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December 1999

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Orthodox Multiculturalism



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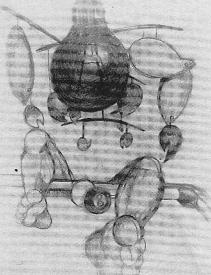




Non-resident South Asians

Prehistoric Tibet





litSA 2000





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Marketing

Suman Shakya Anil Karki Sambhu Guragain Awadhesh K Das Pranita Pradhan

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Marketing Office, Dhaka

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Media Sales Representative, Karachi

Trans Indus Media (Pvt) Ltd 2nd Floor, Haroon House Ziauddin Ahmed Road Karachi 74200 Tel: +92-21-567 0081 Fax: 567 0085 tim@xiber.com

Himal is published and distributed by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd GPO Box 7251, kathmandu, Nepal Tel: +977-1-543333/34/35/36 Fax: 521013 info@himalmag.com editors@himalmag.com (editorial) marketing@himalmag.com (marketing) http://www.himalmag.com ISSN 1012 9804 Library of Congress Card Catalogue Number 88 912882 Imagesetting at: Polyimage Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Kathmandu Tel: +977-1-521393, 536390

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Cover design by **Bilash Rai**. Photo (VPL 6231; courtesy Vancouver Public Library) shows Gurdit Singh (see page 28 for story) standing at left.

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The foreign hand

The excellent report, "Gods in Exile" (October 1999, Himal), took me back many years when I was working in Nepal. At that time, I had read Juergen Schick's *The Gods Are Leaving the Country* (in German) and was shocked to learn of the theft of Nepali

sculptures. When I came back to Europe, I tried to start a project to catalogue the remaining statues, and wrote to several international organisations seeking their help.

I persisted for many years, but the interest just wasn't there. Nearly all the

answers I received were to the effect that the Nepalis themselves have to take the initiative before they can expect any outside support. After many years of work, I gave up, partly out of frustration with the institutional corruption in Nepal and the apathy that the Nepalis have towards their heritage.

Going back to the article itself, the writer argues that stopping the demand is the main solution to idol theft. I have to disagree. There will always be insensitive people in the world to create a demand for ancient artefacts. It is more important for Nepalis to become aware of their rich culture and learn to appreciate it. When that happens, I assure you no sculpture will be able to cross the border. Simply projecting the Western collector as the bad guy is not the way out.

Wolf Altorfer-Ranjitkar Zurich

Interesting

The cover story, "Gods in exile", was interesting, informative and analytical. The story presents an insight into how sculptures, icons, statues and images have been

stolen from Nepal since the 1960s to end up with Western collectors. One has to thank Lain Singh Bangdel and Juergen Schick for their hard work and dedication in documenting the loss of Nepal's artistic heritage, which ultimately led to the return of the four statues

as mentioned in the article. It can only be hoped that their effort will bear more such results. Appreciation also must go to Pratapaditya Pal for his help in the return of the four Nepali pieces.

However, I think the writer was reluctant to deal in detail with the highly publicised case of the attempt to uproot the statue of Bhupatindra Malla at the Bhaktapur Durbar

Square. As was published in different newspapers at that time, the thieves tried to dismantle the statue with the help of a crane. They were stopped by a police officer, the late Rupak Raj Sharma. Sharma's subsequent disappearance for a month after the incident, the daring shown by the thieves to make use of a crane in the middle of the city, and the fact that the papers did not follow up

on the story led to speculation that a ranking member of the Nepali royal family could have been involved in the attempted theft.

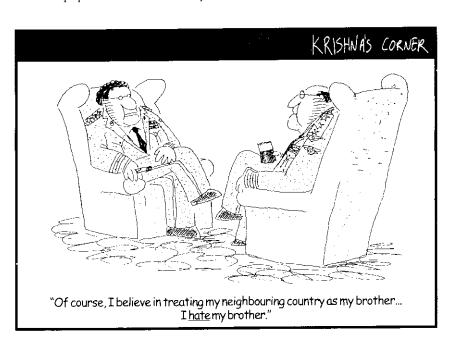
I thought I would put this on record as the passing mention of the incident in the article did not seem adequate.

Prajjwal Chapagain Brisbane

Missing Bhairav

It is a matter of great pleasure, and relief, to us that among the idols returned by an American collector that were mentioned in the October 1999 cover story, is one of Surya Narayan from Panauti's Triveni Ghat. So far, however, the Panauti Municipality has not taken any steps to claim the statue and place it in its original place, although the people here are waiting eagerly to see and worship the deity in their hometown. One can only hope that things will change with growing public pressure.

We would also like to use this forum to help recover another image stolen from our town. This is the mask of Bhairav that disappeared one night in 1985 from the temple of Unmanta Bhairav in Panauti. Since that theft, a new mask has been used



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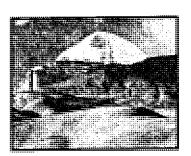
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during the Panauti Jatra during which it plays an essential role. The original mask surfaced in the March-April 1995 issue of *Art in Asia*, where it was advertised for sale (*see picture alongside*). Since it should not be too difficult to track down where the mask eventually ended up, we demand that the authorities concerned take the necessary steps to bring it back as soon as possible.

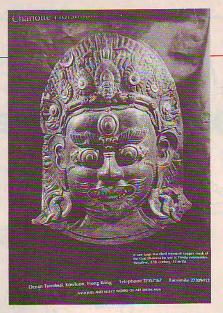
Ram Das Suwal President, Nasancha Puch Panauti, Nepal

Desi-fied SAF

I agree with your commentary (November 1999) that the anaemic performances posted at the recent South Asian Federation Games demonstrated how far this SAARC region has to go to meet world and even Asian standards in many disciplines of sports. No flying Kenyans with their blistering middle- and long-distance runs here, rather they were more like panting babus—part of the bloated contingent of officials who outnumbered the sportspersons—jogging to lunch.

Of course, world-class excellence we do have in games like squash, tennis, cricket and polo. As for field hockey, barring Pakistan's sporadic moments of glory, the sport now excels in negligence and incompetence. The result is that the public of this region shows no interest in SAF. So what do we do to infuse some life into the Games, some masala that can spawn world-beaters? Here's what, include the following disciplines, and we shall have no dearth of quality performances.

Taking a leaf from a popular practice, brick-batting, that is throwing bricks at both moving and stationary targets, could be an exciting possibility, a real crowd pleaser. An accompanying activity has to be lathi-charge, both with and without tear gas. Then there is the soda bottle toss, which could lead to the more lethal molotov (we need a desi name here) cocktail toss;



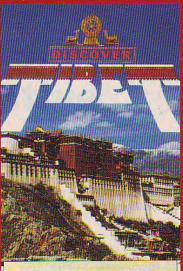
ironically, in parts of the Subcontinent, this is the only cocktail permitted in public.

Car and bus burning can neatly complement the general barricade-building competitions. Not to forget the gherao, a medieval practice of siegecraft adapted to industrial times. And for the younger set, may one suggest the firecracker contest, with tire slashing and windshield smashing thrown in for good measure. Given that these sports are relentlessly practised by bands of young men with access to private funding and influence, the teams would be largely self-financed.

There are a host of other events that could find their way to a more-desified SAF, these may include honking horns at hyper-decibel levels, jumping queues by shoving aside women and children, and paan chewing and spitting for distance competition. The mercantile groups, on their part could grace events like creative short-changing and adulteration, where new heights or depths could be reached—brick powder added to chili powder, sawdust to cumin, animal fat to ghee, etc.

If some of these events are to be included as early as in the next SAF, the world would be astounded at the skills on show. I, for one, am concentrating on brickbatting; so pass me one and wish me luck. Aare bap re, what to do?

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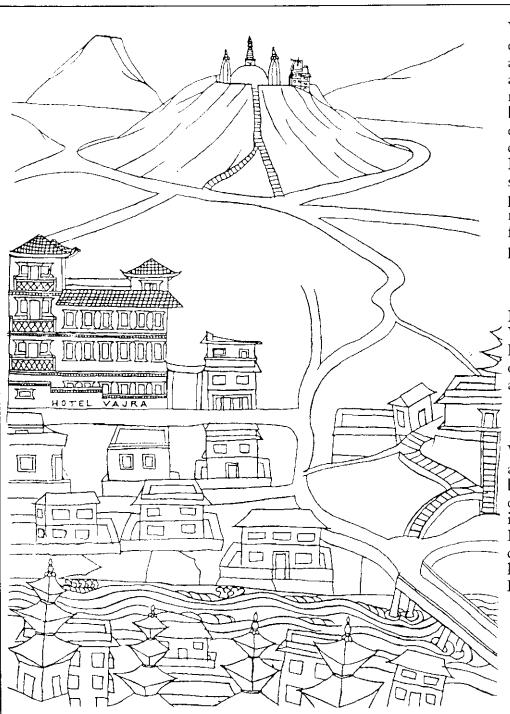
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Vajra (literally-flash of lightning), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the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

Vajra, a serene assembly of brick buildings, grassy c o u r t y a r d s, ivycovered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis over looking, chaotic Kathmandu.

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Thondaman's perspective

W hen Savumyamoorthy Thondaman (see obit, page 46) suggested some years ago that the North and East be given to the ETTE on a trial basis for five years, like most other Sinhalas, I was outraged. I asked myself: "How can this Indian Tamil say such a thing, showing no respect for the feelings of the majority Sinhala with whom he had been living for so many years? Would it mean any less than giving the Tigers their Elam?"

I had since had a grudge against Thondaman. Until the other day, that is, when I had the good fortune to talk to a Jaffna Tamil intellectual, who I shall call "Gnanam", for knowledge. In the course of our conversation. I conveyed to Gnanam what a Jaffna Tamil businessman friend of mine had told me when I asked him about the upcoming presidential polls. This friend thought that only Sinhalas need worry about the polls, and not the Jaffna Tamils, as most of them have wealthy relatives abroad who would help them in case anything went wrong. And if things turned out well, they could of course get their relatives to come back, to perhaps invest in lucrative businesses.

My businessman friend also told me that if indeed peace did prevail in Jaffna—in the form of Elam or whatever—Jaffna's development would be the envy of rest of Asia. I asked whether the LTTE would permit such rapid development, as that would pose a serious threat to their monopoly on power. The reply was that the LTTE are too good as administrators to not take care of the smallest detail.

Gnanam's reaction was a rather sarcastic guffaw. He said this is where the Jaffna people,

who have not been in the front with the LTTE and not lived long under their jurisdiction, are making their biggest mistake. The LTTE, he said, are strict disciplinarians by nature. This is something that people with big money are not likely to tolerate, and by the time the expats think of returning back abroad, it would already be too late.

All kev positions in Jaffna would go only to those who were either with the LTTE or who had been close to them throughout the conflict. Jaffna Tamils would be treated as second-class citizens. The LITE would also want the Hindu caste system to be done away with, which will not to be the liking of the 'upper castes'. Initially, buoved by the achievement of Elam, the Jaffna people might tolerate the excesses, but slowly, they will start protesting, and even the highhanded methods of the LTTE, will not be able to resolve the situation

At the same time, the many Tamils who will obviously refuse to go back to Jaffna after living in the South for ages, would yet again face discrimination from the majority Sinhala who would be smarting under the loss of the North and the East to the Elamists. And will these Tamils be accommodated in Jaffna even if they did want to go? Gnanam believes not. Meanwhile, the LTTE's armed outfit would have to be either disbanded or kept otherwise occupied. This will not prove to be an easy task.

Suddenly I saw Thondaman's suggestion in the right perspective. Had he foreseen all of this? He had definitely realised before anyone else that the LTTE cannot be defeated militarily and that they would have to be

accommodated somehow. Had he also noticed the vulnerabilities of the LTTE when he made the proposal? Would it have been that had the government acceded to his request made back then and granted the North and East to the LTTE to manage for five years, these vulnerable aspects of the LTTE would have been exposed by now and perhaps led to its downfall?

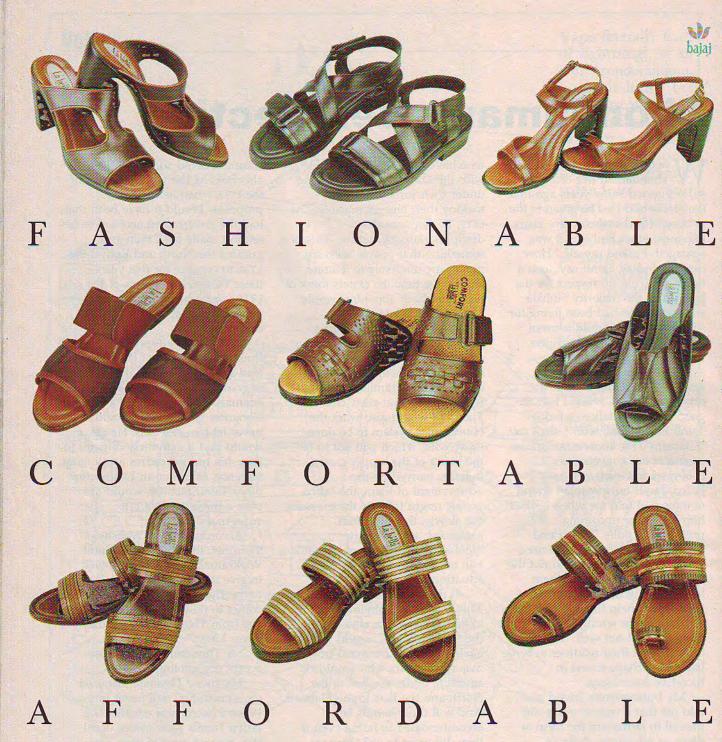
Prabhakaran will not be able to lead a public life even if total Elam is granted; he has too many enemies. An India under a (future) Congress government would never let him rest easy. He also would find it extremely difficult to keep his trained cadres away from violence, as under an Elam setup other Tamil factions would also pose a threat to the LTTE supremacy.

According to the Website, Tamilnet, the UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe has promised to give the North and East to the Tigers for two years if he comes to power. Did he take his cue from Thondaman? We may never know.

Mr Thondaman, sir. Please accept my apologies.

My friend Gnanam also told me something I will never forget. When I asked him whether the Jaffna Tamils were aware of all this, he said most of them are, especially the fairly educated and those who had lived in LTTE-controlled areas all along. He then quoted the Tamil proverb "Kakkaikum Thankunju Ponkunju", meaning "A crow's offspring may be black and ugly, but to the crow it is golden". That explained everything.

Janath Tillekeratne janath@slt.lk



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PAKISTAN

CRACKDOWN

THE SUSPENSE mounted as 16 November drew near. A month earlier, the new military ruler of Pakistan, Gen Pervez Musharraf, had warned all "willful" loan defaulters to repay their debts back to the banks by that date or face the consequences. The build-up to mid-November was marked by daily countdowns in newspapers and TV, and advertised warnings. But when the day came around, the defaulters had returned only 10 billion rupees out of the total colossal figure of PKR 211 billion (USD 1 = PKR 50 approx).

The expectation was that the army would crack down heavily on those who didn't pay back. And some fantasies did come true, with the people getting to see some bigwigs being rounded up; 35 of the top defaulters are now in custody, joining the company of fellow defaulter, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

As a symbolic gesture, the arrests were significant as many of those detained represent some of the most influential families in Pakistan, and the nabbing of a retired air marshal sent out the message that even armed forces personnel (albeit retired) would not be spared. Meanwhile, another former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, wanted in cases of corruption, was declared a fugitive from justice.

Loan defaults have been a highly emotional issue in Pakistan since 1988, when parliamentary democracy was restored to Pakistan with the death of military dictator Zia-ul Haq in a mid-air explosion. Using their new-found freedom, journalists began reporting how top politicians and businessmen connived with bureaucrats and bank officials to plunder people's savings from nationalised banks in the name of loans that they never paid back, and which were often ultimately written off.

Loans were taken out in the names of *benami* companies, which didn't really exist, or in the names of those who came to called "frontmen", with no intentions of repaying. Officially, out of the net 211 billion unrecovered loan, 100 billion has to be paid back by 322 families or groups. "The bulk of them are what we call willful defaulters," says Zubyr Soomro, president of a nationalised bank. "It [default] was not because of genuine business reasons. They had no intention of paying back the money."

As pressure mounted on the government to act against the "Loan Mafia", the Nawaz Sharif government launched two schemes to recover

the money during its second tenure (from 1997 till his ouster in October earlier this year). Under the first scheme, defaulters were offered generous incentives to entice them to repay. Those who had defaulted over a longer period of time, however, were offered a better deal; they were only required to pay a fraction of what they had borrowed. Nothing much was achieved, and when the expected dead end was reached, all that the government could show by way of recovery was about 11 billion rupees, out of which only around 5 billion were in cash; the rest comprised rescheduled loans.

The second scheme, aimed at taking strict legal action against the non-payers collapsed even before it began. Under this scheme, some of the offenders, including Nawaz Sharif, was put under a new cafegory, of those who had "engineered default". As law minister Khalid Anwar explained it, "Default was engineered for political reasons by suddenly with drawing banking facilities from companies which were not defaulters, which were making repayments as per schedule." Thus, instead of repaying, these "engineered defaulters" served damage suits for "artificially and illegally engineering defaults".

For his part, Sharif went on television and offered repayment by handing over his loss-making industries to the banks. This was nothing more than a hoax because the property had been over-valued in the first place. Also, he was seeking to repay only his portion of the amount out of the net default incurred by his family's business empire. But more recently, after the prime minister's arrest, his family cleared PKR 270 million that their Ramzan Sugar Mills owed to the Habib Bank Limited.

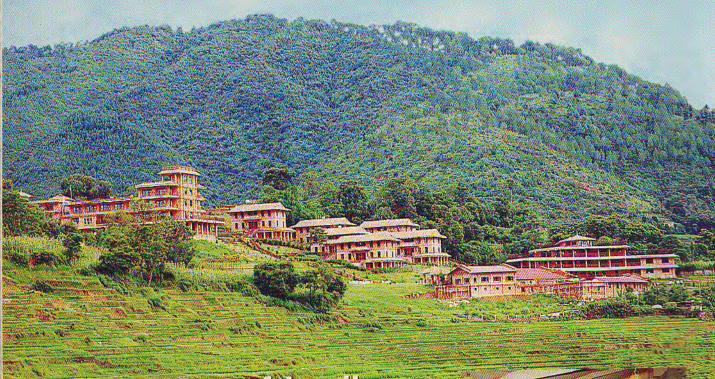
While the military's present drive has not been all that successful, it is still talking tough. It has put some 5000 persons on the Exit Control List, and says that more arrests will be made, and the loans recovered in any case. According to Interior Minister Gen (retd) Mocenuddin Haider, action has been taken against 1939 "willful" defaulters, each of whom have to pay back PKR 100 million and above.

Loan defaults, however, are not the only main ills plaguing Pakistan's economy. If the economy has to be truly revived as per the military's declared intentions after it took over on 12 October, other than the relatively easy task of recovering loans, the authorities have to crack down on all kinds of corruption, including the graft that went into huge 'development' projects. That is the real challenge facing the army now.

—Zaigham Khan



Gen Musharraf: Talking tough.



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BANGLADESH

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THERE MIGHT be some very good reason for calling hartals, but as yet, the general public has not been let into the secret. Not that it particularly cares, knowing only too well that politics is not about their wishes and wills, but a crass and continuous strategy to usurp power. The prescription followed by Bangladesh's opposition, whichever, reads: a hartal a day will blow the government away.

That is the way it has been for some time now. The onus of calling hartals presently rests on the shoulders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and three others—Jamaat-e-Islami, Islamic Oikya Jote (United Islamic alliance) and everyone's old foe, the Jatiyo Party (JP) of former president Hussain Mohammed Ershad. The foursome has been boycotting Parliament and raising havoc on the streets, in an all-too-obvious bid to bring down the constitutionally-sanctioned government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed's Awami League (AL).

This is not say that the AL has been more sinned against than sinning. For what the BNP-led opposition is now demanding is exactly what the AL was demanding when it was in the opposition before 1996, i.e. fresh parliamentary elections. And back then Sheikh Hasina had as her allies the selfsame Jamaate-Islami and JP. The AL used the hartal tactic back then against the BNP, bringing the country to a halt through interminable stoppages.

