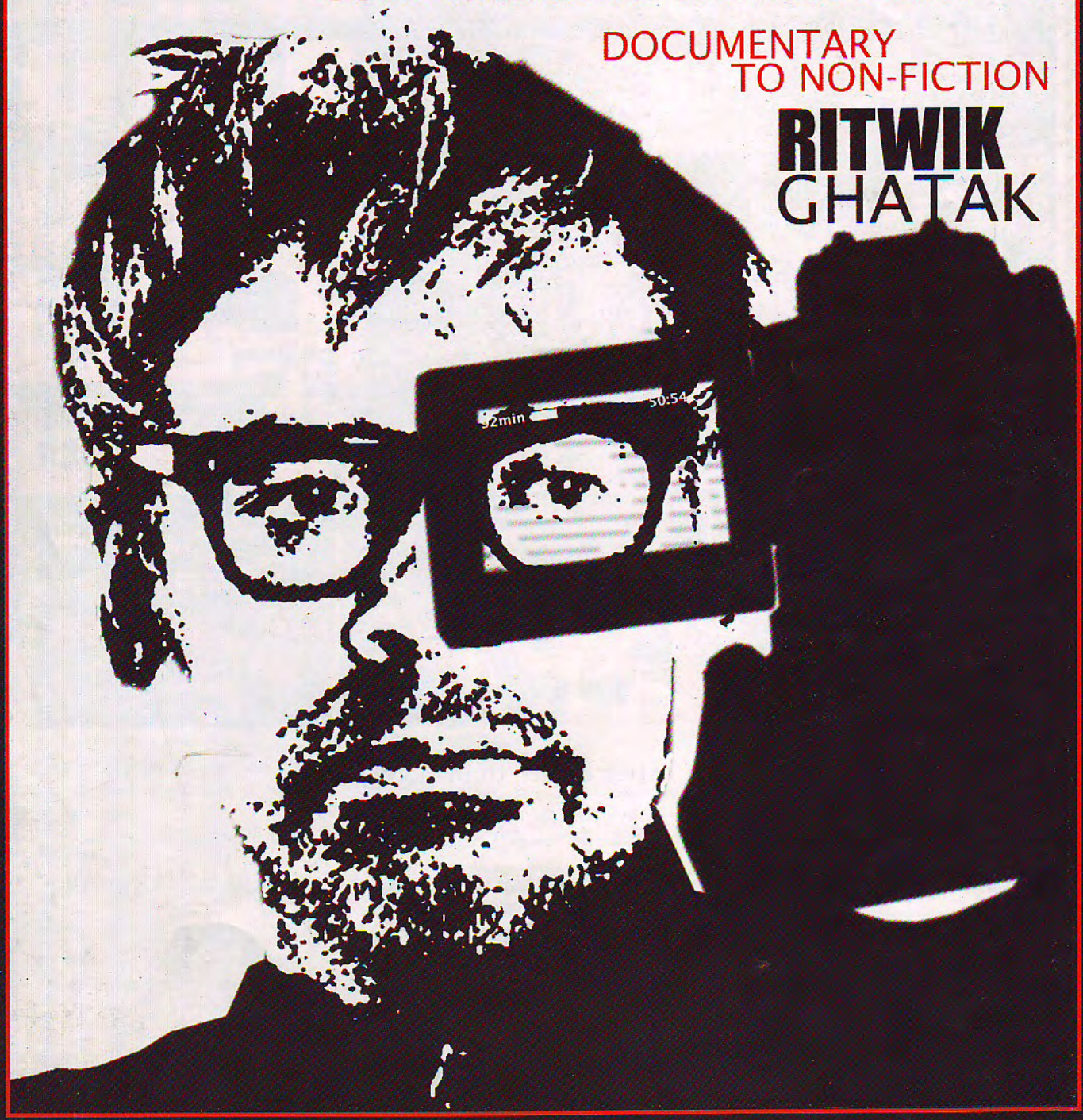
POLITICAL PARALYSIS IN NEPAL

THE CINEMA OF REAL LIFE

CONTROVERSY AT FILM SOUTH ASIA '03

DOCUMENTARY TO NON-FICTION

RITWIK GHATAK

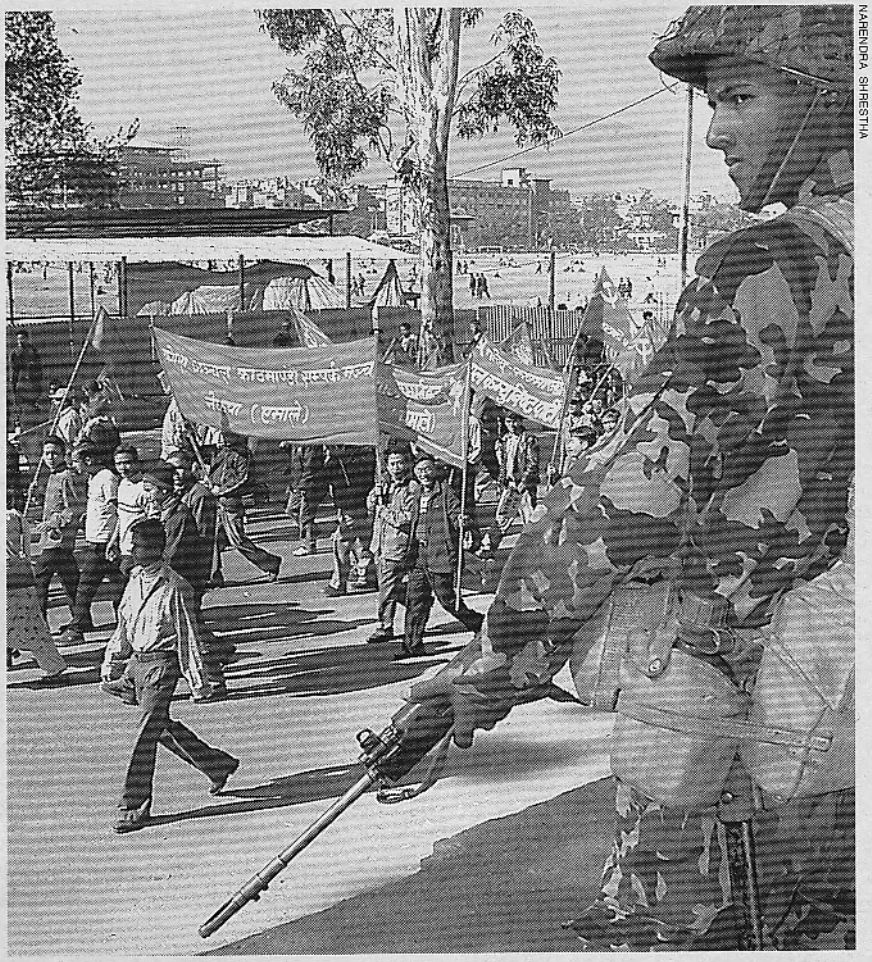


Bangladesh BDT 80 Bhutan BTN 60 India INR 50 Nepal NPR 50 Maldives MLR 40 Pakistan PKR 80 Sri Lanka SLR 80 Elsewhere USD 4/GBP 3

HIMAL SOUTH ASIAN

Vol 16 No 11 November 2003

Political paralysis in Nepal



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

56

CONTENTS

Introducing with this issue: lastlastpage (just as no WMDs were found in Iraq...)

HIMAL
SOUTH ASIAN
editors@himalmag.com

Editor
Kanak Mani Dixit

Associate Editor
Thomas J Mathew

Contributing Editors
CALCUTTA Rajashri Dasgupta
COLOMBO Manik de Silva
DHAKA Afsan Chowdhury
KARACHI Beena Sarwar
NEW DELHI Mitu Varma
N. AMERICA Amitava Kumar

Editorial Assistant
Joe Thomas K

Design Team
Indra Shrestha
Kam Singh Chepang
Suresh Neupane
Bilash Rai (Graphics)
Bhushan Shilpakar (Website)

Marketing
advertising@himalmedia.com

Subscription/Overseas Sales
Anil Karki
subscription@himalmedia.com

Nepal/Northeast India Sales
Sudan Bista
sales@himalmedia.com

Marketing Office, Karachi
Ajmal Kamal
City Press
316 Madina City Mall
Abdullah Haroon Road
Saddar, Karachi 74400
Ph. +92-21-5650623/5213916
email: cp@citypress.cc

Himal is published and distributed by
Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-5543333, 5523845
Fax: 5521013
Email: editors@himalmag.com
http://www.himalmag.com
ISSN 1012 9804
Library of Congress Control Number
88 912882
Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-5521393, 5543017

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

Contributors to this issue

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar is a Rawalpindi activist involved with people's movements.

CK Lal is a Kathmandu engineer and *Nepali Times* columnist.

Devinder Sharma is a food and trade policy analyst who chairs the New Delhi-based Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security.

Hari Roka is completing his doctoral research on the political economy of Nepal at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Jehan Perera, a human rights activist based in Colombo, writes a column in the *Daily Mirror*.

Lubna Marium is a classical dancer from Dhaka currently based in Sagar on an Indian Council for Cultural Relations scholarship.

Luv Puri is the Jammu correspondent for *The Hindu*.

Manesh Shrestha is the Director of Film South Asia, based in Kathmandu.

Michael O'Shea and **Fareesha Abdulla** are the editors of maldivesculture.com.

Mrinmoy Bhuyan is a Guwahati-based engineer.

Nupur Basu is a television journalist and documentary filmmaker from New Delhi.

Pankaj Sheksaria, based in Pune, is a member of the environmental action group, Kalpavriksh.

Partha Chatterjee is a filmmaker and writer on cinema based in New Delhi.

Santa B Pun formerly Officer on Special Duty with the Ministry of Water Resources and ex-Managing Director of Nepal Electricity Authority is based in Kathmandu

Sudhirendar Sharma is a water expert and development analyst with the New Delhi-based Ecological Foundation.

Yash Ghai is Sir YK Pao Professor of Public Law, University of Hong Kong.

Cover and lastlastpage design by **Tsering Phuntsok.**
lastlastpage concept by **Joe Thomas K**

SRI LANKA

PLAYING TO THE SINHALA GALLERY

A MISTAKEN political judgement has lead the Sri Lankan President endanger the peace process. Sagacity is now required from both Ranil Wickremesinghe as well as Vellupillai Prabhakaran while this mess in Colombo is sorted out.

After grappling with 20 years of conflict, Sri Lanka was beginning to see positive steps towards economic growth, peace and stability when President Chandrika Kumaratunga, exercising her constitutional powers, took over three ministerial portfolios and prorogued parliament on 4 November 2003. This came in the wake of the long awaited LTTE proposals on an interim administration for the North East, which were handed over on 31 October 2003 to the Norwegian facilitators to be forwarded to the government. The business climate had improved, and major foreign investors were finalising their plans for investments in the economy. It was at this juncture that power politics in Colombo rudely interrupted a process that seemed to have regained its equilibrium after a long deadlock.

Fortunately, the peace process is not yet a victim of the political changes, though the economy that has been weakened by the sudden collapse of the stock market is likely to deter long-term economic investments for some time until stability is seen to be re-established. Despite the LTTE sending in its interim administration proposals, the peace talks were not expected, in any event, to recommence before the new year. But when the president's take-over was announced, and troops brought out onto the streets, there was apprehension that the ceasefire itself might be endangered. The president responded to these concerns in a positive manner by affirming her commitment to the ceasefire, to the peace process and to the rulings of the international monitors. To a considerable extent, this was a reversal of her earlier stance in respect of each one of them. In the coming weeks, until the political crisis is resolved, it will be very important for the president, the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the LTTE to act with utmost caution in relation to military matters.

The need to make up.

There are potential flash points that could trigger off a war that the people do not want and only vested interests want. It will be difficult for Wickremesinghe's government to ensure stability in the peace process without control over the defence ministry. This may explain the decision to notify the general public and the international community that President Kumaratunga and her team should take charge of the peace process at this time. However, such a decision on the part of the government to abdicate its responsibility regarding the peace process is not a responsible one. The decision to call on President Kumaratunga to take charge of the peace process may be to show the world at large that she is unable to take on that task, but this is a dangerous political ploy that could cost the country dearly. Realistically speaking, it will be next to impossible for the president and her team to negotiate successfully with the LTTE, whom they constantly describe as terrorists and have vowed to wage war with. Further, it took them no more than two days to reject the LTTE's interim administration proposals in toto, clearly showing a certain ineptness when it comes to conflict resolution.

> With its proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority, the LTTE has given concrete form to its expectations in a manner that is essentially compatible with peaceful co-existence in a united Sri Lanka.

Sinhala gallery

The short shrift that the president's team gave to the LTTE's proposals, which was the product of six months of labour and much advice that they solicited from around the world, may have been intended to please the gallery of Sinhalese nationalists. But it failed in the ABCs of conflict resolution, which is to show respect for the opponent with whom a negotiated settlement is sought. It is interesting to note, in contrast, that the LTTE's move to present its political proposals was immediately welcomed by the international community, including the United States, as a step

forward in the peace process. They collectively urged a return to the negotiating table. In those proposals, the LTTE clearly refrained from frontally addressing emotive issues. They made no mention either of their own military or of the right of the Sri Lankan military to be present in the North East; or of the Sinhalese settlements in the North East. The proposals also did not call for a change in the national flag or anthem or the special place accorded to Buddhism in the Sri Lankan Constitution as any mention of these could have generated an emotional response from Sinhalese nationalists.

The proposals, in sum, call for the establishment of an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) for the North East in which the LTTE would have an absolute majority of members. Thereafter, the proposals indicate that complete autonomy is sought in virtually every aspect of the political and economic life of the people. The LTTE proposals call for separate institutions to be set up for the North East in respect of the police, judiciary, elections, taxation, local and foreign grants and loans, and trade, among others. There is an assurance that internationally mandated standards of human rights, accountability, multi-ethnic representation and free and fair elections will prevail. But all the institutions that are to be set up to ensure such practices of good governance will be under the sole control of the ISGA.

The president and her team believed they could actually form a new government of their own. This did not materialise and so the president has no parliamentary basis for governance.

For nearly six months the LTTE focused its attention on the formulation of its interim administration proposals, holding a wide range of consultations with local and international experts in its capital of Kilinochchi and also in numerous foreign countries, including France, Northern Ireland, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland. The document they have produced is a concise exposition of Tamil thinking, over which there is, of course, the final authority of the LTTE. There is no doubt that the proposals are maximalist in spirit, as indeed could have been anticipated from an organisation that has waged a long war for the cause of complete Tamil separation from Sri Lanka. But they are an opening offer in negotiations in which there has got to be give and take. With its proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority, the LTTE has given concrete form to its expectations in a manner that is essentially compatible with peaceful coexistence in a united Sri Lanka. The fact that the LTTE has recognised the right of the Sri Lankan government to appoint members to the ISGA, and has not challenged the right of the Sri Lankan security forces to be present in the North East, are specific indicators of a preparedness to accept a united country.

Further, even with regard to the new regional institutions they have proposed, such as the police and judiciary, there appears to be an openness to dialogue with the government on how to set them up and on their composition. It is unlikely that the government will either have the ability or the intention to set up new institutions that supersede the existing ones during an interim administrative period. New institutions that require legal and constitutional change are more appropriate for the final political settlement. There is much to commend in the LTTE's proposals, in particular their willingness to give weight to the principles of good governance, representative democracy and accountability. They are the result of a great deal of effort and provide a basis from which to engage in dialogue with other parties to the conflict, such as the government and the Muslims. The fact that the LTTE has invested so much time and effort in a political endeavour is to be appreciated by those who seek a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict.

A delicate equilibrium

However, in a society where the spirit of power sharing is yet to be learned and practiced, obtaining an absolute majority is a potential license for unilateralism. When this potential is coupled with autonomy, the result can be a high degree of control. It is noteworthy that the LTTE's proposals make no provision for integration with nationally prevailing structures. Viewed in this context, it is not surprising that the Wickremesinghe government's response to the LTTE proposals was cautious and restrained. In its own proposals regarding an interim administration for the North East, the government specifically excluded matters pertaining to police, land, revenue and security from the purview of the interim administration. But in the LTTE's counter proposals, all the above, with the exception of security are specifically considered to be

the domain of the ISGA. Further, in the government's proposals, while an absolute majority is conceded to the LTTE, provision was made for a minority veto on matters that affected the interests of the Muslim and Sinhalese communities living in the North East.

On the ground, the Muslims and Sinhalese of the East, who presently constitute over 60 percent of the population in this region, have strongly protested their inclusion into an LTTE-dominated administration. The Muslims in particular have been vociferous about their opposition, as in the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) they have a political party that draws virtually all its strength from the East. The SLMC's first response to the LTTE's proposals has been to say that they do not meet Muslim aspirations. The government's cautious response to the LTTE's proposals could also be due to its apprehensions about a backlash against them from Sinhalese nationalists bolstered by opposition political parties. Pro-war Sinhalese nationalists who call for the military subjugation of Tamil nationalism very recently physically attacked leading Sinhalese and Tamil cultural artistes who had gathered together for an inter-ethnic cultural festival in Colombo. What this increasingly frustrated minority needs is the politically motivated backing by the major opposition parties to run amok and riot on the streets, as has happened on past occasions when governments appeared to make concessions to Tamil demands for regional autonomy.

Given dangerous possibilities inherent in such a delicate equilibrium, this is not the time for political ploys to expose the president and her team. Difficult though it is, Wickremesinghe has to negotiate a settlement with Kumaratunga while at the same time continuing to take the peace process forward. The basis for such a negotiated solution would be recognition of two realities. The first is that the president is indeed vested with enormous executive powers until the end of her term of office in December 2005. She obtained those powers legitimately by winning the presidential election in December 1999. There is no getting around that fact, which permits her to take over the three ministries and more if she so desires. The second reality is that the president's take-over bid was, in the final analysis, a failure. Kumaratunga and her advisors did not intend to merely take-over three ministries and have the process end with that. They had anticipated that members of the government would cross over to their side and provide the president with a parliamentary majority. The president and her team believed they could actually form a new government of their own. This did not materialise and so the president has no parliamentary basis for governance. While it is true that the Sri Lankan presidency is vested with enormous powers in theory, the experience over the last two years shows that a hostile parliament is even more powerful. The president's call for a grand alliance of all political parties in parliament and for a government of national reconciliation came only after this failure, and will justifiably be discounted because of it.

Trouble-shooter Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister

Aims versus gains

A compromise between the government and president could be achieved on a three-fold basis. First, it would be necessary for the government to find a face-saving solution for the president. She would not wish to be seen to be relinquishing the three ministries she took over. Therefore, it may be possible for her to keep the three ministries, but have three deputy ministers perform the day-to-day operations of the ministries. This was the case with the ministry of defence during the period of the last government. The deputy minister for defence was clearly in charge of defence. He stayed in that position despite dismal results without the president interfering.

The second basis for a negotiated settlement would be to accede to a request made by the president at the very commencement of the government's term of office that her nominee should be on the government's negotiating team. This is a fair request, and would add to the representative character of the negotiating team. If the Muslim community could demand that it have a representative at the peace talks, surely the main opposition party is entitled to have one too. It is a sign of the government's own unwillingness to recognise the basic principles of cohabitation that it disregarded this early request of the president in a most cavalier fashion. The presence of a presidential nominee would ensure that the solution would

be easier to legitimise amongst the Sinhalese people as well.

The third basis for a negotiated settlement would be to find a direct role for the president as a democratically elected leader of the country who herself commenced the peace process with courageous leadership. It was during her period that it became uncontroversial to talk about an 'ethnic conflict' rather than a 'terrorist problem'. It was she who frontally confronted the critics of a federal type of political solution, proposed a semi-federal model, and lest we forget, it was Kumaratunga who invited the Norwegians to be facilitators. The president deserves recognition both locally and internationally for the very positive role she once played. A new role for her, best suited to her strengths, but mindful of her weaknesses, needs to be found.

The president deserves recognition both locally and internationally for the very positive role she once played.

There is a need for urgency in the task of resolving this particular unexpected conflict. Political stability must quickly be re-established for Sri Lanka to fulfil its economic promise and for the people to enjoy fully the peace dividend. The conflict between the president and government appears too much of an elite struggle for power at all costs. Instead of trying to defeat each other totally, and escalating the conflict, the political leaders need to negotiate with each other in the same way the government is negotiating with the LTTE. And they need to keep in mind, especially the president and her team, that the mandate of the people at the last general election was for a negotiated peace and not for a war for peace.

–Jehan Perera

SOFTENING THE LINE OF CONTROL

THREE ALTERNATIVE routes are better than the road between Srinagar and Muzafarrabad which New Delhi has offered to open.

The opening the Srinagar-Muzafarrabad road network is one of the confidence building measures (CBM's) offered by the Indian government to Pakistan on 22 October. This has been projected by analysts and the media as a giant step towards solving the problems of millions on either side of the Line of Control (LoC). However, these gushing and effusive commentators, perhaps keen to highlight the magnanimity of the centre's Kashmir policy, have not paused to consider the ground realities before rushing to the conclusion that some act of humanitarianism has been performed.

The idea of 'softening' the border between India and Pakistan along the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not a new one. It is an old idea that is being revived in a new context. The case for it is based mainly on humanitarian grounds, which are supposed to be above political considerations. The primary argument is that it will help families, currently divided, to reunite. These divided families are a permanent peculiarity of the illogical division of a society between two countries based on no particular principle other than the fact that the line of separation represented the respective militaries' state of control as on a particular day. When the state of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two halves between India and Pakistan on 1 January 1949 and the ceasefire line announced, families were divided, by a line, based on the territory held. In short, the separation was on a completely random basis. Since then, various proposals have surfaced from different quarters to open up the Jammu and Kashmir border.

The campaign for soft borders with 'Pakistan-held-Kashmir' has been led by various Kashmiri leaders who have dominated the political spectrum of the state ever since its partition. The tallest Kashmiri leader of the last century, Sheikh Abdullah had also pressed for opening of the border and continued this demand after his dismissal from power in August 1953 till his death in September 1982. It was one of the main demands in the manifesto of his National Conference Party for the assembly election of 1977. The Mirwaiz of Kashmir, Maulvi Umar Farooq, has also been a strong proponent of this idea on the humanitarian ground that divided families long to reunited. He cites the example of his own family, which was divided in 1947.

Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed while repeating this demand has linked it with the ultimate aim of restoration of peace in the state. The thrust of the campaign to soften the border has been to

allow the movement of men and vehicles on the famous Rawalpindi-Srinagar road, which connects not only Pakistan-held-Kashmir with Indian Kashmir, but also with the Punjab province of Pakistan via Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani Kashmir. But the emphasis on this route has been at the cost of ignoring other parts of state, which were also divided in 1947 and for whom the opening of borders would have much greater utility and appeal.

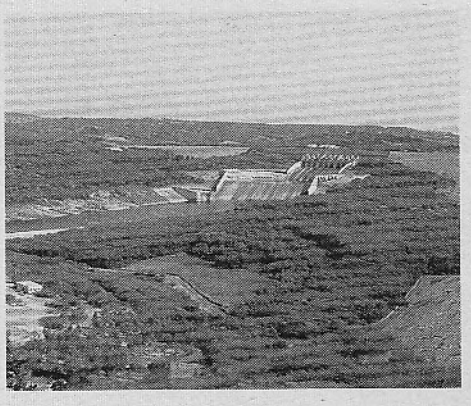
It thus becomes necessary to examine the other possible routes for facilitating the reunion of divided families. The Kashmir valley, which has a very distinct identity, is dissimilar to the culture prevailing in Azad Kashmir on the Pakistani side. Before 1947, only Muzaffarabad district of present-day Pakistan-held-Kashmir was in Kashmir province. The rest of the districts of Pakistani Kashmir were either in Jammu province or in the frontier province of Ladakh and are now called Northern Areas in Pakistan. Even Muzaffarbad district, in linguistic and cultural terms, was closer to the Jammu region. After 1947, Pakistan kept the entity of Kashmir symbolically independent. For instance, the head of the state is known as the president and head of the government is known as the prime minister. The power centre in Azad Kashmir is the roost of Muslim Rajputs, proud of their martial past. All of them are non-Kashmiri speaking and have close ties with the border districts of Jammu region.

During the partition of India, large scale migration of Muslims took place from the region to Pakistan-held-Kashmir and also to other parts of Pakistan, quite apart from the numerous families which were forced to live on either side of the LoC. In the plains belt of Jammu, most of the Muslim families migrated to the Punjab province of Pakistan. For the last 50 years, the families on both sides have been trying hard to remain in touch with their relatives across the border. But since Indo-Pak tensions have become an increasingly frequent phenomenon it is difficult to do so. Today, in fact, even in the less stressful interludes between the periods of tension there have been cases where the death of a relative has been conveyed to the kin after a gap of weeks. Just recently the case came to light of a woman from Sialkot in Pakistan (11 km from Jammu) who had come to her parental house on the Indian side during her pregnancy (a common practice) more than two years back and has

since not been able to return because of continuing tensions following the 13 December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament (as a result of which travel between the two countries was suspended). Tales of such tragedies in the region is unremitting. The opening of the Suchetgarh-Sialkot road across the international border would provide immediate relief to thousands of families who would otherwise have to take a much longer route to cross over. As the border in that segment is in the plains, the larger road network would make travel easier.

The number of divided families in the state is far more in the hilly belt of Jammu ie Rajouri-Poonch than they are in the plains. The Line of Control here not only divided the territory, but also villages and even individual houses. The illegal movement of families across the LoC has been a regular feature of life since partition. As the terrain in hilly areas comprises creeks, mountains and numerous passes, people have been illegally going across the border on both festive and tragic occasions. The situation has changed now. As the maximum infiltration of militants takes place in these tracts, security has become very tight. The movement of families across the LoC has decreased dramatically as a result of increased security patrols, but desperate attempts to cross the line are not at all uncommon.

The softening of the borders will provide immediate relief to the Muslim families of this hilly region. Even the Hindus on the Indian side of the LoC have a nostalgic desire to visit the areas they left on the other side. In the pre-1947 era most of the area was part of the Jammu province. Mirpur was the largest constituent of Azad Kashmir and comprises the tehsils of Bhimber, Kotli and Mirpur. The district lies on the



Mangla Dam: Mirpur's nemesis.

famous Mughal road, passing through Mirpur-Bimber-Rajouri, which was the main artery connecting the state with the rest of the country. The present relationship of Mirpur with the rest of Pakistan is quite unsettled. In the 1960's the Pakistan government built the Mangla dam in Mirpur which ended up submerging the entire town of Mirpur.

This encouraged the expatriation of people from Mirpur, many of whom settled down in large numbers in Britain and who have continued their protest against the construction of Mangla dam and its recent extension. Prior to that, in the midst of the partition riots, several thousands of Hindu Mirpuris had to migrate from their ancestral homes and had to settle down in different parts of Jammu province in India. Since then, their numbers have increased to several lakhs. Even after over 50 years of sustained tension between India and Pakistan the sympathy of Hindu Mirpuris for their Muslim counterparts remains at a very high level and they express their support to the latter in the struggle to save their home land from the effects of the dam.

Of the other areas similarly affected, Poonch, in 1947, was the only district of the state which was itself bifurcated between the two countries. It was, therefore, the worst affected district. Many Muslim families were separated from each other. As a result, ties with the other side were never broken until militancy surfaced in the state,. So high was the level of contact that even marriage parties used to go from one side to the other, a phenomenon that was rarely witnessed in other parts of the region.

Since Jammu has the maximum number of divided families as compared to any other part of the country, opening three roads in the region, namely the Suchetgarh-Sialkot road, the Mirpur-Bimber-Rajouri or Mughal road and the intra-Poonch route, would best serve the cause of reuniting divided families. The special importance of these three roads on ethnic, emotional and humanitarian grounds can hardly be disputed. Since security is an obvious consideration, needful precautions along those lines can be taken fairly easily. As a first step, since restrictions on general movement of people will be imposed, at least genuinely divided families should be allowed to meet so that their distress does not remain hostage to the hostility between the two states. In the longer run, when the security environment permits, cultural bridges between the two parts could be built through these roads, failing which much headway will not be made since temporary peace, as and when it is restored, will be all too fragile. Opening the Jammu borders would not only solve a major humanitarian problem of the Subcontinent but will also go a long way in cementing the cultural bonds between the two countries at the level that matters in everyday terms, between people.

– *Luv Puri*

RIVER LINKING

VICTIMISING RIVERS OF THE SOUTH

EVEN AS the Indian Ministry of Water Resources has been maintaining that it is inching closer and closer to implementing the first of the proposed 30 links under the grand programme of interlinking rivers (see *Himal*, August, September 2003), the Kerala Legislative Assembly showed just how weak this claim is by passing a resolution that called the linking of two rivers in the state with one in neighbouring Tamil Nadu as discriminatory and unconstitutional. The proposed link would divert waters from the Pamba and the Achankovil rivers of Kerala to the Vaippar river in Tamilnadu.

This move by a state in India to question the diversion of water to a neighbouring state mirrors the opposition voiced by Bangladesh to the Indian government's ambitious project. Bangladesh has officially protested what it has called "a unilateral move to appropriate transboundary waters". It is evident that once serious thought was given to the ramifications of the project from affected quarters, the voices of protest would not only increase in volume but would also be raised from different corners of the Subcontinent. The cavalier disregard for issues of equity and fairness in the distribution of water displayed by the creative

thinkers who dreamt up this scheme in India has had its obvious consequences.

The architects of this fanciful scheme have been forced to go into trouble shooting mode since, unlike in the initial stages when the opposition was being voiced from civil society alone, the protests have now begun to emanate from within official institutions. On the international front, the crisis has been managed by exerting diplomatic pressure and Bangladesh has been advised to show restraint, as befits a smaller neighbour. But in this particular case the international dimension is more amenable to a forced solution than the domestic dimension is. If Bangladesh is eventually short changed that is a problem for the Bangladesh government to deal with, whereas if a state in India feels cheated it is likely to have more or less direct political repercussions. Besides, there really is no mechanism similar to diplomacy to iron out domestic discord.

It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that the Government of India has been conspicuously silent on the Kerala assembly resolution. Obviously the government at the centre, at present, is not keen to be embroiled in a political tangle that may scuttle its desperate efforts to build consensus aimed at gaining the desired electoral edge for the general elections due next year. To make matters worse, that the legislative assembly of the most literate state in the country has unequivocally condemned the project can only vindicate the stand of critics outside the arena of state institutions. This is the first point of intersection between the polity and civil society on this issue, and may well set a trend that accelerates in momentum with time.

Critics who have been studying the ecological effects of the project have welcomed the boost to their efforts that has come from the political class. "It offers a respite to Kerala rivers, which have a short running span but significant ecological functions to perform from their point of origin in the Western Ghats", says Dr Latha of the Chalakudy Puzha Samarakshan Samiti (Chalakudy River Conservation Organisation) in Thrissur district of Kerala. Of the 41 west-flowing rivers in the state, only two rivers are allowed an uninterrupted flow into the Arabian Sea.

Storage or diversion of waters for irrigation from the remaining 39 rivers has caused ecological damage reflected in the irreversible saline ingress along the state's coast. Periyar, the longest river of the state, with a length of 244-kilometres, has already lost 22 per cent of its average flow due to diversions. Likewise, the Bharathapuzha has had its flow reduced by 12 per cent on its 209-kilometre-long journey to the sea. By far, the biggest victim has been the 140-kilometre-long Chalakudy river, which has suffered a 37 per cent reduction in its natural flow. Interestingly, the tributaries of these three rivers are the main culprits in reducing the volume of flow, as they are locked into a puzzling inter-basin water transfer called the Parambikulam Aliyar Project (PAP).

This particular transfer arrangement is puzzling because the PAP treaty was signed between Kerala and Tamil Nadu only on 29 May 1970, in a ritual act of post facto validation. The construction of dams to transfer the waters had been commissioned much before the actual treaty legalising the diversion was signed. It is puzzling also because the state was reportedly forced to sign the controversial treaty in exchange for the majestic Idukki hydropower project. And it is even more perplexing because the three dams involved in the transfer—Parambikulum, Peruvarippallam and Thunacadavu—are all inside the territory of Kerala, but the land on which they stand and their operations are still under the control of the Tamil Nadu government. Is this the model that the hydraulic visionaries at the centre in New Delhi have in mind to enforce the proposed new transfers?

Indeed, Kerala has been duped many times in the past over inter-basin water transfers by Tamil Nadu. The first such instance was in 1886, when the Maharaja of Travancore signed the Mullaperiyar Agreement with the British administration in the Madras Presidency. By the terms of this agreement the Madras administration was granted the right to construct and maintain the Mullaperiyar dam located in the Travancore region of Kerala and divert the water to irrigate arid lands in Madurai region. This 106 year old agreement was evidently the precursor for the 33-year-old Parambikulam Aliyar Project treaty.

If these two treaties and the more recent Siruvani treaty are any indication, the idea of 'surplus water' has been consistently misconceived. PAP is one of the many cases in Kerala that illustrate how vested interests have hidden facts from the public. The nine dams built on the eight tributaries of

Periyar, Chalakudy and Bharathapuzha rivers, as part of the Parambikulam Aliyar Project, have made available a total of 33 thousand million cubic feet (TMC) of water for diversion. As per the treaty, Tamil Nadu is entitled to 16.5 TMC of water every year from the yield of those three dams (viz, Parambikulam, Peruvarippallam and Thunacadavu) but in effect it is diverting the entire flow into its territory.

By fudging the flow data, Tamil Nadu has appropriated the entire available water from PAP by forcing the three tributaries of the Chalakudy river to run dry for a stretch of anywhere between five to six kilometres from the dam sites. All these dried stretches lie in forested areas and are inhabited by tribal populations. Further, as the water is not released downstream, the Kerala Sholayar and Poringalkuthu hydropower projects on the Chalakudy river operate well below their installed capacity.

After a long history of compromising on ecologically sensitive issues by succumbing to the idea of surplus waters in its rivers, the Kerala government seems to have learnt its lessons finally

More importantly, these diversions have forced the west-flowing tributaries to flow eastward. The ecological impact of such aberrant acts is only now beginning to be understood across the state. According to the noted environmentalist S Sathischandran Nair, Kerala has already paid a heavy price for the erroneous conception of surplus flow in its rivers. In an ecological context, no river can have a drop of surplus. (For a discussion on the idea of surplus, see 'Rivers of collective belonging', *Himal*, October 2003).

Given the fact that Kerala has a unique topography that undergoes significant altitudinal variations within its maximum width of about 60 kilometres, the management of its meandering rivers emerging from the forested Western Ghats assumes special significance. Since these rivers reach the sea in quick time, they must perform significant ecological functions of sustaining flora and fauna along their course. Any discontinuation or reduction in their flow could be ecologically disturbing. Needless to say, the impact of such ecological disturbances has already been felt along the Kerala coast.

The assembly resolution has come at the right time in recognising the merits of the ecological critique of artificially diverting rivers. This critique was articulated with force at the National Conference on Interlinking of Rivers, organised by the Chalakudy Puzha Samarakshan Samiti and the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), in July 2003 in Thrissur. It was at this meeting that the state administration confirmed its stand on the Kerala component of the river-linking scheme. The State Planning Board categorically stated that Kerala was opposed to the Pampa-Achankovil-Vaippar link. It would appear that after a long history of compromising on ecologically sensitive issues by succumbing to the idea of surplus waters in its rivers, the Kerala government seems to have learnt its lessons finally. What remains to be seen is not only how the central government reacts to this unexpected jolt, but also how many other states are enthused to follow in the footsteps of the Kerala legislators.

– Sudhirendar Sharma

RIVER LINKING

ASSAM: RIPARIAN UNILATERALISM

NEW DELHI has an extravagant vision. 56 million tones of cement, 2 million tones of steel, 32 dams, and 30 canals, spread over 9, 600 kilometres linking 37 rivers will deliver 17.3 billion cubic metres of water to irrigate 34 million hectares of land and supply water to 101 districts and five metros. 40 million man-years of employment will be created for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. GDP growth will increase by 4 percent. And food grain production will go up from 212 million tones per year to 450 millions in the next 20 years.

