JUNE 1996 • Vol 9 number 4

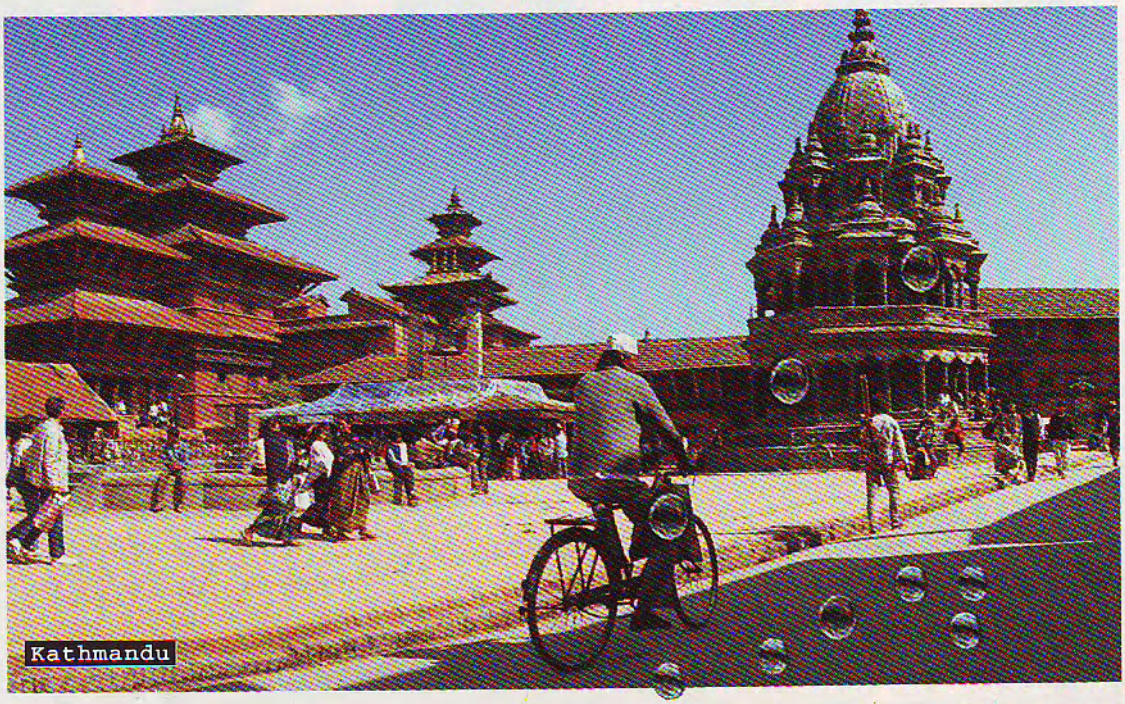
HIMAL

SOUTH ASIA

Orbital Junk

Abusing History

Fear and Despair in Kabul



Also seen in the skies of Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Colombo, Male, Dhaka, Muscat, Kuwait, Sharjah, Fujairah and Ras-al-Khaimah.

इंडियन एयरलाइन्स
Indian Airlines
WELCOME ABROAD

HIMAL
SOUTH ASIA

Vol 9 No 4 June 1996

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Information for New Readers

Himal magazine was started in 1987 as a journal for the Himalayan region. With the March 1996 issue, the magazine transformed into the first and only South Asian magazine. Every month, HIMAL South Asia provides readers in the Subcontinent and overseas with reportage and commentary on issues and trends that affect the region's 1.3 billion people.

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For subscription details, see page 54.

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COVER

Cover picture by Chandrashekhar Karki shows Madhuri Dixit in Anjaam as seen on ATN.

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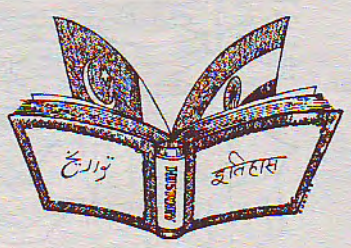

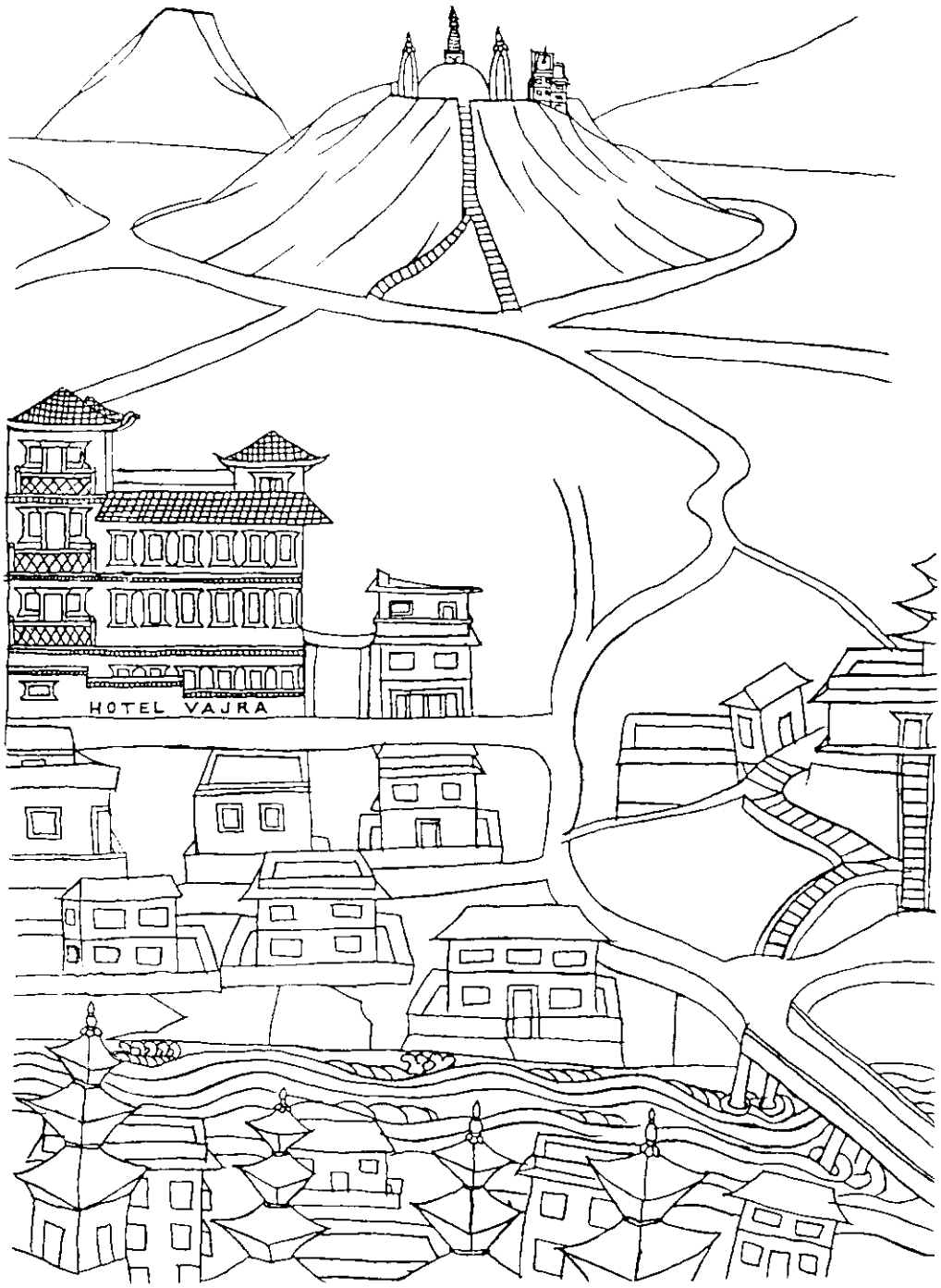

Vajra (literally--flash of lighting), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

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

John Collee
The London Observer

in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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Going By the *Gita*

While initially concerned at the changed and diluted focus or broadened dimensions of Himal, your May issue convinces one of your wisdom to venture into new areas of interest and readership.

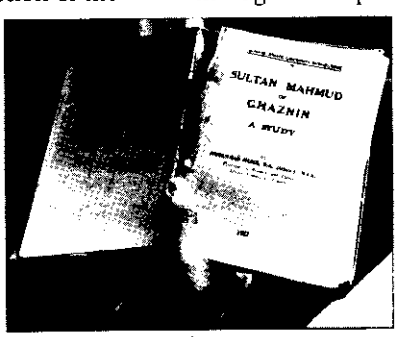
Your coverage of the Hindu religion (**May 1996**) was as diverse and compelling as the philosophies it expounds. Mohammed Habib's assertion in the article "Hindu and Muslim—I" that brutalities committed in the name of Islam are perverse deviation from the holy Quran and misrepresentation of its precepts to suit the interests of individual or collective glory, power or gratification, is equally applicable to the persecutions and bloodshed perpetuated in the propagation of Christianity. Similarly, the inhuman oppression caused by practice of the caste system imposed on birth, rather than division of vocations on the basis of aptitude or qualities born out of nature, has emerged out of malpractice of the creed, not the original philosophy of Hinduism.

Dipak Gyawali's description of the dilemma of the modern-day Hindu, caught between the shackles of the past and challenges of the future, was perceptive and will find many takers. His view that according to the *Bhagavad Gita* "for every spiritual success, there would be a hundred thousand automatic failures", however, does not portray a true picture or is perhaps seeking an answer, as Arjuna does in the *Gita* (Chapter VI, Verse 37). The answers are provided in meticulous detail, starting from Verse 40 of the same chapter, and once more Chapter IX, Verses 30 to 34. True the *Gita* does not subscribe to the belief that random acts of ritual or a confession now and then will cleanse the soul of perpetual wrongs or sins. But it finds ample room and sets out meticulous course for gradual spiritual growth, for sinners, non-believers, bewildered seekers and learned thinkers alike.

Aldous Huxley found the *Gita* "one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries of the perennial philosophy". Hindu scriptures do provide a vast treasure of spiritual wisdom along with some quite obviously tilted views which devalue and degrade the status of all but the male members of the upper and middle class "born" Hindus. However, its strong roots have helped it survive for centuries and it now attracts attention of a large number of new followers and many serious scholars, spiritual or secular.

Nevertheless, Stephen Truax Eckerd is quite right in stating that Hinduism is seeing neglect and decay in its place of birth and growth. This trend can only be reversed if the practice of religion is rid of the outmoded and often absurd rituals and abhorrent practices, perpetuated by generations of spiritual and political dictators.

As Mr Eckerd suggests, healthy growth and revival cannot be achieved through the imposition of another set of values even by well-meaning intellectuals, and even less through rejection of the entire philosophy on account of passions aroused by some of its practices or practitioners. Indeed, the principal cause for its decline is 'death' of Sanskrit, the language of the scriptures. The best teachings should, therefore, be translated into contemporary languages and included in the curriculum of schools and colleges. At the same time, encouragement at the family and local levels to establish a library of the best and most sensible teachings in the written, audio and visual media, as recommended by Mr Eckerd, would surely help bring about the much needed renaissance.



Sagar S.J.B. Rana
Lalitpur, Nepal

Iran's Intellectuals

I found the article on Sultan Mahmud ("Hindu and Muslim" **May 1996**) both informative and in agreement with my own sentiments on this issue. But this is the opinion not only of a liberal intellectual. Sultan Mahmud was an Iranian King of Turkish origin. But, despite the love affair of some nationalist Iranians with their kings, his plundering of Hindu temples is never upheld as a source of pride. The same is true of ultra-religious folk: Sultan Mahmud's claims to expand Islam and declare *jihad* on the infidel has never been taken seriously. These are brutal tyrants whose reign was as hard on their own people as it was harsh on the conquered peoples.

Going back some years, Dipak Gyawali's article on the intellectuals of Nepal (Sep/Oct 1994) was a revelation. It made me realise how little I knew about the history and sociology of Nepal and also how similar are the problems faced by both Nepali intellectuals and their counterparts in Iran.

My book, *Max Weber's Sociology of Intellectuals*, which aimed to shed light on the theoretical aspects of the sociology of intellectuals, generated about a dozen academic reviews, but it is only Mr Gyawali who has put it to the use it was intended for—to help sort out the varieties of intellectuality in a given context.

Ahmad Sadri
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Lake Forest College, Illinois

Waning Hinduism

Stephen Truax Eckerd's "Is it Enough to be Born a Hindu?" (**May 1996**) borders on exoticism and conveniently ignores the dynamics that push a society forward. The article charts with remarkable clarity the loss of cultural values and the decline of the Hindu way of life in parts of Nepal.

However, the writer fails to go beyond nostalgic longing for a lost Hinduness and explain why and how the change occurred. Indeed, he seems overburdened with a concern for Hinduism as he first saw it practiced in Nepal as a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1960s.

The contention that Hindi cinema is one of the main culprits for the dissipation of traditional values might be true, but what would Mr Eckerd propose? Nepal is no Bhutan, and forces of history have kept it open to outside influence. It was, therefore, bound to suffer from

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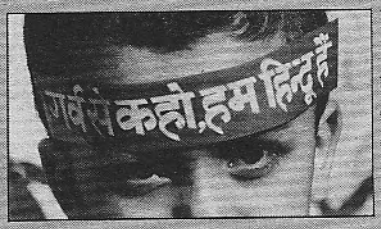
globalisation, or regionalisa-tion, in this case.

It is also unclear which Hindu the writer is talking about? Urban or rural? And how many Hindus in Nepal's remote areas can be said to have been influenced by Hindi films? When Mr Eckerd suggests that parents create good family libraries "with the best books, tape-recordings, movies and video tapes that Hindu culture has produced", he is obviously limiting himself to rich, urban, English-speaking professional families. And yet elsewhere, he talks longingly of what obviously is a tarai village where he served. This constant shifting from a poor rural to a rich urban setting is confusing, and gives the impression that the writer likes to generalise.

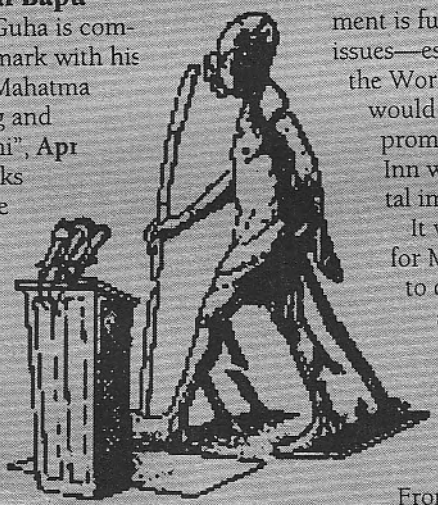
As for Hinduism being "particularly handicapped in its attempt to respond to these social problems and provide moral guidelines and ethical standards in a rapidly changing social environment," I say thank god that Nepal's Hindus do not have the same missionary zeal as members of some other religions do.

A. Upadhyay
Lalitpur, Nepal



Unintellectual Bapu

Ramachandra Guha is completely off the mark with his comments on Mahatma Gandhi ("Using and Abusing Gandhi", **April 1996**). He thinks that Bapuji, like himself, was an intellectual too and so Ms Guha merely superimposed his ideas on Bapuji. He sounds most ridiculous when he says that Bapuji is a product of the Western Mind. I know what made him the Mahatma he became and what his purpose in life was. It is the *Bhagavad Gita* and his faith in God and his goal in life is best described in one word from the *Gita*, "lokasaMgraha". In fact, Gandhiji himself said so.



Dhruva Chakravarti
New York

Height of Exaggeration

It is heartening to know that Colin Goldner is concerned about the environmental impact of the proposed 8000 Inn in the Khumbu Valley of the Everest region ("The Height of Nonsense", Mail, **April 1996**). Mr Goldner is to be commended for cautioning the Nepali government against destroying the fragile ecosystem of the Everest region, as has happened through thoughtless tourism development in the Bavarian Alps.

But the story of horror in the Khumbu as related by Mr Goldner is not based on reality. He blows the matter out of proportion when he calls the proposed inn a "prestigious project" and the "world's highest hotel". If he had cared to verify facts, Mr Goldner would have found out that 8000 Inn is only a 20-bed hostel proposed to be built alongside the research laboratory Ev K2 CNR. He would also have learnt that there are a number of tourist lodges at higher elevations in the same area, for example by the Gokyo lakes.

Mr Goldner thinks that Nepal's Ministry of Tourism is about to make the same mistake that the Bavarian authorities made some 40 years ago. Mr Goldner should know that His Majesty's Government is fully sensitised to environmental issues—especially with Mount Everest in the World Heritage Site list—and that it would not have allowed any tourism promotion activity such as the 8000 Inn without making an environmental impact study.

It would have been well advised for Mr Goldner not to have jumped to conclusions with little research and thus achieved the height of exaggeration.

Nima Nuru Sherpa
8000 Inn, Khumbu

Arthur's a Brit

From reading your second issue, I think you are hitting your stride as a South Asian magazine. Just a correction. My old friend Arthur C. Clarke is *not* an American (Abominably Yours, Himal, **April 1996**). He was born in 1917 in the town of Minehead in Somerset, England. He now lives, and has done so for many years, in Colombo. I share his views on cricket.

Jeremy Bernstein
New York

Keeping up with the Joneses

David P. Jones, whose letter you printed in the March issue of Himal is from British Columbia, Canada, and not from Berkeley California, as given. Since there are several David Joneses in the climbing world, it is important to keep the record straight. By the way, the new magazine looks great. I am sure it will help to keep us better informed on South Asia—and we're glad Ms Abo Minable stays!

Joie Seagram
British Columbia

Emic vs Etic

With due apologies from an ex-student to a guru, I would like to point out that Dilli R. Dahal's "The Fallout of Deviant Anthropology" (**May 1996**) itself was a piece of a biased native anthropologist's deviant anthropological opinion. It is undeniable and understandable that the anthropological portrayal of Nepal had its genesis in the Western social scientist's perspective, or, to use the anthropological term, in the 'etic' (outside) approach. And seen in the light of 'emic' (inside) approach, questions can be raised about the interpretations and theses propounded from the 'etic' perspective.

Mr Caplan's case study of two Brahmin brothers and his drawing of generalisations in order to legitimise his Brahmin-exploits-Limbu hypothesis in his *Land and Social Change in East Nepal*, it is true, does have its share of bias. As Mr Dahal points out, Mr Caplan did not take into account many other variables at play in his area of research. His arguments that Mr Caplan did not bring into the purview of his study other ethnic or caste groups and that there were no references to Gurungs although they were relatively richer than some of the local Brahmins and had exploited the *kipat* system of land holdings of the Limbus are valid. But only to an extent.

For is that not what social scientists

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in HSA. Letters should be brief, to the point, and may be edited. Letters that are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Include daytime telephone number, if possible.

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usually do in their research work? Is it not true that while carrying out social science research, "set variables" are defined to test a hypothesis or legitimise a thesis? And even if quantitative data is collected, 5 to 10 percent data collected from the total universe is conventionally accepted as reliable and encompassing enough to derive generalisations.

There is variety in every community, and this holds true for the Brahmin community as well. But even when there is variety, there is also a common or collective or generalised character which dominates the variety and that collective character "characterises" a community as a whole. Thus, there is collective characterisation of most communities in Nepal which, though not necessarily applicable to everyone in the community, is generally ascribed to it: Brahmins are witty and sly, Newars are stingy and business-minded, Rais and Limbus are sloppy and short-tempered, Gurungs are knuckle-headed and valiant, and so on.

If Mr Caplan's book can be termed a prime example of an anthropological report biased towards a pre-ordained conclusion, and a model of "deviant anthropology", I wonder what appellation can be given to Mr Dahal's opinionated belief that anthropological studies on Nepal have to be critically reviewed. If Mr Dahal feels so strongly about his views, perhaps it is the responsibility of an apparently unbiased anthropologist like him to find out why studies have been carried out on practically every other community but not on the Brahmin. Perhaps the answer to this is also pre-ordained.

Kishor Pradhan
Patan, Nepal

Bes-Yul Dremojong

The article "Sikkim Awakening" by Ludwig Schaefer (**Oct 1995**) was most revealing. The views of the writer, obviously an admirer of the Himalaya, are bound to invigorate the indigenous people of Sikkim who oppose the Rathong Chu Hydel Project. The call given by Concerned Citizens of Sikkim to safeguard the time-tested spiritual treasure of Bes-Yul Dremojong (Sikkim), a land personally consecrated by Mahaguru Padmasambhava, is timely and significant. As such, both the Central and state governments must appreciate the sanctity of the Yuksum plateau as one of the holiest spots of Buddhism and recognise it as such. The present blase attitude of those in power is regrettable.

Dawa Lama
Bansbari, Nepal

Delighted

This is a brief note from a North American reader and a great fan of your magazine. I subscribed just in time to get your inaugural March issue. It is a wonderful addition to the journalistic scene in South Asia. I wish you all possible success although, like some of your critics quoted in the April issue, I remain somewhat apprehensive about the advertising revenue being sufficient to keep you above water.

Arthur H.M. Ross
Phoenix, Arizona

Delighted

Congratulations! The April issue of Himal is even better than the first. I read all the articles, which I do not do for most magazines; they were all interesting and well-written. The piece on the unknown temples in the Salt Range was outstanding. Your problem now will be to sustain the high standard you have set.

Ajit Bhattacharjee
Director, Press Institute of India
New Delhi

Disappointed

I am writing this as a reader and friend of Himal who has held its journalistic coverage of the Himalayan region in high esteem. After seeing the second number of the 'new' Himal, I must say that I am disappointed. The old Himal was a treasure trove of Himalayan affairs, on Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, etc. In the new magazine, however, I do not find anything I would want to read. The problem seems to be that there are too many magazines in the market covering the same field.

I will, therefore, not extend my subscription and do hope you will understand. Why not have another Himalayan magazine under a new title?

Erhard Haubold
Asia Correspondent
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
New Delhi

Wonder

I am beginning to wonder at your strategy of changing Himal into a South Asian magazine, having been a keen reader of your magazine for the last two years. I am also a fairly regular reader of *India Today*, *Sahara* and other publications from the Subcontinent, particularly India, widely available in Nepal.

Your feature "A Bovine Boondoggle in Bihar" (May 1996) is, as you will surely accept, old news. Trying to compete at this level is, for the reader, tiring. The difference between events recalled on a monthly basis in comparison to weekly accounts will always be different and unless you are lucky with news arriving the week before press, you are always going to come out second best. The strength of Himal has been its features which develop on a different time scale, those which need to be highlighted but are not necessarily news grabbing.

I would like to think that your present moves are part of a longer term strategy which involves a South Asian magazine plus Himal in Nepali as well as a version of this in the English medium. In effect, returning to your roots within an expanded business.

Richard Sobey
VSO Volunteer, Nepal

Editor's Note:

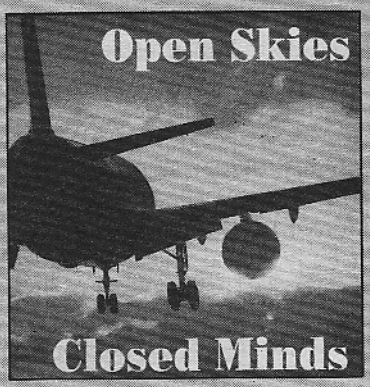
We thank readers who have sent in letters regarding Himal's transformation from Himalayan journal to South Asian magazine. In order to allow space for discussion on other matters, we will now stop carrying letters pertaining to the pros and cons regarding the transformation, which was a move dictated by lack of sufficient readership for the Himalayan Himal and the belief that a similar magazine for the larger South Asian readership was required and would be sustainable.

Briefs

Powerless in Sri Lanka

May 1996

Social Engineering by the Clock. In late May, Sri Lanka decided to adjust its clock forward by one hour from midnight in late May to help cope with the worsening power crisis caused by the delay in the arrival of the monsoon, said a government press release. Water levels at hydroelectric reservoirs, which provide 84 percent of the island's electricity, were so low that only a few more days worth of power could be generated. A cabinet sitting decided that Sri Lanka Time would change to 6.5 hours ahead of GMT rather than 5.5 hours, which would lead to reduced use of electricity as people went to sleep earlier.



Cover

Open Skies, Closed Minds

April 1996

Miscellany. In early May, Indian Airlines, the domestic government-owned Indian carrier, unveiled plans for a turnaround by the end of the 1996-97 fiscal year. This included improved fleet utilisation, pilot availability, and customer service. Over across the Bay of Bengal, Singapore Airlines' net income for the year to end March 1996 rose nearly 12 percent over the previous year, and reached an alltime high of USD 1.3 billion.

SIA and the Tatas evidently intend to continue lobbying for their joint venture domestic airline for India, with plans to bring in 19 new widebodied aircraft over a five-year period. The Tatas are to hold 60 percent stake in the proposed airline, to SIA's 40. Lufthansa, meanwhile, has decided to pull out of its collaboration with the Indian carrier ModiLuft, mainly due to the latter's inability to pay arrears for three leased planes.

While South Asian governments hold on to their closed skies policies as if they were lifelines, Indonesia has opened its skies, with deregulation meant to tap the tourism boom. Domestic private airlines are being allowed to go international, while international carriers are being made more welcome. Back in Nepal, the government has asked for private airlines for proposals on flying international routes. If the Nepali privates are finally allowed to fly international, and they remain sceptical about the government's plans, this would mark a South Asian first.

Feature

The BJP's Neighbourhood

March 1996

Short-lived Government. Looking ahead to the general elections in India, Himal had carried an article on anxiety among some of India's neighbours about a possible Bharatiya Janata Party victory in the polls. "Surprisingly, BJP pragmatists might choose to live and let live," Rachana Pathak had written in her feature, and the double takes the party did upon coming to power regarding Article 370 in the Constitution (concerning special status for Jammu and Kashmir), on India as a secular state, and on a uniform civil code (which many Muslims oppose) meant that perhaps pragmatists would have carried the day had the party been able to muster support to stay in power. "They all love Vajpayee," Himal had written, and indeed the immediate post-election coverage indicated that while the neighbours were generally worried about the BJP in power, they were willing to countenance it as long as Mr Vajpayee remained Prime Minister.

Commentary

A Watershed on the Mahakali

March 1996

Lukewarm on Treaty. The all-party consensus on the Mahakali Treaty, which was initialled between the Nepali and Indian foreign ministers in February in order to build the Pancheswar Hydroelectricity Project on the Mahakali river, seems to be evaporating. According to *The Kathmandu Post*, "Leftists, rightists and centrists" are opposing the treaty on the interesting premise that the Mahakali river belongs "exclusively to Nepal". More significant is the growing opposition in the main leftist opposition party, CPN (UML), to the treaty, although it was its acquiescence which led to the initialling. Rather than any notions of lost sovereignty, however, it seems likely that the Nepali left has felt emboldened to reject the treaty now that Indian Foregin Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who brokered the agreement, is out of South Block.

Feature

A Bovine Boondoggle in Bihar

May 1996

Laloo Stays Home. For someone who had been held forward as the man with prime ministerial timber, when the time came to select the man to run the United Front government in New Delhi, Laloo Prasad Yadav was nowhere in the picture. The prospects of the Chief Minister (who is also Janata Dal President) are said to have nosedived with the election results in Bihar, where only half of the Dal's 44 candidates fielded won seats to the Lok Sabha. The animal husbandry scam played a part in the low scores for the Dal, it is said. His party's Bihar functionaries, meanwhile, are heaving a sigh of relief because with Mr Yadav in Delhi, there would have been bedlam in Bihar.

Bangladesh • India

HATE THY NEIGHBOUR

Some of the more promising election-time pitches in the SAARC countries are linked to the matter of "bad neighbour" rather than domestic issues. In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party's constant harping on the Bangladeshi migrants issue proved very campaign friendly. In Pakistan, the Kashmir factor and alleged Indian designs form a sound poll platform.

The India Factor figured as well in the runup to Bangladesh's national elections in mid-June. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by the former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia told a massive crowd the day after she resigned in March-end that people should vote her back to power to prevent "Indian servitude". She called for a nationalist alliance against "Indian hegemonism", and declared that, if elected, she would not renew the Indo-Bangla Friendship Treaty.

People want cheap eggs and don't care which side of the border the chicken lays

All this rhetoric was meant to make the Awami League, Begum Zia's arch rival, squirm. It was the League which signed the treaty with India in 1972 after the liberation war, and which has had to constantly face criticism of having "sold out to India", not an unfamiliar bogey in some other neighbours of India. During the election campaign, the Awami League retaliated by asking why the BNP, which had after all been in power longer than Awami League, never scrapped the treaty. But keeping public sentiments in mind, the League has declared that it, too, would not renew the treaty if voted to power. The instrument is due to expire in 1997.

Very few people have any idea what the treaty actually says. Anti-treaty feelings are whetted by speculation that it *probably* has a clause saying that in case of external threat Bangladesh may call upon India to intervene. The closest Bangladesh got to that point was back in 1975 when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed in a military putsch and his Awami League lost power. Reportedly, India considered, and then ruled out, an intervention at that time. Says a political analyst from Dhaka University, "New Delhi opted instead to continuously make life miserable for the new set of rulers, which was a cheaper and more effective method of coercion than a military intervention."

It might not be able to trumpet the fact, but Sheikh Hasina Wajed's Awami League sees an ally in the Congress Party in India, which, under Indira Gandhi, lent it crucial support during the liberation war in 1971. As a result, the League has been hampered in domestic Bangla politics by its inability to go after the Congress Party, which has been in power in New Delhi for much of the last quarter century. Even on the critical issue of Ganga water sharing, the League has been timid in its criticism, which has cost the party politically. To correct this perception of an India tilt, the League has been sounding decidedly less "pro-Indian" lately, the stance on the friendship treaty being a case in point.