The tactic worked so well that, in the three years the AL has been in power, Bangladesh has been witnessing a repeat performance by the present opposition demanding the same thing: call off the government, and call in the elections. Why? Because the government doesn't enjoy public support anymore! Not that the public is being asked its opinion. The government's reply is a tape recording or carbon copy of what the BNP government was saying till 1994, that there will be no stepping down, if at all, till the end of the stipulated 5-year term, which ends July 2001.

As time goes on, however, it is not so much the omnipresence of hartals that is cause for worry, but that the hartals themselves (and the state's reaction) have been mutating into new and dangerous forms. For its part, even while it claims to be for negotiation with the opposition, the government is all-too willing

to come down hard on the hartal cadres, and to use seriously offensive language against the BNP and its leader Begum Khaleda Zia.

It did seem for a while that the hartals had become benign, but in November they came back to strike with new levels of fury. Here are some of the gory details: a truck driver fried to death by a petrol bomb and his assistant burned from head to toe; a housewife dead from a pellet fired by a police gun as she leant on the balcony to see the sights; a taxi driver killed as his vehicle turns turtle trying to escape a militant procession; general bash-ups proffered by the police and protestors alike; and injuries to BNP lawmakers, including the Dhaka BNP chief, Sadek Hossain Khoka. Hartals were never meant to be this violent.

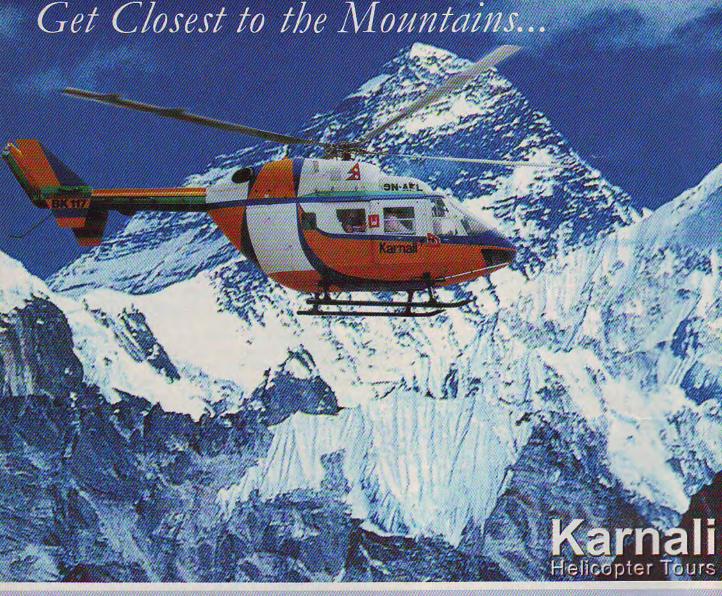
The AL authorities have made sure that, barring certain parts of the city, the BNP activists cannot boast of cent percent success anywhere. Apart from having a hartal-fatigued public on their side, they have been resorting to furious



Just another day in Dhaka.

counter-action by both the police and their own activists. On a hartal day, one can see armed plainclothesmen with cell phones walking the streets, or travelling in trucks to get quickly to the scene of action. That can easily dampen the zeal of an opposition worker hoping to torch a rickshaw or two, whose only option then is to throw a molotov or two at innocent passers-by and run.

As for the strength of the four-party opposition alliance, it doesn't look a mighty lot. Except for the BNP, others cannot even make the numbers. The JP, party of the former president, is nicely split into two and although the general owns the larger chunk, it still does not still add



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up to much. However, Ershad can stake claim to a victory of sorts now that his party rubs shoulders with the BNP—the very party that pushed it out of power in 1990—and is now no longer considered a pariah. The lady who once accused the general of masterminding the assassination of her president-husband, Zia-ur Rahman, today poses with him for photographs.

Even as the holy month of Ramadan approaches, the battle of Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina shows no sign of abating. They have between them 40 years of agitational politics and are seasoned veterans of the street heat. Begum Zia has said that she will call hartals even during Ramadan because Prophet Mohammed too had fought the Battle of Badr, a turning point in his military campaign in the earliest days of establishing Islam. The prime minister has said that she couldn't care less. Neither does the public.

INDIA

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

AT THE same time as India gets ready to launch the 'second phase' of neo-liberal economic 'reforms', the Bharatiya Janata Partydominated government is trying to ram through a Hindu sectarian agenda in culture and education. One of its more important moves recently has been to seize control of the supposedly autonomous Prasar Bharati Corporation, which runs India's public television, Doordarshan, and All India Radio.

In mid-November, the government sacked two directors of the Prasar Bharati (PB) Board, Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav, by invoking the principle of biennial 'rotation' of members. It did this because the government is not legally empowered to remove or appoint directors. Thapar is India's best-known historian, a world-class scholar, and a highly regarded public intellectual. Yadav is a reputed Hindi writer and commentator. Both are known for their independent views and their com-mitment to genuinely autonomous public media.

The government's midnight coup against Thapar and Yadav was a shocking violation of the spirit of media autonomy. The action deserves to be condemned not least because the PB came into existence after a quarter century of debate marked by the reluctance of succ-



Vajpayee amongst likeminded people in khaki shorts.

essive governments to cede control over the powerful state-owned electronic media and vest it, in the model of the BBC, in a broad-based board which would not be answerable to the government. In a country where nearly half the population is illiterate, the electronic media enjoys a privileged status and has enormous reach.

The government could have applied an objective criterion to retire two of the six directors, such as in the drawing of lots, which had been proposed by the PB Board itself. Instead, this malicious targeting of Thapar and Yadav, termed "intellectual violence" by Jaipal Reddy, the man who helped establish the PB, showed up the BJP's motive. And that is to remove anyone who would oppose the BJP's attempt to control the powerful body. It is now widely expected that the two new directors to be appointed will be those whose worldview complements that of the BJP's own.

Already, in practice, it has been difficult for the PB Board to be an effective and autonomous body which guides and provides oversight to the governmental electronic media. For example, it has no finances or staff of its own. The impact of padding the PB Board with ideological fellow BJP travellers will have a pernicious and direct impact on programming. Given that the audience of Doordarshan and AIR go throughout India and also to a significant audience elsewhere in the South Asian neighbourhood should be enough to convince anyone of the negative fallout of which the ousting the two directors could be harbingers to.

Turning from the electronic media, then, to education, no less pernicious has been the effort of Education Minister Murli Manohar Joshi to

get school curricula radically rewritten so as to promote "Bharatiya culture" (read, glorification of "Hindu India" and deny the rich non-Hindu influences on Indian culture).

Curricular revision is a long, elaborate process in India, and education is as much the charge of the 25 constituent states as of the central government. Guidelines have to be issued to framers of syllabi and writers of textbooks by specialised organisations such as the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which in turn draw upon scholars from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

The BJP has begun tinkering with this superstructure by appointing its own people to head the NCERT and the National Open School. It has radically recast the ICSSR and ICHR by appointing utterly discredited individuals to leadership positions, persons of the kind who invent history rather than research it. And the curricular revision is very definitively underway with discussion papers and guidelines in circulation. Some of these papers not only stipulate the objectives and 'values' of education, but also substantially lay down its core content. All future textbooks must conform to these 'values' and standards. (In practice, this will apply to institutions at the state level too because they are donor-driven by federallevel funders).

To take one example, the Discussion Paper for the National Open School (with more than one million pupils) has highly objectionable formulations about Indian culture and its 'unique contribution' to the world history. It glorifies "Bharat" and regards all other South Asian societies "uncultured". A few examples:

• Indians are "a race". More, they have "a mission" and "destiny" as a race.

• It is "a fundamental postulate of Hindu thought that every way of life has its own contribution to make..." But "the ultimate reality" is defined by Krishna alone.

 According to the Ramayana legend, Sri Lanka was opulent. It had "excellent houses, decorated with wonderful wreaths and jewels, golden archways, pearls, diamonds, etc". But it was not "cultured". "In refreshing contrast, Ayodhya was both civilised and cultured. People were learned, free from greed [and] truthful..."

• India, irrespective of who ruled it, has never sought to subjugate other people, cultures or lands (i.e., it never had to contend with marauding nawabs and brutal *rajahs*).

• "Bharatiya culture is the only culture which has understood the life problems (sic) in their totality... In the history of the world, it is the only effort to see the science, philosophy, religion, psychology and social life in an integrated form."

 "Bharat excelled in every branch of Science... Our sages realised reality lying in

every sphere of life."

Such denial of the plain truth that India has since ancient time been a multi-cultural, multi-religious, syncretic society will lead today's student generation right up the path of communal bigotry. Certainly they will never be told in the classrooms that Christianity or Islam in India is older than Hinduism as most Indians know it today. The discussion papers greatly exaggerate ancient India's achievements and present the country as a victim of repeated foreign aggressions and invasions, especially from Islam. They argue that the time has now come for Indians (read 'Hindus') to assert themselves. It will not be long before this toxic bundle of fanciful ideas will be fed to millions of schoolchildren as absolute, historical truth.

The BJP's project in culture and education is driven and well-defined. In the most recent government (as in the one immediately prior to it), the party showed itself open to sharing certain cabinet portfolios with its junior allies, but it has jealously guarded culture and education for its own minister. This is because the BJP is serious about its long-term agenda of imposing a narrow majoritarian vision of culture upon India's masses and India's children. This Project of Prejudice is, in the end, far more insidious than the demolition of mosques, for it involves manipulating minds, injecting hatred into them, encouraging

Travelling Film South Asia

A selection of 15 outstanding films from Film South Asia '99, the festival of South Asian documentaries, held in Kathmandu in September/October 1999 is ready to start travelling all over the Subcontinent and the world. This collection of the best of South Asian documentary-making will give audiences an opportunity to sample the enormous range and variety of the latest documentaries available in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and elsewhere on South Asian subjects.

Host organisations interested in taking Travelling Film South Asia to their venues should contact Manesh Shrestha at fax: +977-1-542544 or email: <fsa@mos.com.np> Additional information on TFSA, including costs and logistics involved, descriptions of 15 films, etc, ore available at <www.himalmag.com/fsa>. stereotypes, and yoking India's young to a hateridden kind of nationalism.

Already, the party is promoting xenophobia by bringing in a bill to prevent persons of foreign origin (read, Sonia Gandhi) from holding high office. It is busy whipping up hatred and advancing agendas of political overcentralisation and authoritarianism. All of this can only spell trouble for Indian democracy in the days ahead.

—Praful Bidwai

SOUTH ASIA

WHAT MILLENNIUM?

CALL US spoilsports, party poopers, or antifun, but we refuse to get goose-haired or drunk over a date, and we don't particularly relish the idea of being forced to party at media-gunpoint. Nor do we want to enhance the company of some South Asian English-educated executive types who are sure to make a mess of themselves between 31 December 1999 and 1 January 2000.

Besides loving our sleep, the editors of Himal like the majority of South Asians celebrate, live and sleep by a different set of calendars. The calendar of the sequel Pope, Gregory XIII touches our lives but skin deep, in economics and administration, but our cultural being is ruled by calendars that are more homegrown. They may be a bit unscientific, relying as they tend to on the lunar rather than the solar, but they have proved quite sufficient these past several millennia to call forth a Dasain or a Dussehra, or a Pongal or a Karva Chouth.

On another level, we could go into the metaphysical bit about how time can't be measured by calendars, but that's better left to the poets and particle physicists. The 21st century, by some of our calendars, is old hat, while by some, like the Islamic lunar one, it's a good six centuries away; the Tibetan Buddhist calendar is now running 2126, while the widely used Hindu Vikram Sambat is in the year 2056. Meanwhile, the Nepal Sambat struggles gamely along, tortoise-like, at year 1120.

How can we call archaic or useless these calendars which rule the cultural lives of more than 90 percent of South Asia's 1.3 billion people? Most certainly can't, dear English reader. That's why we would hate to run into those back-slapping exees on 31 December 1999/1 January 2000 (Gregorian), with their borrowed drawl: "Hey man, welcome to the 21st century."

In this dismissal of the Gregorian 21st cen-

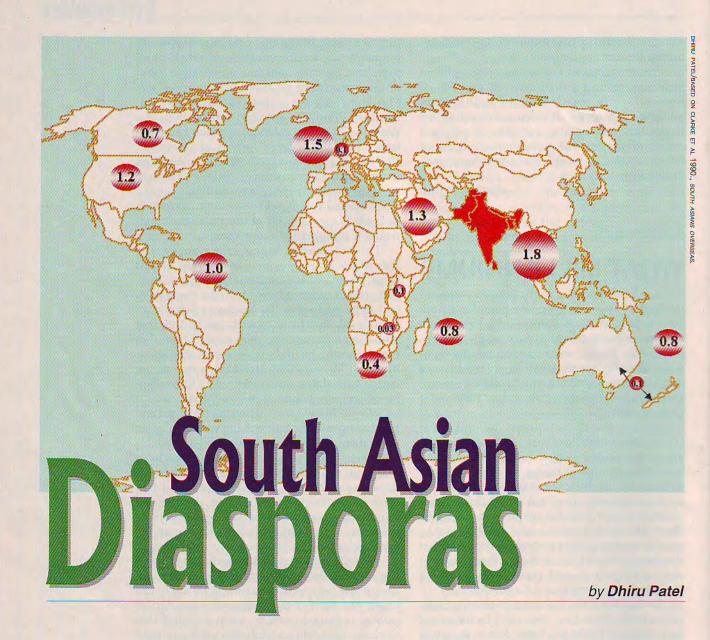
tury, we are in the august company of some of the more reactionary mullahs and shivsainiks, to be sure, but take note that Himal is not about to declare a fatwa on non-Christian revellers. This is because we realise that the entire Millennium Phoobah is not so much about the Western Gregorian calendar-wallahs being entranced by the epochal import of December 1999 turning into January 2000. The millennium madness has more to do with a global reason to party, with the help of transnational media, transnational hype and the willing complicity of English-speaking (or at the very least Occidental-leaning) elites everywhere.

This is just a bigger version of the Valentine's Day fever that has caught all our South Asian societies at the teeny bopper level, and an indication of how much the excitement and hype created in the Northern Atlantic affects us all. In a planet which has had its first global war by satellite television (Operation Desert Storm), its first global sexual scandal by Internet (Bill and Monica), what we are waiting for is a Global Reason for Party. And the millennium comes in handy at this very moment.

Why didn't we party when the Buddhist and Hindus turned the millennial corner? To begin with, there was no worldwide media available back then. Even if that were the case, global hype is mostly manufactured in the United States these days, although the rest of the world partakes in it with gusto. Then again, the tens and hundreds are not given the same earth-shaking power in other cultures, where 12-year or 60-year cycles may be given more importance.

We will not insist that nobody party when the clock strikes midnight. But let us try and keep some perspective on this. If we are to celebrate the turn of the Gregorian calendar for purely religious reasons, keep in mind that Christianity while certainly the most populous religion in the world, does not pull in any more than 34 percent of the global populace. For Hindus, 1 January will just be another day in the month of Poush, year 2056. For Muslims, it will be the middle of Ramadan in 1420. For the Tibetans, it will be another day in Earth-Hare year 2126.

For the rest of us whose administrative and secular lives are certainly ruled by the Gregorian calendar, we should remember that those who are getting excited about it is because the myth has it that Jesus of Nazareth was born, supposedly, on a manger, 2000 years ago. Now if that makes us jump with joy that the Son of God came down amongst us to lead us to salvation, we should just go ahead and party.



About 10 million people of South Asian origin can be found living outside their 'homeland'—from the Caribbean to Fiji, from Canada to New Zealand. They are concentrated in North America, Southeast Asia (mainly Malaysia, Burma and Singapore), Europe (mainly the UK), Eastern and Southern Africa (mostly Mauritius and South Africa), the Caribbean, the Pacific (mostly in Fiji), and now, as migrant workers, in West Asia.

The stories they have to tell are as varied as the communities and regions in South Asia which they or their ancestors left. From the indentured labourer condemned to

subhuman existence to the gutsy 'free' entrepreneurs who ventured out to make a fortune; from the unskilled working at menial jobs in the industrial heartland of the West to the highly educated, skilled professional of the global economy, they all left their home regions seeking a better future. Most people know of the latter-day migrants and how they are faring in their new countries, but accounts of the earlier pioneers are largely consigned to scholarly tomes and hardly appear in popular circulation.

For more than 2000 years, people from South Asia travelled and settled in Southeast

Figures in above map are approximates in millions. 1996 data for Canada & for US (Source: Respective Census).



Asia, Central Asia, and even China and Japan and the East African coast. However, unlike many other peoples, South Asians did not migrate permanently in substantial numbers to other parts of the world till the 19th century. Large-scale migration from the Subcontinent began in earnest in the 1830s with the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. To replace the recently-freed slaves with cheap labour in the sugar and cocoa plantations (as well as coal mines and estates) in other British, French and Dutch colonies, the British government set up the system of "indentured labour" to allow recruitment of workers to go abroad on five to 10-year contracts.

The tiny Indian Ocean island of Mauritius situated 500 miles east of Madagascar ('discovered' by the Portuguese, and taken by the British in 1810 after periods of Dutch and French rule) was the first to receive Indian indentured labourers in 1834. Next came British Guiana in 1838, Trinidad, Réunion, Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1845, Jamaica in 1854, Natal, South Africa, in 1860, Dutch Guiana in 1873, Fiji in 1879, East Africa in 1895, and smaller numbers in a number of other outposts.

Servants and dancing girls

Noted British historian Hugh Tinker observes in his now-classic A New System of Slavery that for most South Asians "emigration was not accepted as a natural process" and that "even under the most desperate circumstances, he [the Indian] always leaves his native land with an idea of returning to it". Emigration was more a matter of 'push' than 'pull' for most South Asians who needed to escape intolerable living situations back home.

The emigrants mainly hailed from the overcrowded agricultural districts of India, where crop failure could plunge whole villages to near-starvation. There were clear correlations between years of poor harvests in particular areas and large-scale emigration from there. On an individual level, of course, there were those who migrated for more personal reasons, such as having displeased village notables, lost a family quarrel, or being wanted by the authorities.

Because of the mystery surrounding emigration, local touts (called *arkatia* or *arkati*, the origin of which is not clear) could easily prey upon vulnerable, illiterate villagers with wonderful accounts of places that required their services. It was only from

the licensed recruiters at the boarding depot that the peasants often learnt of the true facts. But when they declined to go, they would be asked for road expenses up to the depot, which left the peasants with the choice of returning home penniless or emigrating. It was also often the case that the deception was concealed until arrival in the far-off colony, by which time it was obviously too late.

Most of the labourers were recruited by licensed recruiting agencies using, as noted by Tinker, "the most dubious methods" from the areas closest to the ports, especially Madras and Calcutta. Thus the Tamil and Telugu districts of the Madras Presidency in the south and Bihar's Chhota Nagpur and the United Provinces districts in the north were the principal areas of recruitment.

All kinds of individuals were swept into the emigration agent's net and although the latter was supposed to examine the muscles and hands for signs of manual toil, they signed up anyone and everyone in order to fill the ships quickly. One official report noted, for example, that of the 27 emigrants in one ship interviewed, 14 were non-labourers and included weavers, scribes, shoemakers and beggars, all of them having been duped into going overseas. On another boat, over half were domestic servants, soldiers, policemen, barbers, shopkeepers, hawkers, and even dancing girls and their male attendants.

The journey

Recruitment took place mainly in the interior. These were the days before the British built the incredible network of Indian railways, and so the labourers had to travel hundreds of miles on foot to reach the ports. An average trek from Varanasi or Patna to Calcutta port would take 30 to 40 days. With the advent of the railways, and the emigrants, writes Tinker, "squeezed together, 10 in a third-class compartment", this trip was reduced to less than two days.

