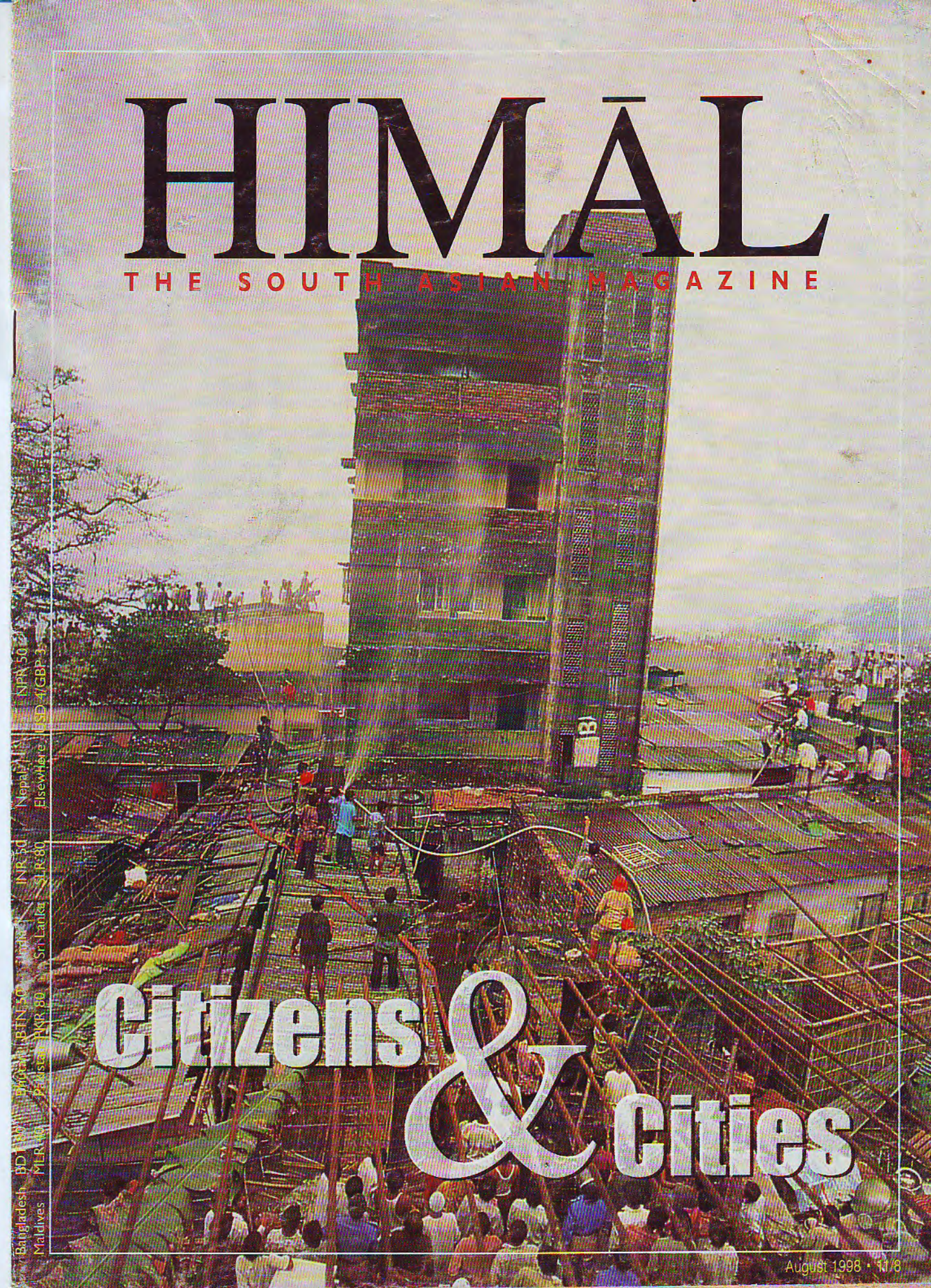


# HIMAL

THE SOUTH ASIAN MAGAZINE



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Vol 11 No 8 August 1998

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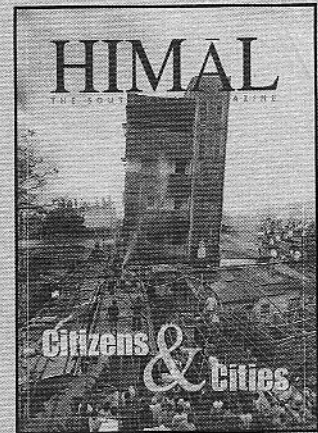
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A shot of a blazing building at Katashur in Dhaka. The fire broke out in the surrounding slums and spread to the building which did not have an emergency exit. The firemen had to clamber onto the slum rooftops to control the fire.

Photo and design respectively by Md. Main Uddin and Reza of Drik Picture Library, Dhaka.



## Cover

- 12 **The Largest Mass Migration in South Asian History.**  
by Patralekha Chatterjee



- 19 **Sufism and the art of urban healing**  
by Tarik Ali Khan

- 24 **"I should never have left Patna."**

Interview with Akhtar Hameed Khan

- 26 **Mumbai**  
by Suketu Mehta

- 30 **If**  
by M.V. Ramana

## Departments

- 3 **Mail**  
Krishna's Corner

- 8 **Commentary**  
Morning after  
Fair is foul  
Tibet-free

- 33 **Briefs**  
Tully crosses the Bridge  
South by Southwest  
Another Kashmiri avatar  
Visa veil  
Operation Gandhara  
The king's new clothes  
Beware of men

- Obituary**  
38 **A tribute to two South Asian stalwarts**  
by Javed Jabbar

- 40 **Mediafile**

- Opinion**  
42 **Good ink for bad blood**  
by Khaled Ahmed  
44 **Vanishing volunteerism**  
by Bunker Roy  
45 **Upper catchment vs command area**  
by Amit Mitra

- 48 **VOICES**

- Arts & Society**  
51 **A little bookshop in Goa**  
by Frederick Naronha

- Reviews**  
53 **Pakistan Cinema: 1947-1997**  
reviewed by Mushtaq Gazdar  
57 **Her Gold and Her Body**  
reviewed by Jyoti Thottam

- 60 **Abominably yours**

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in Himal. Letters should be brief, to the point, and may be edited. Letters that are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained.

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### Oppenheimer's angst

IN your June issue you quote a sloka from the *Bhagavad Gita* which you attribute to Julius Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project, when, on 16 July 1945, he saw the flash of the first atomic bomb, which the US-British project had created.

I have not found any record of this particular quote in the histories of those events. But your readers should be familiar with what Oppenheimer later recollected to the camera of his thoughts at the time. Foremost in his mind, he said, had been the words of Lord Siva – "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."

It is worthwhile to note, also, that Oppenheimer chose an allusion to Christian theology in the name of that first atomic bomb test, when he called it "Trinity". Prominent in his mind during those turbulent days, he explained, was the poetry of John Donne: "As East and West/In all flat maps (and I am one) are one/So death doth touch the resurrection."

*Caspar Henderson  
Oxford, UK*

### Three letters on Bhutan

YOUR article "Pink slips in Thimphu" (July 1998) is biased and meant for the pro-Nepal audience. Anyway, Himal magazine has never been a free press as it would want itself to be seen; it is always geared towards the good and beautiful and godly about Nepal when it comes to foreign policy. So far I have never seen a good view expressed on Bhutan and since you have a Nepali background, your paper lacks the essence of truth.

I am just an ordinary citizen of Bhutan and I feel what we are doing is good for the citizens of Bhutan. We are not here to please any other country. As long as we are happy, so what? If we are not happy, we, the Bhutanese, will cry for change – why should the cry for change come from foreign soil?

*Pemba Wangchuk  
Leeds, UK*

THIS is in response to Himal's media and journalistic coverage of Bhutan over the last decade or so. The editor, Kanak Mani Dixit, does not distinguish clearly between the people of Bhutan and the government when he lobbs his hate bombs. As a journalist, he has allowed his ethnic background as a Nepali to affect his objectivity and professional judgement. His analysis is clouded by racism and bias against the Bhutanese.

One then questions if what Himal is doing with regard to coverage on Bhutan is journalism or a campaign of blatant hate mongering.

Himal often cites Bhutan's "sophisticated" management of foreign media and opinion, but personally I think Himal has done a far more devastating job worldwide. For instance, recently an American student found out that I was a Bhutanese and said that he disliked Bhutanese since he had read in Himal about what savages Bhutanese people were. Why should I have to suffer for Kanak Mani Dixit's personal insecurities and hate of the Bhutanese people?

This is strange, because in Bhutan the Nepali-Bhutanese and other Bhutanese live in peace. In

Thimphu my neighbours are of ethnic Nepali background. Our kids play together and attend the same school and I certainly do not hate them. But given the egging on and propaganda spewing out from Himal (and other Nepal-based media) one wonders what kind of response it will evoke from common people like me and my neighbour Mr Chhetri. Should we slaughter each other like in Rwanda and the Balkans simply because Kanak Mani Dixit is urging us to do so? No. Both Mr Chhetri and I know better and understand the ground realities in Bhutan more comprehensively than a hate monger who has never even been to Bhutan.

On the refugee issue I agree that an amicable solution needs to be found. But the corrupt politicians in Kathmandu need to get their act together. Instead of dragging their feet and basking in the outflow of international sympathy, they should work to find a genuine solution to the refugee issue. Simply saying "take everyone hack" will not work. You and I and the rest of the world know that a large number of the so-called "Bhutanese refugees" are Nepal's own countrymen and women attracted to the camps by

## KRISHNA'S CORNER



"WELL FROM THE SYMPTOMS YOU DESCRIBE YOU'RE EITHER SUFFERING FROM DELUSIONAL PARANOIA AND DEPRESSION OR ELSE YOU WORK AT THE SAARC SECRETARIAT..."

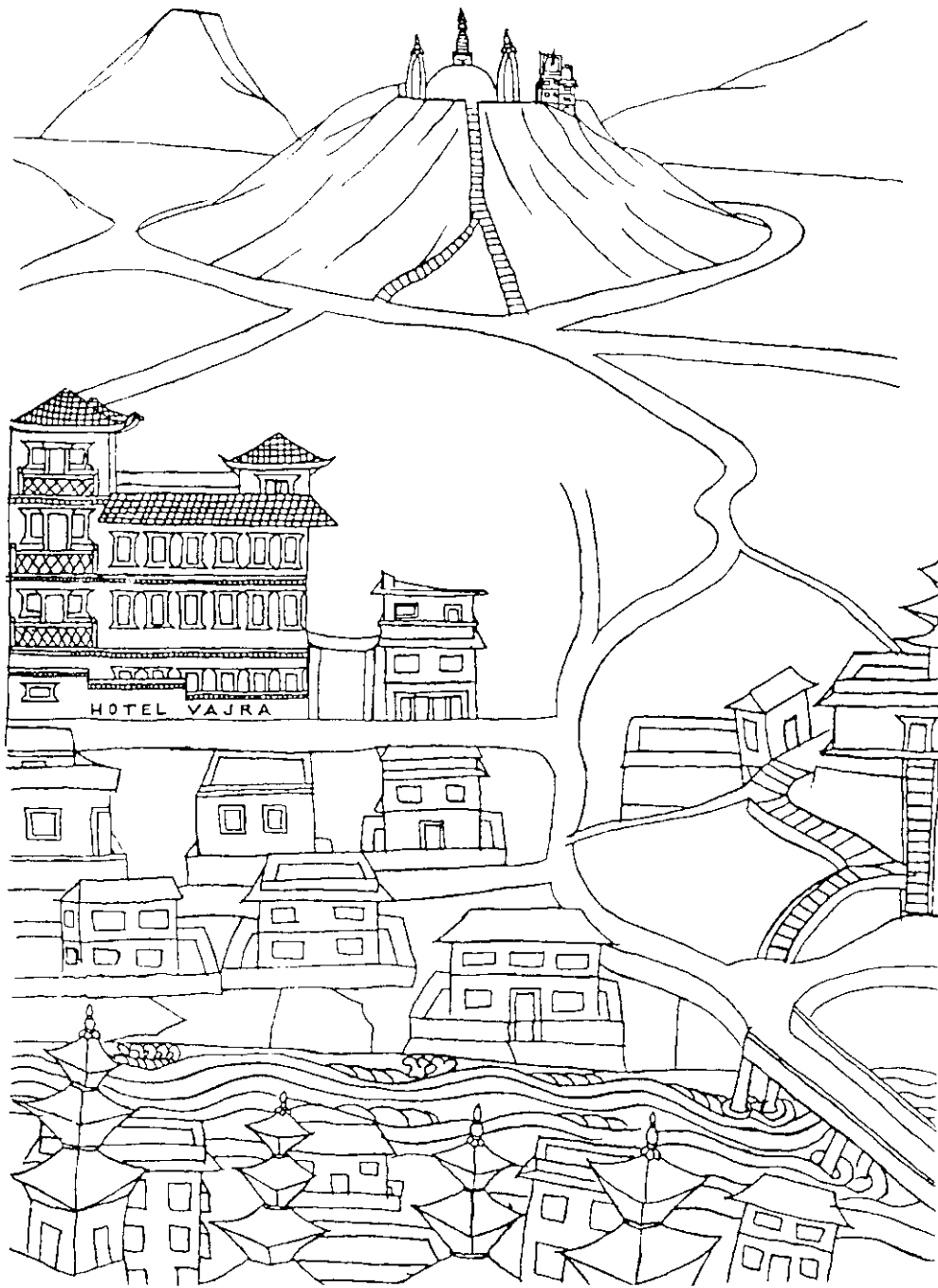


**Vajra** (literally--flash of lightning), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

Ketaki Sheth  
*Inside Outside*

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

John Collee  
*The London Observer*



## in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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the daily monetary allowance, free food, shelter, education, and health care which the Nepali government has failed to provide to a large number of its citizens.

On the Bhutan government's side, too, it is high time to take back the common people who left in the confusion and fear created by the dissident Bhutan People's Party in the early 1990s. Much like the tactics used by the Maoists in Nepal today (and also increasingly by the Nepali Congress government), a campaign of fear swept through the south of Bhutan. "Join us or die" was the message and unfortunately many people left because they had no choice. Common people became pawns and victims of vested political agenda. To this end, the dissidents have succeeded in gathering a critical mass of people on their side. The Bhutanese government played into the trap and now needs to extricate itself and the nation from the hole.

The problem, of course, is in identifying the genuine refugees from the pretenders. The solution may be to ask the people in the camps themselves. Mediators from neutral third parties should talk to all the three players and especially to the people in the camps in Nepal. If they want to come back to their land and farms in Bhutan, they should step forward and not be intimidated by the false refugees and the political elite and leaders in the camps. Why should thousands suffer for the vested interests of a few?

*Kunley Tshering  
Arlington, Virginia*

IT was interesting going through your article on the changes in Thimphu, but it was regrettable that the analysis was clouded by racism and bias against the Bhutanese. As journalists, you should use your objectivity and rationality, and the editor's ethnic background as a Nepali should not interfere with professional judgement. Anyway, do you think Nepal now is in any way better than it was in the past? I think the democratic form of government is for those nations

where the people are literate and know the meaning of democracy. Otherwise, I do not think you are blindfolded enough not to see the had to worse changes in your own country.

*Kuenga Namgay  
<mindu98@hotmail.com>*

### Atomic truths

WHILE your Website cartoon "So Who Can Go Further in South Asia?" reflects your disappointment over two South Asian countries going nuclear, which I share, there are many other implications that cannot be ignored. Being a South Asian magazine of repute, I hope you will help in the propagation of a more comprehensive view of such vital issues.

Both for India and Pakistan, there are some purely South Asian or even national priorities that have influenced the decision in favour of the nuclear tests. However, the tests have also exposed some serious lacunae in matters relating to global governance. When the world is unifying economically at a fast pace, issues of global governance become no less important than those of national governance.

Here I refer to the aspiration of probably an overwhelming number of the residents of our planet, that all nuclear weapons should be destroyed at the earliest. There is a great amount of interest among the members of the UN Security Council to decommission weapons of mass destruction supposedly hidden in Iraq. There is, however, little interest in the same body to decommission the nuclear weapons possessed by its own permanent members.

One of the positive results of the recent set of tests conducted by India and Pakistan is that the world has been awakened to the truth that the dream of a nuclear-free world is

a very distant one. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) needs to be understood in this background.

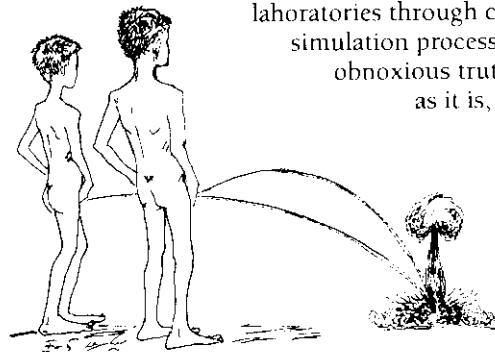
The Club of 5 nations with nuclear weapons and holding permanent seats in the UN Security Council have created, in the form of the CTBT, another exclusive cake of world power. Neither India nor Pakistan accepted this nuclear monopolisation and thus did not sign the CTBT. The recent tests have shaken the Club of 5 so much that they are using the UN Security Council to browbeat India and Pakistan into signing the CTBT without delay.

That the CTBT as it is, is a cover for a permanent hegemony of the Club of 5 in a permanently nuclear threatened world needs to be brought home to the unsuspecting world population. Today it needs just a graduate in physics to tell you that, having completed the necessary series of tests and having gathered the required amount of information from these tests, the Club of 5 can continue their research and development on more powerful nuclear devices within the laboratories through computerised simulation processes. The

obnoxious truth about CTBT as it is, is that it is not a golden path towards a nuclear-free world, but a dark alley towards a permanent nuclear hegemony of the Club of 5.

The Pokharan and Chagai blasts have brought the world to a moment of truth about whether we need a CTBT that does not give us a nuclear-free world. Without this rather obnoxious reminder, the world leaders would have continued dilly-dallying over the question of an international convention for a nuclear-free world. The real issue is whether the Club of 5 is at all interested in a nuclear-free world?

On this count, the South Asian



Who can go further in South Asia?

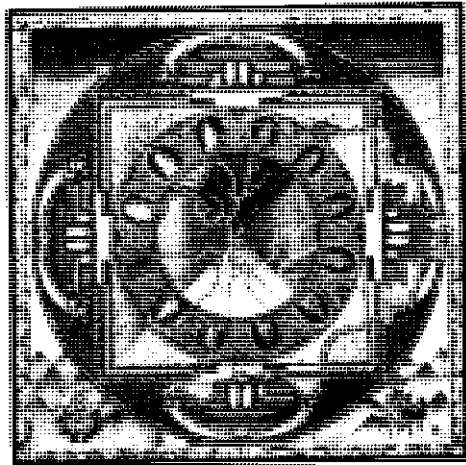


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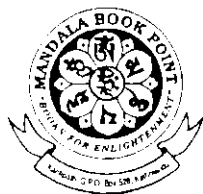


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nuclear tests have contributed a great deal towards putting up this vital question in front of all of us!

J. Bandyopadhyay  
Calcutta

### Deeper links

I was deeply touched by the article "Nepal forgets Tibet" by Kanak Mani Dixit in your June 1998 issue. I agree with him that hlaacking out Tibet from the Nepali mindset within such a short period is a sad thing.

One consolation that I cherish, however, is that besides the Nepali poem *Muna Madan*, there is a storehouse of Tibetan folk songs usually sung on the way during their pilgrimage to Nepal which are still alive among elders and the rural folk. The following songs, sung by Tibetan pilgrims from the Kyirong and Dzonga regions of Tibet are popular.

I  
Just as the Tibetan pilgrims set out for their long journey, they are reminded of the difficult path and the Trisuli river. Thus, they sing this song:

*In the east, at the other side of the river  
Is situated the sacred cave of Bawa  
lhagang.*

*The wish to see the cave remains a wish,  
For the mighty Chuvo (Trisuli River)  
Would not let us reach the other side.*

II  
No sooner do the travellers reach a certain point within the rim of the "Yambhu Valley" and get a glimpse of the shrines of Baudhnath and Swayambhunath, than they prostrate in veneration, and name this spot "Chhag-tsal gang", meaning "Height of Prostration". This song is thus sung like a prayer.

*From the height of Chhag-tsal gang,  
We start getting "darshan" of the Yambhu  
Valley.*

*Holy chhoten [Baudhnath] is a great  
blessing to see,*

*Just as the hustle and bustle of Gyalsa [Ason  
Market] is to enjoy.*

III  
When they arrive in Yambhu Gyalsa (Kathmandu or Ason), they sing these songs.

*From the heart of Yambhu Gyalsa,  
I heard the melodies of a Gyaling,  
I wish I knew who the player is [of this  
instrument]*

*For the melody is very much engraved in my  
memory.*

*When you talk of rice,  
Talk about the rice of Yambhu Gyalsa  
When you talk about De-Chhang [rice  
chhang]*

*Talk about De-Chhang of Ngari Dzonga [in  
Tibet]*

*Bhu Dawa  
Kathmandu, Nepal*

### Balti numbers

FIRST of all let me congratulate you on your May 1998 issue, which proves again that Himal is a magazine that covers the South Asian mountain arc adequately. Baltistan, indeed, is a region both neglected and of strategic importance, and the contributions of Tarik Ali Khan, Martijn van Beek and Martin Sökefeld provide important information and address aspects otherwise seldom covered. Only the contribution of Nigel Allan follows a superficial and prejudiced path highlighting popular and/or populist views.

There are some questions I would like to raise, however. In Tarik Ali Khan's contribution, the population of Baltistan is somehow exaggerated at 400,000 residents. Also, the Frontier Crimes Regulations stayed in place a little longer than stated in the article. However, what surprises me is that there was no mention at all of the prominent Shia sect of the Nurbakshia which is quite important for Baltistan and somehow unique to the region.

I hope to read more about the Western Himalaya in the pages of Himal in future.

*Hermann Kreutzmann  
Institute of Geography, University  
of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany*

### Tarik Ali Khan responds:

"400,000" was the figure most commonly given to me by the Baltis themselves. Considering that Baltistan's population according to 1986 figures was 272,000 (AKRSP 1996 Annual Review), and that it has a very high birth rate, it is likely that its population is certainly closer to 400,000 than 300,000. In any event, the results of the 1998 National Census should soon reveal the actual figure. I agree that the Nurbakshia sect is indeed important for Baltistan and unique to the region, and I believe this aspect has been dealt with adequately in the short item, "Sufi Revival", on pg 18 of the same issue.

### Biased

I found your clarification about the lack of pro-nuke views in the July issue a bit like the nuclearisation of the Subcontinent. Most people suspected that both India and Pakistan had the Bomb, but as long as it was not confirmed publicly, we could all pretend that it did not exist.

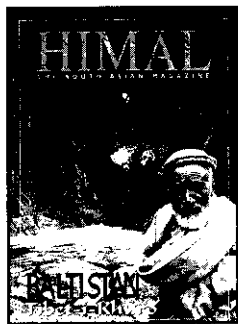
In a similar way, although most of us feel deep down that no newspaper or magazine can really be objective and that they reflect the editor's views, we pretend that some of the better ones are indeed objective and present a balanced view. The July 1998 issue has proved that Himal carries only those articles that agree with the editor's point of view. Now at least readers can put Himal's articles in a proper perspective: they all reflect one side of the story – the side that the editor backs.

*Kabindra Pradhan  
Butwal, Nepal*

### Not biased

NOT only is the issue on the Bomb most useful and well produced, but I also want to congratulate you on the fine partisan statement you offered in a box early in the issue. There is nothing like making such a stand, that the pro-Bomb position is beneath reason. It reminded me a bit of a statement by Noam Chomsky that to deal with the details of some arguments is already to lose one's humanity.

*Vijay Prashad  
Connecticut, USA*





PAKISTAN

# MORNING AFTER

**THE MOOD IN** Pakistan changed swiftly following the nuclear tests, from what was dubbed as "euphoria" into today's uncertainty and fear, which have escalated as the extent of the economic crisis has become evident. Economists, who had long been warning of this day, found their predictions coming true rather earlier than expected, thanks to the Nawaz Sharif government's decision to retaliate against India's misguided show of brute nuclear strength.