However, all this is possibly quite unnecessary because given the choice the people would vote for a party which fills the belly better, rather than the one which renews or does not renew treaties. To most Bangladeshis, the next-door Indian economy has been a fact of life longer than either politics or diplomacy. Most consumer goods are cheaper if imported from India. The same goes for capital goods.

For all its anti-Indian bluster, it is a fact that Begum Zia's BNP has been rather Delhi-friendly when it was in power till forced to bow out in favour of a caretaker government. It is also true that Indian business boomed during the last few years of BNP rule. There has been little protest. People want cheap eggs and don't care which side of the border the chicken lays.

No matter how much one screams about the about-to-expire treaty, Bangladesh will have to play against a diplomatic pace which is set by India. Treaty or no treaty, says Dhaka intellectuals, Indians will intervene if they want to and as a major market for the developed world, will get away with it. Indians goods too will enter Bangladesh, legally or otherwise, they say. Indian satellites have already conquered the skies, can the rest be far behind?

Sri Lanka

BACK TO THE DARK AGE

Cheap power was touted as the prime attraction of Sri Lanka's brave adventure to liberalise its economy 20 years ago when the country became the first South Asian to go free market. Electricity at bargain prices was supposed to draw investors to the island's first free trade zone near Colombo International Airport at Katunayake. The massive Mahaweli hydroelectric schemes were just coming on line and it was possible to offer foreign businesses inexpensive energy. Politicians even talked airily of selling electricity to South India.

All that seemed like a fantasy in May as the nation sweltered under massive power cuts that lasted days on end (See Himal, April 1996). The power shortage was caused by profligate use of electricity during the

Cricket World Cup, a long spell of dry weather, and a delayed (or failed) southwest monsoon aggravated by a strike by employees of the state-owned Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB).

Former President J.R. Jayewardene and more so his successor, the late Ranasinghe Premadasa, had visions of transforming Sri Lanka into a Singapore. A series of big dams were built, and as electricity became abundant it led to an urban development strategy full of airconditioned highrise buildings with which Colombo is now too well served. Many of these concrete monstrosities have no windows to open. Affluent Colombans have discovered that their city is uninhabitable without electricity.

Many services long taken for granted suddenly disappeared as CEB strikers even crippled the water supply in Greater Colombo and elsewhere by taking away vital components of stand-by generators servicing the pumping system. Predictably, there were angry fulminations, with the government alleging sabotage and the state media, quoting governmental sources, pointing accusing fingers at the United National Party (UNP) opposition.

Even before the strike, when there was no one to blame but the weather, General Anuruddha Ratwatte, the Minister of Power, Energy and Irrigation, had accused the previous administration of not planning ahead, leaving the country overly dependent on hydro-power. (Ratwatte is clearly an over-worked minister. In addition to the power, irrigation and energy portfolio he, as deputy defence minister, is in charge of the day-to-day operational command of the armed forces.)

There is no doubt that Sri Lanka is overly dependent on hydro-electricity, with 82 percent of the system capacity hydro based. Up to now, the necessary thermal back-up, though expensive, was available for periods of dry weather. But electricity generated by fuel guzzling gas turbines and diesel generators does not come cheap. The CEB strike, though short-lived, gave Sri Lankans living outside the country's war zone a taste of what the population of the Jaffna peninsula has suffered for the past 13 years when they had no electricity at all.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga could not go on television (without electricity, telecasts were not possible) to point an accusing finger at her predecessors. But that did not stop her from alleging a UNP conspiracy behind the CEB strike, rooted in opposition to the government's policy of breaking the state monopoly in the generation and distribution of electricity. The fact is that the government does not have the money to meet the growth in demand for power. BOT (build, own and transfer) and BOO (build, own and operate) projects are the only answer.

Sri Lanka's experience in this area, in fact, holds lessons for other countries in the region looking to privatise state enterprises. Employees generally do not favour divestment. They fear loss of employment and harsher work demands under tight private sector management. They also know that there will be less influence peddling as the enterprises begin to function under commercial principles.

The late President Premadasa sweetened the pill by devising a formula of gifting 10 percent of all privatised undertakings to their employees. The number of shares beneficiaries received was related to their years of service only and not to the position they held. Very small people were therefore able to get hefty slices of cake in some privatised companies. The Chandrika administration is continuing this policy, but given the strong opposition to privatisation within the ruling People's Alliance itself, even the sugar is not tasting as sweet as it should.

President Kumaratunga was barely into her teens when her father, Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, was virtually crippled by leftist inspired strikes before his 1959 assassination. Economic imperatives are forcing the government rightward against the will of many of those who helped it to be elected to office. Recent victories on the war front are on the plus side of the president's ledger. But she herself does not under-estimate the formidable economic challenges that confront her as members of the government pull in different directions. △

Economic imperatives are
forcing the government rightward
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of those who helped it
to be elected to office

Pakistan

KARACHI: IS PEACE HERE TO STAY?

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's government may have bludgeoned Karachi into submission, but independent observers are asking whether the apparent peace is here to stay.

It is true that the terror that long held the city in its grip has subsided. Several pockets of the city are

RAHAT DAR

Family fembers mourn dead in Korangi

still considered unsafe to venture into after dark, but they no longer resound with the gunfire of rival factions battling it out. Kidnappings for ransom and the all-too-familiar daily headlines of "Eight gunned down" or "Twelve killed in sniper fire" seem now to be a nightmare of the past. Tortured, bullet-riddled, blood-stained bodies tied in gunny sacks no longer turn up on roadsides.

Once again, Karachi's roads are buzzing with activity, restaurants are crowded at meal-times, and business has picked up in the shops and bazaars. Employees at multinational companies, banks and businesses no longer quail at working late nights, and taxi drivers now accept fares to volatile areas like Korangi.

Over the last couple of months, the government has been thumping its chest in victory, citing the relative peace that now reigns over the city as a measure of its success. The loudest self-congratulatory statements have come from the powerful Interior Minister Major-General (retd) Naseerullah Babar, whose ruthless crackdown on Karachi has been heavily criticised by human rights groups. Gen Babar says that there is little chance of the city being overrun by militants again, and his confidence is echoed by the Prime Minister herself.

Many Karachiites believe that measures taken by Gen Babar (including the suspension of all cellular phone operations to sever the militants' channels of communication) will yield only temporary success unless efforts are made towards a long-term political solution that necessarily involves the renegade Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM). This belief is shared by political observers, journalists, and human rights activists all over the country.

As Pakistan's economic nerve centre and largest city, Karachi needs special attention, which it has not received. With a population of over 12 million, and a literacy rate as high as 80 per cent, this megapolis suffers from extreme neglect of sectors such as transport, housing, unemployment, sanitation, water and health, and law and order. It was the presence of ineffective administration and a corrupt police force which together made possible the rise of armed factions of educated, unemployed youth who made a living out of daylight extortion.

When Pakistan emerged from military rule in 1988, rather like a lid being lifted off a boiling pot, Karachi exploded in violence, largely fomented by the MQM. The government came down hard on MQM activists, whose leader Altaf Hussain has been in self-exile in London since the crackdown began a couple of years ago.

Last year alone, over 2000 citizens were killed in the city, more than half of them at the hands of law enforcement agencies. Those not killed in "police encounters" could expect to be tortured. Alienation grew because most of the police rank and file hail from upcountry areas, and have little understanding or sympathy for the locals.

Over time, therefore, the MQM has taken on the look of a persecuted underdog, and there is visible resurgence of sympathy for the party, even among independent observers. Supporters who had distanced themselves from the party due to its violent politics are to be found again in the MQM fold.

Since the government suspended local bodies throughout the country, the MQM, which once ruled the roost in Karachi, has been effectively sidelined from mainstream politics. Karachi has had virtually no political representation in the National Assembly. The MQM, the party that Karachi returned every time, boycotted the 1993 Assembly.

Instead of realising that Karachi's problems arise from a lack of representative governance, the government recently decided to divide the city's many districts, formerly governed by elected local body officials, into zones that would be controlled by bureaucrats—Deputy Commissioners from the Pakistan Civil Services. Jamat-e-Islami and the MQM, bitter rivals, have both roundly criticised this move.

Despite the relative calm that now prevails, Karachi is not the city it once was. The psychological, physical and financial battering it has taken has left scars that will take time to heal. And no long-term peace and urban revival is possible without bringing the MQM back into the mainstream.

India

A MANDATE FOR FEDERALISM?

The beginning of June in India saw the beginning of a unique experiment: for the first time in its history, a broad-based 13-party coalition of disparate elements took over the reigns of power. A very prominent group in this comprised the 'Federal Front', a conglomeration of regional parties that between themselves had garnered a substantial chunk of votes in the April-May general elections. Faced with a choice at the national level between the Congress Party, now widely perceived as moribund and corrupt, and a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that seeks to impose a monocultural identity on the country, the voters had chosen instead to allow regional issues and alternatives to come to the fore.

Mercifully, there was no assassination to render the polls an emotional exercise, as in 1984 and 1991 when Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were violently removed from the scene. Despite the trouble in Kashmir, "unity and stability" did not develop as issues in this election as had happened in the previous ones. Ironically, it was P.V. Narasimha Rao's stable government of the last five years which made that electoral plank obsolete. With nearly half a century of freedom and democratic rule under its belt, the public was confident enough to ignore exhortations on the need for a strong centre. This was an election which focused on local issues of imme diate concern.

Jettisoning the BJP government which could not muster support in the House, a United Front coalition government supported by the Congress ("from the outside") now finds itself in the hot seat. Among its constituents are the Tamil Manila Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) from Tamil Nadu, the Asom Gana Parishad from Assam, the Telugu Desam Party from Andhra Pradesh, the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Party from the largest state at the country's centre, and the Samajwadi Party, whose strength is in Uttar Pradesh.

Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar believes that this development does not bode well for the Indian Union. He and others like him believe that things will begin to fall apart and the centre will not hold. On the other hand, another former Prime Minister, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, believes that this is an opportunity for India to establish a truly federal polity. The relationship between New Delhi and the states has always been an uneasy one, and this has been specially true in states ruled by a party other than the one in power at the Centre. Even when chief ministers were of the same party as the Prime Minister, their wings were clipped the moment they were seen as developing into rival power centres. If it was not Article 356 of the Constitution that was arbitrarily used to dismiss unfriendly state governments, then New Delhi often succeeded in ruffling feathers by drawing the purse strings too tight.

Existing constitutional provisions concentrate fiscal powers in the Central Government, with New Delhi holding the right to disburse national wealth among the states. The report of the Sarkaria Commission, instituted to look into centre-state relations, had recommended that the states be given a bigger share in fiscal powers. Both the BJP and the United Front have made promises to implement the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and amend Article 356 to prevent its abuse.

If this is done, the states will find themselves firmly in control of their future. No longer will they have to depend on the Centre for largesse and require clearance from New Delhi for every international project. They can formulate and implement schemes according to the felt needs on the ground. And this power can be further decentralised to reach the local bodies and the village Panchayats.

With power, comes responsibility, and the state leadership will have to learn to say no to populist schemes whose sole purpose is to cultivate vote banks. In the past, some chief ministers have been profligate, secure in the knowledge that the Centre will foot the bills. With their hold on New Delhi, the powerful state satraps will be tempted to use the Centre's coffers once more. For example, Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam might be tempted to pass on the costs of the two-rupees-per-kg rice scheme in Andhra Pradesh and of the bill on prohibition to the Centre. Similarly, Laloo Prasad Yadav might have to be persuaded not to lay the cost of the abysmal financial mismanagement in Bihar at New Delhi's door.

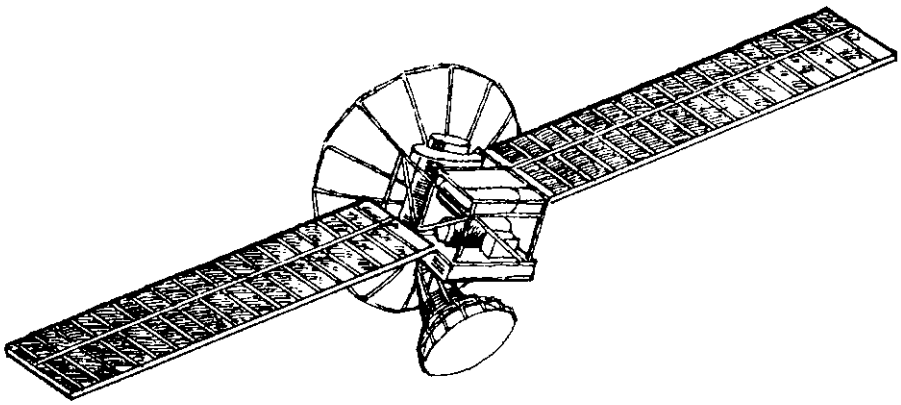
The contrast in the leaderships of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the United front is so striking that they represent two different images of Indian society. While the 12-member BJP Cabinet headed by Mr Vajpayee had six members based in Delhi or Bombay, the 14-member steering committee of the United Front has members who have been operating in Guwahati, Patna, Lucknow, Gwalior, Hyderabad, Madras and Bangalore.

From "Not a Motley Crowd" by Surendra Mohan in *The Hindu* of 1 June, 1996.

In fact, even as a new federal structure takes hold, the regional leadership should be encouraged to look towards raising more resources in the states, and ensuring more fiscal responsibility. While no state government would individually be able to effect unpopular measures, perhaps it is possible to take such decisions jointly at the Centre. These must include the doing away of subsidies in crucial loss-making sectors such as electricity and irrigation, and the implementation of some form of tax on the agricultural income of rich farmers.

Politically, the devolution of power would also mean greater autonomy within the states for disgruntled regions like Jharkhand and Vidarbha. The Janata Dal, the major constituent of the front, has promised to look into demands for autonomy for such regions and set up a commission to examine the possibility of having smaller states. Even the BJP, seeing the way the wind blows, had made a similar promise. This could, in the longer run, mean a resolution to violent agitations such as 'Gorkhaland', 'Bodoland' or 'Uttarakhand'. If true federalism does take root and the regional aspirations of the people are legitimately fulfilled, it could also mean no more festering wounds like Punjab and Kashmir.

The new leaders in New Delhi come from the mofussil, so to speak, and have been given a tremendous opportunity by the people of India, by indicating where their hopes lie. It is up to them to rise to the occasion.



Collecting Orbital Junk

South Asia is hooked on satellite television and what it gets is an eyeful. But there's nobody looking out for the public interest as commercial channels swamp the airwaves.

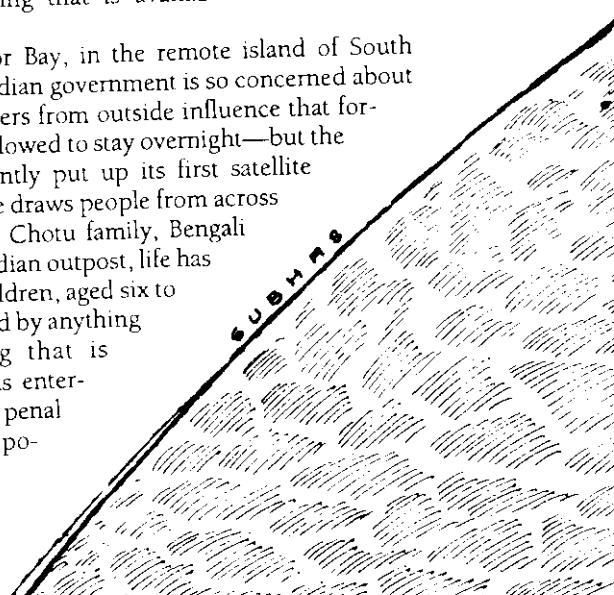
by ***Pratap Rughani***

Zaibunissa Sheikh is a mother of three in Bombay's Colaba slum. Her husband's alcohol habit eats into the family income, but with a cleaning job, the children's contributions and by hawking prawns in the market, she makes 650 rupees a month. All costs, for food, clothing, keeping the children at school—everything—are taken care of with this money. Her narrow one-room house has no running water, and the family visits a community toilet nearby. Life is a grind, but there, in one corner of her room, a television blinks to life and is quickly tuned to MTV.

Zaibunissa's household is addicted to satellite television. The connection charge is INR 110 a month. Mother and children, and the father when he is home and sober, watch BBC World's *Food and Drink* (with the latest on this season's Bordeaux wines), *The Clothes Show*'s couture fashion tips, re-runs of American soaps like *The Bold and The Beautiful*, and several channels of 24-hour, wall-to-wall Bollywood movies and film song compilations.

Up in Jomosom, in the arid rain-shadow region north of the Himalayan range in Nepal, the flat-topped mud-roof houses are all decked with a year's supply of firewood—a symbol of wealth in this semi-Tibetan society. Incongruously, satellite dish antennas peer over the roof-top woodpiles. With a micro-hydropower plant nearby providing the electricity, the locals take their pick of the same programming that is available from Dubai to Hong Kong.

On Wandoor Bay, in the remote island of South Andaman, the Indian government is so concerned about protecting islanders from outside influence that foreigners are not allowed to stay overnight—but the community recently put up its first satellite dish, and the fare draws people from across the bay. For the Chotu family, Bengali settlers in this Indian outpost, life has changed: the children, aged six to 16, are captivated by anything and everything that is beamed down as entertainment. From penal colony to couch po-



tato, total isolation to the satellite age, each day the children soak up about four hours of cartoons, Hindi song-and-dance and sports.

Geostationary Globalisation

Children across South Asia boogie to Western and 'Indipop' music. Lahore kids dress like London dudes, and Colombo's teenagers affect California accents and mannerisms. Globalisation has arrived courtesy of the geostationary orbit, and with it a new youth culture. The era of instant communications, predicted by Marshal McLuhan's "global village", now delivers glimpses of the other's life, but interpreted through commercial —and overwhelmingly consumerist—broadcasting.

The Subcontinent is engaged in a pellmell dash into the satellite age. Under the umbrella coverage of the satellite, diverse regions and populations are being hit by monochromatic programming that, for the moment at least, is equally divided between Western pop culture and Hindi mainstream programming.

We are today living drastic change, and the impact will be visible within the decade, when sociologists and historians study how satellite television changed the face of South Asia. One thing they will marvel at is the incredible human capacity to adapt: villagers in remote hamlets who have not taken a ride in a car or seen a film, are suddenly confronted with gyrating figures in the box that is lit from inside. And this they seem to accept and enjoy: be it the villager from Arunachal Pradesh, the Deccan tribal or the woman behind the purdah in Baluchistan.

The immediacy of television has the ability to inflame passions (witness the role of Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana* series in the rise of Hindutva). But on the positive side it is, albeit cathartically, introducing South Asian societies to the modern world. Even so, South Asia's television 'consumers' have little or no say over programming. This is indication enough that there is more bad than good in the system today. The voice of the social philosopher is drowned by the VJ's ramblings.

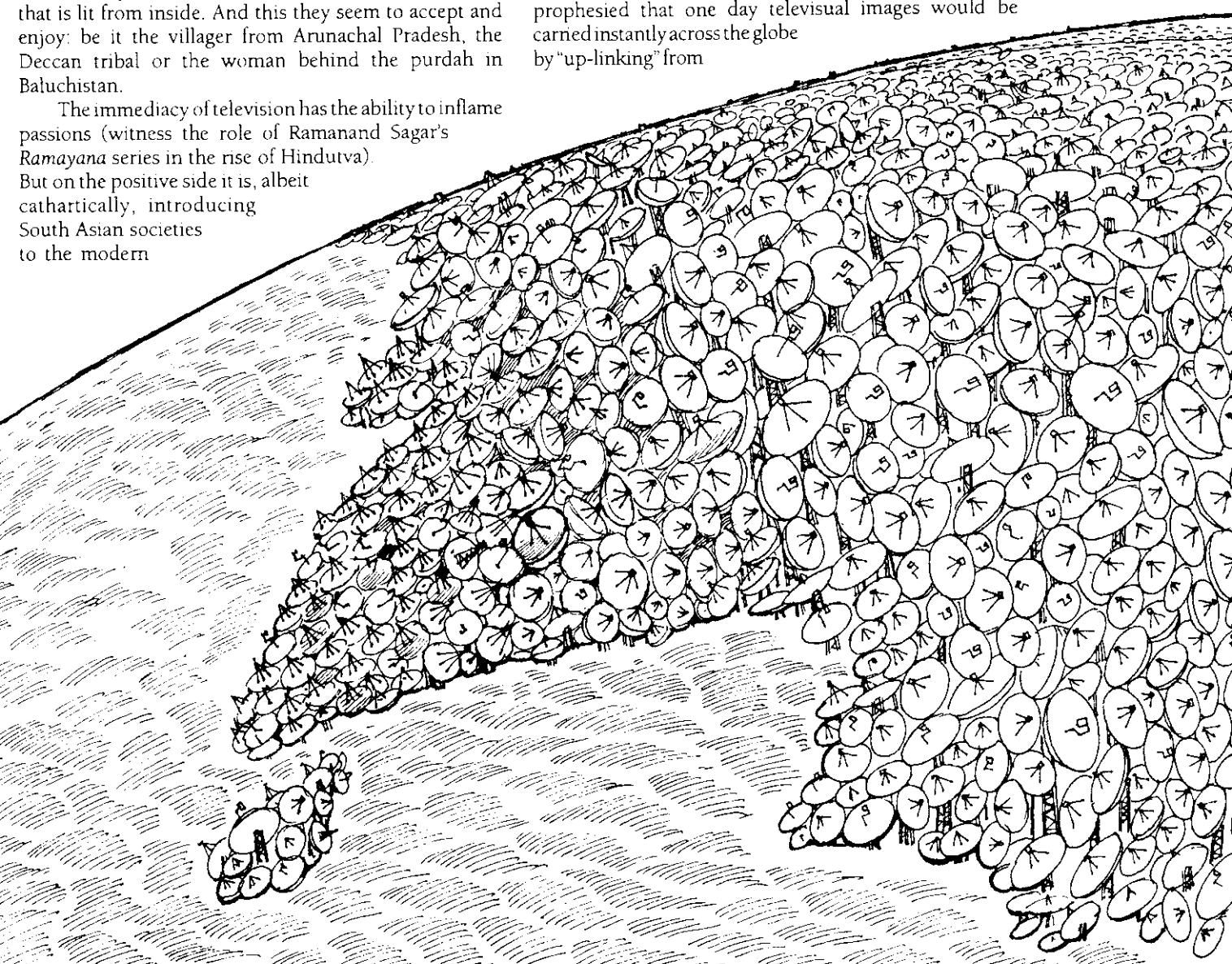
There is alarmist discussion in South Asia of what satellite television is doing to indigenous societies. But these concerns get scant attention from the multinational channels, and there is even less hope from government channels, which for decades have restricted themselves to packaging government news and dull development themes. Confronted with the satellite era, government corporations like PTV, Doordarshan or Rupavahini have tried to catch up to the international channels, going for more chat shows, song-and-dance programmes and serials.

With multinationals ruling the skies, satellite television has gone pan-South Asian with its footprint. Meanwhile, the print media, the world of publishing, and the government departments of information and broadcasting are firmly within nationalist boundaries and straitjackets. Similarly, the fact that consumers are divided across so many linguistic, geographic and national boundaries means that a united challenge to satellite multinationals has not yet been contemplated.

The new push from satellite means that South Asia takes what the West gives, but the reverse is hardly true.

One-Way Satellite

In the late 1940s, science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke prophesied that one day televisual images would be carried instantly across the globe by "up-linking" from



Broadcasts Without Borders

So far so good. Where will the satellite programmers go from here?

by Kamila Hyat

THESE DAYS, it is fashionable in Pakistan, as it is elsewhere, to malign satellite television. Given the daily diet of meaningless Hindi film songs, inane game shows or moronic soap operas churned out by the vast majority of these channels, this is hardly surprising. Quite evidently space for quality programming, which draws less commercial support, is limited on most of the channels, with Jain, ATN and a number of others said to be locked in a battle for survival.

The main exceptions come in the form of the sports and news channels, and, of course, most importantly the Discovery Channel. This channel, initially set up by the National Geographic Society with Russian and British collaboration, gives some indication of how powerful an educational force satellite television can be.

But even though it is the "popular entertainment" aired by Zee, EL, V and so many others, which attracts the vast majority of viewers, the fact is that in Pakistan, satellite channels have had a positive impact.

Because BBC or CNN or even one of the India-based networks are now available, literally at the flick of a remote, a growing number of Pakistanis have access to a variety of perspectives on issues such as Kashmir, the situation in Karachi and so on. Viewers accustomed to hearing Pakistan Television's (PTV) newscasters unflappably ignore all bad news from home while describing in painstaking details violence further afield, in say Bosnia or the West Bank, can now turn to an alternate news channel for a more accurate version of events.

The fact that an increasing number of Pakistanis have access to programming from the West and India has also helped promote a growing liberalistation within a culture choked by the religious extremism enforced and nourished by the country's late military dictator, General Zia-ul Haq. There is little doubt that intense competition from Zee TV and the other satellite channels has encouraged PTV to revoke its former hardline attitude, ushering in an era where more female presenters, pop music concerts, fashion shows and so on make it to air. Although it can be argued that this hardly constitutes liberalisation, in the Pakistani context, a tolerance for what is permitted in the public sphere comes as a welcome change.

It is also true that the borderless world of satellite tv has introduced more people than ever before to India, a country which seen from the eyes of many Pakistanis, is strangely familiar, yet alien; a nation which has much in common, but is seen as the enemy. It is, of course, a pity that all too much of the image of India being beamed across to Pakistan is dominated by the fantasy world of Bollywood—whose stars attract a huge following in Pakistan. But even this has led to a new interest in Indian affairs, with, for instance, a larger number of people than ever before following the Indian elections. Talk about the various modes of coverage by the satellite channels and, obviously, the results themselves, was widespread and this new awareness about realities across the frontier is certainly a positive development.

But the question now is: where will the satellite revolution go from here? Clearly, the potential is immense. How it is put to use will depend on the willingness of the networks to divert from the most commercially viable options, such as game shows, music programmes or Hindi films, towards programming which can offer South Asia a little more in terms of news, opinion and awareness about cultural and political realities in which so much is held in common. Perhaps satellite television can help bring together people whom borders have kept apart.

an earth station to a communications satellite which could then transmit the message to a satellite dish pointed at its signal anywhere within its vast footprint.

In the last five years, and particularly after the fireworks of the Gulf War of 1992 were carried live by CNN, South Asia has been squashed by the satellite heel. Today, Clarke himself is a South Asian citizen living in Sri Lanka. And he has contempt for television. Writing in the journal *Index on Censorship*, he concludes that there could be no superior civilisation in the immediate vicinity of the Solar System because if there were, then, after having watched television, the inter-galactic cops would have been here in no time, "sirens screaming right across the radio spectrum".

What makes satellite television so problematic is that firstly, it is a free-for-all commercial enterprise, and secondly, there is as yet no means to demand some accountability and social responsibility from the multinational proprietors. For George Fernandes, nemesis of multinationals and recently re-elected MP from Bihar, satellite tv looks like it is part of a global conspiracy. "It is the latest act of Western aggression against the Third World," he says. However, while he was once able to ban Coca Cola from India, there is no wriggling out of the satellite footprint.

Cultural Hypnosis

Satellite tv stands at the interface of a futuristic communications industry which US Vice President Al Gore says has great economic and social prospects. By creating a "network of networks, transmitted messages and images at the speed of light across every continent", he says, the world of future media can deliver "sustainable development for the human family" which will bring "strong democracies, better environmental management, improved health care" to the planet.

That might be so, but for the moment, satellite communications in South Asia is nothing but a one-way street. In contrast to Mr Gore's utopian vision, listen to Noam Chomsky during his recent whistle-stop tour of India. The global media, Chomsky told a Bombay audience in early February, is the extension of transnational corporate tyranny. He added: "These are tyrannical, totalitarian institutions, mega-corporations. They are huge command economies, run from the top, relatively unaccountable, and interlinked in various ways. Their first interest is profit, but much broader than that, it is to construct an audience of a particular type. One that is addicted to a certain lifestyle with artificial wants. An audience atomised, separated from one another, fragmented enough so that they don't enter the political arena and disturb the powerful...it's like opening up India to international narco-traffickers."

N RAM, COURTESY FRONTLINE

Chomsky in Madras

Satellite tv has come to symbolise many fights. Demonised or deified as a badge of what's wrong or right

CHANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

with economic liberalism, the debate continues to produce much heat, but certainly no enlightened media policy. Do the guardians of 'Indian values' need to feel so alarmed by youngsters in jeans jiving to Channel V? Or are we distracted by a costume change of minimal significance, and thus missing the bigger picture?

Marshall McLuhan warned in his 1964 treatise *The Medium Is the Message*: "Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the 'content' of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind...The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance."

At the structural level, we are being robbed of the social role of television to educate and inform with interesting and entertaining programmes. Thus, we tumble towards a new information order where ruthlessly commercial imperatives are television's substantial rationale. The dominance of Bollywood programming marks a remarkably easy capitulation to values which have little to do with cultural imperialism from the West and everything to do with how broadcast media and government policy in India are being handed over to "free market forces".

Hindi Hegemony

Will the cultural individuality that is South Asia's gift to the world be swamped by global junk-tv, or will there come a time when populations will truly be able to benefit from a new "democracy of information"? Notwithstanding the oft-repeated diatribes against "cultural imperialism" of satellite tv, it cannot be banned or wished away. In anarchic South Asia, only Bhutan has banned dish antennas, and that too is but a holding operation, for satellite receivers will soon be so small that the state will not be able to police them.

At first, when there were only STAR TV, CNN and BBC, there was a lot of talk in the Indian media of cultural invasion from the skies. Since Hindi programming also began to ride the satellite bands, the debate has subsided. While there is criticism of this Hindi hegemony of the satellite transponder in other regions and countries, it has been difficult for critics to make their mark because Hindi programming responds to the market that smaller language groups do not seem to command.