The shock and alienation felt by the emigrants, most of whom would have left their village and birth places for the first time, was greatly deepened as they waited for three weeks or more in the depot in the company of total strangers "whose speech was unintelligible, and whose physical characteristics appeared foreign, while their ways of eating and other habits would all seem wrong". However, they would have to conform to these strange ways (including standard-issue, convict-like clothing), and

quickly pick up the lingua franca of the depot, Hindustani. There was also the inevitable epidemic which often turned the depots into a place of sickness and death. Thus, as Tinker writes, the emigrant "was now immersed in a process of deculturisation, almost dehumanisation".

The sea journey intensified this process. Notes Tinker: "Time and again the Europeans involved in these voyages made a comparison with the Middle Passage of slavery." As with the slaves, the experience "both shattered and strengthened" the survivors who gained "fortitude, and a sense of comradeship, and even brotherhood for those who had shared the passage". The voyage lasted anywhere from eight weeks (to Mauritius) to up to 26 weeks (to the Caribbean).

Conditions on the sailing ships left much to be desired. The crew tended to ill-treat their human cargo with impunity. Sickness, disease and death were common, and mortality rates were appalling, reaching up to 38 percent in the case of one passage. Then there were the inevitable storms and shipwrecks.

Life on the plantation

After landing, the recruits were sorted out and marched off to their new 'home' – the old slave quarters, still called the Camp des

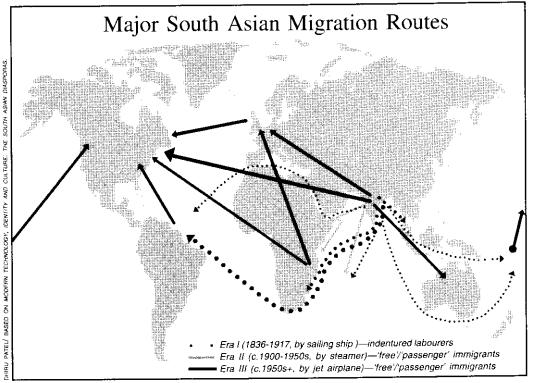
Noirs (Camp of the Blacks) and "Nigger Yard". Many spent their first year in sorrowful shock, remembering their homes and realising how badly they had been tricked. The first few years were very trying and many failed to adapt to the arduous conditions. Mortality rates went as high as 12 percent, while life for the survivors was literally a living hell, or *narak*, as it is called in Hindustani.

The workers had very few rights, and these were generally ignored. They were subject to the whims of those in charge: the overseers, the manager or the owner who did not have their welfare in their minds as a priority. Working and living conditions were terrible, health care and housing extremely primitive, and wages very low (and to remain unchanged for 100 years). It was no wonder that suicide rates were shockingly high. In the mid-1870s, while they varied between 46 per million in Madras to 54 in the UP back home, it was 640 among expatriate Indians in Natal and 780 in Fiji (climbing to 831 in 1910).

The system of indenture was configured in such a way that it tied the labourers to their contract longer than they had agreed to. Fines were frequently imposed for trivial offences such as quarrelling with other workers, and deductions were made from pay for not meeting the un-

realistic production targets, and so on. The workers often ended up owing the plantation owner at the end of their indentureship and so had to re-indenture repeatedly. This was a new system of slavery and it lasted al. of 90 years after its inception. It was a fact, after all, that indentured labourers cost only half as much as the slaves they had replaced.

About a third of the labourers returned home, and almost all of them came back penniless. Tinker s research showed that in 1916, 76 percent brought back nothing.



with 10 percent bringing 100 to 150 rupees. Worst of all, most returned with their health shattered.

Marriage and geography

The length, harshness and risks of the voyages in this period of indentureship (1830s-1910s), together with the subsistence-level pay, would have made visits to South Asia extremely difficult, if not impossible. So the only contacts with the homeland were through new arrivals and correspondence (with the help of letter-writers), and later through visitors such as Hindu and Muslim 'missionaries' and others.

There is, however, one crucial difference in the condition of African slaves and that of the Indians who stayed on, and that is the question of identity. Both groups went through the same soul-destroying conditions in the colonies. But while that experience obliterated the identity of the African slaves, Indian labourers retained, albeit to varying degrees, much of what made up their cultural heritage, which included elements of language, religion, food, celebrations, and music, and held on tightly to it.

With the growing affluence of the Caribbean Indian communities after 1945 and, presumably, significantly more comfortable and faster means of travel - by steam/diesel ship, later by air to South Asia and then inland by train or car/bus-the contacts intensified. Indian artistes were invited to perform and a greater number of Caribbean Indians began going to India (on pilgrimages, visits to ancestral places, business or to study). The government of India also encouraged the building of links with descendants of its 19th-century citizens in the Caribbean as well as in Mauritius, Fiji and other places, through a variety of activities, such as visits by parliamentarians.

In recent times there has been, among their descendants, a marked revival of 'Indianness' and contact with the Subcontinent. The story of Jaipal Chamar, indentured in 1912 to Jamaica, who was able to re-establish in 1954 his Indian connection with a son in India born some months after his departure, is not atypical, as historian B. Samaroo notes:

Jaipal Chamar's search for his heritage has been re-enacted time and time again by Indians settled abroad... During the century and a half that Indians have been in the Caribbean they have constantly sought to maintain this contact by seeking out, during indentureship, new immigrants who could tell them of developments at home... After indentureship ended the contact took other forms...

In the case of East Africa, the pattern of contact was different from the very beginning due to several factors. Significant Indian immigration began only at the end of the 19th century, some 60 years after the first wave to the Caribbean. Virtually all of them migrated, and especially so after World War I, as 'free', 'passenger' or non-indentured immigrants, who had more ambition and enterprise, and the majority (mostly from Gujarat and the Punjab) went for trade.

The trips from the Subcontinent to East Africa (which were by steamship by the second decade of this century) took only about three weeks compared to the 26 weeks sail to the Caribbean. The frequency of travel in both directions was hence much higher, leading to easier contact and consequently

stronger retention of South Asian culture and identity in East Africa and in nearby Mauritius.

But the situation in South Africa was closer to that in the Caribbean than, as it might be surmised, to East Africa. This was due to the similarity

of circumstance. As in the Caribbean, the vast majority of South Asians were brought to South Africa as indentured labourers and lived as disenfranchised, landless, semi-skilled and unskilled workers under oppressive racist regimes. This virtually cancelled out the advantage of relative proximity to South Asia. In contrast, the much smaller communities in the territories between East and South Africa (i.e. Central Africa) maintained closer contact with South Asia precisely because their conditions were similar to those of their East African brethren.

In the critical area of marriage, geographic proximity played a vital role. It was easier for immigrants in East Africa to search for marriage partners from back home, at least until the 1960s, by which time the local pool of potential partners had grown sufficiently to make such trips less necessary. This was particularly important for the much-smaller immigrant communities in Central Africa, which began to look increasingly to the East



The immigrant/crew aboard the Avoca, one of the many ships that plied between India and Trinidad & Tobago.

Poonammand people's history

The popular notion that the indentured workers were primarily male is a misinformed one. Women made up at least a third—as required by government statute—and sometimes close to 40 to 45 percent of the labourers being transported from India.

The continued migration of Indian women through the nearly 100 years of indentureship facilitated greater degree of exclusivity around racial and ethnic boundaries in Trinidad and elsewhere. It also made racial mixture with other groups--particularly the Afro-Trinidadians--less likely, and which often threw up situations of resistance and resentment.

Recent decades have seen education and political participation help the Indo-Trinidadian population to integrate into mainstream Trinidadian society. But there still exist exclusive ethnic enclaves in certain pockets of Trinidadian society, which was made possible by the presence of Indian women from the very beginning.

Sumita Chatterjee presents a brief portrait of one of the few surviving women of that generation of indentured workers who was born in India, and who had re-created a new home and a new identity in Trinidad.

I met Poonamma Armoogam for the first time on a hot afternoon at her daughter Sookia's modest house in Tunapuna, Trinidad, in 1995. A widow, she was living alone and, at 86, still maintained an independent livelihood. Visiting her daughter's house, she reminisced about her remarkable and tenacious life, a life that straddled almost a century, and one, that had witnessed the traumas and turbulence of colonial displacement in very personal ways.

Poonamma emigrated from Madras in 1915 as a six-year-old with her parents who were travelling on indentured contracts to Trinidad. On being asked about what she remembered of the long sea journey, she recalled the excitement of seeing a submarine! Not surprisingly, as a child who could not have known of

the hard plantation work that was awaiting their arrival, she had only fond memories of the voyage.

But, of course, other sources tell us of the harrowing nature of the journey, ominously termed "Kalapani" (Black

Waters), by many who recalled the details of the travel. Migration became a metaphor for loss—a loss of their sense of self, their homes, their identity, their roots. It would take many decades of struggle to reimagine a space they could call their own—a home outside the realm of the plantation barracks and semi-servitude.

Poonamma started rural work in

Poonamma Armoogam (above) and a slave barrack for indentured workers in Trinidad.



the children's gang on plantation Petit Morne, and laboured on different sugar estates all her adult life. After indentureship was abolished, Poonamma married a *jahaji bhai* (ship mate travelling together from India) with whom she set up home on a small piece of marshy land.

After marriage, Poonamma continued to divide her time between the home plot and the nearby Caroni sugar estate in order to make ends meet. The labour and creativity of women like Poonamma were extremely crucial in setting up alternative modes of survival, away from the plantation economy.

She recalled, with a great degree of pride, her own mother's role in shaping her identity, be it in the handing down of rituals of birth, death and marriage, or in the example she set by the life she had led

of hard work and self reliance. Interestingly, Poonamma's mother, Amrawaddy, did not follow her husband and only son back to India after indentureship, but decided to stay back in Trinidad to be around her two daughters—Meena and Poonamma.

Poonamma's daughter, Sookia, acknowledged that it was her grandmother and mother who were responsible for her fluency in both Tamil and Bhojpuri. Significant aspects of the oral tradition, from reciting the *Ramayana*, to learning the songs of Chhatti and Sohar were handed down from mother to daughter. Poonamma, like her mother before her, continues to remain fiercely independent, tending her land and garden.

4

African and South African groups by the 1960s.

In total contrast, it appears that not many visited South Asia from Fiji. Their principal mode of contact was similar to the Caribbean one referred to above, with one significant exception. The several thousand Gujarati and Punjabi 'free' immigrants of the 1920-1940 period retained close ties with South Asia; but they "were felt to constitute a separate, almost 'alien' element in the Fijian Indian community", writes anthropologist A.C. Mayer.

Modern emigrants

The massive spurt in post-1950 South Asian emigration consisted of two very different types of South Asians. Most of those who emigrated in the 1950s and 60s were unskilled workers who went to fill post-World War II labour shortages in the lowestpaid unskilled, menial occupations in British cities. A sizeable number of skilled South Asians also departed East Africa to escape the escalating local anti-Asian climate after independence, culminating in Idi Amin's peremptory en masse expulsion of Indians in 1972.

In contrast, in the post-1970 period the majority of emigrants have been skilled professionals - technicians, engineers, doctors, academics—who have settled in high-paying jobs, mostly in North America. In addition, a large number of temporary workers from South Asia also go to the oilproducing countries of West Asia.

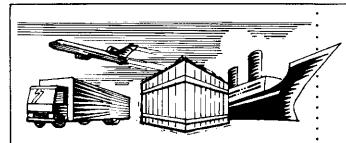
The pattern of travel and contact for immigrants in the earlier period (pre-1950)

and for those in the most recent period could not be more dramatically different. With the arrival of the jet plane, travel time and distance have been virtually eliminated: it now takes less than 18 hours to go from the Caribbean to South Asia, a trip that took more than six months a century ago, and more of the diaspora South Asians today can afford the cut-rate air fares of the modern era.

There is now considerable travel back and forth to the Subcontinent, particularly from North America and the UK, and also from the earlier areas of immigration such as the Caribbean. The purposes of the visits (often two-way), of course, vary-to see family and friends, arrange marriages, conduct business, undertake cultural or religious activities, etc-but they all reinforce the South Asian identity.

Furthermore, developments modern transportation and communication technologies have also helped create a world where dispersed South Asians, rather than being culturally isolated, can now find in most major world cities easy access to everything from Asian-language broadcasts and newspapers to shops selling videotapes in Indian languages.

Whether the contacts will continue or what the extent or strength of the contacts will be in the second and subsequent generations, born and brought up outside of South Asia, remains to be seen. If the past is anything to go by, it is very likely that the binding force of South Asian culture will ensure the continuation of some form of contact for some time into the future at least.



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Anglo-Indian by Lionel Lumb

A community that has become a state of mind.

An Anglo-Indian these days is almost a state of mind. Many who became part of the community's diaspora after India and Pakistan gained Independence in 1947, never declare themselves as Anglo-Indians, seemingly eager to disappear into their host societies in the Anglophone countries of the West.

However, there are enough who care about their unique heritage to try to preserve and celebrate it, and have done so with international gatherings every three years: in the UK in 1989; in Canada in 1992; in Australia in 1995; and last year in India itself, officially in Bangalore and with a spirited follow-up in Calcutta, home to the largest population of Anglo-Indians through the centuries.

The much-anticipated Bangalore gathering was a thorough disappointment. It was racked by disagreement among rival Anglo-Indian groups within India, and the spirit of celebration so visible in Toronto and Perth turned joyless and sour. The 300-or-so delegates from abroad came to the reunion awash with nostalgia, believing this would go down as the most important reunion. Instead, they found dissension and a startling degree of uncaring for poorer host-country participants among the Anglo-Indian elites of India. Fortunately, Calcutta turned out different.

When Anglo-Indians get together in cities like Toronto, the discussion turns to the best parts of the good old days in India—evenings at the club, the company of friends, dinners and great food, memorable parties, incomparable dance bands, and the general solidarity of a community centred on the church or social club. Forgotten or glossed over are the difficulties: the clerical, subordinate or mid-management jobs that seemed their destiny; the promotions they saw going to the British in pre-Indepen-

dence days and to 'full-blooded' Indians after 1947; the contempt and ridicule they often faced from both the British and Indians because of their mixed race.

There were and are outstanding exceptions. Many Anglo-Indian families can point with pride to members who rose to the top in branches of the civil service, in education and even in private business. But the fact is that the majority stumbled against a thus-far-and-no-farther hurdle. One reason was education. Anglo-Indians had a highly developed system that gave them the finest high school education, but strangely very few went on to university. That was partly because the jobs in which the British had quotas reserved for them-such as in the railways, the post and telegraph, the customs and the police-did not require university degrees. For whatever reason, the Anglo-Indian parents undervalued higher education and rarely pushed their children beyond high school.

Of course, the fate of the Anglo-Indians was tied more to the fortunes of the British than anything else. During emergencies

An "Anglo-Indian" means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India, and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes

 Article 366(2) of the Constitution of India, 1950.





when the British needed the services of this most loyal group, they prospered, and as the crisis invariably blew over, they suffered. In this sense, the best thing that may have happened to the community was loss of the self-serving patronage that British rule gave them.

With the British departing from India, many Anglo-Indians felt betrayed and abandoned. Many decided to leave, and those who departed on the heels of the British went mostly to Britain. Later waves went to Australia after it dropped its whites-only immigration policy in the 1960s, and to Canada and the United States.

It is difficult to put hard figures to the Anglo-Indian populations since so many of them do not declare themselves as such in their rush to become part of the white hostsocieties. But it is believed that more Anglo-Indians now live outside South Asia than within, perhaps as many as 350,000, with fewer than 200,000 remaining in India and Pakistan. Those who 'got away' built on the survival skills they had acquired at surviving as a buffer community between the ruling British and the resentful Indian mass.

There has been little research done on the community in North America, but in Australia Adrian Gilbert has made an important study of Anglo-Indians settled there. He found that Anglo-Indians in Australia (and this probably applies to Canada as well) are doing better socially, educationally and economically, than in Britain or, indeed, India. As Gilbert puts it, India and Britain are both stratified societies, but in Australia, Anglo-Indians are "just another immigrant group that had



to establish themselves".

The situation for many of those who did not 'get away' is far from satisfactory, with prosperity, as ever, tied to education. There are Anglo-Indian slums in Madras and Calcutta, with Tiljallah, outside Calcutta on the way to Dum Dum airport, being perhaps the most badly off. At the other end of the scale, of course, there are better-educated Anglo-Indians who are prospering in business or in management positions.

The good news is that Anglo-Indians in the diaspora have begun to show increasing pride of community. The Internet has made a significant difference, with many websites which make it easier for Anglo-Indians to stay in touch. The younger generation, it seems, is more eager to learn more about their heritage and to discuss ways of preserving their most uniquely South Asian culture. Best of all, perhaps, they have begun to contribute to various relief funds for their less-fortunate members back in India. Which makes one hopeful that the next reunion, to be held in Auckland in 2001, will not be marked by the rancour witnessed in Bangalore.



Reunion III in Perth,



A 1920s photo showing Railway Superintendent Robert Bird (third from left) with fellow Anglo-Indian replacement (second from right) at Guntakal, Andhra Pradesh.

Diasporics have generally favoured the technologies that allow for narrowcasting to target specific audiences over those that provide the means for mass communication.

Digital



Diasporic communication networks are sometimes viewed as forming alternatives to the structures of corporate globalisation. Commentators writing from the perspectives of cultural studies and postcolonialism tend to see them as "the empire striking back". The diasporic site becomes the cultural border, Homi Bhabha's metaphorical "third space", lying between the country of origin and the country of residence.

This is the zone of intense, cutting-edge creativity born out of the existential angst of the immigrant who is neither here nor there. She is Abdul JanMohammed's "specular border intellectual" who "caught between two cultures...subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them". One could cite from just within the South Asian diaspora a growing list of accomplished writers to support these ideas: it would include Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lanka/Canada), Moez G. Vassanji (Kenya/Tanzania/ Canada), Rohinton Mistry (India/Canada), Anita Desai (India/Canada), Cyril Dabydeen (Guyana/Canada), V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad/ England), Salman Rushdie (India/England), and Hanif Kureishi (England).

The media of diasporic groups have frequently been at the leading edge of technology adoption due to the particular challenges they face in reaching their audiences. The relatively small and widely scattered nature of communities they serve have always encouraged them to seek out the most

efficient and cost-effective means of communication.

Diasporics have generally favoured the technologies that allow for narrowcasting to target specific audiences over those that provide the means for mass communication. Marie Gillespie notes about the Indian community in Southhall, England, that many families obtained VCRs as early as 1978 "well before most households in Britain". This is probably true for other parts of the South Asian diaspora which voraciously consume movies from India and TV serials from Pakistan.

Having little input into the content of dominant national or global media, transnations (cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai's term) have also found new technologies like digital broadcasting satellites (DBS) and the Internet as particularly appropriate in maintaining active links among their far-flung members. Indeed, diasporic groups in North America and Europe were among the earliest to adopt DBS for cross-border transmissions. But at the same time, these very market-based technological solutions, which are enabling transnational communities to overcome structural communication barriers, are also drawing them into the dominant global

Corporate providers of digital broadcast services in the West have realised the viability of ethnic channels and are making



them a significant part of their offerings. The India-oriented Network Asia appears on DirectTV in the US and Canada's ExpressVu carries the (South) Asian Television Network (ATN), which telecasts Doordarshan programming.

That "Asian Indians have the highest per capita income and educational level of any US ethnic group" has been an important part of ATN's North American marketing strategy. Diasporic DBS broadcasters carry out market research, programme scheduling, and advertising similar to those conducted by major networks. Apart from certain differences in the modes of narrative, the only major difference in these broadcasts, compared to Western mainstream programming, seems to be in the languages and cultures of the content.

There is a price to be paid in adopting a market-based model of diasporic broadcasting. Given the lack of public media content for cultural minorities in the West, they become reliant on commercial ethnic broadcasters. This has led to the tacit acceptance of production values that are frequently at odds with artistic integrity. There is often convergence of programme content and advertised products in the shows put out by several commercially-based ethnic broadcasters. Creative cultural programming appears to be a low priority in much of diasporic broadcasting, and the primary problem does not seem to be Western cultural imperialism. Adoption of the market model of broadcasting appears to belie the cultural studies view of minority media in the West as uniformly resisting dominant

structures and discourses.