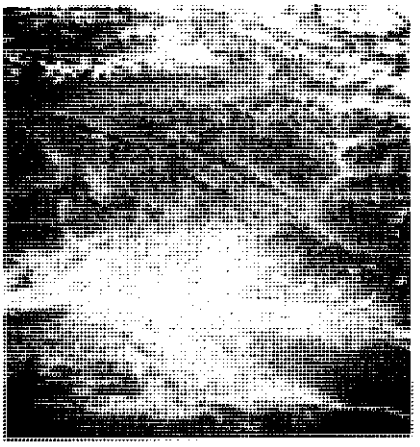
Does New Delhi have the circumspection to keep from pursuing this extravagance? Past experience does not inspire confidence. In that case, does New Delhi have the acumen to create a consensus in favour of its extravagance? The rumbling protests from the states do not seem to suggest so. And if, despite all the opposition, New Delhi lacks the prudence to desist from the extravagance, does it at least have the scruple to distribute the costs, colossal as it will be, in proportion to the benefits, such as they are. There is nothing in the historical evidence to support this view.

In Assam, a state where grievances against the centre have given rise in the past to a sustained mass agitation first and eventually militancy, the issue has raised hackles. The Brahmaputra, one of the rivers the centre has unilaterally, and in the national interest, decided to relieve off its load of 'excess' water, is a river bisecting the state. But the river is also something more than just that; it holds deep emotional and symbolic significance for the people of the state. Consequently, the Government of India will have a difficult task on hand to persuade a sceptical public to let it have its way.

New Delhi's concern for Assam's misfortunes is both recent and suspicious. True, the monsoon floods of the Brahmaputra have created havoc in the valley, inundating large areas of the arable land, washing away houses and damaging property worth crores of rupees over the years. Yet, until now, the state's demand, periodically reiterated, to declare the flood problem in Assam a national one, has never been given due importance. Central assistance for flood relief has also been consistently and grossly inadequate. But now, in the alleged attempt to mitigate the misery of drought-prone people on other parts of the country, the centre has suddenly remembered that Assam's floods constitute surplus water.

Given the possibility that transferring water via West Bengal could well aggravate the already existing flood problem in that state, it will be difficult for Assam to be persuaded that New Delhi is seriously concerned about floods. Even the promise of corollary benefits, like the increased availability of power is unlikely to produce the required groundswell of support for the project. Among the litany of benefits being advertised by the centre's Task Force on River Linking is the projected 34, 000 Mw of cheap and clean power that will be generated, which it is claimed will help facilitate industrial development in the country. Some of this power, it is argued, will help ease the power crisis in Assam. Funnily enough, until now the centre has never been unduly bothered about improving the power situation in the state, even after the establishment of the National Power Grid. As with the floods, so with power—Assam's needs, long unfulfilled, have found an unexpected solution, only on the condition that the Brahmaputra's waters are made available for some distant purpose identified by the water mandarins in New Delhi. Not a word has been uttered about the long-standing demand to expand electrification in rural Assam.

Meanwhile, while they peddle the virtues of the river linking project, its proponents are disturbingly silent about the obvious hurdles that stand in the way. There is the thorny issue of interstate water sharing principles that will have to be evolved. The Indian centre has an abysmally poor record on this count. Is there any guarantee that a state that has suffered from New Delhi's indifference in the past will be able to get a good deal out of the proposed transfer of water? Then there is the perennially unresolved question of rehabilitation. In the absence of any concrete scheme for the rehabilitation of people displaced by all the engineering activity envisaged on the Brahmaputra, there is unlikely to be an excess of enthusiasm for the project.



Assam Brahmaputra by satellite: as the 'centre' of attraction.

Overall, New Delhi's biggest problem is its lack of credibility. History since independence is littered with the broken pledges and promises of the federal government. There are many examples to cite. The Kosi project in Bihar was started in 1955, but the land for the resettlement of as many as 372 displaced villages has yet to be acquired. In the case of the Mahananda and Bagmati embankments of the 1970s, hundreds of villages received only 'shifting allowances' for their houses, which amounted to a paltry figure of between INR 250 and 500 per household. The pathetic story of the victims of the Kamla embankment is also well known. They were not even told where the rehabilitation office of the project was located. Under the circumstances, the florid assurances of the river linking project's spin managers are unlikely to wash with a sceptical Assamese public.

It is reassuring that those who run the country from New Delhi are keen to solve the problem of acute water shortage. At least someone seems to be engaged with the problem. But the plan and policies that form part of the so-called solution are not exactly transparent. For instance, there has been no public disclosure yet on the contour data or the points from where the Brahmaputra's water will be diverted in Assam. This link is supposed to send the Brahmaputra to the

Mahanadi through the Ganga over a 9000 kilometre maze of 30 canals, and there is still not a single map on the horizon. But all these are finally only procedural questions that concern the functioning of the bureaucracy. There has been no mention of the ecological problems that the project portends. There are ample examples of rivers diverted through canals which led to the drying up of stretches of the affected rivers.

But even if the water bureaucracy is not endowed with enough foresight to visualise such deleterious consequences, surely there must be at least some among them who would have been struck by the international ramifications of riparian unilateralism and the reference here is not to Bhutan, Nepal or Bangladesh. The first question to ask regarding diverting the Brahmaputra is, "who controls the flow of the Brahmaputra in its Tibetan segment? It is the People's Republic to the north. China with its propensity for big water projects has already planned to pump out, yearly, 48 trillion litres of water from the Yangtse river along its 800 mile course to draught stricken northern China. The Brahmaputra, known as Tsang-Po in its first 700 miles, is on the northern slope of the Himalaya. If New Delhi is so confident about its own abilities south of the Himalaya, who is to guarantee that tomorrow China will not go in for a mega project to divert the upstream Tsang-Po for its own ends A little humility is all it takes to keep hubris in its place. Failing that, some upstream unilateralism will do the job just as effectively. Even if the Task Force cannot bring itself to abandon the whole project, it would do well to reflect a bit more on the Brahmaputra.

If New Delhi is so confident about its own abilities south of the Himalaya, who is to guarantee that tomorrow China will not go in for a mega project to divert the upstream Tsang-Po for its own ends

– Mrinmoy Bhuyan

WTO WORLD VILLAGE

THE FIFTH ministerial of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) failed and the Indian media was quick enough to lap it up as a huge success for India and the developing world. Some of the leading dailies had dramatic headlines on 16 September:
"Cancun's fall: the rich hardsell, poor don't buy" - *Indian Express*
"India gains at Cancun" - *The Times of India*
"Cancun meet collapses after standoff" - *The Hindu*

The stories that followed eloquently and proudly informed readers of how India had bravely warded off the unfair and unequal trade order being imposed on the world and how it played a leading role in protecting the interests of millions of farmers and poor people from developing countries. "India Inc. hails Jaitley", read another headline, applauding the Union Minister for Commerce Arun Jaitley for successfully leading the fight against the vested economic and political interests of the developed world. "The fact that we brought the concerns of developing countries to the centre stage reflects the success of Cancun", Jaitley is reported to have said at the conclusion of the talks.

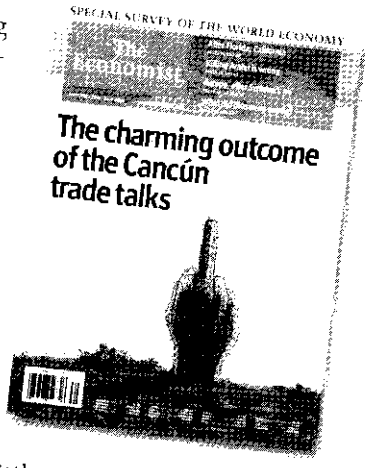
Centre stage and success? One had all along been led to believe, with a vehemence that brooked no misgiving, that the whole purpose of trade liberalisation and the WTO was always to benefit the developing world. Now one is expected to believe that these concerns were not even in the picture in the first place, and that the entire struggle is to get them to the centre stage, and that 'success' lies in actually achieving this objective. It is interesting to look at the semantics of the media take on the talks—the talks failed? Or did they succeed? If they failed, did India gain? If India gained, did the talks fail? How could they fail? If India gained because the talks failed, who actually failed? Who lost? If nobody lost, how did the talks fail? If everybody lost, why the celebration? If failure is success, why were the talks held in the first place? And who wanted them? Who continues to want them?

For the last decade the political elite and economic experts of the country have lost no opportunity to push the TINA (there is no alternative) factor vis-à-vis the WTO—in its success is salvation for the poor and the solution to the poverty of this country and that this was the route to becoming a 'developed' country. Also, that the WTO is the only gateway to larger international markets to improve trade and that increasing trade was the only way of improving our own lives and lifestyles—even if this re-

quired the sacrifice of a large part of individual economic sovereignty for the country. Those who disregarded the 'bounties' of unfettered international trade had vested interests in opposing the WTO or keeping national markets closed. These were 'anti-nationals' who opposed development and did not understand the needs and desires of the people of the country. The world was becoming a village and staying out of it was bad economics. If all that the political, economic and media bosses have tried hard to convince the people of was indeed true, what happened now? Why the celebrations?

There is now convincing proof that liberalisation and opening up of the markets is destroying the livelihoods of millions of third world farmers. It is penury and starvation, not the promised wealth and prosperity that is coming their way. But, has the media learnt to look deeper than simply report on farmer suicides and industrial layoffs? One day before the talks in Cancun collapsed, an 'expert' explained in his weekly column in an Indian national daily as to why "imports are better than exports". But he could do no more than to simply assert that "exports are a bad thing and imports are a good thing" and that this was actually good for the poor. But the fact is, there are still some die-hard believers who cannot bring themselves to abandon the faith. A day after the talks failed, an article in a national daily explained that too much (unnecessary) focus was being laid on the protectionism in the rich countries. "The Cancun collapse", the author argued, "was in no small measure due to the unwillingness of developing countries to make credible market-open concessions to match those they demanded from the rich countries". Efforts were needed, he concluded, to strengthen the ability of leaders in developing countries to sell liberalisation to their domestic constituencies. Clearly the skewed 'handouts' after a decade of this process and the accompanying statistics have failed to raise a consideration on the part of 'experts' that something is not right—the emperor may be naked, but so what? Long live the emperor! For them, and minister Jaitley must have surely received a good dressing down from them when he returned, liberalisation has to be 'sold'. Markets have to be opened, whatever the cost and whosoever may have to pay for it.

The best must be saved for the last— and as always, the most self-serving opinion comes from *The Economist*, the mantra-provider for the world's well-heeled. Its special report, titled 'WTO under fire' (20 September), explains that one of the three reasons for the failure of the talks in Cancun was the WTO itself. "Finally", says the weekly, "the blame belongs to the WTO's own decision-making procedures, or rather the lack of them...Its predecessor, the old GATT system ...was run by rich countries. Poor countries had little power, but also few responsibilities. The WTO, by contrast, is a democratic organisation that works by consensus, but with no formal procedures to get there. Any one of the organisation's 148 members can hold up any aspect of any negotiation. Efforts to create smaller informal groups are decried as 'non-transparent' by those left out....The worst problem, though, is that the WTO's requirement for consensus makes it virtually impossible for it to be reformed". This, not surprisingly, is the kind of view held by the US and European Union (EU) trade representatives as well.



The gentlemen do not favour consenus.

The irony of the situation would be hilarious if actually it was not this tragic. *The Economist* wants the WTO reformed and if this means that it loses its apparently democratic and transparent nature and consensus mode of decision-making, so be it. Large portions of the developing world fought for the failure of Cancun because they thought the way the WTO talks were headed, was unfair. If a democratic and consensus-based system itself was found to be unreasonable and unfair, it is amazing that *The Economist* and others can believe and say what they actually do. And if, indeed, *The Economist*'s wishes were to come true, will the media in the developing world once again simply echo the sentiments of this, their market-leader.

– Pankaj Sheksaria

The relentless tragedy of Ritwik

Nearly quarter of a century after his death, Ritwik Ghatak's films show the power of creativity of a people's artist who authored an Indian/SouthAsian language of cinema. If only we knew...

by ***Partha Chatterjee***

An artiste, even in this age of mindless greed and hurry, captures the public imagination, if only for a moment or two, should he or she answer to type, that is, of being a romantic idealist. Ritwik Ghatak, the Bengali filmmaker and short story writer, was such an individual and an alcoholic to boot, like the Urdu poet of romance and revolution, Majaz Lucknawi; or Sailoz Mookerjea, the painter whose soul made a daily creative journey across continents—from the French countryside of the Impressionists to the verdant green Bengal of his childhood and youth, and austere, dusty Delhi where he finally settled down. Like them, Ghatak died young – in his fifty-first year, on 6 February 1976. His send-off was perfunctory, like the ones accorded to Majaz and Sailoz, and it took a long time for a larger public to gauge the worth of the three of them. The reason for this neglect was probably the lack of access to their work.

In retrospect, Ghatak stands a better chance of being in the public gaze because of the nature of his medium—cinema—which has a far greater reach than either poetry or painting. He had problems finding finance for his films because of his inability to suffer fools, especially in the film world, and this compounded with a talent for insulting hypocrites, including would-be producers, when drunk, made his own life and that of his family completely miserable.

He forgot that he lived in a country that was simultaneously half-feudal and half-capitalist and was still emerging from the shadow of colonialism. Directness and honesty in private and professional life were qualities lauded in the abstract but viewed with suspicion, even fear, in the real world. In Ghatak's case, it was inevitable that alienation and unemployment would lead to alcoholism, bankruptcy and an early death. His worldly failure was somehow seen as the touchstone of 'artistic worth' by a certain section of the Indian elite and he was claimed by them as one of their own some ten years ago. This is all the more ironic for they have neither knowledge nor intuition of the language or the culture that made a genius like him possible.

Like many communists of his time, Ghatak came from the feudal class, but from its educated minority that had access to Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian, English, the literature and philosophy of Europe, including the writings of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, and the heritage of Hindustani and Western classical music. To this formidable intellectual baggage he added, in later years of artistic maturity, the ideas of the psychoanalyst, CG Jung, the explorations in cultural anthropology, including the Great Mother image in Joseph Campbell's prose, derived from Erich Neuemann's *The Great Mother*, and the vast repertoire of folklore and folk music of India, and the two Bengals—East and West.

Like many young people of his generation, Ghatak joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI). This organisation had rendered yeomen service during the Bengal famine of 1943, which witnessed a death toll of five million. IPTA had brought succour to the starving and destitute in the state by bringing them food supplies and, in Bijon Bhattacharya, found a dedicated actor and playwright who wrote the path-breaking Bengali play *Nabanna* (*New Harvest*) on the cataclysm. Bhattacharya, was to soon marry Ghatak's niece, Mahashweta Devi, who is the celebrated writer and activist of today.

IPTA travelled from village to village and to the small towns in Bengal, apart from playing in Calcutta and its suburbs, and soon had roots all over India. It did contemporary Indian plays and significant Western ones as well. In addition, the 'song squad' was famous for

its musical acumen and rousing repertoire. The organisation's role in the evolving of cultural values in independent India was seminal. To say that modern ideas in Indian theatre and cinema grew out of the activities of IPTA would be no exaggeration.

Ghatak's own growth as an artiste and a socially conscious individual can be linked to his apprenticeship in the IPTA as a fledging playwright, actor and director. He took his first tentative steps in the cinema in Nemai Ghosh's left-wing neo-realist *Chinna mool*, about East Bengali refugees who come to Calcutta after partition. He himself played a young comb seller. Ghatak could never give up acting and cast himself in cameo roles in some of the films he was to direct later.

The three earth-shaking events of twentieth century India, viz, the Bengal famine, the second world war and the partition of country in 1947 marked him for life. The bestiality and madness that perverted human relations during this period made him a confirmed pessimist, though he tried bravely to bring hope and sunshine in the last scenes of all his films. The psychological effect usually was the opposite.

When Ghatak made his first film, *Nagarik*, in 1952, he was nearing 27. It was produced on half-a-shoe-string budget with actors mostly from IPTA, and had for its story the travails of a middle-class refugee family from East Bengal which had banked unwisely on the job prospects of the older son to keep it afloat. Rather a grim beginning for a budding artiste. The film was never released in his lifetime and only a negative struck from a damaged print discovered at Bengal Lab, in Tollygunge, Calcutta, a year after his death made a token two-week commercial release possible.

The lack of outward polish in *Nagarik* could not suppress innate qualities that revealed a genuine involvement with social issues; a caring attitude towards the sorrows of the deprived; an unusual sense of music, incidental sound and camera placement and confident handling of actors. The great Bengali stage actress, Prabha Devi's performance as the nurturing mother was the high point of the film and a close second was Kali Prasanna Das's music, that included the song, 'Priye Pran Kathin Kathore', set to the lyrics of Maithili mystic poet, Vidyapati. There was enough in this first work to indicate the arrival of a director capable of rising to great heights given the opportunity. But that was still five years away.

His second feature film, *Ajantrik*, came after much struggle. Following the non-release of *Nagrik*, three-and-a-half years were spent in Bombay, writing scripts, first for Filmistan Studio whose boss, S Mukherjee, he tried to wean away from the hackneyed charm of commercial Hindi cinema. Ghatak then worked for Bimal Roy Productions and wrote the story and screen play for the memorable ghost-romance, *Madhumati*. His other worthy script was for Hrishikesh Mukerjee's debut film, *Musafir*, that included in its three tales O Henry's *The Last Leaf*.

Ghatak's 1957 release *Ajantrik* too was based on a literary work, like his very first venture, *Bedini* (1951), abandoned after a 20-day outdoor schedule when the shot footage got spoilt by a camera defect. Tarashankar Bandopadhyay's tale about gypsies never got to the screen, but Subodh Ghosh's memorable short story did. It was about a cranky, poetic cab-driver's attachment to his 1926 model Chevrolet named Jaggadal that he drives in the Chhotanagpur tribal belt in Bihar. It was Ghatak's first major artistic success. He had prepared for it by directing a two-reel documentary simply entitled *The Oraons of Chotanagpur* on the tribe of that name for the Aurora Film Corporation, Calcutta, and another short, *Bihar Ke Kuch Darshaniye Sthaan* (*Some scenic locales of Bihar*), for the state government. These exercises helped Ghatak develop a grasp of the landscape that became an organic part of *Ajantrik*'s narrative. Perhaps it was for the first time that nature was used with such poetic authority in an Indian film to bring into focus both its concrete and abstract elements.

> The most illuminating moments occur in Ghatak's cinema not in great bursts of dramatic action but in the gaps between them.

When the jalopy is sold as scrap, after its final breakdown following an expensive restoration job, to a dealer wearing diamond earnings, the most stone-hearted viewer's heart is wrenched despite the premonition of the inevitable that hovers over the film almost from the beginning. The final moments have indeed the clarity of a parable, as Bimal (Kali Banerjee), the taxi driver, hears and sees a little boy playing with the discarded horn of his beloved car on which he had lavished the attention he would on a dearly loved wife. The wisdom and charm of *Ajantrik* is elusive, almost metaphysical, although it deals with a very real situation in human terms. The Communist Party of India welcomed the film with open arms after driving away its director on grounds of being a Trotskyite. The left felt it depicted the dialectics between man and machine to great effect. Still others saw it as a satire on the haphazard industrial development in the newly independent country and its negative effect on the countryside. But there were too many disparate elements within the story to ensure a clear-cut, all-embracing interpretation.

What, however, could not be accounted for was the prominence given to the local lunatic, Bula (played unforgettably by Keshto Mukherjee), who is attached to his aluminium plate and is the butt of cruel jokes of the children who hover around him. The only concession to rationality in the conception of his role is when, towards the end of the film, he is seen jubilantly hugging his new plate and dancing around, saying, "Oh my new thali, my new thali"! This bit prepares us for the

idea that will assert itself in the end, that the old makes way for the new and, therefore, of the continuity of life. It is, however, difficult to interpret in strictly intellectual terms the backward descent of Jaggadal down a steep slope, with fields of ripening paddy on either side, during its test run after Bimal has spent all his savings towards repairs.

Then, of course, there is that deceptive shot that follows soon after. It looks pat but is not. Bimal pushes his broken-down car over a high bridge with the help of adivasi men and women, some of whom are seated in the vehicle. Just as they reach the middle, a steam locomotive comes roaring in on the tracks below. There is also the charming little scene of Bimal all dressed up with his boy assistant to get himself and his car photographed by the local view-camera master who asks him not to smile foolishly lest the picture be spoilt! A night dance in the forest by the Oraon tribals that Bimal attends and is quite drunk at the end of, is extremely lyrical. Shots of the car making its way through rain-lashed landscapes and, of course, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's haunting rendering of raga Bilas Khani Todi on the sarod, all add up to create a work of art that makes the viewer feel that he has been onto important things, indeed privy to secrets related to man and nature.

Meghe Dhaka Tara (1960)

Meghe Dhaka Tara is a seminal depiction of the existential dilemma of the Indian lower middle class, where the sacrifice of the one good, meek, dutiful daughter ensures the survival of the rest of the family.

A fairly low negative cost of one lakh thirty-five thousand rupees was difficult to recover with *Ajantrik*'s release. Even the money spent on prints and publicity expenses was not recouped. The Bengali audience of 1957 was completely bewildered by a film in which a recalcitrant old car was the hero, with its eccentric driver as its most effective supporting cast. There were, of course, other fine cameo performances. But the viewers in Calcutta, despite *Pather Panchali* and *Aparajito* by Satyajit Ray, were completely unprepared for Ghatak's cinematic poem. More than a quarter of a century went by before recognition came for the film's path-breaking qualities. *Cahiers du Cinema* compared its director's unique juxtaposition of sound and image, after its Paris screening in 1983, to the explorations of great European experimentalists like Jean Marie Straub, Jacques Tati and Robert Bresson. Sadly, recognition first came abroad. Small sections of discerning viewers in India gradually woke up to its merits. The film's use of incidental sounds served the purpose of another 'voice', giving a human dimension to a machine by its presence.

Pramod Lahiri, the producer, had already made a touching serio-comedy, *Paras Pathar* with Satyajit Ray and was about to embark on a new film with him when, at Ray's insistence, he decided to do *Bari Theke Paliye*, based on a story by humorist Shibram Chakravarti, in 1959 with Ghatak in the hope of making up his losses on *Ajantrik*. The story of a stern village schoolmaster's pre-teenage son who runs away to the metropolis of Calcutta in search of the El Dorado that he has read about did not gell. What could have been a sparkling children's film became a dull tract on the heartlessness of city life where only the poor have humanity and the rich are indifferent. The director fell prey to the necessity of having a *sabak* or moral lesson for the prospective young viewer. What one remembers after all these years about the film is the charming performance of young Parambhattarak Lahiri, the producer's son, as Kanchan, the runaway little boy, and the lilting musical score by Salil Chowdhury. Predictably, the film failed. Even Khaled Chaudhury's hilarious poster could not attract children in sufficient numbers to see it.

A married man with responsibilities, Ghatak turned now desperately to 'saleable material'. For his new venture he chose a well-written popular novel, *Koto Ajaana Rey* by Shankar. Mihir Law, a successful paint manufacturer, provided the wherewithal for an expensive production, albeit by Bengali standards. Ghatak bought additional insurance by engaging a big star like Chabi Biswas to play Barwell, the English barrister, a crucial figure in the novel. He also had Anil Chatterjee, a fine actor whose star was rising at the box-office, and a supporting cast that included Karuna Banerjee from *Pathar Panchali* and *Aparajito*, and a powerful young left-wing theatre actor named Utpal Dutt. The shooting progressed well and both director and producer were happy with the results. Then, as on many other occasions in the artiste's later life, shooting came to a halt over an absurd incident. He had instructed the literal minded 'Gorkha' watchman of the studio not to let anyone in as he was shooting a crucial scene in the script. The producer, Mihir Law too was denied admission by the zealous sentry. Deeply insulted, he closed down production after having already sunk several lakhs of rupees; big money for a black-and-white production in the late 1950s!

Ghatak kept the home fires burning by scripting *Swaralipi* for Asit Sen, a successful commercial director and a highly skilled craftsman. Mahendra Kumar Gupt, the producer of this film, teamed up with the scriptwriter with a certain talent for attracting trouble

to produce in 1959-60 *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, a film that turned the tide in the director's life and art. At the outset, Ghatak felt he had been forced into a commercial transaction. But it proved a big hit and, to everybody's surprise, a genuine critical success as well. It is the one film on which Ghatak's reputation rests; the one work that everyone hails as an unqualified masterpiece; a seminal depiction of the existential dilemma of the Indian lower middle class, where the sacrifice of the one good, meek, dutiful daughter - she dies tragically of TB in the end - ensures the survival of the rest of the family. Shaktipada Raj Guru's ordinary melodrama, *Chena Mukh*, thus became the source of one of the most emotionally rich films ever made anywhere in the world.

Gross misdemeanours

Ghatak promptly invested the two-and-a-half lakh rupees he had earned from this film in the new one, *Komal Gandhar*, a marvelous picaresque comedy with serious undertones that obliquely examined the causes behind the failure of the IPTA and, by extension, the CPI. It was a glorious artistic achievement and, ironically, a hopeless tactical error that was to ruin the rest of his life. An original screenplay full of pathos, humour and music and daring technique – the film was twenty years ahead of its time - there was enough in *Komal Gandhar* to drive an aware filmmaker wild with jealousy and the party bosses, who thought they had seen the last of him, to despair.

Komal Gandhar (1961)

There was enough in *Komal Gandhar* to drive an aware filmmaker wild with jealousy and the party bosses, who thought they had seen the last of him, to despair.

To digress to the background of the film and its subject matter: the communist movement in India reached its height in 1948-49 when, in the Telangana district of Andhra Pradesh, an armed struggle by the peasantry led by the CPI against the Indian state took place. The ill-fed, barely-armed revolutionaries were soon overwhelmed and the CPI was banned by the ruling party, the Indian National Congress. The left, so to say, was wiped out in a trice, and, after a humiliating compromise in the early 1950s, came back to participate in parliamentary politics. There was an elected communist government in Kerala in 1957 and then the breakaway Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) led by Jyoti Basu formed the ministry in West Bengal in 1977. Having eschewed revolutionary politics, the communists in 1960-61, at the time of Komal Gandhar's making and release, had become, particularly their middle and upper class leadership, adept coffee house debaters. Their hold on the poor rural peasantry and the exploited urban working class was eroding rapidly. Moreover, their finest cultural workers had already been driven away by a myopic party ideologue by the name of Sudhi Pradhan. Most of them, like Ghatak, Balraj Sahni, Salil Chowdhury, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Kaifi Azmi, Shailendra, Vishmitra Adil and KA Abbas, left to earn a living in the cinema, while Shambhu Mitra, Bijon Bhattacharya and Utpal Dutt prospered in theatre.

Ghatak's criticism of the party's cultural policy in his new film was seen as gross misdemeanor by the bosses and worthy of severe punishment. Of that later.

Komal Gandhar was about a committed theatre group that reached out to the people in the countryside, bringing to them genuine works of art. There is the staging of *Shakuntala*, the Sanskrit classic by Kalidas, in the film. which perhaps was included as an extension of Ghatak's own memories of having directed onstage Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Rabindranath Tagore's *Visarjan* for IPTA in the early 1950s. There are resonances and nuances within the story that would have got to the sensibilities of even the most obtuse of partymen. The inclusion of a scene from *Shakuntala* looks like deliberate guerilla warfare despite its redolent romance. Shakuntala helped by her female companions, is dressing up in her guru's jungle ashram to look beautiful for her lover Dushyanta, a king travelling incognito with his entourage. He, getting her with child, shall forget her on reaching his kingdom. Nothing of the latter part of his life is shown but the story is too well-known in India and Shakuntala at her toilette on camera would subliminally help the audience to imagine her fate. Shakuntala is of course India, Dushyanta the CPI and their prospective child the ordinary people of India.

Laughter and tears are good companions in this moving film that makes nonsense of artificial geographic borders and manufactured history. A common heritage of language, music and customs brings people together and the machinations of demented politicians forcibly divide them along with the land where they have their roots. All the wars fought in the last hundred years have been over purely commercial considerations; racism has always been used alongside as an excuse to consolidate business gains. A snatch of an old folksong is heard in the film - *Aey Paar Paddaa O Paar Paddaa/ Moddi Khaaney Chaur/Tahaar Moddeye Bosheye/Aachen Shibo Saudagor* ("On this bank is the river Padma / On the other bank is the Padma too / And an island lies between them / Where lives Lord Shiva / The trader-great").

Another example of the syncretic culture of undivided Bengal that inflects the film is the chorus literally

crying out "*Dohai Ali!*" (Mercy Ali!) in gradually increased speed as the camera simulates the movement of a train hurtling forward towards the end of the railway tracks that are closed to acknowledge the presence of the new country - Pakistan. There is also the repeated use of the wedding song from East Bengal - *Aam Tolaaye Zhumur Zhaamur/Kaula Tawlaaye Biyaa/Aayee lo Shundorir Zhaamaayee/Mukut Maathaye Diyaa* ("A stirring of breezes cool in the mango grove/A wedding blessed by the auspicious green plantains all around/Comes now the groom for the beauteous bride/Wearing chivalry's glorious crown").

This song comes on at the most unexpected moments in the background, most expressively in the landscape shots of the undulating *khoai* in Santiniketan when the two protagonists Bhrigu (Abaneesh Bandopadhyay) and Ansuiyya (Supriya Choudhury), unknown to themselves, fall in love with each other. There is also the snatch of a *bhawaiyya* sung by Debabrata Biswas towards the end of the film as he comes to a concert early in the morning. The use of the two Rabindra Sangeets is effective: first with actor Anil Chatterjee who lips on camera Debabrata Biswas's rendering of *Aakash Bhauraa/Shurjo Taara* ("This endless expanse of sky filled/with Suns and Stars") to great effect in broad daylight in Kurseong, of all places; and then in a poetic simulation of moonlight *Aaj Jyotsna Raatey Shobaaee Gaecheye Boneye* ("On this full-moon night/lovers together, go to the woods") sung by Sumitra Sen on the soundtrack. There are old IPTA group songs too that add to the texture of the film's narration and serve the same purpose as an obligato would in a musical score.

> Shakuntala is of course India, Dushyanta the CPI and their prospective child the ordinary people of India.

Komal Gandhar, for all its adolescent preoccupation with the idea of mother and motherland and, at the same time, the authentic poetic connection between the two, is also a loving tribute to the nation-building energies that went into the activities of the IPTA which was, before it was sabotaged from within by the CPI, an organisation of idealists who had a purity of purpose and dreamt of building a contended egalitarian India.

The release was stymied reportedly by the party with the help of goons who owed allegiance to the ruling Congress party. According to Ghatak, *Komal Gandhar* played to a responsive packed house in the first week. Then, at the beginning of the second, he began to notice strange happenings in the dark of the theatre. Loud sobbing would be heard from different parts of the hall during funny or romantic scenes and raucous laughter at moments of sorrow, sending conflicting messages to the audience. Attendance rapidly dwindled by midweek and fell away altogether at the end of it. The film had to be withdrawn, causing an enormous financial loss to the two producers, Mahendra Gupt and Ghatak himself. It was later discovered that a fairly large number of tickets were bought by shady characters, who had been instructed to disturb the real audience.

The failure engineered by forces inimical to his integrity as an artiste and person, completely shattered the director. He could not believe that the very people who not so long ago had been his comrades could get together to sink him. His descent into alcoholism had begun. Beer suddenly gave way to hard liquor and relentless drinking occupied him more than cinema, literature, the plastic arts or music. "He was signing in three bars for his drinks, and, not being able to drink alone, was also being the generous host", remembered Barin Saba, iconoclast, filmmaker and social activist in 1977, a year after the director's death. Quite naturally, funds were going to run out sooner than later. People had barely understood *Komal Gandhar* during its subverted release and that fact too undermined his self-confidence. Then, Abhi Bhattacharya, an old actor friend, appeared out of nowhere to bail him out.

Bhattacharya took Ghatak back with him to Bombay, where he lived and worked, to help him recuperate from the excesses of his emotional life. One evening he came back with a proposal. A friend of his, one Radheyshyam Jhunjhunwala, was willing to finance a feature film in Bengali with Abhi Bhattacharya in the lead and to be directed by his beleaguered friend. There was, however, one condition—that the volatile director behave himself during the entire period of its making. The story, or its bare skeleton, was provided by the producer himself. It was about a brother and sister who are separated in childhood and meet as adults quite by accident, she as a prostitute making her debut and he as her first customer. When they suddenly recognise each other, she kills herself. A desperate Ghatak agreed and took enough of an advance to complete the shooting of the film.

The golden line

Subarnarekha (1962) was an act of magic in which the artiste transformed the producer's puerile story into a multi-dimensional meditation on life, with the partition serving as a backdrop. When he saw the rough cut, Jhunjhunwala panicked and ran away. Ghatak then did the only advertising short of his life for Imperial Tobacco Company, publicising the popular brand of Scissors cigarettes, courtesy his old friend, Chidananda Dasgupta, who was chief of public relations there. With the proceeds he got the first print of *Subarnarekha* out of the laboratory. It was only after *Subarnarekha* was sold to Rajshree Pictures, owned by Tarachand Barjatia, to 'balance' their books in a particularly profitable year, that Jhunjhunwala reappeared on the scene.

In the three years between the completion of *Subarnarekha* and its release in 1965, Ghatak's life was like a see-saw. He tried unsuccessfully to get backing

for a film based on Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay's *Aaranyak*. Ghatak was perfect for the subject, for no one since the American documentary poet, Robert Flaherty, had responded to nature with such feeling and understanding in cinema. Set in the wilderness, the novel ran as a counter point to the urban world. It was worthy as anything written by the great writer on nature in English literature, WH Hudson. If there was anyone who could grasp the link between the metaphysical and the physical that was there on the written page and transfer it to the screen without loss of intensity, it was Ghatak. But Jagganath Koley, heir to a well known Calcutta biscuit company and minister of information and broadcasting in the state government, could not, despite his best efforts, convince the bureaucracy under him to sponsor the film and waive the mandatory bank guarantee that the director was unable to provide.

Then, of course, there was the adaptation from Italian Alexander Blassetti's hit serio-comedy, *Two Steps into the Clouds*, filmed in 1941. *Bagalar Bangadarshan*, in its 1964 Bengali reincarnation is completely transformed to suit the local milieu. It flows elegantly in print and captures the abiding values of rural Bengal without appearing to be remotely reactionary, and with unusual wit and charm. The four reels that were actually shot were lovely to look at but Ghatak's inability to oblige an unusually decent producer, Raman Lal Maheshwari, by not drinking on the sets—as his quick mood changes unsettled the actors—led to its closure. Had it been completed, *Bagalar Bangadarshan* would have posed real problems for all those people who pigeon-hole him as the tragedian of the partition of India. The story of an absconding village tomboy, brought home by a young, married Calcutta medical representative she meets on the way, was both touching and hilarious. On their return to her village he is mistaken for her husband. Her fiancé lurks about nearby without being able to do anything. It is discovered in the course of events that he ran away after impregnating her in Calcutta because she was in the habit of beating him up! Of course, all ends well in the script of this comedy of Shakespearean resonance.

The release of *Subarnarekha*, meanwhile, was a success and it played to packed houses before Rajshree Pictures realised it had actually bought the film as a tax writeoff, having made huge amounts of money earlier with a Hindi melodrama, *Dosti*. To Ghatak's shock and surprise, his film was withdrawn from Calcutta theatres without explanation. It was the most demanding film he had ever made, and, in scope and breadth surpassed everything he had done before. The filming, it is reported, was improvised on a day-to-day basis. Not even a master improviser like the Swiss-French director Jean-Luc Goddard, had ever been through such an ordeal.

Subarnarekha (1962)

The filming of *Subarnarekha*, it is reported, was improvised on a day-to-day basis and not even a master improviser like the Swiss-French director Jean-Luc Goddard, had ever been through such an ordeal.