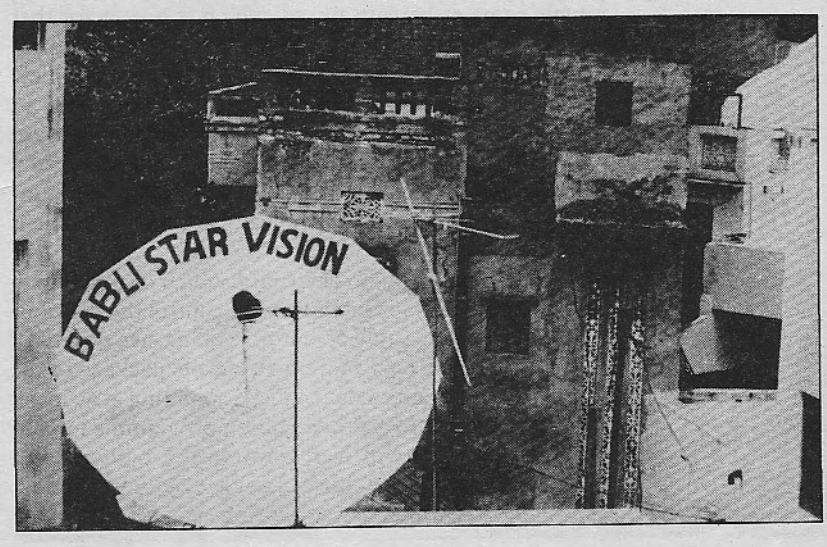
Hindi programming is dominated by Zee TV, EL TV, Sony ATN and a suddenly consumer-savvy Doordarshan which is quite unrecognisable from the slothful creature of the pre-STAR era. But it is India's South which has seen the real explosion of channels. Today, there are tv channels in each of the four major language groups: Sun TV, Raj TV and J.Jay TV in Tamil, Gemini TV and Eenadu TV in Telegu, Asianet in Malayalam, and a Kannada channel.

The totalitarian ownership of satellite tv in the hands of a few corporations has proved inimical to the ideal of freedom of information

It is at first glance a bit incongruous that India's northern Hindi heartland has so few satellite channels, whereas the South has a plethora. But, this seems understandable when one takes into account the fact that Hindi is the link language of the North. Any Hindi channel is likely to reach a much larger audience than would local language programmes. This makes it an easy medium for the programmer as well as the advertiser.

In the highland states of the Indian Northeast, 'cultural imperialism' refers not to American soaps, but to the Hindi-language, Delhi-centric programmes that the people of Mizoram, Nagaland or Meghalaya are forced to watch in the name of indigenous television. At a recent media workshop in Calcutta, participants from the Northeast said they actually welcomed STAR TV as a relief from Doordarshan.

The only way to save South Asia from Western and Hindi domination would be through more local programming. As STAR TV's chief executive Gary Davey learnt at the Calcutta workshop, locally produced programmes in local languages are the key to capturing mass audiences in the future. After all, despite the criticism of satellite programming, it has hardly stayed static in the last few years. The first wave of Indian satellite channels brought Hindi hits like *Filmi Chakkar* and soaps like *Tara*. Stage



PHAL S. GIROTA

Cable operator's invitation, New Delhi


CHANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

two has seen new Indian channels cultivate their different markets more precisely, and stage three could well throw up more local language programming.

It all depends, however, on whether a market can sustain a local language channel. The fact that Zee TV stopped its Bengali programming a few months ago indicates that there is as yet little advertising in localised markets to act as an incentive.

Technology and Market

In the past, broadcast frequencies were a scarce resource and television signals were distributed by earth-bound transmitters and kept within national boundaries. Satellite technology changed all that. With its northern and southern 'footprints' STAR TV spans 53 countries of Asia.

Dozens of communications satellites in geostationary orbit now rule the Asian skies. Who owns a satellite or who is able to rent transponders depends entirely upon the size and clout of a country and government, or the size of the market back on earth. Satellites carrying tv channels to South Asia include PanAmSat 4, Insat-2C, Palapa C1, Gorizont, Intelsat 704, AsiaSat-1 and AsiaSat-2.

The collapse of the Soviet Union meant that satellite rentals came at bargain prices, which is one factor that contributed to the satellite tv explosion in the Subcontinent. New satellites are going up all the time and new channels are being created to beam programmes to an expanding market on the ground. Digital compression technology (a method of squeezing a signal so that many more can be carried simultaneously) means that hundreds of channels could technically become available if we want them.

But the people who determine which channels succeed will increasingly be those who control the distribution network, like cable operators who receive dozens of channels but deliver a more manageable package to the home. No one wants a dozen dishes pointing at as many satellites in order to get their chosen programme mix, so the cable-wallahs will lean towards the best package on two or three "hot bird" satellites. Most channels, especially newcomers, want to join the same satellite as the market leaders.

Due primarily to the technology advance, South Asian television has moved rapidly from public monopolies like Doordarshan to a handful of private corporations joined now by the indigenous channels. Currently, all of the satellite channels in India except Zee TV lose money. For the big players like STAR, CNN-I, TNT and MTV that's fine: they have deep pockets and they can afford to cross-subsidise their Asian operations and ride out the lean period whilst they get firmly established. To meet local language needs, their strategy has been to buy tv rights to peak events or commission local programming. Or, they buy you out. STAR TV observed Zee's success in capturing almost a quarter of advertising spent on satellite tv—so they bought a 50-percent stake in Zee.

Advertising revenue for television in India is rising, and is predicted to reach INR 1,100 crore (USD 35 million) in the current year. However, for the moment, the attention of all the competing channels is focussed on prestige, audience size and profile. Hard cash will flow later, especially when they start to encrypt signals so that homes that want to continue to receive the signal will have to pay a fee to have it decoded.

STAR TV, owned by Rupert Murdoch's multi-billion dollar News Corporation, aims at an integrated communications domination of Asia by establishing the most popular media package (channels of sports, music, movies, local language programming and, later, current affairs) to take decisive control of the market. Mr Murdoch's vision of a grand private monopoly is already materialising. News Corp has patented an encryption and decoding system that looks like it will become the industry standard. It is a bit like owning the railway engines, the tracks, and even deciding the timetables. That is what Mr Murdoch has in mind for South Asia, and the world.

Totalitarian TV

After buying STAR TV, Mr Murdoch declared that satellite tv is "a direct threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere". But in the same way that "free trade" is part slogan/part euphemism for trading relationships broadly defined in the Western interest, so "freedom of information" is in no sense an equal exchange. The new push from satellite means that South Asia takes what the West gives, but the reverse is hardly true.

No sooner had he trumpeted his threat to totalitarian regimes, than Mr Murdoch received complaints from Beijing authorities about news on BBC World (part of STAR


CHANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

TV's package) dealing with human rights abuses in China, in particular the trade in human organs for transplants. Mr Murdoch, worried that his business ambitions in China's vast economy might be threatened, responded by throwing BBC World off the northern beam of the STAR satellite.

The Chinese government had found a coalition partner they could do business with and were much appeased by this monumental act of censorship. What became clear, however, was that the shiny new satellite operators might spout democracy, but they are beholden to market-Leninism. Like the concentration of media ownership in the hands of one state broadcaster, the totalitarian ownership of satellite tv in the hands of a few corporations has proved itself to be inimical to the ideal of freedom of information.

By concentrating on opening up the satellite channels for a multiplicity of independent voices, South Asia can try to provide regional and local news that is not filtered through a prism in Atlanta or London, and force the opening up of societies from the decades-long grip of the government ministries of information.

Up to a point, this is already happening, and news and analyses are already being beamed down by private channels, though not in the most wholesome of ways. In South India, politicians have found a way to cement the unholy alliance of commercial and political interests, as was seen clearly in the coverage of the recent elections. J.Jay TV in Tamil Nadu, owned by then Chief Minister Jayalalitha's relations, provided blatantly partisan reporting throughout her catastrophic campaign. The station defended itself by pointing out that the rival Sun TV, owned by political rivals, was doing the same.

Notwithstanding the biases shown by J.Jay and Sun, analysts believe that television coverage of the Indian general election was a watershed in terms of news and current affairs programming for South Asia. For the first time, viewers were allowed uncensored, un-edited, real-time coverage, and the public was able to see news being created in front of the camera. "Now that the public has seen what real news on television is, it will be difficult for Doordarshan to try to stuff the genie back into the bottle," said one newscaster.

He and other television people believe that Indian private channels will really come into their own—both in terms of independent news and quality programming—once they are allowed to uplink their programmes to a satellite from India. Because of governmental suspicions and protection of Doordarshan, uplinking can be done now only very expensively through the government. Once the government gets over its hangups, the private channels will be able to go live rather than have to transport videotapes as far afield as Manila and Moscow for uplinking.

Sushma Swaraj, Minister for Information and Broadcasting for 13 days in the short-lived BJP government, had indicated that the demand for uplinking made by private tv station operators was "justified".

Market-Friendly Doordarshan

There is no choice but for enlightened governments in all South Asian countries to let go of government television

CHANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

Game shows are as popular as song-and-dance

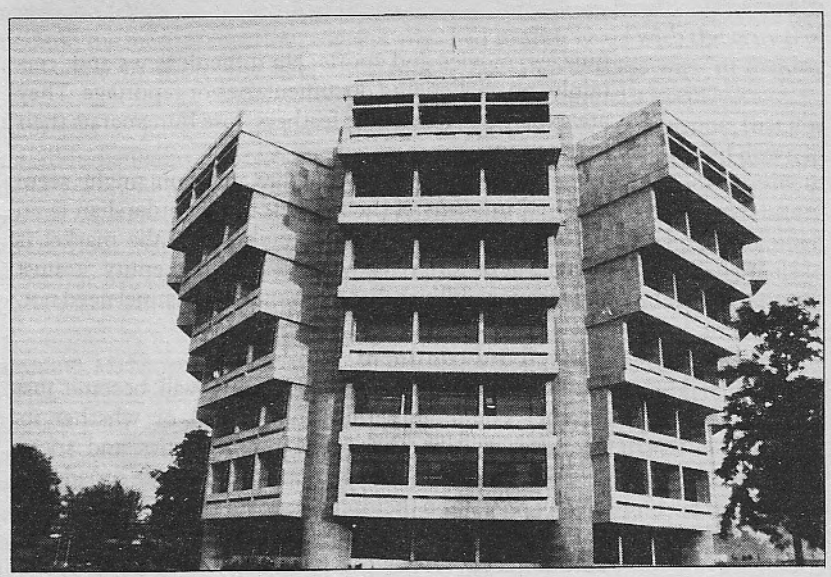
stations. Rather than close down the state stations or privatise them, however, they must instead be transformed into autonomous bodies, market-oriented but with a commitment to quality programming. The only way to face the challenge of new technology is to develop a new response, otherwise state broadcasters are in danger of being sidelined.

A study of how Doordarshan is evolving and the direction that it should take, for example, would be useful as India's neighbours decide what to do with their state-owned stations. Doordarshan is one of the largest television broadcasters in the world, and in India it has a 'baseline viewership' of 80 million, through direct satellite broadcasts as well as local repeater stations in rural areas.

For decades, Doordarshan relied on programming made up of dull development reports aimed at rural viewers, government-dictated news and current affairs, and *Chitrahaar*, the original medley of Hindi film song-dance sequences. When the satellite invasion arrived, Doordarshan proved more than willing to jettison its public responsibilities. In its panic, it has gone down-market to compete to win back satellite audiences.

Like the new satellite broadcasters, Doordarshan now wants only to commission "programme products" that will deliver the audiences craved by advertisers as cheaply and as uncontroversially as possible. Game shows,

Mandi House, HQ of Doordarshan, still decides what most of India watches



PRAVIN GHUTA

Long Before STAR, There Was SITE

THE FIRST satellite invasion of the Subcontinent occurred fully two decades ago, and it was benign. Encouraged by forward-looking scientists like the late Vikram Sarabhai, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi launched a programme known as Satellite Instructional Televison Experiment, SITE for short. The plan was to make 'global village technology' serve the villages of India and, starting in August 1975, SITE began transmitting development and educational programmes to 2400 villages in six states.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the New Delhi earth station during the SITE telecasts

Programmes on health and nutrition, farming and contraception, as well as educational broadcasts for children, were beamed to community TV sets. The programme was supported by the United States, which provided the satellite as well as the television sets.

SITE was television with a social purpose and, like most well-meaning development exercises, it died, because: a) it was boring after the initial interest wore off, b) it was not backed up by 'extension workers' in the target villages, and c) it was a one-time experiment which did not have inbuilt sustainability.

Today, with Doordarshan and state broadcasters in South Asia wearing only the fig leaf of development programming, the SITE experiment does not even exist in institutional memory. Arbind Sinha, coordinator of the Development and Communications Research Unit based at the Indian Space Research Unit in Ahmedabad, which ran the SITE programme, acknowledges that "there has been a shift from the original intention of using TV as a medium for education and development to domination by poor quality entertainment aimed at pleasing urban viewers."

quizzes, movies and sports. No difficult news and, certainly, no challenging documentaries or reportage. They are expensive, may ruffle feathers, lose bureaucrats their promotions.

Its response to the satellite invasion might seem inspired in terms of the market, but Doordarshan is on the wrong track. Its current embrace of the market is incongruous for, as a government-owned entity, it must bear responsibilities that a commercial channel need not.

Spliced Subcontinent

Paradoxically, whether broadcasting will become just another commodity (like in the US) or whether its character will be shaped by public duties and social responsibilities will depend on whether state broadcasters can reposition themselves to take the lead. The reason to go back to the state broadcasters—suitably autonomised—for at least some of tomorrow's satellite tv programming is because private industry will not go beyond the isolated token gesture. Left to their own devices, commercial satellite operators will not deliver what South Asians need most. We will end up with a version of American television: dozens of channels offering trashy game shows, escapist or violent soaps and sensationalised news, all tightly held within the narrow cultural range that advertisers deem acceptable.

The disappointing capitulation from the ideals of public service broadcasting that we are seeing today all over the Subcontinent must be arrested. The continuing tension between democratic values, state control and the pattern of private media ownership concentrated in the hands of a few overseas players need urgent resolution in a way that television is reclaimed for public service rather than solely for entertainment.

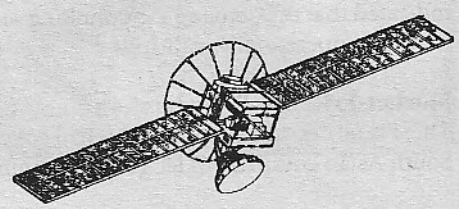
By broadcasting to diverse constituencies, satellite programming could help reconnect a spliced subcontinent in its giant catchment area. Providing news that is independent of governmental strictures because there is no one to ban their reception, satellite channels can help promote mutual understanding of the contentious issues that have kept South Asians—particularly Indians and Pakistanis—apart for four decades. Good, culture-specific programming—for children, for example—can go a long way towards promoting education and spreading knowledge regionwide.

Progressive groups must now work with enlightened policy-makers to look regionally at what modern media should deliver for all our communities. Humanising the global ambitions of satellite transnationals and insisting on the public service responsibilities of state-run stations demands a coordinated regional response.

Since, unlike the cinema and the press, satellite tv boradcasts cover the entire Subcontinent, concerned South Asians from all over must come together and raise a voice for quality programming. As a bloc, a South Asian Broadcasting Union could agree on common production guidelines and negotiate, for example, a dedicated channel of good children's and educational programmes in regional languages, cross-subsidised by the money-spinning movie and sports channels.

The satellite revolution is an opportunity for South Asian broadcasting to evolve an ethical broadcasting culture and a coherent media policy to deliver it. With this, television can at last come of age as a public service: a medium that contributes significantly to the region rather than one that only anaesthetises audiences into a vacuous attempt to escape it. That would be television worth watching.

P. Rughani is a documentary director and Associate Producer of the Channel 4 television series Satellite Wars.



Through the Magic Window
Television and Change in India

by Sevanti Ninan
Penguin Books India, New Delhi
ISBN 0-14-025631-8
INR 125

Since the satellites began bearing down on the Subcontinent, television has displaced many household activities, "notably sleeping", says the author of a book on India and the tube.

review by ***Kanak Mani Dixit***

Sevanti Ninan, a Delhi-based journalist following the electronic media since 1986, relies on market re search done for Doordarshan, India's state broadcaster, and studies by departments of mass communications in several universities, to produce a useful and up-to-date dissertation on India's recent transformation into a television society.

Ms Ninan's interests veer towards the use of the medium for development purposes, and for the benefit of children and women. She believes that these responsibilities have been abdicated by Doordarshan as it scrambled to confront international competition which arrived via satellite.

In the pre-satellite era, writes Ms Ninan, Doordarshan seemed intent only in expanding its reach, rather than developing good "software", meaning programming. The result was that for decades the South and the Northeast were forced to suffer Hindi programmes, and the country as a whole had to live with a "distinct Delhi-centred approach".

As time went on, development programming, exemplified by the SITE experiment started in 1975 *(see box on facing page)*, "began to look like an aberration in Doordarshan's steady progress as an instrument for propaganda and mass entertainment." A medium meant for the illiterate and underdeveloped was hijacked by the urban middle class.

As for Prasar Bharati, the bill which was to have created an autonomous body conjoining All India Radio and Doordarshan, it was pushed through Parliament by the Janata Dal government in 1989, but the matter has stood still since. Will the bill be revived, now that a coalition government with Janata Dal as leading member has just achieved power in New Delhi? Ms Ninan would know.

Author Ninan

Even without developmental programming, Ms Ninan concedes the benefits of satellite tv. The little screen makes momentous events real for India's poor in a manner that the print media (which requires reading) was never able to. Indian housewives now understand politics a little better. Above all, the author sees television as a friend of the poor, providing company and entertainment to millions of households. (The upper classes were hooked after international news channels and pay channels came on.)

On the down side, impossible aspirations are being created, says Ms Ninan, and the sale of imitation cosmetics and skin whiteners is up all over India. Village belles demand hair conditioners when mustard oil used to serve just fine. "Indians treat commercials as premium entertainment. Television has created tremendous brand awareness among every class of viewer."

Ms Ninan has grave concerns about the continuous film-based programming that children of all classes are watching. A 1990 Doordarshan survey of 18,000 families showed that children were watching everything except the programmes meant for them. Poor children watch television longer than rich children. Both categories are being exposed to overt sexuality among teenagers at a very early age, with an excess of "kissing and disrobing" Also, a whole generation of the Subcontinent's children, whether they live in Shimla or Cochin, are being "homogenised".

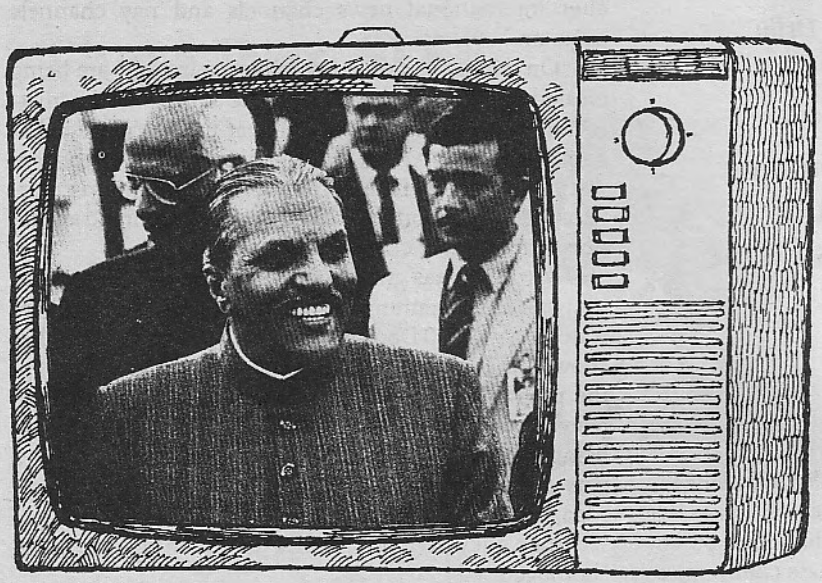
The author tracks Doordarshan's metamorphosis from a staid government channel to a fiesty player which has now begun to speak the language of commercial broadcasters. Faced with multinational marauders, "by March 1995 Doordarshan had launched a counter-satellite invasion of neighbouring countries in South Asia." Indian producers became so proficient that, "by 1995 the satellite invasion was helping India make an impact on countries and societies overseas." Satellite television has allowed Bombay's advertisement houses break into the Gulf market, and today they make commercials for clients in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Ms Ninan's research throws up many interesting tidbits. Few know, for example, that STAR TV's acronym stands for Satellite Television for the Asia Region. Housewives all over India began to skip their afternoon naps, she reports, after Doordarshan began showing movies in its afternoon transmission and added a daily soap for good measure. Cable operators who control much of the consumer programming in India are mostly former video parlour owners who had to shift gears with the arrival of the satellite channels. Zee TV's success was "in making film music pay for the whole channel's keep."

The weaknesses of this volume are few: one, that it is occasionally repetitious; two, that it gets bogged down in research details; and three, Ms Ninan does not venture to chart the course for television in India, and, by extension, South Asia. For example, what will (or should) happen when the Indian Government allows Indian channels to uplink directly, and how will the broadcasting of non-Doordarshan news affect Indian politics? Can space be created between dull development programming and the song-and-dance—for what in the West is called "public television"?

Through the Magic Window, published in 1995, remains current and readable even though the world of television is in a state of flux. It should be read by all Subcontinentals who are concerned about what satellite television is doing to us.

Caught between Zee and Zia



Most Pakistanis understand Hindi, and so they watch Zee TV. What to do? Some say better this than the state-run propagandist medium bequeathed by Gen Zia-ul Haq.

by ***Kamila Hyat***

It is a cold March evening in a tiny mountain village, a few miles north of the popular hill station of Murree. Crowded together in a small house alongside a river, a group of 40 men and children, warmly wrapped against the chill in shawls and traditional woollen hats, has gathered around a television set. They are watching a typical Zee TV transmission, dominated by gyrating screen stars and tunes from popular Hindi film hits.

The owner of the set was the first to instal a dish antenna in the village, and since it was set up a few months ago, people gather before it every night. Apart from the occasional PTV (Pakistan Television) drama serial or news bulletin, the most popular choice is Zee TV and EL—partly because all the other available channels air programmes mainly in English which, obviously, holds little interest for these villagers.

The viewers seem unclear as to where the transmissions emanate from, although a few youngsters mention a "huge station" which is "based on a rocket". A 21-year-old wagon driver, Darshan, explains, "We like to watch mainly the Hindi songs and films as this gives us something to enjoy. Otherwise we had just PTV, which shows nothing but news and discussions by politicians".

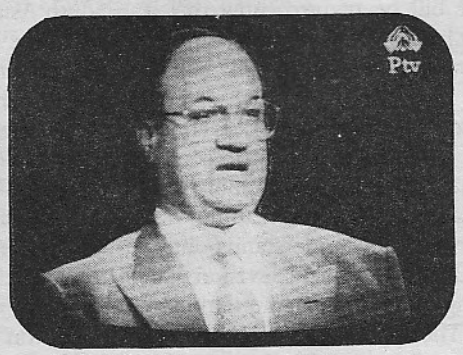
This, of course, is not strictly true, but what is beyond dispute is that the Indian programmes beamed out by Zee, Jain, ATN, EL, Sony, Movie Club are more entertaining than local programmes and are widely watched. The irresistibility of Hindi programmes is also due to the fact that Hindi is understood by virtually everyone in Pakistan, not to mention the huge popularity enjoyed there by Bollywood film stars.

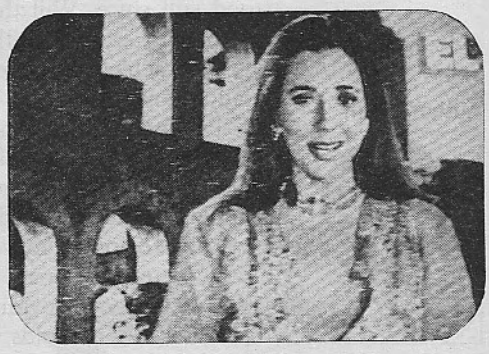
"This has always been the kind of entertainment people have gone for, it allows them an escape into a world of fantasy and romance so, naturally, when it is so widely available, they will turn to it. Before satellite TV, Indian radio stations playing songs were tuned in to all the time," says Saiqa Haider, a post-graduate sociology research student based at Leeds University in the UK.

Ms Haider is studying the influence of the satellite revolution and has just returned from the conservative Dera Ghazi Khan area in rural Baluchistan. She reports that in some of the remoter parts of Pakistan, out of reach of even PTV, satellite dish antennas pull in Hindi programming with clear reception. "This is suddenly bringing before the people a totally new impression of life, in terms of the modern Hindi plays, films, and so on," she says.

"On the longer term, this will undoubtedly have an impact," she says, citing the case of an elderly Baloch woman who, after watching a play on Zee, refused to believe that young, unaccompanied women "wear such daring clothes in public". Her granddaughters, who do not attend school, are not allowed to watch, for fear they will be 'corrupted'.

PTV is very staid compared to Zee and EL





CHANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

Hindi Rout

Access to satellite transmission is now widespread in urban and rural Pakistan. With the cost of locally made dish antennas and receivers having fallen to as little as PKR 6000, a growing number of middle-class homes now receive the transmissions. The most popular stations are Zee and EL, mainly because antennas capable of receiving the AsiaSat signal are more commonly owned. After BBC switched over to the PanAmSat-4 system in April this year, or because they wanted to catch ESPN's sports programming, a number of people did instal a new antenna and polariser which gave them access not only to the BBC news but also to Sony, TNT, ABN, ESPN, Movie Club, Chinese channel and Discovery.

The Jain and MTV signals are also available, but reception is poor. However, dish antenna dealers in Lahore report that more new buyers are opting for either access to the PanAmSat-4 system, because it offers more Hindi language networks, or antennas which can be manually rotated to catch a greater variety of channels.

Pakistan as yet has no cable TV system, although the first such scheme is presently being set up in Karachi. The director of Pay TV, as the company is called, Air Marshal (retd) Shafique Haider, is adamant that no Indian channels will be offered through the cable network "because we don't want to promote Indian culture or the propaganda they are showing".

Even so, Zee is the most popular channel and is commonly watched in hundreds of thousands of households around the country. The popularity of the Hindi films and songs, compared to which Pakistani film songs seem staid, is immense. But even though the audience for these programmes, along with game shows such as *Close-up Antakshari* is huge, most people seem defensive when asked about their viewing habits.

"There's nothing wrong with the Zee songs, we switch them off if they are too vulgar and the children are watching, and we don't watch the news on Zee TV because it is nothing but propaganda," says Mohammad Farhan, a bank manager. This attitude is common, with many complaining that the news on Zee and programmes like *Aap ki Adaalat* are biased.

But at the same time, most also admit that they do watch the entertainment programmes churned out round the clock by these channels. Some, like Islamabad-based advertising executive Kamran Zafar, also admit privately that Zee news, for example, is well presented and 'more balanced' than the news on PTV.

Undoubtedly, the satellite revolution has had its impact on Pakistani television. Both PTV and the semi-private STN (Shalimar Television Network) have borrowed from the success of Zee and EL, among others. Coinciding with the growing liberalisation which followed the end of the martial law era of General Zia-ul Haq in 1988, many of the film and pop music programmes on both of Pakistan's earth-bound networks mimic the Zee, EL or V Channel style of presentation. Hep young presenters here increasingly adopt the new lingua franca of the airwaves: a blend of Urdu and English which is today much in vogue. STN is also advertising that it will soon begin a series of "Zee TV-style" game shows.

Changing face of PTV: Sania Saeed hosting *Hawwa ka Naam*, a talk show on women's issues

Prostitution in the Air

The 'Zee-ification' of Pakistani society is not universally interpreted as a healthy development. Most satellite channels, some of which are struggling for survival, concentrate on providing cheaply produced, popular entertainment programmes. There is little room for quality documentary slots, programmes highlighting social issues, and so on. Prominent documentary film-maker Mushtaq Gazdar, whose controversial films on a variety of social issues, including religious bigotry, have won international acclaim, is scathing in his criticism of Hindi satellite channels.

"They are promoting only a glamorous and soapy way of life, with a heavily entertainment-based song-and-dance format," he says. "Glamour in this form is in some ways an early form of prostitution." Mr Gazdar regrets that there is so little room on these channels for programmes highlighting the realities of life in South Asia. However, he concedes that, from the Pakistani point of view, even the form of liberalisation offered by these channels may not be entirely negative. After the Zia period with its conservative, so-called Islamic policies, any form of liberalisation is welcomed. Even if this should take the unfortunate form of women promenading down a catwalk, at least it serves the purpose of making a wider variety of activities acceptable in public.

Not surprisingly, the Islamic clergy has been harsh in its attacks on the satellite channels, and particularly the Indian networks. The right-wing Jamaat-i-Islami routinely accuses them of spreading "immorality and propaganda". Newspaper columns and letters to the editor in some sections of the press propagate the same view, with the conservative *Nawa-e-Waqt* Urdu language daily calling recently for a ban on "naked women and other indecency". Late last year, at the Punjab University campus, which is patrolled by the Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba (IJT, the student wing of the Jamaat), a student was badly roughed up for maintaining that some Indian channels provided good programmes for the youth.

But this hostility towards the satellite channels seems to be a minority perspective. Perhaps reflecting the fact that religious parties have never gained even a two percent representation in the Pakistani legislature, their views on many issues hold little real weight. There is little doubt that satellite channels now available across Pakistan are here to stay and be seen.