Diasporic groups are also making extensive use of on-line services like Usenet and Listserv. These global networks are allowing for relatively easy connections for communities living in various continents. Unlike the one-way broadcast model of communication, on-line media are interactive and less hierarchical. The ability to exchange messages with individuals on the other side of the planet and to have access to community information almost instantaneously changes the dynamics of the diaspora, allowing for qualitatively and quantitatively enhanced linkages.

Access to the Net remains limited, however. Even in Western countries with the highest connectivity, those who are poor, elderly, lack higher education, or live in rural regions are not likely to be linked. The situation is much worse in the poorer countries. Whereas South Asians are increasingly using the new media, exposure seems largely limited to an information elite which is creating diasporic directories of individuals, community institutions, and businesses. Interestingly, this cybercaste has also extended their endogamous search for future spouses from diasporic newspapers to websites.

For those who wish to obtain free Internet-based services, several corporate giants are willing to oblige as long as patrons agree to become captive audiences to the growing amount of advertising on electronic sites. This becomes yet another way by which the diasporic who seeks to re-establish community by digital means is snared in the (World Wide) Web spun by global corporations.

Who is a desi?

Himal's poser to the discussion group of the South Asian Journalists Association (SAJA) led moderator Sreenath Sreenivasan to draw our attention to the SAJA Stylebook www.saja.org/stylebook, which listed desi as: A colloquial name for people who trace their ancestry to South Asia, especially India and Pakistan. Pronounced "DAY-see", it is the Hindi word for "from my country". Added Sreenivasan: "In an article about the South Asian party scene in the Big Apple, New York Times reporter Somini Sengupta described the word as a "Hindi version of homeboy or homegirl" (NYT, 6/30/96: "To Be Young, Indian and Hip").

The following two reactions are from other SAJA discussants:

When I use the term desi, I mean: "of my people". I feel a camaraderie with a desi. A desi is someone who's like me. Someone who experiences the same cultural fusion, gender role bewilderment, and racism, while wearing a brown-is-cool attitude.

Ushma U < ushma@jhu.edu>

As an American-born Indian, I stick with the definition "of the country". On a personal level, to be desi connotes some sort of ancestral affiliation with the Subcontinent and some sort of desire in crafting a sense of identity or feeling of community with others who share that ancestral affiliation. I guess I also associate it with things like enjoying dal and rice, not getting unnerved by the things that unravel many foreigners and NRIs who return to India—like beggars, no toilet paper, that kind of thing.

Himanee Gupta Honolulu, Hawaii

Canada Sikhs

by Tarik Ali Khan

In the 1980s, as India fought its dirty war to quash Sikh separatism, it inadvertently inspired a new generation of savvy Canadian Sikh politicians.

Stepping off the plane, the first-time visitor to Toronto might be surprised at what seems like a Sikh monopoly on jobs at Pearson International Airport. Everyone, from the customs and immigration officials to the elderly "aunties" mopping the floors, are Sikhs, and all reflecting their characteristic image: proud and hard-working.

What may come as even more of a surprise is that today a Sikh is poised to become premier of the very Canadian province notorious for its once racist policies towards Canadian Asians. It may not be long before the far western province of British Columbia, the bastion of Anglo pioneerism, will be governed by Ujjal Dosanjh. As the province's Attorney General, Dosanjh has had a high profile and is now leading the race for the leadership of the ruling New Democrat Party (NDP). Challenging him is, among others, a Sikh MP named Manmohan (Moe) Sihota.

Dosanjh's is the classic North American immigrant success story. Arriving as a teenager in Canada barely able to speak English, he worked in the sawmills of British Co-

lumbia before moving on to a career in law and subsequently being elected to the provincial legislature. If Dosanjh manages to clinch the party leadership, and the public votes the NDP back in office in the next election scheduled for 2001, the political space for 'visible minorities' in Canada will once again have been widened by the Sikhs.

Turban trouble

It would be an understatement to say that South Asians have generally been successful in North America. The late 1960s and 70s saw the arrival of educated professionals as well as skilled labourers from the Subcontinent to North America. Some migrants excelled at white-collar professions such as medicine, engineering and accounting, others carved out a niche in small and mid-size business, and a few even made inroads into the world of big business. What most people do not know is that the pioneers have always been the Sikhs.

Presently numbering over 300,000 of the roughly 700,000 South Asian migrants in Canada, Sikhs have always been Canada's most prominent South Asians. This is particularly so in the west coast and in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto, where Indian restaurants offer largely Punjabi fare. Government posters promoting the value of "multiculturalism" invariably offer up the



image of the turbaned Sikh.

For those who choose to remember, however, the road to integration with the mainstream has been long and rough. From the pioneer fruit farmers and sawmill workers out west to the taxi-drivers and professionals who arrived later in the cities, Sikhs have endured racism which had a particular edge because of their *de rigueur* turbans and uncut hair. Indeed, on this score the struggle has been continuous and extends to this day.

In the early 1990s, a Sikh member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) successfully challenged the Mounties in court for their refusal to allow him to wear his turban as part of his uniform. Then there was the recent ludicrous incident in which the Royal Canadian Legion (a war veterans association) barred turbaned Sikhs from entering their halls because they refused to "take off their hats". Sikh youth in Toronto and Edmonton have successfully taken cases to the national human rights commission demanding the right to carry the ceremonial dagger, the kirpan, and recently a court ruled in favour of a Sikh boxer against the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association, which claimed that his beard could cause injury to his opponents!

Komagata Maru

Indians, of course, had been travelling to South Africa, the West Indies and Fiji as contract labourers since the 1830s. After Punjab's relatively late annexation into British India (1849), Sikhs too were taken to work in the Caribbean. But their fiercely independent spirit meant that they were prepared to fight for their rights, something new for plantation owners used to pliant subcontinental labour. Many Sikh labourers simply escaped to Spanish Central America in search of more lucrative work. When 'free migrants' began leaving Indian shores to seek their fortunes towards the end of the 19th century, Sikhs were also among the

first of them.

In 1897, it so happened that Sikh soldiers attending Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in London returned to India via British Columbia. They saw the opportunity in Canada's wild west and spread the word upon their return to Punjab. Sikhs who had already reached Shanghai and Hong Kong heard about the 2.50 dollar daily-wage rates for workers in lumber yards and steel factories (compared to the going rate of 30 cents in India) and they too began to seek passage across the Pacific to the west coast of North America. The first major migration of Sikhs took place in 1903-04.

The increasing number of Sikhs and other Asian migrants (Chinese and Japanese) created a violent backlash from the white settlers on the west coast. By 1907, the Asian Expulsion League in British Columbia had lobbied successfully to disenfranchise all people arriving from India. They were referred to simply as "Hindus" (although almost all of them were Sikhs), and in spite of their being British citizens and Canada itself being a British dominion, the government of British Columbia stripped them of the right to vote, purchase Crown timber, and work in certain professions. The same year, farther down the coast in Bellingham, Washington, an "anti-Hindu" riot erupted and angry white sawmill workers fearful for their jobs chased 300 Sikhs out of town.

The Dominion Government of Canada briefly considered deporting its 2000 Indian settlers to British Honduras (now Belize). As for new arrivals, in 1908 it was mandated that all immigrants come by 'continuous passage' (i.e. without stopping at any port) from their country of origin. No ship could make such a voyage from India in those days. Additionally, immigrants were required to have at least two hundred dollars with them, which meant that the door for Indians was effectively shut.

In 1914, a steamship, the Komagata Maru, bringing Sikh immigrants to Canada was forced to return to India (see box overleaf) even though it had arrived by continuous passage. As they watched their Sikh brethren turned away from the shores of Canada, it was difficult

The two sides of a first day cover of the Canadian postage stamp celebrating 100 years of Sikhs in the country.

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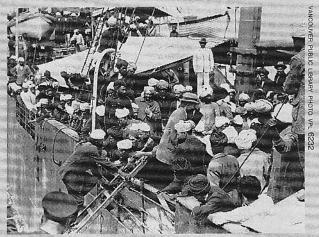
To admit Orientals in large numbers would mean, in the end, the extinction of the white people, and we always have in mind the necessity of keeping this a white man's country.

—Sir Richard McBride
Premier of British Columbia, 1914.

Canada's racist policies were put to the test in May 1914 over the infamous Komagata Maru Incident. Testing the law requiring 'continuous passage', entrepreneur Gurdit Singh chartered a Japanese steamship, the *Komagata Maru*, to bring 376 largely Sikh passengers via continuous passage to British Columbia.

Upon entering the Vancouver Harbour, the ship was stopped and the passengers prevented from disembarking, despite the fact that they were all British (Indian) citizens. For the next two months, the press fanned local paranoia about an invasion of 'Hindus' who were described as degraded, sick, hungry and a menace to women and children. The stranded passengers began to run out of supplies as they waited for Canada to decide their fate.

Under orders from the Immigration Department, the Canadian Navy eventually forced the ship to return to India. A series of grisly events followed. The officer responsible for the deportation, William Hopkinson, had used informants from the Sikh community to report on any efforts to assist the passengers. These informants were promptly assassinated by other Sikh community members. In October 1914, Hopkinson himself was murdered by one Mewa Singh. The government tried and executed Singh the following year.



Posing on board the Komogata Maru with Vancouver in the background (top), awaiting immigration clearance that never came. A film detailing the deportation of the Sikh immigrants, The Komagata Maru Incident, written by well-known Indian director Mahesh Bhatt and directed by Deepa Mehta (Fire and Earth), is currently being filmed.

Meanwhile back in India, the ignominious return of the Komagata Maru prompted the Budge Budge Riot in Calcutta as the deported passengers refused to be forcefully returned to Punjab. Twenty of them were shot dead by British soldiers.

It is estimated that over 7000, mostly Sikh, Indians migrated to the United States and Canada between 1899 and 1920. However, racist government policies ensured that the next wave of Sikhs would not arrive until the 1960s. For a Canada that today prides itself on its multiculturalism, the Komagata Maru Incident is seen as an indelible stain on its record.

for the resident population not to feel betrayed by their colonial rulers.

The idea of overthrowing the British in India soon spread through the Sikh settler communities in North America, particularly California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. Leaders of the local Gadar (Mutiny) Movement called for Sikhs to return to India to fight for their homeland. The call was heeded by the migrants, almost entirely male, and over 3000 returned to India, leaving a few hundred in the US and roughly 700 in Canada's lumber mills and logging camps.

Shedding the stereotype

The diminished Canadian Sikh community grew slowly over the next few decades. The Sikhs eventually won the right to vote in 1947 and the slow integration into the mainstream continued. That is, until 1984, when Indira Gandhi ordered troops to storm the Golden Temple in Amritsar, which led to her own assassination and retaliatory riots against Sikhs in various parts of India. Sikhs all over the world felt betrayed in their homeland. With the Khalistan movement for an independent Sikh state in full swing in India, extremist elements began to fundraise in Canada's gurdwaras. As in India, the militant movement now began to win over moderate Sikhs who were shocked by the 1984 massacres of Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere.

The next year, an Air India flight originating in Toronto blew up over the Atlantic, and suspicion fell on the Khalistani militants. Canadian security agencies began to pursue Sikh activists, while Sikh refugee claimants from India became immediately suspect. The Sikhs now confronted a new stereotype—'terrorists'.

Canada's Sikh community went into crisis management mode, and began working in earnest to show the Canadian public that they were not only law-abiding citizens, but model Canadians as well. Renowned Sikh lawyer, T. Sher Singh from Ontario, attributes the political successes of today's Canadian Sikhs to this struggle to shed the ste-

reotype.

However, divisive politics continue to

plague the community. Today, a battle royal rages between pro-Khalistan fundamentalists and moderates in the gurdwaras. Recently, disagreements over religious customs, such as sitting on the ground versus using tables and chairs during langar (free kitchen) ceremonies, have escalated into fullscale violence. In 1998, Tara Singh Hayer, the editor of the moderate Indo-Canadian Times was assassinated in his Vancouver home for daring to openly criticise the fundamentalists. Even Ujjal Dosanjh, aspirant to British Columbia's premiership, was beaten for daring to speak out against separatism [in India] during the Sikhs' darkest hour.

For the moment, the ability of the Khalistani movement to excite the Canadian Sikh seems to be on the wane. In India, the militancy is nearly finished, and in Canada the fundamentalists seem to be losing the war. Overall, the Sikhs seem have mastered the fine balance of integrating into the mainstream, while preserving their identity and their political interests. And after years of struggle, the stories of the first Sikh pioneers are finally being told and are being included in the discourse of early settlement in Canada (a topic that had hitherto focused on white settlers only).

The new generation of Canada's most visible minority is thus being raised not only with the characteristic work ethic, but with an unparallelled level of political engagement as well. Sikhs today boast of nine elected officials at various levels of government in Canada, including Harbance (Herb)

Dhaliwal, Federal Minister for Fisheries and Oceans. For the former revenue minister, and for the Sikh community as a whole, this is no token portfolio.

And in April 1999, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien unveiled a postage stamp commemorating the 100th year anniversary of the Sikhs in Canada. From the lumberyard to the postage stamp, the Sikhs of Canada seem to have made it.

Ujjal Dosanjh: Future premier of British Columbia?

Vocal Immigrants

WASHINGTON—Although they did not begin arriving in this country in large numbers until the late 1960s, after a change in US immigration law, Indian immigrants have emerged as one of the nation's most dynamic ethnic communities. According to 1990 census data, Indian Americans have the highest average household income—USD 60,903—of any Asian-Pacific ethnic group, a category that includes Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans.

Indian entrepreneurial skills have had a spectacular impact in the Internet and software industries, where Indian Americans have begun to organise into groups such as the Indus Entrepreneurs and the Indian CEO High Tech Council. The latter boasts a Washington area membership of 165 Indian American chief executives whose companies employ nearly 20,000 people.

These software engineers and start-up specialists have not been shy about translating their economic success into political clout. "In politics, the power comes from money and business," said Reggie Aggarwal, a 30-year-old lawyer and president of a Fairfax high-tech firm who helped found the Council. "A group like ours can meet with all kinds of senators and congressmen. We're not just going to get you active people, we're going to get you power players. Every event we've had is a grand slam."

That is no idle boast. In September 1996, Indian American executives and professionals held a fund-raiser for Clinton at the Mayflower Hotel that raised a reported USD 400,000.

Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush has already benefitted from the largesse of Indian Americans such as Krishna Srinivasa, 54, who immigrated in 1969 and now runs a computer consulting business in Atlanta. "We want better Indo-US relations," said Srinivasa, who so far has raised USD 150,000 for Bush at two campaign events and recently met with the candidate at his Austin office. "There is no reason the world's largest democracy cannot have a working relationship with the world's greatest democracy."

Indian Americans' generosity to po-

litical campaigns has been accompanied by growing support for India on Capitol Hill. The Congressional India Caucus, founded in 1993, now has 115 members. Ackerman, the group's chairman, has travelled to India six times and employs an Indian American on his staff.

"They have helped a great many members of Congress to understand the issues, and to focus a little more attention on an area of the world that deserves more attention," said Ackerman, who receives contributions from Indian Americans nationwide

While groups such as the High Tech Council are focused primarily on promoting husiness ties between the United States and South Asia, many Indian Americans feel passionately about foreign policy matters such as the Kashmir conflict.

Rajesh Kadian, for example, is a Great Falls gastroenterologist with two daughters at the University of Virginia and a teenage son who is a wide receiver on the Langley High School football team. He is also the author of several books on Indian military strategy and a firm heliever in the need to explain the Indian point of view to American policymakers.

To that end, he organised a 1995 fund-raiser that netted USD 15.500 for Sen Charles S. Robh (D-Va.). He meets occasionally with State Department officials and, in one instance, helped arrange a meeting between the Indian ambassador and a key lawmaker—whom he prefers not to name—so they could discuss the nuclear test issue.

"India has never got the respect of the United States," Kadian complains. "But this is a responsible, important country, and it has a role to play in the world."

India's standing in Washington suffered a scrious setback when it set off underground nuclear devices in May 1998, prompting Pakistan to respond in kind several weeks later. The blasts triggered economic sanctions against both countries, though Clinton subsequently waived some provisions for one year.

While Indian Americans were divided over the wisdom of the tests, many nonetheless felt it was their duty to defend their native land against accusations that its government had acted irresponsibly. The American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, for example, set aside its customary emphasis on health care issues and circulated a letter explaining the "context" of India's decision, according to a spokesman.

India also got help from Chatterjee, the head of the Indian American Forum, who parlayed his fund-raising activities on hehalf of Sen Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, into a meeting between Helms and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh.

"We told him, 'India needs a fair hearing,'" said Chatterjee, who attended the meeting along with Srinivasa, the Bush campaign supporter.

Such efforts have started to pay off. At least twice this year. India's supporters in Congress blocked legislation that would have cut off its foreign aid. Similarly, when the House International Relations Committee passed a resolution blaming Pakistan for last spring's flare-up in Kashmir, the White House welcomed the move as "a useful way of reminding the [Pakistani] prime minister and others that Congress could use its influence in ways that were not in Pakistan's interest". But Indian Americans do not necessarily march in lockstep with the Indian government. Congress, for example, is considering legislation that would clear the way for a resumption of military sales to both India and Pakistan. While the Indian embassy opposes the move on grounds that it would mostly benefit Pakistan, which needs spare parts for its US-made hardware, some Indian Americans favour lifting the ban to help promote business and strategic ties with In-

"We have to look at what is good for the United States," said a prominent Indian American businessman who spoke on condition of anonymity. "We are not agents of the Indian government."

Excerpted from "Activism Boosts India's Fortunes Politically Vocal Immigrants Help Tilt Policy in Washington" by John Lancaster, The Washington Post, 9 October, 1999.

Hi-tech underbelly

In the sweat shops of Silicon Valley, immigrant dreams are shattered.

by Raj Jayadev

"Hurry up Line 1! You are not here to talk, you are here to work! GEE-VAAN WHAT'S THE HOLD UP?!" The supervisor's words always carried a certain violence, intended to elicit immediate obedience, the way a prison guard would use a night_stick. Jivan had only been at the plant for a few months, but had grown accustomed to the daily harassment by the supervisor. So, in response to the harangue, he went back to stocking the conveyer belt with printers, but not before saying, "You know, in India workers would not stand for this treatment."

Jivan and I had taken a minute's rest from the back-breaking work to talk about our lives outside the plant. It was a minute we thought was well-deserved. Our line had already met its daily quota of 846 components, and yet the reward was a humiliating scolding. It was the end of another monotonous and dehumanising day on a Silicon Valley assembly line.

Jivan had come to the US less than a year ago from Kerala, where he had run a metal shop. Just as my parents did over 30 years ago, he came to America so that he could provide better education to his children, and has plans to return once his two boys finish school. But in the highly volatile and unstable labour market of what is being touted as the 'new economy', Jivan finds himself struggling just to stay afloat in a job that has remained constant in the Valley for the past two decades: low-wage electronics assembly.

Hi-tech ghetto

In the Valley, low-wage assembly and manufacturing has been the not-much-talked-about anchor of technological and economic growth. This labour niche at the bottom of the rung has been created and reserved for immigrant workers of colour, and this hidden workforce is subject to work in physically and mentally gruelling circumstances, all for sub-livable compensation.



The irony is stark, as this labour constitutes the base of one of the most prolific profitgenerating industries in modern times, with its workstation located in one of the world's most powerful financial hubs.

There is this popular presumption about the Information Age, that the technology is produced by some sort of divine intervention requiring no actual Industrial Age-type of assembling or manufacturing. Yet the fact is that every computer, printer, and other piece of technological wizardry has to be birthed in some inglorious assembly-line production site.

Indeed, electronics production requires so much labour that the high-tech industry employs one out of every five wage earners in the Valley. There are thus over 200,000 people labouring in the Valley's manufacturing sector, 70 percent of whom are Asian (a growing percentage of which is South Asian). Contrary to the attention-grabbing Intel commercials displaying workers in fabrication labs dancing around in choreographed bliss, the real work environment is anything but a party.

Fabrication labs and other high-tech production sites have proven to be danger-

Chip assembly requires precision handling through microscopes all day. This can can cause permanent eye damage.