The anxiety caused by the imposition of emergency and the freezing of foreign currency accounts has only exacerbated since. Ironically, it was the first Sharif government which had allowed the opening of foreign exchange accounts in local and multinational bank branches in Pakistan. Back then, the warnings of newspaper columnists and economists that this step would eventually backfire in the faces of those who fell for it went unheeded as the government assured potential forex depositors that their money would be safe.

The second coming of Nawaz Sharif has,

unfortunately for those who trusted him, proved these warnings correct. But in Pakistan, it is always the big fish who manage to slip through the net, and so it was that those with huge dollar or pound sterling accounts were able to withdraw thousands of dollars through backdated transactions on the very eve of the accounts being frozen.

But freezing the private foreign accounts has not worked to make the economy solvent; after all, they totalled no more than a meagre USD 1.5 million. Meanwhile, the government magnanimously allowed the bank clients to withdraw money from their foreign currency accounts in rupees, at the official rate of USD 1 to PKR 46. And all the while, the dollar was climbing to unprecedented heights in the open market, selling for as much as PKR 65 on some days. Some bankers say privately that by the end of the year, a dollar can be expected to fetch PKR 100.

There's worse. Economists report gloomily that 22 percent of the expenditure of the Government of Pakistan is now accounted for by debt servicing. The country apparently needs some USD 5 billion to climb out of its ditch of external and internal debt. A 25 percent increase in gasoline prices in late July dealt another severe blow to the middle-in-



## FAREWELL

*Himal* was saddened by the passing of Nikhil Chakravarty and Mahbub ul Haq, two South Asian humanists whose commitment to regionalism was visionary. Nikhilda gave us a pat on the back and an encouraging push at the India International Centre in New Delhi back in March 1996, when he launched *Himal* as a South Asian magazine. That first issue of *Himal* which he held aloft then had within it the lead article by Mahbub ul Haq, 'The Subcontinent of Sub-Saharan Asia'. In

it, Mahbub ul Haq wrote, "South Asia is just not prepared to enter the 21st century. It does not invest enough in its people... The swamp of human despair can become a frontier of human hope once we begin to invest in education, training and the spirit of the people." Pictures: Nikhil Chakarvarty looks on as editor Kanak Mani Dixit speaks at *Himal*'s launch in 1996 (left); contributing editor Mitu Varma speaks to Mahbub ul Haq in New Delhi about the inaugural issue.

(See also page 38)



come and salaried classes. There are no signs of relief: the economic meltdown of Pakistan, warn economists, has started.

The tension which had been building up since India's nuclear tests found release in the mad dancing, the "duma dum must qalandar" bhangras, on the streets immediately following Pakistan's detonations. Those celebrations have receded in memory now, as people ask anxiously whether Pakistan will sign the CTBT, an act which may stave off international sanctions and provide some relief.

There are as yet no signs of a statesman/woman in the Pakistani horizon, someone who will lead the country out of the economic and political quagmire. Meanwhile, the rumour mills are working overtime, suggesting that the days of the Sharif government are numbered. But pulling down yet another government before it has completed its term is hardly the answer, for there is no third force available to take over. So it is Mian Nawaz Sharif's government which will have to pull itself together, get a grip on the situation and begin taking damage-control measures.

Soon after taking over power for the second time in February 1997, the prime minister did take some bold decisions, such as doing away with Friday and establishing Sunday as the weekly holiday, and holding out the hand of friendship towards India – both steps criticised loudly by the conservative lobby but welcomed by his real constituency, the business community. It is this community that can now help pull Pakistan back from the brink, but this will first require improving the law and order situation.

Can Nawaz Sharif rise to the occasion and rebuild the shattered confidence of the people of Pakistan?

## INDIA

# FAIR IS FOUL

**IT WOULD HAVE** been a revolutionary bill and a first for this part of the world. But whoever heard of parliamentarians voluntarily giving up their privileges? The Women's Bill, reserving a third of the seats in Parliament and legislative assemblies for women, was cleverly scuttled by the very parties overtly supporting it.

Outwardly, of course, it was the two Yadav ex-chief ministers whose hooliganism won the day. Both Laloo Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav encouraged their sup-



porters to create pandemonium in the House when the bill was introduced. One of them even went so far as to grab the hill, tear it up and hurl it at the treasury benches. The house was adjourned, an all-party meeting called in Parliament and the bill deferred "for the time being". This effectively has put it in cold storage.

The Yadavs' ostensible argument was that the bill did not provide for a quota for women from the middle-rung of the caste hierarchy, the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). It seemed to matter little that the bill reserved 7.2 percent of the existing 22.5 percent quota for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for women (which alone would guarantee at least 43 Dalit or trihal women in the next parliament, a number equal to the total number of female parliamentarians in the current House).

Both the Yadavs together command the support of only 37 parliamentarians in the 544-member Lok Sabha. How was it, then, that they were able to stall the bill on their own? The fact was that they received covert support from almost all the other major parties to kill the bill.

The Yadavs and their supporters argued that the total number of seats for the Dalits and Muslims should be increased by putting in an additional sub-quota within the proposed 33.3 percent reservation for women. This argument swayed a lot of parties because the OBCs form 27 percent of the electorate, while the Muslims form 12 percent. Besides, cutting across party lines, there are more than 200 parliamentarians in the current Lok Sabha who belong to OBCs. Women leaders like Mayawati of the Bahujan Samaj Party or Uma Bharti of the BJP were opposed to the bill for this reason.

Sonia Gandhi, who had earlier offered total support to the bill, rescinded in part, saying her party favoured further reservations for



OBCs. But she put the ball back in the BJP's court saying the Congress would support the bill if it came up and then later push for an amendment. The BJP itself did not seem too keen to table it again. From supporting a resolution that said the bill would be deferred for two days, they suggested an indefinite postponement on the pretext of seeking a consensus. Only the left parties stood by their resolve of pushing it through.

In fact, Muslim and OBC women belonging to the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, a left-affiliated women's group with six million members throughout the country, came out vocally in support of the bill as it was, saying they wanted no special reservations for themselves apart from those generally for women.

The real issue was not sub-quotas, of course, but that the reservation would have meant that men would have to step down from what have become personal fiefdoms. The bill envisaged reservations on a rotational basis so that all constituencies of the country were ultimately covered over three elections in 15 years, after which Parliament would have to vote once again to decide whether the reservations should be continued. This would mean men vacating their constituencies for at least one round, and being out of power for at least one term. This was quite unacceptable to male MPs of almost all parties. Many snide remarks were made regarding women and their capabilities and a lot of covert support was offered to the Yadavs.

Giving the Yadavs support were elite columnists like Tavleen Singh of *India Today*, who argued that the bill would only bring about more Rabri Devis, Sonia Gandhis and Jayalalithas, who acquired power only because of their male relations. If she had taken the trouble to travel in the interiors and seen what reservations have done for women in

women have come into their own and are active members in grassroots development today. Over a million women now sit as representatives in local bodies across the country.

From the near certainty of becoming a law when the session opened with support from the BJP, the Congress and the Left parties, to being unceremoniously dumped by most so-called champions of the cause, the bill traversed a rocky path before falling off a cliff. India's 500 million women, making up 41 percent of the urban and 74 percent of the agricultural work force, have only a 7 percent representation in Parliament and a 6 percent representation in ministerial and sub-ministerial offices. Thanks to the Yadavs and their silent majority in Parliament, women will have to wait some more for their fair share of power.

## CHINA

# TIBET-FREE

**DHARAMSALA HAD IT** coming, obviously. The swing of the media pendulum is vicious and whatever is lionised gets trashed, sooner or later. With the surfeit of Hollywood productions and personalities supporting the "Tibetan cause" of independence and/or autonomy, it was inevitable that someone would come along and question the way the cause was being pushed.

The Dalai Lama himself has not been spared the discomfort of adverse publicity. Only recently, writing in *The Nation* of New York, journalist Christopher Hitchens, who had trashed Mother Teresa earlier, came down heavily on the god-king and monk, something that has a lot to do with the kind of funding Dharamsala has been receiving over the years.

It is indeed boomtime for Tibetan Buddhism all over the globe, and Hitchens was shocked enough to report that the Dalai Lama's office had not only received USD 1.2 million from Shoko Asahara, the mastermind behind the Tokyo subway nerve gas attack, but had also later arranged for the cult guru's meeting with the Dalai Lama, which was somewhat akin to Mother Teresa meeting Papa Doc Duvalier.

Neither has the Dorje Shugden controversy left Dharamsala unscathed. The Dalai Lama's instructions against the propitiation of the Tibetan deity of Dorje Shugden raised serious concerns about freedom of worship, and also exposed the fine line that the Dalai Lama

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*At the heart of the opposition was not that there were no sub-quotas, but that reservations would have meant men giving up their personal fiefdoms.*

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Panchayats and local bodies, she would not, perhaps, have raised this argument. Even after being put up as dummy candidates in highly chauvinistic states like Rajasthan, most



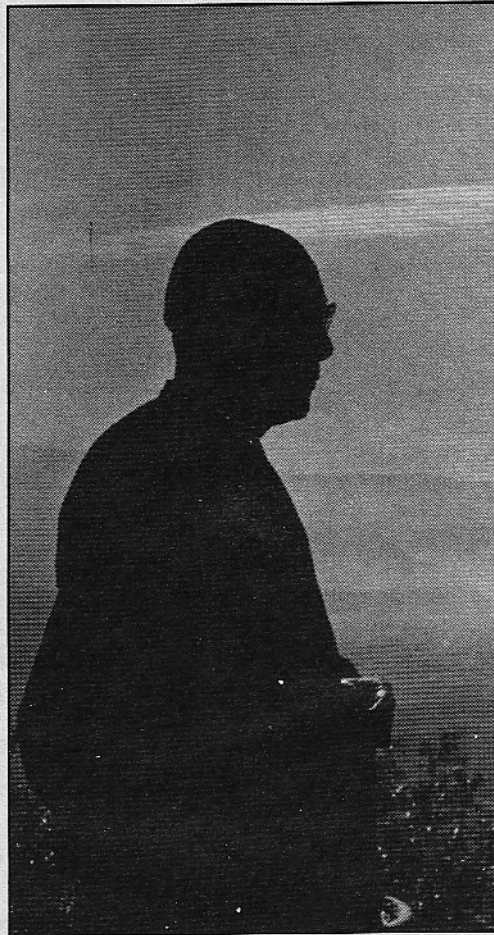
walks between the spiritual and the temporal. A Swiss documentary intercuts footage of the Dalai Lama denying that his supporters have been hounding Derge Shugden supporters with scenes of his followers carrying "Wanted" posters and other instruments of ostracism.

Muckracking journalism, of course, is to be expected whenever someone becomes too 'popular', and Tenzin Gyatso (the Dalai Lama) is, together with Nelson Mandela, the most well-liked global personality today (except in the People's Republic of China, of course). Mandela dons the mantle of politics very easily, as part of his very being, whereas the Dalai Lama resides in that fuzzy realm between religion and politics/diplomacy – a much harder place to be.

With few other means of publicity at its command, the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala uses the Dalai Lama to the maximum. Reacting to the official blackouts by governments everywhere, especially within South Asia, it has made the most it can of Western enthralment with Tibetan society in general as well as of the genuine distaste that is there for the Chinese takeover and inundation of the high plateau.

But, occasionally, the spin doctors of Dharamsala may be asking themselves if the publicity bandwagon has not gone a little out of control, to the extent that it is now leading to the as-yet-mild backlash we see today. Take the case of the Dalai Lama posing for an Apple computer campaign titled "Think Different", which Apple itself was cowardly enough to drop from Asian magazines for fear of hurting Beijing's sentiments. After first calling the Dalai Lama's reported support for India's nuclear blasts as "crass", "banal" and "opportunistic", Hitchens turns his sights on the Apple advertisement: "Among the untested assumptions of this billboard campaign is the widely and lazily held belief that Oriental religion is different from other faiths: less dogmatic, more contemplative, more...transcendental... Buddhism can be as hysterical and sanguinary as any other system that relies on faith and tribe." Overall, writes Hitchens, the "Free Tibet" campaign has been mercenary in nature, as for example, in its happy use of the "moronic" and "robotic" Hollywood actor Steven Seagal, who has been proclaimed a *tulku* (reincarnated lama) of Tibetan Buddhism.

Such criticism is bound to come the way of Dharamsala, now that it has decided to go all-out in courting the world as the only way to put pressure on the Chinese. One would only hope that the Dalai Lama continues to maintain a perspective and a balance between



VIAR KOANIT

Tenzin Gyatso: let's not do advertising.

his spiritual and political persona. At the same time, it is very important for the Dharamsala exile government not to forget that the real reason for its existence is the well-being, not of the 200,000 or so exiles, many of whom are unlikely to return even if given the chance, but of the four to six million Tibetans within Tibet.

Held in awe by the Western world in a way that no other South Asian group has been able to match, it is very easy for the Dharamsala mandarins to mouth the 'cause' without necessarily feeling it. Clearly, they must think imaginatively of alternative ways to press the demand for autonomy/independence than solely through the Dalai Lama. He has held this burden long enough, and true Tibetan patriots should also look ahead to the day when his incredible persona is no longer there to lead them. For the moment, there is no one else other than Tenzin Gyatso.

The debilitating lack of creativity that afflicts those in exile is sometimes known as the 'Tunisia syndrome', which affected the PLO under Yasser Arafat as long as it was hosted in comfortable Tunis, far from the travails of the West Bank and Gaza. Dharamsala, in this sense, is Tunisia. △



BIKAS RAJUNAR



Calcutta easy rider.

by *Patralkha Chatterjee*

It was easy to find Shivram Goregaonkar. His directions had been clear: "Shack number 194, near Matunga railway station." A rotund clay Ganesh – the god of success, Bombay's reigning deity – welcomes the visitor. A signboard on the grilled window says, "Girish Tailors – Ladie's, Jents and Allteration".

Shivram's pavement shack is just one among thousands of huts on Senapati Bapat Marg, patched together with asbestos sheets,

# The Lar in

plastic, canvas, jute, strips of plywood, bamboo and bricks. On one side is the railway track, across the road a branch office of the Bank of Baroda and a billboard trumpeting "Visapower". The floor above the bank houses "Seigneur's French Academy" offering middle-class Bombayites the cosmopolitan touch at a bargain. Nearby are grey residential buildings, many of whose inmates come to the tailor across the road. Shivram had fondly named the shop after his 11-year-old son, Girish.

It is difficult to miss the pavement shacks on Senapati Bapat Marg. They force themselves upon the senses as you drive downtown from Santa Cruz Airport. They have been there for decades, even when the road was known as Tulsi Pipe Road – after the huge concrete drainage pipes which the locals took over as living quarters before they could be placed underground. The pipe squatters were ultimately evicted, but many came back. That was when the shacks sprouted.

Today, one can barely see the rail tracks – they are hidden by the row of plastic-canvas-bamboo huts along the pavement, stretching along a 4-kilometre stretch from Mahim to Matunga to Dadar railway stations. Most of the pavement dwellers work as vendors, domestic help, casual labourers, scrap collectors or are in other odd jobs which constitute what



# gest Mass Migration South Asian History.

**Jobless villagers keep pouring into the Subcontinent's exploding megacities. Urban life will be bearable only if now communities organise to help themselves.**

experts call the "informal economy". In Bombay, as in most other cities of the Subcontinent, it is the informal economy that provides a livelihood to the swelling ranks of the urban poor, and a cheap service industry that makes possible the lifestyle of the urban rich.

## **Beautiful Bombay**

Seventy percent of Bombay's labour force is said to be "informally employed", somewhat higher than Lahore's 60 percent. For people like Shivram on Senapati Bapat Marg, the term and the statistics have no meaning. He has little choice. Besides working as a tailor by day, he is also a waiter at the exclusive Willingdon Catholic Gymkhana Club in the evenings. Altogether, he makes about INR

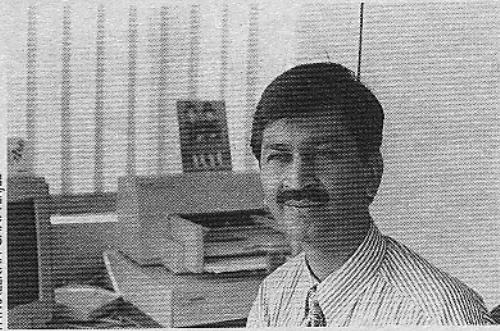
4000 a month, just enough to support his wife and three children, and send Girish to an English-medium school.

Life has become a lot easier for the family since Shivram managed to get an illegal water connection inside his pavement shack. Now, he gets up leisurely at 7 am, climbs out of his bed in the loft, has a bath and a shave in the little corner beside the tap. Then he reads the newspaper, scanning for news about demolitions ordered by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. Breakfast is a slice of bread and a hot cup of tea prepared by his wife. By half past seven, Shivram is ready to face the world. He pulls his chair outside and sits at his Usha sewing machine.

Many unemployed boys come to Shivram looking for work. He chuckles, recalling the



PATRALEKHA CHATTERJEE



PATRALEKHA CHATTERJEE

*Shivram  
Goregaonkar  
and Aniruddha  
Joshi.*



days when he himself learnt the basics of tailoring watching a master tailor. Shivram works till 1 pm, has lunch and takes an hour's rest. Then, it is back to work at the sewing machine. Between four and five in the evening, he likes to spend time with Girish, supervising his homework. At six o'clock, Shivram dresses up in a crisp white shirt and black trousers, and boards a bus for the Willingdon Club. He rarely gets home before 11 pm, and on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, work continues past midnight.

Shivram was born in a village in the Raigad district of Maharashtra. The village offered no hope, he says, so he came to Bombay when just 14. A drop-out, he has worked as a loader, a delivery boy in a cake factory, a waiter and cashier in a gambling den. He has slept on railway platforms, survived on the generosity of total strangers, led strikes, and been handcuffed by the police. Today, he has managed to barely pull his family from poverty, but life on Senapati Bapat Marg is still not secure.

A few shacks away lives 36-year-old Mumtaz Hussain Khan, who provides graphic descriptions of the municipal demolition squads. In 1981, the shacks were razed and the squatters were driven out of the city limits, she recalls. They came back. In 1992, in midwinter, another demolition drive destroyed her shack and many belongings. She slept out in the open for more than a month. "But here I am back again," says Mumtaz.

The planners want to make Bombay an "international city", like Singapore or Hongkong, and this has Shivram worried. There is talk of wider roads, flyovers, beautification. The tailor knows there would be no place for the likes of him and other shantytown dwellers in Beautiful Bombay. Specifi-

cally, it is known that the Maharashtra State Government would like to convert Senapati Bapat Marg into a sweeping expressway linking the city to the airport. The pavement dwellers have refused to move until suitable alternative housing is provided, and the authorities have promised that all those who can prove that they have been on the pavements before 1995 will be rehabilitated. Where, no one knows.

### Pavement population

Through all the ups and downs, Shivram has not lost faith in his city. He is a member of the Footpathvasi Nagarik Sangathan, a pavement dwellers' association, set up in 1991 with the help of groups like YUVA (Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action). Today, the association has more than 3000 registered members, a majority of them from Senapati Bapat Marg. Members pay an admission fee of five rupees and a monthly fee of a rupee. The Sangathan has been trying to persuade all the pavement dwellers to start saving up to a hundred rupees every month, and it has nearly INR 300,000 deposited in a collective bank account. All members have documents to prove their contribution. Shivram is saving for a house. He says, "We don't want charity. If the government provides low-cost housing in a suitable location, we will take a bank loan. These savings will come handy as collateral."

Across town, amidst the concrete and glass of Nariman Point, Bombay's commercial hub, Aniruddha Joshi hopes that the government finally means business. The dapper, 34-year-old regional manager of a multinational computer firm is excited about the municipal corporation's new cleanliness drive. He especially likes the "chhi, chhi" campaign. Each time he sees someone spitting on the street, he sticks his head out of the car window, looks the culprit in the eye, and shouts "chhi, chhi" (shame, shame).

The squatters of Senapati Bapat Marg do not figure among Aniruddha Joshi's concerns except when he is driving to or from the airport. They just do not fit in with his neat plans for the city (and himself): "If only there were wider roads and fewer jaywalkers. If only there was not such a range of activities going on in the middle of the road – the flower vendor, the trinket seller, the men with pushcarts, the cyclists, the street urchins defecating on the road, my nerves would be less jangled. My driving time to the office would be down by 30 percent." The formal economy sees no value in the informal economy.

Aniruddha starts from home at 7:30 am to get to work a little before nine. He works

Mumtaz Hussain Khan on Senapati Bapat Marg.



PATRIKHA CHATTERJEE



till eight in the evening, partly to avoid the stampede on the streets. Even then, he rarely gets home before half past nine. On a weekday, Aniruddha barely gets to see his six-year-old twins. He is quite clear – if Bombay wants to become Singapore, it has to clamp down on this unchecked immigration of the poor from the rest of India: “We cannot afford it.”

It is difficult to say just how many are living on the Bombay pavements, but you can see the numbers especially at night, when the sidewalks all over turn into one gigantic open-air dormitory. One estimate puts the pavement population at 980,000, roughly 7 percent of Bombay's total. Three-fourths of the city live in “informal housing structures”, said a 1997 study by YUVA and the Social Science Centre of St Xavier's College, Bombay.

The problems of squatters and slum-dwellers of Bombay are emblematic of the acute housing crisis facing almost every South Asian city today. This is a region where till recently, the overwhelming majority lived in the countryside, but rapid population growth alongside increasing landlessness and lack of work in the villages drive tens of thousands daily into the towns and cities.

Just 50 years ago, only 15 percent of Indians lived in cities. Today, amidst a much larger population, it is 25 percent. Bangladesh, the country with the highest density of population in South Asia, has seen its urban population jump from 4.2 percent to 15.7 percent in 40 years. Pakistan's has almost doubled since 1950 and today 32 percent of Pakistanis live in cities.

### Salem to Dakshinpuri

The way the poor are streaming into cities in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India today makes it the biggest mass migration in South Asian history. The new migrants settle in already overcrowded slums where non-existent sanitation and inadequate drinking water make life a living hell. But for many, this life is better than the hand-to-mouth existence in the jobless countryside.

This population ingress results in sharp income disparities. In Delhi, the top 20 percent of households earn more than 11 times the bottom 20 percent. There are such stark differences in other regions of the world as well, but it is only here that there is such an absence of basic facilities such as piped water, electricity, decent housing and health care.

“In every South Asian megacity, you will find the tale of two cities,” says Vinay Lall, director of the Society for Development Studies (SDS) in New Delhi. “They are poor not just in terms of money. In Bombay, Delhi,



PATRALEKHA CHATTERJEE

Karachi and Dhaka, they lack the amenities required to lead normal, healthy lives. The cities are choked.”

The residents of New Delhi, designed by Edward Lutyens to be the capital of British India, are insulated from much of this – they have a separate municipal corporation which gets its money straight from the federal government. The rest of Delhi, however, suffers from a surfeit of power cuts, water shortage, congested roads and pollution.

K. Ravi lives in Dakshinpuri, which goes without power for four to six hours every night. He works seven days a week manufacturing voltage regulators, and sees the irony in this. He gets out of the factory at 10 pm, bicycles for an hour to get home, and finds there are no lights. The one-room house is too stifling to sleep in, so the family pull the cots out into the open. The next morning, there is no water in the tap because there was no electricity to work the pump.

For all the tribulations, Ravi is thankful he is not living in a shack. He is a migrant with three children from Salem district in Tamil Nadu. With his salary of 2000 rupees a month, and overtime of 15 rupees an hour, life in Delhi is barely worth it. And on nights when there is no electricity, he feels tired. “I don't feel like going to work the next day. But I have to. What is the choice? I have to raise the children.”

The 1998 summer turned out to be the hottest of the century in Delhi, and the power distribution system collapsed. Dakshinpuri and much of the rest of Delhi went without electricity for hours and even days altogether. As the temperatures neared 47 degrees Celsius, angry citizens poured out into the streets and vandalised electricity substations. In the end, it was the monsoon rains, and not the municipal authorities, that brought relief.

Family hut on Senapati Bapat Marg.