K. Hyat is a journalist with The News, *Lahore.*

After the Zia period with its conservative, so-called Islamic policies, any form of liberalisation is welcomed

NEPAL TELEVISION

Surrender to the Satellite Challenge

by ***Suman Pradhan***

It is not even a state secret—Nepal has the worst television in all South Asia. Nepal Television (NTV), the state-owned broadcasting monopoly doles out such stale fare that, other than a couple of humour shows, its two most popular programmes are Pakistani serials on Tuesday evenings and Hindi films on Saturday afternoons.

If it is true that the only way to counter the satellite invasion is by producing as good if not better programmes than are beamed down, then NTV can provide the best advice on how to avoid that responsibility. For NTV's news is without spine, its tele-dramas hark back to the early days of melodramatic theatre, and a feudal mentality keeps good producers alienated and off the air.

The result is that the Nepali audience has abandoned Nepal Television as hopeless. The odd minister probably still watches to see himself garlanding some statue or other, but the public is elsewhere, tuning into Doordarshan, or Zee, or even PTV. Five years after the satellite invasion, every middle class Kathmandu household is hooked to one or more of the numerous satellite channels.

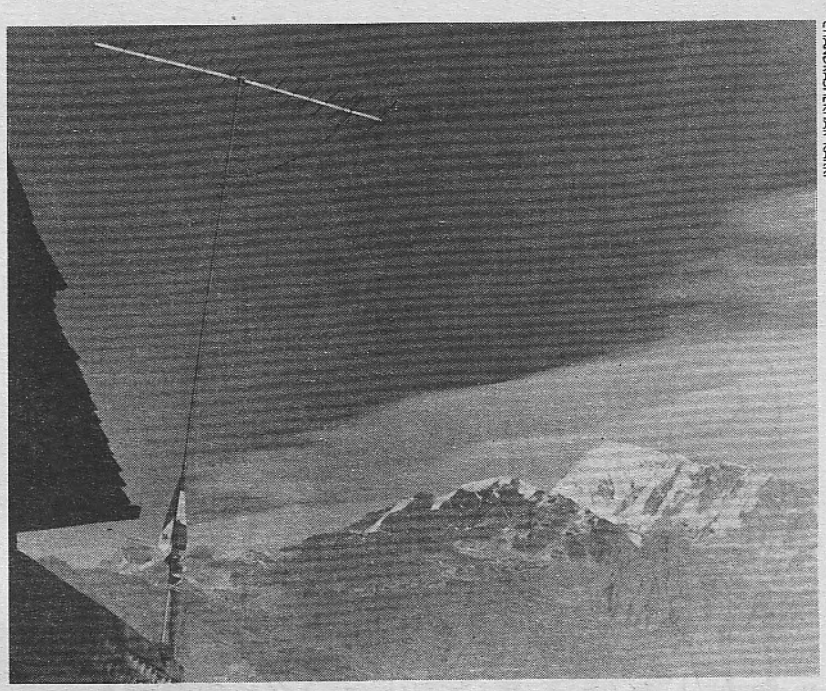
NTV, which once enjoyed near-total monopoly, has been relegated to the status of a minor player in its own country. Despite a decade in existence, the station's revenue is stagnant at NPR 4 crores per annum, and it is on for less than 7 hours a day. As long as NTV's programming remains so embarrassingly bad, it does not make sense even to debate such hefty societal issues as electronic cultural invasion (from India, Pakistan or the West).

While the travails of NTV are not much different than those of other state-owned broadcasters in the region, what is unique is the Nepali station's inability to respond. While others, notably India's Doordarshan, first fumbled but then found their feet, NTV remains entangled in red-tape.

Of course, it need not be this way. The Nepali market is now large and active enough to attract a fairly strong commercial base. Besides, if it were to go on satellite, NTV could tap into the larger audience footprint that is available across Darjeeling, Sikkim, southern Bhutan (where dish antennas are for the moment banned) and a large Nepali diaspora all over India.

The national broadcaster has been agonizingly slow to respond to the threat from the skies. Programmes which can lure viewers are too few and far between, and popular entertainers have given up in disgust even as NTV hires slapstick entertainers whose hallmark is mediocrity.

NTV has not given up on its amateurish airing of "educational programmes", which include sleepy development documentaries and current affairs programmes run by unappealing anchors. NTV says it is obliged to do development broadcasts to meet its "social obligations", but it is these programmes that some think are anti-social for their inability to respect the viewer.



C.HANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

How long before a dish replaces the comb?

NTV's Chairman Kishore Nepal, who comes from the print media, concedes that his station has not been able to compete with the satellite broadcasters. "If nothing is done now, we could lose more viewers," he says.

If NTV cannot ensure quality programming, then the only way is to involve the private sector. Says Abhaya Shrestha, Operations Vice President of Shangri-La Channel, a private satellite signal distributor, "NTV should focus on being a national broadcaster, and leave programme production to the private sector."

Indeed, purely in terms of its reach, NTV is well on its way to becoming a national broadcaster. With one broadcasting studio and seven repeater stations, it covers the eastern and central regions where 43 percent of Nepal's 21 million population lives. Work is underway to bring in the west of the country under NTV's network as well.

As NTV gropes about, one private party is already preparing to go on satellite. Space Time Network (STN), Nepal's biggest cable operator, already has an uplinking license from the government and has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Panamsat-4 satellite (in geostationary orbit over the Indian Ocean) and Rimsat to lease a transponder to beam its own Nepali language programmes.

Jamim Shah, chairman and managing director of STN, says his company already has enough Nepali programmes on tape for four months and it is just a matter of time before he uplinks with the satellite. "The Nepali market is large enough to sustain good local language programming," says Shah. Somebody should let Nepal Television in on that secret.

S. Pradhan is a reporter with The Kathmandu Post.

Extra Terrestrial Piracy

Some call him a pirate, others say he is just a shrewd businessman. He has made money by plucking satellite programmes off the satellite channels.

by Manik de Silva

Nahil Wijesuriya, a 51-year-old self-made millionaire, is a likeable guy. Stockily built with short-cropped hair, his eyes twinkle and he laughs easily. He likes the fun things of this world and revels at the chance of a ringside seat to excitement. He certainly had all that when he set up the zanily named Extra Terrestrial Vision, Sri Lanka's fifth television station.

ETV has bloomed by helping itself, free, gratis and for nothing, to BBC signals taken off satellites orbiting the earth.

"It is rather like this," explains Mr Wijesuriya. "If your neighbour's mango tree overhangs your garden, you are free to take the fruit over your property. That is perfectly legitimate. You are not breaking any law. The BBC signal was plucked from the sovereign air space of Sri Lanka. We did not do anything illegal and despite a great deal of effort, nobody has been able to establish that we have."

The BBC tolerated it for a while. But not only was ETV pirating the signal, it was also editing out original commercials to replace them with local advertisements. Mr Wijesuriya said that BBC initially was very supportive of their programmes reaching Sri Lanka courtesy ETV, which had got its project approved by the regulators in Colombo on the basis that they were going into satellite transmissions. But as to whether they were going to pay the parties originating these transmissions was, to borrow the ETV promoter's language, "not mentioned".

ETV had gone through the appraisal process to set up shop, obtained the approval of the Director-General of Telecommunications to import transmitters, begun test transmissions with the necessary authority and was awaiting formal cabinet approval when lightning struck. The late President Ranasinghe Premadasa, then in office, perceived the new station and its promoters to be unsympathetic to him and slammed the door on a project which already had had considerable investment made on it.

"He regarded us as a Gamini Dissanayake station," says Mr Wijesuriya. That explains a lot. Mr Wijesuriya had made his fortune hauling heavy equipment for the multi-purpose Mahaweli river diversion project that his friend, Mr Dissanayake, had promoted 15 years ago. Mr Dissanayake (and Lalith Athulathmudali) had unsuccessfully competed with Mr Premadasa for the ruling United National Party (UNP) ticket to succeed ageing President J.R. Jayewardene.

Ensconced in the presidency, Mr Premadasa had commenced marginalising his rivals. Tragically, all three men who ran that race have since been assassinated—first Mr Athulathmudali, then Mr Premadasa and, finally, Mr Dissanayake. But ETV has survived and prospered thanks to what Mr Wijesuriya's friends see as his genius and critics as his crookedness.

What ETV was doing enraged a rival Sri Lankan station, MTV, even more than it did the BBC. MTV (no relation to its namesake music channel) had paid the BBC to beam a news broadcast under which the 1600 hours BBC news would be beamed at 1900 hours local time. Mr Wijesuriya says his ETV had an edge because it was bouncing off live the BBC's satellite transmissions. He says, "We were relaying BBC 24 hours and viewers here could have it no sooner it was beamed out of London.

"The MTV owners protested and got BBC to write us a 'cease-and-desist' letter. I went to court (in Colombo) and said they were impinging on our rights. By the third hearing it was agreed that the case be taken off the roll and we come to an agreement," he adds.

There has been a lot of angry noise but no agreement. Mr Wijesuriya argues that the Intellectual Property Act and the Broadcasting Law applicable to these matters in

Sri Lanka were not being hroken in any way. He says the BBC knew it was on a sticky wicket and only acted as they did because they were gingered up by the MTV owners. "We are small enough for them to ignore. It's just that the Maharajahs (then owners of MTV) warmed them up," he said.

Legal Pirates

In the two years he ran ETV, Mr Wijesuriya claims to have made SLR 24 million after depreciation. Some months ago, he sold off the station to a Lankan group at a tidy 400 percent profit. He claims that what he did was knock programming prices down for everybody. Says Wijesuriya: "People who want to buy programmes from satellite operators are able to negotiate the prices down because they know they have an option." That option, of course, is pirating.

MTV's Managing Director John Barton whose station has also been beaming BBC 24 hours of the day since 1 April (after paying for the rights) says that 50 percent of the television product now available in Sri Lanka is pirated by ETV. "BBC is bought by us and ripped off by ETV," he says matter-of-factly. Mr Barton recognises Mr Wijesuriya as an "astute businessman who knows how to play the game down here".

He says ETV's new owners seemed receptive to discontinuing practices pioneered by Mr Wijesuriya but admits that they would find it difficult to make money if they do. Industry sources said that MTV, which is losing money right now on its television activity but hopes for profits down the road, had also considered piracy. But the station's owners say they wish to be strictly legitimate.

The Colombo government has been making some noises about closing loopholes in the copyright laws to prevent piracy of foreign satellite transmissions. Trade Minister Kingsley Wickramaratne said recently the local copyright authority had been asked to study this matter but nothing has come of it. Media Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake is on record saying that amendments to the 1982 Intellectual Property Act are being contemplated.

Mr Senanayake believes, as does Mr Wijesuriya, that the existing law does not protect satellite transmissions that can be picked up within the country. But Mr Barton disagrees with the contention that ETV is within the law in plucking signals without payment from satellites orbiting the earth. Why is that notion not being tested? "Protecting television material (via copyright actions) is going to be a long and exhaustive process," he says.

In April this year, ETV obtained an enjoining order from the District Court of Colombo restraining MTV from interfering with ETV's rights "to transmit or telecast to viewers in Sri Lanka television programmes originating outside Sri Lanka and broadcast, re-broadcast, or beamed over and above the airspace of Sri Lanka not being the words of authors who are nationals and/or have their habitual residence in Sri Lanka and not being words first published in Sri Lanka".

ETV also rushed to court when the media minister hinted that he might have to use his powers to cancel the station's licence if they ignored the ministry's warning not to go ahead with plans to telecast the Wills World Cup cricket in Sri Lanka. Rupavahini, one of the two state-owned stations, had paid a fortune for the exclusive television rights to the matches when ETV threw its hat into that ring. The court action was withdrawn on a state assurance that the minister would not cancel ETV's licence without a proper inquiry.

Lankan Panache

Is plucking satellite signals the ETV way a Sri Lanka exclusive? On this scale, yes, says John Barton of MTV. He said that as far as he knew it was being done by a small cable operator in India and also in Indonesia. But nowhere on the Sri Lankan scale and style. "Sri Lanka's international reputation is at stake," he says.

But the bottom line is that the government would not like to interfere with viewers in Sri Lanka getting for free programmes that would otherwise be unavailable to them because of high cost. The owners of these programmes now have also understood the available pirating option and, as Mr Wijesuriya says, that knowledge reflects on programme pricing for those who want to pay.

MICHAEL WILMORE

School teacher Bharat Sharma doubles as RCTV's reporter, cameraman, script editor and newsreader

Indigenous Media: Bold Is Beautiful

When the disenfranchised of the world see that they, too, can be bold and beautiful, a positive self-image is created.

by ***Michael Wilmore***

Switch on cable television in Tansen, a small town in the hills of central Nepal, and what do you get? If you are watching on Saturday afternoons you might see the town's weekly news bulletin, a comedy skit publicising diarrhoea treatment, or a programme on a recent Buddhist festival. You have tuned into Ratna Cable TV (RCTV), Nepal's (and possibly the region's) only community tv station.

In the face of the threat of media disenfranchisement many of the world's people have come up with a simple solution: produce it yourself. The idea seems improbable merely because 'we' (academics, journalists and politicians) have been brought up on models of a monolithic 'Media' founded on the strictly regulated legal frameworks of the Western nation state and cannot believe the audacity of those who have tackled the media industry head-on. But once one begins to look, examples of what anthropologists may call 'indigenous media' appear to be a near-universal phenomenon, rather than isolated examples of resistance to the hegemony of the state or transnational media.

There is space here to cite only a few examples. Yanomamo Indians in the Amazon produce videos to publicise environmental destruction by miners. Black trade unions in apartheid-era South Africa made audio cassettes of underground meetings to distribute to supporters. Australian Aborigines own and run satellite tv stations to broadcast programmes in their own languages. British football fans produce fanzines to celebrate their teams and pressure club owners to protect the interests of fans. In Nepal, RCTV makes news programmes that reflect the community's own concerns and interests rather than that of the Kathmandu-based national media.

Media commentators interested in the disequilibrium in the media balance of power have tended to focus on the threat from a spatially, economically and politically distant 'Global Media'. But, as the above examples show, indigenous producers are usually motivated by concerns that are closer to home. It is at the level of the nation or local community that interest and motivation appears to be most easily sustainable. It is also of crucial importance that the distribution system needed for these media is relatively low cost and require no access to the delivery systems monopolised by the state or transnational media. The varied forms that indigenous media take probably explains why the phenomenon itself has, until comparatively recently, been overlooked, but what unites all indigenous media is that they are self-produced by those whose voices are absent from the established mass media.

It is important to draw the distinction between indigenous media which uses modern forms of production and 'traditional' folk media such as dance, song and story-telling. As one anthropologist stated after an encounter with a minority language video production crew in Papua New Guinea, it is precisely because of the appropriation of modern technology that indigenous media is potentially so powerful. When the disenfranchised of the world see that they, too, can be bold and beautiful, a positive self-image is created—one that may be difficult to dilute. The local base of indigenous media also allows for a vigorous dialogue to take place between

consumers and producers of information, a dialogue lacking in the remote world of mainstream media.

Bazaar Bias

Inevitably, there are problems with indigenous media, and Tansen's local tv station can be taken as an example. The genesis of Ratna Cable TV goes back to a cable tv distribution system which grew out of the radio repair shop of Buddha Ratna Shakya and his family. Local broadcasts began in 1992, and RCTV's mix of local news, information and entertainment quickly became popular with the audience, which, at around 6,000 people, is almost a third of the town's population.

Soon enough came the Nepali government's order to cease broadcasting. With the backing of the municipality and mayor, Mr Shakya defied the order until the issue was resolved with the metamorphosis of the broadcasting arm of the company into Communication for Development Palpa, an NGO officially sanctioned by Kathmandu.

But bureaucratic wrangling of this sort is peripheral to the larger issue of finance which determines the sustainability of any such media. RCTV gets some revenue through the installation of cable tv to homeowners, the business from which the organisation grew, but the organisation still has to depend on donations of hardware and software from outside agencies. Once identified, indigenous media groups form an obvious target for the receipt of aid, but it needs to be questioned whether external funding threatens their greatest asset—independence.

Important issues are: who has editorial control, and, in the case of an expensive media like cable tv, who watches? In Tansen, RCTV's constituency is largely urban and middle-class. The geographical limits of the cable network, and the fact that the volunteer cameramen are unlikely to venture into Tansen's rural hinterland, has led to a distinct bazaar bias which is recognised and regretted by the producers themselves.

RCTV relies heavily on volunteers to produce its programmes and spend a considerable time filming news stories. There has been a decline in the number of volunteers, now that the enthusiasm of the initial years has waned. Broadcast time has been reduced to just one hour every Saturday from the earlier two hours, and a sizeable portion of the week's programming is taken up, not with locally produced programmes as was the case initially, but with Hindi "religious operas" and Nepali film songs. These are popular with the audience and cost nothing in terms of time and labour, but are typical of mainstream programming by Nepal TV and Doordarshan.

Finally, RCTV has tried to steer clear of controversy by adopting a strategy of not covering overtly party political events. However, its seemingly expedient policy of simply focussing attention on civic events has given the ruling Congress party politicians of Tansen Municipality extensive coverage and accusations of bias are occasionally, if rather mutedly, levelled at the organisation by other political parties.

Unhappy and Marginalised

To those commentators who despair in the face of transnational media's encroachment into almost every corner of the world, the tv phenomenon in Tansen shows that 'ordinary' people are quite capable of resisting this media and may not be willing to passively accept what they are given. But, equally, it shows that indigenous media producers should not be romanticised, becoming the late 20 century's equivalent of Rousseau's noble savage, albeit wielding a camcorder instead of a spear. The operators of RCTV are certainly not an oppressed minority!

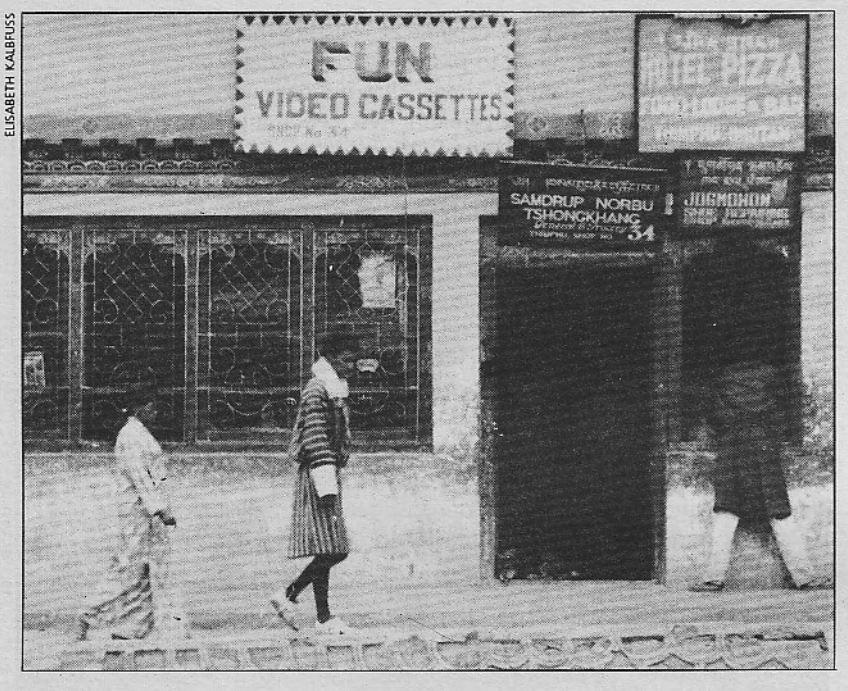
In Nepal, however, the political landscape is moulded by the obsessions of the print and electronic media with national politics and the morals and mores of the Kathmandu social scene around which these dramas are played out. The majority of the country's population may view this media marginalisation irrelevant compared to the daily struggle for survival. But to the educated, articulate and increasingly wealthy middle classes of Nepal's provincial towns, this marginalisation is acutely felt simply because it is apparent in the intimacy of their

sitting rooms whenever they turn on NTV and radio or read a newspaper.

This marginalisation has been addressed in Tansen through compromise—fashioning a local medium to redress the perceived national media imbalance. In other South Asian communities, indeed throughout both the industrialised and developing world, the contradiction between the improving economic conditions and stagnant political power of the middle class may instead lead towards the cheap fixes of populist politics, scapegoating of minorities, or, at the very least, disillusionment with parliamentary democracy.

Indigenous media do not necessarily deal in utopian ideals of equality or aim in every case to be socially inclusive, but they are always, as Deborah Spitulnik, an American anthropologist working on indigenous media, has pointed out in a recent review of media research, "extremely potent arenas of political struggle." And it may be that that struggle is sometimes better played out in the virtual world of television than on the street.

M. Wilmore's research in Tansen is funded by the University of London and the Royal Anthropological Institute.



ELISABETH KALBFUSS

Dish-liking Television

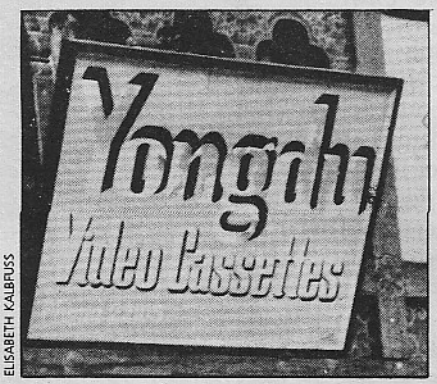
Thimphu houses do not sport rooftop antennas, but the video parlours stock enough options.

by ***Elisabeth Kalbfuss***

It is Saturday night in Thimphu and in this quiet town without bars, clubs or night life, the action is concentrated at the local video stores.

A young man in his 20s steps in to pick up three films: *Braveheart*, *Men of War* and *Agnisakshi*. "I like everything, especially war movies," he says. "Social movies put me to sleep. I like action movies. Lots of people get killed in this. I mean, I hope so," he says about *Men of War*.

While Druk Yul, the land of the thunder dragon, has taken the Singapore path and banned the satellite dish antenna in the hope of limiting encroachment on what the monarchy describes as a fragile culture in need of protection, every corner on the main street of Norzin Lam boasts at least one video rental shop.



ELISABETH KALBFUSS

Glimpses of foreign culture are everywhere—Hindi and English video titles sit side by side on the shelves, including the most recent American releases: cops-and-bad-guys films like *Heat*, *Seven* and *Executive Decision* and children's films like *Babe*. A George Michael poster fills up one wall of a shop, Hindi film posters line other walls. Bookstores stock Archie comic books, novels by best-selling Western writers like Danielle Steele and John Grisham and Hindi film magazines like *Stardust*. Tapes of pop music by groups like The Eagles sit beside a small selection of local artistes.

"Everything is popular," says the woman at the video counter in Yangchenma bookstore, "love stories, action films, horror—English or Hindi." People interviewed said they pick up two or three films a night, several times a week. The current hot titles in the store are *Jaan*, a Hindi film that combines action with a love story, and the American film *Parallel Lives*.

"There's nothing to do here," complains one Thimphu resident. "People drink. There's no television, nowhere to go. Those who have been outside the country, sure they miss it."

There is a movie theatre in town which is one of about a half dozen or so in the country and it changes shows frequently, offering English, Hindi and Nepali fare. That is about all the entertainment there is for those who do not have VCRs at home.

Pornography on Tape

Satellite television does exist in Bhutan, but only in foreign missions and aid offices which have carefully hidden dishes. And though the government turns a blind eye to it, it is out of reach of the average Bhutanese. "I wouldn't invite a Bhutanese over specifically to watch television," says one foreign worker. "And they wouldn't dare ask."

Officials concede it is a contradiction, if not downright hypocritical, to outlaw television and at the same time allow easy access to films that are often more violent or sexually explicit than anything shown on Star TV.

"Television itself doesn't that much affect our culture and religion," said Sangay Wangchuk, Secretary of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs. "Personally, I feel video is more dangerous than TV. BBC or CNN news, it doesn't seem to me that would affect our culture."

Mr Wangchuk says that the government has plans to allow television. (It is currently listed as part of the country's eighth five-year development plan that kicks off next year.) And when television does come, he says, it should include locally produced religious, cultural and educational programming. Perhaps the Bhutanese will have to wait until such programming is available before they also get to tune into tv.

In the meantime, there are some who fear that the government could suddenly decide to get tough on videos and ban or limit access to them. There had been a clampdown earlier, aimed against x-rated films. Nowadays, shopkeepers insist they do not keep pornographic films in stock but it is generally known that they are still available if one is discreet. "You have to know the people (the shopkeepers), then they'll give them to you," says one resident who admits to having acquired a taste for soft porn during several years in the United States.

"Do you want to watch one? I'll see what I can find."

E. Kalbfuss is a Canadian journalist currently on a fellowship with Gemini News Service in London.

The BUKHARA

Renowned for its Tandoori cooking from the North West Frontier Region of India, the Bukhara is now open at the Soaltee Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza.

The Bukhara, located by the Poolside, is open for Lunch and Dinner seven days a week. The meal in the rugged interiors of the restaurant, is quite an experience !! You may even take back a picture of yourself with the Chef.

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Bangladesh Artists Visit Pakistan

Painting by Jamal Ahmed

SOON AFTER A contingent of retired Indian army officers and their wives returned after a goodwill visit of Pakistan, it was time for cultural visitors from Bangladesh.

Five artists arrived in Pakistan in mid-May with their artwork in tow. The newly-opened Kunj Art Gallery in Karachi displayed the work of Jamal Ahmed, Mahbubul Amin, Aminul Islam and Masuda Rashid Chowdhury.

Aminul Islam, a painter of vibrant abstract compositions, is one of Bangaldesh's most celebrated artists. He was well known in Pakistan in the 1960s. Mahbubul Amin, who had the largest repertoire of paintings, depicts local life and people with a strong ethnic flavour, which found favour with many of those present. Jamal Ahmed is one of Bangaldesh's most dynamic younger artists, and his creations included landscapes and figurative paintings. Masuda Chowdhury—a painter, print-maker and art critic—brought her ethereal watercolours to Karachi. When not painting, she is involved in the promotion of women's art in Bangladesh and abroad.

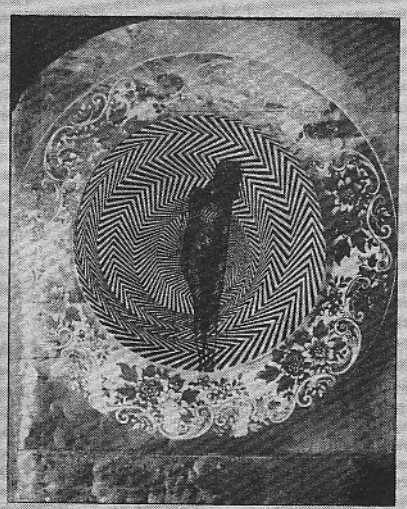
Kunj was not the only Karachi gallery with a Bangla exhibition. Across town, the well-established Chawkandi Art Gallery was showing Rokeya Sultana, from the Dhaka Insitute of Fine Arts.

The visit by Bangladeshi artists was welcomed by art circles in Pakistan as a healthy development in South Asian cultural exchange. At a time when Karachi's art galleries are looking to overseas artists for new perspectives and fresh visual ideas, the choice of a neighbouring country was both unique as well as obvious.

Many senior artists of Bangladesh are familiar with Pakistan and have many admirers of their work. Besides Aminul Islam, they include artists like Zainul Abedin, Murtaza Bashir, Hamidur Rahman, Mobinul Azim and Noorul Islam, who were very much part of the West Pakistan art scene as well before 1971. The visit of the Bangladeshi artists revitalises this earlier link between the Bengali artists and their Pakistani connossieurs.

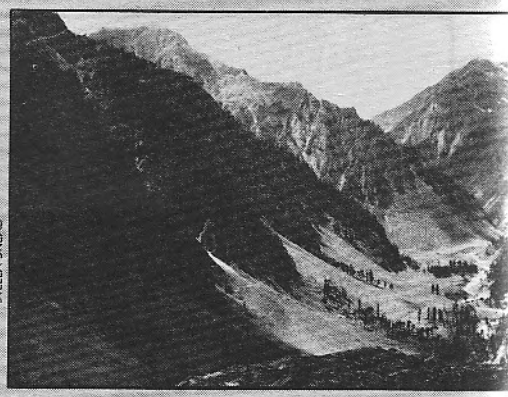
- ***Moeen Faruqi***

Bangla and Pakistani Art Visit Kathmandu



BOX: SUDDENLY, painters and paintings are travelling between South Asian countries. Just when we were getting tired of inter-regional diplomatic palavers and seminars, the galleries have discovered artists of neighbouring countries. We cannot but be thankful.

June in Kathmandu, like Karachi, saw openings by several Pakistani and Bangladeshi artists. On 5 June, as part of a Festival of Bangladeshi Art and Culture, 51 recent works by 33 well-known artists will be presented, encompassing "all the phases of modern art in Bangladesh." On 13 June, the Siddhartha Art Gallery unveils an exhibition of mixed-media artwork from Pakistan by artists Riffat Alvi, Summaya Durrani and Meher Afroz.



STELLA SNEAD

Sonenmarg

Treeless in Kashmir

VAST TRACTS OF forests in South Kashmir have fallen to militants and what remains is being devastated by the Indian Army's "eco-vandalism", reports writer Max Martin of the *CSE-Down To Earth Feature Service*.

Areas like Anantnag, Shopian, Sharif, Chrar and Tral have been denuded by the Kalashnikov-bearing militants and the income used to fund their activities. Along the Srinagar-Leh highway near Kangan, pine logs are hurled down the mountain to land with a resounding splash on a canal which carries them to a sawmill downstream. Pine wood sold at INR 80 per cubic ft here can fetch more than three times that amount in Srinagar.