The group, Workers Acting Together for Change, put on "bunny suits" for their performance of their play Toxic Avengers Theatre.

ous, abusive, and - shockingly - never seem to play danceable 70s disco music. The 'clean' reputation of the modern high-tech industry is riddled with some of the most archaic expressions of exploitation. The electronics manufacturing plants and their low-income neighbourhoods are saturated with carcinogens, acids and highly toxic gases. Toxicology studies have shown that the chemicals in common industrial use have damaging effects on the brain and immune, endocrine and central nervous systems. And these studies have only taken into account less than two percent of the 80,000 industrial chemicals that are in use in these plants.

Chip orchard

While exploitation of the immigrant workforce is nothing new to California or Silicon Valley, the cancerous nature of the electronic industry's growth and economic "success" has never been more obvious to its growing low-wage workforce. Once known as the Valley of Hearts Delight for being the most productive orchard region

in the United States, Silicon Valley's present profile as a high-tech location is rooted in its practice of using disposable immigrant workers as industrial fodder.

Beginning with the Mexican Americans who once picked fruit in the fields of the Valley, the electronics industry has managed to meet its ever-increasing number of production orders by filling its chemically polluted semiconductor fabrication rooms and assembly lines with an array of hard-working hands of colour. The view of the diverse blue-collar workforce is distorted from the safe distance of the management's window. From that perspective, all that is seen is a blur of slightly varying shades of brown skin.

The worker demographic mirrors the immigration history of the area—the Latinos having been joined by men and women of Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Ethiopian, and more recently, of South Asian origin. For the high-tech tycoons of the new economy, it is a set-up that offers all the advantages of low-cost Third World labour in the convenience and luxury of the United States. While



the much-touted IIT-trained South Asian whiz-kids ride the top of the Silicon valley totem pole to multi-millionairedom, ironically, the electronic sweatshops are filling up fast with not-so-fortunate subcontinentals earning no more than USD 6-8 an hour in one of the most unaffordable places to live in the country, without job security, or health insurance.

Many immigrants start a job thinking of the workplace abuses as passing burdens of a transitional reality, which will end once a better job is found. But due to the paradoxical lack of "good assembly job", most temporary workers tend to be stuck at the same plant, at the same position and pay, for years. Temporary work thus becomes permanent.

Model mushrooms

The meteoric ascendance of a portion of South Asian engineers and business people into the Silicon Valley royalty, has been both a captivating and surprising tale of immigrant entrepreneurial stewardship. Captivating for the phenomenal amount of wealth that the South Asians have been able to corner, especially given that the bulk of South Asians (read mostly Indian) have established themselves only over the last two decades.

According to one study, Chinese and South Asian entrepreneurs notched up USD 16.8 billion in sales last year alone. The fact that there are over 20 publicly traded companies each with sales in the millions founded or run by Indians in Silicon Valley, seems to buttress the "model minority" paradigm which these immigrants earn for themselves and the US economy. This South Asian entrepreneurial class has even gone so far as to create high-tech industry associations like "The Indus Entrepreneur" to institutionalise their clite positioning and growing political weight.

The model minority myth is consequently allowed to perpetuate, more so because the reality of the rest of the South Asian American existence is given a blind eye, thereby also avoiding the exposure of an embarrassingly two-faced relationship of opportunity and exploitation with high-tech industry. The loud recognition of the top-dog South Asians in the Valley is accompanied by a strange silence about their cousins who toil at the other end of this high-tech food chain. Unhealthy in itself, this myopia needs to be corrected so that the worse-than-'Third World reality' of the

sontinental immigrants on the assembly line be improved. Clearly, there is need for organising among the South Asian labour forces in the valley, one which would be an active ally of the broader-immigrant labour movement.

The issue of community intervention becomes even more pressing given the Valley's anti-union history. While most industries of size have union representation to rely upon as a voice for workers' rights, Silicon Valley has put tremendous energy and resources into keeping the industry "union-free". Having the guile to foresee how a union could disrupt the patently unfair labour practices of his industry, Bob Noyce (co-founder of Intel) writes in his 1984 book entitled Silicon Valley Fever that, "Remaining non-union is essential for survival for most of our companies. If we had work rules that unionised companies have, we'd all go out of business. This is a very high priority for management."

The industry has religiously obeyed this commandment of the silicon guru throughout the booming business expansions of the past two decades. It has done this by implementing rapid-response union-busting campaigns to diffuse any effort that hinted at worker organising. Without union protection or a community support network, a worker such as Jivan in Silicon Valley is left in a battle for workplace justice that pits himself alone against an entire industrial complex stocked with money, political clout, and incredibly effective media campaigns. The romantic struggle of the underdog loses its charm when viewed in the context of these unfair odds stacked against him/her.

"They (management) think we're mushrooms. They keep us in the dark and feed
us shit," says Jivan. The rising number of
South Asians in the manufacturing sector of
Silicon Valley is an alert to animate the collective South Asian consciousness in North
America. The focus has to be well-being in
the workplace, and the separations that
today exist between labour and community
organisations must be done away with.
As more South Asians join the underclass
of North America, it is best to make common cause.

Decethe by Vijay Prashad and Biju Mathew

We began our study of the Hindu Right in the United States several years ago, when word of large funds being transferred to India by sympathetic organisations started doing the rounds. Of course, the flow of such cash to the 'mother country' was not a novel occurrence among South Asians, as we had before us the highly publicised cases of the generosity of some Sri Lankan Tamils towards the LTTE, as well as of European, Canadian and American Sikhs towards Khalistani groups in Punjab.

The transfer of saffron dollars to India, of course, had the potential of being much larger. However, as is the case with the religious right of all persuasions, accessing information from these secretive organisations was not very easy. The secrecy has, in fact, increased after there were protests a few years ago about the dubious use of charity front organisations to channel funds to India. In 1994, there was even an effort to raise money through the US charity, United Way, but sustained protests from secular South Asian groups forced a withdrawal. Since that episode in particular, fund-raisers for the Hindu Right have been far less generous with information about their work.

Additionally, the fund-raisers are wary of openly talking about money because they tend to make extensive use of the illegal hawala network to transfer cash funds. Since the Hindu Right does not conduct 'terrorist' activity on North American soil, the US authorities do not pay as much attention to transfer of saffron dollars as they do to the Khalistani and LTTE money. The latter two organisations, after all, have conducted extortion and assassinations in North America, whereas the Hindu Right has been, if anything, more subtle.

Blocked thus in our search to learn of the way money flows into the Subcontinent, we turned our investigation to how the religious right raises money in the US and Canada. To do this, we had to understand the ways of

the Right, notably the means by which it creates moorings for itself among the overseas South Asian population.

Orthodox multiculturalism

Why have the US (and Canadian) authorities allowed the religious right to flourish, untrammelled, in North America? 'Multiculturalism' is the answer. Faced with massive social unrest among minorities (mainly African Americans, Native Americans, Latino Americans, as also feminists, gay and lesbian activists), the US establishment has over the decades evolved a cultural policy that has ceased to demand that all people assimilate into the murky soup of homogeneity. Thus, the social protests, going back to the 1950s and 60s, forced government to accept the diverse heritages of people as the cultural logic of the nation. New curricula came to be written for schools in the 1970s in the name of multiculturalism.

This politically correct and sensitive incorporation of multiculturalism by the state in the US and Canada was of immediate support to the Hindu Right when over the 1980s and 90s it began to flex its muscle and open its wallet. With tolerance bred from the fact that most Americans perceive South Asia as a region imbued with religiosity, the religious right of all persuasions presented itself as the true interpreter of South Asian culture. Thus, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) came forward to represent Hindus, while the Jamaat-e-Islami made to speak for South Asian Muslims. The diversity of South Asia was thus rendered mute by these organisations, which liked to define a South Asia as one that was clearly divided on the lines of faith. The beauty of multiculturalism was quickly reduced to communalism.

The two Dharma Sansads held by the VHPA (1998 and 1999) offered rules on how Hindus in America should live their lives, in its arbitrary capacity as the sole authority

over who they now call "Hindu Americans". The Jamaat and the Sikh organisations hold similar camps and conclaves at which they hand down absolute cultural orders for the community they claim to represent. The clamour of these rightist organisations, making full use of the crutch of multiculturalism, is that they are champions of a neglected, nay oppressed, religion within the US. Of course, one is asked to forget the orthodox and reactionary role played by these very organisations in the homeland of South Asia, as in the diaspora they may portray themselves as champions of the weak.

These right-wing organisations get vicarious glamour amongst their target South Asian flock from the very fact that the North American establishment is in its own rush to be politically correct to kowtow to these groups. This will certainly act as a draw to migrants and their children, who routinely face the unpleasant reality of racism. When teachers at school or college, otherwise ignorant about South Asia, bow sanctimoniously before faith-clad organisations such as the Hindu Student Council (a wing of the VHPA) or the Muslim Student Association (an independent network of Muslim student organisations), a sense of awe at their power is bound to overcome the South Asian migrant population.

Distorted morals

As the story goes in the *Ramayana*, Mareecha the magician acting at the behest of Ravana turns himself into a golden deer to lure Ram and Lakshman away from Sita. The activities of the Hindu Right in North America can be likened to that golden deer of Chitrakoot forest, offering simple and attractive answers to worldly problems, but its simplicity a magical cover for more devious intentions. In their desperate search for 'identity', the migrants of the diaspora commit themselves to the religious right with little thought given to its deeper agenda, which is guided in large part by the need to channel funds to the homeland.

Since the diaspora is as yet seeking nothing more than an identity prop, the religious right is having a free ride for the moment. It is able to provide minimal service while garnering political clout from its membership, and harvesting dollars to boot. Indeed, the religious right provides little or no solace to so many among the diaspora, and offers few answers to the grave social prob-

lems that beset the first and second generation migrants in North America. Here there are genuine problems of racism, of sexism, of excessive pressure to succeed, all of which deserve compassion and struggle.

Instead, all that the religious right seems willing to offer is a withering critique of lifestyle, coupled with a demand for any surplus income, as ways to salve the conscience (for doing 'better' than relatives back home). Yet, almost everyone is willing to defer to them as the authentic representatives of South Asian 'culture', and there are very few who would come forward to expose the deeply conservative culture preached by them.

Follow the money

Having thus gained legitimacy amongst both the host country authorities as well as the diasporic 'flock', the organisations of the religious right are ready to cash in and go after their primary agenda — finance activity in the homeland. To uncover this aspect of their work, as amateur sleuths we decided to "follow the money".

In the case of the LTTE and the Khalistani militants, the money trail is easy to follow as much is already available in US and Canadian government documents. The LTTE operates in Canada as the World Tamil Movement, an ethnic designation that is acceptable to multiculturalists. Sikh separatists also adopted such ethnic language to evade the radar of the US-Canadian authorities until the 1985 attacks initiated by the Khalistanis in Canada. This was followed by Canada's crackdown on the LTTE, and the same year, the FBI sent a special team to Canada to discuss the problem of the LTTE and the issue of extortion of funds.

Unlike such open scrutiny by the authorities, the religious right has a much better multicultural cover and their activities

The 1999 VHPA Dharma Sansad, or religious assembly.



harder to track. The lack of attention by authorities is mainly because the VHPA and the Jamaat do not appear to be a threat to the US or Canadian establishments. Take the case of the Hindu Right. Sewa International is an offshoot of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (the US version of the ultra-rightist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh/RSS) and it claims to "educate and propagate the principles enunciated in Hindu Dharma with particular reference to serving the poor, sick, needy and weak". Its stated mission is thus twofold—offer charity and provide ideology to its following.

To use their money effectively, the VHPA and its kin organisations claim to offer help to those who are the most socially and financially desperate, raising funds for orphans (through its Support-A-Child programme, begun in 1985) and tribals or 'adivasis' (through its Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra network). The organisations all claim to be "non-political" charities, which evidence shows to be not true.

In Bhopal, for example, the US-based Indian Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) provides funds to Sewa Bharati which tries to "protect the tribal people from subversion, and integrate them into the mainstream". In reality, what this means is that the money is used to bring the adivasis into the 'Hindutva' stream as propagated by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. In Hyderabad, the IDRF funds Keshava Seva Samithi where destitute children are housed to "mould them into an ideal citizenry through education/vocational training". As it happens, Keshava Seva Samiti shares the same address as the RSS headquarters in the city.

The amounts raised by the US organisations are by no means trivial. Since the early 1990s, the IDRF (set up in 1978) has raised over USD 2 million. Another

The Muslim World Day Parade in New York.



organisation, the Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE) has collected USD 2.6 million in contributions and pledges since its establishment in 1994. These dollars enter a part of Indian society that is starved of funds. Each dollar is not only converted into so many rupees, but each of those many rupees functions with far more power among the oppressed adivasis than among the moneyed elite of, say, Bombay.

While the IDRF is openly political, organisations like the Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE) remain in the shadows of religiosity. The IDRF supports "exemplary, grassroots non-governmental organisations in India". The term "grassroots" is used to attract money from donors in the US presently besotted with the idea of micro-credit and micro-development—those who might otherwise put their funds into something like the Grameen Bank. And just as the Grameen Bank wields immense power in underfunded sectors in Bangladesh, so does the well-funded right throw its fiscal weight about amongst orphans and adivasis.

Dollars for zakat

If dollar funds dharma in India, the dollars for zakat raised by the Islamic Orthodoxy are not very different. The Jamaat has lately begun using tactics perfected by the VHPA. It is, however, less diffident about its political ambitions, as evident in the intervention made (from Florida) by the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islam chief, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, during prime minister Nawaz Sharif's meeting with Bill Clinton last July.

Like the Hindu Right, the Jamaat is eager to enter into the lives of young "Muslim Americans". Thus far, organisations like the Bangladeshi Youth Federation have inserted themselves into this space at the expense of the Islamic orthodoxy, and the religious right would dearly like to change this situation.

The crucial difference between the Dollar Dharma and the Islamic Orthodoxy is that the latter has, as of now, not tried to raise vast funds within North America. J.I. Khan of the Kashmir People's Democratic Forum (a leftist Kashmiri organisation in the US) has pointed to the Islamic Right's reliance upon "the drug mafia, the ISI and the Saudi government" for its funds. As he told us, "If these are your benefactors, you do not need Muslims in the US or Canada to be the principal funders." But if the funds from Saudi Arabia and the drug mafia dry up, Khan recognises, it is likely that the Islamic Orthodoxy may

turn with its collection tray to North American Muslims.

The 'problem' faced by Islamic Orthodoxy, however, is that many of its organisations are staffed by both Indian and Pakistani Muslims, which makes it difficult for it to take strong and populist positions on subcontinental politics—something available to the India-leaning Hindu Right. To leverage money for Pakistani politics or to foment trouble in Kashmir will not appeal to many Indian American Muslims. Meanwhile, without its access to outside money, the Bangladeshi Jamaat has already turned to the diaspora for funds, a reason for its rapid growth across North America.

Despite the lack of importance given to zakat (obligatory annual payment for charitable and religious purposes under Islamic law) among most Muslims in North America, Khan and others argue that the Pakistani American community is no less a hive of right-wing sentiment. As evidence, they point to the rapid growth of Islamic centres across North America and to the popularity of leaders such as Tahir Ul Qadri of the Tafheen-e-Quran. As Rizwan Raja, a Pakistani New Yorker, says, "From early childhood in Pakistan we have been socialised to give more precedence to Islam than even Pakistan. If you add to this the sense of alienation we immigrants feel, and the sense of attack that many Muslims experience in the West, it is not surprising that many of us are easy targets for right-wing propaganda."

The politicisation of the Pakistani diaspora was evident in the days following Nawaz Sharif's ouster, when there was a wave of support for the military action and for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (the Taliban of Pakistan), that old friend of many in the Pakistani armed forces.

Communal diaspora

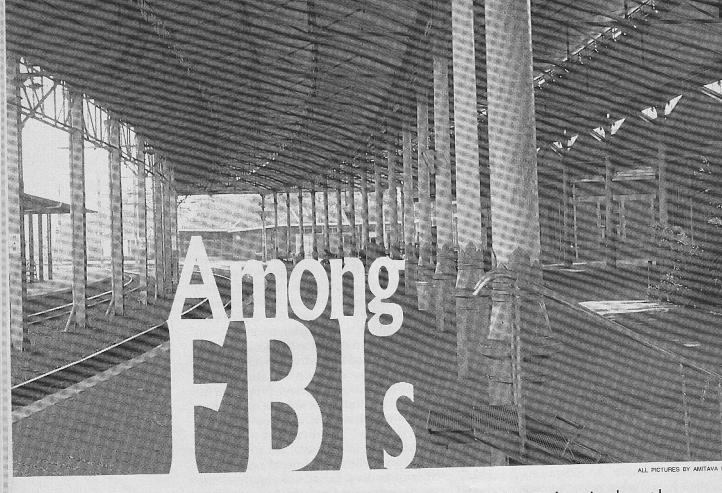
One cannot remain immune from the currents that one promotes. The support of communal politics in South Asia, in the final analysis, ends up communalising the 'donors' as well. The implications in the subcontinental diaspora of this support of communalisation are legion. For one, the drive to raise money enters one's most cherished celebrations. As one brochure has it, if you are "celebrating a birthday or wedding anniversary, enjoying a graduation party, solemnising a pooja, rejoicing a festival or commemorating your beloved ones, IDRF is at your service. It offers you a unique op-

portunity for serving God through selfless, humanitarian service, and thus enhancing your inner joy!"

Such a campaign appeal is directed at those South Asians who, it is hoped, will begin to organise themselves along religious rather than secular lines. Dinesh Agarwal, a well-known elder of the Hindu Right, posted this note on the Hindu Students Council on-line forum in 1995: "There is a new trend developing in the youth of Indian origin. When they marry, they contribute all their cash and other gifts to Seva (Service) projects in India. Recently, sister of Shri Satish Tamboli of Washington (an active worker of RSS and IDRF) got married. She contributed all her cash gifts for buying a medical van for Seva Bharati Project in India. Shri Sanjay, son of Shri Vinod Prakash of Washington, followed the same example. He also contributed all his cash gifts for Seva projects in India. May this volunteer service spirit grow and more and more of our youths follow their examples." The rhythm of a chain letter stands out in this note, but so too does the strategy of using the idea of 'service' and 'culture' to draw funds not only from the first-generation migrant, but more importantly from their children.

The VHPA also routinely raises money from corporate matching gift programmes (in which corporations, in the hope of appearing benevolent, ask their employees to donate money to charity organisations, with the corporation itself making a pledge to match the amount donated). Routinely, the religious right has counselled its members to take advantage of this policy and nominate its charity organisations. In the early 1990s, employees at AT&T attempted to do this, but when a campaign revealed the VHP's role at Ayodhya, the corporation felt uneasy about any further controversy. To keep track of this use of funds is difficult, and for sure, large amounts of funds find their way to South Asia's religious right through this channel of corporate-supported giving.

Meanwhile, in the political forests of South Asia, the Dollars convert into Rupees and multiply madness. The only conversion that has not been condemned is that from the Dollar. That conversion is used to strike terror in the heart of all those who refuse to convert to bigotry, or whose cultural forms are deemed dangerous.



South African Indians at least have a history, Indians in America do not have that, and so they invest in myths of mystical greatness and update them with profiles of Sachin Tendulkar.

by Amitava Kumar

Indians living outside India sometimes consider themselves more Indian than those left inside. These desi diasporics are members of the FBI, the acronym for "Full-Blooded Indians". I'm an Indian who lives and works in the US but I resigned from the FBI long ago. This past summer I went to South Africa to conduct research for a film about the FBIs in that country.

My findings: When it comes to the fight for a non-racial society, the FBIs in South Africa leave behind in the dust the FBIs in the US. When I was there, accompanied by my film-collaborator Sanjeev Chatterjee, *The Johannesburg Mail & Guardian* carried a matrimonial ad in its pages that was a little different from those one usually encounters in the classifieds. It read: "Sick of South Africa? USA man seeks single white female, non-smoker, 28-40, to emigrate."