BIKAS RAJNIAK

*Sleeping on Coke in Calcutta.*

### Urban decongestant

As the urban crisis becomes more and more unmanageable all over, the challenge for governments is to reconcile conflicting visions of cities – between Aniruddha Joshi's on the one hand, say, and Shivram Goregaonkar's and K. Ravi's on the other. If there is one thing the authorities have learnt along the way, it is that ignoring the urban poor or pushing them to the periphery will not work. Large amounts of money are required to improve the urban infrastructure and make these cities livable, but who will pick up the tab?

To Aniruddha Joshi, the problem of Bombay is clearly one of management. "We have to decide. Should we or should we not make Bombay a nerve centre? If the answer is yes, then we must have some controls over the influx of people." Joshi is uncomfortable with questions about what to do with all those people. "We will cross that bridge when we come to it."

He is not impressed by the argument that the poor of Bombay provide a host of services close to home. "I do not mind going to a supermarket to do my shopping. It is more hygienic anyway. Fewer people have handled that food. I do not see why you need a maid to wash the dishes at home. It is easier to buy a dishwasher. If there were proper creches and play-schools, we would not need maids to look after our children all the time."

But Vinay Lall of SDS says no one can fix a holding capacity for cities. "It all depends on habitable space and the economic base. Take Tokyo. It has a high population and space constraints but it sustains itself because of high incomes. Anyway, India is a democracy. Constitutionally, you cannot prevent people from moving from one place to another."

Interestingly, pavement dwellers and slum dwellers themselves do not want more mi-

grants. Pramila Sawat, a young migrant says, "People should be given work in the villages, then they would not all come to Bombay."

And indeed, the pressure on the cities can be lessened by improving the quality of life in the countryside and providing employment opportunities in the villages. But rural development has remained an ineffectual mantra all over – much as urban renewal has been, but on a much larger scale – so the city lights will simply continue to attract. In fact, many rural development projects themselves have the opposite effect of pushing the destitute villagers to the cities. Vinay Lall points to the Madhya Pradesh government's watershed management programmes which helped rich farmers and pushed the landless, low-caste labourers and marginal farmers to the cities.

With the rural influx continuing unabated, 'decongestion' became the buzzword among urban planners. But what does it mean on the ground? In Delhi, there is a law demarcating a 30,000-sq-km area as the National Capital Region (NCR), which takes in towns up to a two-hour drive away. These towns are supposed to act as counter-magnets to Delhi, but how could the plan work when the towns suffer power cuts that last up to 12 hours a day. The roads are bad, the schools worse, good hospitals non-existent. Coca Cola and Pepsi have located their India headquarters in Gurgaon, just beyond the Delhi border, but almost all their workers live and commute from Delhi.

The counter-magnets have not worked because there is not enough money to develop them. The politicians have not allocated the required budget, says town planner Syed Shafi, "because most of them do not have a perspective beyond five years." R.C. Aggarwal, a member of the NCR Planning Board, agrees. The entire region has received INR 2.9 billion for its development over the last 10 years, a pittance given the ambitiousness of the plan.

Some hope was generated recently when the NCR budget was raised to INR 3.5 billion, and the Board decided it would approach the private capital markets for more money. But then, India's new high-profile Minister for Urban Affairs Ram Jethmalani made a series of policy announcements that went directly against the concept of decongestion. Jethmalani announced that anyone in Delhi would now be free to add an extra floor to their houses, the private sector would be allowed into the housing sector, and all squatter colonies would be given official recognition. Meant to ease the housing shortage in India's capital, these decisions are bound to lead to a collapse of the urban infrastructure.



Even without Jethmalani's proposals, however, no decongestion plan is going to work as long as the large cities get more amenities than the smaller towns and villages. Despite the many hours of power cuts in Delhi which had everyone tearing at their hair this past summer, Aggarwal points out that electricity shortages in the city are only 8 percent of the time. (It is 21 percent in Uttar Pradesh and 33 percent in Haryana.)

One rational suggestion for "decongestion" is "decentralisation", and the government should take the lead in this, says Aggarwal. Taking Delhi's example, he says that the departments which have no business here should be the first to go. For instance, with the nearest beach over 1000 km away, there is no need for the headquarters of the Indian Coast Guard and the Directorate of Lighthouses to be located in New Delhi.

### Slums and services

Indian politicians take much pride in the 74th amendment to the Constitution, which sought to give more power to municipal bodies and to usher in urban reform. But this "harbinger of a new era of empowered and vigorous system of urban local self-government" has not really managed to move into the area of money supply.

Though the demand for municipal services is increasing, the local resource base is shrinking. Today, municipal bodies receive a smaller percentage of the government's development expenditure than they did 40 years ago. Citing one reason or another, state government after state government have blocked the transfer of funds to municipal bodies. The complaint of Rita Bahuguna Joshi, the mayor of Allahabad, is that "every time any municipality wants to carry out any development project, it has to keep running to the state government for money".

But the municipalities themselves cannot evade a share of the blame. Their tax collection has always been poor, and hardly a city has seen the revision of tax rates in the last few decades. Most crucially, the fees levied for vital services like electricity and water supply bear no relationship to the costs involved. With politicians reluctant to raise tax rates and user charges, the municipalities just cannot maintain the services.

"This kind of subsidisation is absurd," says Gangadhar Jha, urban finance specialist at the Delhi-based National Institute of Urban Affairs. It is in the poorest neighbourhoods that urban services tend to break down most often, at which point the citizens are forced to rely on private agencies at a much higher cost.

The poor thus end up paying much more for basic amenities than the rich. In the slums of Delhi, residents often buy a bucket of water from a private supplier for the same amount as the richest citizens of the city pay for their monthly water bill. "If you must have subsidies, at least target them to those who need the subsidies," says Jha.

Interestingly, the very crisis of overcrowding, poverty and environmental degradation that is driving the teeming South Asian cities to the brink of disaster is also providing inspiration for fresh thinking and innovative solutions. Take "slum upgrading" for instance, with experiences in dozens of shanty towns across South Asia showing that it is possible to bring basic services to shanty-town dwellers. In Karachi, the Orangi Pilot Project (*see following story*) has shown how low-income communities can be innovative in setting up a low-cost sewer system. In Bombay, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) is tapping mutual funds for the poorest sections of society. The Securities and Exchange Board of India has approved a pioneering mutual fund scheme for the poor with a minimum subscription of INR 1000. If the pilot project takes off, it is likely to be replicated in 15 Indian cities, including Delhi, Kanpur, Madurai, Pune and Coimbatore.

Meanwhile, five Indian cities (Tirupur, Ahmedabad, Pune, Vijaywada and Surat) are developing commercially viable infrastructure projects under the Indo-US Financial Institutions Reform and Expansion programme. Here and elsewhere, many city administrators have come to understand the need to look inward for resources. Seeking the helping hand of the state or central government has proved desultory. Last year, Ahmedabad issued a one-billion-rupee municipal bond, the first in-

Piped water in a Howrah lane.



BIKAS RAJAN



stance of an Indian municipal corporation tapping the capital markets to upgrade its water supply, sewage, sanitation and other infrastructure projects.

Tirupur, in southern India, is the hub of India's cotton knitwear industry. More than 300,000 people working in the industries here suffer from poor services, such as acute water shortage. The Tirupur Exporters Association took the initiative, and with the assistance of international agencies and the government, evolved an infrastructure development programme. In future, industrial water users will have to pay a competitive price and the project will use the cash flow to recover investment and upgrade services.

"Bombay First", an industry initiative to improve living conditions in Bombay, has come up with an innovative proposal of "business improvement districts", says the programme's Chief Executive Officer, W.J.N. Danait. Designed after similar urban initiatives in the United States, Danait says BIDs can offer solutions to more modest problems such as how to find additional funding for city renewal in the business areas and self-help in smaller residential neighbourhoods.

Danait points at several partnerships between industry and communities, such as the

"Clean Up Churchgate" initiative, which involves residential associations and private enterprise. About 1.5 million commuters pass through the Churchgate area every day. These initiatives, admits Danait, are not a cure-all, and they deal with symptoms rather than causes, but then there is no magic wand to wish away the problems of South Asian cities at one go.

Overcrowding, pollution and breakdown of basic services are maladies that have become second nature to these cities. These problems will be around for a long time yet. Things can get a little better, but only if citizens themselves take the initiative in their own neighbourhoods and pressurise their representatives at the municipal level. Wherever things have got better in any South Asian city, and there are not too many examples, it is because the citizens and their communities have decided to act rather than wait for the dole. There is no sense in trying to solve all problems at one go, for there are too many, says Shafi. "Let's just do the things we can."

*P. Chatterjee is a New Delhi-based journalist specialising in urban issues.*



# TIBET

The rugged, unearthly beauty of the "Roof of the world" and its rich Buddhist tradition has captivated countless travelers down the centuries. Now open to outsiders, travel here is still restricted and your "tour" has to be arranged by a local operator. Nevertheless, a journey to Tibet truly surpasses one's wildest imagination.

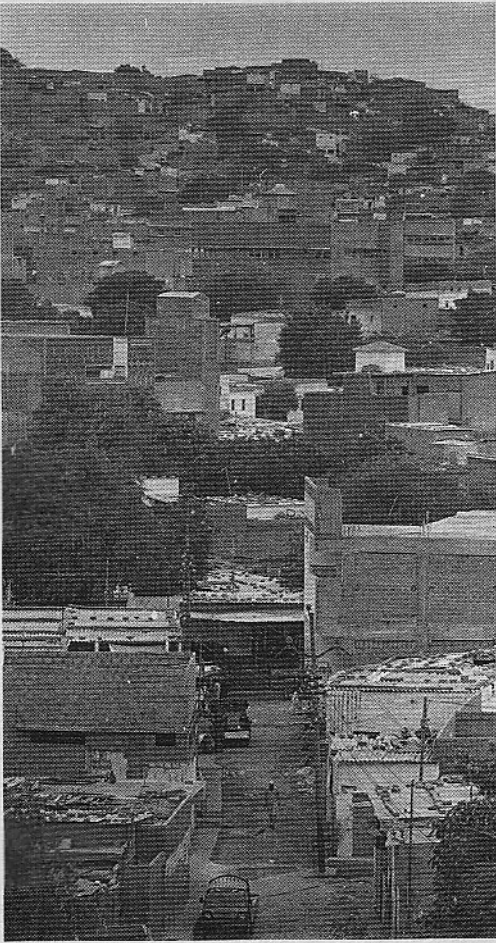
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Orangi.

# Sufism and the art of urban healing

**As sanctions start to bite,  
Pakistanis learn from Akhtar Hameed  
Khan's calls for simplicity, renunciation  
and self-reliance.**

by *Tarik Ali Khan*

**E**very morning Akhtar Hameed Khan makes the journey to Orangi, Pakistan's largest unplanned urban settlement, or *katchi abadi*. Located 12 kilometres from Karachi's centre, it is a microcosm of this city of migrants, a sprawling community of *mohajirs* (Indian Muslim refugees from 1947), Biharis (more recent refugees from Bangladesh), Pathans, Sindhis, Punjabis and Balochs. Orangi has swallowed up 7000 acres of the barren Sindh landscape on the edge of Karachi and is still growing. Orangi is as big as Colombo or Amsterdam, a city within a city.

More than three and a half million people live in the 400 *katchi abadis* that surround Karachi. Being outside the official city plan, the migrants have little access to

government-funded resources. Officials have traditionally ignored their squalor. Orangi itself began to be occupied in 1965 and grew rapidly after 1972 with the influx of refugees from newly independent Bangladesh.

Orangi could have resembled the desolation of many other famous South Asian slums. But Orangi today is a development miracle, a thriving community of middle and lower-income migrants. The difference from a 'slum' is immediately apparent: the stench of human waste has disappeared due to a network of sewerage lines, secondary drains and pour-flush toilets. Small locally-built schools vastly outnumber government schools – all built by Orangi residents with technical and organisational guidance from Khan's brainchild, the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP).



After a stint at teaching at Michigan State University in the 1970s, Khan returned to Pakistan to serve as an adviser to a rural development project near Peshawar. The Bank of Credit and Commerce (BCCI) approached him in 1980 to start a project in Orangi. With no office, no staff, and no contacts in Orangi, Khan began by walking the lanes for months. He peered into the middle and lower income houses of its one million residents, people who came in search of the economic dream in Karachi. Khan spoke to local officials, councillors and lobbyists and discovered how little the katchi abadi residents had in the way of rights.

### Hard programme

Realising that OPP would have little legitimacy and no authority within the traditional structures of city government, Khan decided that the solution lay in organising residents. He got to work with them, and the communities identified health and sanitation as the primary needs. In response, OPP began to develop low-cost sanitation technologies that people could craft themselves. An engineer offered technical help and OPP-trained social organisers provided the logistics.

Work soon picked up steam. Every *mohalla* (locality) elected a manager, someone who would oversee the work of installing sewerage lines, secondary drains and toilets. Khan recalls: "The designs made by foreign consultants were expensive and inappropriate, we found. The ones we developed were more culturally appropriate and made at one-tenth the cost." By 1995, 76 percent of Orangi households had proper sanitation facilities. On average, only 24 percent of Pakistani households enjoy this kind of access.

But perhaps the biggest urban manage-

ment lesson was that it could all be done without grants or subsidies. Khan has been able to harness and organise the migrant's spirit of enterprise. With their own money, and supported by the OPP's technical guidance, residents constructed over 5000 sewerage lines and 80,000 latrines. With the sewage taken care of, the communities went on to build 750 schools and 646 health clinics. Residents formed their own local organisations and took over the running of the facilities from OPP.

The results have been dramatic. Between 1982 and 1991, Orangi's infant mortality rate dropped from 130 to 34 per 1000 (Pakistan's average is 95 per 1000). Property prices rose in Orangi, and the residents benefitted. Through OPP's Research and Training Institute, Khan's action research approach has brought more initiatives after the initial focus on sanitation, health and education: social forestry, low-cost housing construction, and family planning.

From the Pathan children who collect plastic bags for recycling to the Banarasi silk weavers busy with their intricate work, every lane of Orangi bustles with enterprise. Khan felt the average working family's productive capacity could be improved through access to credit. In 1987, OPP established a trust which borrowed from Pakistani banks and began lending. The first two years saw high default and blackmailing, but today a tight lending policy ensures that there is a 95 percent return rate on OPP loans. New clients must be referred by a trustworthy former loan recipient, and each recipient finds himself listed in one of four categories: competent/honest, incompetent/honest, competent/dishonest, incompetent/dishonest.

Over the years, Akhtar Hameed Khan has become convinced that true development must make the poor self sufficient. Subsidies or handouts have contributed to dependence on foreign aid, which he calls the "*langar khana* (free food) mentality". Beginning a project like OPP was no easy task because, as Karachi mushroomed in the 1980s, politicians like the late Gen Zia-ul Haq were making wild promises to the shanty-town residents. "Whereas we were telling them not to wait for handouts and do it for themselves," recalls Khan. "It was hard to convince them."

Believing that women are generally more honest, Khan has employed an all-female staff to handle credit disbursement and repayment. The credit office at OPP has a deliberately spacious and open design to encourage transparency and prevent under-the-table deals. Khan's own daily vigilance routine also has an effect on the staff; he is still as watchful as

The OPP's Research and Training Institute at work.



OPP



a hawk. "All Pakistani organisations which dole out money are corrupt. Initially out of the 10 staff I hired, I had to fire five," he says.

Khan is convinced that Pakistan's problems are largely moral. Given the country's current state of corruption and debt, Khan says what it needs is a hard programme of development, one that demands self-sufficiency without donor aid. At Orangi, OPP has broken the vicious circle of waiting for a free lunch: residents and staff both accept the new ethos of a hard programme, even if leaders do not.

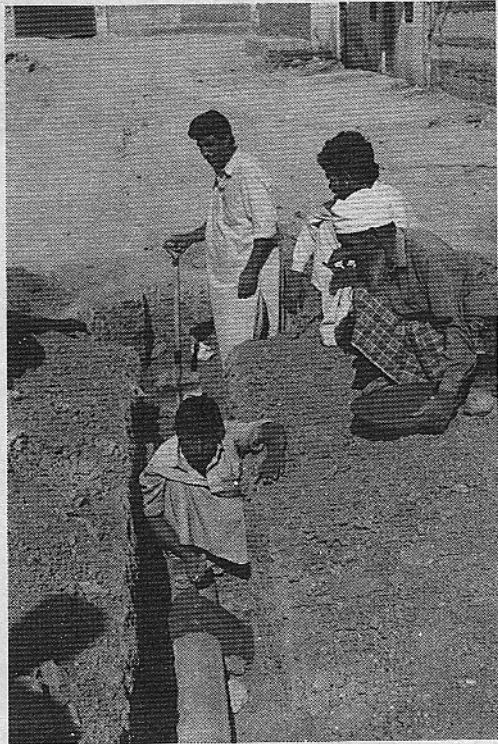
### Shurfa boy

In a country where feudal politicians, bureaucrats and the military elite call the shots, Akhtar Hameed Khan draws his inspiration from the Sufi and Buddhist principles of simplicity and renunciation. Born to a Uttar Pradesh Pathan family from Agra in 1914, Khan was bred for success. He recalls life as part of the *shurfa*, or Muslim middle class, that continued to survive in North India after the Mughal decline. The UP Pathans had been transformed from belligerent tribes who challenged the Marathas in the 18th century into *jagirdars* (landowners), policemen, soldiers and civil servants.

He was raised in the tradition of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the 19th-century reformer who founded the Aligarh Muslim University and encouraged Muslims to synthesise Western knowledge and Islamic thought. Sir Syed offered Muslims reformation through his humanist alternative to the religious *madrassah* schooling and post-Mughal decadence. His promotion of English education brought opposition from the *ulema*. He discouraged practices such as having multiple wives and dancing girls in the *shurfa* household and encouraged Victorian self-discipline, modesty and frugality.

Akhtar Hameed Khan says that in his college days in Meerut, he was influenced by Nietzsche and the writings of Allama Mashriqui, the latter a strong proponent of *ghalba-i-Islam*, or Islamic domination. In the 1930s, Mashriqui had founded the All-India Khaksar Movement. Dressed in khaki, Khaksar's largely lower-class members were organised for social service, but its militant fascist undertones were obvious. Khan eventually married Mashriqui's daughter and joined the prestigious Indian Civil Service (ICS).

But after nine years as a colonial civil servant, and having participated in the poor central planning that led to the 1943 famine in Bengal, Khan was disillusioned. The decay of



Laying sewer lines at Orangi.

the British Empire was as apparent to him as was the growing poverty of the Subcontinent. Long influenced by Islam's Sufi mystics and the writings of Tolstoy, he decided to renounce the world. He resigned from the ICS in 1945 and spent the next two years as a reclusive locksmith.

"Why did Buddha give up his princehood to become a wandering mendicant?" Khan muses. "Because the way to discover the meaning of life is through controlling your instincts. This is the message of Sufi poets like Jalaluddin Rumi as well. What are the three things we must control? Greed, hatred and delusion."

Khan confesses that his love of scholarship brought him back to the world. His Khaksar fantasy dissolved and he soon discovered his next teacher, Zakir Hussain, the head of Delhi's Jamia Milia Islamic University, and, later, president of India. In Zakir Hussain, he found Sir Syed's rationalism coupled with strong Indian nationalism. Khan taught English to primary and secondary schoolchildren and history to college classes at the Jamia Milia until 1949. Its extensive library allowed him to continue studying the writings of Islam's mystics and philosophers, while Partition took place outside.

But East Pakistan soon beckoned. "Zakir Hussain told me not to leave for Pakistan. He said that people like me were leaving because we were frustrated. He felt that we could better serve the Muslims of India. But I was full





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of Islamic ideology and thought Pakistan would be a utopia. There is no mistake in my life except this migration."

Khan's love of scholarship and free speech is often exploited by his enemies, those whose very power is threatened when the poor become mobilised. "My social work in Pakistan is like walking a tightrope. I have to avoid controversy at every turn. But the advice of the Sufis is not to care for one's surroundings. The world is within you."

In teaching, he had found his calling. He migrated to East Pakistan in 1950 where he was appointed principal of Comilla College. In addition to the writings of the sages, he began to devour books on economics and the theories of Marxism and capitalism. With his ICS experience as an administrator in Bengal, he was soon appointed director of the US-sponsored village agricultural and industrial development ("V-AID") projects. He was sent for a year to Michigan State University for training and the Americans became his new teachers. He returned to an appointment as director of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development in Comilla (today the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development).

### Organised development

The task before Khan now was to figure out where to begin the development process. The colonial legacy of the British was an administration based on law and order and revenue collection. The foundation stone for maintaining the Pax Britannica in the Subcontinent had been – and continued to be – the *thana*, the police station. The few facilities which existed in the rural areas (schools, health dispensaries, veterinary dispensaries, and even roads) were often at the *thana*. For Khan, the jurisdiction of the police station was small enough, and developed enough, to serve as the centre of his activities. The Comilla experiment was underway.

Khan focussed on improving rural infrastructure: link roads and irrigation channels. While development fads like community development and V-AID came and went, Comilla blossomed. It had American financial backing and the support of Pakistan's prime minister, Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Its *thana* training centres, rural works projects, and peasants' cooperatives soon became models of organised development. Khan says Comilla was the American answer to the socialist model of development but makes it clear he was not driven by any ideology, either communism or capitalism (see following interview).

Khan left in 1969 and ended up teaching

at his alma mater, Michigan State University. By the time he returned to Pakistan in the late 1970s, the east had become independent Bangladesh. Officially retired, he was soon busy giving advice on Comilla-style pilot projects at Daudzai near Peshawar, and in the Northern Areas with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme. But it is at Orangi, where he has patiently brought development according to his Sufi-Buddhist principles of right liveli-

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**"My social work in Pakistan is like walking a tightrope. I have to avoid controversy at every turn. But the advice of the Sufis is not to care for one's surroundings. The world is within you."**

---

hood, that his efforts sank deep and paid off.

Khan's towering six-foot body is now slightly stooped, the gait is slow as he arrives every morning at OPP's office to meet guests and receive reports from the staff. His associates listen intently to his booming voice as he responds to each new situation, quoting instructively from the *Qur'an* in Arabic, Sufi poetry in Persian and the Buddhist sutras in Pali.

Says Khan, "Although there is no concept of an ashram in our society, I feel OPP is an ashram. And here I am not a bull haboon who demands obedience. I am more like a *daadi ma* (grandmother) who guides out of love."

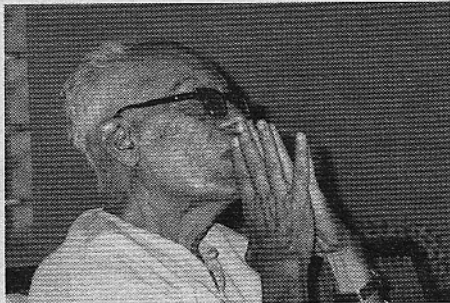
Asked whether OPP will survive without him, Khan sounds confident, and it is clear he is proud of his associates and the people of Orangi. "The work will go on. We have Arif Hassan at OPP and Tasneem Siddiqui of the Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority. These people understand the self-help philosophy. We have the support of the people. And even though we criticise them, we now have the support of the government as well. We have proven here that the 'hard programme' lives. It is sustainable."

*T.A. Khan is an MSc candidate in Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph, Canada.*

*Akhtar Hameed Khan is author of Rural Development in Pakistan (Vanguard Press, Lahore, 1985) and Orangi Pilot Project: Reminiscences and Reflections (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1996).*



# "I should never have left Patna."



**Excerpts from an interview of Akhtar Hameed Khan taken by Dhaka features service NewsNetwork. The interviewers write: "Begum Akhtar Hameed Khan came and served us tea and snacks herself. They have no full-time household help even though Karachi is full of Bengali domestics. The apartment they live in is simple and without any frills."**

• *Would you tell us something about the Comilla model?*

AKH: The Comilla model was not my idea at all. It was an American idea. All I did was to implement it. All I can claim is that I implemented the rural development model well. It was a good demonstration... You must remember the time when the model was tried. It was at the height of the Cold War. The Harvard group was running a variety of models in Asia to explore alternatives to communism. Comilla was one of them.