Subarnarekha is about rational elements like history, war and its aftermath, mass displacement and loss of an old habitat and hence roots on the one hand, and irrational entities like destiny and fate that are not supposed to but do affect human beings and their conduct to alter their lives irreversibly on the other. Ishwar Chakravarti, a man of god as his first name seems to suggest, comes after partition as a refugee from East Bengal to live with his fellow sufferers in Navjeevan Colony, a settlement for the displaced on the outskirts of Calcutta. With him is his little sister, Sita, and an orphan, Abhiram, whom he has accepted as his little foster brother.

Ishwar meets Rambilas, an old friend and now a prosperous industrialist, accidentally in the street. Hearing of his plight, he offers Ishwar a job managing his factory by the river Subarnarekha in Bihar. Harprasad, the schoolmaster who has nurtured the new home of his fellow unfortunates, accuses Ishwar of being a coward and for thinking only of his own welfare and not that of the others around him. We are plunged into the heart of a morality tale that can only end in tragedy. And a tragedy it is, borrowing its narrative method from the ancient Indian epics and folk tales where there are digressions in the shoreline with moral and metaphysical ideas thrown up for the audience's knowledge, but the end effect is overwhelming, cleansing and uplifting. *Subarnarekha* illustrates the idea, long before the Russian master, Andrei Tarkovsky, thought of it and used it as the title of his autobiography, that cinema is indeed sculpting in time.

The most illuminating moments occur in Ghatak's cinema as in Luis Bunuel's, a director he particularly admired, not in great bursts of dramatic action but in the gaps between them. The bravura scenes are there only to confirm what we have intuitively gathered to be the essential ingredients of the unfolding story. These are the real moments of revelation. This is true particularly of *Subarnarekha*, where plainness and exaggeration coexist in a technique born out of necessity; the producer had to be lulled into believing that a lurid melodrama was in the making, which would on its re-

lease make a killing at the box-office.

The most talked about revelatory moment in the film is of course when the child, Sita, accidentally runs into the *bohurupee* (quick change artiste) dressed as Mahakaal, the scourge of time, and is shocked at the sight of him. When he is chided by the broken-down old accountant of the factory where Ishwar is manager, for scaring a little girl, the man replies, "I did not try to scare her, sir, she sort of ran into me". The little scene takes on a new dimension when it is learnt that the old man consoling her has been in a precarious emotional state himself ever since his own daughter eloped with her lover. The scene is further enriched when he and Sita walk away from the camera and we hear him ask her name and on hearing it proceeds tell her the story of Janak, the king of Mithila, who one day found his daughter, Sita, in the very soil he was tilling. When seen in the context of the whole film, the scene's function seems to be oracular, a prediction, as it were, of Sita and Abhiram's tragic future together as adults.

There is a sudden flash of prophetic intuition in a scene from Sita and Abhiram's childhood when they pretend to be aircraft taking off from a long-forgotten, dilapidated second world war British airstrip near Panagarh in the Bengal countryside. At the climax of their game, through the use of a subjective camera, they appear to personify an aircraft taking flight. Truth in the arts, particularly the cinema, is achieved through such enunciatory acts. There are other instances of poetic insight in a film where the paradox and irony of life become apparent all of a sudden.

On the same desolate airstrip Sita sings a *bandish* in raga Kalavati, "Aaj ki anando" ("Oh, how joyful is the day"). The raga is also used to create a sombre mood, when she sings a different composition at the same sight at dusk, after her elder brother, who is like a father to her, rejects the fact that she and Abhiram are in love and would like to marry. The abandoned airstrip is used for the last time in the final quarter of the film, when Ishwar and the ghost from his past, Harprasad, the idealist schoolteacher and founder of Navjeevan Colony, arrive there after a night of despair, when he is prevented by his friend's sudden appearance from hanging himself out of grief following Sita's elopement with Abhiram.

The final scene, heart-breaking and of surpassing beauty with Ishwar and Binu, the orphaned little son of Sita and Abhiram, walking away towards a craggy landscape with the horizon far in the background, accompanied by choral chanting of the *Charai betiye mantra* on the sound track, in search of a new life, sums up the forced political and hence historical displacement of millions, in our own times and earlier, people whose only crime was that they had sought a little peace, dignity and happiness in their lives.

Betrayed by belief

While Ishwar and his nephew were able to go out to find a new life at the end of *Subarnarekha*, Ghatak's own was fast reaching a point of no return. A cherished documentary on Ustad Allauddin Khan of Maihar, the father figure of Hindustani instrumental music in the post-1940 era, had to be abandoned after the shooting because Ghatak had the first of his alcohol-related breakdowns. After waiting for a recovery that did not come quick enough, the producer Harisadhan Dasgupta, reluctantly patched together a version for the Films Division of India. It was predictably, not the film Ghatak had conceived.

Sheer economic necessity had forced him to join the Film and Television institute of India, Pune, in 1965 as Vice Principal. His controversial 18 months there proved him to be an outstanding teacher. He did ghost-direct the haunting short, *Rendezvous*, a diploma film credited to Rajendranath Shukla, photographed ingeniously by Amarjeet Singh at the Karla caves in Lonavala near Pune. Always a practical man when it came to filmmaking, Ghatak had once filmed a tree in the early morning light in black-and-white in order to help his students connect with nature in their lives and art. Needless to say, the result was exquisite. This single shot of three hundred feet or three minutes and twenty seconds in 35mm was preserved in the institute vaults for many years and may still be there to inspire new generations of filmmakers.

Ghatak filmed a tree in the early morning light in black-and-white in order to help his students connect with nature in their lives and art. The result was exquisite.

Ghatak came back to Calcutta, having resigned his job at Pune, to resume a career that was already in the doldrums. He wrote the story, 'Pandit Mashai', now lost, in a non-stop seventeen-hour session, and collapsed at the end of it. He produced a screenplay based on it called *Janmabhoomi* that still survives. The story is of a Sanskrit scholar and teacher who seeks refuge after the partition in a traditional crematorium or burning ghat along with his young daughter. Their lives are destroyed in the course of events, as it happened with millions in Ghatak's generation who, in order to live, had to adapt to the cruelty and indifference of changing times but could not. They were people who believed in the regenerative powers of love for themselves and for others and were betrayed for their beliefs.

Ghatak adapted Manik Bandopadhyay's classic novel, *Padda Nadir Majhi* for the screen and carried a bound copy with him till the end and tried to get his old friend, producer Hiten Choudhury, sculptor Sankho Choudhury's elder brother and editor Sachin Choudhury's younger brother, to produce it in colour.

He also wrote the script for the *Ashtamsarga* of Kalidas's *Kumara Sambhava*. These were two projects that he wanted to do very badly. But failing health and hospitalisation for psychiatric disorders, including a diagnosis of dual personality by doctors at the Gobra Mental Asylum, Calcutta, and chronic lack of even basic expense money prevented him from filming them. His wife, Surama, in the meanwhile, had gone out to teach and keep the wolf from the door.

In 1968, he began *Ranger Golam*, an adaptation of a novel by Narayan Sanyal, "with amazing confidence", in the words of Anil Chatterjee, who was to play the lead. Chatterjee had earlier played a cameo as an irresponsible, thieving young husband in *Ajantrik* and then stellar role in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* as Shankar the classical singer to whom fame and money come in time to pull his family out of the financial mire but too late to save the life of the beloved tubercular elder sister, Nita. And of course, he was the rebellious, thinking theatre actor in *Komal Gandhar*. "Seeing him work, you wouldn't believe he had been so ill just before he began *Ranger Golam*", said Chatterjee. A melancholic script added to Ghatak's refusal to stop drinking at work led to the closure of this production as well. He was unable to understand that people investing money in a production directed by him also had the right to feel emotionally secure in his presence.

Jukti Takko Aar Gappo (1971)

Jukti Takko Aar Gappo was the story of one Neelkantha Bagchi, a played-out alcoholic, once a respected teacher and intellectual. It is a not-so-veiled self-portrait of the director himself.

Ghatak wrote the screenplay for Premendra Mitra's heart-wrenching short story *Sansar Seemante*. He wanted Madhavi Mukherjee and Soumitra Chatterjee in the lead for the new film. Madhavi was moved to tears by the script and declared it was the best thing she had ever come across. But, she said she would only do the film if Ghatak did not drink on the sets. He flew into a rage and stormed out of her house, kicking her pet Pomeranian standing in his way. Shakti Samanta, a successful producer-director in the Hindi cinema of Bombay, and an admirer of Ghatak's work, offered to produce two films of his choice, giving him complete artistic freedom. Again, Ghatak's by-now-notorious temper proved a stumbling block. He sent Shakti packing. Another fine opportunity was lost.

Between 1968 and 1970, the director made four documentaries on commission. *Scientists of Tomorrow* and *Yeh Kyon* were for the Films Division of India, and *Amar Lenin* and *Chau Dance of Purulia* for the Government of West Bengal. Of them, only *Chau Dance of Purulia* had any artistic merit, with certain moments of genuine poetry in it. The rest were bread and butter jobs or, better still, 'drink providing' jobs. The war of liberation in Bangladesh in 1971 made him direct *Durbaar Gati Padma*, a twenty minute piece of fiction with the improbable pairing of Biswajeet, a chocolate-box hero of Hindi films, and a resurrected retired female icon, Nargis Dutt. To put it mildly, it was a strange film but had some impressive black-and-white shots of his beloved river Padma.

Ghatak's anvil

Ghatak had known Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the distant past and liked to call her his Santiniketan connection. She had as a girl been all too briefly a student there during Rabindranath Tagore's lifetime. He happened to know people close to her, particularly PN Haksar, an ex-communist and her main advisor. It was through her good offices that he got the National Film Development Corporation of India to finance *Jukti Tappo Aar Gappo* in 1971. The selection committee felt that he was too much of an alcoholic to actually complete and deliver a film within a given time-frame. Their objections were overruled by the prime minister herself.

Jukti Takko Aar Gappo had enormous promise as a script. It was the story of one Neelkantha Bagchi—the name is deliberately chosen to draw parallels between Lord Shiva's blue throat after having swallowed all the poisons-of-the-world during the churning of the ocean and the character in the film, a played-out alcoholic, once a respected teacher and intellectual. It is a not-so-veiled self-portrait of the director himself. His wife and son leave him for being a failed breadwinner and family man. He is about to leave his rented house before the landlord evicts him, when he runs into Banga Bala, literally meaning Lass of Bengal, who is a refugee from Bangladesh and, like him, is in futile search of a shelter. The return of his protégé after the sale of a ceiling fan prompts him to take to the streets with the two youngsters in tow. The rest of the film is about Neelkantha's misadventures and eventual death in the cross-fire between Maoist revolutionaries and the police. Peripatetic but top-heavy with dialogue, the film did nothing for Ghatak's reputation.

While he was making *Jukti* in 1971, Bangladesh was liberated, and Pran Katha Chitro, a Bangladeshi production company, invited him to direct a film for them the following year. He chose Adwaitya Malla Burman's literary saga of an East Bengali fishing community in the early decades of the twentieth century, *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam*. He shot it in a record 17 days and nearly

died in the process. He had to be evacuated from location by helicopter and spent the next 18 months in hospital. The producers released the film, much to his chagrin, without showing him the final cut. Having recovered somewhat, he went over to Dakha to re-cut the film. "I am 75 per cent happy with the film. Work needs to be done on the sound", he declared in March 1975 to this writer after a screening of the film in Sapru House, New Delhi, during the first retrospective of his work in his lifetime, organised by the Bengalee Club, Kali Bari, New Delhi.

Titash Ekti Nadir Naam is a relentless tragedy. There is no let-up through its two-and-a-quarter hour run. It is dynamically photographed and the ensemble acting is spirited throughout. The cinematic rendering of the novel is a curious case of Thomas Hardy meeting with Hegel and Karl Marx in the riverine culture of Bengal just as industrialisation is beginning to make a dent. The film succeeds perhaps because of its authentic local flavour. Even jades in far-off Manhattan, New York City, were moved to tears seeing it in a retrospective of his films in 1996.

Titash Ekti Nadir Naam (1973)

The charge of emotion in *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* is genuine and sustained from beginning to end and the sense of loss in its depiction is seldom approached in post-war cinema.

Ghatak's conscious effort to keep the narrative on an even keel, giving prominence to the river and the village near its bank and the characters living there, would fool the viewer for a while into believing that a documentary by a superior sensibility was unraveling on the screen. Then, suddenly, inexplicably ambiguous poetic elements begin to make their presence felt, infusing tragic grandeur into a story of a river drying up and leaving the fishing community on its banks without livelihood or purpose, and making them prey to attacks of goondas in the pay of city businessmen who wish to take over what has become real estate.

Titash is by no means flawless. But its charge of emotion is genuine and sustained from beginning to end and there is a sense of loss in its depiction seldom approached in post-war cinema. Had it been his last film, it would have been a worthy farewell but that was not to be.

Jukti Tappo Aar Gappo was received enthusiastically by the young turks of the film society movement in Calcutta, but it was not a film worthy of his genius, four excellent sequences notwithstanding and also Ghatak's own gripping performance as a drunken gadfly. The picturisation of the Tagore song, "Kaeno Cheye Aacho go Maa" on Ghatak himself is kingly in its austerity. But, his health had completely failed and he ran high fever, was vomiting blood during the filming. The end was near.

When death came, he had for some years borne a resemblance to King Lear. His hair had turned white, his body had shrunk and he looked thirty years older than his actual age. Yet there was something majestic about him. Broken in health but ever optimistic, Ghatak was full of plans. He had always wanted to make a genuine children's film and actively engaged in negotiations with the Children's Film Society of India to produce *Princess Kalavati*, based on a famous Bengali folktale, "Buddhu Bhutum". He devised ways of achieving special effects elegantly and effectively for the film within a modest budget.

The second important project on Ghatak's anvil was *Sheye O Bishnupriya*, a contemporary tale of rape and murder juxtaposed with the fate of the real Bishnupriya, the unfortunate third wife of the medieval Vaishnav saint Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Nabadwip, West Bengal. At another level, the script dealt with the male's gradual loss of *paurush* or manliness and sensitivity, his fear of woman's innate goodness and creativity, and his attempts to first reject and then destroy it in the course of history.

Also on the anvil was an untitled comedy about a fishmonger, who is believed to have won a huge lottery and his predictable rise in the esteem of certain greedy business folk who want to grab his prize money. But luck decrees otherwise. It is revealed that he has actually lost by the margin of a single crucial digit blurred by the constant handling of his lottery ticket with grubby hands. Ghatak wrote the script in tribute to his hero – Charlie Chaplin.

The best of Ritwik Ghatak continues to be invigorating cinema twenty-seven years after his death: prescient, plastic and rich with under-stated possibility. He always claimed that he did not care for storytelling in his films and that for him the story was only a starting point. But in his own way he was a terrific storyteller, who could, like the Indian literary masters before the industrial age and much earlier, digress from the main story in a seemingly arbitrary fashion and always return to enrich it. In this respect, Ghatak resembled his friend, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, the supreme improviser in Hindustani music, who at his best can take the listener by complete surprise with his digressions from the main composition in a given raga; by his sly asides, and his startling return to the dominant theme to create new, unforeseen avenues of thought and feeling.

There are long stretches in *Ajantrik, Meghe Dhaka*

Tara, *Komal Gandhar*, *Subarnarekha* and *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* that create a bond with the viewer, thus making him/her an integral part of the film's creative process. Only the finest of artistes in the performing arts have this quality. Ghatak at his best certainly did.

It is a subcontinental pity he did not work more and was constantly strapped for cash, and that he let the demons in his professional life take over his personal life to the ultimate destruction of both. Ghatak did not have a strong survival instinct like Bertolt Brecht did. He allowed mean and vicious people to hurt him repeatedly and drive him to irreversible alcoholism, at which point he began to hurt those who loved him the most and tried to help him. The left that had made him an artiste in the first place, had by the end of his life - much earlier, actually - abdicated its responsibility towards the exploited and the spurned and begun to nurse bourgeois aspirations. Only he continued to dream of being a people's artiste, of working towards an Indian film language, though not consciously. He was forced to accept, in penury, a documentary on Indira Gandhi, deluding himself that he would get the better of her by portraying her as Lady Macbeth. He was released from his agony when he turned up late and drunk at Dum Dum airport in Calcutta during a leg of the shooting and she took him off the project, inadvertently saving his dignity for posterity.

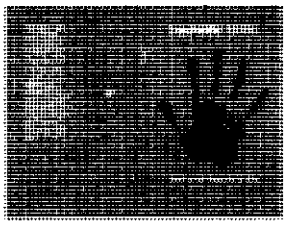
Ritwik Ghatak: prescient, plastic and rich with understated possibility.

For a further understanding of the man, one must go back to *Paras Pathar*, a story he wrote as a young man of twenty-three. In it, Chandrakant Sarkar, a humble clerk in a colliery and a connoisseur of Hindustani music, attacks and robs the assistant manager carrying the company's payroll. He does so in order to fund the research based on knowledge got from a travelling sadhu to bring back to life the recently dead. When the law catches up with him he is seen by a waterfall in the jungle, completely unhinged by the fact that he has lost the piece of paper that had the formula the shaman had given him. Ritwik Ghatak's greatness and his vulnerability are symbolically predicted in this story.

Brahmans and Cricket: Lagaan's Millennial Purana and Other Myths
S. Anand

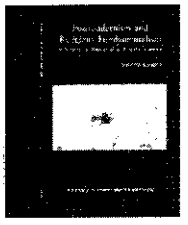
Cricket unites Indians. Cricket is nationalism. Cricket is religion. We are told cricket is also secular. A leftist and a hindutvawadi equally celebrate an Indian victory. However, till recently, a cricket team comprised a majority of brahmans, sometimes 8 out of 11 players. How did a priestly class—soft, even effeminate—come to dominate a sport? Why does such dominance not extend to hockey or football? In Brahmans and Cricket, S. ANAND seeks answers to unasked questions. Beginning with a critique of Aamir Khan's 2002 blockbuster Lagaan and the politics of representation of its dalit character, Kachra, the author tangentially examines why the nation is under the thrall of cricket and cinema. SUDHANVA DESHPANDE and LUBNA MARIAM respond. A debate ensues. A must-read for those interested in sports, politics, film, caste and identity politics.

Touchable Tales: Publishing and Reading Dalit Literature
Ed. S. Anand



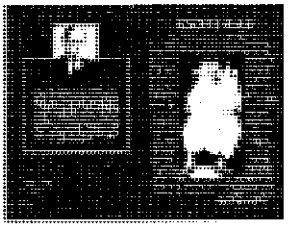
Mainstream publishers in India and abroad are seeking out dalit literature. Dalit writers are being invited to literary festivals abroad. Dalit literature is also being taught in universities. But who decides what gets published? Who are these interlocutors—the publishers, translators and editors? Why are autobiographies prioritized? While dalits in Tamil Nadu are being forced to consumeshit and piss, who are the consumers of dalit literature in English? In this book, those involved with the publishing, teaching, and creation of dalit literature—Ravikumar Mini Krishnan, Gail Omvedt, K. Satyanarayana, Arundhati Roy, Alok Mukherjee, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Sivakami, K.P.Singh, Mandira Sen, Narendra Jadhav, Anand Teltumbde—debate these issues.

Postmodernism and Religious Fundamentalism: A Scientific Rebuttal to Hindu Science
MEERA NANDA



The promotion of an anti-Enlightenment, anti-modernist view of the world by the seemingly leftwing, postmodernist scholars with indigenist sympathies has ended up affirming the common sense of rightwing fundamentalist movements. We have landed in a situation where Hindu, Islamic and Christian fundamentalists assert the right to their 'own' science, and this sits well with the postmodernist denigration of science as a 'western construct'. Hindutva, this book demonstrates, speaks the same language as academic postmodernism popularized in India by the neo-gandhian and postcolonial critics of modernity. The secularization of science—the hard-won freedom of science from churches, brahmans and mullahs—is under threat. However, philosopher of science MEERA NANDA, in this collection—an essay, a review of her work, and an interview with her—sees hope in the ideas of Ambedkar, the dalit movement and neo-Buddhism.

Ambedkar: Autobiographical Notes
B.R. Ambedkar



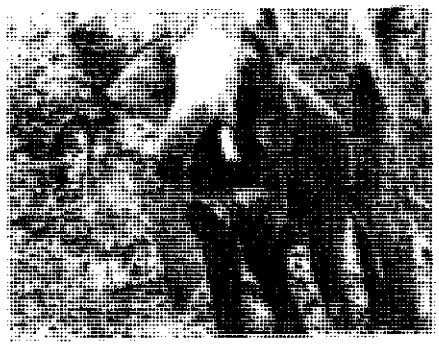
In six autobiographical sketches, B.R. AMBEDKAR, India's foremost civil rights leader, reminiscences his experiences of untouchability. Beginning with an incident when he was nine years old, Ambedkar recalls his humiliation at a Parsi inn in Baroda soon after his return from studies abroad, later as a tourist at the Daulatabad fort, and a few other incidents. In his introduction, RAVIKUMAR, activist-theoretician of the dalit movement, tries to understand the complex manner in which the 'private' and the 'public' operate for a dalit person. He situates our lack of access to Ambedkar's private in this binary of the dalit self.

Judging Film South Asia

by **Lubna Marium**

I tend to disagree with the concept of art for art's sake and view all creative activity as purposive – be it literature, art, music or even cinema. However, I have often wondered too how these purposes have been achieved and, in attempting to understand the entire process, have come to agree with scholars of yore who view all art experience as a tripartite event which includes the author, the medium of expression and, finally, the empathiser who is either the reader, the listener or the viewer, according to the medium of expression. The onus of achievement, however, lies in the ability of the work to be able to inspire a response in the mind of the empathiser. All creative activity is actualised when and only when it finds a resonance in the empathiser.

Having danced for the last 35 years and written for about half of those many years I tend to view my audience and my reader with a healthy respect and treat each of their responses with due consideration. It took Film South Asia to teach me that the same goes for every other form of expression.



The 18th Elephant - 3 Monologues

I was admittedly apprehensive when asked to be a member of the jury of Film South Asia '03 in September 2003, together with Mark Tully, of radio fame, and Mizorams' Lalswamlani, of the India International Centre Film Club (New Delhi). Films are not my line of expression. I wondered if I would be able to do justice to a medium which used celluloid images and a specialised technology that I knew nothing about. I motivated myself for the juryship by convincing myself that visual images are just another tool for expression and could possibly, at one level, be judged merely on their success in articulating just what they had intended to, irrespective of the technicalities inherent in the mode.

Watching the 43 films in final line-up at FSA '03 with my fellow jurors, I was not proved wrong. However, in those three and a half days of intense viewing I added another criterion, subjective though it was. Documentaries, I had thought, differed from features by the fact that they presented reality as it is without editorialised narration. I came to realise that, on the contrary, documentaries were all about editorial interpolations which were all the more forceful when they came not just as verbal narratives but as visual images; images that made you 'see' the world, that you had grown up with, anew. For me that principle became the determining factor. Did the visuals add to the discourse on that subject in the print media thus justifying their usage? I searched for convincing visual tracts that enhanced my knowledge of a particular subject and in this way gauged their efficacy.

There was, of course, another major concern. Through the years, FSA has come to stand for a platform where liberal filmmakers are assured uncensored screening of their work. If not explicitly, implicitly it is the activist's stage. FSA is all about documentaries that speak for the people of South Asia and about issues that are tearing the region apart. FSA can proudly say it stands for the voice of the people of South Asia – be they marginalised segments of society, or unheralded men and women on the streets and in the villages. Given the character of FSA, we, the members of the jury wondered if we were to make a political statement through our choice. After some soul searching we decided otherwise. The bottom-line was to be the craft itself.

As such, I emphatically feel that our choice of P Balan's *The 18th Elephant - 3 Monologues* allowed us to remain true to our conscience while awarding the young filmmaker from South India for his exquisite use of the moving picture to document the unscrupulous attitude of mankind towards mute fellow creatures. Kawsar Chowdhury's documentation of the atrocious happenings of 25 March 1971, when the Pakistani army had attacked academic quarters in Dhaka, was the cause of much personal angst for myself. While we had, all of us, been convincingly touched by the stark recreation of that dark night, I was personally of the opinion that such films served only to deepen divides while jettisoning the need to forgive and move ahead with our lives. I reminded myself that the awards were not a testimony of my beliefs and the *Tale of the Darkest Night*

was definitely a fine example of the genre of reconstructed reportage. I set aside my reservations. The visuals of *Sand and Water*, truly, told the tale of the unknown heroes of South Asia. The unadorned blend of sorrow and joy, filmed in the Bangladeshi delta, speaks of the resilience of South Asians as a people and could have been filmed anywhere in the Subcontinent. Our choice of *Fire Within* was absolutely undisputed. It had brought to life the unfair marginalisation of ethnic minorities true for all the nations of South Asia. And of course, with *Bhedako Oon Jasto* we gave in to the sheer joy exuded by the entire exercise of "searching for a song" in the hills of Nepal. There were undertones in the films which said much through suggestive images alone.

The choices for the outstanding films of Film South Asia '03, though initially difficult, were made unanimously, and left us satisfied about a job well done. It was not to be.

The awards ceremony over at the Jai Nepal Cinema Hall, the efficient team of festival organisers gathered together the assorted group of participants (filmmakers, volunteers, jury members) and drove us to the exquisite premises of the Patan Durbar Square for a sumptuous Newari feast signalling the closure of festivities. As judgments are bound to do, ours too had brought with it its fair share of concurrence and conflict. It was of course just as expected. So far so good.

Bhedako Oon Jasto

Then I was introduced to this handsome filmmaker who looked at me down his nose. After a brief brooding glance, Anand Patwardhan accosted me outright about the absence of any "anti-fascist" films in our list of awards. I had not been expecting such a direct confrontation and quietly replied that as jury we had felt that these films could have been better crafted. Patwardhan was grossly affronted and challenged my credentials for telling off a filmmaker like him who had been in the business for 30 years and went on to inform me that documentaries were not about aesthetics and "beautiful sunsets". On hindsight, I do concede that I could have been more sensitive towards a filmmaker of Patwardhan's stature and skill, for his *War and Peace* had deeply impressed us all. What I should instead have said was that the films that had been awarded were, we felt, better crafted.

Of course, I realise that that too would not have pleased Patwardhan. Undeterred, I asked him if he thought that the *18th Elephant* was not made well enough. My adversary replied in disgust, "It is a good film, but how many people do you see taking up arms for mere elephants? Our country is under the siege of fascists and you play it safe by awarding a film on elephants! It really doesn't say much about your beliefs and your understanding of documentaries". This time I firmly stated that the awards were not a statement of our politics and went on to disclose that taking into consideration the vision of South Asia that FSA held to, most of the 'activist' films were in fact being included in the 15 films for Travelling Film South Asia which would be screened at venues throughout the various countries of South Asia and overseas. This proved to be the final straw, and Patwardhan spoke to me no more.

Back home now, I continue to believe that we made the right choices. I firmly believe that South Asia is fortunate to have a large number of people who continue to be concerned about the sorrowful plight of humanity in all our countries. Of course each finds his, or her, own cultural response and modus operandi to confront the situation. It is unjust to discard P Balan's film as a mere documentation of elephants. While the film may not implicitly be about fascism in saffron or bearded garbs, it too brings to light a fundamental question about man's tyrannical and uncaring attitude towards his fellow creatures and also towards the environment in general. The *18th Elephant* does make us question our personal mores and values, which go a long way in contributing towards the generally unhappy situation in our countries. A little compassion for each other's battles would go a long way in improving our lot. After all aren't we all fighting for the same end?

Documentaries have played a major role in disseminating information and creating an awareness of issues crucial to our lives. That does not go to say that the craft and technique cannot be improved upon. Saying the right thing doesn't necessarily guarantee that one has said it to the best of one's abilities. I agree with Patwardhan that aesthetics is not about "beautiful sunsets". Any aesthetic experience is all about the force with which images touch your heart. And, incidentally, I do believe there isn't a single sunset in the films awarded at FSA '03, while a few have scenes that are gruesome enough to leave one nauseous and gasping for air.

Furthermore, entering one's work in a festival necessitates the need to understand that this immediately entails a brush with critique. The jury panel seemed to be a balanced mix of the lay and professional observer. I do, too, however believe that every viewer as an empathiser has the right to critique a work. Film South Asia is a festival for the people of South Asia and will at the end of the day be judged by them alone. I see myself as a representative of this mainstream audience which forms the benchmark for the success of our films. After all, the more people one can reach out to the more successful is a venture.

Jury out on the jury

by **Nupur Basu**

Film South Asia 2003 began with sobriety and ended with heartburn. This was the fourth edition of the Kathmandu-based biennial festival of South Asian documentary films, a routine and robust fixture on the festival calendar since its inception in 1997. Sobriety is a virtue that the documentary medium has steadfastly clung on to, when all the other media have succumbed to flippancy in their haste to capture the market. The mood of the opening was therefore entirely in keeping with the spirit of the medium.

Documentary filmmakers from cities from all over the Subcontinent like Bombay, Karachi, Dhaka, Colombo, and from smaller corners like Peshawar, Ranchi and the Maldives were present in strength, reflecting the festival's reach. Another sign of the extent to which the fixture has evolved as an institution is the transformation it has wrought in Kathmandu. For a city whose cinematic tradition is incipient at best, the documentaries on show attracted an extraordinary degree of interest. Despite all that is sometimes said about the documentary's lack of dramatic appeal, the ticket booths at the Russian Cultural Centre at Kamalpokhari in Kathmandu, where FSA '03 was screened from September 25 to 28, almost always had a 'SOLD OUT' sign at the box office.

"There needs to be dynamism in story telling and presentation and a major investment in creating a viable market."

- Mahesh Bhatt

"The increasing popularity of documentaries not only with audiences but also with the filmmakers can be measured from the fact that in 1997 when the first festival was held we had 135 film entries and in 2003 the entries climbed to 203", said Manesh Shreshta, the Director of Film South Asia (FSA). An experiment started by a group of print journalists associated with the magazine *Himal* in 1997 to create this special space for South Asian documentary filmmakers had worked!

Though the festival began with a dash of Bollywood, which normally evokes scorn in the documentary world, this time it was Bollywood making all the appropriate noises. A director known for his outspoken views and unconventional images, Mahesh Bhatt, opened the festival with his key-note address and said what documentary filmmakers like to hear: "I am hopeful for the documentary because essentially those that work with me in the dream machine feed from the same reality that the documentary portrays". He recounted his own encounter with the true power of the documentary while working with OXFAM after the cyclone in Orissa in 1999. He realised at that point how dramatic and powerful the imagery of real life situations could be. "There needs to be dynamism in story telling and presentation and a major investment in creating a viable market for it", Bhatt pointed out.

Although the masala Hindi film is the genre that continues to dominate the popular imagination of the entire Subcontinent, small budget, small star, experimental films, more in tune with the urban realities, are beginning to find popularity in the growing multiplexes across India. Even the documentary, the poor and neglected cousin of mainstream cinema, has finally begun to catch the attention of big-time filmmakers. Despite the fact that documentaries have become a little more visible in the public sphere than they were, regular venues for their routine screening are few and far between. Filmmakers therefore still have to depend primarily on festivals and special screenings to reach an audience.

This is even more so for those who make what are, with a hint of condescension, called 'serious' films. It is not surprising that FSA '03 attracted so many of these serious films. Though the slogan for the festival this time around was "Documentaries can be fun!", the background note from the organisers aptly described the real mood of most of the films: "The films being exhibited in FSA describe the tumultuous times we live in. Everywhere fundamentalism is on the rise. The gun is increasingly the option of choice. Communal conflagrations provide a foretaste of more catastrophic times ahead. Societies and cultures are buckling under the pressure of a rapacious market that is unchecked by government, academia,

media or civil society. And yet the people cope, make do, survive and nurture the hope for better days. The films selected for screening at FSA reflect the concerns of the times and mood of the people of South Asia. In the hands of masters of non-fiction, the films help us look at ourselves".

What unravelled on celluloid over the next four days were the fault lines in the Subcontinent. The documentaries held up a disturbing fare of reality images from a region with a population of over one and half billion—mired in poverty, illiteracy, hunger, gender discrimination, exploitation of children, caste conflicts, growing fundamentalism and ethnic strife, nuclear mongering and the politics of hate. Video had set free a rush of images that gave the marginalised a voice and unleashed a torrent of critique of governments that are sometimes ranged against their own people.

"The best way for different parts of a diverse South Asia to know of each other's concerns is through the documentary film. Fortunately, documentary films are now being made more and more with the audience in mind, so they are more riveting and hence are able to carry the message across", says Kanak Mani Dixit, chairman of FSA. For a Subcontinent mired in conflict and mutual distrust among neighbours this, as always, seemed like the ideal South Asian melting pot. The endorsement came from the filmmakers themselves.

"Where else would I see films from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal? This festival creates for us a very special South Asian space. We share the same sensibilities here and break out of Western stereotypes", says Indian filmmaker Gargi Sen, whose film *The Story Tellers*, was one of the entries at the festival.

From Pakistan, the sensibility was the same even if the emphasis was slightly different. "It was a long journey to get here but worth every bit of the trouble. It is an eye opener for me to see the sense of freedom that Indian filmmakers have and great to watch the films they have made. In Pakistan, although the print media has been an independent force, documentary filmmaking has still not reached any critical stage. Our middle class base is so small that we are not effectively combating the issues that are facing us ...people are scared...nobody has seen my film in Pakistan although it has been screened all over in the US", says Sharmeen Obaid, director of *Terror's Children*.

Samar Minallah, a woman filmmaker from Peshawar, in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, spoke of a predicament that many other documentary filmmakers from the Subcontinent routinely face. "I did not enter my film in any Western festival because I know they will use my critique of the custom of *swara* to beat Islam with. I made the film for my country and my people and I entered it at the Film South Asia because here I will find an empathetic audience not an exploitative one". Minallah's film, *Swara: A bridge over troubled waters* is a hard-hitting comment on the Pakhtun practice of giving minor girls in marriage to an "enemy family" in reparation for serious crimes like murder committed by male members of the little girl's family. The issue is now before the country's Supreme Court and Minallah is hoping that legislation will be introduced soon to ban the practice.

The jury from left to right: Lubna Marium, Lalsawmliani Tochhawng and Mark Tully.

Implicit in what Minallah says is the idea that the films being made and screened today have evolved in form and content to emerge as powerful critiques. This is a view that is forcefully and explicitly articulated by others. "The kind of documentary films that are being made these days ...*rongte khade karne wale hote hain* (they make your hair stand on end!)", said Meghnath, director of *Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun*.

'Locating' the festival

A compact documentary festival in a country without its own entrenched tradition of independent film-making has many advantages. For one, it has the potential to accord filmmakers from different countries equal standing in the absence of what could be perceived as a home advantage. For another, it can promote the culture of documentary films in the countries whose filmmaking tradition is weak and create an environment of visual literacy in the medium both for making films and viewing them. Further, because the festival is regional in scope and its venue is geo-politically 'neutral', it can facilitate the emergence of networks of survival among embattled filmmakers from the Subcontinent. FSA certainly afforded this opportunity and, between screenings, documentary filmmakers took time off to plot new marketing strategies for distributing their works.

But it is not at all certain that all the potential inherent in a festival of this kind was actually realised. In particular, it is a matter of some doubt whether the manner in which the jury exercised its judgement will contribute very much to the cause of serious filmmaking in the adverse circumstances that prevail in South Asia. And it most certainly is the case that the jury squandered the advantage of Kathmandu's reputation as a neutral venue in order to make some distinctly simplistic decisions. Or is it the case that such conspicuous

simplicity is what makes for a 'neutral' repute?

Whatever the reasons for the jury's verdict, there were a great many protesting voices among both filmmakers and film viewers as the curtain came down on FSA '03. The jury had evidently satisfied itself, but it had done very little to satisfy the rest. That the jury's choice of award winning films had not gone down well became clear not only from the murmurings of protest from the discerning audiences which had flocked to see these films and given mental marks to their favourite "bold" documentaries. The jury was told in so many words by some of the filmmakers themselves.