M. Khan, assistant to a timber smuggler thought to have links with the now well-entrenched Hizbul Mujahideen explains casually: "We have wiped off entire patches including walnut groves in this area. Nothing much is left." M. A. Mufti, the state's principal chief conservator of forests, says he has no statistics because his people cannot go to the field, but that "roughly the extent of degradation is about 35 percent of the total forest area."

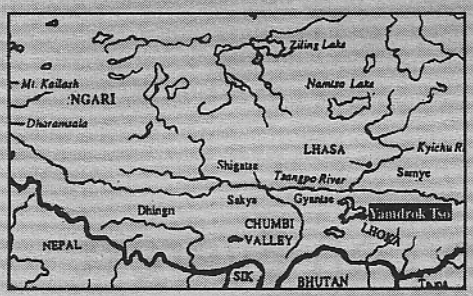
In Khiram, a stronghold of the Hizbul Mujahideen, some villagers on condition of anonymity admit that Hizbul protects those who cut forests. However, Hizbul's local commander, Zuhur Ahmed, puts the blame on the security forces, "whose men do it in civil dress. Then they blame it on us".

The Srinagar-based *Feature and News Agency* claims that the Army has 92,000 hectares of forest area, and that extensive destruction has been carried out near the border areas. "Nonsense," replies Squadron Leader S. Hariharan, Public Relations Officer for the Army, according to whom the Northern Command actually has a "mega-scaled" afforestation plan for the region.

Yamdrok Tso, Tibet's Aral Sea?

ANTI-DAM ACTIVISTS of South Asia are an insular lot, not very interested in other people's problems. Thus, Narmada or Tehri, Tarbela or Kaptai, there is little communication among those who are battling government, technocracy and the "dominant development paradigm". In fact, some of the opponents of the now-dead Arun-III project felt it appropriate to bring Cree Indians from the Jones Bay Project area in northern Canada to the Arun Valley in Nepal, but did not think of inviting environmental activist Suderlal Bahuguna.

While Mr Bahuguna once again submits to a fast by the banks of the Bhagirathi to draw attention to disaster that Tehri Dam will invite, few think—even know—about the Yamdrok Tso. This is a holy lake 120 km southwest of Lhasa, the third-largest in Tibet and the biggest fresh-water lake on the



high plateau.

The authorities in Tibet plan to drain the lake in order to provide electricity. They say that they will pump back water from the Yarlung River (Tsangpo, later the Brahmaputra) to replenish the lake during off-peak hours, but Western activists who are concerned about Yamdrok believe that this is a tall claim, and that the region faces an Aral Sea-type disaster. "At best, replenishing the lake means that the snow-fed lake water will be replaced with muddy river flow, with unknown effects on the ecological balance of the lake. At worst, the lake could drain away within 50 years," says Lorne Stockman, coordinator of the London-based Yamdrok Tso Campaign.

According Ms Stockman, the Austrian firm ELIN and the Austrian branch of the German firm JM VOITH AG are supplying turbines and other operating systems for the project through contracts worth about USD 40 million. "Both firms have a history of constructing controversial dams and they have been involved in the Pak-Mun dam in Thailand where 20,000 people were forcibly moved, the Cirata dam in Indonesia where 60,000 people were dispossessed, and the Mosul Dam in the Kurdish region of Iraq which was completely cleared of all forms of human life by the military."

Now that is not good company.

ITBP in Tibet

THE VERY FACT that an Indo-Tibetan Border Police team was climbing Everest from the North (Tibetan) side is noteworthy. The ITBP was raised by the Indian government soon after the 1962 Indo-Chinese war. While it has now been deployed in different tasks which range from guarding VIPs to providing a para-military presence in Assam and elsewhere, the primary task of the force is to guard the Himalayan frontier against Chinese encroachment. Does the fact that an ITBP team can climb Everest from the north and not raise anyone's eyebrows mean that the Indo-Chinese thaw has achieved melting point?

Solar Toilets

FOR GENERATIONS, households in Nepal's Khumbu region on the trekking trail to Mt Everest Base Camp have known what to do with human waste. Traditionally, waste is composted with leaves or pine needles and later removed from the toilets to the adjoining fields. But when income generated from tourism displaces agriculture as the region's chief source of earning, the waste becomes a nuisance rather than a resource.

Each year more than 10,000 tourists and a larger number of guides and porters trudge up and down the mountains and valleys of the Khumbu. While the local economy is certainly benefitting a great deal, tackling the problem of excreta at high altitude has been equally great.

The demand for extra water makes flush toilets impractical, and even pit latrines pose problems of their own due to low soil depth and the cold temperatures. A lodge-owner at Gokyo (4750 metres) reported that toilets could be emptied only at certain seasons because the ground remains frozen. "If the toilet fills up, there is nothing we can do."

The problems are the same at the Everest Base Camp. Every year more than a dozen national and international mountaineering groups set up camp but none have come up with a sustainable waste management policy. Expedition members do dig pit latrines on the moraines but porters, overnight campers and day-hikers find it more expedient to go behind a boulder, creating hundreds of toilet sites.

Many innovative attempts have been made to manage waste but, because of various reasons, have not succeeded. The "solar toilet" is one such innovation and there is hope that it will eventually gain acceptance from the local residents.

Solar toilets use the passive energy from the sun to treat human waste. Energy from the sun enters the chamber where the waste is stored. A clear barrier allows the sun's heat to enter but not escape, similar in operation to a greenhouse. The waste is zapped by solar rays, dehydrated, its volume reduced and, in the absence of water, it becomes a sterile powder.

The first of solar toilets was successfully tested in 1994 with yak dung in which the collection chamber recorded a temperature of 70°C. Two such toilets have already been

PAUL LACHAPELLE

Yak patty in Khumbu kiln

installed, one in a hospital and the other in a school, with satisfactory results. But scepticism about their efficacy still persists. The only encouraging factor is that Sherpas have been known to be very receptive to new ideas. Whether they will be equally amenable to changing their toilet habits—and those of visitors—remains to be seen.

- Paul Lachapelle

What Happened on the Mountain?

Capt Kohli was critical of the Japanese

ONE OF THE tragedies that Mount Everest saw in the spring climbing season was the death of three members of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. But even as controversy over whether a Japanese team could have saved the three who perished continues, it now seems that the trio did not even reach the top at all. The expedition has claimed that they did.

Pasang Kami Sherpa was with the group of the Japanese mountaineers who were the last to see the ITBP team alive. He says: "We saw a traditional Lama flag, some crampons and an empty oxygen cylinder belonging to Indian team much below the summit. These things are meant to be placed or pitched on the summit." Jon Gandgal, leader of the Norwegian team, also climbing from the Tibetan side, doubts that the Indians ever made it to the summit. There are other summiteers who share the views of Mr Pasang Kami and Mr Gandgal.

The ITBP threesome—Inspector T. Samnala and Constables Tsewang Paljor and Dorje Morup—reportedly began climbing towards the summit at 7:30 am and were said to have reached the top at around 6:30 in the evening. But climbers who had seen the ITBP mountaineers claim they were "too far behind" to have made it to the summit by that time. Normally, climbers head for the summit between 1 and 2 am and top the mountain around midday, leaving enough time for descent to camp. An experienced Sherpa climber with the Japanese team who does not want to be named says the climbers could not have reached beyond 8,600m on the 8848m mountain.

There had apparently been an understanding among four of the teams attempting Everest from the north side (Norwegian, Taiwanese, Japanese, and the Indians) that all would strike for the summit together on 11 May. The others were surprised, therefore, when the ITBP unannounced decided to make its bid a day earlier. Unfortunately, bad weather chose to strike on that very day, the same storm which also took many lives on the other (Nepal) side of the mountain.

The Secretary of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF), Capt K.S. Kohli, believes that the three climbers made it to the summit. But Capt Kohli raised a Himalayan controversy when he went public with the accusation that the climbers could have been saved if only the Japanese expedition members who came by had tried to rescue them. He practically blamed the deaths on the Japanese, who, could hardly have been expected to take kindly to this suggestion.

Upon his arrival in Kathmandu on his way back home, Koji Yada, the leader of the Japanese expedition said Capt. Kohli's allegation was "baseless and false". While Mr Yada's reaction seemed rather tame in light of the accusation, other mountaineers more than made up for it. Mr Gandgal is on record as saying that the Indian team was poorly organised and that the charges against the Japanese are nothing but a cover-up attempt. There were other climbers on the mountain at the time who have said that the Indian expedition was not led well by team-leader Mohinder Singh, who preferred to direct affairs from base camp.

A Sherpa mountaineer who was climbing with the Japanese says it is very difficult when you are above 8000m to use the same standards as you would in lower altitudes. "There is so much pressure on the climber that you do not go around making courtesy calls. Unless someone is showing obvious distress or there is an obvious call for help, you go your own way. Someone sitting down could either have frozen to death or could just be taking a breather." The Sherpa says that in the case of the ITBP members, they were about 12 metres from the track that the Japanese were taking up the mountain, and there was no call for help.

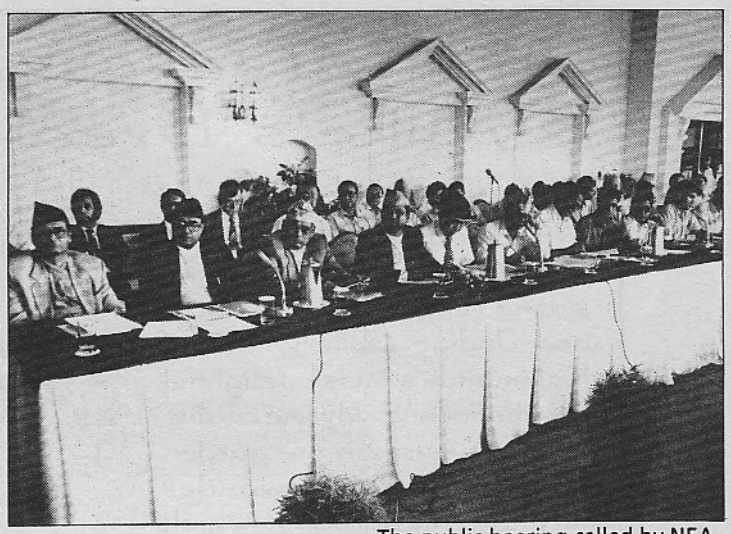
An old mountaineering hand in Kathmandu, acknowledges that it is difficult to pin blame in matters such as this, as Capt. Kohli has done with such alacrity. He adds, "Having said that, the Japanese are not great mountaineers when it comes to fair play. You cannot expect most Japanese climbers to do what the Russian Anatoli Bourkreev did on the south side when he rescued fellow climbers."

-Akhilesh Upadhyay

An Eventful Spring on Everest

- The 1996 spring season was the best ever on Mount Everest in terms of successful ascents. A total of 87 climbers stood on the top of the world leaving the previous record of 58 in the spring of 1992 far behind.
- The season also saw the highest number of deaths ever on the mountain. A total of 11 people died in a particularly bad spell of weather in mid-May.
- Commercial climbing on Everest, or paying money to be guided to the top, received a severe jolt as, for the first time, two of the USD 65,000-paying clients lost their lives. Should amateurs be taken up the mountain simply because they have the ability to pay?
- The New Zealander guide Rob Hall could have saved himself but he felt his duty lay in staying back with a disabled client just below the summit. Both perished. The Russian Anatoli Bourkreev showed uncommon valour when he went about rescuing fellow climbers above the South Col (7,955m). Lt Col Madan K.C. of the Royal Nepal Army made what is said to be the highest-ever helicopter rescue at 20,000 feet.
- While the deaths were widely reported in the international media, it was hardly noticed that no Sherpa figured among the dead despite the fact Sherpas were present in droves on both the northern and the southern slopes of Everest as support staff and climbers. Among the Sherpas was the "Snow Leopard", Ang Rita, from the nearby village of Thame, nonchalantly making his tenth ascent. Another Sherpa, Lobsang Jangbu, found time for some publicity-seeking bufoonery on the mountain by making the summit clad in a *shitorio* karate dress. (He had done earlier climbs in a Sherpa *bakkhu* and the Nepali national dress, the *labeda surwal*.) Lobsang Jangbu also carried two large framed photographs of Nepal's royal couple and proudly posed with them on the summit.
- Another Himalayan climber very much in the news was Jamling Tenzing Norgay, following the footsteps of his father, Tenzing Norgay, the most famous of them all.
- To prove that Sherpas are not the only ones that can reach the top again and again with a minimum of fuss, cinematographer David Breashers made his third ascent. This time he was filming the ascent of Everest in the Imax format, the largest picture format of them all, which had him shooting with a 35-pound camera all the way to the summit.

No Economy of Scale on Kali Gandaki-A


NARESH

The public hearing called by NEA

LESS THAN A year after the World Bank pulled out of the proposed Arun III hydroelectric project after a lengthy tussle with non-governmental organisations, another power project in Nepal is stuck in controversy.

Kali Gandaki-A is a medium-sized 144 megawatt hydroelectirciay project planned in central Nepal on the river of the same name. A memorandum of understanding has already been signed between the Nepali government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to finance the project. The Japanese government is also providing assistance.

At the Hotel Himalaya in downtown Patan in late May, the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) called a "public hearing", which was packed mostly with its own staff, vociferous pro-dam representatives bussed in from the dam site, and a few journalists and 'alternative development' activists.

Those who questioned Kali Gandaki's high costs were promptly dubbed "anti-Kali Gandaki" by government officials still smarting under the unprecendented defeat over Arun-III, a much larger project at USD 1 billion project cost, which would have seen many a career through to retirement.

Gopal Siwakoti Chintan, one among a breed of activists which specialises in putting a spanner into the government's and donor agencies' carefully laid out plans, says, "We are not against Kali Gandaki per se, even though we are constantly being labelled anti-dam. We understand the need for power generation. All we want to know is why the estimated cost of the project has gone so high."

Chintan and others have challenged the NEA as to why the economies of scale did not seem to apply to Kali Gandaki-A. Says Girish Kharel, a micro-hydropower expert, referring to several other smaller projects which are presently in the pipeline, "Energy from the 6 megawatt Puwa Khola is expected to cost 2.9 cents/unit, from the 14 MW Modi Khola it will be 3.5 cents/unit, and from the 20 MW Chilime Khola 2.3 cents/unit. So how is it that the many times larger Kali Gandaki will cost Nepal a whopping 4.9 cents/unit?"

At the public hearing, NEA officials were unable to provide convincing answers as to the high costs, while the activists for their part are convinced that it is the old story of commissions, kickbacks and "tied aid"—in which donor countries provide grants and soft loans with strings attached. While they acknowledged NEA's transparency exercise, the activists did not get answers to the most important questions. On the other hand, Rameshananda Vaidya of the National Planning Commission thought the hearing had succeeded at a consensus-building, and that "the level of discussion was very high."

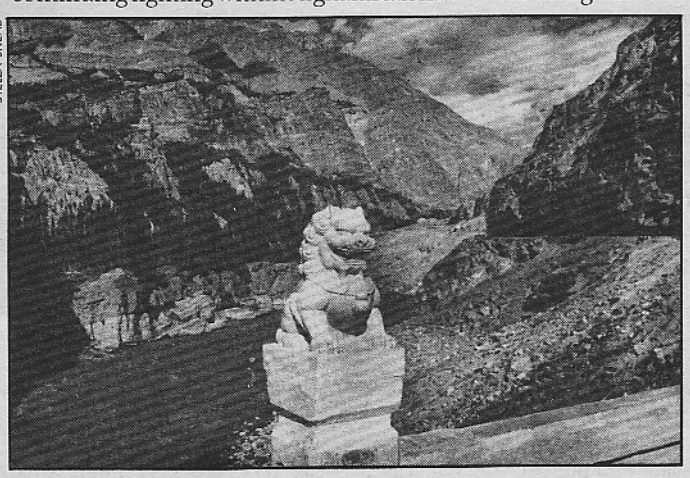
"What seems saddest is that the lessons provided by the toppling of Arun-III seems to have been wasted on our planners," says Ajaya Dixit, a water engineer. "Arun-III was opposed because it was too expensive, did not help build Nepali capability, and was not the appropriate project for the economy. Not all these criticisms will apply to Kali Gandaki-A, but certainly the government has to listen to those who question the high costs."

It did not seem, however, that the government was doing any learning from the Arun-III debacle, other than to regard all activists as enemies of the state. Leading the chorus was Water Resources Minister Pashupati Shumshere Rana, who charged activists with being "anti-development". Meanwhile, there were press reoports that Mr Rana's ministry was doling out hydropower development without the transparency which everyone seems to be talking about these days.

KKH, the Karakoram Link

THE PAKISTAN Government has decided to upgrade and rehabilitate the Karakoram Highway (KKH) at a cost of PKR 3.1 billion over the next three-year period. The plan is for the widened roadway to pick up the expected increase in traffic from Central Asia via China, headed for Karachi port. The continuing fighting within Afghanistan having wrecked plans to develop the Khyber-Salang Tunnel route to Central Asia, Islamabad seems to have settled on spending money on the slightly roundabout Karakoram Highway.

Protocols have already been signed by China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan on using the KKH to link with the highway system of Xinjiang province of China and the roadway network of the two eastern Central Asians which are very keen on a reliable access to the Arabian Sea.


STELLA SNEAD

How far to the sea?

The KKH, 700 km long from Rawalpindi to the border with China at a place called Sust, is notorious for its rockfalls, landslides and mudslips. It is easy to see why it will cost three billion to rehabilitate.

SAARCWATCH

A tentative list of scheduled activities for June 1996 provided by the SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu.

- Meeting of producers to produce Radio and TV joint production on "SAARC Year of Literacy-1996", New Delhi, 10-11 June
- Training programme for regional district TB Coordinators, Kathmandu, 4-8 June
- Meeting on consensus development on germplasm and IPR in Plants, New Delhi, 10-11 June
- Workshop on open learning, Sri Lanka, 26-28 June
- Seminar on predictability of monsoon rain and flooding, Dhaka, 19-21 June
- Privatisation in road sector, India, 20-22, June
- Seminar on green manures, Kathmandu, 25-26 June
- 15th meeting of technical committee on agriculture, 11-12 June
- 1st meeting of governing board of South Asian Development Fund, Dhaka, 17-18 June
- Meeting of experts on bio-processing and food enzymes, 21-26 June
- One-week training workshop on precipitation and flood forecasting during the south-west monsoon session, Lahore, 10-16 June
- Workshop on essential new born care, Madras, 26-28 June

HINDU AND MUSLIM – II

"Hindu and Muslim" is an occasional column which reflects on the Hindu-Muslim schism, its origins and ramifications. The writer of this instalment is a Karachi-based educationist and a student of Islam.

Community, or Communal?

With Babri Masjid and the ten percent increase in the defence budget of both India and Pakistan, with hawks on both sides gleeful that the future of war-mongering is so bright, is it true to say that Hindus and Muslims are fated to be enemies? Are they, historically and by karmic law, always meant to be on a collision course? *Need they be that way?*

The first thing to think of when considering the relations between the Hindu and the Muslim is a strange paradox: *They are a community separated by the very people who claim to bring them together.*

Let me explain. This point of view is based on the profound insight of a master of community relations: Professor Karrar Husain, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Balochistan and at present Director of the Islamic Study Forum. When asked about the future of the Muslim and the Hindu in the Subcontinent, he replied:

"Let us begin first with principles. To live together you must respect me for what I am. You must not flatten that which makes me unique into a formula of convenience. Then only will I feel safe in confiding to you that which keeps me awake at nights. And then, I will be better able to face it: knowing that I can count on you to understand. We may even discover that the fears that I felt, the dangers that I thought were out there, were not just for me but for both of us.

"In the beginning, the two communities lived together. The Hindu has a greater share of *choot-chaat* built into his culture. The Muslim, though coming from a different tradition, could understand that. The fact of a discipline was never an issue. It never is when the people live in a traditional society. At the folk level of the faith, certainly there was much less give and take. But at the higher levels, a Dara Shikoh could seriously argue for *wahdatul wajud* from Hindu texts; just as Kabir could bring about a singular rapproachment of the Bhakti movement with sufism. Thus, in an age when the Mughal King Akbar could laugh at the Brahmin of his Nine Jewels because he had not had his bath one morning, no one could say that the Hindus were getting ready for an ethnic riot. In spite of the differences, the untouchability, the reluctance to share food, when inter-marriages were simply not *on*, the two peoples lived together in far more peace than later."

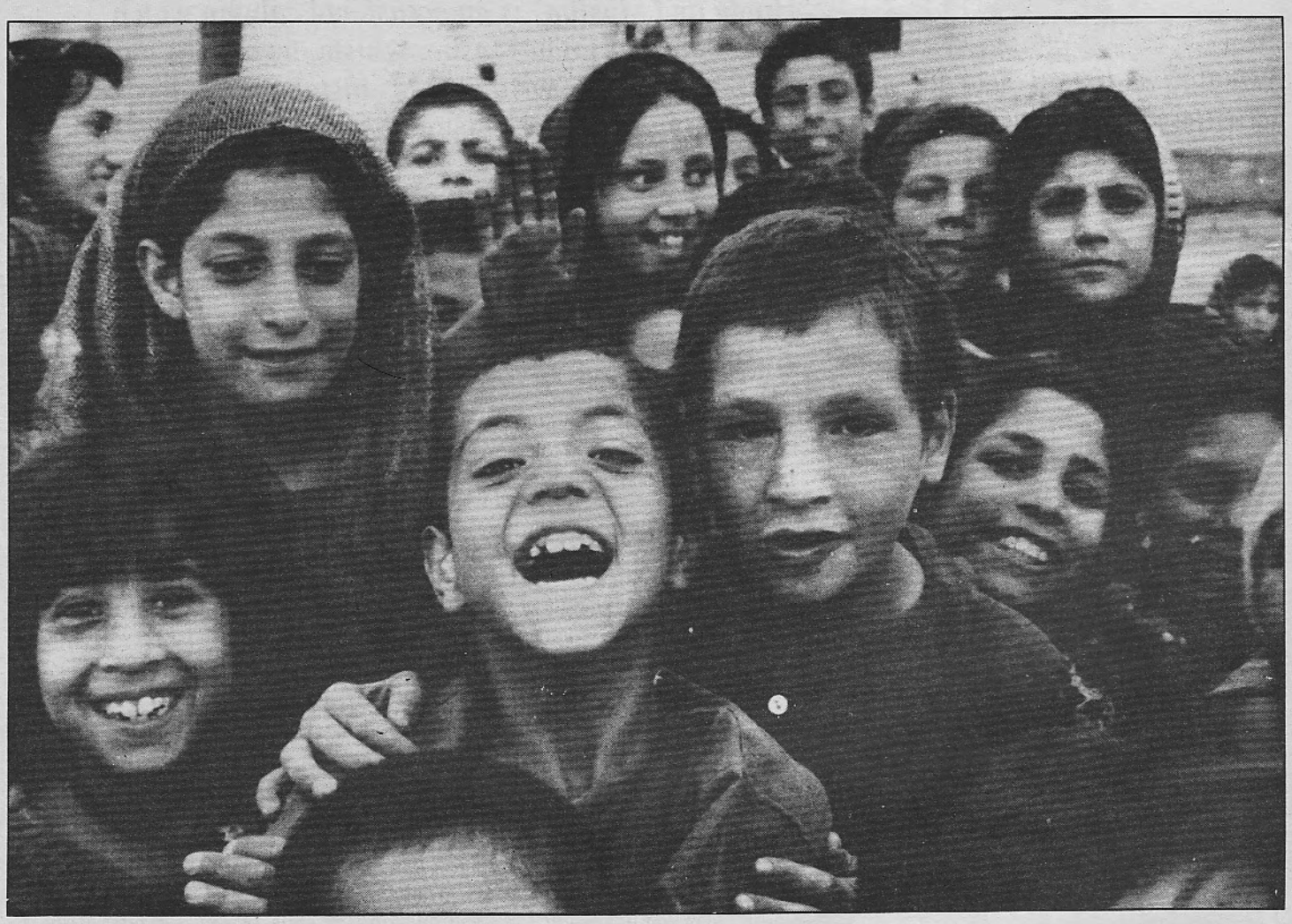
In any relationship, the first thing is to accept that there are differences. Two friends do not merge into one absurdity. They become deeply interested in that uniqueness that keeps them apart, which they cherish; and rejoice in the other's uniqueness. It is when there is evil behind the intention, when the speaker says "we are one" and there is a dagger in the smile, that you can be sure to expect mischief.

And so it was. When the tide of history turned, and the *Angrez Bahadur* was upon us, we found to our great dismay the strange appeals of oneness and unity. These led to a greater and greater reluctance to speak up for the irreconciliable difference that were staring at everyone in the face. This absurd merging into one made us unable to speak to each other as equals and as friends. This made some of us scream in protest. Then the Two-Nation Theory was spelt out, and the Nation was divided, not so much due to the insistence of the Muslims as the intransigence of the Hindus.

Today, the need is to understand that greater peril that we are both facing: our populations can ill afford another century longing for better days to come. The promise of which is before their eyes in the form of the images falling from the sky. We have to see to their needs as rights, not alms. Otherwise, all that we have saved is a burden on the wind.

–Abbas Husain

Fear and Despair in Kabul



Afghans have known nothing but war for the past 17 years. They have always been afraid—afraid of the Afghan secret police, of the Soviets, of the mujahideen, of land mines, of the cold, of hunger, and of the Taliban rockets that can strike at any time without warning. They are fed up of being afraid.

by ***Bruno Philip***

Maliha is 19 years old, a child of war. She has known little but sorrow, pain and fear. Three years ago, a rocket landed on her family's house in Chelsetoun. "The ceiling crashed on our heads and I woke up in hospital. My father and mother, along with my four brothers and sisters, were all killed."

Taken in first by her aunt, Maliha lives today in this decrepit flat with the surviving members of her family: an alert sister of 14 and a seven-year-old brother whose eyes are full of fear. Maliha is lucky because her job with a Western relief agency earns her USD 100 a month, which is a fortune in Kabul these days.

Maliha's freezing apartment with its plastic sheet covering broken window panes has a tenacious, all-pervading smell of burning. The "dining room" wall has a hole where a shell came in. The family room is separated by a curtain, and the furniture consists of a piece of yellowish linoleum on the floor with a few cushions. There has been no electricity, no heating, no water here for three years, and the winter temperature can fall well

below minus 20 degrees Celsius.

A million Kabulis live in conditions similar to Maliha's. This collective suffering cannot be compared with anything in any of the other violent corners of South Asia. The suffering of Kabul's population is unique, and practically unreported.

This is Kabul today: the bleak Soviet architecture, the rubble of toppled buildings on the streets, frozen garbage in the backyards, clothes drying on balconies—and ruins everywhere. The ruins of a country at war with itself, and a once-proud city that lies dying. All bombed cities look the same in their uniformity of destroyed houses and the misery of the survivors in the rubble: Dresden, Berlin, Grozny, Kabul...

At least 25,000 Kabulis have been killed in the last four years: first in the house-to-house fighting as mujahideen fought each other, then in the bombardments from the outskirts by the Jamaat-e-Islami and later the Taliban. One million Afghans have died since 1979, five million others have fled to Pakistan and Iran. Many of them are still there.

ARUN JETLIE

Kid soldier surveys his city in ruins

Child of War

Maliha's life is intertwined with war. Her house stands on the banks of the Kabul River on the frontline between the intense inter-mujahideen wars that have successively ravaged Kabul since 1992. It was the fall of the Soviet-backed Najibullah government that year which sparked off infighting between various factions that were once united in the anti-Soviet jihad.

Maliha was born in 1977, two years before the communist takeover. She is too young to remember or care about the times when upper-class Afghan girls could roam around in a cosmopolitan Kabul, dressed in smart skirts and shiny leather jackets. "My family was orthodox. I am a Muslim and so wearing the veil is no effort. I carry the burdens of a family, that is why I have remained unmarried. In Kabul, our primary thoughts are food and survival."

Two years ago, the Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostam, himself a former communist, joined the rebels against the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani in Kabul. Rabbani's position is shaky but he gets strength from his Tajik cousin, Ahmad Shah Masoud, hero of the jihad and a brilliant guerrilla leader who is now Defence Minister.

Rabbani and Masoud today control only half a dozen out of thirty provinces of Afghanistan—the rest are in the hands of the Taliban and Gen Dostam. It was Gen Dostam's cannons that fired the shells that fell on Maliha's house in Chelsetoun.

Maliha is tired of being afraid. She could leave Kabul, but where would she go? The rich have already left, only the middle class and the poor remain. What does it matter whether the shells strike at shorter or longer intervals? The Taliban are at the gates of Kabul and regularly shell the city. Who cares that the Taliban wants to impose an even more Islamic society in Afghanistan that won't allow women to work or study?

"I am only afraid at night when the wind blows in the plastic sheets or when someone knocks at the door," Maliha tells a visitor.

A City's Betrayal

The 10-year war between the Soviet Army and the mujahideen hadn't affected Kabul much. Guerrillas would shell the capital from time to time, but life was fairly normal in Kabul. Its inhabitants, although wary of the ever-present political police, would still go to the movies, to the restaurants, to the *chaikhanas* to sip tea sitting cross-legged on the floor, and to private courtyards to plot and conspire. The expatriates would keep count of the rockets while drinking beer at the British Embassy club or at the United Nations bar.

"We were better off under communist rule," says one Kabul intellectual, voicing the unanimous refrain of a city that disliked the communists as much as they do today's ruling 'Islamists'. Neither does this prevent them from criticising the Taliban who are camped at the city's outskirts, bent on imposing an even more severe Islamic order. The bickering brothers of 'liberated' Afghanistan are settling scores. The prize is Kabul, a city that according to one old saying can only be "either a throne or a coffin, nothing in between".