• *So it did have economic propaganda objectives?*

Yes, it did. In fact, it was the US response to the socialist model of agricultural development. The Americans developed and tried out such models in various parts of Asia especially Southeast Asia. Pakistan was at that time friendly towards the USA. So the model was applied here as well. It fell to Comilla to try it and we did a good job.

• *And what do you think of the impact of the model. What do you think was its permanent effect?*

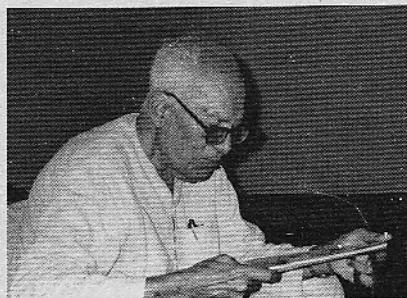
Well, it is obvious today that the socialist world is in disarray.

Examples of failure are all over. On the other hand, the Southeast Asian countries, where the models were tried in full have done extremely well. They have problems now and then but they have been able to deliver a lot of goods and services to their people.

• *So, in a way you participated in a proxy economic ideological battle?*

I was not interested in the socialist or the capitalist ideology. I have my own ideology to follow. I wanted to help people. I think Bangladesh would have benefitted a lot if they had continued with the Comilla approach. But they put politics into it and that ended it.

• *There is a lot of politics around the Comilla model now. You are accused of*



*being a pro-American and anti-socialist.*

Yes, and by your country's upper class socialist economists who would never think of spending a night in the village as a way of life. Who would be totally lost if they had to live like a common man.

• *And you disagree with their criticism that you were working on behalf of Western political interest?*

I worked for no one except the people and certainly have a strong personal philosophy to uphold. If these new socialists are so confident about their ideology, why haven't they come up with a solution for Bangladesh's distressed economy? Why haven't they helped Bangladesh? I tried to do something practical for the people and my work was grounded in the co-operative movement, in the spirit of working together. That worked as long as the Comilla spirit was there.

• *But then why such criticism?*

Because we criticise the past to defend our present. Criticising Comilla isn't necessary to do something new. However, let's not get into controversy anymore. But the so-called socialist

intellectuals haven't yet done much for Bangladesh's welfare.

• *Why do you call them "so-called"?*

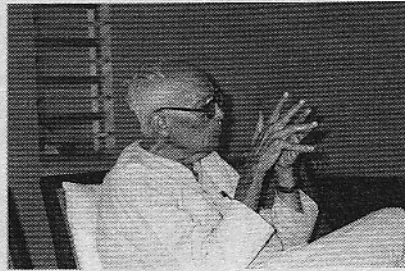
Because they stay in the most expensive part of Dhaka, earn huge sums through consultancy contracts and talk about socialism. I can claim to be a socialist. I earn little and live simply. That is socialism. You can't be a hypocrite and work for the people. (Starts laughing)

• *You are still talked about. Your admirers tell many stories about you. Some of the anecdotes, like your transformation to social service from imperial ICS as a result of an interaction with a cobbler, how you spent time as a locksmith in Patna to lose your ego and so on...*

Stories are always made about people. Don't believe any stories that you hear...

• *And are you really driven by any philosophy. Any creed or dogma or faith?*  
I believe that if you can accept the

fact that you will be parted from your dear and beloved ones and lose what you consider precious, then you have conquered much of your self. You can't be touched by pain anymore.



You can work without thinking of awards or rewards. The pain of living will be diminished and accepting that reality you can go ahead.

• *You have had some trouble with the religious groups here. You were accused of blasphemy.*

It's all a misunderstanding. It's more the work of a few people who had problems with other people. I don't think I have had any trouble.

It's over now.

• *You have been part of the development initiative in South Asia, especially Pakistan, East and West. How would you describe the future?*

Pakistan's two great problems are sectarianism and feudalism. People are not together. In that way, despite your [Bangladesh's] present economic difficulties you have a bright future. If you notice, the Bangladesh economy is skill-centred. The garments sector is a good example. Women have joined the work force and that's very important. There is a lot of similarity between the nature of Bangladeshi economy and that of the Southeast Asian tiger economies. You aren't held back by feudalism like Pakistan is.

• *The final question. Any real regrets in life?*

Yes, one. I should never have left Patna. △

PICTURES BY TARIK ALI KHAN

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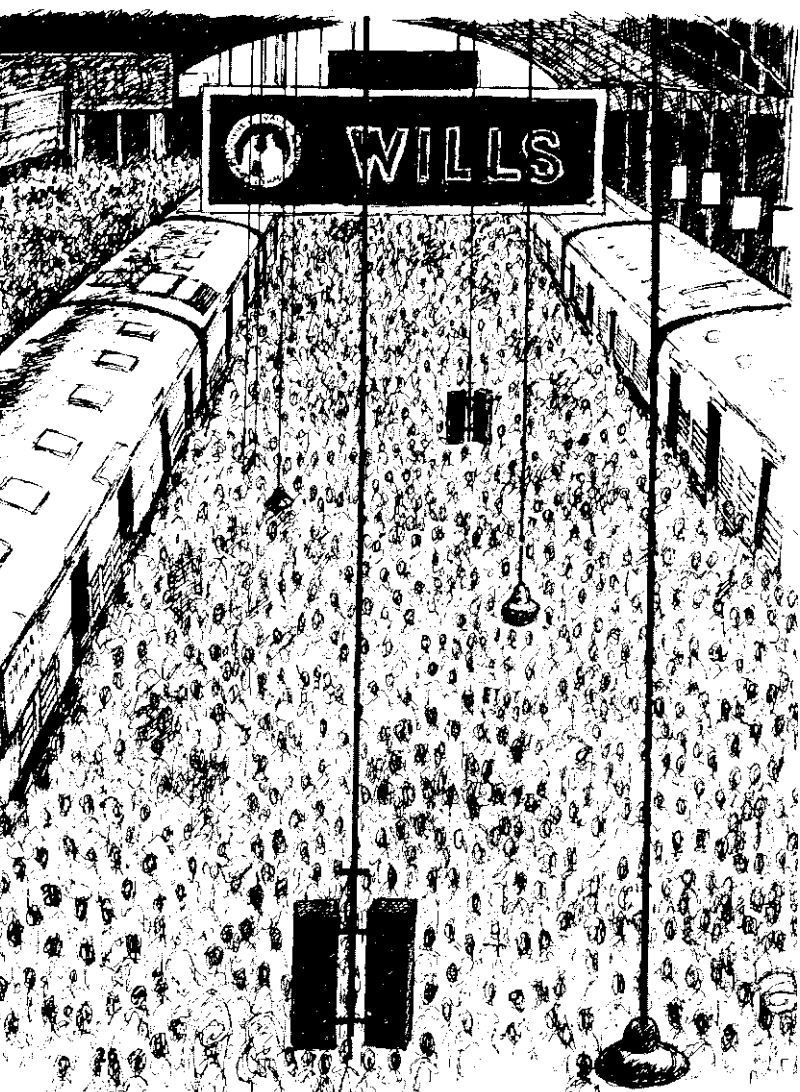
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# MUMBAI MUMBAI

**"Don't worry. If they push you out,  
they also pull you in."**

by Suketu Mehta



SUBHAS RAIL BASED ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF CHURCHGATE STATION BY SEBASTIAO SALGADO

**B**ombay (now officially Mumbai) is a city with an identity crisis; a city experiencing both a boom and a civic emergency. It's the biggest, fastest, richest city in India. It held 12 million people at the last count – more than Greece – and 38 percent of the nation's taxes are paid by its citizens. Yet half the population is homeless. In the Bayview Bar of the Oberoi Hotel you can order [a bottle of] Dom Perignon champagne for 20,250 rupees, more than one-and-a-half times the average annual income; this in a city where 40 percent of the houses are without safe drinking water. In a country where a number of people still die of starvation, Bombay boasts 150 diet clinics. *Urbs prima in Indis*, says the plaque outside the Gateway of India. By the year 2020, it is predicted, Bombay will be the largest city in the world.

Four years ago, this divided metropolis went to war with itself. On 6 December 1992 the Babri Masjid was destroyed by a fanatical Hindu mob. Ayodhya is many hundreds of miles away in Uttar Pradesh, but the rubble from its mosque swiftly provided the foundations for the walls that shot up between Hindus and Muslims in Bombay. A series of riots left 1400 people dead. Four years later, at the end of 1996, I was back in Bombay and was planning a trip with a group of slum women. When I suggested the following Friday, 6 December, there was a silence. The women laughed uneasily, looked at each other. Finally, one said, "No one will leave the house on that date."

The riots were a tragedy in three acts. First, there was a spontaneous upheaval involving the police and Muslims. This was followed, in January, by a second wave of more serious rioting, instigated by the Hindu political movement Shiv Sena, in which Muslims were systematically identified and massacred, their houses and shops burnt and looted. The third stage was the revenge of the Muslims: on 12 March, ten powerful bombs went off all over the city. One exploded in the Stock Exchange, another in the Air India building. There were bombs in cars and scooters. 317 people died, many of them Muslims.

Yet, many Muslims cheered the perpetrators. It was the old story: the powerful wish of minorities all over the world to be the oppressor rather than the oppressed. Almost every Muslim I spoke to in Bombay agreed that the riots had devastated their sense of self-worth; they were forced to stand helplessly as they watched their sons slaughtered, their possessions burnt before their eyes. There are 1.6 million Muslims in Bombay: more than 10 percent of the city's total population. When

they rode the commuter trains, they stood with their heads bent down. How could they meet the eyes of the victorious Hindus? Then the bombs went off, and the Hindus were reminded that the Muslims weren't helpless. On the trains, they could hold their heads high again.

Last December, I was taken on a tour of the battlegrounds by a group of Shiv Sena men and Raghav, a private taxi operator, a short, stocky man wearing jeans labelled "Saviour". He was not officially a member of Shiv Sena, but he was called upon by the leader of the local branch whenever there was party work to be done. He led me through Jogeshwari, the slum where, on 8 January 1993, the second wave of trouble began. A Hindu family of mill workers had been sleeping in a room in Radhabai Chawl, in the Muslim area. Someone locked their door from the outside and threw a petrol bomb in through the window. The family died screaming, clawing at the door. One of them was a handicapped teenage girl.

Raghav and a couple of the others took me into the slums through passages so narrow that two people cannot walk abreast. They were cautious, at first. But as we passed a mosque, Raghav laughed. "This is where we shat in the Masjid," he said. One of his companions shot him a warning look. Only later did I learn what he meant. The Sena zealots had burnt down this mosque; it was one of the high points of the war for them, and they recalled it with glee. One man had taken a cylinder of cooking gas, opened the valve, lit a match and rolled it inside. He then joined the police force, where he remains to this day.

We were discussing all this not in some back room, in whispers, but in the middle of the street, in the morning, with hundreds of people coming and going. Raghav was completely open, neither bragging nor playing down what he had done; just telling it as it happened. The Sena men – the *sainiks* – were comfortable; this was their turf. They pointed out the sole remaining shop owned by a Muslim: a textile shop that used to be called Ghafoor's. During the riots some of the boys wanted to kill him, but others who had grown up with him protected him, and he got away with merely having his stock burnt. Now it has reopened, under the name Maharashtra Mattress. Raghav pointed to the store next to it. "I looted that battery shop," he said.

He led me to an open patch of ground by the train sheds. There was a vast garbage dump on one side, with groups of people hacking at the ground with picks, a crowd of boys playing cricket, sewers running at our

feet, train tracks in sheds in the middle distance, and a series of concrete tower blocks beyond. A week ago, I had been standing on the far side with a Muslim man, who pointed towards where I now stood, saying, "That is where the Hindus came from."

Raghav remembered. This was where he and his friends had caught two Muslims. "We burnt them," he said. "We poured kerosene over them and set them on fire."

"Did they scream?"

"No, because we beat them a lot before burning them. Their bodies lay here in the ditch, rotting, for ten days. Crows were eating them. Dogs were eating them. The police wouldn't take the bodies away because the Jogeshwari police said it was in the Goregaon police's jurisdiction, and the Goregaon police said it was the railway police's jurisdiction."

Raghav also recalled an old Muslim man who was throwing hot water on the Sena boys. They broke down his door, dragged him out, took a neighbour's blanket, wrapped him in it and set him alight. "It was like a movie," he said. "Silent, empty, someone burning somewhere, and us hiding, and the army. Sometimes I couldn't sleep, thinking that just as I had burnt someone, so somebody could burn me."

I asked him, as we looked over the waste land, if the Muslims they burnt had hedged for their lives.

"Yes. They would say, 'Have mercy on us!' But we were filled with such hate, and we had Radhabai Chawl on our minds. And even if there was one of us who said, let him go, there would be ten others saying no, kill him. And so we had to kill him."

"But what if he was innocent?"

Raghav looked at me. "He was Muslim," he said.

### White all over

A few days later I met Sunil, deputy leader of the Jogeshwari *shakha*, or branch, of the Shiv Sena. He came with two other Sena boys to drink with me in my friend's apartment. They all looked around appreciatively. We were on the sixth floor, on a hill, and the highway throbbed with traffic below us. Sunil looked out of the window. "It's a good place to shoot people from," he said, making the rat-tat-tat motion of firing a sub-machine gun. I had not thought of the apartment this way.

Sunil was one of the favourites to be *pramukh*, the leader, of the entire *shakha* one day. He first joined the Shiv Sena when he needed a blood transfusion, and the Sena boys gave their blood, an act which touched him deeply – his political comrades were, literally,



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and dreams  
revolve.**

his blood brothers. He was in his twenties now, helpful, generous and likeable. He has a wide range of contacts with Muslims, from taking his daughter to a Muslim holy man to be exorcised, to buying chickens in Mohammedali Road during the riots for resale to Hindus at a good profit. But what preyed on his mind now was the conviction that the handicapped girl who died in the fire in Radhabai Chawl had been raped by her Muslim assailants. There was no evidence of this; the police report did not mention it. But that didn't matter. It was a powerful, catalytic image: a disabled girl on the ground with a line of leering Muslim men waiting their turn to abuse her, while her parents matched her screams with their own as their bodies caught the flames.

Sunil insisted on referring to the riots as a "war". Certainly, at the J.J. Hospital, he had witnessed scenes typical of wartime: corpses identifiable only by numbered tags. And at Cooper Hospital, where Hindus and Muslims were placed next to each other in the same ward, fights would break out; wounded men would rip saline drips out of their arms and hurl them at their enemies. During the riots, the government sent tankers of milk to the Muslim areas. Sunil, with three of his fellow *sainiks* dressed as Muslims, put a deadly insecticide in one of the containers: the Muslims smelt it and refused all the milk. Sunil's men also shut off the water supply to the Muslim quarter. After six days, he said, the Muslims were forced to come out to the big *chowk* in the centre of the quarter. "That's when we got them," he recalled.

I asked him: "What does a man look like when he's on fire?"

The other Shiv Sena men looked at each other. They didn't trust me yet. "We weren't there," they said. "The Sena didn't have anything to do with the rioting."

But Sunil would have none of this. "I'll tell you. I was there," he said. He looked directly at me. "A man on fire gets up, falls, runs for his life, falls, gets up, runs. It is horror. Oil drips from his body, his eyes become huge, huge, the white shows, white, white, you touch his arm like this" – he flicked his arm – "the white shows, it shows especially on the nose." He rubbed his nose with two fingers, as if scraping off the skin. "Oil drips from him, water drips from him, white, white all over.

"Those were not days for thought," he continued. "We five people hurnt one Mussulman. At four in the morning, after we heard about the Radhabai Chawl massacre, a moh assembled, the like of which I'd never seen. Ladies, gents. They picked up any weapon they could. Then we marched to the

Muslim side. We met a *pau* wallah [bread-seller] on the highway, on a bicycle. I knew him, he used to sell me bread every day. I set him on fire. We poured petrol over him and set light to him. All I thought was that he was a Muslim. He was shaking. He was crying, 'I have children, I have children.' I said: 'When your Muslims were killing the Radhabai Chawl people, did you think of your children?' That day we showed them what Hindu dharma is."

### Island dwellers

"We used to roller skate down Teen Batti," an architect said to me. He used the past imperfect tense; he meant that he used to *be able* to roller skate down Teen Batti. Teen Batti is at the top of the road that winds up from the sea; the Ridge Road leads from there up Malabar Hill. The area is now a shabby high-rise ghetto where the cats leave no room for the juvenile traffic of roller skates and bicycles. What he said stuck with me because I used to roller skate down Teen Batti and cycle around there too. I cannot imagine a 12-year-old boy doing so now.

The sounds, colours and moods of the sea lent heft and weight to my childhood. From my uncle's apartment I can still see the rocks where the boys from our building would catch little fish trapped in the hollows when the tide went out. We sat down there and watched the whole progress of the sunset, from light to dark, and planned our lives – who would become the police inspector, who the astronaut. Gradually, a colony of hutments took over these rocks, and when we walked on them we would sometimes slip and fall on shit. The rocks are now a public latrine, full of strange smells. There are two million people in Bombay who have to defecate in any space they can find. The sea air sometimes wafts the stench over the skyscrapers of the rich, nudging them, reminding them.

We lived in Bombay and never had much to do with Mumbai. Mumbai was what Maharashtrians called the city; and Bombay was the capital of Maharashtra. But so far as we Gujaratis – migrants, like so many in Bombay – were concerned, Mumbai meant the people who came to wash our clothes or look at our electricity meters. We had a term for them – *ghatis*: people from the ghats – meaning someone coarse, poor. There were whole worlds in the city which were as foreign to me as the ice fields of the Arctic or the deserts of Arabia. I was eight years old when Marathi, the language of Maharashtra, became compulsory in our school. How we groaned. It was a servants' language, we said.

I moved to New York when I was 14. When I went back I found that the city had grown in wild and strange ways. In front of my uncle's building, for instance, was a monstrous skyscraper, its skeleton completed more than a decade before, lying vacant. Several such buildings dot the city. The flats have been bought for huge sums but are empty because they violate municipal height limits. The builders knew they would not get planning consent but went ahead anyway. The first priority was to put up the concrete reality; they could deal with the extraneous issues – municipal clearances, legal papers, bribes – later. But the city corporation put its foot down, and the fate of the building entered the courts. While the most expensive, most desirable real estate in Bombay lies vacant, half the population sleeps on the pavement.

Land is to Bombay what politics is to Delhi: the reigning obsession, the fetish, the *raison d'être* and the topic around which conversations, business, newspapers and dreams revolve. Property is the mania of island dwellers all over the world, and Bombay is washed by water on three sides. It regards the rest of India much as Manhattan looks on the rest of America: as a place distant, unfamiliar and inferior. The lament I kept hearing – from both Hindus and Muslims – was that the riots were an ungentle reminder that Bombay was part of India.

In 1994 a survey revealed that real-estate prices in Bombay were the highest in the world. There was general jubilation in the city. It confirmed something that Bombayites had long felt: that this was where the action was, not New York or London. Here, if you wanted a flat in a new building shooting up from the narrow strip of land behind the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Nariman Point, you would need three million dollars.

### **A lover's embrace**

The manager of Bombay's suburban railway system was recently asked when the system would improve to a point where it could carry its five million daily passengers in comfort. "Not in my lifetime," he answered. Certainly, if you commute into Bombay, you are made aware of the precise temperature of the human body as it curls around you on all sides, adjusting itself to every curve of your own. A lover's embrace was never so close.

One morning I took the rush hour train to Jogeshwari. There was a crush of passengers, and I could only get halfway into the carriage. As the train gathered speed, I hung on to the top of the open door. I feared I would be pushed out, but someone reassured me:

"Don't worry, if they push you out they also pull you in."

Asad Bin Saif is a scholar of the slums, moving tirelessly among the sewers, cataloguing numberless communal flare-ups and riots, seeing first-hand the slow destruction of the social fabric of the city. He is from Bhagalpur, in Bihar, site not only of some of the worst rioting in the nation, but also of a famous incident in 1980, in which the police blinded a group of criminals with knitting needles and acid. Asad, of all people, has seen humanity at its worst. I asked him if he felt pessimistic about the human race.

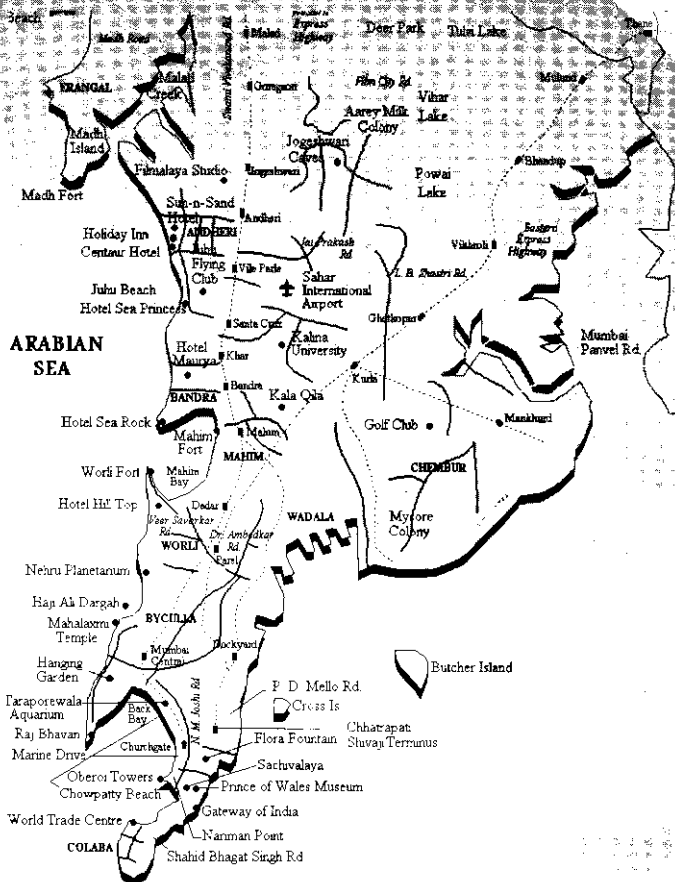
"Not at all," he replied. "Look at the hands from the trains."

If you are late for work in Bombay, and reach the station just as the train is leaving the platform, you can run up to the packed compartments and you will find many hands stretching out to grab you on board, unfolding outward from the train like petals. As you run alongside you will be picked up, and some tiny space will be made for your feet on the edge of the open doorway. The rest is up to you; you will probably have to hang on to the door frame with your fingertips, being careful not to lean out too far lest you get decapitated by a pole placed close to the tracks. But consider what has happened: your fellow passengers, already packed tighter than cattle are legally allowed to be, their shirts drenched with sweat in the badly ventilated compartment, having stood like this for hours, retain an empathy for you, know that your boss might yell at you or cut your pay if you miss this train and will make space where none exists to take one more person with them. And at the moment of contact, they do not know if the hand that is reaching for theirs belongs to a Hindu or Muslim or Christian or Brahmin or untouchable or whether you were born in this city or arrived only this morning or whether you live in Malabar Hill or Jogeshwari; whether you're from Bombay or Mumbai or New York. All they know is that you're trying to get to the city of gold, and that's enough. Come on board, they say. We'll adjust.

*S. Mehta is working on a non-fiction book on Bombay and a novel. A longer version of this article first appeared in Granta.*

*Himal's coverage of South Asian cities in this issue was supported by AP2000 and Panos Institute.*





## Bombing Bombay

by M.V. Ramana

**T**he weapon used is a fission bomb with a yield of 15 kilotons detonated at a height of 600 metres. The choice of yield and altitude correspond closely to the weapon that went off over Hiroshima 50 years ago. With such a small yield, it is not possible to destroy the whole city of Bombay. The extent and kind of devastation would depend upon where in Bombay the bomb goes off.

The shock wave of a blast centred in the Fort area would destroy more or less completely a circle with a 1.1-kilometre radius. Most of the buildings from Colaba to Victoria Terminus, along the entire width of the island, would be destroyed. All *kuchha* houses up to 1.7 km from the point of explosion would be destroyed. The winds accompanying the shock wave, reaching speeds of over 110 km/h to a distance of 3 km or more, would destroy many more buildings. One has to remember that many of the city's buildings, especially older ones, are poorly constructed and are liable to collapse due to the shock wave and the hurricane-speed winds even if they are far from the epicentre.