The jury's choice was critiqued primarily because it appeared to have steered clear of controversial political films that had taken on governments. There was clearly an expectation that the jury would be as bold in its judgement as many of the films they were called upon to judge. Without doubt, the jury failed to live up to that expectation and chose instead to play it safe by conferring awards on themes and subjects that would not offend or ruffle any establishment. The charge against a jury that had come to judge a documentary festival was as severe as it could get. They had gone to some lengths to remain studiously apolitical and, in doing that, simply ignored the merits of some of the entries, which had been made under extremely difficult circumstances.

Whatever individual members of the jury may say in defence of the criteria they applied in arriving at their decisions, it is evident that they did not take into account the context in which such films are made. It is of course important to judge any creative output on its internal merits, but where complex issues are concerned that cannot be the sole ground for judgement. It is equally important, in the case of an endangered activity like documentary filmmaking, to give due weight to the themes on which they are made and the conditions under which they are made. This is all the more true when the mass media has increasingly silenced itself on sensitive matters in the effort to stay on the right side of the political establishment. To that extent, the timing of the judgement hurt filmmakers who, in the pursuit of their craft, are prepared to step beyond the permissible limits established by polite consensus. At a time when documentary filmmakers are struggling against the censorship regime imposed by their governments, the jury's choice of award winning films seemed to be unmindful of these grim realities. The organisers sensed the discomfort and seemed to get equally uncomfortable. At the closing dinner in Patan Museum, so painstakingly hosted by the organisers, the atmosphere was glacial.

It is not as if documentary filmmakers make films solely to win awards. Far from it. They make films because, first of all, they have consciously opted to work in this genre and they have a commitment to document the struggle of people in the non-fictional mode. But at another level, shunned by the establishment and cinema theatres as they are because they choose to portray controversial subjects, documentary festivals are their only life-line of recognition and encouragement. An award is always a bonus in a documentary filmmaking career that is pursued in an overall climate in which neither the genre nor the filmmaker gets due recognition. Awards help bring hitherto neglected works and their themes into focus.

It is in this context that the decision of the FSA '03 jury to completely ignore sharp and well made socio-political documentaries which showed the chilling consequences of possible conflicts in South Asia: like Anand Patwardhan's *Jung aur Aman* (*War and Peace*) which takes the lens close to nuclear nationalism; Sanjay Kak's 85-minute long powerful documentary on the Narmada andolan, *Words on Water*, which deftly pits the grassroots movement of the Narmada Bachao Andolan against the powers that be in the World Bank in yet another riveting documentary on the Narmada struggle; Greg Stitt's *Diverted to Delhi*, a film on the cultural disasters of globalisation through the example of call centres; Gopal Menon's *Resilient Rhythms*, on the continuing oppression of dalits in India; and Samar Minallah's *Swara: A bridge over troubled waters*, a hard-hitting comment on a reprehensible Pakhtun practice.

A powerful and recurrent theme at the festival was the growing fundamentalism in India. The Gujarat carnage appears to have become a focal point for several documentaries. Shubradeep Chakravorty's *Godhra Tak : The Terror Trail* is 60 minute-long clinical investigation of who possibly set fire to the train in Godhra (and who certainly did not) and it Vachani's 98-minute film *The Men in the Tree*, on the rise and influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India, were perhaps the best explorations of this theme. Likewise, ace directors KP Jayashankar and Anjali Monteiro provide a moving personalised tale of communal harmony in Mumbai's biggest slum, Dharavi, in their film *Nata* (*The Bond*). The list is long.

But none of these passionate, well crafted and well argued documentaries found favour with the FSA jury. None of them featured in the list of awards and special mentions announced by the trio led by former BBC journalist, Delhi-based Mark Tully and his co-jurors, Lubna Marium from Dhaka and sawmliani Tochhawng from Mizoram. It is as if the jury had somehow missed the pulse of the festival and its very essence—political documentaries that challenge the global world order and the pursuits of narrow nationalism. They seemed to be entirely oblivious to the mechanics of the production of these films—to the struggle and anxieties of documentary filmmakers who make these films against heavy odds and sometimes with little or no money, and only their convictions to sustain them. It is as if the jury had carefully plucked these out and put it in their reject bin almost as a conscious choice and selected those which were made under much less difficult circumstances. More importantly they seemed to have picked films that did not upset the apple cart. In effect, they had completely disregarded the socio-political impulses that are driving the documentary community in the Subcontinent.

After all what is it that makes a Michael Moore lift the Oscar with his documentary *Bowling for Columbine*? Or an Alanis Obomsawin, with her powerful documentary from Canada, *Kanehsatake: 270 years of Resistance* pick up over 18 international awards? Or journalist, writer, and documentary filmmaker, John Pilger, stand out with his innumerable political documentaries? Is it not the fact that they dare to take on the politics of their governments and expose the lies?

Defiant grammar

Defiance is the grammar of *cinema verite* as established by some of the world's finest documentary filmmakers over the ages. At a time when mainstream media is driven by the urgings of the market place, this is the only form of cinema that is continuing to fight on rights issues, whether it be of indigenous or poor people in the world, the forces of neo-colonialism, or the dangerous fallout of the global arms trade. After all, the documentary genre itself was a reaction against the pleasure machine of mainstream cinema and an attempt to take celluloid back to a socially driven mode of filmmaking. As Jean-Luc Godard pithily summed it up, "The problem is not to make political films, but to make films politically".

The tenuous existence of films that expressly articulate views and perspectives that militate against the confirmed orthodoxies and cannons of the nationalist faith is what makes jury awards more than just symbolically significant. The award is also more than just a ritual gesture of empathy. It is a statement endorsing the legitimacy of both the subject of the film and the dissident sensibility that informs its treatment. For that reason the award is a statement of its own politics. In this sense, the award privileges certain kinds of world

Lubna Marium with Anand Patwardhan.

views over others, and in a world that has increasingly circumscribed the public space for dissidence, a documentary audience expects the jury to at least honour the tradition of democratic dissent by recognising such films. And in an otherwise arid landscape, it provides filmmakers with the reassurance that their efforts have been worth the trouble. "We come to these festivals not only to show our own films but also to see the works of other filmmakers. The awards are crucial in a sense because that gives us newcomers into the field an idea of what kind of films should be our role models...which should set the benchmark...the selection by this jury has left us baffled", said Samar Minallah, filmmaker from Peshawar, whose film on the male-dominated North West Frontier province was made under extremely trying circumstances. She was not alone in her criticism as many others echoed her sentiments.

It is ironic, though not necessarily surprising, that the jury chose so pointedly to distance itself from the political documentary in the immediate aftermath of an unprecedented and aggressive display of hostility against documentary filmmakers by government of India. Just prior to FSA '03, they had run headlong into a major crisis when the government suddenly made it mandatory for documentary filmmakers to get censor certificates for their films as a precondition for submitting them for the bi-annual Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF). The festival is billed as one of the biggest and best documentary festivals in India and no such rule had been applicable prior to this peculiar stipulation. The censorship clause provoked a huge protest in the documentary film community. As many as a 170 Indian documentary filmmakers threatened to boycott the festival. Some foreign filmmakers too joined them in support. An embarrassed government finally backtracked and is now pleading with filmmakers to send in their entries.

The censorship certificate

In circumstances when filmmakers have to go through extraordinary trouble to not only make their films but also to have it screened, political filmmakers need to be given due encouragement if the genre of documenta-

ries is not to go the way of the other media, by eschewing its real investigating and critical functions in favour of fun films that will meet with the jury's approval. This is all the more so because the general context that permits such serious anti-status quoist documentaries has not fully emerged in South Asia. In India, documentaries are made in reasonable numbers but the state tries to screen them from the public. According to it Vachani, director of *The Men in the Tree*, "The state clearly perceives a threat from documentary filmmakers who are critical of its functioning...there is a growing paranoia in the establishment about the visual medium ...and under these circumstances it is getting more and more difficult to screen films which are seen as controversial in public spaces...my film has found it very hard to get venues in India...a screening set up at the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad was cancelled at the last minute...".

There are indications that this trend is looking increasingly attractive to other countries of the region, like Bangladesh and Nepal. In Nepal, FSA '03 was almost up in the air this time with the government demanding that films should have censor certificates before they could be screened at the venue. Last minute backroom cinema-diplomacy with Nepal's Information Ministry and the fear that the cancellation of the festival could cause acute embarrassments, allowed the festival to happen. FSA '03 was held as usual without anyone knowing the hurdles that had almost short-circuited it! But from another, more country-specific angle, overt censorship is not even required since the conditions simply do not exist to encourage the emergence of a culture of political documentaries. How else is one to explain the scarcity of political documentary makers in Nepal, a country that has been going through acute political turmoil for close to a decade.

The situation is no different in Sri Lanka where the censorship regime has made it very difficult for documentary filmmakers to operate and make films critiquing the establishment. And this accounts for the fact that there was no Sri Lankan film at FSA 2001 and only one entry at this year's FSA. And even this lone entry was not made in Sri Lanka, having been made by Yasin Khan, who lives in Canada and works for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

Besides overt censorship and subtle pressure tactics, states also resort to cruder methods of intimidation. Says Anand Patwardhan, one of India's most consistent and tireless documentary filmmakers, "I have had policemen barge into auditoriums and try to stop the screening of my films...till I produce my censor certificate and then they are forced to leave...that's the one reason that I make it a point to get a censor certificate".

Patwardhan goes on to add, "The state has always been jittery about documentary films, whether it be the Congress government or the BJP". He recalls that Satyajit Ray, had to intervene on behalf of his film *Prisoners of Conscience*, which was made just after the emergency in 1978 and the government had tried to censor it. Since then, this filmmaker has fought innumerable cases in court to ensure that his films are not blocked. "They wanted 21 cuts in all in my film *War and Peace* this time. I finally won the court case in April this year and got a censorship certificate without a single cut...luckily our democratic system still functions from time to time !", says Patwardhan.

Clearly then, the dissident film, the film as a critique of holy cows, is an endangered craft, given the difficulties encountered before, during and after the making of the film. Odds of this magnitude are enough to daunt young filmmakers from using their medium to attempt what the other media have for the most part abandoned. It is entirely understandable, though not excusable, why states in South Asia have a preference for soft films over tough films. What is less understandable is the FSA '03 jury's disinterest in the very form that the more politically informed expected them to uphold. While the organisers merely believed that documentaries can be fun, the jury emphasised that documentaries should be fun. Some documentary films can no doubt be fun, but what happens in the meanwhile to all the cinematic chronicles of people who are dead, dying or living like the dead, across the South Asian landmass. In Sanjay Kak's film, *Words on Water*, an epitaph on the gravestone of a Narmada tribal read: "This is the true war against terror".

> Whatever individual members of the jury may say in defence of the criteria they applied in arriving at their decisions, it is evident that they did not take into account the context in which films are made.

The parallel with documentary films is obvious. They are the true, and sometimes the only, challenge to terror in our societies. But did the FSA '03 jury think about such issues?

Errata

The first line of Siriyavan Anands review (***Himal* October 2003**) of Meera Nanda's book *Breaking the Spell of Dharma and Other Essays* should read as follows:

> In recent times, there have been very few intellectual voices from among the English-using sections of India with the commitment and courage to take on both Hinduism and Hindutva. Even the most passionate spokespersons of secularism in India seem to invest faith in 'good Hinduism' and its 'plurality' and seem content to direct their critical energies against Hindutva, refusing to see the fundamental links between the former and the latter.

(The error is regretted)

Goodbye documentary, hello non-fiction

The director of Kathmandu's Film South Asia festival of documentaries looks back at the history of documentary films, maps evolving trends in the genre, reflects on the emergence of a substantial body of viewers for serious non-fiction and ponders on the ways in which these films can be taken to a larger audience.

by ***Manesh Shrestha***

When the Travelling Film South Asia festival of non-fiction films arrived in the central-Nepal hill-town of Pokhara in early November, the screening of 15 films—some light-hearted, but mostly activists' fare—proved to be the documentary filmmakers' dream come true. Could this really be happening? The venue, a commercial cinema hall with capacity of 600, was often showing documentaries to a packed hall of more than a thousand, tickets of twenty rupees were being sold in 'black' for up to Rs 200. Even an eighteen-minute film on the sexual identity of Bombay transvestites got a respectable audience of 250.

"Let us have a screening revolution!" has been a slogan of the organisers of the biennial Film South Asia festival in Kathmandu. The Pokhara response to the travelling festival seemed to herald just such a revolution. It proved that documentaries, firstly, had audiences aplenty even beyond the serious connoisseurs in the capitals and main metros. Pokhara also proved that an audience that is not accustomed to seeing documentaries has nevertheless developed a taste for it, from word-of-mouth travelling all the way west from Kathmandu, from watching documentaries on television, and generally being capable of imbibing more information in audio-visual format than earlier generations.

A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachhuman Magar (1997).

The overwhelming response in Pokhara, which was much more than what the FSA organisers had seen anywhere in South Asia in eight years of organising documentary festivals, was also due to the fact that there were several Nepal-made documentaries in the line-up, including an archival film from the 1950s by a Swiss geologist, and several films on cultural themes made with deftness and depth by Nepali filmmakers who had themselves been groomed over years of watching documentaries from all over, in successive Film South Asia festivals.

What was missing in the Nepali films was the passion of the activist, which has defined much of independent filmmaking in South Asia before this, but that lack was more than made up for by films from the rest of the Subcontinent, from a scream of pain on behalf of elephants (P Balan, Kerala) to questions about what really happened in the burnt railway coach at Godhra (Subhradeep Chakravarty, Delhi), the sacrifice of girls to assuage male family pride in the Northwest Frontier Province (Samar Minallah, Peshawar) and the rhythms of life in a poor village in the delta region of Bangladesh. All these films were received enthusiastically by the Pokhara audience.

The documentary film has travelled a fairly long distance in the matter of just a few years in South Asia, taking advantage of the rapid advance in both production technology (the digital camera, editing on computer, etc) as well as screening equipment (most importantly, the video projector, video tapes and DVDs). Meanwhile, the tastes of the audience have been sharpened by the evolution in South Asian cinema (particularly the 'A'

IF AWARD winning documentaries at Film South Asia held in Kathmandu since 1997 are any indication, the 'better' films as adjudged by the juries (led variously over the years by Goutam Ghose, Shyam Benegal, Mark Tully) are ones that tell stories of societies via the medium of individual experience. The award winners have included Tsering Rhitar's *The Spirit Does Not Come Anymore* which told the story of intergenerational conflict between a Tibetan faith healer and his son; Farjad Nabi's take on the life of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan as well as his *No One Believes the Professor*, about the eccentric Lahori theatre actor; *Thin Air*, about magicians in Bombay and their hopes and insecurities; Sabeena Gadihoke's *Three Women and a Camera* about individual women photographers; *My Migrant Soul*, the very personal story of a Bangladeshi migrant labourer, his hopes and fears; and *A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachhuman Magar*. The story of awards was no different in the Film South Asia '03 just concluded in Kathmandu, when the jury awarded the 'best' film award to *The 18th Elephant – 3 Monologues*, which is a 'personal' story about three elephants.

market Hindi film), and the plethora of television channels and programmes. What has been missing is diversity in the documentary genre of a kind that includes not only propaganda at one extreme and activism in the other, but lightness, cultural commentary and even humour in the delivery of the message if there is one. Even more importantly, there is as yet no screening network which really appreciates the value of the documentary and the appeal that it has in society. That the audience for documentary films does exist in sufficient volume to even sustain a moderate level of commercial success was proven by the Pokhara event, which has been repeated in the smaller cities of South Asia that have hosted the Travelling Film South Asia. If a medium-sized hill-town in Nepal with no history of documentary film festivals can provide an audience that turned up in early November, one can imagine the unfulfilled demand that exists in the far corners of South Asia which have been more socialised into non-fiction film than Pokhara has been.

When the Nepali film *A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachhuman Magar* was declared the second best documentary at Film South Asia '01, a filmmaker in the audience remarked, "That is not even a documentary, how could it win an award?" The 38-minute long Nepali film was a portrait of a retired soldier from the Indian Gorkha regiment, working as a sweeper in a tourist lodge. A raconteur with self-deprecating bent and an eye for women in the village paddy fields and Kathmandu streets alike, Lachhuman Magar was an unlikely subject for 'traditional' documentaries, given over as they are either to present governmental and developmental propaganda, or the deeply-held views and convictions of the documentary-maker-as-activists. Lachhuman Magar thus marked a departure into another realm of filmmaking in Nepal too, delving into artistic expression, pleasant emotions and engaging description. The life and times of the former soldier, as captured by the hand-held camera of filmmaker Dinesh Deokota, does deal with deep issues such as poverty, exploitation, deprivation and politics, but none of it directly.

With the expansion in the repertoire of the non-fiction film, it was but natural that a parting of ways would come about between filmmakers of the earlier moulds and those who were branching out to explore new avenues of expression. This divergence was exemplified in the tension between filmmakers who are among the best in the line of activist documentary-making and the three-member jury of FSA '03, because the latter decided to reward aesthetic appeal as a necessary element in presenting films to an audience. This was, in fact, the most radical departure from all FSA festivals in the past, where the commitment and political vision of the film was given maximum weight.

That there was such a difference of vision is itself a positive factor, for it indicates that the entire spectrum of possibilities in the making of documentary films is now in the process of being filled. Documentary filmmakers are also becoming more alert to the needs of the audience, and utilising more sophisticated cinematic techniques to reach them. There is also a visible trend towards a more nuanced rendering of subjects to an alert audience. The fact that the majority of films that are now being submitted to Film South Asia for exhibition are actually made in the 'regional' or national languages rather than English also indicates that the target audience of these films is no more the English-speaking film aficionados of the major metros. This relationship between a new type of filmmaker and a new type of audience has freed the documentary from some of its typecast roles and made for a greater realism and honesty that is universal in its appeal and accessibility despite the need to communicate dialogue through subtitles.

The early documentary

There have been two ways to understand the 'documentary'. One is as the public was brought up until recently to believe — that it is essentially a medium for the public information output of government as packaged in the classical newsreel. More recently, it has come to be associated in the public perception as the vehicle for subtle propaganda by development agencies, whether domestic or foreign, of their aims, objectives and achievements. In contrast to this propagandist view, is the understanding of the 'purist', of the documentary as real life film which raises issues, provides a voice of dissent, documents the natural world or por-

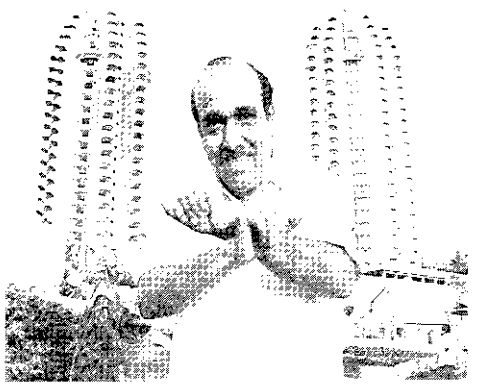
trays a way of life that needs to be brought to the notice of a larger public, embellished with the voice of good narration. Lachhuman Magar was not, by these definitions, a documentary. Unless the definition of the 'documentary' can be expanded to include these types of films, it may be wiser to use the more generic and neutral category 'non-fiction' for such films as they evolve over time to explore new themes and techniques of representation.

Indeed, the South Asian documentary has come a long way since 1910 when the first moving-picture documentation was made on celluloid film. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, or Dadasheb as the pioneer was known in the world of early Hindi cinema, recorded on film the growth of a pea plant over one and half months. *The Growth of Pea Plant* was a 200-foot film which ran two minutes, and it was a documentary made with no higher purpose than to convince would-be investors about making a feature film. Thus was the Hindustan Film Company formed in 1917. Phalke, who went on to lay the foundations of the Indian film industry, made several documentaries including one entitled *How Films are Made*. It was in 1938 that, what we now know as, documentaries were made for the first time in India when a two-reel film on the Indian National Congress session at Haripura was produced.

The film on the 1938 Congress conclave became the prototypical documentary for those who came later. Such was the propaganda value of films that the British set up three establishments within India—the Film Advisory Board (FAB), the Information Films of India and the India News Parade—with the aim of building support for their cause in the second world war. The establishment of the Films Division in 1948 by the Indian government post-independence simply continued the tradition, and the audience was captive as the output was to be compulsorily screened at cinemas before the commercial features. This tradition was continued in Pakistan by the Department of Film and Publication, and in Sri Lanka by the Government Film Unit. Not to be left behind, government newsreels were produced in Bangladesh by the Department of Film and Publications and in Nepal by the National Film Development Corporation, churning out a variety films on cultural landscapes, development efforts, national integration and 'desh darshan' travelogues.

While filmmakers-as-government-employees picked up the camera in support of the state, in the 1950s, a small 'independent' filmmaking movement was begun by Paul Zils, a refugee from Hitler's Germany who had landed in the Subcontinent. A Short Film Guild was organised, later to evolve into the Indian Documentary Producer's Association, and the new genre of films sought to widen the scope of the non-fiction celluloid. Zil's former assistant, S Sukdev, introduced activism into filmmaking in India with his debut film *The Saint and the Peasant* (1958), about the land reform movement led by Vinoba Bhave. Sukdev believed that filmmakers, as artists, must be aware of their social role and responsibilities and use cinema as a weapon to expose the truth about society. The movement started by Sukdev continues powerfully to this today, particularly in India, with the activist exposing the dark underbelly of subcontinental societies. Given the impulse for free expression that has survived in India, it is only natural that films that courageously question given mores have had a more fertile ground there than in the neighbouring countries, where only lately has the activist film begun to be regarded as a possibility.

In fact, the activist film seeking to challenge social prejudices seems only now to be extending roots in Pakistan. Bangladesh, which does produce fine documentaries, is still locked into learning from the catharsis of 1971, while Nepal is moving firmly along the path of producing engaging films on cultural matters but keeping well clear of uncomfortable social and political truths at a time when the national society confronts extended crisis. Inexplicably, Sri Lanka as the country which could have been expected to produce the best of South Asian documentaries because of its alert urban intelligentsia, the legacy of a media inherited from colonial times and a whole raft of societal issues to tackle, has been surprisingly the laggard when it comes to documentary-making.



Thin Air (1999).

Development docs

The advent of television meant a sudden jump in the reach and quantity of documentaries, but quality was a different matter. Government-owned television stations did no better than the films divisions, proffering films with a didactic tone and little creativity and imagination. As a result, the image of the documentary as propaganda material—or at the very least as pedestrian productions—churned out by government became even more imprinted in the popular imagination.

Though the initial promise of television as a medium of creativity was not fulfilled, the more or less simultaneous advent of the videotape did promote a democratisation of the discipline. Cumbersome 16mm and 35mm cameras and sound equipment and post-production facilities and expensive raw stock gave way to easy-to-carry and affordable cameras, post-production equipment and much cheaper tapes to shoot the films on. With the drastic reduction in investment required, an individual or a small company could con-

sider becoming a producer with equipment purchased or hired. But, to be fair to government television, it did help produce manpower, for in the absence of film schools, on-the-job training was the only way to learn the craft.

In India, the state of emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975 provided an impetus for dissident filmmaking, and productions like Anand Patwardhan's *Waves of Revolution* and *Prisoners of Conscience* (1976) opened the sluice gates for activist films. Following the footsteps of Sukdev, his protégé Tapan Bose made *An Indian Story* (1981), on the blinding of prisoners by the police in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Suhashini Mulay produced *Bhopal: A Genocide* in the 1980s on the gas tragedy. As could be expected, these politically charged films have had their share of problems with the censors. These earlier films were expensive to make because they used celluloid stock, and the market was almost non-existent. For being political and anti-establishment, they did get some support in Western universities and elsewhere, which made it possible for the filmmakers to live another day and plan another onslaught against 'the establishment'.

Abhimanyu's Face (2001)

Till the early 1990s, independent documentary films invariably focused on political marginalisation, social movements, or the portraiture of famous renegade personalities. There was, however, a gradual shift to a slightly wider arena, including a focus on social ills, and a particular proclivity towards films on not-so-famous traditional artistes like puppeteers, singers and dancers—perhaps attracted by the photogenic appeal of the subjects. This period also saw an increase in the developmental film. If earlier documentaries on celluloid were meant for the public at large, documentaries in the development genre tended to be made for more limited audiences. Mostly funded by in-country or overseas development agencies, these films were of two 'types'—one which profiled the activities of the aid agency, and the other highlighting their concerns in areas such as gender, children's rights, human rights, environmental degradation, decentralisation and social challenges such as casteism.

As the documentaries became a favourite of aid agencies as an effective audio-visual medium to publicise their work for fund-raising and other purposes, many documentary makers cashed in on the bonanza. The pay was good even if the subject and treatment did not correspond with their own creative impulses. In many cases, neither funder nor the funded filmmaker really understood the genre, so what you got were films with the omniscient narrator, didactic productions projecting the developmental optimism of the funding organisation or how-to films supposedly meant for the grassroots 'target' community. Innovation and creativity were at a premium in the absence of a local audience for these films, since most of them, in the initial stages, tended to be in English and targeted at the overseas viewer or, at the very least, their 'native' counterparts in the South Asian metros.

With no market for independent documentaries, filmmakers in India thus submitted to the requirements of development agencies, corporations or government entities. In the process of pleasing the funders, the filmmakers ended up compromising their art. Fortunately, the tide has begun to turn, and those who had not entirely abandoned their creativity are now looking to a documentary viewership that is slowly beginning to take shape. At the same time, innovative and often irreverent young filmmakers are coming out of film schools, or taking a side track from the world of advertising or feature films, and dabbling in non-fiction. They are picking up where Sukdev, for one, left off and coming up with films that are as committed, but are also responding to the larger market by putting more 'craft' into their productions.

In addition to the filmmakers of the big cities who have better exposure, access to funds and the modest overseas market, a lot of films are now being made all over India. In the south, especially Kerala, there has been a proliferation of films on cultural and social issues. The emerging activist film movement, led by Shriprakash among others, in Jharkhand also needs to mentioned. These films from the 'moffussil' are in the vernacular and are made for local audiences rather than for the English-speaking elite, and often uses the VHS home video camera, as Shriprakash (he uses only one name) does. Usually made on a shoestring, and hence often completed over a long period of time, these films tend to me more 'honest' and come from the heart. P Balan's *The 18th Elephant – 3 Monologues* (2003) and Meghnath and Biju Toppo's *Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun* (2003) are examples. These are in contrast to the activist films that come out from the cities, which tend to be broader in scope, more ambitious and more sweeping in their 'take'. Meanwhile Madhushree Dutta of the Majlis group in Bombay and Amar Kanwar of Delhi are engaged in incessant experimentation. Dutta's Scribbles on *Akka* (2000) and Kanwar's *A Night of Prophecy* (2002) are artistic attempts to take the non-fiction film further along on its path of South Asian discovery.

Since 2000, a great many documentaries have been

commissioned by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust of India and many of these get telecast on national television albeit outside primetime. In the evolving scenario, there is a shift away from what may be (some would say unfairly) called films with the "Delhi proclivity". These films are symptomatic of how Delhi looks at the rest of India. 'Elite' filmmakers go, shoot and telecast with little empathy for the subject matter. Such films tend often to be insular and superficial. These are the equivalent of commissioned development films in other countries of the region. Delhi filmmakers are, in fact, the recipients of the lions-share of grants (national and international) as well—we are talking of 50-70 films in the past few years—which filmmakers elsewhere in the Subcontinent are often unaware of. The PSBT, for one, could help in national integration by commissioning films from those in the 'mofussil'.

Elsewhere

Without the Sukdevs and Patwardhans to follow, and lacking the relatively freer environment for expression in India, non-fiction filmmakers bloomed late elsewhere in South Asia. While, on the one hand, government film units ruled the roost till recently, the arrival of the donors wanting to project themselves on the audio-visual medium meant that the few filmmakers who were around got picked up and converted into purveyors of development. Working within the parameters of donor interests, only exceptional filmmakers were therefore able to produce films that were political and activistic. So, while films began to be made in the 1980s, outside of the purview of government, and organisations like Worldview International Foundation were set up in Nepal and Sri Lanka specifically to train a new breed of filmmakers, the fact is that the power of the audio-visual medium was wrested from the government but then hijacked by the development agencies. Although the subject matter of these films made with donor funding differed from those made by government, the instructional tone remained. However, with this new donor-driven industry, the volume of films being produced went up sharply and some sort of innovation and experimentation was inevitable.

The fact is that the power of the audio-visual medium was wrested from the government but then hijacked by the development agencies

India, for historical and political reasons, is obviously ahead of every other South Asian country in documentary production of every type—governmental, developmental and independent. Bangladesh comes second, in terms of quality and volume of output, and the last decade has seen a surge in independent productions. The large donor presence in Dhaka naturally seems to have encouraged young professionals to pick up filmmaking as a career, with the Germans having held a series of documentary workshops in the late 1980s and 1990s. More important perhaps was the cine-club movement that had existed in Dhaka for decades, which led to a trend towards making low-cost short fictions and documentaries on socio-political subjects in the late 1980s. The result was the emergence of the Bangladesh Short Film Forum in 1986, and film festivals began to be organised in the country from 1988 onwards, which gave exposure to budding film professionals. Dhaka went on to become perhaps the first city in South Asia where a documentary film achieved commercial success in the cinema halls. This was Tareque and Catherine Masud's *Muktir Gaan* on the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 and the role of a cultural troupe in it.

The war of liberation has been the recurring leitmotif of Bangladeshi films, and till today filmmakers have stayed with this theme—while also making liberal use of different genres of Bangla melody, from the music of Rabindrasangeet to that of the Bauls. This musical bent appears to give Bangladeshi documentaries a natural upper hand with the viewers. *Muktir Gaan* was of course the controversial cause celebre in the genre of 1971 films, but the trend continues. The latest in the lineup is *Shei Rater Kotha Bolte Eshechi* (*Tale of the Darkest Night*) by Kawsar Chaudhary (2001), on a Pakistani army attack on Dhaka University academics just before the 1971 war. Themes dear to development agencies, such as child labour and gender issues, have also been recurring subjects for Bangladeshi documentaries. But of late Dhaka documentarists have been diverging to wider arenas of public concern, with an example to be found in Manzare Hasaain's *Rokeya* (1997), a film which unravels the life of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, one of the pioneers of women's liberation and social progress in Bengal in the early twentieth century. Fauzia Khan's *Perception - The Other Canvas* (2001) profiles six women painters of Dhaka, while Tareque and Catherine Masud's *A Kind of Childhood*, delves into child labour. The Ram Bahadur Trophy for best film in Film South Asia '01 went to *My Migrant Soul* by Yasmine Kabir, a film tailored around the audio tapes sent home by a Bangladeshi migrant who was to die as an expatriate labourer in Malaysia.

After India and Bangladesh, it is Nepal which seems to be producing the largest number of independent documentaries in the region. Documentaries in Nepal, too, have their provenance in propaganda films made in the early years of the Panchayat regime, starting with heroic portrayals of King Mahendra as he toured the country in the early 1960s. The arrival of Nepal Television in the mid-1980s saw a surge in films seeking to promote national integration by extolling the cultural-physical bounty of the country. Then came the 'donors',

and a string of documentaries followed to cover development themes, few of which are remembered today.

Significantly, many films on Nepal tended to be made by Westerners, as the central Himalaya became the stomping ground of the climber, the trekker, the anthropologist and the 'development professional'. A genre of 'Shangri La' documentaries brought out touristic documentaries that tended to focus on the High Himalayan rather than midhill or plains' societies of the country. Anthropologists shot 'real-time' footage of all manner of subjects, from shamanistic rituals among the Magar of the western hills to full-length films on animal sacrifice in Kathmandu Valley—films which keep alive the cultural specificities of the country. One significant production on Nepal was *The Fragile Mountain* (1982), by California-based filmmaker Sandra Nichols, which set the mindset for the coming decades on population pressures leading to land erosion in the hills (a hypothesis that has now been convincingly disproved). Nepali filmmakers themselves, in the meantime, were rapidly being converted into development-peddlers by the surfeit of aid agencies with deep pockets, so independent filmmaking took a back seat.

Sand and Water (2002)

It was only in the late 1990s that some Nepali cinematographers woke up from the '*bikasey*' (development) slumber, and cast about for other themes. The energy for this came from the growth of an audience that had been created by a string of documentary film festivals in Kathmandu, starting in 1994 with a Himalayan film festival which evolved into the biennial Film South Asia documentary film festival. The existence of a growing and responsive audience inspired filmmakers to produce invigorating and cultural commentaries with a light touch, such as *A Rough Cut on the Life and Times of Lachhuman Magar* (Dinesh Deokota, 1997), *Itihaas Jitneharuko Laagi* (*History for Winners*) (Pranay Limbu, 2003) and *Bhedako Oon Jasto ... In Search of a Song* (Kiran Krishna Shrestha, 2003). What is missing in these productions, however, is any reference whatsoever to the excruciating times the Nepali people are passing through in the context of the ongoing civil war. *The Killing Terraces* (Dhruba Basnet, 2001) and *The Living of Jogimara* (Mohan Mainali, 2002) have been the rare attempts at capturing the origins of the 'people's war' as well as the state's cruel response, but overall, filmmakers have preferred to pick cultural themes because of political difficulties in dealing with harsh realities, with fear of reprisals from the government as well as the Maoists.

A similar diffidence with regard to political powerbrokers seems to have stymied independent film production in Pakistan, which is all the more galling since the country is as much an inheritor of the legacy of documentary in the Subcontinent as is present-day India. Political factors have played a major part keeping the lid on independent filmmaking in Pakistan, where the focus has been on social ills rather than political infirmities. Filmmakers such as Sahiba Sumar, Mustaq Gazdar and Shirin Pasha have been the noted independent documentarists of Pakistan, but of late their production has trailed (and in the meantime Gazdar passed away in 2001). While Sumar's and Gazdar's films took up social issues, Pasha's were on the culture and lifestyle of the country. The cultural dissidence exhibited by exponents of Hindustani classical dance (Kathak, Bharat Natyam) against 'fundamentalist' forces has been one theme picked up more than once by documentary filmmakers of Pakistan. Increasingly, however, there are films that challenge the conservative notions of the woman's place in society, including the 2003 production by Samar Minallah, on the sacrifice of young girls to rival clans to save male honour in the NWFP. Similar to the trend in Nepal, constricted in the political sphere, Pakistani filmmakers are experimenting with cultural expression, as with the journalist-turned-filmmaker, Farjad Nabi, whose debut in 1997 was *Nusrat Has Left the Building ... But When*, on the flowering and decay of the musical soul of the sufi-inspired Pakistani *qawwal*, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. His second film was on an iconoclastic thespian in Lahore.

The relative decline of Pakistani non-fiction filmmaking—or at the very least its inability to move along with the times and feed the audience that doubtless exists—could be attributed to restrictive censorship policies and the lack of exposure of young people to the excitement of a career in documentary. As elsewhere, independent filmmakers of potential have also been co-opted by 'development' to highlight important issues in a superficial manner. The absence of regular film festivals, which were not held in Pakistan till a couple of years ago (there is one now in Karachi), also kept people away from alternative and independent cinema, including documentaries.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the Government Film Unit (GFU) was established in 1948 to produce newsreels and documentaries to educate people on their newly won independence, though over the years GFU films emerged as tools for outright government propaganda. Even though Sri Lanka now boasts of several television channels, and it is also home to Young Asia Television which would be churning out young audio-visual talent, independent filmmaking in Sri Lanka is surpris-

ingly the least energetic in all of South Asia. This is surprising, given that Colombo as a metropolis has all the ingredients for the advance of documentary—an alert intelligentsia, English exposure which opens up a world of possibilities in media, an agonisingly long ethnic crisis, and so on. Unfortunately, non-fiction filmmaking has remained more or less where it was when the CFU was established more than half a century ago.