The man who had placed the ad in the paper was a South African by the name of Neil Shuda. When one of the Mail & Guard-

ian reporters asked Shuda why he wanted to emigrate, he replied, "Even Al Capone never attacked a police station—he wouldn't have dared to. Yet in South Africa, people just drive up to satellite [police] stations and shoot cops to death."

Crime might be driving South Africans like Shuda away from their own country. But, it isn't keeping away the Indian and Pakistani immigrants from South Africa. Especially the latter, who are hard-hit by domestic inflation following the economic sanctions imposed after the 1998 nuclear blasts.

Lining the streets in the local neighbourhoods of Johannesburg, you can see Urdu- and Hindi-speaking men and women running small kebab shops. Tar drums, sawed in half and filled with cinder, serve as ovens. Smoke and the smell of spiced meat fills the air.

These are not, however, the FBIs. That is a term reserved for the Indians who are fully South African. These newer immigrants, the

Platform at
Pietermaritzburg
station, north of Durban,
where Mohandas K.
Gandhi was thrown out
of a first-class
compartment because
of his skin colour.



ones selling kebabs and working at menial jobs in shopping malls, are often only called "India Papas". Others—including those of Indian descent—find the India Papas mildly amusing. As one FBI said, "They dress funny. You can tell them from a mile away."

I cannot imagine how furny the ancestors of these Indian South Africans had appeared to their European masters a century ago. I say this with all sobriety. Even today, the descendants of the Indians in South Africa are called "Russians" (because they fly red flags on bamboo poles in their houses) or "Rotis" and "Calkies" (because it was somehow believed that all of them had come from Calcutta). Or "Coolies" (because they are the children of indentureds, or maybe only because they need to be put in their place. Even in the new South Africa).

Shiva's chosen

What are these diasporic Indians to think of themselves today, particularly after the demise of apartheid that had up till now designated their place in the racial hierarchy? One evening, I was listening to my car radio. I was tuned to Radio Lotus, South Africa's Indian station (its slogan: "You are in the position. Lotus."). The programme I was listening to was "Viewpoint".

I had heard about the show from several friends in Johannesburg and Capetown. The show's host Ashwin Desai, I had been told, was smart and provocative. The topic under discussion that night was "Identity". A man called in to say that he was Indian because he prayed every day. Desai asked him if, for example, Jewish people didn't pray every day. Did that make them Indians? The caller insisted that he was Indian because India, the land from where his forefathers came, is, as we all know, the greatest country in the world...

On this particular night, I was in Durban, where Radio Lotus is based, and a city with an Indian majority. In the Durban telephone directory, the entries under "Naidoo" totalled 15 pages. The second longest list of entries, which ran up to 10 pages, belonged to "Pillay".

It was exciting to be among such a large group of diasporic Indians, and the questions Desai was posing were hard-hitting and vital. When I turned into my hotel driveway, Desai was asking a caller, "Can I be a homosexual and still be Indian?"

I called the show from my room. I said

that I was in town to do research for a documentary which was going to be called "Where Gandhi Became Indian". On air, I asked Desai why one of his callers felt he was Indian because he prayed every day. Why wasn't he proud to be Indian, instead, because another Indian by the name of Yusuf Dadoo had laid the foundation for Indian and African liberation in South Africa or others like Laloo Chiba and Ahmed Timol had been tortured in prison for their resistance to the system of apartheid?

Mythical greats

The callers on "Viewpoint" did not answer my question that evening, but Desai invited me to be on his show the next night. Delighted, I went, and got my answers. One irate listener called in to say that we were Indians because we were a special people descended from Lord Shiva, and who the hell was I to say anything about the need to examine what it meant to be Indian? Another caller from nearby Phoenix suggested to the host that folks from the Subcontinent were "a bitter lot", envious of all that the Indians in South Africa had achieved. I replied that



I was indeed. I was envious that so many of them had fought against apartheid.

The decisive contributions made by Indians to the political and economic structure of modern South Africa is incontestable. This is evident not only in the present leadership of the African National Congress (with a presence of Indians that far exceeds in proportion their population vis-a-vis Africans and the so-called coloureds) but also in other groups going back to the days of the Natal and the Transvaal Indian Congress's. The callers to the radio station were making it plain, however, that they did not value that

Poster for the television serial Ramayana in Lanasia, the township outside Johannesburg allocated to Indians during apartheid.

particular past, and, sadly, their sense of pride seemed premised on long-distance Indian nationalism that had nothing to do with struggles and sacrifices in the broader Afri-

can struggle.

Isn't that largely true also of Non-Resident Indians in the US, that vast land that now plays host to a million FBIs? American FBIs invest in myths of mystical greatness, and update them with profiles of Sachin Tendulkar.

We take pride in acts of jingoistic muscleflexing in the Subcontinent or worship the gods of Bollywood. I have encountered very few instances where our sense of community, and our pride in it, emerges from our

acts of cross-cultural activism and achievement. We'd rather go on about yet another Indian child who has won the

spelling-bee contest!

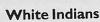
In the few days prior to my radio interview, I had read Indres Naidoo's prison memoir Island in Chains. Naidoo, an ANC activist, had been jailed on Robben Island for 10 years. I remembered one line from his 1963 trial report about

rilla operations, and later Mandela's neighbour in the "B" block at Robben Island. He was there for 18 years.

When I talked to him, he had not mentioned his prison experiences, but Naidoo's description and my meeting with Chiba had made this part of the country's history real to me. I wanted to convey this to my radio audience and I said that I was envious that there were so many Indians who, choosing amongst their idols everyone from Mohandas Gandhi to Steve Biko, had faced imprisonment and death, fighting apartheid. And I was envious that, rather than thinking of themselves as a separate people, men and women of Indian origin had made common

cause with Africans and fought a united fight. These included Mac Maharaj and Ahmad Kathrada, both fellow prisoners of Mandela on Robben Island, and whom he thanks in his autobiography. Accused of sabotage, they too spent 20

vears in prison.



It is not my intention to idealise South Africa or Indian South

Africans. I was stung by the elitist, indeed racist, ways in which subcontinentals were given the name "India Papas". Clearly, if nothing else, some of the inanities of my interlocutors on "Viewpoint" would also certainly halt unchecked optimism. And, as Ashwin Desai points out in his acerbic book, South Africa Still Revolting, prejudice is still pervasive there: "Among Indians the latest is, 'Muslims bury the same day, Hindus the next and Africans after a week because they have to find the other leg in the bush'." So, if I still use the word envy, it is primarily to acknowledge the differences I perceive between Indians in South Africa and the US.

The main difference, I believe, is that when it comes to the question of a struggle for a non-racial society, American FBIs have done nothing to even merit comparison with the Indian South Africans. Prejudice, especially against African-Americans, reigns unabashed in Indian communities in the US.

Let me return for a moment to the prison memoirs of Indres Naidoo in pre-democratic South Africa. A white policeman asked Naidoo, "What's the matter with you Indians? You've got a long history of civilisation, you wore silk long before the white man, and here you are jumping from tree to tree

Ahmad Kahrada in his office (right) and ANC MPs Ismail Wadi (in beard) and Laloo Chiba.



Laloo Chiba and the visit in prison from Chiba's wife: "Laloo had suffered because the warders had insisted that he speak only English or Afrikaans and his wife knew only Gujarati so that the two of them had simply had to stare at each other for the whole visiting period with tears in their eyes and saying nothing..."

We had met and interviewed Chiba for the film in his ANC office the previous week. Chiba is now a leading member of the South African Parliament. At the height of the ANC struggle, he was a commander of the guerwith these barbarians, what's wrong with you, man?"

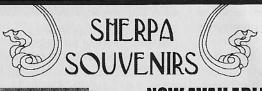
In the US, quite frankly, we have not waited for the white man to impart us this piece of racist wisdom. We have produced it in our own heads and embraced it with unabashed fervour. And even in places where that slur is absent, there is hardly any evidence of a passion for solidarity. If you read the pages of a publication like *India Abroad*, you might encounter a lot of breast-beating about apathy among Indians. Several column inches are devoted to the need for political awareness among Indians, but that notion of politics is as narrowly identitarian as doing garba dance and eating samosas.

There's never a word about laying a coalitional, democratic foundation for a non-racial society. We'll fete second-string white legislative leaders. We'll have parties for dignitaries in the Indian embassy and consulates. We'll don ill-fitting suits and thrust out our paunches in pride every time any mainstream politician praises India for the most fatuous reasons. And, in this picture, you see me rubbing my oily forehead against the chappal worn by Jesse Helms—or for that matter anyone who is anyone in

Washington DC.

But, that is the insider politics of lobbying! Every group—from soy manufacturers to the sellers of guns—has its lobby, and so why should FBIs in US not have one? Their privileged position as members of a professional class inclines them to such machinations, and the US system is certainly complicitous in encouraging such trends. The point of a more progressive, pro-people's politics, however, is in the organising of strong, new identities, especially if they are identities forged collectively and aimed at the greatest good of all.

The discovery of such identities for the Indian communities will begin with a recognition that they form a part of a mixed majority of people of colour. And that their success as a group and as a people lies, in large part, in taking a stance against an unjust society that keeps black and brown populations disenfranchised and poor. A drive through the inner cities of America, even through the safety of our Honda Accords and Mercedes-Benzes, should confirm not our feelings of false superiority but the realities of an invisible system of apartheid at work here.



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Pre-history of Tibet

When it comes to Tibetan history, the tendency is to begin by focusing on the Buddhist heritage that took root in the early 7th century with King Srongsten Gompo. Civilisation in Tibet, however, originated much earlier and is associated with the lost kingdom of Shang Shung of the north and west of the Changtang Plateau. The character and extent of this mysterious civilisation is only now emerging as scholars search for cultural and archaeological remains of that distant past. John Vincent Bellezza has been part of this process of discovery and has used the texts of Bon, the indigenous religion of Tibet, to locate the temples, forts and villages of Shang Shung. Emerging from Tibet one more time recently, he writes of simple discoveries with intriguing antecedents.

A hundred and fifty kilometres north of Lhasa rises Nyenchen Thanglha, the great sacred mountain of Tibet's north country. Standing 7000 metres tall, this massif is the centrepiece of the Trans-Himalayan range and considered the mythical legendary ruler of the 360 neighbouring peaks. According to ancient Tibetan mythology, Nyenchen Thanglha is inhabited by a white archetypal father figure mounted on a white steed, who was worshipped by local rulers.

It was following the decline of the north country that the kings of Tibet came to dominate the entire plateau. Sallying forth from their strongholds in the south of the country at the end of the 6th century, a priority of the Tibetan armies was to conquer the region around Nyenchen Thanglha, which lay on the frontier with Shang Shung.

But the advent of Tibet's imperial period did not lead to the diminishing of the importance of the holy mountain. According to ancient texts, the 8th-century Tibetan king Trisrong Deutsan relied on Nyenchen Thangla to protect his 'soul force'. After the break-up of the Tibetan empire in mid-9th century,

it is believed that the descendants of King Trisrong were scattered across the Tibetan plateau. Among them, one group, the Ngadag lamas, eventually made their way south into Nupri, in the central Nepal Himalaya, where even today Nyenchen Thanglha is revered as the protective deity.

Enigmatic earthworks

In my bid to understand this obscure period of Tibet's history, I have visited Nyenchen Thanglha a number of times. During these explorations, I have come upon unrecorded archaeological sites at the mountain. Located in the shadow of the south side of the massif, are large manmade earthern platforms. However, since no excavations have been made, it is not possible to conclusively identify these enigmatic earthworks.

Reference to ancient structures in the region are to be found in the elusive text known as *Logyu Chenmo*, where forts are mentioned at places called Dam and Za. It does not seem unlikely that these platforms may have been part of the larger infrastructures of forts.

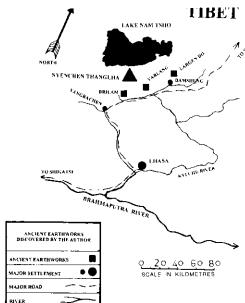
This conjecture is also supported



Lake Nam Tsho with Nyenchen Thanglha providing the backdrop (above); remains of stone wall near "Incense Nook of Lhamo Drugmo"

by the oral histories of the region which indicate that the region around Nyenchen Thanglha was far more powerful and densely populated in ancient times than it is today, when all one sees are small plots of barley and peas such as around the villages of Largen Do and Tre Do.

Another reference hinting at large settlements in the neighbourhood of Nyenchen Thanglha is found in the *Old Tibet Chronicle*, written about the 8th century. This is about Ngepo, perhaps a feudatory of Shang Shung, which was ruled by Prince Zingpo Je Tag Kyawa with his capital at Nyenkar Nyingpa, somewhere near the great mountain. According to the *Chronicle*, this supposedly wicked



prince had been deposed by one of his ministers with the help of another local prince.

Celtic architecture

It was quite by accident I came upon the platforms of earth. They are near Nyingdrung, a group of villages off the main road to Damshung, north of Lhasa. I was in the area interviewing an elderly spirit medium and during our conversation the medium suggested that I visit an obscure holy site said to have been occupied by Lhamo Drugmo, the wife of the Tibetan epic hero Ling Gesar.

With a couple of companions I set off from the village of Yarlang. We had been walking for about one hour when they pointed to a small rise in the plain far off in the distance. At first, I did not see anything significant, but before long we came upon the square platform of earth, all of 70 metres square and elevated two to three metres above the surrounding plain. Its perfect regularity and the fragments of walls found at the site showed without doubt that this was a man-made structure.

In all my extensive travels through Tibet, I had never seen anything like this platform, which seemed to have more in common with Iron Age Celtic hill forts. My companions suggested that this platform would have been even higher, and that the erosion of centuries had taken its toll. This seemed possible, given the undulating surface and water channels on the surface of the

platform. Like the surrounding plain, the platform is covered in alpine turf. Level with its surface, is a small stone wall—evidence that it had at one time supported structures.

The local spirit medium and others would have it that this earthwork were built as a platform for the giant tent of Lhamo Drugmo. In the Tibetan Gesar epic, Lhamo Drugmo and Ling Gesar were active in the region for several years before they were able to defeat its demonic ruler, Dud Lutshan, with the help of Nyenchen Thanglha. The legend echoes Tibet's martial past and could very well be rooted in fact, and the platform itself may have had a military function. As it is a broad platform and not a mound I did not get the impression that this was a burial site – it seems too large and flat, although it is recorded that burial tumuli are found in many places in Tibet.

About 300 metres to the south is another earthworks about 30 metres square. This specimen is called Lhamo Drugmo Sang Khug, the "Incense Nook of Lhamo Drugmo", and is where the heroine is supposed to have made incense offerings to Nyenchen Thanglha. Since it is more heavily eroded than its larger neighbour, its dimensions are not so clear. Remains of walls at ground level are visible on both the south and the northeast part of the platform.

Drugmoi Dora

Paralleling Nyenchen Thanglha, I trekked southwest from Yarlang. Having covered about 30 kilometres on a wide plain, several kilometres from the settlement of Drilam, I found another earthen platform. The local herders who guided me there told the same story of the structure being used by Lhamo Drugmo to erect her tent. The Drilam platform is also approximately 70 metres square and rises about two metres above the surrounding plain. This one, too, is much more croded than the one in Yarlang and surface has been corroded into a concavity. No

walls are visible at this site.

I also learnt of another, larger, earthen platform on the outskirts of the village of Largen Do, located near the county seat of Damshung. Traveling thither, I found this time a much-larger earthwork platform measuring about 80 metres by 250 metres. This structure is called Drugmoi Dora ("Stone Perimeter of Drugmo") and it, too, is said by the locals to be the site where the consort of the epic hero pitched her tent.

Within the perimeter are the remains of rocky tumuli, depressions and terraces. Drugmoi Dora is located no more than a few metres from the road to the popular tourist destination of Nam Tsho, but because of the terrain it is very hard to spot. According to information collected some 60 years ago by Hugh Richardson, the last British resident at Lhasa and himself a well-known Tibetologist, the tumuli at Largan Do are the final resting place of an ancient Mongol army.

While surveying Drugmoi Dora I came to learn of ancient earthworks just a few kilometres south at Kyang Ragkha Yog. This is another large complex consisting of mounds, terraces and long walls built of earth.

In the Changtang Plateau, in the shadow of the Nvenchen Thanglha range, these earthen structures hint at a past in Tibet which has yet to generate interest among those who tend to see Tibet's past as purely Buddhistic. Even local Tibetans are unaware and uninterested in the story that these mounds and platforms as yet hold in their wombs. Their associations with the Tibetan epic and ancient battles and power struggles have all been relegated to a silent chapter of Tibetan history. Are there burial chambers here, and will excavations throw up town plans and fortifications? We will know only when there are scientific excavations. These simple structures have survived the harsh climate of millennia and will doubtless survive for several more, while they await for those whose interest in human civilisation in the high plateau goes back beyond the 7th century.

SHAHIDUL ALAM/DRIK

The matriarch lives on

by Afsan Chowdhury

By the time she died at age 89 on 20 November, Begum Sufia Kamal had accomplished what would take more ordinary folks many lifetimes. One of the earliest Muslim Bengalee women poets, Begum Sufia was also probably the first Muslim woman in the world to have taken a plane ride (in 1928), and that too in a burgah. She was part of almost all the progressive women's movements of her time, both in preindependent India and Bangladesh. She was an inspiration to many women politicians, but was never affiliated to any party, and this in a partisan land, is saying something.

In the last 15 years, she had been the fragile but unrelenting leader of political movements — whether it was in bringing down the unpopular rule of General H.M. Ershad, or

in leading the streets to demand a trial of the killers and rapists during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. Yet she was a far cry from the typical image of the hardened revolutionary. Frail and nearly blind for decades, she had a soft sing-song voice in which she felt comfort-



able discussing recipes as much as in voicing daring resolve to never forgive the ones who violated women and killed children.

Born in Barisal, south of Dhaka, Sufia saw little of her father, a practising lawyer and a mystic, who left home as a sufi when his daughter was seven months old. Thus her growing-up years were spent in the aristocratic home of her maternal grandparents. The young Sufia was much interested in education, but had to be content with learning Urdu, and taking secret lessons in Bangla from her mother.

But she was so adamant about going to school, something which girls from her background were not allowed to back then, that at one point she was being dressed up as a boy to attend classes. By then, she

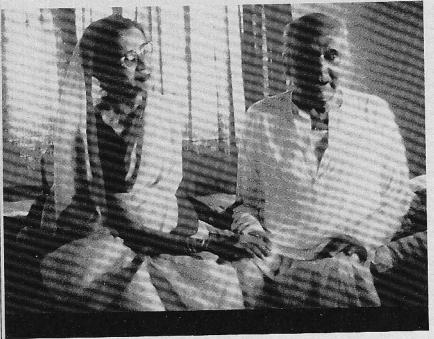
had become proficient in Urdu, Bangla, Arabic and English.

Sufia's first story was published when she was only 12 (by when she was already a married girl). A contemporary of the leaders of the Bengalee literary world—

including Rabindrananth Tagore (at whose residence she read poems on his birthday) and Nazrul Islam—she knew many of them personally. She was close to Mohammed Nasiruddin, the first magazine editor to provide space to Muslim women writers of Bengal, who were fighting the conventional and casual discrimination perpetrated by the better-educated Hindu majority literati, as well as those by conservative Muslims.

It was Nazrul Islam, Bangladesh's national poet, who gave Sufia her break as a poet, getting her works published in Calcutta magazines. As her fame grew, the sheer power of her poetry made it impossible to ignore her, and for years, she led the literary movement, first in India and then in Bangladesh, creating space for the following generations, including the present likes of fatwa-ridden author Taslima Nasreen.