Within a few minutes the fires ignited by the flash of light and heat would start to coalesce into super-fires, engulfing an area within a radius of up to 2 km. The temperatures in the fire zone could reach several hundred degrees. The high heat covering such a large area would act like a large pump sucking in air from surrounding areas. The inward winds would reach speeds of 50-80 km/h.

The combination of high winds, thick smoke, destruction of water mains, debris blocking access routes, as well

as destruction of men and materials would make effective fire-fighting impossible. The chance of citizens in the blast area escaping the firestorm would be slim.

Unlike the cities that suffered firestorms during World War II due to aerial bombings, the fires in Bombay would be much worse because of the many secondary explosions which would take place in the wake of the heat and fire of the nuclear blast. These would include explosions of gas cylinders in household kitchens, diesel and gasoline tanks of motor vehicles, pump stations, as well as industrial neighbourhoods full of flammable and toxic materials. India's highest concentration of chemical industries is in the trans-Thane creek area, which has over 2000 factories. Central Bombay itself is home to several mills.

Besides chemical industries, India's largest nuclear laboratory, the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, is in Trombay, just outside Bombay. A nuclear explosion in the vicinity of the reactors or the reprocessing plant or radioactive waste/spent fuel storage facilities could lead to the release of a large amount of radioactivity in addition to the quantities resulting from the explosion itself. This would increase the amounts of fallout tremendously.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, black rain carrying radioactive fallout descended after the explosion. Bombay, being close to the sea, has high levels of water vapour in the atmosphere. This could lead to water droplets condensing around radioactive particles and descending as rain soon after the blast.

Since the direction of wind is variable, it is not easy to predict which areas would be subject to high levels of ra-



radioactivity. The regions subject to high levels of fallout would have high levels of casualties and radiation sickness. But, even people who live in areas subject to lower levels of radiation, unless they are immediately evacuated, would be victims of radiation sickness. Given the large population of Bombay and the likely damage to transportation infrastructure (train stations and tracks, roads, petrol stations, dockyards, airports, etc), the evacuation of all inhabitants would be nearly impossible.

According to the 1991 census, the population of Greater Bombay is 9.9 million. If the satellite city of Thane is also included, the population goes up to 12.6 million. Since the growth of Bombay's population in the preceding decade was a little over 20 percent, it is safe to assume that these numbers are significantly conservative.

The Corporation of Bombay lists the area of the city as 438 square kilometres, which leads to an average population density of about 23,000 people per square kilometre. However, there are areas where the population density exceeds 100,000 people per square kilometre. These figures, however, do not take into account the commuters who flood in and out of Bombay every day, from as far away as Pune. A daytime attack (which is more likely than a nighttime one) would, therefore, trap tens of thousands more in the blast and fireball.

Assuming these population densities, one would conservatively expect somewhere between 150,000 to 800,000 deaths within a few weeks of the explosion, resulting from just one small 15-kiloton nuclear device. If the weapon

used had a yield of 150 kilotons, then the immediate deaths would go up to anywhere between two to six million. These would be the "prompt" casualties (those who die within a few weeks of the explosion). Many more would die of long-term effects, especially of radiation-related causes leading to leukemia, thyroid cancer, breast cancer, lung cancer and so on. There would also be numerous non-fatal health effects such as growth of keloids, cataracts, malformations and other birth defects, mental retardation in young children, and so on.

It is important to understand that the medical facilities of Bombay, extremely inadequate in the best of circumstances, would be mostly dysfunctional due to the attack. It is extremely unlikely that those injured in the nuclear attack would find medical treatment to help them survive.

The immense catastrophe which would result from a nuclear blast over Bombay, that too resulting from just a single-fission weapon of a low yield, should give pause to those who contemplate use of such weapons in warfare in South Asia. △

*M.V. Ramana is with the Security Studies Programme, Centre for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This is an excerpt from a report which will be published by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.*

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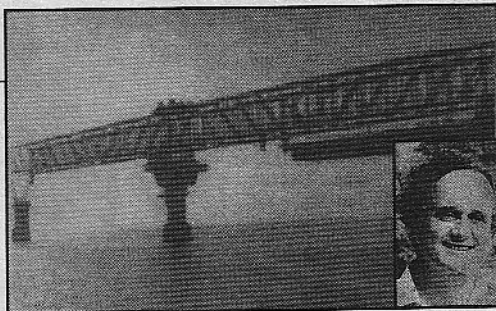
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# Tully crosses the Bridge



Mark Tully, radio personality and raconteur, was there on 23 June 1998 when Bangladesh opened its great bridge over the Brahmaputra (Jamuna), northwest of Dhaka. He contributed this piece to *The Independent of Dhaka*.

AS SOON AS I heard about the opening of the Jamuna Bridge, I said to myself, I want to be there. I had been a witness to so much of Bangladesh's history, happy occasions and sad too, successes and tragedies, that I felt I could not miss this milestone. Milestone it certainly is. A river always thought too treacherous to bridge has been bridged.

The north-west, once the market garden of Calcutta, will be able to send its produce to the great cities of Bangladesh. Those wanting to travel quickly from east to west have an alternative to tedious queues at airports. An important link in the Asian Highway and Railway has been put in place.

What pleases me particularly is that Bangladesh Railways have been preserved from disaster. If they had not convinced the donor agencies who thought railways had no future that they were wrong, Bangladesh Railways would not have been given a berth on the bridge. That would have meant the final surrender to roads.

As it is I travelled on the first train from the Bangabandhu West to Bangabandhu East and on that train I was given a colourful magazine which explained how the railways planned to use the bridge as the spearhead of their campaign to rationalise the gauges in Bangladesh and take broad gauge to Dhaka and Chittagong.

As the train proceeded over the bridge, I asked my friend Prof Sahajahan of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, a member of the expert panel which has been advising the bridge builders, why we were going so slow. He replied we had to go carefully as we were the first fully loaded train to cross the bridge. We crossed safely enough.

The bridge is a real achievement for Bangladesh. First of all Bangladesh had to persuade the donors it was economically justified. Then the government, Bangladesh contractors and Bangladesh engineers had to collaborate at all stages with the companies building the bridge. All these could have gone badly wrong, but they didn't and the Bridge's Engineer Dick Tappin described the opening of the bridge to me as a triumph for Bangladesh.

I was only saddened that the opening ceremony seemed to be confined to the good and the great and to us journalists, who always manage to gate-crash parties like these. But I

needn't have worried. After the Prime Minister's helicopter took off and the lorry loads of securitymen drove away, the bridge was claimed by its rightful owners, the people of Bangladesh. They brought the returning train to a halt rushing the track to clamber on to the engine and the carriages. They leapt into lorries and climbed on the roofs of the buses. Many were content just to walk. One young student from Tangail was crossing the bridge bare-footed in its honour. An old man had come from Dhaka "just to see our new bridge". Two students from Rajshahi were bowled over by the engineers' achievement. "Its magnificent," they said.

But I have only one doubt. Some autorickshaws and cars were already proceeding westward down the eastward lanes. The pedestrians were impeding the free flow of traffic. The engineers believe they have taken all the possible vagaries of the Jamuna into account. But have they taken into account the enthusiasm of Bangladeshis for their new bridge and the strange ways of Bangladeshi drivers?

## South by Southwest

**GEO-POLITICS IS** often guilty of imposing macro-regional divisions where the small fish choke anonymously in the bellies of the big ones. The rescue act must involve, among other things, baptismal rites in the form of new regional labels for the neglected lot. So how about "Southwest Asia"?

Not so long ago (April 1997), this magazine, quoting a Maldivian diplomat, had suggested the term "South South Asia" to define the areas of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The idea was to salvage the south of the Subcontinent from the overbearing shadows of the north.

Lending another fresh angle to regional labelling is the Netherlands-based International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), which, in its Newsletter, has carved out a new identity for the scattered Indian Ocean archipelago of Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritius, Réunion and Seychelles. This is your Insular Southwest Asia.



The origin of the term, as explained by editor Sandra Evers, has much to do with the fact that both Asian and African studies have neglected this part of the world as it did not fit conveniently into their sense of regional divisions. Thus the term was coined in an attempt to stimulate "expanded and better coordinated research programmes on the Southwest Indian Ocean". This linkage, Evers avers, would also throw new light on Southwest Asia's bordering areas - Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Arabo-Persian world, as

well as the African continent - as the archipelago's inhabitants have ancestors from all over the world, making it a "juxtaposition of civilisations".

But then, if the archipelago's citizens own up to a pan-continental culture, why should they be seen as Asians? Evers says the Southwest Indian Ocean should be seen as an integral part of Asia "because the Asian linguistic, social and cultural influences obviously reached further than the South Asian region".

One thing comes to mind though. If it is to be Southwest Asia, could it not just as easily be South-east Africa? Maybe both.



# Another Kashmiri avatar

**THE KASHMIR POT** is overflowing. After the grandstanding by the nuclear greats of South Asia, words of war between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory have recorded new decibel figures. Sanity would seem an extinct entity on both sides. But in Kashmir itself, there still struggle a few voices of sobriety. Like Shabir Shah's.

The Kashmiri leader – perhaps the most popular one in the Valley – has been treading a difficult path, between the Indian state on the one hand and Islamic fundamentalism on the other. In late May, Shah again hit the headlines after he floated a brand new outfit called the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party. (He had earlier been expelled from the All Party Hurriyat Conference.)

Shah also surprised many by offering unconditional talks with the Indian government, and by agreeing to participate in Kashmir polls if they are conducted by non-government agencies. Shah displayed a philanthropic bent as well, donating INR 10 million to a newly formed trust towards the rehabilitation of families affected by the insurgency in the state.

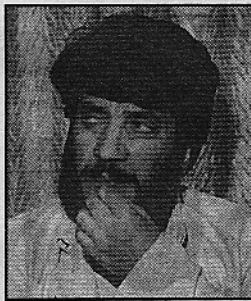
Interestingly, Shah's announcement died in the press. With the Delhi-based journalists and columnists participating in the nuclear drama with weighty comments and reportage, Shah's significant announcement was neglected by the press. It also seemed that across the border, in Pakistan too, Shah's announcement got short shrift. What was clear, once again, was that the establishment in both countries prefer to ignore matters when Kashmiris talk about their own vision for the region, rather than Islamabad's or New Delhi's.

It was a daily from India's South,

*The Deccan Herald*, which took the initiative to carry an interview with Shabir Shah in its 31 May magazine section. Excerpts of that interview:

*Deccan Herald: Soon after forming the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party, you announced that you would take part in elections provided they are conducted by non-government organisations of the country. Is it not a shift in your policy?*

**Shabir Shah:** I want to make it clear that my party is not interested in forming any government in Jammu and Kashmir. We want polls only to elect true representatives of people, who can hold dialogue with the governments of India and Pakistan to solve the Kashmir issue. It is true that like the Hurriyat Conference leaders I was advocating elections under UN supervision till recently. But this is practically impossible. India is a great country with great people living in it. Why shouldn't we ask them to conduct the polls and see who really the representatives of the people are?



A wrong impression has been created outside the state that Dr Farooq Abdullah's National Conference is the true representative party of the people and that separatist leaders only preach violence and do not believe in peace and democracy. We have to remove this misconception... I feel that there is a serious need to review our course of action. There is no wisdom in binding oneself blindly to an emotional approach that gives nothing except distancing us from our logical objective.

*DH: But other separatist leaders, particularly that of the Hurriyat Conference, have strongly criticised your willingness to take part in polls*

*DH: But other separatist leaders, particularly that of the Hurriyat Conference, have strongly criticised your willingness to take part in polls*

*and describe it as a sell out?*

**Shah:** My conscience is clear. I do not need any certificate from Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Gani Lone or Yasin Malik. Geelani and Lone are former legislators. They contested elections and took oath under the Indian Constitution when I launched the movement and was in jail. Yasin Malik has also shown faith in Indian democracy when he was the polling agent of Syed Sallahu Din (now chief of Hizbul Mujahideen), during the 1987 Assembly polls. Had I to sell the movement to Government of India, I would have done it in 1994 when I was released from jail and my popularity graph was high.

*DH: Since you have formed the new party, what is your basic programme?*

**Shah:** We believe that Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed issue whose political future is yet to be decided by its own people. My party will work for a permanent, peaceful and lasting solution to this problem, safe return of migrant Kashmiri pandits, and stopping of human rights violations. But it is essential that the people be provided an atmosphere free from any kind of pressure, so that they can decide their political future. We believe that a meaningful dialogue can evolve a permanent, just and lasting solution to the Kashmir issue.

*DH: If the Central government invites you for talks, will you accept the invitation?*

**Shah:** Yes, provided they are unconditional. We cannot close our doors and expect a solution to the problem. A breakthrough was possible when the then prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral and Defence Minister George Fernandes offered unconditional dialogue. But, unfortunately, both of them backtracked for unknown reasons. The Government of India will have to give up its rigid stance and initiate an unconditional dialogue with the true representatives of the people of Jammu and Kashmir... Look, India and Pakistan have now become nuclear powers and made their people more vulnerable. In fact Kashmir issue forced both the countries to conduct the tests... This is very unfortunate.



# Visa veil

**DON'T BUY THE** well-spun, well-doctored rhetoric of "enhancing regional cooperation" that has come from the SAARC Summit in Colombo. Instead, as an ordinary citizen of a member country, try getting a visa for another. The chances are you will not. That's the irony of it all – while South Asia's political and diplomatic elite show off the wonder umbrella that is SAARC, for the ordinary citizen, it leaks in the worst possible way.

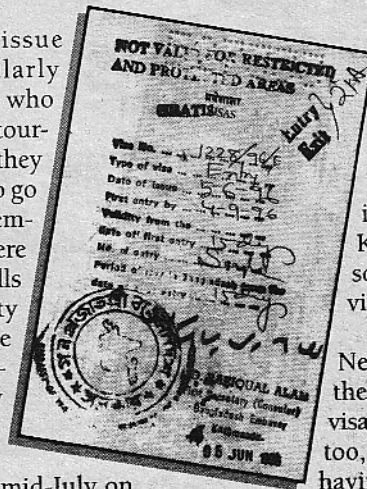
The observation is not made out of cynicism, but compelled by recent events which saw a conference in Dhaka being cancelled, and some journalists failing to make it to Colombo – for the frustrating reason that (in each case) the host country dithered over issuing visas.

As far as the Colombo Summit was concerned, apparently an 'advisory' had gone out to Sri Lankan high commissions (and embassies) in the

region not to issue visas, particularly to media. Those who wanted to go as tourists were asked if they might not want to go a week later. Seemingly, the hosts were responding to calls for extra security from the state delegations attending the party in Colombo.

A conference was planned for mid-July on "Regional Consultation on Minority Rights in South Asia" by the Kathmandu-based South Asian Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) and the Dhaka-based human rights body, ODHAKAR. After giving the go-ahead to the conference, some unknown hand in the Government of Bangladesh went about sabotaging it.

In Colombo, the Sri Lankan delegates to the conference were given their visas in a jiffy, and even invited



to tea with the High Commissioner. In New Delhi, the Indians also got theirs, after waiting for four days. Four Pakistanis had no problems, but when it came to the fifth one, Khaled Ahmed, an editor of some repute, the ink on the visa seals just dried up.

In Kathmandu, the three Nepali participants waited till the cows came home, but no visas. Three members of SAFHR, too, suffered the same fate, not having been given visas ("denied" would be the wrong term, for the Embassy was awaiting "word from Dhaka"). Says a SAFHR member, "They never said 'no', they just didn't give the visas."

Sufficiently suffused with the 'SAARC spirit', the minorities rights conference has been rescheduled for the third week of August, this time in Kathmandu. It is now up to Nepali officialdom to redefine the spirit of regional cooperation.

## Operation Gandhara



**INDIA AND PAKISTAN** may have hit the nadir in political ties, but in some realms friendship is budding. The vehicle of the bonhomie is that prodigious fount of aesthetic charms – Gandhara art, the sudden flowering of expressive culture at the beginning of the Christian era which has influenced much of the art that followed in the Subcontinent.

Today, of course, no discussion of the Buddhist Gandhara art can proceed without the presence of art historians and archaeologists from the decidedly Muslim state of Pakistan. For, it was on the west bank of Indus, and in the valleys of Peshawar, Swat, Buner and Bejaur that this art form with all its Hellenistic and Roman influences, originated. It was here that Gandhara made its most important contribution – the creation of Buddha images inspired by the Yaksha figures of yore.

Thus, when India's Chandigarh recently hosted an exhibition-

cum-colloquium on Gandhara art, the presence of Pakistani experts was but natural. At the meeting, there was a lot of welcome talk on the need for collaborative work between Pakistani and Indian artists. It was agreed that younger cultural scholars of both countries should get together to fashion fresh approaches to Gandhara art.

Listen to Professor Dar, director of the Lahore Museum: "Scholars from India and Pakistan have to work together. Pakistani scholars are fresh in ideas and materials and the Indian scholars have a deep background in indigenous literature, to which we do not have an easy access. There has to be synthesis at work."

So, while competitive nuclear detonations go off in desert and hill, elsewhere there is a reaching back to the Subcontinent's undivided heritage of art and archaeology. The Buddha would have smiled.



# The king's new clothes

ON 29 JUNE, Bhutan's Tshongdu, the National Assembly, voted for itself the power to vote a king out of office to pave the way for the next in line for succession. The king, in the current instance, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, will henceforth have to seek a mandatory vote of confidence from the Tshongdu on a regular basis.

The resolution, pushed on an apparently reluctant house by King Jigme through a *kasho* (royal edict), paved the way for an elected cabinet with complete executive powers to hold office for a five-year term. "This is certainly a major benchmark for Bhutan," says long-time Hongkong-based Bhutan watcher Brian Shaw. "(It will) go a long way to take Bhutan towards a more representative form of government."

That is a point of view that fails to find favour with dissidents fighting for "genuine democracy" in Bhutan. According to Thinley Penjore, leader with the exile group United Front for Democracy, the seeds of reform were actually sown by the present king's father, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. Back in 1953, he had established the Tshongdu, and, 15 years later, given up the power of royal veto to empower the Assembly to force a royal abdication. It was his son King Jigme Singye who introduced "royal absolutism" upon ascending the throne, says the dissident.

According to Tshongdu secretary Tashi Phuntsho, the recent reforms do indeed follow from the process of decentralisation of decision-making started by King Jigme Dorji. The late king's suggestion that the Assembly should have the powers to vote out a sitting monarch by a two-third majority proposal could not be pushed through, recalls Phuntsho, because members thought it was "not safe to disturb the institution of monarchy".

The announced changes are an eyewash put forward by a wily admin-

istration to divert attention from the festering refugee situation and the need for genuine democracy within Bhutan, says the exile leadership. The king is merely seeking to bolster Bhutan's image in the eyes of the world, particularly with the donor community, says Penjore.

He adds, "This is a rubber stamp National Assembly, the new cabinet ministers are also handpicked by the



King Jigme Dorji the Reformer.

King. If Wangchuk is serious about democracy, he should dissolve the Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council and hold fresh elections to them in a fair manner."

Bhutan cannot be expected to get into fast forward towards multi-party democracy all of a sudden, says Shaw, who has been writing sympathetically about the Bhutanese government over the years. Having attended many Tshongdu sessions, he sees a "distinct change" in the approach of its members. Says Shaw, "Those who would hide behind pillars now attack ministers for lapses and even disagree

with the king on crucial issues."

Ratan Gazmere, chief of the Appeal Movement Coordination Council, another leading Bhutanese dissident group, expects the so-called reforms to be harbingers of an intensified reign of terror in the south and the east of the country, where the restive Lhotshampa (Nepali-speakers) and Sarchop communities are concentrated. Gazmere points out that the new cabinet does not have a single Lhotshampa, indicating clear bias against a significant population group.

Indeed, it seems clear from the makeup of the new cabinet (containing two Sarchop members) that King Jigme and his advisers are trying to placate the Sarchop while settling for a hard line against the Lhotshampas. Indeed, a Tshongdu resolution advocating a tough stand on the so-called *ngolops* (anti-nationals) matter suggests a crackdown in the offing.

Such is the suspicion with which the dissidents regard the government that the announcement that King Jigme would not attend the SAARC Summit in late July, too, was taken with a pinch of salt. The king is said to have stayed home to usher in the changes recently announced, and preferred to send his "head of government", the former diplomat Jigme Thinley, to represent Bhutan among the leaders at Colombo.

To the dissident leaders, this was merely further proof of the Thimphu regime's public relations acumen, drawing attention to the announced changes while at the same time avoiding uncomfortable discussions of the Lhotshampa refugee matter with the Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

For the moment, in the war of words between the exiles and the Drukpa government, it does seem advantage King Jigme.

-Subir Bhaumik

# Beware of men

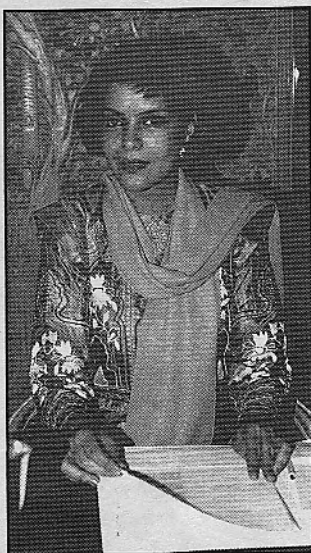
**ZEENAT AMAN**, THE Indian screen's glamour queen of the 1970s recently called a press conference to reveal how she was beaten up by relatives of her ex-husband, whom she divorced some months ago. Among those involved in the attack was her own 11-year-old son, who, she said, had been abducted and brainwashed by her former husband, the ailing bit actor Mazhar Khan.

The actress' experience, in her own words, served to focus some attention on the wide prevalence of violence against women. Said Zeenat Aman: "This has happened to me despite the fact that I belong to the privileged society. I am now realising the fate of women and children not belonging to such a well-off background who have undergone similar experiences."

According to the World Health Organisation, on a worldwide scale, one in five women has been physically or sexually abused by a man at some time in her life. Most abusers are husbands, fathers, neighbours and colleagues rather than strangers. Gender violence causes more death and disability among women aged between 16 and 44 years than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or even war.

It is well acknowledged that violence against women in urban India is endemic, with beatings and molestations of spouses, household help, and even relatives. Zeenat Aman's case reveals how social and economic barriers account for nothing in such instances.

The breaking down of traditional gender roles due to the changing economic patterns of society is said to trigger violence in many instances. Its source lies in the husband's inability to fit into the "provider" role. Women's groups are also discovering a definite link between male impotence and violence against women. For example, the Mahila Samakhya



Battered woman:  
Zeenat Aman

project in Rajasthan found that a large number of battered women they worked with were subjected to violence because their husbands were impotent.

As a state, Rajasthan is notorious for its ill-treatment of women and its low female-to-male ratio. The tiny desert state has one of the highest rates of atrocities committed against women. There, in 1996, the registered cases of crime against women amounted to 10,603. Child marriage, female infanticide and foeticide are common. And it was in this state where the infamous sati incident took place 10 years ago.

Rajasthan is presently embroiled in one particularly shocking instance of multiple rape carried out over several years, in which the fact that the people involved are related to an influential legislator has kept the case from being tried. The case took a complex turn when the victim retracted her statement, embarrassing the Mahila Atyachar Virodhi Mandal, a forum of 40 women's groups in Rajasthan, which had taken up the cause.

However, an activist involved with the group, Kavita Srivastava, says that the retraction cannot erase the brutal reality of the victim's gangrape, nor the fact that this reality is repeated many times over daily in her state and in the rest of India. Between the celluloid siren and a Rajasthani belle, are the hundreds of thousands of women in India who daily suffer abuse, quietly.

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**Nikhil Chakravarty**

# Two South Asian stalwarts



**Mahbub ul Haq**

*a tribute by Javed Jabbar*

**W**ith the passing away of Nikhil Chakravarty and Mahbub ul Haq less than three weeks apart, on 27 June and 16 July, South Asia has lost two outstanding individuals who belonged to different countries yet shared a deep commitment to the region.

While the fact that Nikhil Chakravarty was Indian and Mahbub ul Haq was Pakistani underlines their distinct national identities within South Asia, their personal attributes were so universal and humanistic that they rose above the variances to define the large, singular vision of which they, and all of us, are intrinsic parts.