Today, the *chaikhanas* have almost disappeared, a few restaurants still exist and the movie halls remain open. Incredibly, Kabul survives. It is used to the daily shelling and the aerial bombings aimed at the presidential palace near the city centre. The days 'with' now outnumber the days 'without' bombing. "One gets used to rockets," comments a lady doctor wearing a light veil.

Broken alliances, reversals of loyalties and other betrayals are everyday occurrences in this War of Four Years. Take a look at, say, the career of Masoud, once hailed as the "Lion of Panjshir", the area from which his forces taunted the Soviet Army. With the best-trained and best-equipped army, Masoud has managed to maintain his hold over the capital, resisting forces made up of former allies and former enemies. At the same time, anti-Masoud forces are united to fight another force, the Taliban which have overrun the southern half of Afghanistan in the last year. (See Himal, Nov/Dec 1995)

Here, then, is a brief summary of the present situation: the Kabul 'government' is surrounded in the north, the north-east and the east by Dostam's forces, who are themselves hostile to the Taliban attackers from

the south. Everyone is against the Taliban, but somehow Masoud and Dostam have failed to bury their difference to confront them.

There is no doubt in any one's mind here who is stoking the fires of the Afghan conflict. Domestic ethnic, sectarian and ideological differences are being sharpened by mentors in the region who are playing out their proxy wars on the poor Afghans. They all have their hands in the Afghan pie: Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia ...

"All this is absurd. I do not even want to talk politics any more. I have even stopped listening to the radio. I don't give a damn," says Habib, a French language instructor. Afraid of fighters on all sides, he has tried to blend in by wearing a Muslim skull cap, a Pathan dress and growing a beard. "I disguise myself as a mujahideen."

Omar is a chemist, and also wears a 'mujahideen disguise'. He says with disgust: "It is a tough choice: on the one hand are the 'moderates' of Kabul, and on the other, the extremists on the southern front. One has to survive between these two evils."

Along the frontlines to the south of Kabul is the once-fashionable suburb adjoining the royal palace of Daroulaman. Amidst the rubble of houses stands Mohammed Jan. He is afraid of hunger. "If I were to show you my tummy, you would know that I have not eaten well for a long time," he says. "I only get to eat dry bread and drink tea. But I'm not leaving. Only the rich have left. I send my daughter and my wife to beg in the streets during the daytime. I am waiting for the bullet that will kill me eventually."

It is ten o'clock in the morning. Nearby, the blast of the first incoming shells herald a new day of fighting. Behind the tanks, inside make-shift bunkers, the defenders of Kabul talk disparagingly of the Taliban, who have taken positions a few kilometres away with tanks which are the same model as theirs. Here, every side fights with the same salvaged hardware of the former Russian enemy.

"They smoke hashish and aim randomly at each other," says Mohammed. Hunkered down behind a mound of sandbags is Ammanullah. His combat uniform is in shreds, tennis shoes full of holes, and unkempt hair falls on his face. He claims to be 18 years old, but looks barely 14. His voice breaks, betraying fear, when he swears that he is "ready for the supreme sacrifice". Beyond the sandbags, across the barren slopes at the base of the snow-capped hills in a bunker like his own, is another Ammanullah. His enemy.

View of the False Communist

During the heyday of the Europe-to-India overland travel, Chicken Street at Kabul's heart used to be where weary travellers stayed and stocked up on provisions. Today, Chicken Street still overflows with food: piles of caviar and cans of ham, vegetables and meat, but the prices are beyond the average Kabuli's reach.

Ghulam, 12, swings an old can that has incense burning inside—all the time casting a wary eye at the sky to look out for diving Taliban bombers. A passer-by pays and sniffs a few times in order to avoid the 'evil eye'. The street urchin, in his *chapka* with falling ear-covers and his patched-up trousers, has a mischievous grin as he says: "Yes, the bombs frighten me but I have to walk the streets for my work." Ghulam earns the equivalent of half a dollar a day.

Abdul too, is frightened. But he refuses to grow a beard. During the communist rule, this son of a former Afghan aristocrat let himself be persuaded to join the party, then he was afraid to send back his membership card. He earned scholarships to study in Eastern Europe and Soviet Central Asia, spending most of the war abroad. He shows black-and-white pictures taken in Tashkent where he had given a talk at a university under the portrait of Marx.

"Do you know that 90 percent of former members of the political police work for the present government?" Abdul whispers. "I never was a communist. In this country, I have met neither a genuine communist nor a genuine Islamist..."

"The Taliban are certainly the worst of the lot. But neither can we agree with any of the other groups, whether moderate or not, whether holding power in Kabul or not. If Bangladesh or Pakistan can have women prime ministers, why can't we? Are we a different kind of Muslim country?"

It is *iftar*, the moment to break the ceremonial fasting of Ramadan that Abdul follows scrupulously. His wife lays out a feast of kababs, fruits, raisins, bread, cakes and a puts a kettle to boil. Outside, night is falling gently and the snow peaks are dimly visible. Abdul says he is lucky to have escaped the 'witch-hunt', and he owes his good fortune to the modest rank he held in the party hierarchy.

It is ironic that people like Abdul are safest in the midst of the chaos and confused politics of today's theatre of the absurd in Kabul. Former communists are disguised as mujahideen, former mujahideen brothers are fighting themselves, but Abdul, the genuinely false communist, has managed to retain his dignity.

How could we?

B. Philip, who was in Kabul earlier this year, is the South Asia correspondent for Le Monde. *Translated from the original French by Kalpana Ghimire.*

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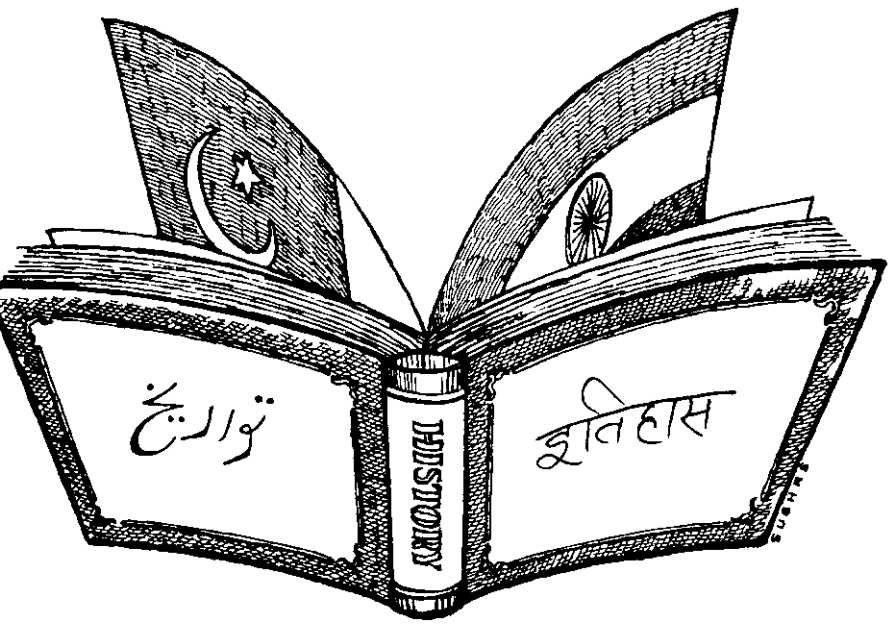


End of History

The political abuse of history in India and Pakistan is fostering entire generations that are conditioned to regard each other as the enemy.

by Navnita Chadha Behera

India's Evil Designs Against Pakistan." This is not a slogan raised by the Jamaat-i-Islami but the title of a history textbook chapter for fifth class students in Pakistan. Eight-year-old children can rattle off India's wrong-doings against Pakistan at a moment's notice, and, in all innocence, they can also enlighten an already shocked Indian visitor about how "unclean" and "inferior" Hindus are!

Neither are India's young far behind. For the children of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-sponsored Saraswati Shishu Mandirs in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, India's history is a long tale of foreign invasions, especially by the "barbarians among Arabs", and of "Hindu" resistance.

To say that legacies of history divide India and Pakistan is not merely a cliche: it is a living reality for the younger generation, thanks to partisan history being taught on both sides of the border. Ruling regimes in India and Pakistan have tried often to re-write the past of their respective countries to suit their political ideologies. In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its earlier incarnation, the Jana Sangh, have long sought to tailor history to suit their Hindu nationalism. When it was part of the Janata Dal government in 1977, the Jana Sangh was able to persuade Prime Minister Morarji Desai "to correct distortions in the presentation of history".

Across the border, General Zia-ul Haq, seeking legitimacy after overthrowing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government, found a convenient crutch in Islamic ideology. It became essential for the military ruler to project Pakistan as the "bastion of Islam", the creation of which had been a historic inevitability ever since the first Muslim invasion of the Subcontinent. This is how the "Ideology of Pakistan", not even part of political parlance till then, came to be the raison d'être of its existence.

Making History

For the proponents of Hindutva in India, a revisionist history is closely linked to the question of projecting a distinctive 'Hindu' identity. With the underlying premise that India's national identity is rooted in Hindu culture and civilisation, it becomes essential for them to manipulate history in order to justify the Hindu identity.

Fortunately, in India, school textbooks are written according to guidelines prepared by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which is an autonomous body. An examination shows that these textbooks offer a more or less secular interpretation of history. It is only their account of the independence movement that can be faulted, such as when the Jinnah-led Muslim League is described as a communal organisation and the Muslim League's two-nation theory is termed "unscientific and unhistorical" (Bipin Chandra, *Modern India*, NCERT, 1990).

Indian history books deny the concept of Muslim nationalism and argue that nationalist leaders accepted partition not because there were two nations—a Hindu nation and a Muslim one—but because the historical development of communalism, both Hindu and Muslim, over the past 70 years or so had created a situation where the alternative to partition was senseless and barbaric communal riots.

Medieval history is, on the whole, without prejudice. Except for a few exceptions such as Aurangzeb, most Muslim rulers are shown as being liberal-minded. It is argued that there was no ideological divide between the Hindu and Muslim cultures and that alliances between Muslim and Hindu kings and the rationale of their wars against each other are explained in political and socio-economic terms rather than religious.

This was precisely the pretext used by the Jana Sangh to convince Morarji Desai to undertake the task of "historical rectification" by proposing a ban on some history textbooks whose "controversial and biased material may lead readers to acquire a prejudiced view of Indian history". Romila Thapar's *Medieval India* was castigated for its "lack of anti-Muslim and pro-Hindu enthusiasm" and Bipin Chandra's critical treatment of the nationalist generation was lambasted on the grounds that he held nationalists such as Tilak and Surobindo Ghosh responsible for creating disunity between Hindus and Muslims. Dr R.C. Majumdar, who championed the Hindu chauvinist view of Indian history, denounced these books for "belittling the Hindus and encouraging Muslims".

Historians took strong exception to the communal interpretation of historical events and argued that the attacks on the textbooks had no intellectual basis. Instead, they represented direct political intervention by communal and authoritarian elements in what should have been a secular arena.

Despite such protests from academia, the Janata government withdrew R.S. Sharma's book, *Ancient India*, from the Class 12 syllabus of the 1100 Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)-affiliated schools in July 1978. It also sharply curtailed the distribution of Thapar's *Medieval India* and Chandra's *Modern India*. But the Jana Sangh's attempts to proceed further in re-writing history textbooks were stalled, partly because the Janata government was thrown out of power in 1979. Also, to their credit, the NCERT and the Indian History Congress, the highly respected forum of historians, refused to endorse the government's position on history.

Bharatiya Values

More than a decade later, the precedent set by the Jana Sangh was followed with full vigour in the BJP-ruled states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. The campaign began through Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) front organisations. A memorandum was sent to state and central bodies, including the Ministry for Human Resources Development, the NCERT and the Commission for Public Instruction, Bangalore, demanding that history books highlight "India's freedom struggle against foreign invaders for the last 2500 years"; that the eternal "Bharatiya" values be included in the syllabi at all levels of education; and that discriminatory laws and provisions that divide Indian society into majority and minority factions and which are detrimental to national integration be changed.

These views were endorsed subsequently by the Uttar Pradesh Education Minister, Rajnath Singh, who announced at the National Conference on Indian History organised by the State Council of Educational Research and Training in April 1992 that the education system in UP would be *dharma sapeksh* (religion based). As a result, vedic mathematics was introduced and new chapters glorifying India's ancient cultural heritage were added in the Hindi and history textbooks.

The revised history textbooks centred around the following themes: (i) Aryans were the original inhabitants of India, and Indian civilisation and culture are basically the work of Aryans whose civilisation is superior to every other; (ii) India's freedom struggle began about 2500 years ago during a period of "national resistance" against foreigners; (iii) Islam spread only with the use of force, Muslim rulers were religious bigots who committed atrocities against Hindus, and there has been a continuous struggle between the Hindu and Muslim cultures.

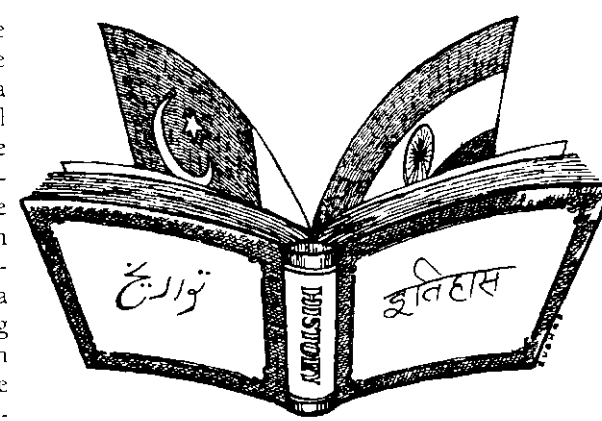
The entire period of medieval Indian history is presented as one of antagonism between Hindus and Muslims where the two communities were like "two armed camps in which the atmosphere of mutual conflict was always present" (*High School Itihas, Bhag I*, history textbook for secondary schools, Government of UP, 1992). As another secondary school textbook puts it "due to circumstances, it (Islam) gradually assumed the form a *sainik dharma* (military religion) and with the force of arms, with lightning speed, it advanced and became an international religion". Another book refers to Muslims as a "set of invaders who came with the sword in one hand and the *Quran* in the other and numberless Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam on the point of sword. This struggle for freedom became a 'religious war' " (*Itihas Gaa Raha Hai*).

Historians took strong exception to the communal interpretation of historical events and argued that the attacks on the textbooks had no intellectual basis

Muslim rulers are portrayed as religious bigots, Hindu-baiters, idol-smashers and converters by the sword. Akbar is the only ruler who is spared for having thought about the welfare of his Hindu subjects. But his liberal policies are explained more in terms of his 'Hinduisation'—"Akbar adopted the Hindu ways and customs. He took part in Hindu festivals. He used to worship the Sun God. He was always happy when he wore a Hindu dress" (N.R. Sharma, *A Text Book of High School History, Part I & II*, Agra, H.M. Publications, first edition, 1991).

With regard to modern history, these textbooks legitimise and glorify the role of Hindu communal organisations such as the RSS and of its founder, Keshwar Hedgewar. The RSS is supposed to have "won the hearts of patriots connected with different communities, religions and ideologies" and its *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) "removed the evils which hundreds of years of slavery had given."

When these revisions became public, it led to a round of national debate on the abuse of history by parties in power. The Ministry of Human Resource Development appointed a National Steering Committee, which in turn deputed the NCERT to re-evalu-



Given that there is a will for erasing distortions, Pakistan faces more of an uphill task since a whole new generation has been brought up on half-truths and twisted history

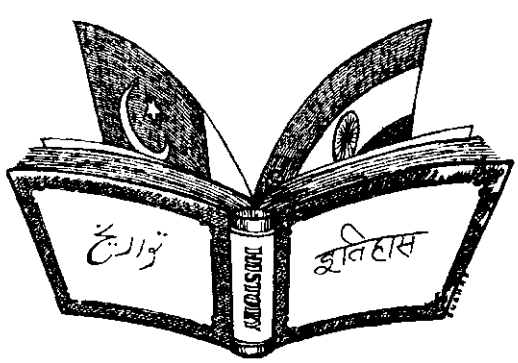
ate these textbooks. The Committee submitted its report in January 1993 concluding that these books presented an "historically inaccurate and distorted view of India's past" giving it a "blatantly communal orientation". The Committee recommended the books be withdrawn and that in future no unauthorised textbooks be allowed in schools run by private bodies or religious and cultural organisations, whether they are government-aided or not.

Islamic Ideology

In Pakistan, there has never been a similar attempt to try to rescue the history curriculum. Zia-ul Haq's adoption of the Islamic ideology for Pakistan saw a confluence of interests with certain orthodox religious political parties such as Jamaat-i-Islami. As a result, the way history is taught in Pakistan was drastically reoriented. Military rulers abolished history as a subject in Pakistani schools, replacing it with "Social Studies" for Classes 1 to 8, and "Pakistan Studies" for Classes 9 to 12 and for degree students. Both courses are amalgams of bits of geography, history, civics, economics, Islamic studies and international relations.

General Zia's regime restructured the entire educational system along Islamic lines. The University Grants Commission issued a directive in 1981 to prospective textbook authors specifying the following objectives for the new "Pakistan Studies" course: to engender complete faith in Pakistan and its ideology; to foster the belief that Pakistan was obtained on the basis of Islam; to negate the propaganda of the enemies of Pakistan to the effect that Pakistan was established with the help of the British; to build Pakistan as a real "Cathedral of Islam"; and to cherish Quaid-i-Azam's motto "unity, faith and discipline" for the consolidation of the country and to safeguard it from the enemies of Pakistan and Islam.

Fulfilling the government directive, the revised history texthooks are centred on the following themes: the Ideology of Pakistan, both as a historical force which motivated the movement for Pakistan as well as being its raison d'être and the depiction of Jinnah as a man of orthodox views who sought the creation of a theocratic state; immutability of the Hindu-Muslim divide and generation of communal antagonism; and portrayal of India as a land of non-Muslims and an enemy of Pakistan and Islam.



History in these textbooks starts with the advent of Islam in the Subcontinent in the 7th century, obliterating its ancient 'Hindu' past as well as the periods of the Indus valley civilisation and the Maurya and Gupta empires. The word "invasion" is avoided scrupulously when referring to all Muslim conquerors. Muslim rule is glorified as one based on the Islamic principles of *shariat* and is credited with reforming the ills of Hindu society.

As a social studies book published by the Sindh Textbook Board for Class 8 students has it, "Their (Islamic) teaching dispelled many superstitions of the Hindus and reformed their bad practices. Thereby Hindu religion of the olden days came to an end". Islam is portrayed as the antithesis of Hinduism and students are told that Hindu and Muslim civilisations and cultures had nothing in common in their religion, way of life, customs or rites.

Coming to modern history, the Indian National Congress is shown as a pro-British and purely Hindu body, and the Muslim League as an anti-British organisation. Facts are distorted to show that orthodox religious political parties like the Jamaat-i-Islami, Majlis-i-Ahrar and Khaksar Party had supported the demand for Pakistan with great enthusiasm, even though it is well known that they had opposed its creation, stating that it was un-Islamic.

The depiction of the 1947 communal riots is blatantly biased in every textbook, with only Hindu and Sikh massacres of "unarmed Muslims" being mentioned. The partition is described as a story of Muslims' persecution and genocide by the Hindus—"Hindus and Sikh, enemies of mankind, killed and dishonoured thousands nay thousands of women, children, the old and the young, with extreme cruelty and heartlessness" (*Mutala'a-i-Pakistan*, published by NWFP Textbook Board).

The Hindu is invariably portrayed as cunning and treacherous, obsessively seeking to settle scores with his erstwhile masters. Justice Shameem Hussain Kadri, ex-Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, writes of the "diabolical Hindus" and "Hindu conspiracies" in his officially circulated book *The Creation of Pakistan*. There are countless similar examples. Words and phrases like "oppression", "domination", "subjugation", "inhumane elimination", and even "physical extermination" and "extinction", are used to describe the policies of Hindu rulers and, subsequently, of Congress leaders towards Muslims. The Congress goal of a united India is interpreted as aiming at the extermination of Muslims from Indian society.

The hatred for Hindus historically is translated into loathing directed at India in the post-independence period. The textbooks are full of references to India's evil designs against Pakistan and Islam, which only the Pakistani military is capable of dealing with. This was essential for a military regime seeking justification for the continuation of its rule.

The fact that six years after General Zia's death and successive democratic governments no changes have been made to correct these distortions shows that the Jamaat's deep inroads into restructuring Pakistan's national education system have outlasted its alliance with General Zia's military regime.

Benazir Bhutto had instituted a commission for revis-

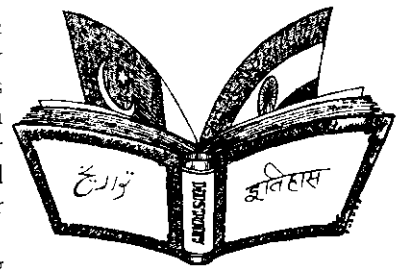
ing history and geography textbooks in 1988, but these attempts were aborted mid-way in the face of severe criticism from the opposition, particularly the Jamaat-i-Islami, in the National Assembly. Nawaz Sharif's government could not possibly undertake this task given its alliance with Jamaat-i-Islami and other Islamic political parties. Ms Bhutto has now re-instituted the commission for correcting history textbooks, but this is an area of low priority for a government plagued with so many domestic political problems.

It is also clear that there has been no real debate on the issue of misleading textbooks in historical circles and the wider intelligentsia in Pakistan. This is partly because, over the years, a strong nexus has developed among research institutes (established, financed and controlled by the government), college and university teachers (who produce or write these textbooks), and official texthook boards (which have their own vested interests in not allowing any meaningful revisions).

Us vs Them

A communal interpretation of history, whether by Muslim or Hindu fundamentalists, has its source in the same wellspring. Both view history in terms of a religious struggle between Islam and Hinduism and strive to prove that the two are anti-thetical. Hostility towards an 'Islamic' Pakistan or a 'Hindu' India is the only logical next step.

A communal approach to history, besides imbuing children with an 'us-versus-them' feeling at a tender age and imprinting an inimical picture of the 'other side' in their minds, also sets the pace for students to view inter-state relations between India and Pakistan through the prism of a Hindu-Muslim divide. The fact remains that four decades after partition, reciprocal hatred continues to be inculcated in India and Pakistan in a conscious and systematic manner via school textbooks. This is indeed ominous in terms of the search for peace in the Subcontinent.



Given that there is a will for erasing distortions, Pakistan faces more of an uphill task since a whole new generation brought up on the half-truths and twisted history of their textbooks has come to assume that India is a land of non-Muslims and hence, the biggest enemy of Pakistan and Islam. Meanwhile, in India, the rising political fortunes of the BJP may complicate matters further. The proponents of Hindutva have made it clear that their concerns about textbooks still remain on the political agenda.

Relations between Pakistan and India cannot improve if there is psychological conditioning of the young in each country to distrust the other. The prejudiced manipulation of textbooks bas to end. In 1988, Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto had actually arrived at an understanding to re-examine textbooks as the means to break down barriers between the two countries. They had hoped to break the stereotyped prejudices which poisoned the minds of the younger generation. It is time this agreement was given a second look.

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MR NICE GUY. Who was the most written-about man in the Southern Hemisphere for a couple of weeks in May 1990? Why, Atal Bihari Vaj-payee, of course. All Asian and international newsmag-azines (Asia editions, mind you—for it cannot be imagined that a *Time* reader in the American Midwest would follow the shenanigans in the Lok Sabha with great interest) carried stories on Atalji. And before you knew it, he was gone. But the incongruousness of it all came through in the write-ups: Mr Vajpayee is a *nice* man, they all said. It is just that he is in the wrong party.

RIAZ HUSAIN Khokhar vs Indian media. Who wins? Mr Khokhar, the Pakistani High Commissioner to New Delhi since 1992, who has the knack for "needling India on Indian soil" as one columnist put it. Just before the general elections, the irrepressible/irresponsible (depending on your geopolitical perspective) diplomat told the *India Abroad News Service* that the poll exercise in Kashmir was bound to be rigged. The media backlash was deafening, but a preoccupied Rao Government did not respond with expulsion, and a light rap on the knuckles by South Block foreman Salman Haider seemed to be enough. The extremes of the Indo-Pak pendulum now seem more moderate, which means that a Subcontinental nuclear war is not as near as we thought. And Mr Khokhar provides the key.

AT LEAST UNTIL the elections in mid-June, trust Bangladeshi newspapers to provide equal column inches to **ladies Zia and Hasina** as they go about their pre-poll whistle-stops. So, if you have a picture of Sheikh Hasina with newcomers to Awami League at her residence, next to it you will find another one of the same dimensions of Begum Khaleda receiving bouquets from former MPs. And if Hasina wants tornado-hit people saved, then the headline on Khaleda appealing for help for victims cannot be far away—in fact, next door.

A **DART** WHICH strikes deep and hurts bad to the editors of *The Kathmandu Post* for printing a closeup of the decomposed body of a rape victim, with accompanying text that describes in meticulous detail the position of the victim's legs and the stage of putrefaction of the body parts. This brings up once again the lack of photo-editing sensibilities in the subcontinent, where the editor-sahebs themselves jump to print the most gruesome picture they can find, be it the decapitated head of a bomb blast victim being carried around by the hair in New Delhi, or a cleanly sliced body part on a street surface in Colombo. Not to mention the alacrity with which we have been printing pictures of the gruesome street scenes from Monroville in Liberia, showing Krahn fighters being killed in various imaginative ways.

NOW THIS FROM a wildlife column about the **amazing Mallee Fowl**, from a nature column in *The Independent* of Dhaka. "Leipoa ocellata is a large chicken-like ground bird which belongs to the Megapodidae family of the order Galliformes. It is well known as the Lowan. The Mallee fowl, an incubator bird, lives in very dry desert areas of *[and now get this]* Australia..." Sorry, not interested. Next bird.

WHICH CAME First, Duck or Egg? Is it for or against the SAARC and SAPTA spirit if one objects to Indian eggs being smuggled into Bangladesh, hitting Bangladeshi poultry bad? These will be the stuff of discussion as South Asian trade picks up. So let us look deeper. I learn that the southwest region, with Jessore as hub, is reeling under the accumulated avarice of "a section of unscrupulous traders in the border districts [who] started smuggling Indian eggs including duck eggs into the country." Well, how Bangladesh today handles the duck and chicken egg crisis is therefore quite important, but I would like it sunny side up, please. Quack.

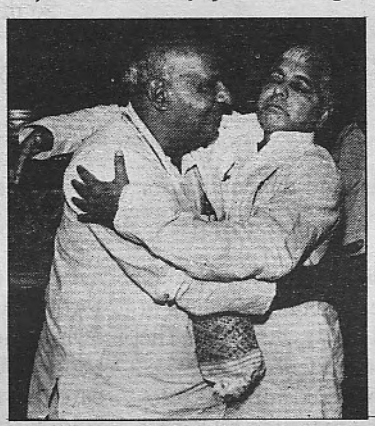
MOST LEVEL-CROSSING accidents involve express trains, said a *Times of India* headline, which finally speaks of something that I have had in mind for quite a while, which is that it is lack of basic physics which leads drivers into fatal accidents all over South Asia. According to the report: "Most mail and express trains approach level crossings at speeds as high as 90 kmph. This means that a train travels 25 meters in one second. If the road driver sights the train at a distance of 300 meters, then the train will reach it in about 12 seconds. However, in many cases, the drivers are not able to negotiate the crossing in 12 seconds." To take the idea further, the rash driving occurs because drivers have not gone to school where they are taught that mass times velocity equals momentum. So, what drivers have to be taught is not traffic rules, but physics.

"BECAUSE IT IS THERE" was the laconic answer by George Leigh Mallory back in 1923 when someone asked him why he wanted to climb Everest. Now, Peter Hillary, son of Sir Ed, has come up with a modern-day rendition of that same phrase. Writing in The *New York Times* op-ed page in the aftermath of the many deaths that the mountain saw this spring, he writes why climbers risk everything to tackle the Himalayan giants: "To challenge the very essence of oneself."

UNEQUAL EVEN In Death. April-May was the time of killing in much of South Asia, and the media played its part in the quickly forgetting act. Four deaths in the

bomb blast in Imran Khan's hospital in Lahore, for example, garnered many times more ink and air time than the 500 deaths by tornado in Bangladesh. Over fifty Santhals were massacred by Bodos in Assam, while eight Nepali workers at a stone-crushing factory in Kashmir Valley were executed by militants. The death-watch in Karachi started winding down, but Colombo seemed to be bracing itself for another one. In Nepal, there were 20 deaths in the Tarai, but what got international attention, with covers in *Time* and *Newsweek*, and wire services going all out to provide coverage, were the deaths on Mt Everest.

EDITORIAL IN *The Independent* of Dhaka, titled **City's Drainage System**, says "the capital city lacks any drainage system worth the name" and that it gets water-logged "every time it rains for about an hour." Apparently, the problem is no longer confined to the city's "low-lying areas", and it takes two or three days for the roads to emerge from under the water. While those of us from more undulating tracts can sympathise, is there anything to be said for the fact that water seeks its own level? Bangladesh is a country where inclines are measured at a metre per two hundred kilometres. So, how can you make water flow to a lower level (which is what the editorial wants) when *there is no lower level*? I trust I have made my point.



POLITICAL HUGGIE BEARS. For the 13 days that the BJP government was in power, there was lots of hugging all around and **laddoos** being downed in parliamentary committees and street corners. After making sure the press photographers were present, Mr Advani would feed laddoos to Mr Vajpayee, and Mr Vajpayee would return the favour. Murli Manoharji awaits his turn, salivating, while Shri Jaswant Singh looks like he would prefer some *barfi* instead. As for the hugging, nobody dared get close to, much less hug, the formidable Vijae Raje Scindia. And how do you hug Ms Sushma Swaraj, soon-to-be Information and Boradcasting Minister for 13 days, without outraging anyone's modesty? With party stalwarts on standby, Mr. K.L. Sharma made a go at it, and a visibly uncomfortable Ms Swaraj wished that bearhugs by male colleagues did not have to be part of winning Lok Sabha elections. Men politicians can hug much more freely, with no body part coming in the way, as Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda and Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav demonstrated.