What lies ahead

What lies at the core of the lack of independent and quality documentary filmmaking in South Asia obviously is not so much the absence of a market as the inability to reach it. Filmmakers will emerge if only they had venues to show their films. And an audience will congregate if only they had venues see these films. Television might have provided a ready market, especially with the spread of the terrestrial network in the 1980s and the boom in satellite television in the 1990s. However, the new commercial channels, too, ended up telecasting off-the-shelf, film-based programmes on the cheap, and the idea of 'servicing' the people has not entered the minds of producers and proprietors. Government television stations, if genuinely autonomous, would have evolved as public television over time, but at present they shy away from anything but the most descriptive and non-analytical documentaries on social and cultural challenges before the people. The very nature and high costs of the television medium—whether government or privately owned—seems to make them wary of documentaries. And so the challenge of getting an audience for documentaries must be sought elsewhere and not television, at least for the foreseeable future. This is where the experience over the last seven years of Film South Asia and its Travelling Film South Asia offshoot might prove useful, for it indicates that the audience does exist in the required numbers for documentaries, particularly those made in the local languages, and that what is required are innovations in distribution, sales, marketing and projection.

As far as marketing is concerned, there is a ready demand for South Asian documentary films in the West, which have been effectively filled by filmmakers such as Anand Patwardhan, whose documentaries are distributed worldwide and also broadcast on overseas channels. Other examples of high sales in the West in the know of the Film South Asia organisation are Dhurba Basnet's *The Killing Terraces* (2002), which has sold hundreds of copies in VHS video format, and Yasmine Kabir's *My Migrant Soul* (2001).

The sale of video prints, priced in the range of USD 150-200, provides unprecedented income for the non-fiction filmmaker, as well as exposure overseas. However, this does not really answer the need to make and show films for and to the local audiences of South Asia. Marketing and distribution remain a hurdle. Other than the fledgling Clearinghouse of South Asian Non-fiction Film launched by Film South Asia in 2001, there is no organisation that is dedicated to the marketing of South Asian films within the region or externally. An effective marketing effort would give filmmakers economic independence to make the kind of films they would want to and allow them to experiment and be innovative. Since filmmakers do not have the time or the wherewithal to market their films, there is a need for documentary film marketing agencies to foster the art in the region.

The development of a market, however, can only come when thousands of diverse organisations, communities and clubs across South Asia realise that there already are, made by the dozens and even hundreds, films that can draw audiences. When, with the use of video projection systems, they begin to organise documentary showings or festivals, this will as a matter of course lead to a rise in demand from a public that is suddenly alive to the possibilities of enjoyment, information and education via the non-fiction film. From then on, the market will feed demand which will feed supply. For various reasons, South Asia can prove that documentaries can work here the way it cannot in most other parts of the world—the freedom that exists here, as does not in large parts of the third world in relative terms on the one hand, and the plethora of subjects and themes available here stand out in contrast to the situation in the more sanitised, democratic societies of the developed world. There are just so much more 'stories' in South Asia—per hectare or per thousand population—than there is in, say, Western Europe or North America. South Asia is, indeed, documentary heaven if only we (public, filmmaker, connossieur) knew it.

Defining documentaries

Even in the case of donor-funded films the future is not bleak, and this is important because development agencies will remain important sources of funding documentaries for some time to come. Filmmakers need to put their foot down when it comes to deciding how to convey the 'development message'. The fact is, most donor agency officials with the hand on the purse strings do not understand the moving image, and the interest is to provide subtle propaganda that will ultimately help the agency's own work, including fundraising. Filmmakers who have a sense of responsibility towards the societies they cover can try and buck the trend, and remain auteurs true to the subject rather than to the funding agency. These filmmakers must convince the agencies that educating the larger public about issues they (the agencies) are interested in can only be achieved if they (the filmmakers) are given a free hand and their creativity is not stunted by excessive interference.

Nepal-based director Alex Gabbay's *Kathmandu: Untold Stories* (2002) and *A Man Called Nomad* (2002) both provide examples of how a filmmaker who sticks to an independent point of view can end up making a film that is useful over the long term. The donor's brief

for the former was to make a film on HIV/AIDS and young people—a staid production to interview HIV/AIDS patients and ask them questions about how they got the virus, what they had to say to the young and to repeat the donor's point of view in the narration. Instead, Gabbay talked to young homosexuals, drug users, vulnerable individuals, as well as other youngsters about their concerns, lifestyles and relationships with peers and parents. The product was a film with stories most Nepali, or for that matter South Asian, young people could identify with. The film, if it gets the exhibition it deserves, would have a lasting impact compared to the traditional donor-defined documentary. A series of four films on young masculinity in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan made in 2000, supported by the Save the Children UK, treats their subjects similarly, and is an example of a donor actually being ahead of the filmmaker in terms of understanding what 'clicks' with the target viewership.

Swara – A Bridge over Troubled Water (2003)

What is clear to the observer is that the audience exists for the documentary in South Asia, for the documentary in all its diversity, from the light-hearted commentary to the polemical treatise on the ills of society. The more documentaries are made in the local languages rather than in English, the more impact they will have where it matters at the grassroots. Till now it is the inability to find the audience that created an obstacle for aspiring non-fiction filmmakers, and there is a continuing need for a 'screening revolution' so that films that are already made are presented before local audiences in thousands of venues—and not only at film festivals. For this, distribution channels will have to come up, and the advances in production technology will have to be understood and utilised. The emergence of audiences in the far corners of South Asia will have the immediate impact of spawning new filmmakers who could well make make films on increasingly localised subjects. At that time, we will be coming close to a documentary revolution, where the human desire to hear a story well told in audio-visual format is finally transferred from the feature film genre to the non-fiction film. The experience of showing Travelling Film South Asia in the town of Pokhara in early November proves all that has been said above—that there is a 'mass' audience for non-fiction film, that films already exist to show before such audiences using video projection systems, and that the more you show, the more you give birth to new filmmakers. The road to a revolution in non-fiction film is already charted, and only needs to be embarked upon, keeping the people in mind.

What has also become obvious over the years is that the definition of 'documentary' is being continuously expanded by filmmakers who are striving to fill the full spectrum of what a non-fiction production can achieve. From a time when the 'documentary' meant governmental newsreels and propaganda, we evolved to a point when the larger public understood that it also means films on development projects and issues. For a more select audience, the documentary signified films with an activist edge, that challenged given social and political mores and spoke—howsoever indirectly and rarified a fashion—for the 'people'. These films were made to "expose the truth",as Sukdev put it, and their intention was never to win awards but to promote social movements if possible. It just did not help that many of these films tended to be in English, but that is changing.

Today, documentary filmmakers have diverged and are making films that are much more 'cultural' and thereby touching a heartstring of the South Asian audience with more localised films on local issues in local languages. There have been delightful commentaries, profiles of heretofore unknown personalities, travelogues, experimental films, 'documentaries' with dramatisations, often relying on local music as accompaniment.

Given that the documentary film has been typed in the minds of the public as a) governmental, b) developmental, c) activistic, and with the scope that exists to expand the repertoire that is available, perhaps it is time to stop saying 'documentary' when we refer to non-fiction film. And, in fact, begin to say 'non-fiction film'.

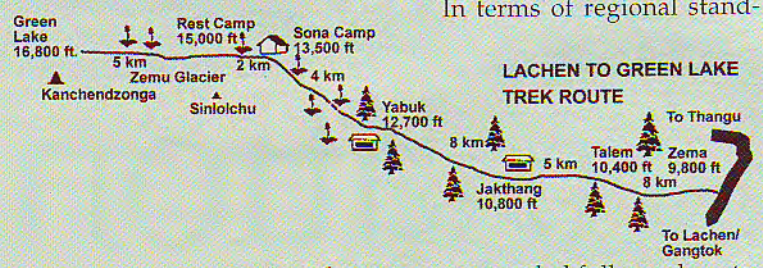
R.O.No. 16/IPR/03-04 dated 6.5.03

Destination Sikkim

Blessed with a vision that is rare in politics, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling has taken Sikkim to new frontiers of progress and development. Under the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), led by Chamling, the state has acquired a unique position in India, primarily because of the implementation of policies that are responsive to the future needs of society. So, how did Sikkim scale these Olympian heights?

Sikkim became the 22nd state of India with effect from 26th April, 1975. The state is divided into nine Sub-Divisions for administrative purposes. Being part of the inner mountain ranges of the Himalayas, topographically Sikkim is hilly having varied elevation ranging from 300 to 8540 meters. The state has a unique blend of cultural and natural landscapes - the population comprises three groups viz. Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas and geographically its nestled on the Himalayas with the beauty of Alpine meadows, Rhododendrons and other forms of fauna and flora.

The USPs of the government are many. In terms of regional standing, the state was accorded full member status to the North Eastern Council (NEC) in December 2002 which allows it access to Central government funds allocated for the region as a whole and also allows the youth of Sikkim far more leverage today in terms of access to prestigious educational institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. At the national level, participation at the level of national institutions has meant an integration of the region both economically as well as at the physical-emotional level. With per capita net state domestic product growth rates running fifth in the country as a whole, Sikkim has a lot to show in terms of tangible achievements as well. Internationally, Sikkim has acquired a new role as a deserving destination for development funding by multilateral and other donor organisations.The government, as one of main actors in the development process, has achieved this with an inclusive, equitable and responsive approach to governance. Sikkim, in its second consecutive term under the SDF is a changed place.



Growth has been achieved under very democratic conditions with transparency exercises like the *Janata Mela*, which allows the government, under a unique system of public meetings, to go to the people directly and assist them with their needs. A Basic Needs Approach has ensured the lesser-off populace of the state with outright grants worth INR 20,000 to assist the construction of their houses under the 'Rural Housing Scheme'. The Chief Minister's Self Employment Scheme (CMSE) enables the educated unemployed youth to start their own ventures and at the same time an effective net of development institutions has meant that educated men and women have access to interest free loans up to INR one lakh. The quantum of soft term loans thus disbursed with the initial launch of the CMSE programme was of the order of INR five crore, with 30 per cent of the recipients comprising females. The idea to empower does not come into effect in the job-seeking phase, but the government has ensured, with schemes like the *Kaushal Vikas Kosh* (Skill Development Fund), that the youth are trained and

Composition of Expenditure, 1985/86 – 1998/99

	85-86	90-91	93-94	98-99
1. Social Services	2226	4289	6287	18409
2. Economic Services	4028	5563	8181	15527
3. Developmental (1+2)	6254	9852	14468	33936
4. Non-Developmental	1504	2963	5532	11369
5. Total Expenditure	7758	12815	20000	45305
6. (3) as % of (5)	80.6	76.8	72.34	74.91

Source: Reserve Bank of India, *Report on Currency and Finance, Vol, II, Statistical Statements*, Bombay, various issues.

R.O.No. 16/IPR/03-04 dated 6.5.03

R.O.No. 16/IPR/03-04 dated 6.5.03

equipped with professional skills through sponsoring of their education to regional and national institutions for acquiring professional degrees and skills in areas like tourism, rural management, software, communications, among others.

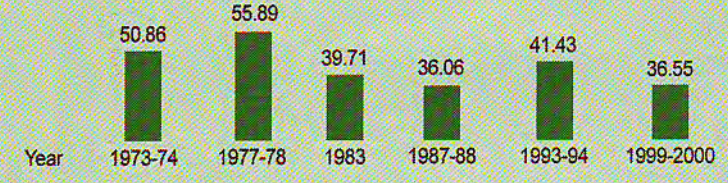
Similarly, the stress on school education has been uncompromising. In 2002, Sikkim, with a total population of a little over 5 lakh, had a total enrolment of 1, 37,656 students in government and government-aided schools. What is remarkable is that almost 50 per cent of the total enrolment in the state comprises girl children. The government has put to practise the slogan of maintaining gender equality in its administration as well with the appointment of women for the first time to positions like the Speaker of the Assembly, Chairperson of the Sikkim Public Service Commission and Cabinet ministers among other positions.

The onus for rural development has been shared in a responsive manner with the rural people themselves through the amendment of the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1993. Party based Panchayat elections were held for the first time in the history of Sikim in October 1997 with due representation secured for women, SCs, STs and OBCs, as stipulated by the Constitution. The SDF continues to empower the Panchayats at the grass root level by delegating incrementally, administrative and financial powers. As for reaching out to the public, the Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling himself meets the public every Wednesday and Thursday of the week. The grievances gathered thereupon are directed to different State Departments. Other ministers and senior officials likewise meet the public on a regular basis. The internet has been made use of for public convenience. If you access http://www.sikkim.nic.in/cmonline/ you can post your grievance directly to the chief minister cutting through bureaucratic hurdles. Delays are cut short in meting out justice to the people by the constitution of *Lok Adalats* or People's Courts in all nine sub-divisions of the state, which deal with different kinds of litigations, ranging from human rights abuses, marital/family problems to consumer rights.

Economic planning and implementation is professionally guided by the Sikkim State Planning Commission, comprising well-known economists and administrators as members. The requirement to submit monthly progress reports by state government departments has only added to the openness and transparency of the administration. This, when seen with the governments felt need to address areas where NGO intervention is required, allows for a balanced participatory set-up for other actors involved in governance. The minutiae of economic planning are no less transparent. Fiscal reforms have paid attention to reducing non-plan expenditure and market borrowings, while close to 75 per cent of the total state expenditure as of 1998-99 was devoted to developmental expenditure. Fiscal deficit has been reduced from 11 per cent in 1999-2000 to four percent in 2002-03. This, coupled with the steady rise in small savings generated by the people has meant better standards of living for the people of Sikkim - per capita income has doubled from INR 8905 to INR 16143 between 1995 and 2002. Paralleling

Population Below Poverty Line

The percentage of population below poverty line has gone down steadily after recording shap jump in 1993-94)



Surce: Planning Commission, *Draft Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) Vol III*, New Delhi, p 40

this has been the sharp fall in the population below the poverty line from 41 percent to a little over 36 per cent between 1993 and 2000.

The growth model is intended to be self-sustaining, with the government focussing on developing high-value and low-volume products. Agro-industry, medicinal plants, handlooms and textiles, information technology among others are pitched to be the engine of growth for Sikkim. Tourism options like 'village tourism' (housing tourists in villages) and eco-tourism (travelling to experience natural areas) are being promoted as areas of core competence. With its fourth consecutive national award for the best performing State in the North East for 2001-02, Sikkim Tourism does show promise in the field of tourism. Sikkim has also seen a structural shift with tertiary or service sector contributions making up the largest share of state domestic income, which, in other words, means that communications, banking, tourism etc, are the income spinners for the state and as of 1999-2000 made up close to 55 per cent of the gross domestic product of the Sikkim economy. With the government's progress report on investing in education charting over 70 per cent literacy rates, the educated workforce could only build up on this.

Sikkim is one of the few states with the lowest consumption rates for chemical fertilisers. Organic farming is encouraged and the departments of Agriculture and Horticulture have already adopted measures to discourage use of artificial fertilisers. Whether it is commercial large cardamom, typical buckwheat or unique pulses – all are 100 per cent organic produce. Though its geographical-climatic constraints force dependence on Union government allocations for food grains, the state government has diligently ensured delivery of the same to rural areas, where accessibility is still a major hurdle. With the help of the Swiss Development Agency, Sikkim will soon be reaching self-sufficiency in milk production and likewise its performance in livestock, poultry production and horticulture production is on the up.

Industrial policy planning has been prudent. The Union government has now extended the new industrial policy for the state of Sikkim on the lines of the existing North-East Industrial Policy. This includes excise and income tax exemption to all new industries as well as expansion of existing units for a period of 10 years from the date of commencement of commercial production. The policy also entails granting of financial concessions to 12 identified thrust areas in industries irrespective of where they are located in the state, including among others –

Sikkimese Economy: Stuctural Change in the Gross Domestic Product

Sectirs	1980-81	1985-86	1990-91	1995-96	1992-2000
Primary	51.59	50.96	46.49	39.41	25.52
Secondary	18.11	16.46	12.97	18.80	19.73
Tertiary	30.30	32.58	40.54	41.79	54.75

Source: Sikkim Ninth Five Year Plan 1997-2002 Volume 1 and Sikkim in Brief 1998, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Planning & Development Department, Government of Sikkim.

R.O.No. 16/IPR/03-04 dated 6.5.03

R.O.No. 16/IPR/03-04 dated 6.5.03

eco-tourism, handicraft and handloom, agro-based industries and pharma-products. The emphasis on the quality of companies also reflects the governments' intentions, namely, having a market leader in each sector of industrial activity so as to allow industrial activities to consolidate their role in the development process as opposed to having a bulk of registered companies floating around.

Investment decisions are guided by perceptions to a large extent. As an investment destination, Sikkim's competence has been affirmed by national business magazines like *Business Today* which bring out the improved perception of investors vis-à-vis Sikkim on several counts like the quality of electric power, social infrastructure and state government support. Add to this, the state governments' initiative in setting up the Board of Investment under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister to implement a 'Single Window Policy' and you have an apex body to service prospective investors in terms of speedy project approvals, grant of facilities and coordination among government agencies. With interactive investment promotion meetings held in different parts of the country from 2001, the state now has a number of formal applications by investors for setting up industrial units in the state.

Infrastructure-wise, with a new airport at Pakyong in east Sikkim under construction, tourist and industrial connectivity will be improved. The Teesta Hydroelectric Project State-V (one of the six hydro-power schemes in the cascade identified on the Teesta basin) has a proposed installed capacity of 510 MW and considering that the project generates 2172 million units annually, the sale rate of energy has been worked out to a little under INR 3 per unit after considering 12 per cent free power to the home state. The SDF government also has two infrastructure projects in the pipeline for early approval by the Union government. One is to build an alternative highway to the present 31-A National highway and the other being the extension of the East-West Corridors to Sikkim to link it with the Golden Quadrilateral under the National Highway Development Project.

But all of this has not been at the cost of the environment. With over 50 per cent of Sikkim's land area covered with forests and over 5000 species of angiosperm (a plant whose ovules are enclosed in an ovary; a flowering plant), the government has been conscious of the need to protect its environment and ecosystems. His nomination as the "Greenest Chief Minister of India", in a national opinion poll conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, is an indication of the commitment Pawan Chamling has shown, with the help of the state agencies, in conserving the state's natural bounties.

The future has more in store for the people of Sikkim. Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's vision is to have by 2015 -a poverty free state, a total organic state (farming), to make available sustainable livelihood options to each household and to ensure a 100 per cent literate Sikkim. Considering the government's 'report card' from 1994 and thereon, it is not difficult to imagine a Sikkim with all of these benchmarks under its belt. Sikkim has all it takes to be the model state for the rest of India. ■

Tourist Arrivals – Dramatic Increase

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
1981	19115	2739	21854
1991	61360	6187	67547
1994	92435	6888	99323
1997	116500	8068	124568
2001	146923	7757	154680

Source: Government of Sikkim, Department of Tourism, Gangtok.

Fauji's foundation

Before starting to question the logic of why the Fauji Foundation is buying out PSO, it is worth considering why PSO is being sold in the first place.

by ***Aasim Sajjad Akhtar***

It has been publicly reported that the Fauji Foundation of Pakistan is foremost amongst the bidders for the soon-to-be-divested Pakistani State Oil (PSO) enterprise. Before one starts to question the logic of Fauji Foundation buying out PSO, it is worth considering why PSO is being sold in the first place. Along with the Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDC), PSO is one of the few profitable state-owned enterprises in the country, and in fact generates substantial profits for the national exchequer.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has pushed long and hard for the privatisation of OGDC and PSO, typically claims that privatisation of state owned enterprises (SOEs) in poor countries such as Pakistan is necessary to address major structural inefficiencies in the operation of such enterprises, or, in other words, to extricate them from perennial losses. Therefore, the offloading of PSO and OGDC to the private sector would appear to be rather unjustified given that these enterprises have been raking in profits consistently in recent years.

The IMF, and its sister institutions, have also made a point in recent times to emphasise the fact that the Pakistani state does not have satisfactory revenue-generating capacity, and has demanded unequivocally that revenues be increased through a variety of means. On the ground, it has been the imposition of general sales tax (GST) on a number of basic commodities that has been the main source of increased revenue in recent times. Given that the resulting price increases of basic commodities have had clear poverty-enhancing impacts, particularly over the past four years, it is intriguing that enterprises such as PSO and OGDC are being offloaded, as such divestments will surely transfer the revenue-generating burden onto the poor.

The once-upon-a-time-debates, like those over the unemployment that is caused by privatisation, no longer even command positions of semi-importance.

The contradictory claims of the international financial institutions (IFIs) aside, the fact of the matter is that there is a frenzied rush to capture and control oil and gas resources the world over. The invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq are clear examples in this regard. In countries such as Pakistan, where the comprador elite classes facilitate the capture of such resources, it is hardly necessary to resort to direct military intervention. In the case of PSO, the corporate interests of the local elite, ie the army, represent the only economic logic at work, and this is quite acceptable to the IFIs and the global financial elite at large.

Perhaps one can argue that as an independent private entity, Fauji Foundation is entitled to invest in any sector it so pleases. Such an argument would be well and good if Fauji Foundation's interest in taking over the country's monopoly producer of oil and gas-related products represented an isolated instance. In fact, Fauji Foundation, and a host of other army-run corporate enterprises in the country, have come to control such a huge proportion of the economy that it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the army literally controls the destiny of a sizeable proportion of the country's population. In the circumstances, the global elite are more than willing to indulge the extravagances of the army so as to ensure that the former's larger geo-political interests are protected.

If, today, Fauji Foundation is buying up PSO, we should rest assured that some very important forces in the oil and gas corporate world are in the loop and are quite willing to facilitate the process.

Needless to say, these same forces, even if they do not directly possess and control the oil and gas of PSO, will be able to exercise control over these resources through their cooperative partners in Pakistan. The once-upon-a-time-debates, like those over the unemployment that is caused by privatisation, no longer even command positions of semi-importance. This reflects just how bankrupt the capitalist system has become, and how the unbridled supremacy of the market has condemned the vast majority of people in the world to obscurity and in dignity.

In the final analysis, the privatisation of PSO and OGDC, and who is buying up the companies, is neither truly about what is genuinely good for the economic health and sovereignty of the state, nor, and more importantly, about the needs of the people of Pakistan. In fact, ordinary Pakistanis will lose from this business of privatisation, as they have in the past from trade and financial liberalisation. The fact is that privatisation and liberalisation do not even take place in the way that their neo-liberal preachers suggest they will. It would be one thing if the global financial elite actually played by their own stipulated rules, but they do not even do that. Structural adjustment policies have not only impoverished Pakistan; such policies are also simultaneously designed to allow the local elite to maintain their monopoly on resource-allocation. For all of the talk of reform, Pakistan's economy still resembles a neo-colonial one that is based on the accumulation of resources by the rich and powerful, and the continuing exploitation of the working class.

It is indeed unfortunate that these sorts of issues do not make headlines in Pakistan, even when the army's political role is discussed every day. It would not be inaccurate to argue that the Pakistani economy now functions as one unit, with provincial economic autonomy virtually non-existent. The tall claims of the Legal Framework Order (constitutional amendments promulgated by President Musharraf in 2002 which gave a constitutional role to the armed forces, power to the president to dissolve the National Assembly and whimsically extended his term as president) notwithstanding, those committed to the people of Pakistan really ought to recognise the serious economic plunder that is taking place within the country, led by the army, and given cover by the IFIs. Those who believe that democracy should reign supreme would do well to remember that there is no political democracy without economic democracy. It is time for those who can and will to take the road less travelled. That will make all the difference. △

AN ARMY OF BUSINESS INTERESTS

Institute of Management & Computer Sciences	1
College of Education	1
Intermediate Colleges	2
Model Schools	81
Vocational Training Centres	67
Technical Training Centres	9
Referral Hospitals	6
Rural Hospitals	5
Fauji Foundation Medical Centres	24
Mobile Health Units	2
Dispensaries	27
Wards in CMH	1 (CMH Mardan)

Fauji Corn Complex, Jehangiria
Fauji Cereals, Rawalpindi
Foundation Gas, Rawalpindi
Fauji Metals, Rawalpindi
Fauji Polypropylene Products, Hub Chowki
Fauji Sugar Mills, Tando Muhammad Khan
Fauji Sugar Mills, Khoski
Fauji Sugar Mills, Sangla Hill
Fauji Foundation Experimental & Seed Multiplication Farm, Nukerji, Sind.
Fauji Software Company, Rawalpindi.
Fauji Medical Transcription, Rawalpindi.
Fauji Institute of Information Technology & Medical transcription
Fauji Foundation Institute of Management & Computer Sciences, Rawalpindi
Fauji Oil Terminal Company, Karachi.
NIC Project, Islamabad.
Fauji Cement Company Ltd
Fauji Fertilizer Company Ltd
Fauji Jordan Fertilizer Company Ltd
Fauji Kabirwala Power Company Ltd
Mari Gas Company Ltd

(www.foundation.edu.pk)

The politics of information control

Dumbing down the Maldivian atolls

As far as the Malé ruling elite is concerned, control, not development, is the first priority in their relationship with the rest of the country.

by ***Michael O'Shea and Fareesha Abdulla***

Over the last decade, growing business opportunities, successful government and private education initiatives, and the popularity of Western and Indian fashion, music and films, have helped spread knowledge of English and Hindi among Maldivians throughout many islands of the atolls. In the last few years a wide range of information accessibility, delivered via popular English and Hindi cable and satellite television channels and the Internet, has raised the level of awareness of the outside world, but news specifically from Maldives is reported only through media controlled by the President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, his ministers and trusted associates. The state-owned radio and television stations are directed by the Minister for Information and Culture, Ibrahim Manik, brother-in-law of first lady, Nasreena Ibrahim, while the three daily newspapers are controlled by other close associates of the president. Mohamed Zahir Hussein, Minister for Youth and Sports, owns the *Haveeru* daily paper. He has been an intimate friend of Gayyoom since their student days at Al Azhar University in Cairo during the 1950s. *Miadhu* newspaper is co-edited by Gayyoom and owned by Minister for Health, Ahmed Abdullah. Abbas Ibrahim, brother of Nasreena Ibrahim and head of the National Council for Linguistic and Historical Research, owns *Aafathis*, the third daily paper.

The local media carries no information about the inner workings of the Malé government, or anything that might embarrass the president and his administration. There is no analysis of government policy or official decisions. Information within Maldives is suppressed by a carefully designed presidential system for censorship and suppression of criticism. This system is based on similar authoritarian practices developed in twentieth century Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Libya. It has allowed not only the Maldives National Security Service (NSS), but also cliques within the administration including the president, to act without legal and ethical restrictions. Any suggestion of reform is treated as a personal threat to these groups. Maldives is a tightly managed society and NSS actions of violence and intimidation without any regard for the legal rights of the people, requires organised connivance by a state acting well beyond the boundaries of traditionally accepted Maldivian norms.

The local media carries no information about the inner workings of the Malé government, or anything that might embarrass the president and his administration.

The criminal procedure law of December 2002 gave the NSS complete control over the investigation process so much so that the arrested person's defence lawyer may now face criminal charges at the discretion of investigating officers. The real high court in the Maldives is the President's Office, and judges of politically sensitive cases receive their verdicts directly from there. In the past, Malé's judges often intervened to prevent abuse of court processes by government, but after the new 1998 Constitution placed the judiciary under direct presidential control, judges lost any semblance of independence.

As far as the Malé ruling elite is concerned, control, not development, is the first priority in their relationship with the rest of the country. Traditionally, the elite's attitude towards the atolls, and people outside their families' circles of power, was one of feudal disdain and indifference, but limited accessibility to distant atolls from the capital meant that large areas of the country were semi-autonomous. When they came into contact with their rulers in Malé, common islanders were required to perform ritual subservience to their rulers. In modern Maldives, these rituals remain important. They are performed in government-sponsored clubs and organisations, at public school meetings and every official function. Non-attendance at these functions is interpreted as disloyalty to the state and a personal criticism of the attending officials and guests.

Despite regular election promises to decentralise government administration and build resorts in distant atolls, President Gayoom has refused to direct department sections and resorts away from the Malé area. Ignoring offers from foreign airlines and governments, he continues to resist the establishment of international airports in the north and south of the country. These are heavily populated but economically depressed areas that need tourists and the consequent increased demand for fresh fish, imported vegetables and rice, government services and employment. In the midst of unparalleled wealth in Malé, the government's obsession with control and suppression of criticism has effectively prevented any comparable economic development beyond the capital. Jealousy, fear of devolution of Malé's power, greed and limited national vision are the root causes of this attitude among Gayoom and his supporters, and over the years, these, along with myopic greed have become dominant factors.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) statistics, the Maldives has the highest per capita income in the South Asian region, at over USD 2,000, (when adjusted for purchasing power parity—USD 4,000), but the cost of living is very high and there are significant income differentials in society, and between the capital Malé and the atolls where most of the population live. In 1998 during an economic boom, Malé's per capita income was 75 percent higher than in the atolls. Life expectancy in the atolls is much lower than for Malé—77 years in the capital compared to 68 years for atoll dwellers. 30 percent of the Maldives population lives below the poverty line, and 43 percent of children below the age of five are underweight. Worker participation rates for women in Maldives are among the lowest in the world, being as low as 19 percent in 1998.

In 2000, tourism earned 70 percent of Maldives' foreign exchange from exports and generated a third of the country's GDP, but Maldivian participation in the resort industry is low. Many resort staff are low-paid foreign contract workers from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India, while the resorts themselves are deliberately concentrated around Malé and the country's sole international airport next door. This ensures that the profits flow directly into the capital and bypass all other islands and most Maldivians. Some Malé families have become extremely wealthy, and all landowners in the capital have been enriched by the phenomenal increase in land values and rents.

Elsewhere in the country, frustration and anger are common among the many who cannot share directly in the tourist bonanza, government jobs or increased land values. In the one industry to which they are permitted limited access—fishing—the profits from the atolls' fleets, as well as investment decisions are controlled by exporters and officials in Malé. There is widespread unemployment among young people in the capital and the islands, and drug addiction and burglary have become commonplace. Malé judges have always found the atolls as convenient places to exile people to, and with the rise in the city's crime rate and the overcrowding of nearby prisons, many law-breakers now serve their sentences in economically depressed islands, thereby enlarging the networks of the drug distributors and stolen property receivers. At the 2003 Atoll Chiefs' Conference in Malé, there were continual complaints about these criminals and their negative influence on young islanders.

As far as the Malé ruling elite is concerned, control, not development, is the first priority in their relationship with the rest of the country.

The arming and military training of the NSS is supposedly designed to protect the Maldives from foreign mercenaries and to prevent illegal fishing in its territorial waters. Instead, it has become an expensive enforcer for a police state of less than 400,000 citizens with a total land area of only 300 square kilometres (about half the size of Singapore). The strict enforcement of drug and sex laws, especially for unemployed young people, combined with the incarceration of growing numbers of non-violent political activists, have overcrowded the prisons, where inmates are subjected to planned NSS programmes of torture, beatings, dehydration and starvation. Directly under the command of President Gayoom, the same NSS officers perform military, policing, prison guard and torture duties.

Against this background of increasing brutalisation, alienation and frustration in Dhivehi society, the official presidential referendum campaign of 2003 may have seemed surreal to foreign observers. The shootings in Maafushi prison (see *Himal* October 2003) and civil unrest in Malé shocked the elite families, not because they were not aware that torture and killings were normal NSS procedure, nor because they are unaware of President Gayyoom's commanding role. They were shocked because people who they consider inferior, dared to publicly protest the president and the behaviour of his NSS, and they were embarrassed and angry because the political inequalities that underpin their wealth and power were being exposed internationally and undeniably, for the first time.

Maldivian society is fast approaching a crossroads, where the class differences, and regional discrimination are fuelling discontent. Can we expect the Male elite to respond to the growing storm with sagacity?

Reporting the Maldives

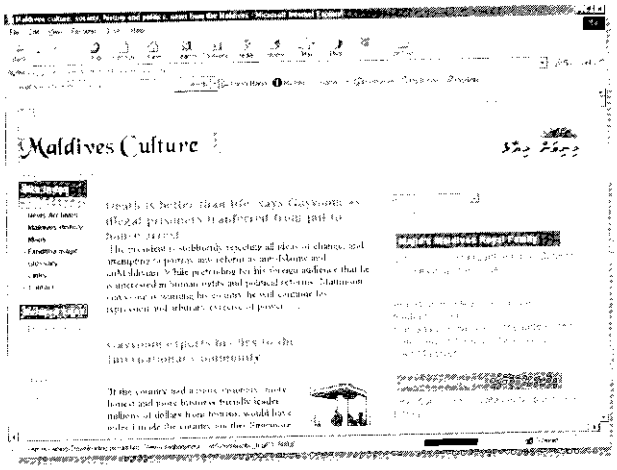
PERHAPS THE only source of independent information on the Maldives, maldivesculture.com was originally established in 1999 to publish the editors' translations and research, and to attract scholars and writers interested in Maldives. Using the site and email, chat rooms and discussion boards, the founders established a broad range of contacts with Maldivians and foreign researchers. It is this cyber-community that really runs maldivesculture.com, and their combined talents and hard work have given the site the influence and respect it now enjoys.

By government order, the site was blocked in the Maldives from the sole internet proxy server in the country, after pages were uploaded that highlighted the number of close relatives and long-term friends of President Maumoon Gayoom and his wife Nasreena who held many powerful positions in the executive, the administration and the licensed media. The pages included extensive quotes from the Dhivehi Forum site where arguments and discussions in English were raging among Maldivians and making these disputes accessible to an international audience for the first time was not taken well by the government/family apparatus. Along with the ban, the editors were subjected to a continuing and sustained hate campaign from anonymous websites and emails over the last two and a half years.

The special challenge for maldivesculture.com is to appeal to both Maldivians and foreigners in a way that treats both groups of readers with respect. Some complain that news and articles on the site are too bleak and negative, but officially sanctioned torture, arbitrary arrest and police harassment are a growing social problem in Maldives, adversely affecting the lives of many individuals and their families.

The translation in 2002 of Ibrahim Luthfee's letters, originally written in Dhivehi in 1999 and sent to the president, ministers and Majlis members, was a watershed in the website's efforts to reveal the true nature of the Gayoom regime. Luthfee's defiance of the president and Ahmed Abdullah, and their efforts to relocate their *Miadhu* newspaper offices into Luthfee's residence and business premises, led to him being harassed and imprisoned. The letters detail this saga of injustice and torture, but they were completely ignored officially. The letters are a damning indictment of President Gayoom, some of his ministers, the NSS and the courts in Malé.

In 2002, Ibrahim Luthfee received a life sentence



for defamation and treason after publishing and distributing, via the Internet, the Dhivehi language newsletter, *Sandhaanu*. At Maafushi prison, where he was serving his sentence, Luthfee's injuries from torture and mistreatment became so severe he was moved to Sri Lanka for treatment. In May this year, Luthfee escaped from a Colombo hospital room and for four months he shifted constantly to avoid capture by NSS officers and Maldivian spies operating in Sri Lanka. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which had been informed about Luthfee's case partly through the translations on maldivesculture.com, granted him political refugee status and in October he left Sri Lanka for asylum in Europe.

Immediately after his escape from hospital, Luthfee contacted maldivesculture.com and predicted correctly that violence would break out soon in Maafushi unless torture at the prison ceased. The uprising in Malé, in September this year, in response to torture and shootings at Maafushi galvanised widespread opposition to Maumoon Abdul Gayoom among influential people in Maldives and expatriate Maldivian communities, and the website has become increasingly important for them. Gayoom has made politics central to all social and intellectual life in the country, and as long as he forbids any reporting of the country's inexorable reform process, it can be expected that the website of maldivesculture.com will continue to play an important role informing Maldivians and rest of the world about the affairs of this fast changing society. △

(www.maldivesculture.com is run by the writers of the accompanying article, Michael O'Shea and Fareesha Abdulla)

Trading off a jewel

The present Nepali dispensation has agreed to let India build a hydropower project that it (Nepal) holds dear. Let the terms be fair, however.

by ***Santa B Pun***

At an October 2003 'track two' meeting in the Nepali capital between the Centre for Policy Research, (CPR) from New Delhi and the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Kathmandu on Indo-Nepal water resources development, the Indian delegation extolled the virtues of the 'Bhutan model'. According to them the USD 600 per capita income accruing from the 336 megawatt (Mw) Chukha project is expected to rise to USD 1200 once the 1,020 Mw Tala hydroelectric project comes on stream in 2005. The CPR team also apprised the Nepali participants that India's National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited (NHPC) was in town, negotiating the 300 Mw Upper Karnali hydropower project. A CPR delegate further stated that the estimated equity distribution for the project could be 85 percent for NHPC, 10 percent for the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and the remaining 5 percent for the Soaltee Group, a Nepali private company. The Nepali participants were not bowled over by the Bhutan model as they were constructed entirely on India's financial strength and ended up with India-imposed power tariffs. The Nepalis instead questioned the status of several regional projects: the American-led Four Border South Asian Regional Initiative on Energy (SARI/E), the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-led Arun Valley Development and the Australian Snowy Mountain Electric Company's seven-year old project called West Seti. Furthermore, the Nepalis summed up that all roads lead to Delhi. But it was on the Upper Karnali issue that Nepali eyebrows were raised, for the 85-10-5 sharing of the spoils was not something that was in the public domain before this.