The two were born in territories (Nikhil Chakravarty in Bengal and Mahbub ul Haq in Jammu) which at one time or another experienced the pain of Partition and the emergence of a new identity. This experience perhaps accentuated their struggle for a unifying conceptual approach that respects national individuality while promoting a fraternal consensus on fundamental issues of social justice.

Though they shared high values and ideals, the two personalities evolved their perspectives through sharply contrasting institutional processes. Nikhil Chakravarty

initially worked in the political sphere on the specific ideological basis of communism and of the Left, to eventually concentrate on journalism and the media. Mahbub ul Haq began by working in the Planning Commission in the Government of Pakistan and then went to work in the World Bank in Washington DC and at UNDP in New York. In the 1980s, Mahbub ul Haq participated directly in the political process of Pakistan by becoming a member of the Senate and of the Cabinet.

Where the one had space and freedom to express his views, the other for the most part was more circumscribed by being part of official national and global organisations. But both articulated their particular concerns without being inhibited by, in one case, party ideology or discipline, and in the other by conventional constraints of employment and public office. Both were candid and outspoken in their writings and speeches because they believed that the truth should transcend all obstacles.

Without the privileges of large sums of inherited wealth, without the special perks and silver spoons which normally fuel young people in pursuit of overseas education,

these two men worked hard and long; by sheer dint of their own intelligence and perseverance they reached each stage of their lives on merit alone.

Men often become remarkable because they are fortunate to be the spouses of exceptional women. In both instances here the wives shared insights as much as their surnames; they shaped lives as well as minds, and retained their identities and perspectives even as they helped their men advocate their causes. Whether it was Renu Chakravarty, who represented the Communist Party of India with admirable devotion in the Lok Sabha between 1952 and 1967 and then went on to invigorate the women's movement until her sad demise in 1994, or whether it is Khadija Haq, who has made valuable contributions to the Society for International Development, to the North-South Roundtable (which she chairs in New York), or to the Human Development Centre in Islamabad (of which she is executive director), the two women were part of their spouses' ideas and actions.

### **Young Nikhil**

Nikhil Chakravarty saw about 20 years more of life in his 84 years

than Mahbub ul Haq did in his 64. The Indian crusader was already an engaged political activist at 33 when Independence came to India and Pakistan in 1947, whereas Mahbub ul Haq, at 13, was still at school but already showing signs of brilliance.

Age separated but did not divide them. The elder of the two formulated his worldview and his empathy for the poor on the basis of a political ideology which had swept across Russia and China, while the younger one evolved his commitment to the poor while working in the insulating confines of government and multilateral institutions which are firmly rigid and exclusivist in their orientation. Both men were dissenters from the formal political thought processes of their respective countries and areas of professional endeavour. Yet both had a sense of maturity and balance to articulate bold and radical approaches without urging violent destruction.

Nikhil Chakravarty was widely respected overseas by those who knew him but he concentrated on working in his own country, whose size, diversity and vicissitudes offered numerous causes which required attention. He began by becoming an elder statesman of Indian journalism who opposed the imposition of the Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 as also the attempt by her son Rajiv Gandhi about a decade later to pass the Anti-Defamation Bill. At the same time he took detailed interest in the problems faced by journalists in small towns and in local publications, providing the weight of his personality to the positions they had taken and helping them through difficulties. As founding editor of *Mainstream*, the journal whose gloss was in its deliberative content rather than on its cover, he expressed the insights that come from quiet contemplation of serious themes.

This writer became personally acquainted with Nikhil Chakravarty quite belatedly, about 10 years ago, and worked closely with him in the formation of the South Asian Media Association (SAMA) in Colombo in 1991. We worked closely together the past eight years to organise

regular gatherings of media practitioners and specialists from the countries of South Asia. These were the first meetings of their kind.

Nikhil Chakravarty visited Karachi in November 1992 for one such seminar and I remember taking him with other delegates to see Benazir Bhutto, who by then had become the leader of the opposition. He listened to her and put questions to her with the curiosity of a young journalist. When he came as a SAARC election observer to Pakistan in 1993 and 1997, he showed the energy and enthusiasm of a young man. In December 1997, in New Delhi when we met for what has turned out to be the last time, we elected him chairman of SAMA for 1998-99.

### Humanist economist

In contrast, my association with Mahbub ul Haq began over 30 years ago and covered personal, professional and political spheres. There were also close family relations. Even though we went into different and opposing political positions and parties, we held common views on a number of issues, particularly in the development sector.

As an economist, Mahbub ul Haq got off to a notable start, winning the Adam Smith prize in 1954 and securing a First from Cambridge in 1955 to go on to become one of the most distinguished international analysts of change. He had an extraordinary capacity to express basic themes and realities in precise, powerfully evocative concepts and statements.

From the first famous formulation that most of the wealth generated in Pakistan in the 1960s had enriched only "22 families", through the publication of his several books including the one called *The Poverty Curtain* in 1976 to the landmark invention of the Human Development Index and the editing of the Human Development Reports this decade, Mahbub ul Haq was able to transform dry-as-dust data into strong, emotive material that touched the heart and the mind.

Working with Robert McNamara at the World Bank in the 1970s, he was able to help sensitise a cold

commercial lending institution to the concerns of the poor in the Third World. As Minister of Finance with prime minister Mohammed Khan Junejo, he introduced the concept of levying a special import duty on all goods to promote education through the Iqra surcharge and also suggested the introduction of an agricultural income tax which regrettably precipitated his transfer to the Ministry of Planning and Development. He returned for a brief period to the finance portfolio until Zia's death in August 1988.

With the Human Development Report, published by UNDP, Mahbub ul Haq reached the zenith of his work. He drew together all the diverse economic and social processes to place them under an unrelenting scrutiny in purely human terms.

In 1996, Mahbub ul Haq moved to Islamabad and established the Human Development Centre. Immediately, he commenced publication of a series of ground-breaking reports on facets of the South Asian reality. This writer was privileged to serve as a member of the National Advisory Council of this Centre. In my last conversation with him a few weeks before his demise, he had broached an entirely new and exciting concept to promote regional cooperation. He was also on the verge of upgrading his highly successful Foundation of Science and Technology, which runs a number of computer education institutions, into a full-fledged university.

Nikhil Chakravarty and Mahbub ul Haq were deeply devoted to their respective countries and yet never displayed their patriotism on their sleeves. They carried their national identity with dignity and confidence. Both had the rare ability to listen to extremes of criticism and observation with patience and good humour. In their charm and their warmth, they remained very special people.

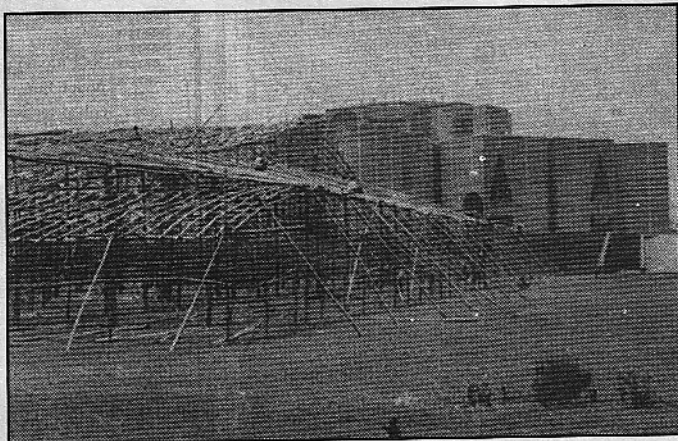
The world at large and South Asia in particular have lost two great men. Let us hope that the ideas and sentiments they represented will be renewed and applied in the years ahead.



POLITICIANS WHO insist on opening never-ending series of inaugurations by lighting the **inaugural lamps** deserve pictures this awful. This one shows Prime Minister G.P. Koirala of Nepal and a lady (who has just handed him the match) peering into a void.



I WOULD NEVER forgive this one. The *Daily Star* of Dhaka reports that the lush green south plaza of the Sangsad Bhawan (Parliament House) was recently invaded by a huge *pandal*, a massive tent of bamboo and canvas for a ruling party political rally. On 22 May, **15,000 local politicians** of the Dhaka region assembled to hear the national ministers pontificate. For six hours' worth of political gas, the Public Health Engineering Department dug up the soil and palm roots to put up 100 temporary latrines. Poor taste. Politicians who can desecrate thus are hardly the kind who can rule a country well, I think. That's a personal opinion.



IN AN OTHERWISE insightful review in *Outlook* of V.S. Naipaul's new book *Beyond Belief: Excursions among the Converted Peoples*, Shahid Amin (or his editors) makes a small slip. He writes, "...the progeny of migrants from such villages as Boorah Dih and Pandepar, Paikauli and Malaon in the **Nepal terai districts of north India**." I suspect that a preposition has been misplaced, and we are talking of "...in the Nepal terai districts north of India." In which case Nepali nationalists will not be very chagrined. They have enough territorial worries on their hands right now (read *Kalapani*) without having to deal with contested lands in the terai. For those who do not know 'terai' (alternatively spelt 'tarai'), it is the plains region immediately contiguous to east-west Himalayan foothills. Called 'duars' in Assam and West Bengal, 'terai' takes over from Nepal westwards, and is even used as far as the Pakistani Punjab, although most people in Lahore did not seem to know of the term when I was there recently.

AS YOU KNOW, **Dilip Kumar (Yusuf Khan)**, born in Peshawar, was back in the land of the pure recently to receive an award from the Pakistan Government. While there, he told *The News* of his views on Indo-Pak politics, "Both countries realise



that we cannot afford to be hostile and cannot afford war. What about water, food, shelter and education of our people?" Well, soon Atalji, and thereafter Mian Saheb, gave a proper answer to Mr Kumar with their nuke blasts. But maybe there is still hope for Bollywood to rescue the Subcontinent, for the actor told the newspaper that he was willing to make a film in Pakistan "if it has a proper theme and not one where you go around trees". Maybe going round trees is what we all need more of than digging deep pits and detonating various fission devices. Yusuf-saab, perhaps we should just tell Mithun Chakraborty to continue to entwine himself around trunks of trees and torsos of leading ladies - that's better than watching Atal Behari acting macho macho.

RECENTLY HAD OCCASION to fly through Dubai, whose duty-free shopping, by the way, does not match its hype. Had occasion to pick up the *Khaleej Times* and *Gulf News* and was interested to note that these are really *desi* newspapers. The news is all tilted towards South Asia (Indo-Pak, mostly), all the society events covered have to do with Z-tv, Usha Uthup and ustad this and ustad that. The mail columns are full of Patels, Chowdhurys and Khans.

THE *DECCAN HERALD* provides a breath of **fresh southern air**. In its sports pages, I found a refreshing focus on hockey in May and June even while the rest of the Subcontinent was given over to soccer frenzy, listening and seeing nothing else. Day after day in May, the paper courageously covered the *other* World Cup, that of hockey, being played in Utrecht. Bravo, *DH*. Clap, clap.

ON THE MATTER of the **grass always being greener** in some other corner of South Asia than one's own, found this interesting letter written to the *Daily Star* by an American journalist just arrived in Dhaka from Pakistan:

*What amuses me often are the envious comparisons the Pakistani press makes about Bangladesh. As you know more and more Pakistanis are focusing on the events of 1971, and there is a touch of envy in almost every reference to Bangladesh, whether it is to the garment exports, the success with encouraging elementary school attendance by putting a cell in the Prime Minister's office, the*



*Grameen Bank, or the tenacious hold of parliamentary government in Dhaka, despite the blips on the screen. Affairs are pretty grim in Pakistan, and the grass looks a lot greener elsewhere.*

HERE'S MY NOMINATION for the **best picture** of the recent past, a snap by Alwin Singh of *The Pioneer* in Delhi, that tottering paper suspected to have been taken over by the BJP. Be that as it may, as Kathmandu's English columnists love to say to show off their English while saying nothing at all, the picture's subject is the Ali Sena activists in Delhi protesting the government's failure to tackle the "water and power crisis" in the Indian capital. Hey, didn't they know that there was a nuclear test on, those anti-nationals!



I HAVE BEEN looking for someone sensible who will trash the current **pantheon of South Asians authors** who have made it in the world of English literature in the West. Such a person has now been identified, via an article in *The Sunday Island* of Colombo. He is Belanwila O.T. Perera, a writer in Sinhala and a former maths teacher and very forthright in his views. First off, I like it when he says that he writes in Sinhala "in order to import some of the critical thought and ideas hovering in English speaking circles to a Sri Lanka audience." My sentiments on what is needed in the **Vernacular Subcontinent** exactly. As for his low regard for "post-modernist writers from the Subcontinent," here is his score card:

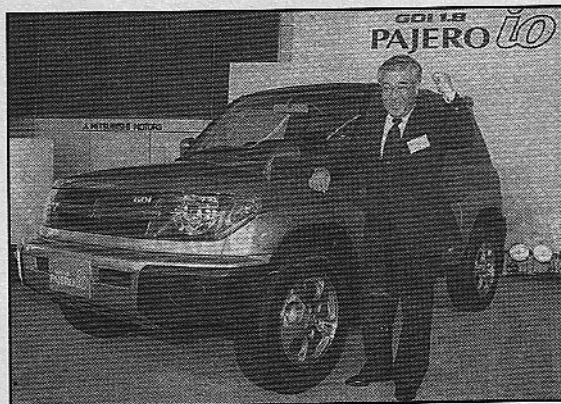
*Salman Rushdie: "I found it difficult what he was trying to say in Midnight's Children."*

*Michael Ondaatje and Arundhati Roy: "Ondaatje and Roy, I think, are beating about the bush too much. They paint on a limited canvas."*

*Romesh Gunasekara: "He is much more closer to the local audience, but he is dwelling on the surface of issues."*

READ THIS. A recent headline in the *Colombo Island* said that 1997 was the "best year" ever for the **poultry** industry in the island. For the industry, I will take their word. But did anyone remember to ask the chicken? I cannot confirm it, but I dare suggest that the fowl would respond in the negative!

YET ANOTHER HEADLINE from Colombo, this one from *The Sunday Observer*: "**After President's Directive: Suicide rate on decline.**" If only things were that easy in the rest of South Asia. The next time I am in Bhutan, I will



ask King Jigme to ask his subjects to stop watching sub-standard videos; and the next time in Kathmandu I will tell King Birendra to order that Nepali politicians to stop riding Pajeros; and flying down to Male, I will tell Mr Gayoom to demand that the process of global warming be halted forthwith.

I HAVE WRITTEN before of how Pakistani ad agencies use ingenious tricks to show **female curves** without

showing too much skin. Well, this one from Sri Lanka takes the cake for the sexual connection being made. "Feminists" (wrote one headline writer) in Colombo are up in arms against the Philips company for an ad which tries to sell its light bulbs (you know, the regular globular ones) with the catch line "Curves as shapely as a sizzling model's". The picture depicts the sexy torso of said model. I'm scratching my head (only, honest) here trying to see the link between the curvaceousness of a light bulb and good, long-lasting and economical lighting. Wonder how the copywriter would describe a tube light, nudge nudge.



HERE IS AN announcement which will bring forth feelings of great satisfaction among corrupt politicians, kick-back merchants and donor-sahebs of South Asia. Mitsubishi Motors has come out with the new **Pajero iO**. How lovely, now that we all know that in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (India as yet spared) development cannot happen without the Mitsubishi Pajero (or at the very least the Toyota Land Cruiser). So, let's get out that chequebook and get ourselves a

*Pajero io*. Oh look, it is powered by Mitsubishi's "fuel-efficient 1.8 litre gasoline direct injection engine"! Oh look, its basic version is priced at no more than 1,598,020 yen, or USD 11,020! Er, how much is the non-basic version? I think the kick-back can manage it for me.

- *Chhetria Patrakar*



# Good ink for bad blood

The vernacular idiom expresses emotion far better than it does reason.

by *Khaled Ahmed*

Indian and Pakistani media were state-dominated to begin with. Since most of the population is not yet literate, it watches television and listens to the radio, which means that the state is still the great communicator. TV and radio on both sides have been hostile to each other, and there never was any subtlety in the propaganda unleashed on each other. There never was any effort to persuade the people on the other side of the border to look at one's country as a good country. Both sides decided to malign each other.

After 50 years of negative portrayal of each other, populations on both sides are totally convinced of the evil-country-next-door thesis. Pakistan's thesis is simple and ideological: India is inhabited by Hindus who were against the formation of Pakistan, Hindu religion is inferior to Islam, Hindu leadership in India dismembered Pakistan and is still at it. The Indian thesis had to be different because it couldn't attack religion, so its thesis is that of destabilisation: Pakistan is an agent of bigger enemies elsewhere (the United States, China) and wants to destroy India's pluralist society.

The result is that both the media have convinced their own populations without having any effect across the border. They have been inward-looking, limited only to brainwashing their own societies. A part of India receives Pakistan's TV and radio broadcast, but after decades of being subjected to Pakistani propaganda no one in India is favourably

inclined towards Pakistan. In Pakistan, the VCR revolution has brought Indian films to people at the district and *tehsil* levels, and the Indian entertainment TV channels are watched in Pakistan more than PTV is, but the people remain totally convinced of the evil-country-next-door thesis.

## Vernacular nationalism

The print media in India and Pakistan has performed the same function to a lesser or a greater degree. The Urdu press of Pakistan and the Hindi press of north India are locked in a battle of two nationalist mythologies. The opinion expressed in the vernacular is close to state policy. Meanwhile, the state policy itself is moulded by the vernacular press because the parliaments of both sides are influenced more by the 'language press' than by the more sophisticated English press.

In fact, with the consolidation of democratic institutions, the influence of the English-language press has declined, and with it also the power of rational discourse. Nationalism is more effectively expressed in vernacular idioms because these idioms express emotion far better than they express reason.

The role of the secret services, too, is prominent when it comes to the

vernacular press. There are two reasons for this. First, the speaker of the vernacular is already indoctrinated in the process of negative and adversarial nation-building; second, the ground-level employees of India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) are not literate in English. In a way, two hostile nationalisms are in the process of communication through the vernacular press of India and Pakistan. Both sides are isolationist and to an extent paranoid — the two qualities of Third World nationalism.

## Same language, different uses

It is in the sector of English-language print journalism that India and Pakistan are found to be quite different. In Pakistan, freedom of the press is



of recent vintage. This freedom expresses itself in opposition to the indoctrination imposed by the state under long years of dictatorship. The English press, because of its varied sources of information, better third-party knowledge of the world

and India, and opposition to dictatorship, expresses a view alternative to the state ideology.

Rational discourse in English and its capacity to carry facts and figures have equipped the Pakistani press with tools of persuasion that puncture indoctrination at two levels: in the domain of internal policy and in the domain of foreign policy. The English press in Pakistan is frequently critical of the ideological transformation of Pakistan as well as its policy towards Kashmir and India. Criticism of the two-way theory and the Kashmir policy is possible in English, though not as yet in Urdu.

In India, the English press plays a powerful role in favour of the country's secularism. It is also extremely effective in acting as the watchdog of the government in power. But in the domain of foreign policy, and particularly of policy affecting Pakistan, there is a consensus that is unnatural given the freedom of expression available in the country.

India's English press communicates with the South Block, where for-

come from the foreign ministry. There is also a much better established mechanism for briefing the press in India than in Pakistan.

In a way, changing the attitude of the influential English press in India is going to be more difficult than in Pakistan. The attitude formation there has come about in an environment of freedom under an unbroken tradition of democratic rule. The opinion of the English press is its own and therefore deeply ingrained as conviction. The indoctrination under democracy is deeper because it gives the illusion of being genuinely 'shared' and not 'imposed'. It, however, relies on nationalism which again gives the illusion of being genuine under democracy. This accounts for the inflexibility in interpreting Pakistan as the evil-country- next-door.

On the contrary, in Pakistan, freedom after decades of dictatorship means revolt against the indoctrination imposed under coercion. It is going to be easier to actually persuade the Pakistani journalist to change his attitude as long as he thinks that this change is a result of his new-found

nothing will be more effective than arranging for more frequent visits to Pakistan. There is a quick disarmament of suspicion when a hidebound Indian journalist visits Pakistan. The problem here is that Pakistan is not institutionally geared to receive Indian journalists. If conditions are created for these visits, the greatest persuader will be what the Indian journalist sees as the ability of the Pakistani press to criticise its own government in all domains of policy.

Pakistani journalists visiting India, however, feel that the prejudice and suspicion among their Indian counterparts are too palpable to ignore. Even so, exposure to Indian society has a positive effect on journalists who have an irrational bias against India. Needless to say, the process of mutual exchange of visits will be more effective among young journalists than among the old, whose negative attitudes have become doctrines to be defended even in the face of hard facts. Moderate senior Pakistani journalists, however, can help in creating a good environment for the visits.

Perhaps the real problem would lie in the exchange of visits between the vernacular journalists on both sides. This is the field which has so far remained unexplored simply because the vernacular field is not well understood by third parties who finance the dialogues. English is the universal medium of dialogue among adversaries, but in the case of India and Pakistan, Urdu and Hindi are so closely linked that a dialogue can take place in them.

The Urdu-Hindi language is also the carrier of state propaganda and the vocabulary of two opposed nationalisms. If a dent is made in this sector, the result will be far-reaching. There is no tradition of communication between the vernacular journalists. As a result, the opinion they express is more virulent and adds more effectively to the rupture of comprehension that has taken place between Indians and Pakistanis.

One advance that has taken place on both sides is the competence with which the two opposed media criticise and reveal misgovernment at their own national level. When Paki-

freedom to think on his own. It is the natural consequence of an ideological state crumbling under freedom of expression.

### Disarming suspicions

What can be done to undo the gridlock of hostile media perception on both sides? The state-owned media are in a way incurable because governments are not prepared to give the sort of freedom necessary for change. It is in the domain of private sector media that changes can be brought about.

Luckily, this is the domain where the ability to persuade is far greater despite the disadvantage of low literacy on both sides and the consequent dependence on TV and radio.

As far as the members of the English press in India are concerned,



foreign policy is formulated. The path of persuasion is a two-way street. The big journalists - some of them experts formerly in the government - guide and mould policy, while the young journalists have taken it for granted that guidelines for Pakistan must



stani and Indian journalists met in the past, they criticised each other's country; now they tell each other what is wrong with their own governments. The possibilities of psychological disarmament using this process has not yet been fathomed to bring the two sides together.

India has the institutional capacity to invite Pakistani journalists and make them stay cheaply in India. Pakistan has no such capacity. Therefore, the expense incurred by exchange of visits is impossible to bear in Pakistan. Even third party interventions prefer the venues in India rather than in Pakistan because of budget constraints. It seems clear, therefore, that some effort must be made to institutionalise visits of Indian jour-

nalists to Pakistan.

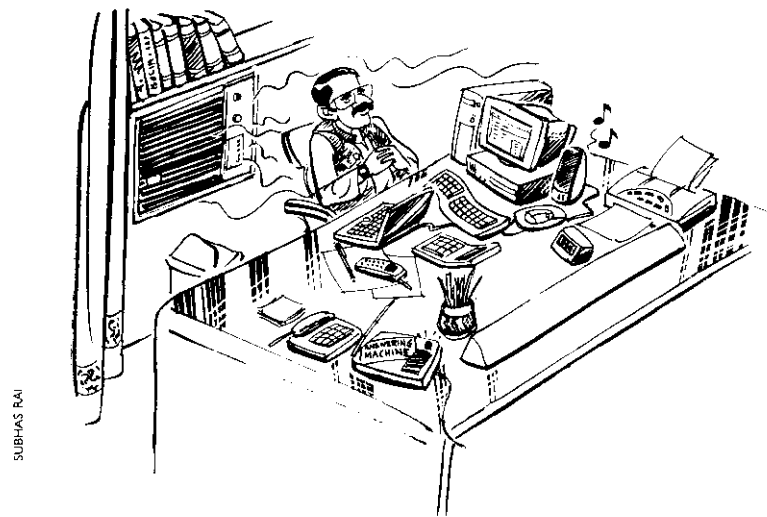
Under SAARC, Pakistan and India have agreed to exchange of publications, that is, to allow free import of each other's publications. But Pakistan has shied away from it because no one has effectively presented the case to the Pakistani press. What will be the effect of such an exchange?