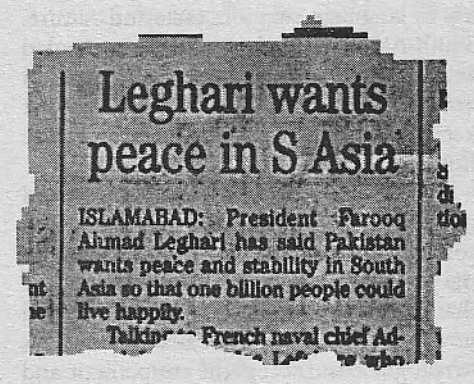
AN OBSCURE ITEM in *The Hindustan Times* of 18 May, sourced to an agency named *ANI*, announced, "**Baluchistan in Ferment Again**". Apparently, the return from exile of "the veteran leader" Ataullah Khan Mengal in January 1996 fuels speculation that something big is in the offing. Citing some other events, and mixing all known metaphors, the writer warns: "With all this political cocktail brewing the province appears to be sitting on a time bomb." Interesting thing is, no one else is saying so. Does it mean that this was just prejudiced reporting, or are the Baloch up to something?

TALKING OF BALOCH nationalism (centred originally on the Kalat state, a Baluchi speaking area), the same article makes an interesting point: The **Khan of Kalat** had preferred independence in 1947 to being joined with Pakistan. His argument was that "the legal status of Nepal and Kalat was different from other princely states of the Indian subcontinent. While the other 'native states' dealt with the British Indian Government in New Delhi, Nepal and Kalat maintained their treaty relationship directly with London."

A PHOTO AND caption in the Dhaka *Independent* shows Salman F. Rahman, the paper's publisher and boss of the Beximco group which seems to own half of Bangladesh, receiving a bouquet as convenor of the **Samriddha Bangladesh Andolan**. Mr Rahman has been known to have political ambitions, and the SBA does have the looks of the beginnings of a political party, but more research is needed. Well, if Imran Khan can get political on the other side of India, why not Salman F. Rahman on the near side?

I REPEAT PART of an article by Sujeet Rajan in *The Times of India* of 17 May, which indicates that the reporter does not know his **Mount Everest** from a polluted sand bank on the Jamuna. The article ends with: "Despite the Everest having been scaled nearly 600 times, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation processes nearly 60 foreign and almost 200 Indian mountaineering expeditions every year." I have no doubt that the IMF indeed does all those things, but Mr Rajan does not seem to know it would have next to nothing to do with processing applications for Chomolongma/Sagarmatha, which comes properly under the jurisdiction (if I am not in a different century, a different *planet*) of Nepal's Ministry of Tourism and/or the Tibet Mountaineering Association.

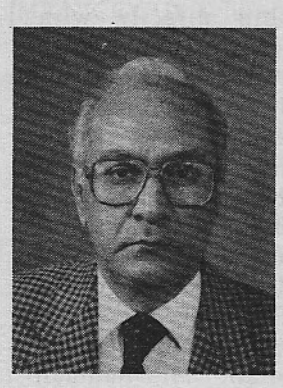
Truism of the month:
headline in *The News* of Lahore


Leghari wants peace in S Asia

ISLAMABAD: President Farooq Ahmad Leghari has said Pakistan wants peace and stability in South Asia so that one billion people could live happily.

Talkin... French naval chief Ad-

- Chhetria Patrakar



Like any feeling that is nurtured for too long, antipathy can assume an involuntary behaviour pattern.

by Iqbal Jafar

South Asian Theatre of the Absurd

Among Homo sapiens, who now number 5.7 billion, about one-fifth are South Asians. They share many characteristics with other Homo sapiens elsewhere. But, unlike other humans, South Asians have no special liking for their own variety. In fact they strongly disapprove of them. To this extent, they are an unusual breed, and of much interest to the scientific community.

Antipathy, even as a temporary aberration, tends to enhance the incipient human aggressiveness and erode objectivity. For South Asians, the feeling of antipathy for other South Asians is not even an aberration. They have lived with it for centuries. It has been bequeathed from one generation to the next as if it were part of folklore. But antipathy, or any feeling nurtured for so long, can assume an involuntary behaviour pattern. It would, then, cross the frontiers of conscious and rational control. This seems to have happened in South Asia, divided as it is by language, religion, caste and culture. South Asians have degenerated into jaded and polarised peoples forever immersed in innumerable old and new conflicts that keep them busy on the streets or at the frontiers.

How and why South Asians were led into this theatre of the absurd is a long and complex chronicle. It would take us far into the past where we are more likely to get lost than redeemed. Also, the purpose here and now is not to discover the causes so much as to recognise and accept the antipathetic and subjective mind-set of the South Asian, as reflected in actual events. Let us, therefore, look at the recent past and the contemporary scene.

First Among Equals

Since Indians are the first among equals in this region, we could begin with them. The 'dawn' of Indian independence broke precisely at midnight, as worked out by astrologers, with the famous invocation by Pandit Nehru: "When the world sleeps, India will awake". No one had the courage to tell Panditji that the world, passing through morning or evening or high noon elsewhere, was not asleep! It was, in fact, the Indians who remained asleep while Rajen Babu, the future President, did his bit to awaken them by making a frightful din through that ancient mollusc trumpet, the 'sankh'. In a symbolic way it was an expression of that charming flair for the use of metaphor and simulation to circumvent or dispose of reality. Within months of that midnight dawn, the Indians plunged, heart and soul, into disputes over Kashmir, Hyderabad, Junagarh and Goa.

After some respite, and old disputes notwithstanding, the Indians began exploring other possibilities. They quarrelled with China over rocks and boulders, with Pakistan over glaciers, with Bangladesh over water, and with Sri Lanka and Nepal over matters that are yet to be identified as solid or liquid. We have not yet seen the last of these disputes, though we could well see the last of some of the disputants.

But we must concede that what the Indians do to themselves is more than what they do to their neighbours. Among themselves, they quarrel endlessly over mosques, temples, language, religion, caste, births, deaths and even marriages! Their army, when not fighting in Sri Lanka or with China or Pakistan, is usually deployed to prevent them from fighting each other. (Indian readers need not fume, we will get to Pakistan momentarily.) One cannot blame the Indians if they don't know whether they are coming or going. And where could they be going, anyway? Where, for instance, is their blue-water Navy supposed to steam up to? The Australians have asked this question, not me.

So much for the Indians. Now, we, in Pakistan, are not willing to accept Indian hegemony even over quarrelsomeness. As an independent and sovereign nation, with a separate identity, we like to have our own separate quarrels. We continue, therefore, to quarrel with Afghans over Afghanistan, with the U.S. over enrichment, and among ourselves over impoverishment. Unfortunately, the world has yet to appreciate that we do all this, and will do more, despite our own domestic quarrels with, over, between and about Shias, Sunnis, Deobandis, Barelvis, Ahle-hadith, Punjabis, Pathans, Sindhis, Balochs, Mohajirs and Saraikis...

Time, I think, to look at the other end of South Asia: Bangladesh, a creation of the mother of quarrels between West Pakistanis, East Pakistanis and, of course, Indians. Well, Bangladesh too has its quarrels—with India, over the water that must come in, with Pakistan over the Biharis who must go out, and again, with India over the Bangladeshis in Assam who must stay.

The Bangladeshis also made a tentative gesture to pick a quarrel with the Burmese over some kindred souls in Arakan.

Now, how about Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives? The reader would recall reference to the problems the Indians have with these mountain and sea-borne shrews, but one has not heard of any quarrel among them. Maybe geography has intervened. Even for us South Asians, it is a bit difficult to rake up quarrels regarding international frontiers, riparian rights, or trade routes between, say, Sri Lanka and Bhutan, or Nepal and the Maldives. However, we can expect quarrels in those countries if not among them, soon, if it is not already happening. Sri Lanka, certainly, has been in a squabble domestically for more than a decade.

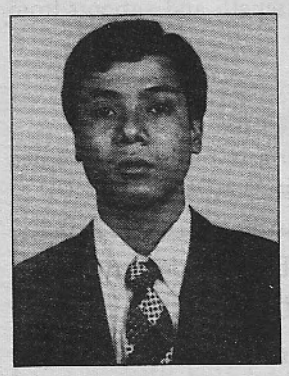
Spinning Spiral

This, then, is what the contemporary South Asian scene looks like. Now, the question: Can this quarrelsomeness and the erosion of objectivity be corrected before it becomes a genetic defect? Well, not in the foreseeable future. The all-pervasive antipathetic feeling and atavistic compulsions, expressed in so many ways and for so long, remain woven into our psycho-social fabric. The future is, thus, preempted and change reduced to mere intrusion.

Watching the seemingly bustling South Asia is like trying to follow a spinning spiral. The grooves and curves appear to travel up and out at great speed. But it is an illusion. The grooves and curves remain exactly where they are. It is the observer who would, ultimately, be no more. This is the great enigma and, for some, the charm and triumph of South Asia. All sorts of observers—the Hun, the Parthian, the Persian, the Greek, the Kushan, the Arab, the Afghan, the Turk, the French, the British—have come and vanished like rabbits in the magician's hat, but South Asia stays where it has always been. And it does so with vengeance.

The soul of South Asia is awe-inspiring. It has the stillness of the primordial deep, though storms rage on the surface. And we know the storms will pass, the stillness will remain. Sardar Pannikar noted with pride, in 1948, that "Indian society is essentially the same as depicted in the *Mahabharata*". This statement, even if debatable, explains the South Asian psyche—an inner compulsion to reach for the past; a yearning for the womb of history. Those in India would be happy with a regression of 3000 years or more. We, in Pakistan, are willing to settle for less—1400 years.

I. Jafar, a former civil servant, heads the Trust for Voluntary Organisations and is based in Islamabad.



Even though, culturally, Burma has more in common with the countries of Southeast Asia, it does not make sense for Rangoon to turn its back on South Asia.

by Soe Myint

Burma, ASEAN and SAARC

Despite global condemnation of the authoritarian regime in Rangoon, ASEAN has been maintaining a policy of "constructive engagement" with the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). This so-called constructive engagement is a policy spearheaded by Thailand with the ideological support of Lee Kwan Yew's "Asian Way of Democracy". Its goal appears to be to promote democratisation in Burma through increased business contacts and connections with the international community. As a result, the ASEAN countries have emerged as major political and economic allies of the SLORC, with heavy investment and strong trade links.

Three decades ago, on 8 August 1967, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) came into existence, with the five founding members committed "to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development" of their countries through regional cooperation. Recently, however, ASEAN has moved beyond its original focus. With the establishment in 1994 of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the association has moved to address political and security issues in the Asia-Pacific region as well.

The military generals of Burma, with the aim of gaining political legitimacy, are anxious to be part of ASEAN, and are not above offering ASEAN a share in Burma's natural resources for the favour. The ASEAN leadership seems to be buying the idea. They allowed Burma to attend the recent ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in Bangkok as a "guest of the host country". On 10 May, Burma was actually admitted into the 19-country ASEAN Regional Forum at the ARF Senior Officials' Meeting held in Indonesia. It is quite likely that Burma will be a full-fledged member of ASEAN by 2000.

To Join or Not to Join

ASEAN's leaders justify their support of SLORC by maintaining that this acts as a counterweight to China's growing military and economic influence in Burma. They fear China's ability to destabilise all of Southeast Asia and are willing to go to great lengths to fend off this threat. There are also those in the ASEAN fold who believe that Burma can be groomed to join the Southeast Asian "tiger" pack once it is part of ASEAN.

Due to the self-interest which has guided ASEAN's friendly attitude towards Rangoon, there are some questions to be raised, especially when we look forward to a future democratic Burma. Should Burma join ASEAN? Can Burma become a "tiger" merely by joining ASEAN?

In the prevailing global political and economic situation, nation states have found that regional cooperation and integration mechanisms are important for managing economic development and security. Multilateral cooperation is dwindling while regional cooperation and negotiations are growing in importance.

In this context, there seems no choice for Burma but to join the ASEAN regional organisation in order to play a part in collective political, economic and social solutions. Closer ties with other regional countries will also help Burma to balance China's growing economic influence. As this influence and the number of illegal Chinese immigrants grow, anti-Chinese sentiment is increasing palpably within the country.

The Burmese pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has stated clearly in an interview that "Burma must join ASEAN since Burma is a part of Southeast Asia". Since Burma shares many socio-cultural characteristics and patterns of behaviour with the peoples of Southeast Asia, this is seen as a natural move. With their Mongoloid features and related languages, the Burmese feel close to their Southeast Asian cousins.

For example, they do not feel as alien when they land in Bangkok or Singapore as they do while disembarking in Calcutta, even though Burmese society owes much to Indian cultural influences.

While the reasons to join ASEAN are clear, it is important to bear in mind that a majority of the ASEAN countries are under more or less authoritarian regimes, so-called 'democratic governments' dominated by the military or autocratic cliques. "Political liberty must be restricted to gain economic development" is the central tenet of this brand of leadership, whose slogan is the "Asian Way of Democracy". ASEAN is becoming a political alliance which challenges the very concept of the universality of human rights. Hence, it would be quite a challenge for a future democratic Burma to work with these quasi-authoritarian governments.

One should also be clear that Burma is not likely to metamorphose overnight into a "tiger" just by joining ASEAN. The present political and economic system will not allow that. The country does not have the infrastructure to sustain economic growth and there are no signs of progress under the ruling military regime. "Some people have a mistaken view that Burma is a potential Singapore or Malaysia. It lacks an educational system to achieve that," says Ms Suu Kyi.

South Asia to the West

Because it seeks to achieve democracy even as it pursues economic cooperation with its eastern neighbours, Burma should not neglect South Asia on its western flank. A democratic Burma should work on reviving historical ties with the Subcontinent which have unfortunately been weakened over the years.

There is a large South Asian community in Burma, and the Subcontinent can be a dynamic trading partner with Rangoon. The fact that the socio-economic level of Burma's development is more akin to those in South Asia means sharing ideas and resources is possible with Bangladesh and India, for example, with whom Burma shares borders.

India and Pakistan were two major importers of Burmese rice in the 1950s, when Burma was a parliamentary democracy. The Burmese people have not forgotten Jawaharlal Nehru's goodwill, for example when he helped U Nu, the then prime minister, to overcome Burma's political and economic woes. When Rangoon was facing a political and economic crisis in 1954, with a huge rice surplus on its hands, India came to her troubled neighbour's rescue by purchasing 900,000 tons on what U Nu called his "suggested terms".

Today, the South Asian countries are trying to convert the South Asia Preferential Trading Area (SAPTA) concept into a reality. Even as it looks to hitch its wagon to ASEAN, Burma must build a structure of economic cooperation that dovetails with the SAPTA effort as well.

The socio-economic challenges facing South Asian countries are similar to those that confront Burma. On the political front, most of the South Asian countries are trying to make Westminster-style democracy work. This is a problem that Burma has already faced once, and is likely to face again when it returns to parliamentary democracy.

All South Asians, like Burma, are trying to reach for the ideal of "healthy economic development". The term, as enunciated by Ms Suu Kyi, involves meeting successfully the challenges of peace and security; of human rights and related responsibilities; of democracy and rule of law; of social justice and reform; and of cultural renaissance and pluralism.

Both in the fight for freedom as well as in the challenges of healthy economic development, while being clear on the need to establish links with Southeast Asia, Burma needs to seek strength and support from South Asia.

S. Myint is a Burmese radio journalist and dissident in exile in New Delhi at present.

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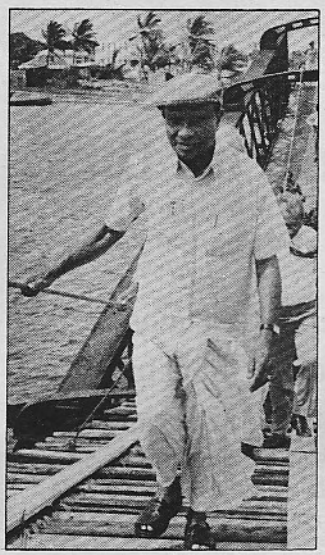
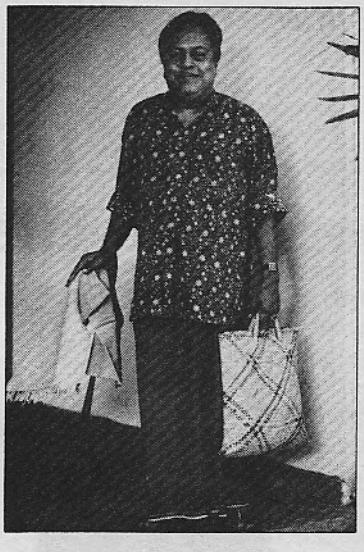


Ranasinghe Premadasa



Manik Sandrasagara in dressy sarong and shirt outfit carrying a woven reed bag

Sarong Revolution

The sarong is no longer in purdah in Sri Lanka.

by ***Manik de Silva***

For Anglicised Sri Lankan men, who comprise the majority of the country's professional, business, social and political elite, the sarong has long been "home clothes". Most of them sleep at night in sarongs and lounge around in the house in one. But it is simply not done to leave home for business or pleasure clad in anything but trousers and shirt.

For formal occasions like weddings, the favoured attire is a western-style suit with jacket and tie despite the heat and discomfort. Young executives and not-so-young public servants favour shirt and tie for work, with the St Michael's brand from Marks and Spencer particularly favoured. The less affluent with no air conditioning at work by grace of either taxpayer or shareholder will sport open necks for reasons of comfort/convenience/economy. But out of home, it is still trousers for most English speakers.

In recent years things have been changing and a few, very few, are venturing out of their homes in sarongs. The late President Ranasinghe Premadasa who was never seen in trousers after entering public life favoured a white sarong for regular wear. A sarong and shirt were his "smart casuals". His predecessor J.R. Jayewardene, who relaxes at home in trousers and bush shirt, also opted for the national dress in public during his several decades of political life.

A few young men have been following the cue of these elders, discarding their trousers in favour of colourful handloomed sarongs from Barbara Sansoni's chic Colombo boutique teamed with matching shirts for casual wear outside home. It has been catching on, albeit slowly, and a few of them have even been featured in the fashion pages of the local English language press.

Revolution

The chances are that the trend towards this costume by those who once, consciously or sub-consciously, regarded the sarong outside bed or home as the garb of the lower orders, will acquire a new momentum. This is thanks to two exclusive Colombo clubs declining to serve two sarong-wearers within their precincts. The Capri was the first offender, and the Colombo Rowing Club followed suit the same evening.

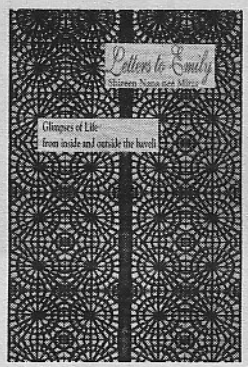
The issue became something as a cause celebre with the state-owned *Daily News*, whose editor was once jailed for contempt for daring to rail at the Supreme Court for requiring witnesses in Western garb to wear a jacket and tie, taking cudgels on behalf of the sarong-wearers.

The newspaper published an indignant letter from one of the party-goers who had to make do with a takeaway dinner after the Capri and the Rowing Club presented their edict on sarongs. She said that she had suggested that one of the victims, Manik Sandrasagara, ditch his nether garment to see whether that would pass muster. But Mr Sandrasagara, who has been playing model for the *Daily News* to illustrate the protest, had not taken her on. He and Chitrasena, one of Sri Lanka's best known dancers, had come for the birthday party in their sarongs from a reception hosted by no less than Sunethra Bandaranaike, President Chandrika's sister.

Recording that, the *Daily News* implied that what was good enough for the Oxford-educated, impeccably pedigreed Ms Bandaranaike was not good enough for either the Capri or the Rowing Club. Mr Sandrasagara had the last laugh, though, with a memorable quote. He left the Rowing Club adapting "Buddhang Saranang Gachchami" (I take refuge in the Buddha) from the everyday Buddhist prayer to "Suddhang Saranang Gachchami" (I take refuge in the *suddha*, or white man).

BOOK REVIEW

Native Informant on the Veiled Life



Letters to Emily: Glimpses of Life from Inside and Outside the Haveli

by Shireen Nana neé Mirza
Kifayat Academy, Karachi, 1994 and 1996
125 pages, PNR 100

by **Firdous Azim**

This book was apparently written in time for the United Nation's Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995, to provide international delegates with the opportunity to "know more about the veiled side of life through a woman's eyes". This is, therefore, a Pakistani venture (state-endorsed) to reveal the truth about life in Sindhi villages, and to demystify some of the notions about feudalism and its treatment of women.

The 1996 version of the book is divided into two sections. The first is in the form of letters to Emily, an American friend of the author. The second, titled "Other Recollections" gives a few pen-pictures of the writer's life and experiences, and includes the remarkable "A Leper's Tale". The author herself is a cosmopolitan, Westernised and, at the same time, traditional woman who, because of her husband's job and her family position, lived in far-flung rural areas of Sindh during the early 1950s. The book performs an anthropological role, and the author occupies the position of "native informant", opening up the inner sanctum of the *haveli* to both Emily and the world.

The problem with the book (and I will begin with the problem) is that it sets out to explain, or justify, a social system and social mores to an external and non-comprehending, even biased, readership. That is why there is a bending-over-backwards to reveal the charms of feudal existence, often overlooking the very serious injustices that such a system perpetrates. However, the unchanging desert landscape does witness the processes of change, as Shireen Nana points out in the introduction, and it is these winds of change that need to be highlighted, rather than the timelessness of its customs and structures.

In a letter from the second section, which, presumably, has been added to the 1996 edition (i.e., it was missing from the books distributed in Beijing) dated 1959 and entitled "Here Time Stands Still—1995" (the different dates are probably there to explain that not much has changed), Shireen Nana describes to Emily how children are brought up in Sindhi villages.

The author in 1994, a year before her death

She describes two characters, Mahmoud and Mahmouda, as they grow into adulthood, are married and settle into domestic life. It is significant that Mahmoud's upbringing occupies 11 pages, whereas Mahmouda occupies a paltry four. Even this observation of life behind the veil somehow flits on the outskirts—the periphery—of these lives, and fails to penetrate the inner sanctum and to give us the 'insider' view.

The book begins with a hostess's flourish, as Emily is introduced into the social niceties of Sindhi rural households. Shireen Nana visualises herself as a denizen of both worlds and has a "delightful feeling of having a foot firmly planted in both camps...in the purdah world of women and in the outside world". The village architecture—the layout of the houses into *otaks* (the outer house for men) and the *havelis* (the inner domestic space, which is not the sole domain *of* women, but the sole domain *for* women, who have no access to life outside the *haveli*)—and the division of its social life into inner sanctum, the outside guests and entertaining is graphically described.

What is also made clear are the social hierarchies that persist between the zamindars and the *haris*, or the serfs. These various levels of existence are seen to be bound in a harmonious relationship, where the tensions between classes and sexes are underplayed, and the ordered hierarchy celebrated. Not that the author was unaware of such tensions—as the daughter of a judge and the wife of an administrator, she had a wide experience of the violence that marks this feudal existence, and her book reveals these issues.

Breaking the Confines

It is on the suffering of women that this book is strangely silent, and what is worse, collusive. The letter "Life Behind the Veil" tries to show how life is actually lived by women in the *havelis*, and seeks to point out how mistaken Western and perhaps modern attitudes are, perceiving as they do these lives as confined and unhealthy. The author sets about undoing these notions of "stifled", "confined" lives. But even while Shireen Nana wants to describe life inside the *haveli*, she brings the women-under-description to Karachi, and describes their excitement and thrill at being in the big city, and their zest for travel.

This is the difficulty with the book—it does not stay within the *haveli* long enough. Our author constantly steps back into the outside world, and instead of using this as a

device to portray the changing world of the *haveli*, as the winds of change slowly enter this inner sanctum, the book's constant escape to the world outside makes it seem as if the author herself found the inside too confining.

The sorrows and tragedies of women's lives are not overlooked, but the onus of bearing them are put on the women themselves. The women behind the veil are admired not only for their "live" and "unfettered" minds, but also for the "attitude of complete calm" with which they face calamities. The author does go on to wonder whether this calm is one of mere fatalistic acceptance or born of deep faith, but in the letter entitled "Three Faces of Eve", she feels only unmitigated admiration for women who display this "calm" in the face of utter calamity. Protest at the helplessness and poverty of lives—at the fact of destitution—remains missing.

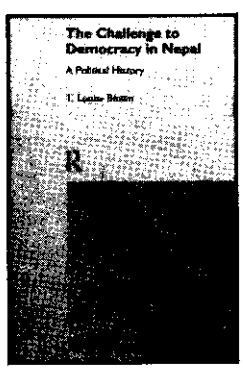
Despite the shortcomings, the book is worth reading. It contains some delightful vignettes of the life of 1950s upper middle-class South Asian families, especially in entries like "A Show Is Planned", "The Haunted House", "Rest Houses" or "Meet Mustafa". Shireen Nana's style is lucid, with touches of humour, and the reading is good.

The final entry "A Leper's Tale" takes the reader out of the main theme of the book, as the leper travels from Burma, his birthplace, through Madras, Mathura, Bangalore, Trichnapuly, Ajmer, Bombay and finally to Karachi. As he relates his encounters with Gujaratis and Mahrathis, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians, the confined world truly opens up and the book acquires a larger identity. There is no justifying or romanticising suffering—as "The Three Faces of Eve" tries to do—but an opening up to a world of adventure, struggle and perhaps a final redemption.

As an avowed project to reveal the world of the *haveli* to the world outside (whether to Emily or the delegates at Beijing), the book fails. But it succeeds in its descriptive capacity. The narrative takes on a wonderful and ebullient life of its own when the author forgets her task of "native informant".

F. Azim teaches English at Dhaka University.

Incomplete Revolution



The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History

by T Louise Brown
Routledge, London and New York, 1996
239 pages, £ 40
ISBN 0 415 08576 4

by **S.D. Muni**

Democratisation in Nepal has been a tardy and protracted zig-zag process. Since the fall of the Ranas in 1951, it has travelled from one triangular balance of mutually antagonistic and incompatible forces to another, from one partial and incomplete "revolution" in 1951 to another in 1990. T. Louise Brown, through her study *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History*, joins a large band of Subcontinental and Western scholars who have attempted to analyse and evaluate Nepal's march towards democracy. Her point of departure from other studies lies in the emphasis placed on the events of the people's "revolution" (*Jan Andolan*) of 1990 and thereafter, to which more than half the book is devoted.

Ms Brown's narrative covers familiar ground in the first half of the book, which deals with the period from the end of the Rana rule until 1990. The only significant change during this period was the resurgence of the monarchy in place of a decadent and discredited Rana system. In the interim, the monarchy struggled to keep the democratic challenge suppressed, by strong-arm methods as well as by political and ideological manoeuvres. Such manoeuvres included not only alliances with and support mobilisation from the remnants of the Rana's vested interests and stratified social structures and feudal institutions, but also from the Communist Party and its radical and extremist associates who did not want to see democratic forces, represented by the Nepali Congress, gain political ground in the Kingdom.

Not enough has been said about a unique feature of the Nepali situation, which is that the Communist movement spread and strengthened itself under the patronage of the monarchy. In order to blunt the ideological challenge posed by democratic forces, the monarchy had to wear the mantle of modernisation which, in a very significant manner, eroded its traditional social support and legitimacy, precipitating what Huntington describes as the "dilemmas of a modernising Monarch". The Nepali kings' attempts to create and sustain, by hook or by crook, the Panchayat system since 1962, was geared to skipping this dilemma. This strategy, no doubt, lengthened the life of the assertive monarchy, but the king could not—and did not—resolve this dilemma forever. The king's failure in this regard led to the developments of 1990.

Ms Brown is able to neatly put this struggle between traditional and modern forces in the context of evolving socio-economic relationships. She also underlines the traditional and authoritarian character of the Panchayat system. But all this has been done by others and, at times, with even sharper focus and persuasive articulation of the inherent contradictions in the Nepali situation.

The conditions for the 1990 "revolution" were created by a curious combination of Nepal's internal and international developments. Brown has carefully identified and analysed the role of internal factors like the rise of the urban middle class, the collapse of the Panchayat system's credibility, and the coming together of anti-monarchical forces, particularly the Nepali Congress and the united Communists. Among the external forces, Brown mentions the end of the Cold War and the conflict precipitated between India and Nepal over trade and transit, the attempt to introduce work permits for Indians seeking employment in Nepal that ran counter to the provisions of the 1950 treaty

between the two countries, as well as the import of Chinese arms by the Panchayat regime.

India's role was most decisive in the success of the popular movement, as it frightened the king and emboldened the democratic forces. Since 1960-62, in its strategy for political survival, the royal regime had exploited India's fears of the China card. However, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's decision to maintain a tough posture broke the Indian policy free from its 30-year-old defeatist syndrome. This stance greatly facilitated the collapse of the Panchayat system and the victory of Nepal's democratic front. King Birendra tried to dismiss the popular forces as agents of India, but in vain. The King also attempted to mobilise all possible support within the Indian political system, from the Shankracharyas, the army generals who had led Gurkha soldiers, to family and personal ties with influential politicians and bureaucrats. But that did not help. Even Rajiv Gandhi's electoral defeat and the coming to power of the government led by Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh, which was sympathetic to the King's regime in Nepal, could not reverse the momentum Mr Gandhi's policies had generated.