How much private sector?

The fact that His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) had traded off the 300 Mw run-of-the-river Upper Karnali to the Government of India (GOI) had been reported in the media for some time. However, the sudden appearance of the GOI owned public sector undertaking, NHPC, in the present politically troubled waters of Nepal does indeed raise many questions, at least among the more critically inclined. When HMGN offered these two projects to GOI, it was believed that the private sector of both the countries— the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)— would be involved. During King Gyanendra's last India visit, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between FNCCI and FICCI was initiated for joint private sector participation in trade and investment with a tourism and hydropower development focus. In fact, knowledgeable circles assert that the strong Indian multinational, the Reliance Group of the Ambanis, was very keen to execute the Upper Karnali project. Reliance must also have had its eyes on the much larger jewel, the 10,800 Mw Karnali Chisapani "Kohinoor", to demonstrate that it could succeed where Enron had failed in the past (see *Himal* March 2002). As it transpired, it was the GOI which effectively blocked Reliance's bid. GOI's policy, for the time being, seems to be that all infrastructure projects in Nepal will have to have the full stamp of Indian public sector undertakings. It was presumably this presence of the public sector that prompted the Embassy of India in Kathmandu to go out of its way to extend reassurances to Nepal. The Commercial Secretary of the embassy made the laboured explanation that this is "...the first time that an Indo-Nepal hydel project is being envisioned on commercial lines. ... It is not a project run on a government to government basis but being done by a company on a commercial basis that makes sound economic sense".

Nepali reactions

There were varying reactions to the recent developments on Upper Karnali but all have the same conclusion: that the aggressive approach of GOI and NHPC indicates that they are going for the "quick and final kill". Some, like Ananda Bahadur Thapa, former Executive Secretary of Nepal's Water and Energy Commission, bemoaned the possible death of a 4,000 Mw storage scheme that could also have been built on the river at this stretch. It will be interesting to see how the two governments react to this complaint: a run-of-the-river

Comparison of existing run-of-river projects with the proposed Upper Karnali project

Table: 1

Power House	Capacity Cost USD/Kw	Capacity in Mw	Avg. Annual Energy Gwh (gigawatt hours)	Head in Meters	Headrace Tunnel
Puwa	2532	6.2	48	304	3.2
Modi	2027	14.8	92.5	67.0	2.1
Chilime	1450	20	137	351.5	2.8
Khimti (no transmission line)	2333	60	350	660	7.6
Bhotekosi (with transmission line)	2750	36	246	139	3.3
Marsyangdi	3078	72	462.5	90.5	7.2
Kali Gandaki A	2639	144	842	115	6.0
Mid-Marsyangdi (under const.)	2714	70	398	90	5.2
Upper Karnali	1514	300	1,915	141	2.2
Bhutan's Tala, IC Rs 40 Billion	847	1,020	4,865	860	23.0
Bhutan's Chukha, IC Rs 2.46 Billion in 1989 (USD 864 Million)	---	336	1679	468	6.5

Source: NEA/Generation, *2003 Annual Report* with the exception of Khimti, Bhotekosi and Upper Karnali

power-only project as opposed to a project with valuable stored water in addition to power. Others lamented that the "jewel in the crown" in the country's hydropower treasure chest should have been for Nepal's own domestic use and is wrongly being licensed for export. The cheap power, they argue, would have played a vital role in stabilising Nepal's spiralling power tariff. There are still others who question the tiny 15 percent equity that Nepal is being apportioned. This point has been rebutted by some Nepalis themselves with the query, "How much cash does NEA have? Has NEA ever paid dividends to HMGN? Therefore, in the circumstances, can NEA afford to cough up the equity investment for Upper Karnali?" Apparently these Nepalis have been badly bitten by the "commercialisation bug" of the industrialised countries which now plagues the developing world. The question that should actually be raised is, which South Asian electric utility coughs up its own cash for its capital intensive generation expansion works? But one does, however, hear that some Nepali investors are seriously jockeying for reasonable stakes in the pie. There is no question that the pie needs to be apportioned properly. As the rightful owner of the resource, it is Nepal, and no one else, that should be doing the apportioning.

The Upper Karnali project is located in the corner of the districts Dailekh-Achham-Surkhet in midhill west Nepal, on the Karnali river (the Ghaghra in India), one of the mighty tributaries of the Ganga emerging from the central Himalaya (see map). The backwater of the 10,800 Mw Karnali Chisapani project is quite far away from the Upper Karnali powerhouse site. One does, however, notice the tellingly seductive loop of the Karnali river when it suddenly changes its course by a full hundred and eighty degrees. No doubt, this is nature's precious gift to Nepal. A mere 2.2 kilometre tunnel creates a drop of 141 meters to generate an average annual energy of 1915 million units. In contrast, the 144 Mw Kali Gandaki project, financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), has a six km tunnel to get the 115 metre drop to produce only 842 million units. In the case of the Upper Karnali, accessibility is already available through the Surkhet to Jumla road that touches the project's proposed headworks. A mere 22 kilometres of road is necessary to connect the headworks with the powerhouse. This is the reason why all eyes are focused on this 300 Mw "jewel".

Very Hot Tariff

With an average selling price of NRN 7.02 per unit (US cents 9.5 at an exchange rate of NRN 74.09 to the dollar), Nepal's electricity tariff is the highest in South Asia. The USA's average national tariff is about six cents per unit, but in hydro-dominated states like Washington the average tariff is only four cents per unit. Among the major reasons attributed for Nepal's high tariff are: heavy reliance on bilateral and multilateral agencies, extensive employment of international consultants and contractors, difficult terrain with non-existent infrastructures and very limited in-house construction and manufacturing capability. Sadly, Nepal has also been unable to capitalise on the economies of scale. This is what has led to the recent spurt of many small hydro-

power projects. As in most South Asian countries, corruption, no doubt, is instrumental in padding up that tariff. There is, however, one aspect that many do not factor in, namely, project selection. Projects are supposed to undergo a rigorous Least Cost Generation Expansion Plan (LCGEP) before they are finally selected for implementation. But when the statistics are conveniently fudged and "sexed up" by the decision makers themselves, then the proverbial garbage in/garbage out is the outcome, naturally. This is one of the main, often-glossed-over reasons for Nepal's inordinately high tariffs. The aborted Arun III project of east Nepal on the Arun tributary of the Kosi is a case in point. The LCGEP debate on Arun III is still shrouded in a lot of smoke. The two concerned multilateral donors, the World Bank and ADB, were not on the same wavelength regarding the Arun III project, with the latter criticising it for its high costs and the former hell bent on pushing it through. The dilemma was very succinctly expressed by a very senior ADB staff at a Kathmandu donors' meet in 1994 when he said, "While Arun III is in our head, it is Kali Gandaki that is in our heart". When Arun III ultimately did get "smoked out", ADB was quick to pick up the Kali Gandaki project. It was now the turn of the World Bank to gleefully criticise the project – Kali Gandaki – for being too expensive! Only a stern official letter from the ADB to the World Bank, querying point blank "Do you or do you not support Kali Gandaki?" permitted ADB to finally proceed with the project.

With an average selling price of NRN 7.02 per unit (US cents 9.5 at an exchange rate of NRN 74.09 to the dollar), Nepal's electricity tariff is the highest in South Asia.

The jewel in the crown

Given the maladies that have plagued hydro-development in Nepal it will be useful to compare the proposed Upper Karnali project with other schemes that have been implemented. Table 1 provides details of some of the existing run-of-the-river plants incorporating tunnels in the Nepal power system, both public and private sector, compared with Upper Karnali and Bhutan's Chukha and Tala project.

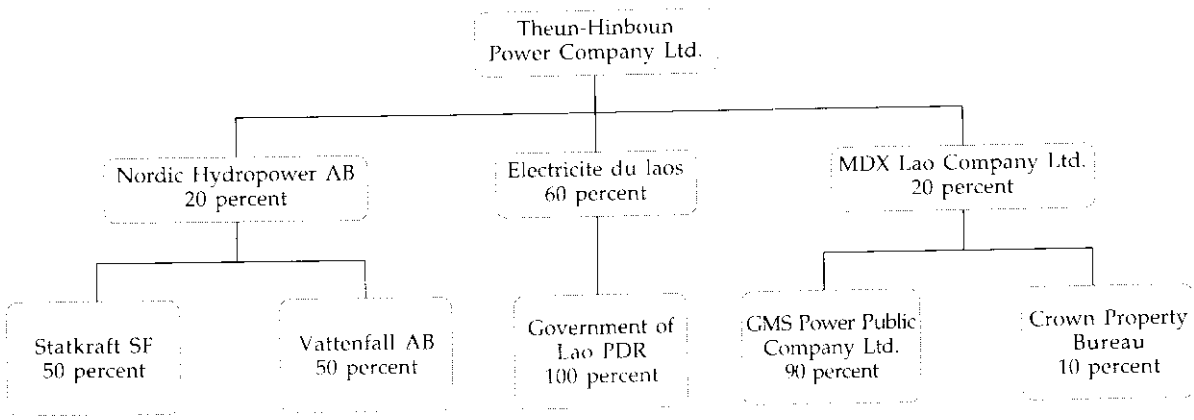
Leaving aside the two "take or pay" Khimti and Bhotekosi projects in the private sector, the major workhorses of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) are the 462 Gwh Marsyangdi and 842 Gwh Kali Gandaki power stations. Both were built through multilateral/bilateral donor loans and have very high capacity cost of over USD 2,600 per Kw. There may still be some increase in the cost of Kali Gandaki when the contractors' 'claims' are settled. Though Marsyangdi, funded mainly by the World Bank and the German bank, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), is still the most expensive project, proponents assert that the project was constructed during the difficult "trade embargo" period with India. About 60 percent of any hydropower project's total cost is notched up by civil works, with the headrace tunnel accounting for a major portion of that cost. Both Kali Gandaki and Marsyangdi have tunnels over 6 kilometres in length. Even the tiny Puwa and Chilime, that generate a meagre 48 Gwh and 137 Gwh respectively, have tunnels in the range of 3 kilometres. Bhutan's much talked about 336 Mw, 1320 Gwh Chukha project, despite a 468 metre head, needed a 6.5 kilometre tunnel with a twin 0.95 kilometre tailrace tunnel. Similarly, Tala in order to produce 3962 Gwh of energy needed a 23 kilometre tunnel plus the 3.1 kilometre tailrace tunnel. The production of 1915 Gwh from a mere 2.2 kilometre tunnel truly makes Upper Karnali Nepal's "jewel in the crown".

Upper Karnali was therefore not kept on HMGN's "solicitation list" of 22 projects. HMGN feverishly doled out the licenses to such media savvy developers as EuroOrient, which promised to immediately start the spade work on the famous 402 Mw Arun III project. None of the 22 "solicited" and licensed projects have started their 'spade' work despite the lapse of four years. The World Bank, that was involved in both the pre-feasibility and feasibility studies of Upper Karnali, did toy around with market testing this project for Nepal's incipient Power Development Fund (PDF). But then the Bank sheepishly settled for the tiny 30 Mw Kabeli to market test PDF. ADB was approached for a possible public/private joint venture. But this was ill-timed as both ADB and OECF were then totally engrossed with

Table: 2

Country/Project	Size in Mw	Energy in Gwh	Tunnel Length (In Km)	Total Cost
Bhutan/Chukha	336	1,679	6.5	IC Rs 2.46 Billion
Bhutan/Tala	1,020	4,865	23.0	IC Rs 40 Billion (USD 864 Million)
Laos/TheunHinboun	210	1,645	6.2	USD 240.3 Million
Nepal/Upper Karnali	300	1,915	2.2	USD 454.3 Million *(1998 Canadian consultant estimate)*

Chart-1: Ownership structure of the Theun-Hinboun Power Company



the Kali Gandaki. There were then a lot of behind-the-scene manoeuvring to pocket the Upper Karnali license. One of them was a Nepali private power developer who, through a lot of Delhi/Lucknow pilgrimages, had an invitation to come for the Upper Karnali power purchase discussion on the official pad of India's Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board. The strong Canadian firm SNC Lavelin did use its own "influence" unsuccessfully. It was the "weird" French humanitarian organisation, Elysses Frontier, that finally pocketed the license by offering NEA/HMGN 30 percent equity without having to dole out a single paisa from their coffers. That the Cabinet Committee on Fast Track Projects could approve such a questionable agreement made one question the very credibility of the Cabinet Committee itself. But this is how the new "privatisation and liberalisation" mantra works in the Nepali power sector, particularly when the political environment is murky. With the "jewel" now firmly in the hands of GOI/NHPC, no more "pundits with new mantras" are expected.

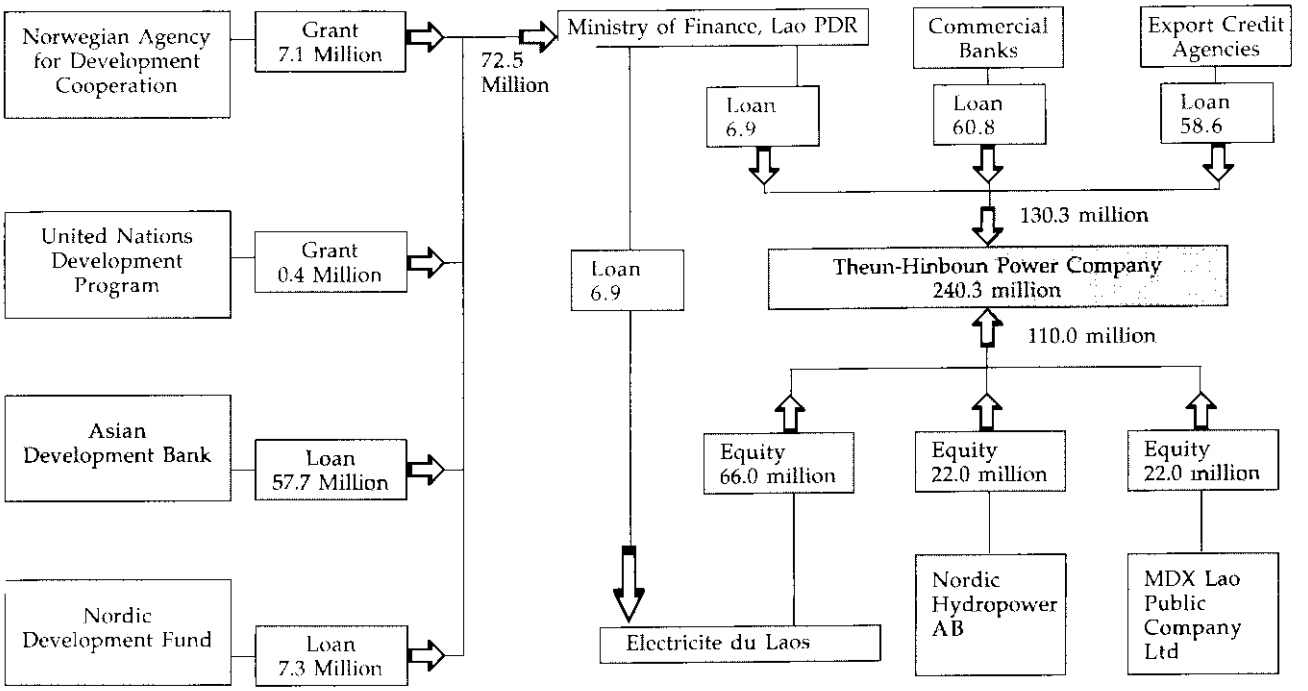
The Laotian way

So then, how can Nepal and India move forward? There is no question of reneging on the Indo-Nepal agreement to implement the Upper Karnali. No one questions the Indian participation, as the consuming market is theirs. But Upper Karnali belongs to Nepal and the power to utter an emphatic "no" on the terms and conditions rests with Nepal. Hence, it all boils down to an equitable sharing of the pie, and the 80-10-5 formula that has been inadvertently leaked can certainly not be considered fair by a huge margin. Nepal must not even remain content with a mere "30 percent equity", as some have suggested, whether this be in the public, private or combined domain. Nepal simply does not have the luxury of relinquishing its "fair and equitable share" in such an attractive project. For those who question where Nepal can access the funds required for Upper Karnali, perhaps a look at the Laotian-Thailand model, the 210 Mw Theun-Hinboun hydropower project, would provide the answer.

Thailand is to Laos what India is to Nepal—a large industrialised giant breathing down the neck of a small landlocked country rich in water resources. The joint public-private Theun-Hinboun power plant in Laos is dedicated to the Thai market, as would be Upper Karnali to the Indian market when built. It is an inter-basin transfer where a 6.2 kilometre tunnel creates a head of 240 meters and generates an average annual energy of 1645 Gwh. The project component also includes the 86 kilometre 230 Kv double circuit transmission line to the power delivery point on the Laos-Thailand border. The project construction started in November 1994 and by March 1998 the plant had started commercial operation, ie, within 40 months. Despite the use of international consultants such as Norconsult and electrical and mechanical contractors such as ABB and Kvaerner, the total project cost of this plant was an incredibly modest USD 240.3 million or USD 1144 per Kw. The ownership structure of the Theun-Hinboun power company is indicated in Chart 1 while Chart 2 depicts its complex financial structure.

Nepal needs to note how Electricite du Laos got the finance for the 60 percent equity. ADB provided a USD 57.7 million loan to the Laos government at the usual one percent service charge, 40 years maturity period with ten years grace. The government then re-lent USD 51.5 million to Electricite du Laos at 6.21 percent interest, 25 years maturity and five years grace. The government also provided a loan of USD 8.5 million to the Theun-Hinboun power company but at a higher commercial interest rate of 10 percent with only 16 years maturity and four years grace period. Commercial banks

Chart-2: Financial structure of the Theun-Hinboun Power Company



Note: All figures in USD
(Source: www.adb.org/projects/theunhinboun/per/conclusions.asp Appendix 7)

also lent out USD 64.8 million and there was a good portion of USD 58.6 million as export credit. It is high time that Nepal learn a lesson or two from this Laotian model. Thailand, which purchases the power generated by the company, was quite content with a humble 20 percent equity. So was Nordic Hydropower, on whose strength the export credit was availed. After commercial operation, ADB noted, "The equity investment is expected to be fully returned within six operating years of the Project".

The final word

Table 2 demonstrates where Nepal's Upper Karnali stands. It clearly stands head and shouldesr above Bhutan's much acclaimed Chukha and Tala projects. By 2005, India will start commercial operation of the 1,020 Mw Tala hydroelectric project in Bhutan, constructed at a cost of about IC Rs 40,000 million or USD 864 million (at the exchange rate of IC Rs 46.3 per USD). This works out to a capacity cost of USD 847 per Kw. By this same formula, Upper Karnali will cost only USD 254 million and not USD 454.3 million as estimated by some Canadian consultants. The normal 70:30 loan/equity financing ratio would mean a total equity of USD 76.2 million. So what exactly is a "fair and equitable" share for Nepal in this 'jewel'? A 60 percent stake is the minimum that Nepal should settle for. It is not asking too much of HMGN/NEA to hunt for the measly USD 46 million that the 60 percent equity constitutes. The World Bank and ADB, after having invested so heavily in Nepal's power system, cannot abandon it in knee-jerk fashion. But it is HMGN that must nudge the two institutions and GOI/NHPC to create a conducive environment.

One must not forget that Nepal's fledgling private sector should also get a firm berth in this project. The policy of negotiating with the Soaltee Group alone does convey the wrong impression. There are a number of other corporates as well in Nepal—the Choudhary, Jyoti, Panchakanya, Golchha groups - to name just a few. Are they untouchables? Why should they be marginalised? One may then naturally ask, would GOI/NHPC be interested in such a Laotian model? If India is as pragmatic as the Thais showed themselves to be, and there is no reason to suppose that they are not, then they should have no objections at all. GOI/NHPC is well aware that all the goods and services (consulting, civil, mechanical and electrical contracts) including the cheap power accruing from Upper Karnali are all destined to head India's way. GOI/NHPC must remain pragmatic with a modest portion of the project. Otherwise, Nepal will be forced to perceive that it is not just the "jewel" that India wants but the entire "jewellery shop" itself!

Flogging the dying horse of agricultural research

by **Devinder Sharma**

Bill Gates' donation of USD 25 million for 'biofortification'—breeding crops with higher levels of micronutrients—is an effort to provide a life-saving shot to the dying family of public-sector international agricultural research institutes. Ironically, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the much heralded institution responsible for ushering in the green revolution technology, is now seriously struggling to keep itself alive. Faced with huge staff layoffs, drastic reductions in research programmes, declining research output and vanishing financial commitments, the CGIAR is contemplating a series of mergers to stay afloat. Gasping for breath, the institute is even considering the merger of two of its premier institutes—the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) at Los Banos, in the Philippines, and the International Crop Research Centre for Wheat and Maize (CIMMYT), in Mexico City.

Such has been the level of desperation that the CGIAR has deviated from its stated position of working for the public good when in 2002 it decided to take on board Syngenta Foundation - an agency established by Syngenta, a global leader in agribusiness. The company's primary business is crop protection bio-technology and high-value commercial seeds, whose sales in the year 2000 were USD 6.9 billion. This major shift in CGIAR's known public image had prompted the group's committee of non-government organisations to freeze its relationship with the organisation. The NGOs believe that the CGIAR has abdicated its responsibility of ensuring food security for the world's poor by bringing in technologies that lead to economically viable and sustainable farming systems. Instead, the CGIAR is evolving into a service centre for corporate interests.

The decade of the 1970s was the period when CGIAR's green revolution technology, supported by appropriate national farm policies, ushered in food self-sufficiency for many of the chronically food deficit countries. Two decades later, in the 1990s, intensive agriculture had begun to take its toll. Apart from the deterioration of the environment that it unleashed, there were other consequences too. Thousands of farmers all over the world, from the technology-sophisticated and subsidy-rich United States, European Union, Japan and Canada to the poor and marginalised majority of the world in India, China, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Mexico, the Philippines and many other countries, have been plunged into a crisis of sustenance. In the poorer countries, the commercial control that agribusinesses have established over the production process has pushed small and medium farmers over the brink of security and into a vortex of mounting debt, leading eventually to the loss of their meagre pieces of land.

All the while, the CGIAR has remained a mute spectator. Not even once did it find it worthwhile to look into the real causes behind this spate of agrarian bankruptcies. If anything it is tainted by association, because the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), one of the organisations funded by CGIAR and which was a beneficiary of Bill Gates' largesse, has concentrated its energies on pushing market reforms in the guise of "sustainably meeting the food needs of the developing world" (as its mission statement says). IFPRI is at the forefront of the frantic campaign to dismantle national policies that had propelled countries to take advantage of the green revolution technology. Such has been its descent into business fetishism that it even wants to bring relief within the purview of the market. IFPRI has gone to the extent of suggesting that food aid, which is governed by an inefficient UN Food Convention, be actually brought under the World Trade Organisation's ambit. Is it not time that the CGIAR begins its own restructuring by closing down the IFPRI? After all, by the principles of market rationality, where is the need to duplicate what the World Bank can do more effectively!

It is evident the CGIAR has abandoned the marginal farmer to join the anachronistic chorus extolling the virtues of corporate-controlled agriculture. An international research system, dominated entirely by Western experts scarcely acquainted in any real sense with the ground realities in developing countries, sooner or later had inevitably to collapse. In the attempt to rectify its own maladies it has once again succumbed to the same forces that led it to abandon its original mandate. Bill Gates' donation comes as a bailout gift for the ailing organisation, but the net result is that its agendas will become more and more detrimental to the interests of the larger agrarian community in the developing world as CGIAR throws its weight behind the corporate club.

Crank solutions

Ever since the release of the dwarf wheat and rice crop varieties some 25-30 years ago, international agricultural research centres have only been engaged in maintenance research. They have simply been trying to pro-

tect what has already been evolved and released. With no clear-cut direction and vision, the donors had begun to drift away. The CGIAR therefore attempted a number of options, such as special thematic research programmes under the 'challenge programmes', but in the end it could come up with no purposeful plan of action to keep itself alive. Floating in the winds of change, it followed the neo-liberal consensus, dumping food security in favour of climate change, and sustainable agriculture for market reforms and globalisation.

Biofortification was one of the misplaced research priorities that CGIAR had proposed earlier but was unable to undertake in the light of the outcry against it. Moreover this particular priority made no research sense, but that was not an insuperable objective since research programmes are no longer required to make any sense. The idea behind this venture was to breed crops that supplement micronutrients. 'Golden rice' is just one instance of the kind of irrational research that is carried out in today's climate. This much-touted variety of rice, the sum total of whose micronutrient value-addition amounted to a miniscule quantum of beta-carotene, has now been widely accepted as misadventure. Distinguished scientists have already confirmed that golden rice cannot address the problem of Vitamin A deficiency.

CGIAR
Nourishing the Future through Scientific Excellence

But ordinary constraints have not stood in the way of crank solutions being developed and dignified as scientific remedies to what are ultimately economic problems. Fortified crops cannot eradicate nutrient deficiency. Technology simply cannot address this problem. Whether the newly evolved genetically-modified crops contain supplements of Vitamin A, iron or zinc, these foods will bring no benefits to those who need it desperately—the malnourished. The reason is simple. The human body requires adequate amount of fats to absorb these nutrients, which is conspicuously absent in malnourished populations. The chronically hungry therefore gain nothing by eating these food supplements. What is more, recourse to this futile technological fix only accentuates the original problem. The higher market price of such grains, owing to their high intellectual property costs, erodes the capacity to buy other kinds of food. In the process, further imbalances are created in one's nutritional status. The biofortification programme is in reality aimed at restoring the credibility of the discredited biotechnology industry, which has come under increasing attack from a number of organisations and groups in Europe and elsewhere.

Bill Gates was probably not properly advised, and for obvious reasons. Harvest Plus, a mere CGIAR public relations outfit, is in dire need of financial resources and therefore used the emotional card of hunger and malnutrition to seek funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Not realising that 'hidden hunger', as nutrient deficiency is generally referred to, cannot be removed by providing the poor and hungry with an 'informed choice' of novel and functional foods. What the poor need is food—which is abundantly available—and that too food rich in nutrients. In India, for instance, which is home to one-third of the world's hungry and malnourished, more than 30 million tonnes of wheat and rice (which was a record 65 million tonnes a year ago) are rotting in the open. The surplus food contains an average of nine percent proteins—four to nine times more than is to be found in any fortified GM crop that scientists have developed so far.

A greater humanitarian purpose would have been served if Bill Gates had instead donated grants to institutes and groups that would have helped reach the abundantly available food to the poor, to ensure that the hungry are adequately fed. The reality is that the poor and hungry do not have the means to buy the food that is available and going bad in front of their eyes. If the hungry cannot afford to buy their normal dietary requirement of rice (or for that matter any other staple food) for a day, how the CGIAR proposes to make high cost 'golden rice' available to them is something that the Gates Foundation programme officers probably forgot to ask. The global scientific and development community (including CGIAR) has failed to understand that if they had aimed at eradicating hunger in the first place, there would be no 'hidden hunger'.

Would Bill Gates understand that biotechnology, the way it is being promoted by corporate interests, has the potential to further the great divide between haves and have-nots? The twin engines of economic growth—technological revolution and globalisation—will only widen the existing gap between the well-fed and the hungry. Biotechnology will, in reality, push more people into the hunger trap. With public attention and resources being diverted from the ground realities, hunger will only grow in the years to come.

CGIAR's blind support for the corporate agenda, therefore, is a pointer to the growing irrelevance of the international agricultural research institutes. Such is the poverty of ideas to meet the growing food needs of the world that the CGIAR has been gradually made to die a premature death, much of which of course was its own doing. It is time for the CGIAR board, which is firmly in the grip of the World Bank and the Japanese government, to follow what is enshrined in its original mandate. The CGIAR should handover the 16 research centres that it supports to the respective countries where these are located. This is what the forefathers of the research system had said at the time of creating the CGIAR, and they were so right. Nothing can revitalise this dying horse, not even Bill Gates with his millions, if the CGIAR cannot stand up for the cause of the poor and marginalised farmer.

Militarisation and democratic rule in Nepal

Nepal's Maoists initiated the process of crippling the institutions of parliamentary democracy by giving primacy to military means over the political. Mainstream parties, unable to resist petty politicking, allowed themselves first to be bludgeoned into submission by Maoist violence and then reduced to irrelevance by autocratic strategems. If civil politics has to triumph, it is up to the political parties to marshal their energies and undertake a non-violent political movement against the current and evolving tendencies in the polity.

by ***Hari Roka***

On 4 October 2002, King Gyanendra seized state power in violation of the 1990 Constitution of Nepal when he dismissed the elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba and nominated Lokendra Bahadur Chand, leader of the royalist Rastriya Parjatantra Party (RPP), as prime minister. Caught unawares, the mainstream political parties could do nothing except belatedly condemn the king's rapidly unfolding actions. They were not even able to organise mass protest rallies against what really was a palace coup. This failure of the main political parties to mobilise mass opinion against the new dispensation in Kathmandu, led both the king and Maoist rebels presumed that the process of polarisation of the polity between themselves had been completed. Therefore, the political parties were ignored in the subsequent talks between the king's government and the Maoists.

People on the road to nowhere.

On 29 January 2003 the nominated government and the Maoists agreed to a ceasefire. When there seemed to be a glimmer of peace on the horizon, the mainstream political formations forged an alliance at the end of March 2003. They jointly finalised an 18-point common minimum programme and launched a movement against the monarchic takeover. Since then, the power struggle in the country has acquired a tripartite character and the balance of forces in the polity has been such that a political settlement has not been reached and none seems to be in sight because the current bargaining positions are mutually incompatible. The palace, backed by the Royal Nepal Army (RNA), is looking to resume the role in the national polity that it enjoyed before the 1990 Constitution came into effect and circumscribed its power. The Maoists, by contrast, are adamant in their demand for the creation of a constituent assembly to draft a drastically revised constitution that does away with perceived anomalies in the relationship between state and society. In opposition to both these positions, the mainstream political parties are demanding a return to constitutional government through the restoration of the dissolved parliament or the creation of an all-party transitional government.

These irreconcilable demands have obstructed the peace process and provides little hope for a long-term truce between the two armed forces as well as the over-ground political parties. The possibilities of peace are being further eroded by the consolidation of military capability on both sides. The fighting strength of the RNA is being upgraded through aid from the USA, the UK and India, while the Maoists have been freely recruiting cadres in the countryside and replenishing their armoury. After three months of ceasefire, starting end-January this year, the official re-

gime and the rebel regime sat at the negotiating table in April this year after agreeing to a code of conduct. At the second round of talks, the government acceded to the Maoist demand of restricting the movement of the army to a five kilometre-radius from their barracks. While it has been reported that this concession had King Gyanendra's all-important sanction, the army denied that any such consensus had been arrived at. Following the army's refusal to submit to the five kilometre restriction, the nominated government of Prime Minister Chand collapsed in May since it had lost the confidence of one of the most crucial entities in the post-constitutional polity.

After the departure of the Chand government, the mainstream political parties were still hopeful of finding a meaningful role in the political process. If they had any expectations from the palace, these were clearly unjustified. The king studiously disregarded their claims and, instead, nominated Surya Bahadur Thapa (also of the Rastriya Parjatantra Party) as prime minister. This reconfirmed the suspicion of the mainstream political forces that the democratic rhetoric emanating from the palace was so much eye-wash and that the takeover of 4 October 2002 had not been a short-term fix for an immediate problem but an attempt at institutional consolidation to recover past glory. The Maoists, who had hitherto deluded themselves into believing that they constituted the decisive factor in the prevailing equilibrium, also realised that the hopes they entertained of a share in state power had come to nothing. The negotiations could obviously go no further, but the ceasefire remained in force since the Maoists were constrained by public pressure and unfavourable circumstances to respect it.

In August 2003, the king's government put forward its political agenda for the last round of negotiations, which, while being long on the social agenda, clearly and unequivocally repudiated the core Maoist demand on constituent assembly. This brought an official closure to the negotiating process, since there was nothing left to be negotiated. Almost simultaneously, the Royal Nepal Army launched an anti-insurgency operation in which 19 Maoist activists were killed in Doramba, Ramechhap districts. This signalled the collapse of the ceasefire, and the country resumed its interrupted civil war.

Towards militarism

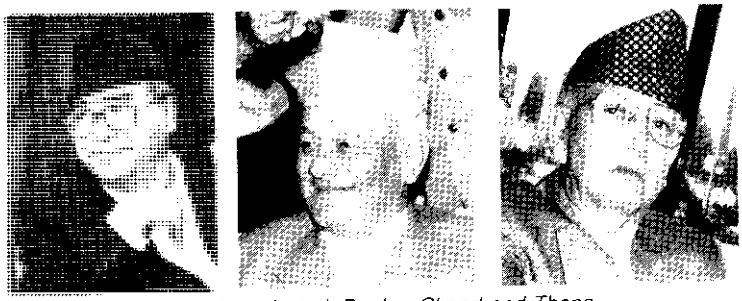
The declaration of the 'people's war' by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in 1996 was the first step in the creeping militarisation of national society that has now suddenly gained momentum. The immediate goal of the rebels was to render parliamentary government obsolete by crippling its functioning, while its long-term goal was the overthrow of the monarchy and the capture of state power. Therefore, in the short run they targeted democratic institutions and the mass base of the parliamentary forces. They proved to be adept at using the situation to their advantage and exploiting the contradictions between the palace and the parliamentary forces, as also the inter- and intra-party conflicts at the core of the political mainstream. These stratagems gave them the space to expand their influence in large parts of the country from their original, limited 'base area' in the midwestern hills.

Concentrating their operations in rural areas, the rebels first went after and often killed politically influential persons affiliated to the Nepali Congress, when that party was in government. They refrained from attacking the army and instead concentrated their firepower on the civilian police force since this would effectively neutralise the capability of the government. In the initial phase of the 'people's war', the leadership of the Nepali Congress believed that, in the long-run, Maoist activity would diminish the mass base of its nearest political rival, the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), though it was their own cadre which was at that time at the receiving end of the violence. For its part, the leadership of the CPN (UML) was misled by the early Maoist focus on Nepali Congress cadres into the believing that the long-run effects of the war would be to weaken the Nepali Congress. This misreading was encouraged by the fact that the retaliatory killing of Maoist cadres was taking place on the orders of the incumbent Nepali Congress government. This process, the mainstream communists believed, would eventually be beneficial to them. The political parties relied too much on these mechanical calculations, and to that extent they fell victim to the Maoist leadership's shrewd strategy of creating and exploiting contradictions within first the political parties and then the ranks of local administrative institutions.

This accentuation of contradictions within the constitutional polity was a necessary precondition for the Maobaadi strategy of building 'red bases' in the countryside until the revolutionary armed forces were ready to capture political power in the main cities. Within Maoist thinking, the "principal area of struggle is the countryside". The situation in the country was conducive for a rapid consolidation based on the disenchantment among the masses. The rivalry between the political parties, their disregard for development, extraordinary levels of corruption while holding the reins of power, and the accentuation of neo-liberal economic policies were the cause of extreme frustration among the rural populace, which was compounded by the absence of employment opportunities in urban areas. The political parties were bereft of any radical agenda for socio-economic transformation and bringing about more inclusiveness in the polity. The Maoist slogan that the rebellion would provide a solution to the ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional conflicts as well as to the political and economic problems besetting the nation evoked a popular response in the countryside. This slogan attracted disgruntled radical elements in all parties, as also deprived sections of the people who

faced economic, social, cultural and political exploitation.