The Indian English-language publications – newspapers and magazines – will find a good market in Pakistan. (Already, the smuggled Indian film magazines are bestsellers.) Once the Indian newspapers establish a market in Pakistan, they will have to arrange for coverage, which will improve their general stance and make it more balanced and less 'nationalist' in deference to new readership.

It is the Pakistani Urdu press that will benefit the most by developing a market in the other direction because of the large Urdu readership among Indian Muslims. The effect would be to bring better balance of coverage because the Pakistani editors would become sensitive to Indian readership. On balance, the Pakistani press will benefit financially in return for moderation on its ideological stance. All international publications with a world-wide market have had to defer to local ideologies and views, and this will happen in South Asia as well.

*K. Ahmed is editor of The Friday Times, Lahore.*

# Vanishing volunteerism



Voluntary work today has been distorted by big money, alien ideas and greed.

*by Bunker Roy*

**T**hirty years ago when I started doing voluntary work (digging wells for drinking water) at villages in India's Rajasthan, it was simple. No money, no prospects, no expectations – just tremendous job satisfaction. Living and working in a village was

not what 'respectable', 'normal' people did in the late 1960s and 1970s, so you were left alone. It was the best of times to try new ideas; it was the worst of times to explain what you were doing because it did not make sense to others, especially friends

and family.

Voluntary work was not considered a profession. It was associated with welfare and charity and had nothing to do with development. You took a living wage (what you need to make ends meet), not a market wage (what you are worth). Today, what people call voluntary has been corrupted by big money, compromised by alien Western methods and ideas, bought by massive foreign funds and swamped by people who are narrow-minded and greedy for recognition, for legitimacy and for financial security, sadly believing that this will attract the best (who or what decides what is best is a different matter).

Volunteerism of the kind that exists in these times suffers from moral bankruptcy. The courage to want to help the poor without taking away their dignity and self respect in a simple, direct and uncomplicated manner is just not there. Donor money has destroyed the ability to innovate, be flexible, think simple and be independent. The so-called volunteers are no different from any other profit-making body in the open market. They see no harm in being totally dependent on foreign funds, being co-opted, controlled and manipulated even as they see great danger in their own government. They look down on their village institutions that have stood the test of time because

Western education has taught them that what is progressive, modern and sustainable is what comes from the West.

The multi-million budget groups talk about transparency and accountability so long as it applies to others. Between 1984-89, in a move to make people think about financial discipline and public accountability, there was a move to draft a code of conduct for voluntary agencies by the agencies themselves. This sounded so threatening that many got together to form VANI (Voluntary Action Network India) just so that the code was not adopted. The code was welcomed by village-based groups but vehemently opposed by urban groups backed by foreign funds. The code was never adopted.

Today, the most serious issue is the total dependence on funds from outside the country. Ninety percent of these organisations would collapse if donor agencies decide to pull out. In fact, the 1980s was a turbulent decade for the voluntary sector. The Kudal Commission set up by Indira Gandhi in 1980 to look into the working of Gandhian and Sarvodaya institutions

broke the Gandhians. When they should have used the powerful weapon of non-cooperation that Gandhiji used so well and refused to submit any documents, they bent over backwards to satisfy the commission head. By the time the commission was wound up by Rajiv Gandhi in 1986, the Gandhians had lost all their credibility in the eyes of the voluntary sector. The eighties also saw the code of conduct debate splitting the sector right down the middle and the passing of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

It is now 1998, and time to look into the structural weaknesses of the FCRA. Voluntary agencies should be allowed to bring in that much money from abroad that they can raise from within through whatever indigenous sources – such as hanks. There should be a ceiling on administrative expenses – not more than 20 percent. And, finally, to strengthen the 73rd and 74th Amendment, the FCRA should make it mandatory for all voluntary agencies to throw open their books and accounts to panchayats and urban bodies because every citizen and voter has a right to be in-

formed of what is happening in their own village and town with external funds, whether foreign or government. Some of the voluntary agencies work with such secrecy that even their own staff are kept totally in the dark – forget the rural communities.

It is these people who have destroyed the spirit of volunteerism in India. Unfortunately, because of their links with mass media and international funding agencies, they have become role models even for those who want to do genuine voluntary work. It is enough to put anyone off.

The silver lining is that there is a silent majority of thousands of groups working in the remote corners of India keeping the voluntary spirit alive. Ordinary people with tremendous guts and dignity, fighting against formidable odds, with very little money and with incredible support from Gandhiji's Last Man. It is their struggles that continue to inspire me, for one.

*B. Roy is a social activist based in Tilonia, Rajasthan.*

## Upper catchment vs command area

Must a few always suffer for the greater good? And how to deal with displacement when it becomes inevitable?

*by Amit Mitra*

Let us take a hard look at some numbers. Between 1951 and 1990, some 16.4 million people were displaced by dams and irrigation projects in India. Of these, only 4.1 million were resettled, and even that poorly. Fully 12.3 million people were thrown to the winds. Of the total 16.4 million displaced, 6.4 million were tribals, of whom only 1.6 million were

given some kind of resettlement package. The rest, 4.8 million tribals (for comparison's sake, 0.6 million more than Norway's 1991 population of 4.2 million, or more than half of Sweden's population), were rendered homeless and destitute.

Various solutions have been sought to address the problem of displacement caused by dams and reser-

voirs. Some call for smaller projects, which minimise the number of 'oustees'. Others propose reducing the dam height or relocating dam sites so that fewer people are displaced by the rising waters. These efforts at minimising displacement represent a kind of hand-aid treatment.

After the alternatives have been tried, there still remains the population that will be dislocated. As far as these unfortunate people are concerned, the oft-heard defence of the technocrats and politicians pushing mega projects is, "A few must sacrifice for the greater good of the many."

This need not be so. The few who would be affected by a project must be magnanimously recompensed through proper rehabilitation and resettlement *because* they are making possible the greater good of so many.

### **Rehab before anything**

What is to be done in cases where displacement becomes inevitable, irrespective of the numbers involved?





REHMAT

Potential oustees protest Madhya Pradesh's Maheshwor Hydro Power Project.

Addressing this matter is not to accept the inevitability of displacement or to accept the logic of the development process which displaces in such large numbers and so haphazardly. Rather, it is to seek solutions in cases where through public debate it has been decided that a dam (or another project) is necessary for some reason or the other, and the least displacing design has been chosen. What is the next logical step?

The very conceptualisation of projects that displace people has to be based on the fact that proper resettlement and total rehabilitation is a basic right of those affected. This right *can not* be compromised. Rehabilitation is not a concession that flows from the project authorities to the affected, nor is it a gesture of mercy or benevolence. If a project cannot adequately resettle and rehabilitate those who have necessarily to be displaced, it should not be undertaken at all.

Of course, promises of resettlement or rehabilitation are easy to make. It is at the implementation stage that the South Asian record has been dismal. The solution, therefore, is to build dams, reservoirs or whatever only *after* the promised resettlement and rehabilitation is complete to the oustees' satisfaction. Let no earth mover lift its claws before this requirement is satisfied.

Cash compensation, which is seen as the easy way out in the rehabilita-

tion package, is not the answer, especially because the recipients by and large tend to come from non-monetised communities. While cash may be made part of the package, it should never be the only element of a rehabilitation deal.

The responsibility for compensation, resettlement and rehabilitation, is to rest squarely on the project authorities and the concerned government department. Satisfactory already-executed resettlement and rehabilitation must be made a precondition for project approval and clearance.

#### Uncompelling argument

The principle behind the recognition of the oustees' right to proper and satisfactory resettlement and rehabilitation is that those paying the price for development, or those few sacrificing for the many, should have the first claims to the benefits of a project. This can be actualised at a general level by providing oustees with jobs generated by the project, or by setting aside a percentage of, say, electricity produced for small industries to be run by the oustees, or by helping set up cooperatives to supply provisions to the new townships formed under the project, and so on.

In the case of irrigation projects, however, the actualising can take more direct forms. For example, cultivable land should be provided to the displaced in the "command area" of

the project, that is, the area which would benefit the most from the irrigation waters.

The history of irrigation in India, where 75 percent of agriculture is dry farming, has been that canals of large projects invariably fill the pockets of a few, not the stomachs of the majority. Surely, those areas which expect the greatest economic boost from a canal network can afford to share a portion of their gains with those who have paid the sacrifice of displacement in some remote upland catchment area. The appropriate, and affordable way of recompense is to set aside space for the oustees in the command area. If they have sacrificed for the well-being of the majority, why does the majority grudge them this little payback?

The argument is compelling. Yet, by all available evidence, not a single multi-purpose hydel project anywhere in India has given land to its displaced in its command area. Even where the demand has been made, various pretexts and ruses have been used to keep the oustees away from prime beneficiary land. It is said, for example, that the displaced would not be able to adapt to modern agriculture, or that tribals should not be torn from their "roots" that are in the upper catchment area.

#### Pay up, or shut up

Often, the difficult times arrive even before the beginning of displacement. In the catchment areas of most mega projects, all development works, such as building roads, schools and dispensaries, grind to a halt the moment a project is announced. Forests are hacked and sold almost immediately. All this despite the fact that the actual resettlement may only happen decades later.

The donor agencies, notably the World Bank, insist that the displaced population be given a package which is at least as good as their standard of living prior to displacement. By ridding the hillsides of forests and otherwise ensuring the pauperisation of the locals, the project actually reduces its rehabilitation burden. Presently, many non-governmental and community-based organisations all over India are lobbying for a two-hectare

compensation package per each displaced family. The immediate reaction to this is: Where is there so much land?! The land is there of course, not in the hilly catchment regions hut in the command areas.

If the government cannot acquire land for the oustees through effective land reform in the command area, or even under the Land Acquisition Act (Why not? it is used effectively enough to evict people during project construction.), it could purchase the land in the open market. The costs of such purchases can be internalised in the project and recovered through various taxes from the beneficiaries over time. If the government and the project promoters insist that there is no land to resettle the oustees, there is only one response: "In that case, cancel the project."

There is one other important aspect of oustee compensation which tends to be ignored during rehabilitation exercises. This is the compensation for the common property resources (CPRS) that are lost when land is submerged. In every project, apart

from the private land holdings and dwelling sites, large amounts of CPRS are destroyed forever, but there is never any talk of compensation for this lost wealth.

The CPRS are the capital of the communities which have nurtured and used them. Instead of compensating communities with cash, the CPRS can be converted into share capital in the project that is being built. This share capital will then become the displaced community's permanent source of income, in a way replacing the physical community resource, be it a rivulet, a grove, or pasture land. This mechanism would also help in maintaining a kind of community spirit among the oustees who have been uprooted and relocated from their ancestral lands.

Seeing rehabilitation complete before a project begins, providing land to the oustees in command areas, and being mindful of community property rights – all this require tremendous political will. But then, if the government and project developers are convinced that large dam and res-

ervoir projects are required to fulfil the mass public's need for water and energy, then they should be able to generate the required political will. After all, the trouble and costs involved are entirely commensurate with the benefit being derived.

If the government does not want to cheat the poorest of the poor, surely it must develop a National Rehabilitation Policy, to be adopted as an Act of Parliament. This policy has to begin with the recognition that when displacement is unavoidable, the oustees have a fundamental right to be rehabilitated, the affected have to be the first beneficiaries of the project and all the costs of the total rehabilitation package should be internalised in a project. The time has come to recognise that the place of the victims of development is at the centre of the development process. No more cheating.

*A. Mitra is a Delhi-based freelance journalist.*

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## **PARADOXES OF MONARCHY,**

writes Declan Quigley in *Anthropology Today*, ensure that kingships will be around for quite some time to come.

With the abolition of the princely states in post-colonial South Asia we see a social formation which might be labelled "kingship without kingdoms". The supreme figureheads have gone, but the institution of kingship is retained and replicated through the practices of the "little king" members of dominant castes. Conversely, in the modern industrial democracies we may often have kingdoms without kingship in all its full-blown sacrificial ambiguity. Nevertheless, the paradoxes that persist may well ensure the survival of a number of monarchies well into the next millennium. If, as some have argued, one of the central purposes of ritual is to make time stand still and if, as others have argued, the essential ingredients of all ritual are to be found in the heightened contrivances of royal ceremonies, then royalists may be right that we lose something very fundamental when we abolish the monarchy. In any case (for those monarchists who need consolation), whether one looks at the installation rituals of republican presidents the world over, or the more mundane workings of caste systems where ritual centralisation remains an everyday political necessity, it would appear that many ostensibly non-monarchical systems live (prosper?) only by surreptitiously proclaiming: "The kingdom is dead; long live the kingship".

## **THE NEW INDIAN ORDER,**

according to Ross Mallick in *Ethnicity and Human Rights in South Asia* (Sage, Delhi, 1998).

It is clear that the post-colonial state is actually the colonial state with new rulers. The foundations were laid in the Government of India Act of 1935 and with modifications continue to the present day. The new rulers were in many ways more circumscribed in their

ability to radically restructure and reform society than their colonial predecessors. While the British had to accommodate local elites to sustain their rule, they were more prepared to undertake fundamental restructuring of traditional society than the Congress system which succeeded it. For instance, they did more for the radical political mobilisation of Untouchables than the Congress ever did. Alien conquering rulers are often in a better position to restructure subject societies than indigenous rulers with only local sources of political support, which was the fundamental dilemma of the Congress system. While the socialist idealists might prefer a secular democratic society, this did not prove to be a workable combination. Democracy enabled and promoted political mobilisation but in a skewed direction under the auspices of dominant rural elites that came to have a veto power over legislation detrimental to their interests; and hence, the continuance of caste apartheid and other traditional customs. Secularism had no basis beyond the elite, and ethnicity soon proved a political basis for mobilisation. The system's deliverance lay in the fact that ethnicity was divided by language, caste and religion, so no group could achieve hegemony and most accepted a *modus operandi* that enabled them to achieve limited powers and privileges for their own constituencies. Only the rise of the BJP has threatened this accommodative politics, though whether its base can be expanded sufficiently to take power, and whether it will restructure the system if it takes office, remains to be seen. The rise of the BJP does not necessarily imply a holocaust for Muslims, but an erosion of rights and further discrimination seems inevitable. India will then become a country for the new religious majority in a way it was not before. Muslims will then be second-class citizens like minorities in neighbouring states. However, should the BJP's dominance be achieved, splits will soon appear, making for renewed coalitions and accommodations with minorities. For the sake of electoral necessity even the BJP proved willing to solicit

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Dalit support, and the Hindu fundamentalists no longer appear with the unity they once claimed.

**THE MA-BEHEN SYNDROME** is one of the factors of sexual harassment of women in public, writes Shuddhabrata Sengupta in *The India Magazine*.

When a man gropes a woman on a Delhi bus, very often the response that she comes up with is “*Ghar mein ma, bahen nahin hai kya?*” (Don’t you have mother and sisters at home?) While this sometimes works as a deterrent against further unwelcome attentions, it is worth considering whether the *ma-behen* syndrome is not in itself one of the factors of furtive sexual harassment in public. The argument runs somewhat like this. The *gupt prasang* [secret matters] have already determined that mother and sister (unlike father and brother) are completely asexual beings, that they cannot be countenanced as having an autonomous sexual agency. Mother and sister will never speak of sex, and they will never be spoken to about sex. This results in a dual distortion in all dealings with women. First, all other women are seen as legitimate targets of indiscriminate sexual attention (after all they are someone else’s mother and sister). Second, given that any proximity with them must contain an undercurrent of *gupt prasang* (as an explicit, open expression of sexual communication is impossible with any woman), furtive groping, or the sudden grab, become easily available conceptual options to the man. A further operation of the *gupt prasang* might even ensure that the woman being groped pretends not to notice.

Perhaps it is only by locating themselves *not* as the notional mothers or sisters of every perverted man, that women can compel an opening out of the domain of sexual behaviour – in which each move is examined on its own grounds, not in terms of whether it ties in with the arcane rules of *gupt gyan* [secret science].

Perhaps it is by asserting and not denying their sexualities that men and women can ensure that sex does not seethe under the surface of every encounter and

transaction. Because then it would be like any other normal human function, as amenable to considered thought and civic discourse as the provision of drinking water and the need for an effective public transport system.

**RUBBISH CLAIM**, concluded Zia Mian and A.H. Nayyar, after interviewing Iftikhar Khan Choudhry who had claimed to leak Pakistani nuclear secrets in the US. So why did the media give him such credibility, ask the two Princeton University profs in *Dawn*.

With the fun and games over, there are serious questions that must be asked about the way the international media has handled the whole Khan affair. Coming in the wake of nuclear tests in India and Pakistan and serious tensions between the two countries, any reporting or comment on the situation demanded great care about the consequences. But with shocking irresponsibility newspaper after newspaper, especially in America and India, carried the wild allegations of Iftikhar Khan Chaudhry day after day. It seems the urge to make a splash, to be first with the news, overwhelmed any sense of journalistic ethics.

The story is now over; the media has moved on to create the next sensation that will sell newspapers and make careers for journalists. What will now happen to Iftikhar Khan Chaudhry? He will most likely be refused asylum and deported back to Pakistan. Once there, he may be severely punished.

But what has he done that deserves punishment? His only real crime was to try to sell a secret that he did not have. He was a poor man with ambitions but no scruples trying to secure a future for himself in the United States. If he had been rich or well educated, there would have been no problem.

Lacking such traditional assets, Iftikhar Khan tried to sell a commodity for which there was a market in the West. But trying to sell something you don’t have only makes you a swindler not a traitor.



# Announcing Film South Asia '99

Himal announces the second edition of Film South Asia, the biennial festival of South Asian documentaries. Film South Asia '99, to be held in Kathmandu in September 1999, follows Film South Asia '97, the first-ever event of its kind which Himal organised in October 1997.

A total of 55 films from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were screened during Film South Asia '97. Some 50 film-makers, film activists and journalists from South Asia attended the four-day festival giving the event a truly Subcontinental flavour. A rough categorisation of the 55 films showed the following: 20 were social commentaries, 9 about personalities, 9 on environmental subjects, 1 historical, 10 ethnographic portrayals and 6 in other categories.

Film South Asia '99 will showcase quality documentaries of the Subcontinent and Subcontinental sensibilities on any subject under the sun. The festival will have both competitive and non-competitive section and the films to be screened at the festival will be chosen from the entries by the festival selection committee. Three outstanding films from the festival will be awarded citations and cash prizes by a three-member jury.

A selection of 15 films from Film South Asia '99 will go around South Asia and other parts of the world as part of Travelling Film South Asia '99 just as one from Film South Asia '97 did (see below).

Entry forms will be available from September 1998. Look out for more information on Film South Asia '99 in these pages.

## TRAVELLING FILM SOUTH ASIA REPORT

After the overwhelming success of Film South Asia '97, the first-ever festival of South Asian documentaries, in Kathmandu in late October 1997, Himal decided to take a selection from the 55 films shown at FSA'97 around South Asia and the world. Fifteen documentaries were chosen with the help of the festival's three-member jury to reflect the quality, thematic variety, and geographic range of documentary-making in the Subcontinent.

For the convenience of local organisers everywhere the films were shown in VHS tapes.

The objective of Travelling Film South Asia (TFSA) was to give film-makers, enthusiasts, scholars, students and the general audience an opportunity to view the latest and finest films from the Subcontinent. TFSA was an excellent opportunity to tell South Asian audiences of the concerns of serious filmmakers from their neighbourhood. Outside South Asia, Himal hoped to create an awareness and a dialogue about South Asian concerns.

TFSA's worldwide journey was made possible by the support and interest of individuals and institutions all over South Asia and overseas. Their voluntary efforts in arranging venues, accessing equipment, finding sponsors, publicising and hosting the event, were well rewarded, we believe, in terms of audience participation all over.

Everywhere the festival went, there was something unique in the event. In Pakistan, this was the first time since the 1960s that India-made films were publicly screened. The crowd that came to see the Bangladeshi *Mukhtir Guan* in Lahore was matched by the Calcutta audience attending the screening of *Mr Jimnah: The Making of Pakistan*. All over, the film screenings led to discussions of issues covered, from the loss of traditional culture to re-evaluation of history, and from sexual identity to macho-communalism.

TFSA has proved conclusively that there is a worldwide audience for quality documentary films on South Asia. It also proved that there is an audience all over the Subcontinent for documentaries. The only thing lacking, by and large, is the venue.

The next edition of the biennial festival of South Asian documentaries, Film South Asia '99, will be held in Kathmandu in September 1999.

### The following is the complete itinerary of TFSA with names of organisers, sponsors and supporters:

Venue	Date	Organiser	Supporter/Sponsor
New Delhi	6-8 Feb 1998	Himal	India Habitat Centre
Dhaka	12-14 Feb 1998	Chalachitram Film Society	Goethe Institut
Princeton University	5-7 Mar 1998	Naila Sattar, South Asia Students' International Centre	Woodrow Wilson School, Department of History, Department of Politics, Department of Women's Studies
University of California at Berkeley	10 Mar-5 May 1998	Raba Gunashekhara	Centre for South Asian Studies Graduate School of Journalism
Harvard University	11-13 Mar 1998	Manisha Aryal William Fisher	Department of Indian and Sanskrit Studies, Department of Anthropology, The Asia Centre
University of Pennsylvania	16-18 Mar 1998	Robert Nichols, David Ludden	Department of South Asia Regional Studies
Colorado State University	19-21 Mar 1998	John Riley	Asian Studies Programme, College of Liberal Arts, Centre for Applied Studies American Ethnicity, Office of International Education
Lahore	21-25 Mar 1998	Farjad Nabi Beena Sarwar Stephen Mikesell	The News International, The American Centre
University of Alabama at Birmingham	26-28 Mar 1998		Department of Anthropology, Centre for International Programmes
University of Hawaii	29-31 Mar 1998	Gregory Maskarinec Mary Chin	Centre for South Asian Studies, School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Chicago	2-4 Apr 1998	Gregory Price Grieve	Centre of South Asian Studies, International House Film Society, South Asian Outreach Educational Project
Cornell University	6-10 Apr 1998	Prasanna Dhungel, Eknath Belbase	Department of English
Wheaton College	6-8 Apr 1998	Bruce Owens	Department of Anthropology and Sociology
Karachi	16-21 Apr 1998	Tamasghar Media Network	The News, USIS
Calcutta	20-22 Apr 1998	S.V. Raman	Max Mueller Bhawan, Goethe-Institut
Jamshedpur	23-25 Apr 1998	Amitav Ghosh	Celluloid Chapter
Islamabad	14-16 May 1998	Peter Claes	Asian Study Group, Islamabad The Human Development Centre, The Allama Iqbal Open University Television Trust for Environment, The British Council
Colombo	26-30 May 1998	Nalaka Gunawardane	
Pondicherry	5-7 June 1998	Prashant Sharma, Dr Palani	
Auroville	8-10 June 1998	Gerard Carabin, Surya Rimaux	Aurofilm
Bangalore	12-14 June 1998	Sumit Basu, Nupur Basu	Indian Institute of Science Film Society
Leiden	25-28 June 1998	Erik de Maaker, Bert van den Hoek Balgopal Shrestha	International Institute of Asian Studies

# A little bookshop in Goa

by Frederick Noronha

It has an eminently missable entrance, even with its address in hand you could well get lost, and for days together few clients visit this outlet. Yet, Goa's Other India Book Store has a turnover which surpasses many other crowded outlets.

Based in Mapusa, this untypical not-for-profit organisation is doing good business. It is also contributing generously to promote Goa as a meeting point for ideas and information from across South Asia and across continents.

Lonely Planet, the influential publisher of guidebooks for global travellers, has labelled OIBS as "the best bookshop" in Goa, noting that the bookstore stocks no titles from Europe or America – all are published in Asia, Africa or Latin America.

OIBS was launched a decade ago by the well-known environmentalist-lawyer couple Claude and Norma Alvares to promote alternative ideas through the distribution of like-minded books and periodicals. Today, it is managed locally and a trust guides its activities.

The breakthrough has been to prove that grassroots ideas do sell. "Our strength lies in the fact that we've been able to make a concept like this work. We're able to compete even with mainstream outlets," says manager Jerry Rodrigues.