Begum Sufia Kamal and Nasreen, however, couldn't be more different in style and belief, which perhaps reflect the two trends in contem-



A full life

- 1931 Became the first Muslim woman to become a member of Indian Women's Federation.
- 1932 Death of first husband.
- 1933 Became a school teacher with the Calcutta Corporation.
- 1937 First collection of stories published.
- 1938 First anthology of poems, with the blessings of Tagore. Second marriage to freedom fighter Kamaluddin Khan and since then known as Sufia Kamal.
- 1946 Ran a sanctuary at the Lady Brabourne College for the communal riot victims of Calcutta. Started a number of magazines.
- 1948 Became chief of East Pakistan Women's Committee.
- 1950 Led the Anti-communal Riots Committee during the 1950 Dhaka riots.
- 1951 Established the East Pakistan Child Protection Society. Also took up the vice-chair of the National Literature Society.
- 1952 Pioneer organiser during the February language movement.
- 1955 Organised the first protest by housewives against rising food prices.
- 1960 Became the chief of the Tagore Centenary Celebrations Committee.
- 1962 Led the move to establish cultural organisations to propagate Tagore culture.
- 1965 Was at the forefront of the anti-Ayub Khan movement, which turned into a mass uprising in 1969.
- 1969 Became chairperson of the Women's Action Committee.
- 1970 Chief of the Women's Committee.
- 1971- Stayed away from all activities after the 1971 military crack-down and also refused to sign an endorsement of Pakistan and its armed actions despite threat to her life. After liberation, presided over the first public meeting at the Martyrs' Monument. Inaugurated the first television programme in independent Bangladesh. Husband Kamaluddin died in 1977.
- 1980 Got actively involved in the anti-martial law movement and moved close to the Awami League. Became member of the committee to "Try the killers and Rapists of 1971".
- 1990 Was at the forefront of the anti-Ershad/martial law agitation, even leading a procession when a curfew was on.

porary Bangladesh. The former lives abroad, adrift from her compatriots' social and political movements, being more comfortable with Western parameters of social behaviour, which, in a way, renders her out of sync with the mainstream. An anti-religious person, who writes about her sexuality with ease, openness and confidence, Nasreen is a shocker, in step with the brave new world.

Begum Sufia Kamal, on the other hand, was a deeply religious person, who would never have contemplated leaving her people. She led, along with Jahanara Imam, the toughest movement mounted since Bangladesh's birth against the Islamic fundamentalists, a fight that lasted till her death. She was not the least bit concerned about death sentences, and was part of so many causes that she almost died of leading a million movements.

By leading a conventional and religious life in her private world and a radical anti-Islamic-fanatic political movement publicly, she proved wrong all conventional arguments about 'backward' Muslim women. She never missed her prayers, but at the same time was the most formidable opponent of the Jammat-e-Islami. And she lent her name and presence to causes that others dared not support. It becomes then fairly obvious why she was *Amma* (mother) to so many Bangladeshis. It was only last year that she was forced to slow down her public life due to failing health.

As a litterateur, Begum Sufia's corpus included over 20 volumes of poetry, as well as short stories and diaries. By the end of the day, Sufia had won over 40 awards, including every national award, a few of which she returned, like the ones given to her by the Pakistani State.

Sufia's last requests were not to be given a state funeral, to be buried in the ordinary city graveyard and not to have her funeral prayers led by the chief cleric of the national mosque, whom she considered an ally of the killers of 1971. All her requests were conceded, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed, chocking with emotion over the death of her neighbour for four decades, refused the request for an ordinary funeral. Begum Sufia Kamal was buried with full state honours. But the grave is a simple one, a grave of a pauper.



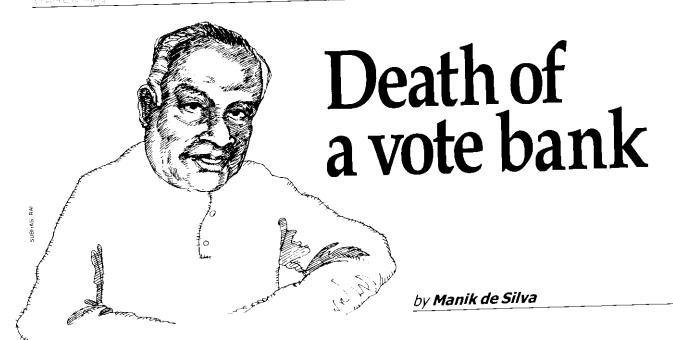
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Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter scattered jasmine Ablossoms on the cortege of Savumyamoorthy Thondaman, the son of a humble plantation worker who made the long trek from South India to Sri Lanka's hilly tea country in search of the crock of gold at the end of the eternal rainbow. Karuppiah "Head Kangany", Thondaman's father, did make his fortune, eventually buying the British-owned estate where he had once laboured. But never would he have dreamt that 76 years after he brought Thondaman to Ceylon, as the country was then known, his son's remains would be cremated at the Independence Square in a state funeral.

It was amidst controversy (to which he was never a stranger) that Thondaman made his final journey to his pyre on 3 November. Sri Lanka's armed forces were taking an unprecedented battering from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) in the northeastern Wanni region, and the use of a military helicopter to honour the departed leader at a time the army was under siege, infuriated many Sinhalese who did not mince their words. To them, Thondaman was a shrewdly-cunning politician who used his leverage on the estate (Indian) Tamil vote to make and break Sinhala-majority governments.

Shrewd he was, cunning he might have been. But it was all for the cause of emancipating a backward people who seemed doomed to pluck tea and tap rubber on the thottams (plots), generation after generation. For over 50 years, Thondaman was the leader of the Indian or estate community, most of whose members were workers in the tea and rubber plantations. As head of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the country's numerically-strongest trade union (dominated by Indian Tamils), he had been able to deliver a dominant share of their votes to both the United National Party (UNP) and

the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which have alternated in office in Independent Sri Lanka. At various times, he served as a Member of Parliament, both elected and appointed, and in the last 22 years of his life, he held important cabinet office in the governments of J.R. Jayewardene, R. Premadasa, D.B. Wijetunge and Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Maker-breaker

Thondaman took the rail ferry across the Palk Strait from South India to Ceylon at age 11 and came by train to Gampola, a plantation town above Kandy, where his father proudly met him in his recently acquired Austin tourer. The boy who had never been in a car all his life, was promptly sick and threw up in the vehicle. As he told his biographer: "My father scolded me saying 'I have just bought this car from the dorai (master) and see what you have done.' The car was stopped and instantly washed."

Karuppiah was as remarkable a man as Thondaman was to be. Coming to Sri Lanka as an ordinary labourer, he rose to be head kangany and labour contractor, providing workers for Wavendon Estate at Ramboda in the Nuwara Eliya district. Entrepreneurial and thrifty, he was able to amass a fortune and buy out the British owners. Efficiently managing the plantation with minimum overheads and branching out into other areas of business like supplies and transport for the estates, he was able to leave his son a wealthy man.

Thondaman learnt the ropes from his father the hard way. He went on to say later in life that he would never be permitted to go to sleep at night until the books were balanced with every cent properly accounted for. "Even if I was one cent out, either plus or minus, I had to reconcile it. No going to sleep before that was done."

Wealthy he was, but most Indian Tamils in the pre-Independence days had very little social position, being regarded as the coolie class. Thondaman entered Ceylon's first Parliament in 1947 as an elected MP of the Ceylon Indian Congress. That was possible at that time because many of the estate workers of the day had the vote. But they were soon to be disenfranchised after that first election. The indigenous Kandyan Sinhalese vociferously urged that an alien people, settled as indentured labour in their ancestral lands by the early British planters, had now outnumbered them and prevented them from even electing their own representatives to parliament. The fact that those elected by the Plantation Tamils, as they were also known, backed the already-strong Left movement in the country sealed their fate. The Indian Tamils were quickly disenfranchised in 1948. (A small number of them who could prove long residence were granted citizenship the same year, but their numbers were not enough to elect one of their own.)

Two more general elections passed before Thondaman tried to re-enter Parliament. But he was, as always, courted by the two major Sinhala parties who wanted him to deliver the estate Tamil vote to them. He ran from Nuwara Eliya in March 1960 but failed to get elected. In July the same year, he was given one of the six nominated places to the House to represent an "unrepresented interest" by prime minister Sirima Bandaranaike, whose SLFP was backed by those of his people who had votes.

In October 1964, Bandaranaike entered into the historic Sirima-Shastri agreement with Indian prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. Under this agreement, India was to grant citizenship to 525,000 "stateless" people of Indian origin living in Sri Lanka and their natural increases, while Sri Lanka was to absorb 300,000 and their progeny. The fate of the balance 150,000 was to be decided later. But Thondaman was not consulted. He was not even permitted to go to New Delhi at the time to make his representations.

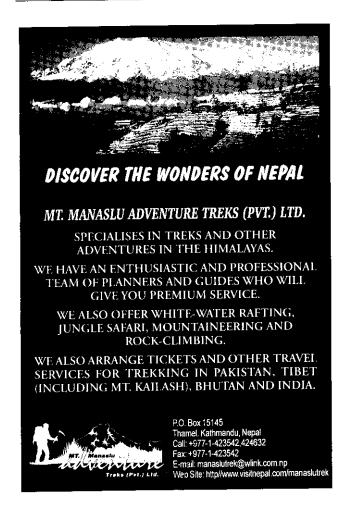
He did not forget that. In 1964, Bandaranaike was toppled in a parliamentary coup by a single vote when several of her ministers and MPs defected. Thondaman who was her nominated MP chose not to vote. Had he cast his vote in Bandaranaike's favour, the voting would have ended in a tie and the government saved by the speaker's casting vote. He then supported the UNP at the elections of 1965 and returned to Parliament as a nominated MP. His metier as a maker and breaker of governments was getting to be more visible than when he was just the deliveryman of the estate Tamil votes.

The UNP was routed by Bandaranaike in 1970 and Thondaman's place as nominated MP representing the Indian Tamils went to his arch rival, Abdul Aziz. But seven years later, he was back, this time as an elected MP backing the UNP in an electoral wave that decimated Bandaranaike's SLFP. He was made a cabinet minister in 1977 and remained a powerful minister till his death.

In those years he used his political and trade-union

muscle to serve his people who had long been the most deprived; he secured Sri Lankan citizenship for tens of thousands of his community who had remained stateless even after the Sirima-Shastri Pact, and the subsequent Indira-Sirima Pact of 1974 when each country agreed to absorb 75,000 of them and their natural increases. His other achievements included equalising the wages of men and women working on the plantations. The women tea pluckers were being paid less than their menfolk, as the latter was perceived to be doing the "heavier" work like pruning and weeding.

The ebony-complexioned Thondaman, who usually wore white khaddar, succeeded in doing what he did from within government because he entered both the UNP and the SLFP cabinets on the strict understanding that he was entitled to an independent role in matters affecting his people. Thus he led crippling strikes countrywide while sitting as a cabinet minister with the same aplomb with which he played tennis in a planter's club upcountry, where once while he was playing, thousands of his union members were out demanding the removal of the very superintendent who was his opponent on the court!



Lahori Peer power

With the deepening shadow of the military rule, it looked for a while as if the entertainment-starved citizens of Lahore would get a raw deal. As the time neared for the Third International Theatre and Dance Festival, to run from 12-22 November, queries from around the world came thick and fast to the organisers, Lahore's Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop, as to whether it would be safe to visit Pakistan at all.

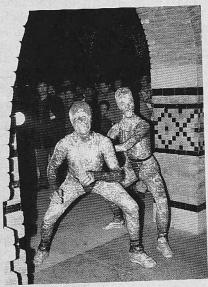
The organisers had found themselves in a similar bind in 1998, after then prime minister Nawaz Sharif announced the controversial 'Shariat Bill' (Constitutional Amendment 15) which would have given him unlimited powers to decide what was right or wrong according to Islam. At that time, at stake was the Fourth International Puppet Festival. But then, as now, Peer power prevailed.

A few groups did cancel their trip at the last moment; an Indian dance troupe was denied visas; and a Pakistani-American artiste who had to pull out because her sponsor, the US consulate, in line with America's policy, struck a blow for democracy by denying required funds. But in the end, all went reasonably well, and the 11-day festival enthralled Lahoris by celebrating 100 years of innovation in theatre and dance-drama.

Besides 20 troupes from Pakistan, there were another 20 international theatre and dance troupes that took the stage at the Alhamra Cultural Complex. The foreign companies came from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Britain, Spain, Iran, Austria, South Africa, Finland, Egypt and Germany.

One of the most acclaimed shows was a remarkably improvisational dance piece, *Urbanthropus/Fata Mondana*, by the Swiss group Da Motus. Unique in its presentation, precise in its choreography, and feline in its movement, *Urban-*

thropus featured two 'futuristic creatures' moving noiselessly along the promenade of the Cultural Complex, dressed in skin-tight costumes that stretched over their faces, while an appreciative audience followed them, along with technicians with heavy-duty lights (see picture). The 'creatures' explained that Urbanthropus is an entity both archaic and futuristic, a digital humanoid with primitive behaviour. This being, living between past and future, and belonging to neither sex, yet possessing a certain erotic



power, has something of a deep mystique, as if appearing in a dream.

The communicative power of theatre was in full evidence elsewhere during the fest as well, and the medium of foreign languages proved no barrier to understanding and appreciation. It also helped that many of the plays were variations of well-known works, such as Hall Hamlet put up by the Swiss Theatre Compagnie, From the Darkness (Theatre Tanto, Austria) and Quijote (Bambilina Titelles, Spain).

Some of the Pakistani offerings, too, were received well. Particularly impressive were the plays *Bala King* (Ajoka Theatre) directed by the well-

known Madeeha Gohar and scripted by her husband, Shahid Nadeem, and *Raagni* (Daastan Drama Circle).

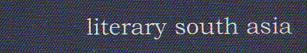
Bala King, a Punjabi adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, is a critique of the present-day political culture, and especially relevant in the Pakistani context. The plot revolves around a company that acquires prime land and gets a subway construction contract by bribing the head of the tender committee. When a faulty underpass collapses, an investigation is launched. A local tough, Bala King, comes to the rescue of the accused, and establishes his stronghold in the area, thus beginning his spectacular rise to power, only to be later charged of grossly misusing his constitutional powers.

The other Pakistani production, Raagni, was an adaptation of Nobel laureate Ariel Darfman's novel, Death and the Maiden. Originally written after Chile's transition from a long dictatorship to democracy, the play, set in an anonymous country, highlights the universality of the human predicament. It was an excellent portrayal of the trauma of an oppressed past that refuses to go away.

For the organisers, the Lahore show marked yet another success story, having earlier organised two others, besides the International Puppet Festival every two years since 1992 and the National Dance Festival in 1995. Perhaps the biggest compliment for the Lahore event came from a Sri Lankan participant. "This festival is only one I have seen that includes puppets, muppets, paintings, dances and theatrical performances. I simply love the combination - in the West or elsewhere the focus is only on dance and theatre," said choreographer Mudiyanse Dissanayke.

Next in line for the Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop is the hosting of the first Sufi Soul World Music Festival in February-March 2000 and then the First Lahore International Film Festival in 2001. Those will be events worth looking forward to, military rule or not.

-Arif Shamim



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sanjeev
mohan:
why I won't
play hamlet
ever again
matt

donahue: the hanging man's restaurant

ranjeet

hOskote:
four poems

THI SSUE

WHY I WON'T PLAY HAMLET TVER AGAIN

A one-act play by Sanjeev Mohan

Scene: A one-bedroom-hall apartment containing all the impedimenta of middle class life; wooden furniture, battered TV set, pots and pans near a kitchen sink. A middle aged man appears to be looking for a book. He finds it and proceeds towards an old armchair. He is around 50, balding, with spectacles perched on his nose. As he sits down, we note that he is reading The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. He starts as if he has heard a knock on the door. He rises and opens it. The entire speech is a monologue, spoken as though another person is present but we see no one.

MAN: Come in. O, it's you. Come on in. What brings you here? This? (indicates the book in his liand) I'm just rereading my Shakespeare. Yes, indeed, it's still my Shakespeare. After all, what else would a poor accountant know. I haven't the advantage of your kind of education, have I? Oxford ... No, no, not that. Let me try and remember, ah yes, Pennsylvania ... no? Well, then Columbia? Sorry. I said I'm sorry, didn't I? You still haven't learned to take a joke.

(shuffles about, searching for something)

Would you like some tea? No? So what have you been up to?

Directing a new play, eh? I thought

what have you been up to?
Directing a new play, eh? I thought
so. For you, plays have to be
enacted; you can't recreate them in
your mind. The best playhouse is not
the Experimental or Prithvi, it's right
here (taps his head). So what's the play
about? What? Hamlet? Again? Sure
brings back old memories. Who's playin
the Enigmatic Prince? ... WHAT! Are

play. And besides, you have already seen me interpret it, so why do you need me? All right, all right, I'm not going to start reopening old wounds; but you yourself had said that you didn't wish to see me again. That you could do any play without my help. Yes, I know I was rude but then, watching you pick my brains over every scene and hogging all the credit later ... Okay, okay, I'll stop but tell me, why come to me now. You're well established and have all the fame you'll ever need. What could you possibly want from an old bhaiya like me? Yes, that's what you called me. Never mind, who told me. "An old fogey and an uncouth bhaiva to boot, who would be better off leaving Shakespeare to his betters." Those were your very words.

What "betters"? You? ... Of course I'm bitter, what else did you expect when you replaced me with a younger, more energetic man ... What was the term you used ... Yes, someone with a "tresh" outlook. Well, he most certainly was tresh ... and from what I hear, so were you. What the hell are you getting so worked up about? Want to know who told me? The same people with whom you so trustingly share confidences, let me tell you, you may have studied (or what's that ever-so-LitBrit term you use—"rem!" literature.) "I read literature at Oxford." (mimes about)

You may have a degree in

a single scene. Not



course, you've got yourself yet another Mohan Prakash. All right, all right, tell me about your proposal. But don't give me all that guff about it benefitting me. The only person who benefits is you, ta long pause as he appears to listen) A foreign trip, a festival of Shakespeare-in-translation in Edinburgh? My, my, aren't we ambitious? So you want this poor, uncouth bhaiya to help you translate and adapt Hamlet, so that you can take your troupe to the UK and strut around as the Saviour of the English language in India, keeping its syntactical bloodline as pure as your so many translations around-you could easily pick up one. I'm sorry, I forgot you can't even read Hindi properly. But then why Hamlet in Hindi, do it in German. Forgotten all your Deutsche, mein Herr. All right, all right, keep your shirt on, Yes, I have been drinking, like I always do-with my own money, on my own time. Just a mere statement. No veiled insinuations here, as if there could ever be unveiled insinuations. Call yourself an English major ... never mind what I said. I'll help you but I will most definitely not play the part. You know very well what it does to me. Besides, just look at me: do I look like a bewildered stripling? Bewildered maybe, but stripling never. Okay, let me think it over. I'll call you in a day or two.

Why should I play Hamlet again? For me and for most of my generation Hamlet is the archetypal Indian male: passionate, dithering, insecure, an enemy to himself, a bully, a coward, a victim, gratefully repressed, arrogant repressor, pychotic, schizophrenic—a number of selves operating at once. One merely needs to introduce a Hamlet-like character into a play (our films do it all the time) for the audience to obtain an immediate identification with the diverse aspects of his varied personae. I for one always find myself being drawn into Hamlet's prevailing mode of expression—that is, depression. Manic me sink deeper and deeper ... So why did I agree to do the play and why do I read it so often? Well, in the beginning I used to experience

catharsis after which, an enormous sense of relief. But now it's becoming more and more difficult to achieve this kind of release. Once the mood catches One thing leads to another and soon you have a fullblown fit of depression. No. I'm normally not depressive; in fact, I'm an unabashed optimist. I'm able to bear fortune's slingshots and arrows like the best of us. Unlike the Pensive Prince of Denmark, I'm a positivist in terms of philosophy: the reason for the world's existence is not a matter of doubt but affirmation.