Seen in a comparative historical context, the Nepali Maobaadi strategy differs substantially from the Chinese peoples' war strategy. The leadership of the Maobaadi has given priority to the military rather than the political strategy. After the breakdown of the second ceasefire last August, the Maoists have been implementing a politico-military strategy (pol-mil), which was first implemented by the Vietnamese Communist Party from 1936 to 1939, when they were fighting against French colonial oppression. This strategy was later adopted by a number of other radical parties in the Philippines, such as the Workers Party of Philippines, the Revolutionary Workers Party, and the Marxist-Leninists. This strategy relied more on the military component and included individual acts of terror designed to destabilise the state, create a dramatic impact, give a warning to individual capitalists and the armed forces, and exert pressure on the ruling class or its individual representatives through assassinations, bombing, sabotage, 'expropriation' and other punitive acts. This strategy unleashed the progressive militarisation of both state and society.



From the elected to the selected: Deuba, Chand and Thapa.

Since the inception of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, the palace and the Kathmandu valley elite in its attendance were more than satisfied with the systematic targeting of parliamentary institutions and their mass base, which was the main bulwark against monarchical absolutism prior to the people's movement that culminated in the 1990 Constitution. The organisational and institutional dismantling of parliamentary forces at the grassroots gave the king a greater leverage over the political process. The Maoists, meanwhile, made the most of this rivalry within the mainstream polity to strengthen themselves organisationally and militarily.

The demise of civil authority

What helped the Maobaadi in particular was the ambiguous position of the army in the state system. While the rebels were attacking the cadres of the over-ground political parties, restricting their political activities among the rural masses, immobilising the police, and destroying the physical infrastructure in the control of the civil government, the army refused to engage in combat on two counts. The army leadership claimed that it could not be party to the killing of Nepalis by Nepalis. It also argued that the army could be mobilised only after the political parties had forged a consensus on the issue and insisted that its intervention was predicated on royal initiative since the king is the RNA's supreme commander. It was clear from these preconditions that the military did not see itself as being subordinated to the elected government but as an institution loyal to the palace.

While King Gyanendra was looking for a legal route to concentrate power within the palace, the army was taking the first steps in driving a wedge within the state system that the monarchy could utilise for its own political purposes. The deliberate refusal to engage militarily with the Maoists at Holery village in Rolpa district in July 2001, despite the army having been dispatched there for that purpose by the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress, was part of this tactic. The RNA's refusal to obey civil instructions had the desired outcome in the form of Koirala's resignation. It is significant that Koirala was the one political entity to have consistently refused to do the palace's bidding. Consequently, on his resignation, he refused to dissolve parliament, a move that the royalists and the army were banking on to take their plans further. Therefore, royal take-over required a few more steps to be taken before the objective was achieved.

This task was made somewhat easier by the fact that Koirala's successor was Sher Bahadur Deuba, who, in order to retain power, was more than willing to appease both the palace and the army. The royalist takeover proceeded at an accelerated pace during Deuba's incumbency, as civil government and parliamentary institutions, weakened by seven years of pounding by the Maobaadi, ended up taking several measures that handed over power to the monarch. The crucial event in the consolidation of monarchic power was the Maoist termination of negotiations with Prime Minister Deuba (who had by then broken off from the main Congress party of Koirala) and the simultaneous unprovoked attack on the army barracks in Dang in November 2001. The timing and motive behind this seemingly ill-conceived Maoist move, which brought the army dramatically into the fray, is shrouded in mystery. This was the first time that the Maoist leadership had made a seemingly self-defeating tactical move, and what is more, this uncharacteristic gambit came at a time when the international circumstances, in the aftermath of 9/11, were none too conducive for such actions.

Whatever the motivations, this development prompted the fulfilment of one of the RNA's main preconditions for entering the combat zone, namely the imposition of a state of emergency and the suspension of civil laws by the Deuba government. In effect, the

army's entry into combat was primarily a political move. The consolidation of the anti-constitutional forces was finalised, ironically enough, by the parliamentary forces, which gave the declaration of emergency their stamp of approval twice, first through legislative ratification and then through renewal six months later. The seeds of the subsequent dissolution of parliament were sown with these two acts of surrender to the palace.

This paved the way for the militarisation of the state to match the militarisation of society by the Maoists. To achieve this, the last vestiges of civil government had to be removed and the first move in this direction was the dissolution of parliament in May 2002 by the ever pliant Deuba in order to re-impose emergency in the face of stiff opposition from the non-royalist political forces, who were now convinced that the re-imposition was a ploy to strengthen the palace and the military. The dissolution of parliament for the purpose of renewing the emergency was a contradiction in terms, because at the moment of dissolution both the rationale and the instrument for the re-imposition of emergency also ceased to exist, since the takeover of the polity by the anti-constitutional faction was practically complete. All that remained to be done was to remove all elected local bodies (in villages and districts) and this happened a month later. The foundations of state-led militarisation had been laid with these two climactic acts, dissolution of parliament and local bodies. The Deuba government, in effect, represented a transitional regime, facilitating the replacement of a parliamentary government by a palace government.

At this stage in the proceedings, with the gun dominating the countryside, it was quite clear that the climate was not suitable for seeking a fresh political mandate on a nation-wide scale. The promise of elections was no more than a fig leaf to destroy what was left of civil government after Deuba's leadership. The final blow was delivered on 4 October, when the now politically redundant prime minister, having fulfilled his role of handing over the polity to the palace, was removed by the king on grounds of incompetence.

With the total elimination of parliamentary forces from any reckoning on the ground, and a royal surrogate in the saddle, the situation was ripe for rightist forces to launch an all-out militarisation of the nation in the name of suppressing the insurgency. Predictably, the incumbent Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa announced, recently, the introduction of a unified command, which subordinates civilian and political decisions at all levels to the military command. A unified command had been introduced earlier too, during Deuba's tenure, but that was of a qualitatively different order, entailing a mechanism for coordination between the army and the police in counter-insurgency operations. The present mechanism is just a more dignified name for military rule.

The unified command signifies the seal of approval and governmental authority to militarisation that has now become country-wide in scope. Its effects are comprehensive. The role of parliamentary forces and statutory bodies has been severely restricted while the operation of constitutional rights has been curtailed. The abrogation of freedoms has reached such absurd levels that the police and army are prohibiting the sale of progressive books and literature. More ominously, even in Kathmandu, where Maoist activity has been low-key, people are being killed on suspicion without verification of their antecedents, and houses are being raided without judicial warrants. In the countryside matters are even grimmer, with encounter killings becoming routine. The army officers have achieved such a level of control over the polity that they nonchalantly disregard judicial orders to present their detenus in court.

> Koirala's successor was Sher Bahadur Deuba, who, in order to retain power, was more than willing to appease both the palace and army.

Managing civil obedience

With the rise of the military in the affairs of the nation, there has been a proportionate neglect of state institutions that fall within parliamentary jurisdiction. The election commission is, for all practical purposes, defunct as it not only has no chief election commissioner; it has no members at all. The Public Service Commission is similarly devoid of commissioners. Procedurally, the present constitution provides no way out of this institutional paralysis. Theoretically, the king has the nominal right to make appointments to all constitutional bodies. But this right can be exercised only on the recommendation of the prime minister in his capacity as Chairman of the Constitutional Council. This body has five members, namely, the prime minister, the chief justice, the speaker of the House of Representatives, the chairman of the Upper House, and the leader of the opposition in the House of Representatives. Since May 2002 there has been no House of Representatives, therefore the posts of the speaker and leader of the opposition do not exist. Meanwhile, the term of office of the chairman of the Upper House also expired in June. Three out of the five mandatory offices are vacant and two of them cannot be filled without a general election. King Gyanendra has also been avoiding appointments to several vacant constitutional offices despite the necessary recommendations by the full council.

But it is not just vacancy of office that creates problems. Even where institutions have their full complement of officials, the absence of a parliament hinders proper functioning. Bodies like the Department of Auditor General, the Commission for the Investigation of

Abuse of Authority, the Nepal Human Rights Commission, the Public Service Commission, the Office of the Attorney General and other constitutional bodies directly accountable and responsible to the House of Representatives have no parent body to report to.

With the Constitution having been given a de facto burial, the governance of the nation is currently being conducted through ordinances signed by King Gyanendra. In the absence of any accountability, royal whims seem to take precedence over national concerns. Because the state is ruled by the *hukumi shasan* (direct rule) of the king, the institution most symmetrically aligned to the interests of the palace—the Royal Nepal Army—has placed itself beyond law and legality, and its adventurism reflects the excitement of an institution that has suddenly discovered power after long being in the shadows. Since the collapse of the second ceasefire in August this year, the army and the Maoists have, between them, been killing, on average, as many as 17 people per day. While not much may be expected of rebels who declare themselves to be unbound by law and see violence as a means to a political end, the impunity with which the army is conducting itself takes it far beyond the pale of the law.

Economic incompetence

The civil government of Deuba was dismissed by King Gyanendra for being 'incompetent'. More than a year has passed since the country has been taken over by royalists. What has been their performance in the department of performance? The death toll in the conflict has mounted dramatically and there is no end in sight. The consequences for the economy have been severe. Government spending on development projects has fallen drastically due to the diversion of funds to the military and inability to spend in the Maobaadi-controlled countryside. Further, due to political instability and deteriorating security, development, construction and investment have come to a standstill. In a country where the government is the largest investor in the infrastructure sector, there has been no fresh investments. This has adversely affected both the purchasing capacity and the overall employment climate, fuelling frustrations that do not bode well for the prospects of peace. National capital is gradually fleeing the country. All available economic indicators suggest a marked deterioration.

Overall, the government's revenue mobilising capacity has plunged to new depths and the deficit in the budget is being kept in some kind of control only by contracting debts. In other words, the burden of maintaining the security establishment at greatly expanded levels is being borne by pushing the country into a debt trap. The so-called counter-insurgency operations being directed by the king's government is being financed through external borrowings. This is the kind of "efficiency" that the country was awaiting after being delivered from the evils of civil government.

In 2002-03, direct investment in Nepal decreased by 50.4 percent over the previous year, and employment-related industries grew only by 0.09 percent. Leaving aside the question of how neo-liberal ideologues will explain away this uncomfortable fact, there is the even more serious problem of the political consequences in the countryside of this reversal. In this regard, the consumer price index does not bring any cheer either. The price of food and beverage has increased by 6.1 percent in 2002-03 as against an increase of 3.5 percent in the corresponding period of the previous year. But the price of rice and pulses has decreased. In other words, the peasantry of Nepal has to bear the burden of declining real incomes. On the other hand, the prices of all imported goods have increased. The price of government-controlled goods has seen an increase of over 11 percent. The price index is more than adequate to demonstrate the proof of rising misery. In such a grim economic climate, the only relief comes by way of financial remittances from Nepali labourers overseas, particularly in the Gulf and Malaysia, which has seen an increase of 28 percent over the previous year. But this repatriation of funds also highlights the Nepali tragedy. Today, caught between the ever-present Maobaadi threat and the military dragnet, able-bodied males have all fled, many of them to work in low-paying jobs in India and overseas. A reorientation of the country's fundamental economic activities to military expediency is underway.

Completing the circle

While the government has failed abysmally to arrest the declining trend in the economy, Maoist activity has been undermining the basis of livelihood in countryside. The rebels have been destroying small hydro-electric projects, post offices, irrigation projects, offices of the village development committees, telephone towers, forest offices, public health posts and every other kind of service delivery infrastructure. They have also been looting banks and cooperatives in the countryside, besides disrupting schools and other social sector institutions. The Maoist method of financing the "people's war" has subjected the rural economy to enormous stress. The public distribution system in many areas is non-functional since Maoist cadres and the RNA commandeer what remains of the supplies after government officials and contractors have taken their share of the spoils. In the case of the army, the seizing of public food stocks is also a counter-insurgency technique to prevent supplies from falling into Maoist hands. Whatever be the official logic, the net result is to push vulnerable families to the edge of starvation. Today, most of the mountainous and hill districts of the country are in the grip of acute food scarcity as essential commodities, including medicines, are diverted to facilitate the prosecution of a war that threatens to become permanent. Maoist extortions have increased and the financial demands being imposed on small and marginal

peasant families are often well beyond the carrying capacity of the household budget. All this, compounded by the violence and the government's failure to manage the economic downslide, has increased the compulsion on people to leave the country in search of the most menial of livelihoods.

By now, militarisation has left its stamp on practically every aspect of national life. Militarisation is not merely the increased presence of armed forces in the public sphere. It is the comprehensive reorientation of national energies and resources to the prosecution of war. On both sides of the conflict, it subordinates politics to the military purpose so that the institutional arena loses its civil character. Most importantly, organised violence is normalised and nationalised as the organisations of war reach all corners of the country and penetrate every level of social and economic activity. In Nepal today, even short-distance bus journeys take an inordinately long time as security checks hold up traffic along the highways. And the checks are so intrusive that little heed is paid even to the ordinary protocols that govern the public interaction between men and women. The militarisation of the country has gone so far that it now routinely invades the modesty of the village woman. What makes it worse for the ordinary citizen is that the primacy accorded to the military conflict has been at the expense of political activity, which for the last decade has been their only medium of articulating grievances. Political silence is the most perverse outcome of the militarisation, as the civil institutions are intimidated into submission.

Reinstating the democratic system

The extreme right and the adventurist left have commandeered the country, and in polarising the depoliticised polity between them they have circumscribed the revival of mass democratic politics. But in doing this they also share the common delusion that they have destroyed mass democratic politics. In the absence of any system of registering what people in society want, this is clearly a premature conclusion. Unfortunately, diplomatic missions and country offices of international institutions also partake of the same feast. In September, when the five-party democratic combine was preparing to launch a mass struggle against the palace to force it to restore the Constitution and the Parliament to its rightful status, there was a frantic bout of diplomatic activity as the ambassadors of India, the UK and the USA rushed about the capital to defuse what they considered to be a crisis. And the so-called crisis was eventually resolved in favour of the palace-military combine as pressure was brought to bear on the parties, by these three countries currently most active in the internal affairs of Nepal. In fact, the concerned ambassadors extended their assurance to the leaders of the agitation that they would impress upon the king the need to restore the parliamentary process. Of course, they omitted to mention a time frame for the restoration. Once again the parties which represent the political spectrum and are presumably the true representatives of the people again proved their naiveté and their inability to sustain political activity even for the purposes of self-preservation.

Both internal 'nationalist' forces and international 'democratic' forces have assumed a recalcitrant attitude to the restoration of the political process in Nepal. The reasons are obvious. The extreme right, including the institutions of international neo-liberalism, and the extreme left, both share a paranoid fear of mass democracy, and the current configuration is ideal for all anti-democratic forces to abide by a common commitment to keep parliamentary institutions defunct.

The belief shared by the palace, the Maoists and the more powerful members of the international community in Kathmandu, that parliamentary parties have become defunct, is simply a by-product of their current political expediency. The space for mass politics does exist. The problem is that since influential forces believe it does not exist, that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as they deploy their influence to ensure that it at least looks like it does not exist. This is one of the main difficulties facing the beleaguered parliamentary forces in the current phase of amplified militarism. Political parties face a very difficult situation today. Mass politics thrives on mass contact and if it is prevented from reaching out to its defining constituency by the reign of terror unleashed by militarised politics, the illusion will be perpetuated that no one needs mass politics any more. But the absence of mass politics currently does not signify the absence of the urgent need for mass politics. In the countryside, the acceleration of the war has revived faith in the political process because of the ways in which the military process bears down on society with such oppressive weight. Caught between two sides whose sole objective is not to lose a war that they are fighting in the belief that they will win it, the rural populace has nowhere to turn to but the political process to articulate their interests.

In such a situation, and despite the opposition of 'patriots' inside the country and 'democrats' outside the country, political parties can play a major role if they assess the balance of forces objectively, forge alliances on the basis of a common minimum understanding (just as the 'other side' has done), jointly cultivate the constituency for peace and parliamentary revival and organise a non-violent movement against the current and evolving autocracy. By doing so they will have responded to a genuine need that exists but is not allowed to be expressed. The sovereignty of the masses was at least nominally established in 1990. It was taken away in 2002-2003. To begin with, that nominal sovereignty can be restored through the same joint platform that secured it for the first time a decade ago. Once they have regained their native turf, the political parties can then resume their ideological and political rivalries in parliamentary ways.

Crisis beyond legality

Will constitutional amendment provide for the social and political needs of the Nepali people and polity? Or a new constitution? And by what procedure?

by ***Yash Ghai***

Nepal is caught in what most people assume to be a constitutional crisis. There are two aspects to this crisis which need to be kept distinct. The first, and the more transient, though it may turn out to be the more problematic, is the result of the dissolution of the House of Representatives and the failure to hold elections within six months of dissolution, as stipulated by the 1990 Constitution. Consequently, the country is presently, at best, operating under half or a quarter of a Constitution. Parliament does not exist and therefore the validity of government itself is questioned as ministers must be drawn from parliament, except for a specified short period that has already lapsed. Moreover there can be no parliamentary accountability of the cabinet. The present practice of accountability to the king has no constitutional legitimacy, nor any political legitimacy. Article 127 (which provides that the king may issue orders "necessary to remove difficulties in bringing the Constitution into force") is too fragile a reed to sustain the burden of the governance of the country and cannot act as life-support for the Constitution, in the context of the collapse of the entire parliamentary system that lies at heart of the 1990 document.

The present practice of accountability to the king has no constitutional legitimacy, nor any political legitimacy.

The second crisis is about the legitimacy of the Constitution itself. The conflict of the last decade, by effectively disabling the state from discharging its fundamental Constitutional obligations to individuals and communities, has rendered the Constitution meaningless. The roots of the Maoist rebellion lay in their dissatisfaction with the way the Constitution was framed, its orientation and how it has operated. But there are other groups as well which are troubled by the lack of constitutional recognition of national diversity or social justice, and which consider that the state has been monopolised by high caste and other privileged groups. While the Constitution has its supporters, there is now a general acknowledgement that it needs, at the least, to be revised, if not replaced.

It is not self-evident how the current Constitution can be resurrected—and without its resurrection there seems to be no obvious way to return to constitutional rule or to find means to tackle problems of reform and national reconciliation. So paradoxically, while the Constitution has some excellent provisions and with reform can serve as the vehicle for future political and social developments, it is clear that the procedure for its revival and reform has to come from outside its own framework. At heart, Nepal's problem is not constitutional but socio-political—the present Constitution contains the seeds of development to respond to present anxieties but they will not germinate without political nourishing. Nepal needs a process to draw up a consensus on its vision of the future and to affirm it in a national compact. Fortunately, that possibility lies within Nepal's grasp. There seems to be considerable consensus on what needs to be done and on the willingness to engage in a process for this purpose. What is lacking is agreement on the procedure to achieve this.

The reforms

The debate has, not surprisingly, centred on the ability of the 1990 Constitution to deal with social and political problems facing Nepal. The vision of the Constitution is sufficiently broad-ranging to encompass the aspirations of Nepal's different groups and communities. The difficulty lies in the technique. While a part of the political settlement that lies behind the abandonment of the Panchayat system and introduction of multiparty democracy was effected in the Constitution, some other components, like inclusiveness and social jus-

tice, were acknowledged but not incorporated in legal forms that lend themselves easily to implementation or enforcement. Constitutional reform now must ensure the complete implementation of the 1990 settlement and understandings explicit in the Constitution.

The claims and passions which now animate Nepali politics are themselves the result of the limited democratisation promoted by the 1990 Constitution. Democracy does stir things up. Those who advocate democracy must accept that its ideology and aspirations create new forms of consciousness, identity and empowerment whose inclusion is necessary to achieve fully the political and social benefits of democracy. The striking thing for an outsider is the similarity in analysis by the key protagonists of the problems facing Nepal and the reforms necessary to solve them. To take the matter forward it is necessary to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Constitution. The general assessment may well be that that while the Constitution has several good points, it needs important reforms in some key respects.

First the good points. The document acknowledges the supremacy of the people and proclaims the supremacy of the Constitution over laws (and presumably administrative policies and acts). It recognises the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the people (but not adequately the religious diversity). It has a reasonable chapter on fundamental rights with a special concern for its enforcement. The Directive Principles of State Policy establish important social and economic goals. It seeks to insulate some critical state powers and functions from political control or influence by vesting them in independent commissions, authorities and offices, such as conduct of elections, appointments to the judiciary, and appointments to and the management of the public service. An independent court system has the powers of judicial review and the authority to maintain the rule of law. A constitutional council exists to ensure independent appointments to sensitive state posts such as that of the chief justice and auditor-general. The Constitution sets up an independent authority to investigate abuse of office, including corruption, with powers of prosecution. Recognising that democracy is not possible without national and democratically run political parties, it provides for the regulation of political parties.

The 1990 Constitution was principally concerned with balancing the interests of the monarchy with those of the political parties. Hence the interests to be balanced were limited

Now to the weaknesses. An overriding goal of the Constitution, besides the celebration of diversity, is national unity and the political integration—an objective which is to be achieved by "promoting healthy and cordial social relations amongst the various religious groups, castes and classes, communities and linguistic groups..." (Article 26.2). The approach of "cordial social relations", accompanied by some remedial action to alleviate discrimination against the disadvantaged, contrasts with a constitutional approach based on rights and entitlements. Some members of the Constitutional Recommendation Commission considered that too explicit a recognition of minorities would perpetuate differences and might even lead to the break-up of the country (while others were of the view that some recognition was essential to ward off criticism that the commission had ignored minorities). Indeed here we have a major dilemma regarding the organisation of the state in multi-ethnic societies. The answer lies perhaps in a middle position, in which people's multiple identities are recognised for some purposes, but within the overarching citizenship of the country.

Thus, while diversity and social justice are presented as key goals, they are insufficiently accommodated in the Constitution. The foremost reform must aim towards inclusiveness—bringing into state and power structures communities that have hitherto been excluded or marginalised. A review of the electoral system is necessary to achieve this, although more vigorous recruitment by political parties and the promotion of candidates from the marginalised communities are also necessary. The issue of the design of the state cannot be avoided. There is need for further democratisation and participation through regional decentralisation of state power to enhance democracy, development and regional equity. Parliamentary government, on which there appears to be very wide consensus, should be strengthened through the clarification of relations between the king, the government and the legislature (and perhaps by removing immunity for acts done by the monarch in the exercise of his public functions - Articles 32 and 56.1 - and restricting some of his rule-making powers, eg, Articles 39, 40.

While these reforms may satisfy supporters of constitutional monarchy (who are numerous), they may be resisted by two groups on the opposite ends of the spectrum—the royalists who may consider that they undermine the institution of the monarchy and Maoists, who have been opposed to the very notion of monarchy and want a republic. The parliamentary system, on which there seems to be universal consensus, also needs 'stabilisers' to ensure stability and effectiveness of government (lacking in some measure so far). This might perhaps be achieved firstly by adopting the German method of the "constructive vote of no confidence"—which requires the motion of no confidence to nominate the successor prime minister—and secondly by restricting, if it is possible, the fragmenting of political parties. The status and role of armed and defence forces

should be defined with greater clarity, emphasising the commitment to the security of individuals and communities and the principle of civilian control. Another imperative is social justice, particularly the removal of the severe economic discrimination against dalits and indigenous communities and affirmative action for a transitional period. The greater participation and integration of women, who do not enjoy full equality with men under the Constitution, in the political and economic spheres brings together many of these objectives—inclusiveness, social justice and participation—and must be a priority for reform.

All this may seem to constitute a new and radical agenda. But the truth is that this agenda is drawn from the Constitution itself. The Constitution recognises ethnic and linguistic diversity but only partially provides for its incorporation (and, in disregard of religious diversity, makes the state 'Hindu'). The Constitution upholds the equality of all citizens and prohibits discrimination on the basis of the various factors that constitute the diversity of Nepal. Every community is guaranteed the right to conserve and promote its language, script, culture and religion (Articles 18 and 19). The Constitution commits the state to "promote the conditions of welfare on the basis of the principles of open society by establishing a just system in all aspects of the national life, including social, economic and political, while at the same time, protecting the life, property and liberty of the general public" (Article 25.1).

The state is committed to eliminating "all types of economic and social inequalities which is possible through the establishment of harmony amongst the various castes, tribes, religions, languages, colour and communities" (Article 25.3), and to pursuing affirmative action (Article 26.11). Another Constitutional commitment, to promote democracy, is "the maximum participation of the people in the governance of the country through the medium of decentralisation of administration" (Article 25.4). The Constitution places special emphasis on gender equity. Not only is the maximisation of opportunities for women in the "task of national development"a state policy (Article 26.7), but a specific method—albeit in the event relatively ineffective—is prescribed for the political representation of women: at least 5 per cent of the candidates of any party for elections to the House of Representatives must be women (Article 114).

The proposed provisions would make the Constitution not merely a political instrument to allocate power among state institutions, but also the social charter that so many people want it to be, responding to their sense of identity and the quest for justice. According to the chair of the Constitution Recommendations Commission of 1990, 95 percent of the suggestions to the commission related to culture, language and religion. Perhaps these were not seen as relevant to the Constitution then; certainly they are not proportionately reflected in it. These social dimensions provide a wonderful vision of Nepal: the richness of many traditions and cultures, the recognition of the several identities its citizens carry, yet its diverse communities united in their common allegiance and loyalty to Nepal, and all committed to establish a democratic, open and just society. It seems that there is more or less a national consensus on this vision. The challenge of reform is to turn it into reality.

The procedure

If outsiders are struck by the broad consensus on reforms that are required, they are equally struck (and surprised) by the lack of a consensus on the procedure for reform, including the method of return to constitutional rule. On the former, differences revolve around two principal options. The first (which has the support of the king, the present government and most political parties) is to secure reforms through amendments to the present Constitution using the amendment procedure provided in Article 116. The other view (held particularly by the Maoists and minorities) is that reforms should take place through a constituent assembly. The difference on procedure can become a real stumbling block to reform. So what hangs on the difference?

What hangs on the difference are the scope of change and the dynamics of the procedure. It may be possible, at a technical level, to improve the Constitution sufficiently to accommodate the concerns of most groups. But the procedure has its own dynamics, and may legally or practically restrict the scope of change, privilege some groups at the expense of others, and affect people's consciousness of the new dispensation. This involves the scope of change. The power of parliament to amend the Constitution is restricted by Article 116.1, which states that an amendment bill "must not be designed to frustrate the spirit of the Preamble of this Constitution". This formulation has resonances with the judicially developed doctrine of "basic features" of the Constitution which the Indian Supreme Court has used to control the amendment powers of the Indian parliament. Presumably the Nepali courts would have the authority to examine whether an amendment violates this restriction.

What may be said to constitute the "spirit of the Preamble"? From the phraseology of the Preamble, the following principles could be identified as the basis of the Constitution: (a) people as the source of sovereignty; (b) guarantees of basic human rights to every citizen; (c) social, political and economic justice for the people; (d) adult franchise; (e) parliamentary system of government; (f) multi-party democracy; (g) constitutional monarchy; (h) an independent and competent system of justice; and (i) fraternity and the bond of unity on the basis of liberty and equality. Some of these principles are not easy to demarcate, but there was some common understanding of them in the struggle for reform in 1990.

For the present purposes it will suffice to say that looking at the present consensus on reform described

above, the only problematic area is constitutional monarchy, which precludes the republican option favoured by the Maoists. Their present position may be less rigid now and a truly constitutional monarchy of the kind implied in the preceding discussion may be acceptable to them. But of course, Article 116.1 does preclude some kinds of change. There also remains the difficult question of what meaning might be ascribed to "amendment". Indian courts (and some academic authorities) have taken the position that "amendment" cannot cover wholesale changes to the Constitution (although some countries, such as Guyana and Fiji, have relied on "amendment" to introduce entirely new constitutions). If the narrower view of "amendment" were adopted, this would impose a restriction on changes (though perhaps only the principle of constitutional monarchy is potentially a sticking point).

The constituent assembly approach would not start with any restriction of this kind. It would, moreover, start with a clean slate. This is its attraction to its supporters, and the flaw to its opponents. Those who favour the 1990 political settlement with the necessary adjustments outlined above are afraid that a constituent assembly may open a Pandora's Box and the fundamentals of that settlement may be thrown out. The constituent assembly procedure is, for them, too open ended and too prone to be hijacked, and they prefer the parliamentary route of reform through amendment. There may well be anxieties about popularising politics, which could result from a broad participatory process. On the other hand, those who advocate a constituent assembly fear that the elites who dominate parliament and fashioned the 1990 settlement as reflected in the Constitution may not adopt the necessary reforms. Once the framework of Article 116 is accepted, there would be no way to force change on parliament. It is therefore useful to look at the dynamics of the two approaches.

The parliamentary procedure would put a premium on a consensus among political parties (which for the most part they seem to have developed). It is probable that political issues would prevail over the social and economic ones. There may also be a propensity to retain power at the centre. The king would have considerable leverage over the process and outcome, as he is given a (limited) veto. He can refuse to assent to the amendments and force the two houses of parliament to reconsider them. Only if they can send the same or another bill to the king, supported in a fresh vote again by a majority of at least two-thirds of the members, would he be compelled to assent.

The constituent assembly would give a greater direct voice to other organised groups as well. It would be clearly based on people's sovereignty and more likely to educate the people in the niceties of constitution engineering and thus more likely to secure legitimacy. But the process could take a longer time and there is some risk that with too many claimants staking their demands, and the dominant forces somewhat marginalised in the assembly, those forces would resist a new Constitution, inside or outside the assembly, perhaps successfully. On the other hand, the constituent assembly may have a greater capacity to fashion a genuinely national consensus if all key interests are represented, putting a closure on constitutional controversies.

There is of course no one method that a constituent assembly has to follow and the opportunities and threats vary with the precise method used. For example, the degree of popular participation depends on how the draft constitution is prepared. If it is prepared by a committee of the assembly (as happened in India), people's participation may not be much greater than in a parliamentary process. It is also possible to have an independent and expert commission with the task of preparing a draft for the constituent assembly, after full consultation with the people.

> Perhaps the easiest way to break the logjam may be for the king to convene a roundtable which will take the process at least to the point where a constitutional commission is set up.

The constitutional recommendation commission seems to be a well-tested device in Nepal and it is likely that its use would bridge, at least to some extent, the differences between the two approaches. Such a commission, provided it was sufficiently reflective of national diversity, could provide the forum for public participation and promote a nation-wide debate on the ills of and cures for the constitutional order. Its report and recommendations must reflect the recommendations of the public. In this way, the demands that the review process must engage the people and provide the basis for national reconciliation can be met short of a constituent assembly.

The prospects of the process would depend on the degree of prior agreement on the objectives of review and the values and principles that must inform the new or amended constitution. Indeed a substantial degree of agreement should be the pre-condition for the start of the process. Fortunately, although there may not be total consensus, it seems that there is enough to prevent this from being a major problem. The differences that remain can be negotiated during the review process when an environment of understanding, goodwill and compromise will have developed.

If the device of prior agreement on the pre-conditions and the appointment of a constitutional commission can bridge the differences between the parliamen-

tary and constitutient assembly routes, then does it matter which approach is adopted? Perhaps it does. A constituent assembly has the great merit that it can be organised to truly reflect the full diversity of the nation. Groups which are not adequately represented in parliament—and they include the Maoists—need to be present as participants at the moment of the birth of the new constitutional order. The 1990 Constitution was principally concerned with balancing the interests of monarchy with those of the political parties, and so the interests to balance were limited. Now the larger agenda has raised a multiplicity of issues which require wider participation to balance competing interests. The character of a constitution as a compact among its people and communities is marked more appropriately through negotiations and in a constituent assembly than in the less inclusive forum of parliament. And there is of course the additional difficulty that there is no parliament now to which the nation can turn.

Doctrine of necessity

First, all the key interests groups must come together. A pre-condition for such a meeting is the cessation of violence. An effective ceasefire will open several options. Therefore the first priority is a truce and an undertaking by all interest groups to pursue a settlement only by peaceful and, if necessary, sustained negotiations. They must agree to negotiate in good faith and be prepared to make concessions. The groups must also undertake to respect the human rights of all individuals and communities. Negotiations cannot take place in an atmosphere of violence or the threat of violence.

Even with a truce, the way forward is contested. The lack of a parliament and with no easy way to convene another, the breakdown in the talks between the government and the Maoists, the declining legitimacy of the king, and the refusal of political parties to engage in constitutional talks without the recall of parliament make a meeting exceedingly difficult. But it is not impossible. There are various options to emerge from the present predicament. The king could convene a meeting of all the groups to discuss the way forward. If the invitation is sent to a sufficiently wide spectrum of organisations representing social and political diversity, a recalcitrant group will find it hard to stay out. This meeting could be the first of a series of roundtables until agreement is reached on all aspects of the review process. (The roundtable could also agree on the running of the government in the interim, as the South Africans did pending a final constitutional settlement). Another possibility is the restoration of the parliament and reliance on the procedures of the Constitution to ratify agreements towards reform.

Perhaps the easiest way to break the logjam may be for the king to convene a roundtable which will take the process at least to the point where a constitutional commission is set up, which means that decisions on the goals and scope of reform and subsequent procedures have been agreed on. A constituent assembly may be the best mechanism for the examination and adoption of the Constitution draft—even if violence continues. The assembly could be composed of the members of the dissolved parliament, and representatives of Maoists, women, dalits, minorities and other social and economic groups nominated or elected by their own organisations. It would be highly desirable in that case that the Constitution is adopted before the next general elections, so that the next general elections can bring the Constitution into effect. Otherwise the implementation of the Constitution could be delayed by several years as the new parliament runs its course.

Some way should be found to give legal effect to the agreement of the roundtable. People will need assurance not only that all parties are committed to it but also that no one will be able to disregard, violate or scuttle it. One way to do this would be for the king to issue a legislative instrument containing the agreement. Better still, parliament might be reconvened for the express, and sole, purpose of entrenching the agreement in the Constitution (and authorising resources for its implementation) which would give a high degree of guarantee.

> The longer the impasse and the governance of the country through arrangements incompatible with the Constitution, the greater is the threat to the very notion of constitutionalism and rule of law.

Is such a procedure legally possible? Yes, most probably. If the roundtable is able to agree on the procedure and if the procedure and objectives of review are close to the spirit of the present Constitution, either of the above measures will carry the force of law under the doctrine of necessity which recognises deviations from the strictly legal rules and procedures if that is the only way to preserve the integrity of the state, or ensure order and stability so that the security of the people is safeguarded. It is obvious that in the present circumstances, the strict constitutional and legal procedures cannot be followed. Steps must therefore be taken to return to constitutional rule as speedily as possible. These steps must involve the Maoists and probably other non-parliamentary groups as well to ensure that the agreement is adhered to. No other steps seem as likely to facilitate the return to constitutionality. The Supreme Court in all probability will endorse the agreement under the doctrine of necessity. To strengthen the legal basis of whichever of the two procedures is followed, the Supreme Court might be requested to give an advisory opinion on this

matter after the steps proposed here have been taken.

While the nation waits for talks about talks, it is unnecessary that the debate on reform be suspended. The debate should be initiated now by those interested in reform. Political parties, civil society, academics, etc, can promote the debate, prepare materials for civic education on constitutional issues, including an analysis of the present Constitution, and distribute papers on options for reform. In this way, when the roundtable meets, its members will be well briefed and so will the public when the Constitution Commission begins to collect public views. Civil society can in the meanwhile, building a peace movement, continue its pressure on key interests groups to begin negotiations.

Trudging the possible

Nepal needs desperately to get out of its political immobilisation. Yet this is a good moment to seize the opportunity for a durable political settlement. People are weary of the war and hunger for peace and normality in their lives. The major interest groups are willing to enter into negotiations. There is sufficient consensus on reforms and the need to engage people in the review process so that a deal can be struck quickly. An early settlement of the political crisis will enable Nepal to resume social development and economic growth, and to ensure physical and psychological security to the people.