OIBS began by distributing a handful of books and magazines published from other parts of Asia, including Malaysia and the Philippines. This brought the welcome news to activist groups in India that there were other Asians thinking on parallel tracks on development, environment and Third World concerns. The idea

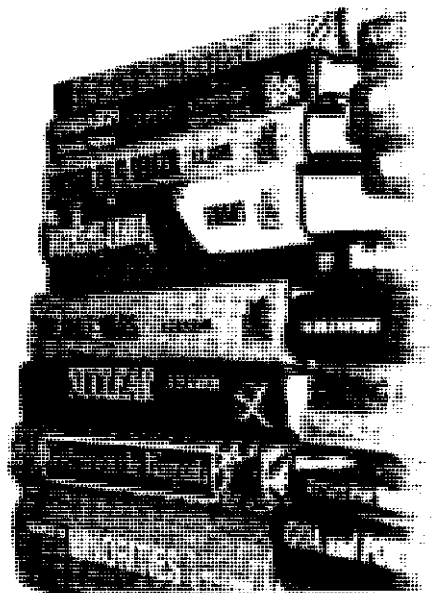
of the bookstore had clicked.

In a Eurocentric world, OIBS has much to offer: it tells us what Asia thinks, Africa feels or Latin America writes. The range of offerings is wide – literature from Mexico, children's tales from Bhutan, a Malaysian lawyer's analysis of TRIPS, or primers to understand Hindutva politics or the Lankan conflict.

With some surprise, the Alvareses found that the Indian not-for-profit groups were strangers to each other. A green group in Gorakhpur would not know what a similar group had done in Kerala, because nobody was marketing their publications. OIBS cashed in on that niche. Its USP, then as now, was that the books would arrive "at your door", packed well to withstand the rigours of Indian summers and train treks of thousands of kilometres.

Initially, the clientele was limited to not-for-profit groups, but later OIBS discovered a good market in universities and colleges. Scholars and students had begun to understand that NGO publications had their ear to the ground and were timely in analysing contemporary issues missed by the media at large. Soon, mainstream booksellers too started looking at what OIBS was distributing.

The main handicap with selling alternative publications was that their low-price meant that the sales commission was low. OIBS got around the problem by coming out with its own catalogue, in tabloid size and packed with titles. The latest one has a thousand titles, all very nicely annotated. "Anyone who writes in for any book is put on our mail-list and continue receiving our catalogue,"



says long-time staffer Rose.

Today OIBS finds ready clients from the hills of Meghalaya to the far-flung Andaman Islands. The book-buyers from small towns are "the main reason why the mail-order service works", says Rodrigues. They bring in about 75 percent of the business, while about 20 percent comes through the trade circuit. The remaining 5 percent goes out to foreign orders. From INR 25,000 worth of publications sold a decade ago, OIBS' sales last year were up to INR 3 million.

An affiliate of OIBS, the Other India Press, comes out with 10-12 publications a year, with focus on the environment, women's issues and public health. It recently came out with the *Organic Farming Source Book*, a 344-page tome that highlights the work of innovative and pioneering organic farmers across India. Union minister Maneka Gandhi's *Heads and Tails*, a book on animal rights, has gone into 13 editions.

OIBS' bestseller is undoubtedly *One Straw Revolution* by the Japanese guru of natural farming, Masanobu Fukuoka. Now in its fourth edition here, it is also out in Marathi and Hindi. When the ageing Fukuoka visited India recently, he was full of awe over how his ideas had taken root in India. All thanks to an alternative bookstore in Goa.

F. Noronha is a journalist from Saligao, Goa.



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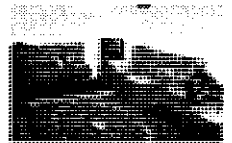


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# An ode to Lahore

A gift for a 'history-starved' land.

There are no history books worth the name in Pakistan. Children encounter Pakistan Studies as a compulsory subject and the text they are given in class to cover the last 50 years makes no mention of facts and personages, unpleasant and pleasant, such as Ayub Khan, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, or the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM). It is in this 'history-starved' land that this book by Mushtaq Gazdar arrives.

In writing about Pakistan cinema, documentary-filmmaker Gazdar has written a history of the land's culture and times. Reading this book, one cannot separate Pakistani cinema history from, well, history. In reading history thus, the subject is no longer the monopoly of regimes but the property of the people and their memory. Gazdar shows the cultural processes behind the major events, and tracks these processes through the work, the voice and career of the individual.

An example of the breath-giving freshness of this approach is *Maula Jat*, the highest blockbuster of Punjabi cinema whose all-too-successful formula established a stranglehold on the industry for over a decade. When the film is mentioned, all polite conversation ends. But Gazdar gives a first-rate analysis of *Maula Jat's* advent and impact against the backdrop of Gen Zia-ul Haq's martial law and Bhutto's trial and hanging.

## Potholes

The film came out on the eve of the final act of the Zia-Bhutto drama. Its villain, Nuri (played by Mustafa Qureshi) is soft-spoken, polite and wants total power (cut to Gen Zia on PTV promising elections, accountability, summary military justice). The film was a great hit in Punjab and rural Sindh, the Bhutto

constituencies.

In five chapters (there are six altogether), one for each decade of Pakistani filmmaking, everything post-1947 is here. Explaining the films and following the careers of filmmakers, Gazdar hits all the historical potholes, from Partition through Ayub Khan and his Ministry of Information's Goebbels-like (Gazdar's term) cultural policies, 1971 and the rise and fall of Bhutto, Zia's long martial law, Islamisation, and the Motion Picture Ordinance.



## Pakistan Cinema: 1947-1997

by Mushtaq Gazdar  
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1997

reviewed by *Rehan Ansari*

Through all this, Gazdar's eyes are firmly on the lives and careers of the film directors, the music directors, the lyricists, the actors and producers, and the challenges facing the industry in Lahore, Karachi and Dhaka. We do not get a litany of "great" leaders and events, but in reading of the changes in cinema and culture we get a insightful perspective of the obstacles.

The author cannot but help look at the Partition generation and show how their careers were affected by that wrenching event. He describes the life and times of film people such as Shaukat Hussain Rizvi (director of *Jugnu*, the Dilip Kumar/Noor Jehan starrer); Ghulam Haider (music director who gave Madam Noor Jehan, Shamshad Begum, Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammed Rafi their first ma-

ior breaks); W.Z. Ahmed (producer who owned the Shalimar Studios of Pune); and Noor Jehan. For many, Partition cut their careers into half.

Gazdar also provides interesting insights into the decline of Pakistani cinema. After Partition, Indian films were coming into their own with Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Madhubala and Nargis all on the rise. Pakistani filmmakers who crossed over to the west, however, literally left their careers behind. Once established in Pakistan, they wanted to close the doors to Indian films so that they would not have to compete. Liberal artists like Ahmed, whose film *Roohi* was the first to be banned by the censor board for its left-leaning sympathies, led the movement to ban Indian films.

The result was a lot of imitation and declining standards. Rizvi and Ahmed's output diminished drastically and soon stopped altogether. Only for Madam Noor Jehan, nothing, not even Partition, stood in the way.

## Lahori to Bombay

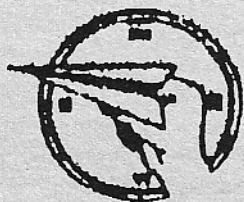
The book says little about how those, who had to leave Lahore after Partition, fared in the Indian cinema business. There is just one complete story: Quetta-born Roop K. Shorey inherited Kamla Movietone in Lahore. He produced the Punjabi block-buster of 1943, *Mangti* (with an all-Lahori cast), and left for Bombay in 1947 when his studio was burnt down by a mob.

In 1951 Shorey produced the blockbuster *Ek Thi Larki* with his film-star wife Meena. In 1955, the couple came to Lahore to make *Miss 56*. Meena, overcome by the attention given to her by Lahoris, as opposed to Bombaywallahs, decided to stay back. Writes Gazdar, "...heart-broken Roop had to take another trip from Lahore, empty-handed... first losing



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Scene from *Maula Jat*.

his livelihood, and then his sweetheart. (He) was never the same man again... and she died a pauper in 1989."

Everything pre-national is here too and that is the first chapter. Here, Pakistani readers are finally allowed knowledge of the many lands and many centuries that have led to our present culture. So how does Gazdar write a pre-national history of Pakistani cinema when others who attempt to write about Pakistani history face such crippling problems? How do you start talking about things Pakistani if you do not want to admit that once we were 'Indian'?

The question about beginnings makes us anxious because it involves complex questions of identity. If we were Indian why are (and when were) we not? Whereas the state monumentally organises itself around the we-are-anything-but-Indian mantra through its media, foreign policy, military budget, the Pakistani public merrily goes ahead and welcomes the on-air superiority of Channel V and Zee TV. (Recently overheard: a media baron in Lahore told a representative of a multinational advertising agency that Pakistani viewers hooked to satellite are "15 percent going on 100 percent".)

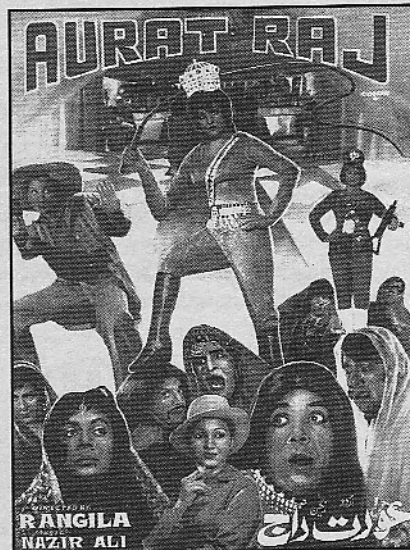
The history of cinema in Pakistan is really the history of cinema of Lahore. And Lahore, as everybody understands, has always been around. This is what allows Gazdar to embrace the history of cinema in the Subcontinent in writing about Pakistani cinema. The link between the Bombay and Lahore industries was intimate from the earliest years of cinema in the region (now it is unrequited – our media baron goes to Dubai if he wants to watch Indian films on a cinema screen).

"Artists and technicians who made it good in Lahore were invariably attracted to Bombay," writes Gazdar. A.R. Kardar for example, belonged to a landed Punjabi family, led the Bhatti Gate Group of intellectuals, made silent films in Lahore, but eventually settled in Bombay. There he made *Sharda*, *Dulari*, *Dillagi*, *Shahjehan* and *Jadoo* (all famous for Naushad's music as well).

Writes Gazdar about the dominance of Lahore in the pre-1947 period: "Bombay had technical superiority but when sound came to film the technical dominance of Bombay had to contend with the cultural dominance of Lahore. For now a well-written story, dialogues and lyrics became indispensable."

### Reel and real history

In the same first chapter, Gazdar smoothly moves beyond the national histories, and goes back to pre-nation state, to resurrect the literary theory of Kautilya (the writer of *Artha Shastra* from the Mauryan era), and the aristocratic attitude towards art of



Akbar. He also writes about the Mughals, the courtiers, tradespeople and the peasants, doing this to explain, among other things, why music is so central to film, the infallibility of our film heroes ("the Krishna legacy"), and how Muslim rulers, including the Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Sayyids and Lodhis, all patronised the arts and held the orthodox elements at bay.

Gazdar's juxtaposition of cinema history with history *per se* works. How else can one explain Pakistani cinema's sudden ugliness in the late seventies and eighties? Murder, rape and pillage filled the screens, as if someone had thrown a switch. It all had to do with martial law and the resultant cultural atrophy. The General had decided to bloody his hands in the Afghan crisis, and as guns and drugs flooded Pakistan we became brutal as never before. No wonder *Maula Jat* spawned a hundred clones thereafter.

The wonderful thing about Gazdar is that he is an optimist even while describing the worst excesses by producers. He writes about recent releases with genuine excitement, and has focused attention on some genuine nuggets of the recent past. Rangeela's 1979 hit *Aurat Raaj* is one of them. It is a gender-bender: a women's party wins an election and decrees that men shall wear confining dresses, rear children, and perform house-work. All the top (and 'macho') male stars of the day acted in the film and did their bit.

What a brave town Lahore turns out to be in the book! Despite all the problems created by state and market, it keeps churning out cinema. There was a 50 percent rise in the production of Urdu films between 1994-96 despite stifling cultural policies and a despondency that had not lifted since the 1980s. Generals and ministers may make grandiose speeches calling for the betterment of the industry, but the filmmakers are out there shooting, shooting. Mushtaq Gazdar, a Karachiwalla, has written the best tribute to Lahore. ▽

R. Ansari, scholar with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, also works for Evernew Studios, Lahore.





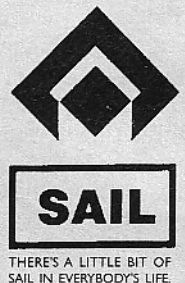
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# Her anger and her cliches

Fuelled by outrage, failed by ideas.

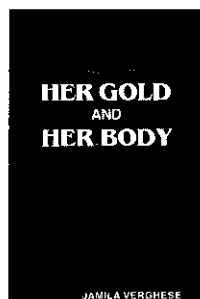
The 59 people and 28 institutions whom Jamila Verghese acknowledges in the opening pages of *Her Gold and Her Body* reveal much about the author's place among woman activists. She is one of the educated urban women who, during the late 1970s and 1980s, formed the core of the women's movement in India. When this book was first published in 1980, it put into words exactly how social institutions were violently oppressing South Asian women. The book, like the movement itself, was fuelled by outrage. Verghese has added more of the same – vivid portraits of dowry, sexual violence, prostitution – in the eight new chapters at the end of this revised edition. She combines journalism, melodrama, and social commentary into a readable polemic on women's rights in India. As she states in the introduction: "I make no claims to erudition or scholarship. I have written a simple book in everyday language...." But coming after two decades of serious work on gender issues, this book would have benefitted from a little less zealotry and a little more analysis.

The first 12 chapters comprise the first edition, and Verghese has left them untouched. It begins with a fictional account of a dowry death, with details culled from true stories – the bride burned in the kitchen and then pushed from a window, a cruel mother-in-law in league with a callous husband, indifferent neighbours, and a courageous whistle-blower. In the subsequent chapters, Verghese intersperses historical background on bride price and dowry with charts, statistics, and more imagined scenes of women and their oppressors. Here, Verghese dramatises how rural debt leads to the trafficking of women to urban brothels:

*Sleeping naked under one coverlet*

*that night with his brothers and his wife [Phullo], Suppa turns the idea over in his mind. The more he thinks about it, the better he likes it. What's wrong with her earning money in this way? Don't we share her here?...Phullo settles down to life in the brothel as Champa Rani. She has to please every customer. She may have to oblige as many as twenty to thirty men a day. She barely gets time off for food, and goes to sleep in the crowded dormitory around 1 am.*

The effect is similar to the street theatre productions staged by NGOs –



## Her Gold and Her Body

by Jamila Verghese  
Vikas Publishing  
House, New Delhi,  
Second (Revised)  
Edition 1997  
INR 175, 345 pp

*reviewed by Jyoti Thottam*

the stories are engaging but too earnest in their message. This is not to detract from Verghese's purpose. Stripped of the whimsical chapter headings ("Catch Me, I'm Worth It!"; "The Gimmee"), the pieces she has stitched together form a sober record of the status of women over the last two decades. The notes at the end of each chapter could serve as a sourcebook for newspaper articles, academic research, and landmark legal judgements.

## Missing the point

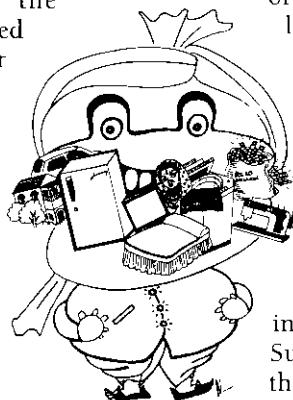
Her analysis, however, is often flawed. For example, in the section on female foeticide, Verghese criticises doctors who abort female fetuses in the name of family planning and praises Goa's "more informed attitude" to family planning. She then notes approvingly that "Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have already achieved a low rate of fertility." Evidence in other chapters about the dowry situation in Kerala and infanticide in Tamil Nadu, however, signals the inadequacy of using measures like fertility rates to evaluate the status of women.

In her update on dowry, Verghese travels to Kerala, a state with a strange combination of high dowry and high female literacy. Verghese flays the courts for failing to decisively reform Syrian Christian family laws, but she does not investigate how and why these laws are circumvented. Despite Mary Roy's celebrated challenge to Syrian Christian inheritance laws (ensuring an equal share for daughters and sons when their father dies intestate), many women do not exercise the legal right they have been given. They simply accept a smaller share than their brothers, knowing that their husbands will have received a larger share of property than their sisters. Issues such as the lack of jobs for women who want to remain outside the dowry system go untouched.

Clearly, Verghese has done her homework on legal cases and ancient Vedic texts, but this limits her arguments to two poles: change the laws or change societal attitudes. Women's organisations throughout South Asia have already discovered that engaging fully in economic and political change (not just cultural awareness or legal battles) is crucial. In the long run, for example, it is impossible to address sexual violence separately from police accountability.

## Wall fly's notebook

In a few instances, Verghese does acknowledge the connections between women's issues and socio-economic inequity. She notes the work of Sulabh International, a group that builds lavatories in rural





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areas: "This would be a boon for women and girls who have to work or attend ill-equipped rural schools far from home, with no privacy for their special needs. Their parents' ever-present worry about the girls losing their virginity, and the heavy work load awaiting them at home, gives the little ones no option but to drop out." These two sentences capture the way poor infrastructure, sexual violence, ill-funded education, low rural wages, and parental prejudice combine to undermine girls' education.

Verghese's failure to explore the political dynamic leads to some odd conclusions. She seems to indirectly

endorse Indira Gandhi's Emergency measures against child marriage and praises Indonesia's government for high levels of education among women. She censures South Indian leader Jayalalitha's foster son's gargantuan wedding not as a gross abuse of political power but as another example of lavish spending on weddings.

Verghese is at her best in the fly-on-the-wall mode. In the original section on Kerala, she speaks to a mixed group of young people about dowry and marriage. Akkamma comments that she doesn't like the "terrible bargaining just like a fish mar-

ket". A would-be IAS officer hopes to be "on the top slab in the marriage market for dowry". The give-and-take of these dialogues injects life into the dry legal and historical explanations and repeated exhortations on the evil of dowry.

On finishing *Her Gold and Her Body*, one is left wishing that Jamila Verghese had used her talents and passionate ideas to write a novel or a straight journalistic piece. This book offers outrage in abundance, but fresh ideas are in short supply.

*J. Thottam is a writer currently living in New York.*

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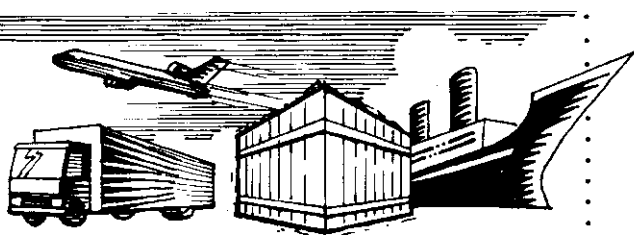
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**T**oday I want to begin by talking about bums. As you must be coming to know, both two India and Pakistan now have Big Bums. Before before, the world was not taking us seriously, because we are not having atom bum. Finally now, big arsenals we have. So no one anymore is poo-pooing us in international fora. India and Pakistan standing shoulder to shoulder to defend our right to be bombastic as we want. Those members of the Nuclear Gymkhana cannot be allowed to twist our arms and ammunitions. We demand our right to play snooker inside the club with Big Brother. Are you listening us?

OK, that said, we can now get back to our cable TV viewing. And let us see what the soaps have in store for us this week:

**Baywatch (THE BOOB TUBE)**

The pressure on the Baywatch sailing team to win the annual lifeguard regatta becomes more

intense when Neely reveals her personal stake in the outcome. Stephanie is recruiting lifeguards to participate in the annual lifeguard sailing regatta, where they will compete against South Bay. Everyone signs on - including Neely, much to Caroline's chagrin. However, Neely makes it perfectly clear on the first day of sailing practice that her goal is not to have a good time or play games, but to win. The other Baywatch lifeguards are taken aback by Neely's intensity but soon discover that the leader of the South Bay sailing team, lifeguard lieutenant Kurt Daniels, was Neely's old boyfriend - before he dumped her. Now, Neely wants nothing more than to get back at him and as a result she and Kurt make a side bet. If Baywatch wins, Kurt will be Neely's slave for a day. If South Bay wins, it's Neely who has to put on

the maid uniform.

**Discovery (UNNATURAL SEX CHANNEL)**

This week's episode is on the reproductive health of Sloth Bears. Intense courtship drama in the undergrowth as a budding love triangle intensifies. There is a punch-up behind the hamboo grove in the late afternoon when Stinko, a bit sozzled after bingeing on fermented wild honey, makes a pass at Lassie. It's a jungle out there. But Stinko quickly learns his lesson when Lassie's hunky boyfriend, Arnold, draws a line on the sand by urinating on a strategic tree trunk. Stinko wakes up with a hangover and finds his paw in a hunter's trap.

**'Allo 'Allo (ENGLISH CHANNEL)**

Rene finds Michelle to be a *piece de resistance*, and both go down to the cellar to hide from the SS. But they get bored, finish off the entire stock of vintage wine and start singing: "Hitler, e 'ad une grande ball, Himmler 'ad trois, mais petit".

Chandrika tries to tell them that size is not important. Hasina happens to be passing by, overhears the conversation and offers to mediate. Atal and Nawaz are a bit hesitant at first, but finally agree to make hot love not cold war. All agree to set up a happy nuclear family.

**Haathi Mere Saathi (GEE! TV)**

Rajesh Khanna has an elephant, Ram, who is not very bright. Neither is Rajesh, but that is not important. What is important is that Rajesh falls in love with Tanuja and vice versa. They sing a duet while riding on Ram who gets pangs of jealousy because Rajesh now spends more time with Tanuja than with him. Rajesh tries to convince Ram that a) he (Ram) is a pachyderm, and that h) he is not a girl. Overriding objections from Elephant, Rajesh marries Tanuja. Plot thickens, tables turn. Tanuja gets jealous that Rajesh is spending more time with Elephant, and less time with Wife. Rajesh and Tanuja have time to sing one more duet before breaking up on grounds of incompatibility. Moral of story: Don't let elephants come between husband and wife.

**The Bold and the Beautiful (EMPTY-V)**

Macy comes to stop Sally. Stephanie is furious. Macy tries without success to explain to Stephanie that she knew nothing of Sally's plan. Brooke tells Sheila her father was jealous of his relationship with her mother. Ridge is worried because his wife does not like his pet sloth bear to dig for roots in their bedroom. Brooke tells Minx she is in the wrong soap, and to get out or else she will call the Gestapo. Damon, in a slightly drunken state, mistakes Minx for Neely from Baywatch and asks her if he can get a silicon implant too.

We'll be right back after these messages.



However, a Gestapo patrol led by Herr Hellich is alerted by the commotion, and catches the two flagrantly violating the fourth commandment. Hellich and his stormtroopers are persuaded to join in the general merriment. Mimi and Edith also arrive and they all get roaring drunk for the cause of Franco-German amity.

**Santa Barbara (STAR MINUS)**

Minx warns Angela that Warren will break her heart, but Angela thinks the only problem in her relationship is Cassie. Professor Simon attacks Lily with a water gun and the police must haul him away. Gina realises Sophia is still in love with CC and tells her about Santana's pregnancy. Santana schedules an abortion but the clinic is bombed. Oops, shouldn't have told you the ending.

**Serendib (SHARK TV)**

Atal and Nawaz get into an argument about who has a bigger one.





.....and you thought you'd seen it all !



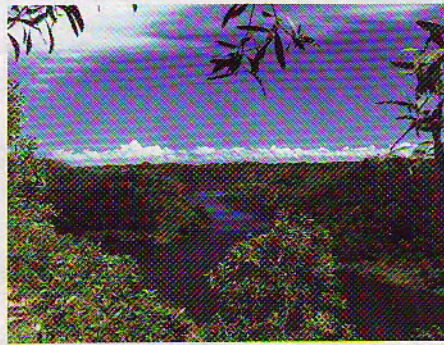
The Hanging Bridge at Rangamati



The blue waters of The Bay of Bengal



The colourful tribes



The unspoiled nature



The traditional tribal flair



The Royal Bengal Tiger

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