(turns and recites:) "The righteons man rejoices in this rejoices and becomes delighted seeing the purity of his own actions." (From The Dhammapada, translated by S. Radhakrishnan, did y/know that?) Laccept the cycle of birth and death, of eternal renewal with the hope of ultimate release. I believe in action. For me action is far more important than speculation or thought. I believe in expressing myself through action rather than words. You could say I'm the very antithesis of Hamlet—though if you say that you'll be wrong, for Hamlet is the antithesis of himself ... (a change of mood, a bit disgusted with himself) Who am I fooling? I am not an unabashed optimist or an unabashed anything. I'm every bit as fragmented as Shakespeare's hero, every bit a Nowhere Man, if anything. It's just that I don't get Once I start entering the persona of Hamlet, I metamorphose into an illogical creature, unable to control the sum of my composite parts, unable to differentiate between good and evil. I begin to negate all that is positive in myself. Nothing is of any real consequence, since good and evil are the doesn't matter if one accepts that all matter is only destined for ultimate destruction. Why act, why printed text; but if you try and internalise him, all hell breaks loose. I only read the Manic Prince



Venice or something feelgood that would act as a foil for the passions aroused by the antics of the Mercurial Prince. What I'm trying to explain is just how dangerous it is to take Hamlet—or for that matter, any play-too seriously. Let us suppose that a rational analysis of Hamlet's malady is possible. After his father's death, Hamlet returns to Denmark, where he learns of possible foul play, palace intrigues being the order of the day in medieval Europe. However, as he suffers from the malaise of Academia, he is incapable of raising an army to avenge his slain father. What we need here is a man of action not a ditherer. Nevertheless, Hamlet feels he needs to determine beyond all possible shadow of doubt the fact that a dastardly crime had been committed. One day, he hears of a ghost roaming the castle battlements. (Under controlled conditions, it is possible to conjecture this as the product of the collective imagination of the guards.) Hamlet, full of remorse at not having avenged his father's death, is deranged. He feels that the ghost speaks to him. What probably happens is that Hamlet's personality has begun to split or come apart. On the one hand, he embodies the clear-headed, rational student; on the other, a merciless, avenging son. So now we have two Hamlets. It is also possible that unknown to Hamlet, it was this other Hamlet who was roaming the battlements in the guise of his father's ghost. Around this time, another element, a most powerful one for a son, comes into play. He is outraged at what he perceives as his mother's lack of modesty in marrying his uncle even before his father had been properly laid to rest. A liaison outside the bounds of propriety in his eyes. This—given the ancient taboos against incest-is a most devastating emotion, one that the grieving Hamlet cannot suppress. So, another persona is let loose. We have now three conflicting emotions in the Irresolute Prince, each of which refuses to reconcile with the others. Linked with incest is a hatred of women or misogyny, which leads him to repel Ophelia. In short, yet another self has

entered the conflict. His avenging self

goads Hamlet to counter palace intrigue with a scheming, callous, Machiavellian manipulation of power to achieve his ends. This aspect of the Schizophrenic Scion soon starts to dominate him; to the extent that he loses all sense of good and evil. But contemporaneously, Hamlet the Connoisseur of High Art is still very much at large, which inspires him to philosophise in his justly-famous soliloquies and to deploy drama to coax out the guilty conscience of his uncle. Art has been subordinated to politics and become its handmaiden. After the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia, Hamlet is plagued by a stricken conscience. This wreaks a major change in him, for now the death-wish has entered him. By now, he has so many conflicting personalities that he is no longer in control of his selves. The persona that surfaces in response to a particular stimulus takes over, until he is emotionally drained or the stimulus subsides. What in another case would have been a simple case of Murder and Revenge turns into a veritable battlefield of clashing personae. Remember that, other than Horatio, Hamlet had few whom he could trust. He had no emotional support, whatsoever. He had been fighting a losing battle on all fronts. And since he had been visited by the death-wish, he was destined to die soon. He himself wills his destruction; some other means would have presented itself, if not at the hands of Laertes. (a long pause) Hamlet, the 'character' in the play dissolves once the curtain falls. But what about the various Hamlets the reader or viewer creates

within himself. Where do they go? (another pause) Some divine playwright is not directing my destiny. My life has not been written out in neat scenes that will not burst open with turbulence. No blank verse transforms my trauma into beauty; no poetry regulates the rhythms of my speech. I can't flip back to the first page once I've reached the end. The audience may

achieve catharsis by watching me
on stage but what about me? No, let
my warring selves be subjugated by
my ego, by my own idea of who I am. My
identity. I exist. I insist I exist. And I wish to
continue to exist.

So, mein Herr, i will not. Ich werde nicht ever play Hamlet again.

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As sure as taking it there yourself

shimal 3 1/1/



Tetramethrin Deltamath had time on his hands and an interest in the sky, so he set across the world, chasing solar eclipses. Packed his bags, kissed his wife and was off, waving hands, promising to return in 2046, July 26, the date of the next hometown eclipse.

Now, waves splashing, beach dogs fighting, he is sitting, legs up, toes bare, beneath a coconut palm. It's one of them bulging down sky sort of dusks. Yellow sand from left to right. The Indian Ocean, repeating itself. 'But nothing dies,' he recalls — change is name and form; like a wave, quietly static, like a chameleon. An ant, red-topped, black-bottomed, meanders across his forearm. He raises two fingers to squash the hapless insect, which flees through rows of maize, trips on gnarled roots and tumbles headfirst through leaves, squishy and wet, panting and wheezing as the fingers' sinister footsteps approach.

In younger days, Tetramethrin's father, Harcoil, erected a playground on hostile terrain. Fiery-red, iron-jowled ants, filtered sands and mounds of cactus, black widow spiders and diamond backed snakes, conspired to spoil the project. To rid the land of ants, Harcoil woke Tetramethrin with boiling water, which the son carried to the playground; his father towered ahead. There followed a scene of terrific destruction. Waves, lethally warm, were poured deliberately, like lava, through the gates of the colony's subterranean capital. Bodies floated downstream.

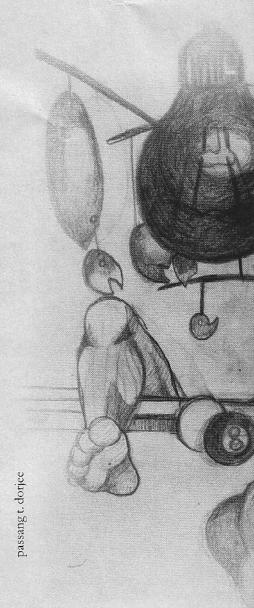
By afternoon, the colony had harvested its dead and mended its streets. Father and son returned, boiling water in hand. 'Let this be a lesson,' Harcoil declared. 'Ants are like people: hard to kill.'

'Since all forms of life are precious,' Tetramethrin now ponders. 'Indeed, since life is one and undifferentiated and since life alone is precious,' he adds. In this way seizing himself with universal compassion, he arrests his murderous digits and offers instead a fingertip of kindness, which lifts the ant away, magic carpet-like, to barren drifts of sand.

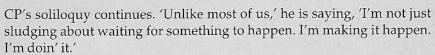
Later in the evening, a motley set of vultures lurks about a table — seven or eight. Smoke-filled air, parabolic arms, sipping and pouring, sucking and lighting. Brief conversations, taps on backs, 'Machung, where ya' been? Yeah, table's crowded.' Tetramethrin, alone, scratches his name on a chalkboard, strategically, and lights another cigarette.

CP is sitting at the bar, talking to a man whose name he does not remember, but who he knows is of high net worth. 'It's ready to take off,' he is saying. 'All we need is capital.' He stresses the last sentence. He has been in conversation with this stranger for nearly two hours. It may never end. Tetramethrin is rooted to the shadows, watching a trio of clowns run the table. Red noses, oversized feet, they clear out the competition. The green-haired guy is stern-looking, jaw clenched. The others are shorter; one's a midget. He paces the counter above the table, heckling the clowns' opponents. His ominous nasal voice: 'Yes, this is a tough shot. It's hard to get a decent strike on the cue ball when it's resting against the bumper like that. ...Oh! see what I mean? Tough shot ...and now look where he's left it!' The third clown takes wildly lanky steps. Circles and circles of motion and circles, as the green-haired guy hulks above the pockets, snickering softly.

a short story by Matt Donahue







'I see.'

'I'm not one of those guys who wakes in the morning wondering what next. I've got plans. I've always got things to do.'

'I see.'

Tetramethrin calls a waiter and waits as a wrinkled man shuffles over, his teeth like crystallised quartz. He watches the shadows on the ceiling, swinging, heaving, shaking.

'Master like more cognac?' Tetramethrin heads toward the dining room. On the way, he encounters CP, whom he acquainted three days before, watching war on tv. Conversation developed over urgent news repeats. CP was of the opinion that the apocalypse was imminent, so they left, together, in search of cheaper drinks. CP now blocks the entrance to the restaurant. 'Hey buddy! getting a bite to eat? I'll join you. Waiter! Waiter! table for two, underneath the hanging man. ... You've got to see this guy, machung. He doesn't feel any pain.'

That being said, two doors swing open. Side by side, he and CP stand, on the threshold of the hanging man restaurant, one of its kind, overlooking the coast of an island famed for its unexpectedly pleasant discoveries, carved within the face of a granite cliff.

'Not bad,' says Tetramethrin.

'This is nothing. Wait till you see the hanging man.'

Coats folding, chairs squeaking, a large party opts to rise, spontaneously, like birds. They file past.

'Who's the hanging man?'

'Huh? His self's.'

'What?'

Their waiter, a sharp young man, a real go-getter, deftly leads them through intimate conversations, rustlings of napkins, turnings of rings. 'Here he is,' says CP, as they round the corner towards CP's prestigious seats. Picture a lean body, the sort that works for pennies in Asia, robbing fruit gardens, selling fruit, bellowing 'Badanay!!' down sleepy high class streets, his body now chalked white, his face — lips eyes nose cheeks — pierced, his back suspended by fishing hooks, blessing for godknowswhosesake, blessing bowed heads with plasters of ash. 'Who thought to place him here,' Tetramethrin enquires.

'My idea,' says CP. 'I'm the hanging man's agent. We're going international.'

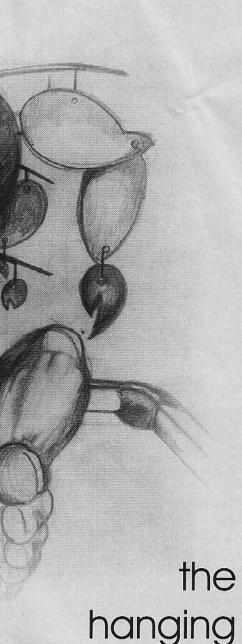
'Congratulations.'

They collapse on two green couches amid waves of neon blue. A snap of CP's digits and the hanging man swings like a hunchback, yanking a coconut coir rope. Palm leaves above rustle gently. A delightfully cool breeze.

'Delightful,' says Tetramethrin.

'Couches are great,' CP avers. 'You lay on one side, and if that side gets tired, you can always flip over, head to toe, and lay on the other.'

'True,' says Tetramethrin, while a chain of waiters scurries diligently, carrying bottles of drink and baskets of fruit, freeing clouds of steam from beneath silver lids, smiling, 'Bon appetit.'



restaurant

man's



PLACE LEGENDS

For Richard Lannoy

Mother Goddess

Pepper vines ring the jackfruit tree that is her shrine. She claims tributes of colour: indigo is hers, and saffron, and carmine.

The rain has washed her altar. You cannot see the blood that quit her veins when the storm-god's iron mace split her head, pinned and broke her arms.

Her stone skin breathes, sweats, watches over anthill Harappas. It is not blind, this torso tapering to a cleft between child-wide hips.

I do not deceive myself. She grows inside me.

Hero Stone

Stone smeared with vermilion, the raddled god stands guard over furrows where dead cities sleep.

Once it was blood, still warm from his victim's pierced abdomen, that anointed him.

One hand carries a drawn sword, the other dips out of sight behind the relief of the horse.

Perhaps that hand, surreptitious, feels for what the rustic sculptor did not carve:

his testicles, twin planets that the god is afraid will withdraw into a cleft, twin planets without which he cannot ride. RANJIT HOSKO,TE

ANOMALIES

Find me a tailor whose needles can mend the sky's ripped tent. Or find me a mimic who can report the taste of sugar on his dry tongue.

I was a simple basket-maker until, one day, a lion roared through my mouth and my fingers bent into claws around the cane.

The lion has now learned to cleave and rein the rattan staves to fit a bright ring in his head: the lion has learned to finger a rosary, wear a green robe.

He is turning into a saint, this lion. He is learning to weave the perfect basket, a basket that can hold

the water that homes in on thirst.



TREASURE MAP WITH NO SPOT MARKED "X"

RANIIT HOSKOTE

Master of first drafts, mason of untrowelled walls, frugal householder, he hoards the comage of poems. Circling the ruins, you hunt for his lost clearing house of fonts, chase the smell of his clay horses with patents.

The original minotaur, he bellows, savage in a labyrinth of versions.

A magneto coiled in his own rage, he melts the hall of mirrors you've devised to catch him, retreats chafing from your locksmith gaze. You'll never tell concave from convex in this hell of inversions. I tell you, wherever you look is the wrong place.

The camera lucida moves to screen him. Slashing through its jammed celluloid, you hope to grab the missing guru, the stable truth metallic behind the moving frame. The projector, agape, spews reams of looped film at you: a mujahid machine gun clipping out magazines of staccato laughter.

He has married a sleeping audience, turned projectionist, mixed up the reels, escaped among the garbled images. You docket the proof to build a case of polygamy: Garbo, hautilus, carbon, woodrose. But when it's time to pin the blame, turn your satchel inside out and you'll shake loose only shadows.

His trademark. Next, with vetch and kale, blue-green travellers' tales, he sows a garden on the beach.

Caretaker of crumbling manuscripts, he needs neither cartridges nor identity cards: he is the turnings of the maze, the flickering instants on the screen. You are the catatonic, he the genius:

he masks himself as you, you face yourself as him. Kabir weaves a shawl with no edge: the horizon is his garden's boundary.



THE GRAMMARIAN'S MARRIAGE POEM

RANJIT HOSKO₄TE

The most beautiful is the object which does not exist

— Zbigniew Herbert: 'Study of the Object'

I.

The most beautiful bride is she who does not exist, she who bears no heroes, who carries no firewood:

the classical absence pinned with jasper brooches, she who is hope, the high-strung trope

of an extinct rhetoric, her limbs fragile as hieroglyphs that I must collect with arms thrown wide

as metal detectors. She is a puzzle that I must assemble into a body of coherent evidence.

П.

The most beautiful bride is music, not sculpture: she will wear flowers of water in her hair

and sew garlands at nightfall from fistfuls of corn, gather splashes of stars at her wrists.

In the wilderness of speech, she will be my farewell to the sins of too much talk, too much prayer;

in a high-walled town on a plain flat as a palm, she will absolve me of all my crazed pieties

of hindsight. She will be the rain of grace bursting from the pods of the wishing tree.

Ш.

She is a sphinx, the most beautiful bride. Defying the logic of her own riddles,

she will relay me from cuneiform to runic, cursive to blackletter. So copied from hand

to hand; version to version, the words of my charter are amended:

I will always be other than I am, a translation of the original text of the tribe

burnt in sacked cities, buried with jewel-hoards, torn apart by ravening wolves.

IV.

She crafts me on her parchment sheaves: I am no territory but only borderlines

born of her artifice. She writes me even as I write this marriage poem for her

and I climb out of the dark night of her beloved body, the most beautiful bride.



the explore nepal group

Vistas & Vignettes of Kathmandu Valley & Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

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Even politically correct nay-saying nabobs have now begun to grudgingly admit that India, in addition to being a Nuclear Power, is also a Pretty Power. You may well ask: What is the connection between beauty pageants and a nuclear weapons programme? Everything. Just as a country is only taken seriously by the international community when it acquires weapons of mass destruction, in the same manner a country whose women are judged the most beautiful in the known universe will find that it is suddenly no longer the butt of jokes in faraway capitals.

Taxi Driver in Oslo (making eye-contact on rear-view mirror): Where you from?

Indian Female: From India, where half the children go to bed hungry every night, and newly-wed women are regularly set on fire by in-laws.

TDO: Oh, India! Congratulations. It is an honour to have a person from the most beautiful country in the universe travelling in my vehicle. Can I have an autograph?

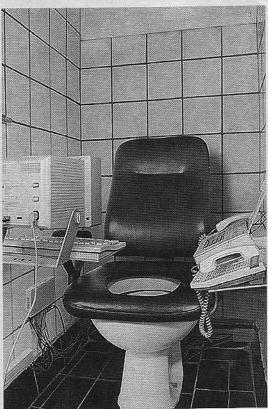
IF: Miss World pageants are sexist cattle markets. Actually, women in India suffer a double burden of discrimination by society and family. Only 38 percent of female adults in India are literate.

TDO: Here we are at the airport, what a lucky day for me to have an Indian passenger.
No, no, no, no payment from you. You get to ride free, you are from India.

See what I mean? Semi-nude and nuke: this is a deadly combination. If deftly handled it can be used to strategic advantage and help India finally secure its permanent seat in the Security Council. The nation that produced Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Yukta Mookhey can now no longer be kicked around as if it were some third-rate banana republic. After all, Indians are now using more fairness cream

per head than any other nonaligned nation on Earth. White Magic™ Skin-lightener Cream commercial: "An All-Albino Republic by the Year 2020."

As a newly-radioactive nation, India's defence expenditure is nearing 10 billion dollars a year, and it is a matter of pride that no other country in the neighbourhood, other than China, spends as much. It is only a



Paperless Office 2000.

question of time before India catches up with China, not only in military spending but also in population size. China may have put a satellite into orbit, but India has won more Miss Worlds and Miss Universes than the Mainland, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan put together.

However, there is no time for complacency. To preserve its lead in beauty contests on the one hand and in the nuclear arms race on the other, India has to pay attention to two other parameters in which it is lagging behind the rest of the world: cellular phone and Internet penetration and toilet prevalence rate. In both cases, India's indices are one-hundredth of the level for OECD nations.

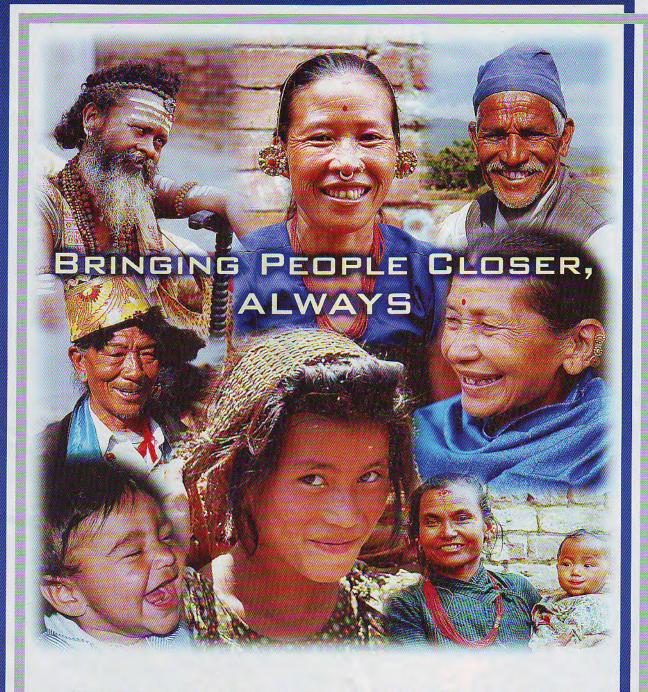
It is no longer tolerable that a multi-award-winning nation still has people pooing on the railway tracks, and not using cell phones. We must frogleap. And the most cost-effective, time-saving method which will allow us to catch up

with the rest of the world will be to integrate the strategy to spread telecommunications to every village with the campaign to improve public hygiene and sanitation so that they go hand-in-hand.

Future village-level internet/fax/phone call stations can be located inside public latrines so that both functions can occur in tandem via modem. Given the billions of cumulative hours that the Subcontinent's chronically constipated citizens spend uselessly every day waiting to log off, I dare say that loos equipped with improved bandwidth Office 2000 hardware will ensure that there is efficient time management. Indeed, just as Cyber Cafes save time for those who want to have a bun on the run while checking mail, these multi-tasking lavatories will save time, save money and save space. While we are making waste, we can also make haste.

VSNL (A Govt of India Undertaker) would do well to moot this strategy without utmost delay and make it as easy as humanely possible for the common man to log on and off. The rest of the Subcontinent could easily replicate this pilot project with a two-pronged strategy to achieve both connectivity and basic hygiene. Look at it this way: we will have toilets on our information superhighway and

they'll all be Y2K OK.



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