Superficial Differences

While Brown has discussed the moves and responses of the King and the democratic forces blow by blow, her treatment of the external factor is brief and superficial. No one can, however, disagree with her conclusions that the Jan Andolan of 1990 was an "uneasy compromise", it was not a "national movement" but an urban based middle-class uprising, and that "Democratic Nepal differs only superficially from Panchayat Nepal".

Indeed, the most critical question in Nepal's democratic struggle has been the truncated and incomplete nature of democratic revolutions. In 1951, the Ranas lost their credibility but they were not completely erased from the post-Rana power structure. Similarly, in 1990, the Panchayat system collapsed and the kingship surrendered to the democratic challenge, but vestiges of both remain in the parliamentary system. Even as a constitutional monarch, the King wields enormous powers and continues to strengthen his position as a key political player.

Why has this been so and who is responsible for not allowing a complete and lasting democratic victory? Brown should have attempted to answer this question and stated clearly that lopsided socio-economic and institutional development within Nepal and the self-proclaimed forces of stability and order from outside, particularly India, combined to force unethical compromises and provided a fresh lease of life and sustenance to the traditional forces in Nepal.

This being the case, the prospects for democratisation in Nepal depend not only on domestic institution-building (such as political parties) and changes in the stratified social hierarchy, but also on the presence of a regional and international atmosphere that is conducive and committed to democratic ideals. One hopes that the next stage of "democratic revolution" will start unfolding before long.

On the whole, Ms Brown's is a good and informative study based on reliable and relevant sources. However, the emphasis on chronological narrative, though useful as detailed reference, is at the cost of analytical insights and logical projections that could have helped enrich the study of emerging theories of democracy in the developing world.

S.D. Muni is Professor of South Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

In Pakistan, the Social Clause is Finally an Issue

by ***Farjad Nabi***

WHENEVER PAKISTANI NGO people have a chance to mingle with fellow Subcontinentals, one question always comes up. Why are Pakistani NGOs so passive and mute about the effects of International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation policies?

As the question is inevitable, the answer has also been immutable--a routine palaver of how elitist Pakistani NGOs are, and how they don't take pains to reach out to the grassroots. No matter how valid the excuses, the fact is that this deafening silence on the part of the public, and especially the NGOs, has helped make the Pakistani government the most willing, unprotesting and uninhibited embracer of free market economy and structural adjustment programmes.

It has been successful in drowning out the feeble squeaks of dissent in a cacophony of slogans and rhetoric such as: "In one year Pakistan has attracted more foreign investment than in the last 20 years combined."

What is not mentioned is that most of this investment is still on paper and even if it comes it will use the country as a free-for-all joyride exploiting its already overburdened people. "When we talk of the multinationals, among ourselves we say they have come to their Dubai," says Amjad Ali Jawa, president of a domestic pharmaceutical companies organisation.

In fact, the government's claim now borders upon the impudent and impolitic. During her recent tour of Sweden, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto proudly declared: "Pakistan is the only country which allows 100 percent foreign ownership."

Mother Knows Best

It is not just foreign investment and trade issues in which the government has presumed it knows best. There is also the so-called Social Action Programme, an ill-disguised structural adjustment policy (it is interesting that both acronyms spell SAP) carried out as demanded by the IMF and World Bank. Under it, changes have been made without any debate inside or outside the parliament. The rupee has been devalued by over 12 percent within months, inflation is riding high--above 20 percent according to some readings--subsidies are being cut and utilities like electricity made increasingly expensive.

The latest is that rather than draw the ire of the feudals sitting in Islamabad by implementing the much-awaited Agricultural Income Tax, a General Sales Tax is being levied on all items which have long been exempt from them in view of their 'essential' nature. Apart from the inevitable price hike, this will result in the local small manufacturer taking a giant leap towards his doom.

Garage Sale

Already Pakistan's small industrialists are groaning under a discriminatory import policy which specifies a lower duty on finished goods than on raw material. Two immediate casualties will be the cycle and fan industries, both of which produce necessary items for the poor (the rich having other modes of conveyance, and air conditioning). Another grim aspect of the SAP is the privatisation policy of the government which, in actuality, is a garage sale of the country's assets. Instead of privatising sick units, healthy units earning more than satisfactory profits are being transferred into private hands under extremely cosy conditions.

Even more distressing, the units and services being privatised are directly related to the basic rights and needs of the people. Fertiliser and telecommunication services are already in private hands, and electricity and water are next. Under World Bank directives, a study is being carried out on privatising the efficiently-run canal system of Punjab. This would be a momentous decision, if taken, in terms of the very future of the country and its people.

The Penny Drops

But things are changing on the activist front. Instead of self-flagellation at seminars at plush five star hotels, NGOs have finally begun to stir out of their donor-induced stupor. Early May saw a gathering of around 40 people from NGOs, trade unions and media people converge on a not-so-grandiose motel in Islamabad to hold an open debate for the first time on the issue of the Social Clause in GATT.

For two days, this group discussed and dissected the issue and came up with a statement which concludes: "Pakistan is a member of WTO but neither the parliament nor public interest groups were consulted before signing the agreement. Hence, the process was not democratic."

Other demands were made: a moratorium on all Pakistani laws which are being changed or have been changed under GATT or SAP requirements, and a comprehensive analysis of sectors being affected by GATT or SAP, involving sectoral and public interest groups under the purview of the parliament.

The government was urged to regulate the business practices of transnational companies since GATT does not regulate their activities. More ambitiously, the statement asked for renegotiation of all agendas of GATT which go against the public interest.

Now that the non-governmental sector is rising to the debate, one can hope that there will be more discussion among government, business and the public on critical economic issues.

JAVAID KHAN

Futuristic Islamabad, home of the Pakistan's NGOs

F. Nabi is a journalist with Lahore-based The News *on Friday.*

Of Hung Parliaments and Hanging Reforms

FIRST NEPAL, THEN India and now likely Bangladesh—hung parliaments have become a South Asian phenomenon. Stable party governments are becoming rare as parties with different ideologies and values compromise to maintain their seats in power. This, more than anything else, is affecting economic agendas the most.

In Nepal, the reforms that were initiated robustly by the Nepali Congress government under Girija Prasad Koirala slowed down when the communists came to power and now, under the present coalition, have completely lost direction. Liberalisation has become simply a buzzword for umpteenth seminars and conferences.

Equally robust were the reforms launched by Narasimha Rao in India but they began to lose steam in Mr Rao's last year in office, presumably because of the approaching elections. With the United Front coalition in power the pace of reforms shall depend on how each partner of the Front chooses to define liberalisation. Though the state of West Bengal has opened up in the past few years even under leftist rule, it needs to be seen how the left parties in the United Front shall okay swift reforms at a national level. One thing, however, has become clear: no party can shy away from liberalisation although stances to the contrary might have been adopted while seeking votes. Even the BJP, with its *swadeshi* rhetoric, had acknowledged this in its brief tenure in office.

In the case of Bangladesh, the little headway Khaleda Zia had made in opening up the economy in the post-Ershad era was stalled by two years of political turbulence and the drainage of resources in this year's two elections. A hung parliament would lead to economic agendas being relegated to lesser priorities, hampering the process of reforms.

In a region that nurtured state control over most areas of production and provided subsidies on practically all basic necessities, policies that do away with state benevolence are never very popular. As Mr Rao's term in office has shown, it needs a strong government, to confidently goad the economy to move, no matter what the cost. But when government is held hostage to the number game of coalition politics, reforms that come heavy on the electorate will certainly not be top priority. No party can risk alienating voters with the possibility of snap polls always lurking around the corner.

Sri Lanka, in spite of its internal problems, has been able to maintain the pace of reforms, leading it to be economically more developed than the other countries in the region. This leaves one wondering whether this process is being facilitated by a presidential form of goverment.

To wait for a time when reforms come about through businessmen becoming prime ministers may be a far cry, but the possibility of redefining democratic systems should not be ruled out. Hung parliaments should definitely not keep economic reforms hanging.

–Sujeev Shakya

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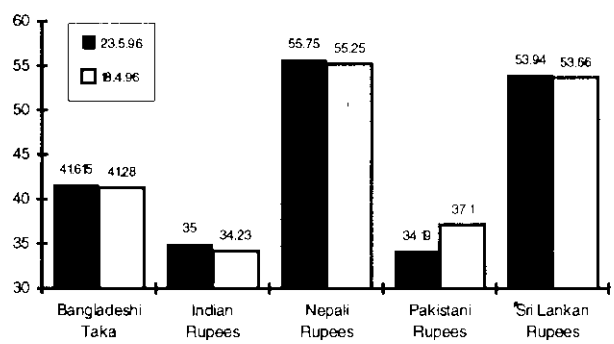
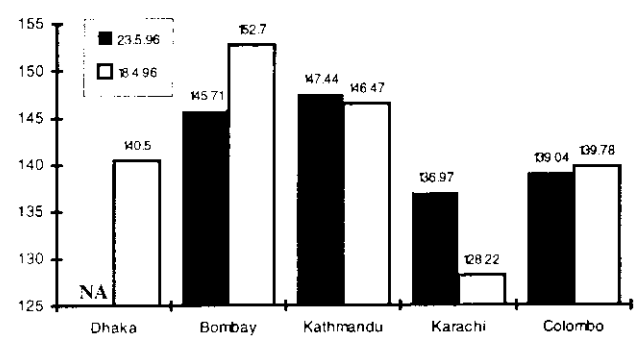
Price of a Dollar



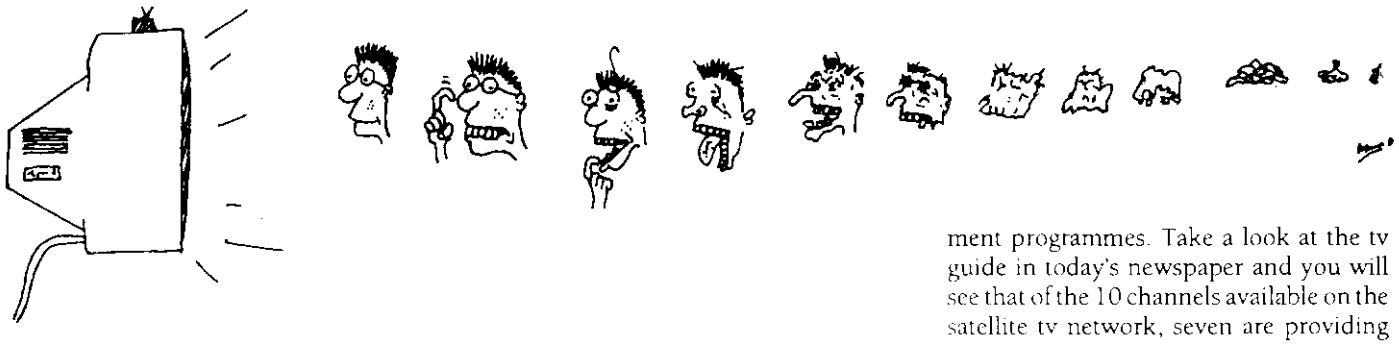
Price of 10 grams of Gold (in USD)



ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	GNP per capita USD	Net foreign resource inflow, 1994*		Export of goods, 1994*		Import of goods, 1994*	
		Total USD (millions)	Percentage Of GDP	Merchandise exports USD (millions)	Avg. annual growth (81-93)	Merchandise imports USD (millions)	Avg.annual growth (81-93)
BANGLADESH	220	7,536	5.85	2,661	7.5	4,701	1.9
INDIA	300	7,085	2.41	25,000	8.8	26,846	4.0
NEPAL	190	329	8.12	363	5.1	1,176	4.4
PAKISTAN	440	3,341	6.42	7,370	10.1	8,890	3.3
SRI LANKA	540	661	5.65	3,210	8.2	4,780	4.7

* *From* Global Economic Prospects and the Developing Countries 1996. *the World Bank.*



Friend or Foe on the Television Screen?

by ***Bindia Loomba Thapar***

THERE IS SOMETHING that holds today's children apart from the previous generation. At the click of a switch, they have access to a mind-boggling array of programmes on the television screen. Children in Western countries have had this kind of option for many years, but it was only the arrival of satellite television a few years back that gave us in South Asia the same kind of choice.

We are reacting to the sudden availability of satellite channels rather like kids who have been let loose in an ice-cream parlour with dozens of flavours to choose from. Until satellite television came along, in each of our countries, all we had was government-run tv, which functioned under the unimaginative control of government ministers and other politicians. Which was why there was so much excitement when it became possible to receive international programmes through dish antennas.

After the initial thrill was over, however, people began thinking about how satellite television was affecting our societies, the way we lived, what we ate, what games we played, and how we *thought*. Satellite television is a great thing to have, but it has to be used properly. Most importantly, many parents who themselves are not used to all that is now available at the press of a button, are allowing their offspring to watch anything and everything.

The reading habit, which is so important to develop the mind, is forgotten when there is mindless television watching. Children who are not guided by mindful elders, are likely to become addicted to television and wrongly influenced by what they see on the screen. Let us be clear about one thing: the channels that are presently being beamed to our cities and villages are mostly the product of Western television producers, based in New York, London or Hongkong.

On the one hand, it feels wonderful to have unrestrained access to a large variety of international programmes. But, on the other hand, by viewing Western programmes and only them, we are constantly being subjected to "values" which are quite alien to our societies and are escapist in nature.

Television, is only a tool. Like every tool, the use and misuse of it lies in our hands. Since satellite tv is new to all of us in South Asia, adults and young adults, it is important to understand this medium and all that it can do for us.

Television Shows

What exactly is the purpose of television programmes? What we see on the screen can be divided into five categories—Entertainment which includes serials and dramas, music, talk shows, game and variety shows; Information and education, through documentaries, discussions and programmes meant specifically to expand knowledge; News and current affairs to bring one up-to-date with events and trends; Education, ranging from shows for pre-school kids to programmes produced by open universities; and Advertising.

Entertainment. The biggest problem with the television we are watching today is that it is almost entirely made up of entertainment programmes. Take a look at the tv guide in today's newspaper and you will see that of the 10 channels available on the satellite tv network, seven are providing only entertainment. The international satellite networks beam mainly old American serials, while the Indian channels concentrate on a mishmash of games, talk shows, hours upon hours of songs and dances from Hindi and Tamil films. Not all the entertainment we receive is trash, of course. If you look around, you will find tucked away some wonderful programmes. Take *The X Files* for example.

There is also a debate on how much we need to worry about the alien cultural, social and moral ethics being introduced into our South Asian societies via satellite television. While many fear that our societies will be negatively affected, there are some who believe that the fears are exaggerated. Our societies and cultures are much too strong and complex to be destroyed by watching television, they say.

In a survey carried out among Indian youngsters by the children's magazine *Target*, 55.5 percent of the children polled said that satellite television was not destroying Indian culture, while 45.5 percent felt it was. Those who said "No" argued that 1) satellite television itself was also spreading Indian culture overseas, and 2) that India's present culture was already an accumulated fusion of a number of influences, and that television was merely assisting in the process of creating a brand new culture.

Incidentally, the same magazine also posed the question whether Indians ape the West unthinkingly. An overwhelming 86 percent said "Yes": from dress codes to hair styles, heavy metal to Italian food, Indians are constantly copying the West, good, bad or ugly. One adolescent called it "mass psychological dementia", and lamented the fact that many Indians associated Western culture with progress.

Information and Education. For those who are seeking to expand their knowledge on a wide variety of subjects, from space exploration to wildlife, from medicine to transportation, satellite television today provides channels dedicated to en-

lightening you. You get to watch investigative reports, descriptive documentaries, and you get to travel to the highest mountains and to the depths of the sea.

It is all there. But how much of it do we watch? The fact is, few of us are able to overcome the lure of the entertainment channels to switch to educational television. So much so that we are surprised sometimes as we are surfing channels to come across a great documentary on the eradication of malaria, or how the pyramids were built by the ancient Egyptians. Like reading, one has to form the habit of watching educational programmes. After a while, you will realise that they are much more interesting than watching music videos for the umpteenth time.

The newly introduced Discovery Channel airs some wonderful programmes which inform, educate and entertain.

News

Unlike documentaries and educational programmes, watching which is somewhat like reading a book, news is the audio-visual equivalent of the newspaper column. Besides entertainment, it is in this sphere that satellite has brought a great change in our lives.

The news that we watch over our national stations continue largely to be dictated by governments, and hence we are sometimes asked to take in large doses of propaganda. It is, therefore, quite refreshing to receive news and current affairs programmes from the BBC or CNN studios. However, this means that we are watching programmes whose content is decided for us by a news editors based in London or Atlanta. As Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans or Nepalis, we are being asked to accept news that is prepared primarily for a Western audience. Sometimes, we will find ourselves forming opinions about our own country or region based on what the Western commentator has to tell us.

Advertising

Television advertising (commercials, as they are known) is there mainly to pay for the programmes that you are watching. Advertisers "buy time" between or within programmes so that they can play their commercials. Whereas advertising must always be treated with some scepticism, the South Asian audience tends to regard commercials as *part* of the programme, giving them quite a lot of credence. Besides, commercials are made to grab attention and advertisers spend a lot of money in their production. Sometimes, the cost of an entire small film can be poured into a commercial that is only a few seconds long.

Advertising on television is considered much more effective than newspaper or radio advertising, because moving images and sound make everything more real. Because television is a much more expensive medium to run than the press or radio, the owners of satellite channels are always on the lookout for companies with large budgets to spend on selling their products. This is why a large chunk of air time goes into advertising consumer products.

Children are especially vulnerable to advertising because they tend to believe what they are told by, say, a lady extolling the virtues of a skin conditioner. Television has been rightly accused of creating wants in children where earlier there were none.

Watching TV

It has become a tradition in many households for everyone to settle down in front of the television set every evening. It is also common to watch tv while eating dinner. Some experts are worried that family members are talking to each other less and less because everyone is too busy watching the television set. Since conversation is one of the most important traits of being human, it is worrisome that it is going out of fashion.

One way of spending quality family time together and watching tv at the same time is to choose a programme that is agreeable to all in the family. Also, if parents and kids discuss what they are watching, then rather than the tv being blamed for creating a gap, maybe it would serve as a tool for *bridging* the generation gap!

If used well, with full understanding of what the medium is all about, television can serve to improve the quality of our lives. It can entertain us, educate us, and inform us. On the other hand, if misused, television can act like a drug on our minds, numb it, and offer us constant escape to a world that is not our own.

B. L. Thapar is a writer and illustrator who lives in Delhi and has a special interest in children's literature.

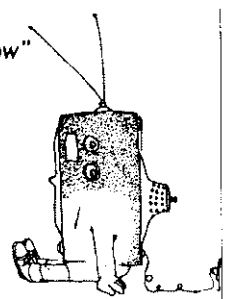
Jimmy Jet and His TV Set

by Shel Silverstein

I'll tell you the story of Jimmy Jet—
And you know what I tell you is true.
He loved to watch his TV set
Almost as much as you.

He watched all day, he watched all night
Till he grew pale and lean,
From "The Early Show" to "The Late Late Show"
And all the shows between.

He watched till his eyes were frozen wide,
And his bottom grew into his chair.
And his chin turned into a tuning dial,
And antennae grew out of his hair.

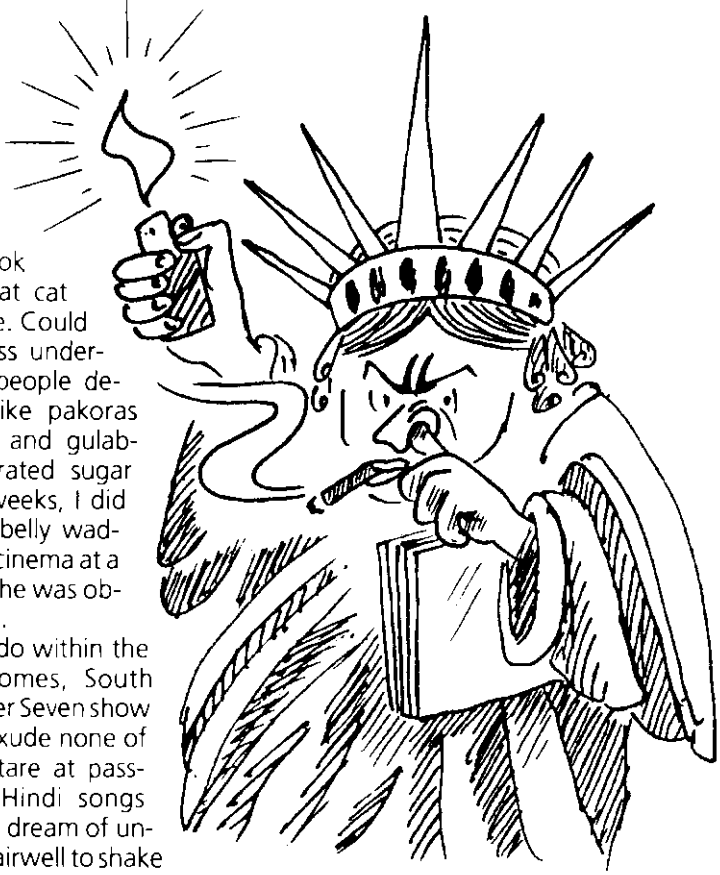


And his brains turned into TV tubes.
And his face to a TV screen.
And two knobs saying "VERT." and "HORIZ."
Grew where his ears had been.

And he grew a plug that looked like a tail
So we plugged in little Jim.
And now instead of him watching TV
We all sit around and watch him.

(From Where the Sidewalk Ends, *courtesy HarperCollins Publishers)*

Abominably Yours



After a fortnight in the United States of Political Correctness, it is refreshing to be back in the Subcontinent where I can pick my nose in public without attracting angry stares from fellow-commuters unlike on the Number Seven from Flushing. This subway route is also known as the "Orient Express" because of the numbers of Indo-Pakistanis that it carries back and forth from Little South Asia to Manhattan. You can see that these huddled masses are itching to be free. Their indiosyncracies have been stifled as they're forced to assimilate in the politically polite tyranny of their adopted country. And they call this the Land of the Free? Ha, and double ha!

Did I see large signs inside the subway warning South Asians not to play pocket billiards or dig for nasal nuggets? Even if I didn't, the effect was the same. New York South Asians looked nervous, fidgety, as if they didn't know what to do with their fingers. As the train rattled through the labyrinth of tunnels, you could tell the strap-hangers on the Orient Express were not the people we know from back home. They had been neutered. Where was the familiar boisterousness, the lascivious leers at passing lasses, the loud conversations with chins held high to prevent the red dye of a juicy *paan* from dribbling out, and why wasn't a single person smoking? No, there was just hollow silence and idle hands. No one looked at anyone else. In fact, even though I was standing in my skinny lycra with my midriff exposed to the elements, not a single seated South Asian male even so much as made eye-contact with my bellybutton. I have never felt so invisible in my life.

Do you know that they do not even flirt in America anymore? Umarried hunks jog around the Central Park Reservoir, their tight pectorals glistening with sweat, with nary a glance at lycra-clad female joggers who in South Asia would have brought entire parliaments to standstill in the middle of an acrimonious zero hour?

And it is shameful how slim North American Indians look compared to the fat cat brethren back home. Could it be a sign of mass undernourishment of a people deprived of staples like pakoras deep-fried in ghee and gulab-jamuns in concentrated sugar syrup? In my two weeks, I did spot a solitary pot belly waddling past the Hindi cinema at a mall in Virginia, but he was obviously on a B-1 visa.

Whatever they do within the privacy of their homes, South Asians on the Number Seven show scant exuberance, exude none of the aroma, don't stare at passersby, don't hum Hindi songs aloud, and wouldn't dream of unzipping below the stairwell to shake hands with the unemployed.

This is funny, because the moment you get out of customs at JFK you already have the feeling you are back at Dum Dum, such is the density of Bongs at the Yellow Cab stand. Cabbie is from Sylhet and speaks Bengali with a Brooklyn accent. But even here, correctness has reared its ugly head. Having been deprived of a smoke throughout my trans-Atlantic flight, I lit up thinking: he won't mind, he is from our neck of the woods where nursing mums smoke bidis. "*Khobordar, sigret khabenna naile* Triborough *pooltheke pheledobo*!" the cabbie barked. Out of the window went my cigarette, and the Rude Bengali (a species that is obviously extinct everywhere else but in the New York jungle) did not utter a word or make eye-contact on the rear-view all the way to *Curry in a Hurry* on 28th and First.

The situation at the workplace is even worse. Anti-smoking fascists have now turned vast tracts of the continental United States into no-man's land. Now, they are debating whether smoking should be banned in Central Park and in the Rocky Mountain wilds of Marlboro Country. If the Americans get to Mars first, they'll ban smoking there too. The Solar System's next. "Sorry, Sir. I cannot give you a window seat in the smoking section. Starship Enterprise is a no-smoking flight." Smokers must hurry and reserve at least one of the planets for themselves before it's too late, make it Saturn, so you can blow rings, ha-ha!

(Seriously, though, it is out of fear of non-smoking planets that I have decided to endorse the Ariane space programme of the Europeans, who are not nearly as finicky about ingesting tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide as are the Americans. See how *their* space programme suffers now.)

But Saturn is just a fall-back option. As smokeless regions spread across the Earth, at least one is safe in the knowledge that back home in politically incorrect South Asia you can still smoke just about anywhere you *@%+# well want. You can smoke inside hospitals—one cousin even lit a fag in the Intensive Care Unit while waiting to get his electroencephalogram, and the doctor asked if he could have a drag. In Tollygunge, the attendant at the petrol station blows smoke out of his nostrils and glances down your shirt as he asks you how many litres. You can smoke in libraries, you can light up inside a crowded train, you can even smoke in the non-smoking section of airplanes!

Take it from me, political correctness, Stalinist non-smokers and fear of sexual harassment charges have spooked America out of its mind. South Asians must teach the rest of the world to light up, and lighten up.

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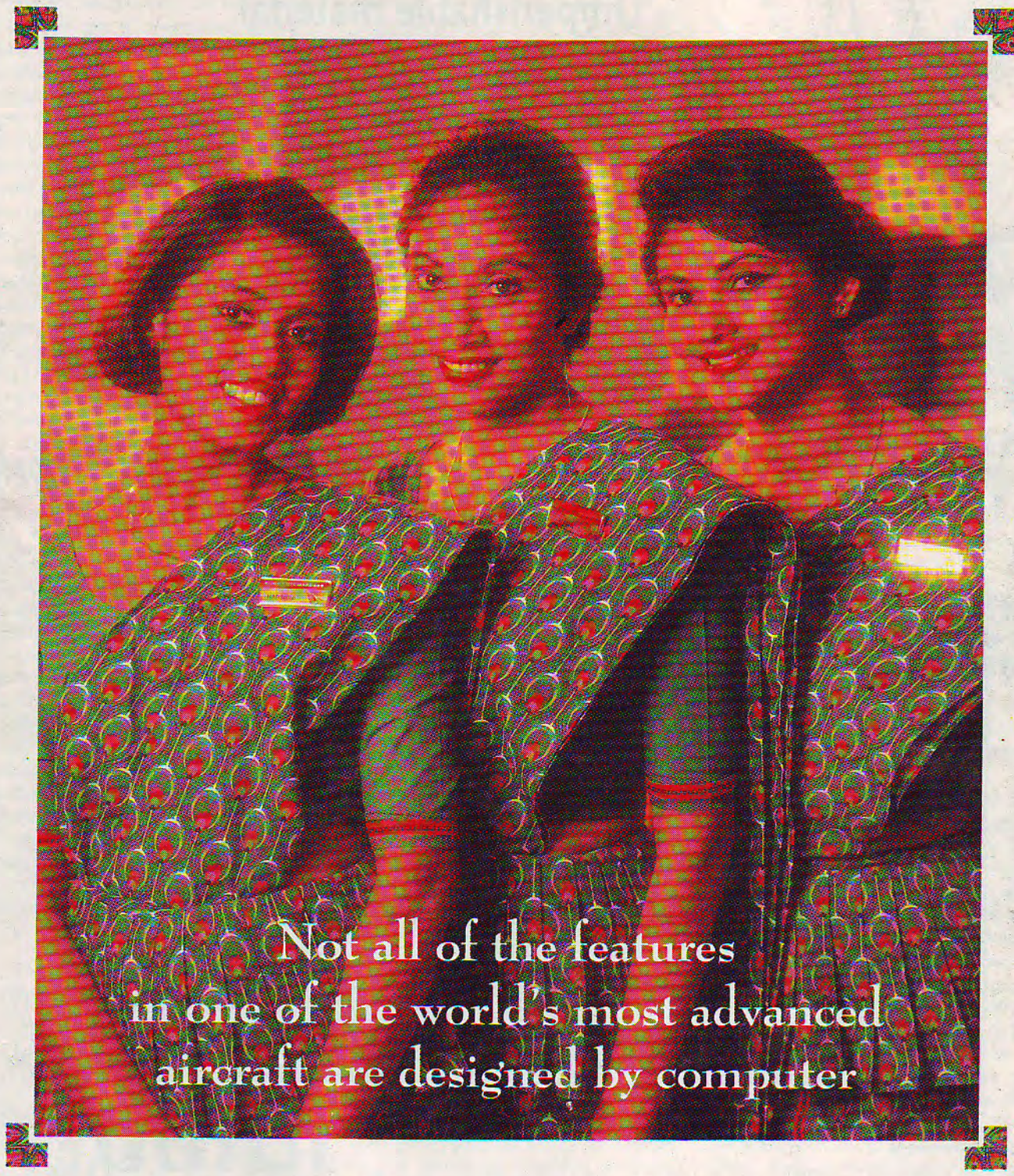

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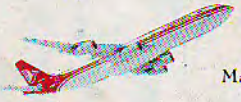

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