There are very considerable dangers in the continuance of the political and constitutional impasse. The longer the impasse and the governance of the country through arrangements incompatible with the Constitution, the greater is the threat to the very notion of constitutionalism and rule of law, so hard fought for. With every day that passes, the culture of violence strikes deeper roots. Numerous lives are lost and communities destroyed needlessly as the impasse continues. The role and influence of the army will increase and its concerns and demands will constitute another set of issues that will need to be negotiated, making a political settlement that much harder. Polarisation within society will increase. It is almost certain, given the dynamics of multi-ethnic societies, that minorities and other marginalised communities will lose patience and escalate their demands and will perhaps resort to violence of their own. Society will become more militarised. The economy will continue to decline, bringing further suffering and despair to the people. The continuing impasse and the lack of energy or willingness to break out of it will diminish the ability of the king to fashion and supervise consensus building. History and the people of Nepal will then judge their leaders very harshly.

On the Road with the FARC

ON A foggy morning in mid-February, a single-engine Cessna Caravan 208 carrying four US military contractors and one Colombian army pilot was flying over the southern jungles of Colombia. The contractors were on a reconnaissance mission — searching out coca fields and the secret camps of the hemisphere's largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, better known as the FARC.

As jobs went, this seemingly dangerous mission was fairly routine for these experienced contractors. The pilot would climb through the thick cloud cover, and the contractors would use high-powered aerial cameras to photograph drug-producing areas allegedly under the control of the rebels. The US and Colombian authorities would use this recon to fumigate the guerrillas' lifeline, the coca crops, and perhaps stage some military assault on the group. The United States also uses infrared technology on the airplanes to locate insurgent command posts.

Somewhere in this flight, however, something went terribly wrong, and the Colombian pilot had to crash-land into the side of a mountain. By the time the authorities arrived at the site, they found the plane riddled with rounds from an M-60 machine gun, with all five of the men missing. Two of them, one American and the other Colombian, were later found dead. They'd been shot in the head and the chest. Three others had vanished.

Since that day, the United States has sent in more than 100 Special Forces soldiers, and the total number of US personnel in Colombia has briefly climbed above 400 for the first time since people started keeping tabs. But rescue efforts have faltered. In late March, another US recon plane smashed into the side of a mountain just miles from where the first went down. The second crash killed the three 'US contractors aboard.

The sudden loss of life has turned a boondoggle into a quagmire. The United States has sent more than USD 2 billion to Colombia in the last four years, most of it in the form of military hardware, intelligence equipment, and training. But during that time period, they've lost several airplanes and close to thirty helicopters. What's more, the aid has had little real impact on the rebels, the primary target of this military assistance.

The man thought to have captured the three US contractors resembles an elf. He has a little round head, short legs, and a skull-hugging haircut. He likes to wear a camouflage baseball hat, and he gives orders in a rubbery, monotone voice. His soldiers look a lot like he does: sturdy peasant farmers who have filtered into the ranks of the FARC by the thousands, especially in the last few years. The rebel group's membership has climbed to close to 20,000 troops. When I last saw him, Jose Benito Cabrera, better known as "Fabian Ramirez", walked around his jungle camp with the slow, methodical pace of a general. He was obviously not in a hurry. Nor was his "movement", the name he and the rest of the guerrillas like to use for the FARC. He was happy, even jovial during those days I spent with him.

The United States has sent more than USD 2 billion to Colombia in the last four years, most of it in the form of military hardware, intelligence equipment, and training.

It was late February 2002. Fabian had recently been promoted to the Estado Mayor, the twenty-seven-member command structure of the guerrillas. And his troops had just played a major role in breaking up a three-year-long peace process the FARC had been carrying out with the government. A week earlier, a special unit under Fabian's command had hijacked a commercial airplane, forced it to land on a major highway, , kidnapped one of the passengers (a prominent senator), then streaked into a 16,000-square-mile area the government had handed over to the guerrillas to hold the peace talks. The audacious act had been carried out with James Bond-like precision: In order for the plane to land safely, guerrillas on the ground had cut some of the trees on the side of the road.

One day later, in a national address to the nation, Colombia's President Andres Pastrana called off the peace process. The president said the FARC was using the 16,000-square-mile area to stockpile weapons, hold kidnap victims, run guns-for-drugs deals, and launch attacks on neighbouring villages. And he was right. Following his speech, the president ordered bombing raids and sent thousands of troops to the area amidst great fanfare and press coverage.

But Fabian's soldiers seemed as if they'd been preparing for this for several years. Within hours after the triumphant return of Colombia's military, Fabian's sizable group of urban and rural militias had successfully

shut down electricity, water, and transportation in the area. The province was paralyzed for weeks, and the military commander in charge of the region resigned in disgust.

As if to put an exclamation point on his operation, Fabian's troops had kidnapped Ingrid Betancourt as she drove through the war-torn area under Fabian's control. Betancourt was at the time a presidential candidate who'd fought for years for some of the same things that Fabian had declared he would die for when he'd joined the FARC as a teenager. For Fabian, Betancourt's politics of anti-corruption and redistribution of wealth didn't matter, only her membership in the status quo. Betancourt's father had been a lifetime diplomat, and she had spent many of her formative years in France. "She's in good spirits," he told me as we toured his steamy jungle camp located under the cover of fifty-foot-high foliage. "She's drafting a law of the 'swapables' ".

The "swapables" are those the FARC hopes to exchange for its rebels being held in Colombian jails. It's part of a larger game the guerrillas have been playing with the government for a long time. Prisoner exchange means more than swapping prisoners; it means recognition as a state — something the rebels have been seeking for nearly forty years. There are an estimated 3,000 guerrillas in Colombian jails. There are a dozen politicians and well over 100 policemen and soldiers in FARC prisons. With the downing of the US plane, three US contractors have joined the ranks of the "swapables."

The possibility of a swap increased after a Colombian journalist interviewed on video both Betancourt and the three US captives. The proof of life put the delicate issue on the table again. For the FARC, it's poetic justice. For the United States, it's a nightmare that seems only to get worse with time. The United States has been attacking the FARC from the very beginning. In 1964, it assisted a Colombian military offensive against 42 communist rebels and a smattering of civilians in an area about 140 miles southwest of the country's capital, Bogotá. The communists had established a stronghold in five mountainside municipalities. It was a harmless political experiment during a volatile time. The communists and their rural leaders-men like the legendary Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda-were asking for a few hundred chickens and some livestock in return for the promise of peace. But at the time, the country wasn't ready for communists in the countryside, and the military wasn't ready to give anyone peace. Colombia was still reeling from twenty years of political bloodshed. Thousands had been killed during what Colombians simply refer to as La Violencia. And Colombian politicians and the military were worried about replicas of Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara emerging on their own soil. When a conservative senator labelled the communist enclaves "independent republics", the military got its wish.

Colombian pilots, manning US fighter planes, dropped napalm, and more than 10,000 Colombian troops ripped through the area. The communists fled, and the Colombian government declared victory. But while the Colombian elite had succeeded in temporarily ridding the country of some Che-wannabes, what they got was much worse: a bunch of stubborn peasant farmers with guns. Marulanda and his troops regrouped farther south, and the communists in the cities hailed their resilient comrades. Two years later, at the behest of the Communist Party, Marulanda formed the FARC. Colombia's modern-day war had begun, bur it would be a long time before the rebels even registered on the country's radar again.

Free-for-all: a paramilitary group in action.

During the next 15 years, the FARC played a minor role in the larger communist strategy. While the Communist Party ran unions, student movements, and peasant leagues in the cities, the rebel group formed part of the rear guard in the rural areas and spent most of its time running from the army. Meanwhile, the FARC's guerrilla rivals -- the April 19 Movement (M-19), the Popular. Liberation Army (EPL), and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—were growing rapidly, especially in the cities. Jealousy turned to anger, and soon a conflict arose between the Communist Party, which was supposed to be making the decisions, and FARC leaders. The guerrillas wanted to be in the cities; the communists wanted to restrict them to the countryside. By the late 1970s, the FARC began to assert its independence.

The rebels started their rise to prominence by making themselves financially autonomous. They did this by kidnapping for ransom and collecting taxes from illegal drug traffickers and producers. These two new financial schemes brought in huge revenues as well as unforeseen problems. Kidnapping eventually extended

to the middle class professionals and small shop owners. Soon this middle class turned against the FARC and began supporting the paramilitary groups emerging in the war-torn zones. Drug trafficking led to corruption. Over time, money threatened to replace politics as the guerrillas' reason for being. It's an internal battle that continues to this day. But in the beginning, the new resources bolstered the confidence of the guerrilla leaders, and they became steadily more ambitious. In a 1982 national conference, the FARC planned an eight-year strategy to take over the country. Guerrilla commanders called for the creation of an army of 30,000 troops and added the words "Army of the People", or EE to their name. They said they would take to the offensive and slowly surround the country's major cities. To advance this strategy, the FARC launched a peace process with the Colombian government during which it created a political party of its own. The rebels called the party the Patriotic Union, or UP.

When Fabian joined, rebels like Mono Jojoy were in the shadows, and the FARC was at the height of its political power.

Fabian Ramirez joined the FARC in the early 1980s, the time when the guerrillas were negotiating peace with the government and creating the UP; in the years prior, he'd grown steadily more radical. It's easy to see why. He went to a Jesuit school in a rural village of the southern province of Caqueta, not too far from where the US plane would crash many years later. Caqueta was Colombia's Wild West. Aside from a few elected officials, the government had little presence in the area. And while the church may have run the schools, leftist guerrillas and drug traffickers ran the villages. The drug traffickers employed people; the FARC was the law. Most of the kids went one way or the other, one of Fabian's former classmates remembered. "I became a drug trafficker", he nonchalantly told me, "Fabian, well, he joined the FARC".

The stout and energetic Fabian became part of the XIV Front. The guerrillas are split into fronts or columns. These fronts are part of six regional "blocs" that answer to what's known as the "Secretariat", or leadership council. Since even before Fabian's time, the XIV Front has been one of the FARC's biggest money-makers. Under the command of a pudgy-faced, rotund commander known as Mono Jojoy, the XIV institutionalized the drug tax, or the gramaje, as it's known. It quickly became the single most important source of income for the guerrillas, and the XIV became one of the most influential fronts. For his part, Mono Jojoy would rise quickly through the ranks and soon symbolize everything that's wrong with the FARC.

But when Fabian joined, rebels like Mono Jojoy were in the shadows, and the FARC was at the height of its political power. With the cease-fire the FARC had brokered with the government, the guerrillas were organizing the UP in the open. In rural townships and villages all over the country, guerrilla soldiers spread their message. In cities, rebel politicians talked on the radio and television and gave interviews for the newspapers. In its first election in 1986, the UP elected 24 provincial deputies and 275 municipal council representatives. The party also elected three senators and four congressional representatives. The winners included two active guerrillas, though not everyone in the UP or even every candidate of the UP was a member of FARC. In fact, the vast majority of its members were simply inspired leftists who thought the UP represented a political alternative and a means toward peaceful reconciliation. In the first presidential elections two months later, the UP garnered nearly four percent of the vote, more than any leftist party in the history of Colombia.

While the FARC talked peace and pushed politics in public, behind the scenes rebel leaders were preparing for more war. Despite their electoral showing and their rising support amongst non-rebels, the guerrillas did not give up their arms and continued with the eight-year plan to build an army and surround the cities. UP offices were often converted into recruiting centres and politicking guerrilla soldiers frequently brought back more than votes. In the period of the UP's greatest popularity, the FARC doubled in size. Some UP members abandoned the party because of this dangerous strategy. But many stayed with the UP. It would cost some their lives — rightwing paramilitaries working closely with the Colombian military would not tolerate the gains of the UP. In a wholesale political slaughter, they wiped out an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 party activists. This ended the FARC's political experiment. And as peace talks fell apart in 1987, it was clear the guerrillas were gearing up for one thing: a prolonged war.

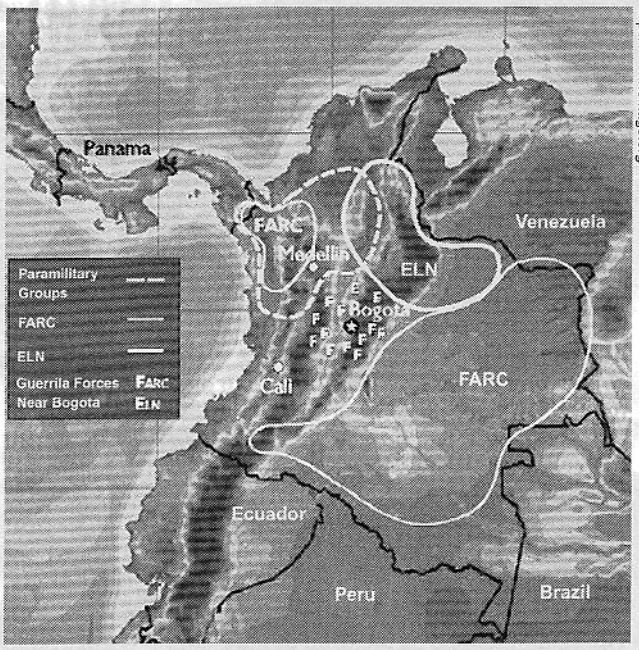
Despite its Marxist-Leninist roots, the FARC is more Maoist than anything else. It's primarily rural in character. The guerrillas, even their leaders, come from peasant backgrounds. Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda came from a coffee-growing family, and he was a small shop owner before sectarian violence ripped across the country and carried him with it. "I started to look for a solution," he once said of the beginnings of La Violencia. "Already you heard people saying, 'Who do we get? Who will join us? Guns? Where are the guns, and how do we get them? If we stay quiet, they're going to kill us all', we couldn't take any more punishment". More than 200,000 people died during La Violencia, most at the

hands of the state and its proxies. The period shaped Marulanda's violent response to the government. He has spent the better part of the past five decades dodging the army and seeking revenge. His enemies have tried unsuccessfully to stop him. He's been declared dead on more than a dozen occasions. The declarations have only enhanced his mystique. "He's incredibly serene, but at the same time a powerful force", one person who met him told me. "Make no mistake, he's a warrior". Through five decades of fighting, Marulanda has become the undisputed symbol of the FARC. With little flash, he has silently created the largest rebel army in the hemisphere; most of his troops emulate his sturdy lead-by-example tradition. Words are spare. Charisma is at a premium. And speeches are less important than actions.

Fabian Ramirez is made in this mould. Indeed, he is said to be one of Marulanda's concentidos, or favourites. He talks in a slow, methodical tone. He doesn't rush to respond to criticisms and is rarely taken off guard by questions. When I told him that the army was saying it had the rebels on the run, he laughed, "We want them to come out to the countryside, not just on television", he said. "That way, they can find the guerrillas, and we can talk about it". The army's bombing campaign had been going on for a week when we met. Yet Fabian was talking to me in a camp that had obviously been there much longer. The guerrillas all slept on wooden beds they'd constructed. Beneath several dark green canopies, they'd set up a kitchen, a dining hall, and a television room where they watched the news and cartoons beaming over a Direct TV satellite perched on the side of a tree. Every morning, the young rebels would wake and pack their homemade backpacks. They travelled light. Frivolity was a luxury they couldn't afford, although some of the girls still managed to stuff glittery makeup bags into their packs, and some of the boys traded cassette tapes of the popular Mexican ranchera. The early morning started with a light workout, a jog and some callisthenics. They then had breakfast of a tamale and hot cocoa followed by political instruction. This consisted of watching the news over the satellite television and then commenting on it. While I was there, Fabian's unit dominated the news. Every time Fabian was mentioned, they exchanged wry smiles. The rest of the day was spent doing chores, cleaning weapons, or just hanging out. Being a guerrilla is about patience, and patience may be the FARC's greatest weapon.

"War isn't just about shooting a gun", Fabian told me as we sat on some tree stumps on the edge of the camp. "War is a fight against hunger and a struggle so that you don't die. War is a fight so that you have clothes. War is a fight to have a roof and to not get rained on. War is a fight to be able to read and not be illiterate. What I mean is that war is a fight so that you don't die, and that's why you fight against all temptation so that this war doesn't enter your own heart".

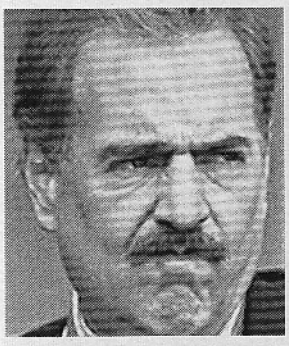
Colombians are enduring an increasingly emotional



http://www.heritage.org/

war. These days, rebels don't run from the army when they destroy entire villages. Last year, the FARC hurled a homemade bomb at their enemies which accidentally hit a church where people were taking cover. 119 people were killed, including at least 48 children. For their part, the army and its proxies, the rightwing paramilitaries, have been even more brutal. While they've begun to shy away from committing wholesale massacres of suspected guerrilla supporters, the paramilitaries still assassinate people by the hundreds. Amnesty International said that 172 unionists had been killed in Colombia in 2002, most at the hands of the paramilitaries. Human Rights Watch noted that "presumed" rightwing groups assassinated 16 human rights workers last year. The paramilitaries also continue to work closely with the military, especially on their incursions into, enemy territory where they routinely pull people from their homes, their offices, and their watering holes to dispose of them. Bodies often disappear, as do the government investigations that follow. In all, about 4,000 people die per year because of political violence. This is a dirty war all around, which makes it virtually impossible to bring the sides together, much less talk about peace.

In this type of conflict, FARC commanders like Fabian shine. In the last few years, he has become one of the most important FARC commanders in Colombia. He's also one of the fiercest. He led troops in two of the most important ambushes in Colombian civil war history: More than 100 Colombian soldiers died in these FARC sneak attacks in the mid-1990s, and the guerrillas took more than 100 soldiers captive (who were later "swapped" for jailed rebels in the first prisoner exchange). Following these attacks, Fabian's reputation extended far and wide. He is wanted on twelve charges of rebellion, homicide, and kidnapping. Interpol has



From left to right: An unhappy President Andres Pastrana, the rebels and their flag.

issued a warrant for his arrest, and the United States is said to be readying a request for his extradition on charges of trafficking drugs.

In the areas he controls, Fabian is known as a stern, even ruthless commander. While the peace talks proceeded, he ran the FARC's "gulags" - work camps where locals who had broken rebel laws were building roads, digging ravines, and constructing bridges. Fabian told The Boston Globe at the time that he hoped the workers would help the guerrillas drive from Ecuador to the Venezuelan border one day. Fabian is also charged with ordering the assassination of prominent congressman Diego Turbay and his mother after the two were stopped along a road in Caqueta in late 2000. It's a charge he doesn't deny. The FARC declared the Turbay family its enemy long ago. The senator whom Fabian's men kidnapped from the airplane just prior to the end of the peace talks was also a Turbay. The Turbay family, the FARC says, are cattle ranchers who exploit the land and the workers-and hire paramilitaries to protect their interest. The accusation .isn't wholly untrue, but the FARC's brutal response only further polarizes the situation.

Fabian's actions have made him the latest in a long list of rebel scourges; easy targets to show that the FARC is just a bunch of bullies. And in many ways, the rebels are. Over the years, the guerrillas have lost their moral compass. Some of the FARC's commanders control huge swaths of territory as if they were their private fiefdoms. And rebels frequently dispense law in an arbitrary and ruthless manner reminiscent of the very regime they'd like to replace. They are also kidnapping thousands of people per year, many of them middle class and even poor farmers and shop-owners. Last year, over half of the 2,200 kidnappings were attributed to the rebels. But the number is probably three times as high since few report the kidnappings to avoid endangering their relatives. A recent attempt to rescue a kidnapped governor and a former defence minister served as a vivid reminder of what can happen: The guerrillas were tipped off to the raid, and just before they fled the scene, they killed ten of the hostages including the governor and the former defence minister.

The old XIV Front commander, Mono Jojoy, and his brother, Grannobles, top the list of these scourges. The United States holds the two responsible for the murder of three US activists in 1999. The three Americans were working closely with an indigenous tribe when they ran into one of Grannobles's units, which carted them into the jungle and shot them. Following the murders of the three Americans, Colombia's profile rose to unprecedented heights. The Clinton Administration pushed through a USD 1.3 billion spending package. The United States elevated its troop presence here and trained three special battalions to fight the guerrillas in drug-producing areas. But these battalions have been largely ineffective. In fact, the guerrillas have grown during this time period. This may help explain the eagerness with which Fabian challenges his mighty northern neighbours to the type of protracted battle the United States fears most.

"It's uneven from the standpoint of guns", Fabian explained to me, referring to the technological superiority the United States has. "But from the point of view of consciousness, I think that this wins over whatever guns the Colombian and US military have. There isn't a weapon any bigger or more effective than your own mind. And when they take away everyone's possibility to have a better life, then they make sure that this weapon, which is the people's consciousness, overcomes all the technology the army brings".

When I left Fabian's camp, I saw the US nightmare firsthand. The Colombian army had sent in thousands of troops but controlled nothing. Urban militias were zooming up and down the roads in motorcycles, burning taxis, buses, and cars. The province was paralyzed. A few miles from Fabian's camp, I ran into an army checkpoint. .

"Where are the guerrillas?" the excited soldiers asked. "Have you seen any guerrillas?"

After my taxi driver and I told them no, they let us pass. Then we ran into two rebels dressed in civilian clothes.

"Did you see the army?" they asked.

By pursing his lips and turning them, the taxi driver motioned back where we came from. The men sped off in the other direction.

—Steven Dudley

(Reproduced from The Progressive*)*

Macaulay's Orphans: The rotten core in the middle

Touch him, and you will find he is all gone inside
Just like an old mushroom, all wormy inside, and hollow
Under a smooth skin and upright appearance
Full of seething, wormy, hollow feelings
Rather nasty—
How beastly the bourgeois is!
— DH Lawrence, "How beastly the bourgeois is!"

MUSLIMS AND Sikhs are ready to die to defend the honour of their women. For the Jains, every living being is sacred. Hindus claim that they worship their women as Mother Goddess. The presiding deity of Dushhera, celebrated last month, is Durga, a power-personified woman. Laxmi, yet another woman of substance, is worshipped during Deepawali as a symbol of wealth and prosperity. Then, why is it that the crime against women is on the upswing in these very societies? What kind of social order is it that makes its mothers go through the harrowing torment of female foeticide?

The woman of 'substance'

Perhaps the explanation lies outside the realm of culture. Questions are social, but answers have to be searched elsewhere too. Perhaps it is the rootless nature of the British model of bourgeoisie in South Asian societies that make them as brutal as they has become? Even if to refute such a possibility, more serious intellectual attempts are necessary to explore the hypothesis that the de-politicisation of the middle-class is responsible for most of the ills that are afflicting this region and its mass of population.

"We must at present do our best to form a class", Macaulay wrote in his famous Minute of 1835, "who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". Today's subcontinental middle-class is a testimony to the success of Macaulay's social engineering. The class that he helped form is no less beastly than DH Lawrence's English bourgeois. This (South Asian) class has no master to interpret issues and events to enhance its understanding, and today finds itself lost in the sea of the masses that it has been taught to fear. These orphans of Macaulay are responsible for a large proportion of the ills that beset South Asian societies, because they are the ones whose values become the norm that the masses aspire to adopt.

The vacuity of the subcontinental intelligentsia is most obvious in the way it reads our shared history of over several millennia. It is a popular perception in the West that India has a past, but no history. The Pakistani intelligentsia confirm this view by relegating its history, older than 1600 years, as merely a past that must lie buried. In order to assert their Muslim identity, opinion makers of Islamabad are ashamed to claim that they too are the inheritors of the civilisation that built the temples of Ajanta, Ellora, Dwarakadhish and Varanasi. Their ancestors achieved these feats when the Bedouins of the Arab desert had not yet learnt to sew a proper tent.

The past of Hindutvawadis of Bharatvarsh, on the other hand, ends just before the reign of Babar and begins once again only with the destruction of Babri Masjid. For these pretenders to Aryan glory, there is no difference between the Mughals who made Hindustan their home and the East India Company that turned the territory into a jewel of the British crown. Macaulay's children seem to have done their work rather well: the South Asian middle-class is resentful of the Mughal rule that gave birth to the very idea of an unified Hindustan, but grateful towards the British who partitioned the region as a parting kick after lording over it for over two centuries.

The language of Macaulay's orphans is no less pretentious. It has no roots in either the history or the culture of this region. It floats on the surface in all its impe-

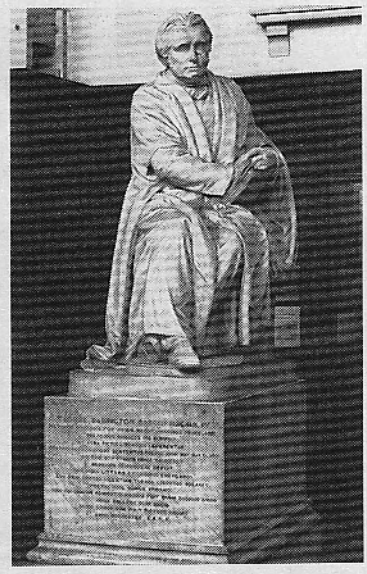
rial majesty. The 'vernacular' of the Pakistani state is Urdu, a language that is more at home in the mansions of Old Delhi. The 'official' language of India is Hindi, an artefact that has no home anywhere in the Subcontinent except in the studios of All India Radio and Doordarshan. The so-called Hindi belt speaks languages with histories as old as the Ganga, but you will not find the proponent of 'Khadi Boli' speaking of the virtues of Pahari, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Magadhi or Maithili.

The Indian scholar of the Awadh, Sanjay Joshi has argued that, in its bid to assume social leadership, the middle class in colonial Lucknow created new norms of respectability by reworking nawabi traditions and tempering them with colonial modernity. This postulation holds true for much of South Asia, and the subcontinental middle class is yet to overcome the contradictions caused by its failure to accommodate the conflicting values of *'pahle aap'* and *'koi hai'*. But then Macaulay has given them a tongue to hide their confusion—the English language. They use the vernacular in their dealing with the masses—whether it is Sonia Gandhi's halting Hindi or General Musharraf's Punjabi Urdu—but lapse into the colonial language while conversing with their own kind.

English is the lingua franca of the South Asian literati. Even those writers who emote in the vernacular have to take resort to English if they want to be taken seriously in their own society. The official language of all discourse in the Subcontinent—*discourse* defined by the scholars of post-modernity as "a socially and historically specific system of assumptions, values and beliefs which materially affects social conduct and social structure"—is English.

Ironically, while the Page Three crowd of New Delhi is gloating over the projection that India will be home to the largest number of people who transact (most of them still lapse into mother tongue when emoting, hence they can't be called English-speakers) in a somewhat bastardised version of the Queen's Language, the state of Bihar has decided recently to revert back to the Hindi of the All India Radio variety for all its official communication.

After the mystification of history and confusion of languages, the subcontinental middle-class has mired itself in needless controversy over its 'official religion'. The West settled this controversy in the middle of the seventeenth century with the Treaty of Westphalia. Archaeologists of South Asia are still digging the foundations of a mosque that may have been built over a temple, which in itself might have sprung up by dismantling a stupa, which in turn may have been the site of an animist shrine of the aboriginals long long ago. Can someone please define how original is an original? Darwin holds that we have all evolved from monkeys. Ergo, the controversial site at Ayodhya should be turned into a forest. Lord Ram would be a happy man, to see his collaborators in the Invasion of Lanka roaming free at a location purported to be his birthplace.



A large proportion of the ills that beset South Asian societies can be traced to his cult.

Adam's acolytes

The subcontinental bourgeois has suddenly discovered Adam Smith, or even more appropriately, *Atlas Shrugged's* Ayn Rand. The favourite mantra of the newly enabled intelligentsia in Islamabad, New Delhi, Colombo, Dhaka and Kathmandu is LPG—liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation. This, despite the fact that the arthritic hand of the free-market has brought nothing but misery for the masses at the bottom rung of South Asian society. No doubt, India has broken the barrier of the 'Hindu Rate of Growth' by bringing Detroit to Gurgaon, Texas to Ahmedabad, and Silicon Valley to the Banjara Hills. But the price that such a globalisation has extracted is unsettling — generations to come among the disadvantaged, be it in Haryana, Gujarat or Telangana, will continue to curse the class that institutionalised inequality in society. Many of them will revolt, as some have already done. VS Naipaul may rejoice in the *million mutinies* because he doesn't have to live in Bhatinda, but it is axiomatic that every revolution—be it of the left or of the right—devours its own children first.

Female foeticide is most prevalent in the newly prosperous regions of western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan. Religious bigotry is more common among the commercialised middle-class of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Meanwhile, left extremism is widespread in the backyard of Cyberabad. Banditry of the Veerappan variety flourishes in the shadow of South Asia's Silicon Plateau. Beyond the islands of prosperity, the sea of inequity that exists, more the rule than the exception, is akin to the badlands of Bihar. If the sale of automobiles were to be the sole criteria to judge a society's health, North Bihar would be near the top of Indian society: despite the condition of the roads in and around Muzaffarpur, the Maruti dealer of that less than remarkable city sells more vehicles per month than many posh metropolitan areas of western India.

The free market has added to the woes of a society

that was already languishing in extreme poverty. When financial success becomes the sole criterion to judge one's station in life, dowry death, abduction for ransom, and banditry are its inevitable consequences. The Harshad Mehtas of the world dupe investors, and the Laloos feast on fodder, their difference is only on how they made their lucre. Both display the same trait celebrated by Ayn Rand—individual initiative for personal benefit. Perhaps it is the blind adoption of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's conditions that has put Pakistan and Nepal towards the bottom level of the UNDP Human Development Index, as the only two non-African states to have performed so miserably. Perhaps there is some connection there with the fact that Islamabad and Kathmandu embraced the Structural Adjustment Programmes and free-market fundamentalism of the Bretton Woods sisters most enthusiastically.

The situation looks so bleak that no escape from the enveloping darkness seems possible. But escape we must. It is going to be a long wait if we are to wait for the proletariat to shrug off its own leaders. The middle-class has to reform itself if the region of 1.4 billion is to have any future. There is only one approach towards this daunting challenge, with faith in Gramsci's aphorism: "Pessimism of the intellect, and optimism of the will".

South Asia needs to read its history as that of the clash of classes, not of religions, cultures, creeds, castes or communities—even *dalit* as a social category probably owes its origin to the political economy of Aryan expansion into the Ganga plains and the Deccan. The Subcontinental bourgeoisie has to accept the multiplicity of languages within national boundaries as wholly arbitrary. It has to learn to control the greed of the few and pay more attention to the needs of the many. There is nothing new here, Gandhi said it all in one word—Swaraj. It is the self-rule free from the trappings of Macaulay and Ayn Rand that will release this region from the misery of its own making.

It is politics that creates the environment for change, and the politicisation of the subcontinental middle-class must be the number one priority of anyone interested in saving the region from self-destruction. As Rosa Luxemburg put it, "it's either socialism or barbarism".

The core has to shift to the left if it is not to destroy itself by raping sisters, burning brides, killing foetuses of daughters, and exporting pampered sons abroad to become non-resident bigots remitting fascism back home.

– CK Lal

"I have nothing but contempt for the covert agencies..."

SAJJAD LONE became the chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference after the assassination of his father Abdul Ghani Lone on 21 May 2002 in Srinagar. He is married to the daughter of Amanullah Khan, the head of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front. Lone's party is represented in the Executive Council of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC). Islamabad journalist Mohammad Shehzad talked to 36-year old Lone on the phone.

Has the Hurriyat split? If yes, which faction is legitimate and which is renegade?

In the absence of a registering authority for parties, like the election commission of Pakistan or India, any person can claim to have split a party. The Hurriyat has not split. Only the people of Kashmir can judge who is a traitor and what constitutes betrayal. Neither the media, not the political establishments of India and Pakistan have any say in it. It is exclusively a domain of the Kashmir people.

Who masterminded the split?

This perception of split suits covert agencies on both sides of the border. The so-called split could be a joint venture of these covert agencies or else a solo venture by one agency with the other facilitating the process. The truth is, this whole thing could not have been done without the implicit or tacit cooperation of both the agencies.

Is there any individual that could claim to be the true leader of Kashmiris?

No there is no single leader, but that is nothing special. Diffusion of leadership is not just a Kashmiri but South Asian phenomenon. The era of solo performers such as the Bhutto, Gandhi or the Sheikh families is over. In Kashmir there is an added dimension. India and Pakistan use their resources to thrust leaders on the people.

You had accused the ISI of masterminding the murder of your father. Are you still sure?

At the spur of the moment I did accuse them. Till date, I do not have any proof to substantiate it. Having said that, I would not be surprised if they were involved. I do not feel that the ISI, or for that matter RAW, is sacred. I have nothing but contempt for all the covert agencies, especially in South Asia. More than anybody else they have harmed the citizens of their own countries whom they purport to defend.

What do you have against elections in Kashmir?

I am not against the concept, but against the Indian viewpoint that elections are a substitute for plebiscite. People elected to administer the state should not be marketed as political leaders to decide the future of Kashmir.

What is the role of Lashkar and Jaish in the struggle of Kashmiris?

Lashkar and Jaish are the products of those countries that have glamourised violence by ignoring politics. The onus of diluting, marginalising or eliminating the role of violent elements is on India. If they accept there is a problem and engage political elements, the violent elements will simply be crowded out.

Who is presently targeting civilian Kashmiris?

All the violent elements in Kashmir are targeting civilians. This is the truth and the truth.

Is militancy a solution to the Kashmir issue?

Militancy has helped in the past in highlighting an issue that was almost forgotten, the unresolved Kashmir dispute. However, continued militancy could prove counterproductive. Whichever way you turn the prism, militancy is detested throughout the world. It is unwise to get excited by the gains of militancy at the local level and ignore the negative political impact it has around the world.

How do you see the role of Pakistan television vis-à-vis the Kashmir issue?

It is negative. PTV has emerged as a biased mouthpiece out of tune with the era of media invasion. Their newsroom is a hub of fiction. It is difficult to tell whether one is watching PTV drama serials or watching PTV news. They don't report, they create.

How do you look at India's confidence building measures announced on 22 October?

On the face of it they do look innocent and harmless. But including humanitarian issues like the treatment of Pakistani children was petty and mean, and Pakistan merely mimicked India in its repsonse. Humanitarian issues are better left to the people of India and Pakistan. Overall it does seem that India has not been able to convince Pakistan that they mean business.

Do you think India and Pakistan can sort out their problems on their own?

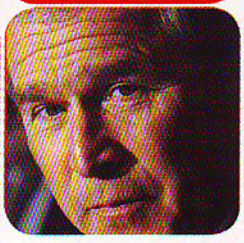
Never. Third party facilitation or supervision or participation or coercion is an imperative in trying to resolve the Kashmir issue.

What do you think is wrong with the approach of India and Pakistan to Kashmir?

Over 55 years after independence, their behaviour is a matter of shame for every South Asian. Irrespective of their public postures, both the countries are averse to the idea of allowing Kashmiris to choose their own destiny.

'RECONSTRUCTED' IRAQI ALPHABET

A B C E
F G H I
J K L N
O P Q R
S T U V
X Y Z

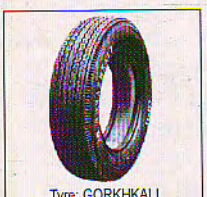


HIMAL
SOUTH ASIAN
www.himalmag.com

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
Size: 9.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck

Tyre: GORKHKALI SEMI LUG
Size: 9.00-20-16PR
Uses: Bus/Truck

Tyre: GORKHKALI RIB
Size: 6.50-16-8PR
Uses: Mini Bus/Jeep

GORAKHKALI RUBBER UDYOG LTD.

Marketing Office:
P.O.Box No.:1700, Kalimati, Kathmandu
Tel: 4274537, 4271102, 4276274
Fax: 00977-1-4270367
E-mail: grul@wlink.com.np

Plant & Head Office:
Majuwa, Deurali, Gorkha, Nepal
Tel: 065-540079
Fax: 00977-65-540080