

Chomsky on Eqbal Ahmad

# HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

July 2001

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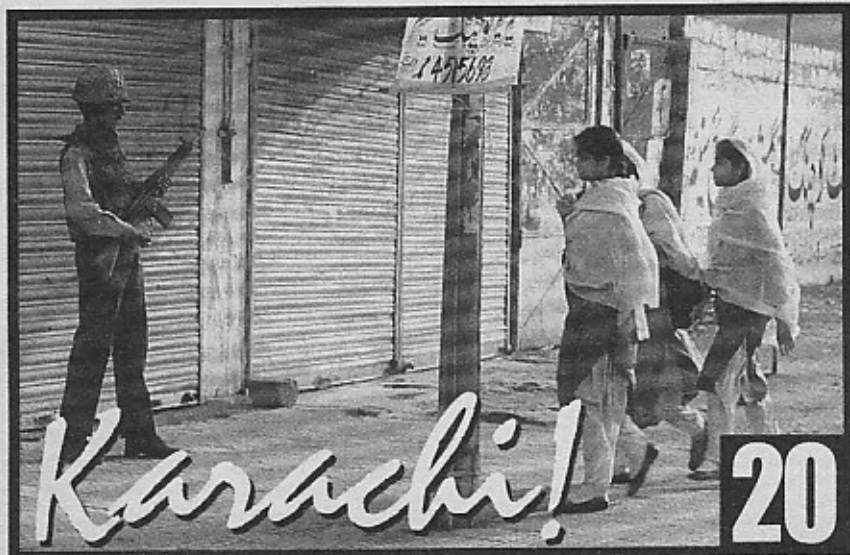


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# HIMAL

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Cover picture shows the cremation of King Birendra at Arya Ghat on the banks of the Bagmati, 2 June. Photograph by **Gopal Chitrakar**. Cover design by **Bilash Rai**.

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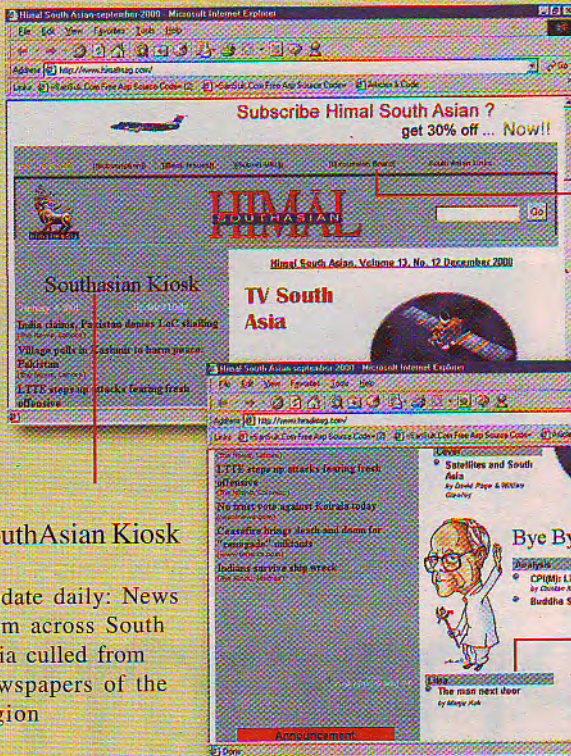
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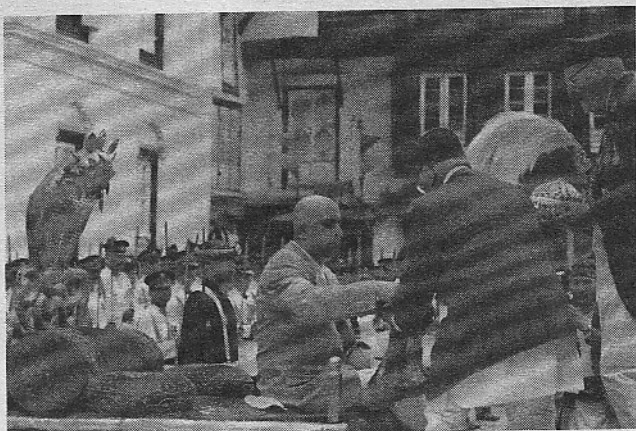
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# Job for a democrat

by *Kanak Mani Dixit*



The royal palace killings marked a cultural watershed for the people of Nepal, the security of the past shattered and an uncertain future left to negotiate. Yes, a son can kill his father, mother, and more. Yes, assault rifles can fire many bullets per second. Yes, there are no illusions left. But after the shock, confusion and smouldering ashes of Arya Ghat, there is still parliamentary democracy. What remains of Nepal's royalty family may descend from its perch and inject energy into the life of an unguided nation. The new man at Narayanhiti may have the sagacity to remain constitutional monarch in a country going rapidly extra-constitutional. The post-Panchayat penance for past authoritarianism is over, and Nepali kingship must now work openly with government and Parliament to bring peace to a shattered land.

4 June 2001, Hanuman Dhoka.

Nepal is robust enough a country to carry on without a king. This was proven when it switched from absolute monarchy to multiparty democracy in 1990 and failed to collapse, contrary to three decades of Panchayat-period propaganda. The point was confirmed over the last 11 years of democratic misrule when, abused by the parties and politicians, the country remained on its feet.

On the other hand, Nepal is fortunate to have a king, as a fulcrum of national identity and institution of last resort. This is a privilege not available to the people of the other larger South Asian countries, whose 'natural' historical evolution was interrupted by the colonial interlude. Rather than a republican presidency, Nepalis have a kingship that reaches back to the very creation of their nation-state two and a half centuries ago and actually much further. That is comforting, except for those who have no use for tradition.

# King

Unique in South Asia, over the decade of the 1990s and up to the present, Nepal has been experimenting with a mix of late-model Westminster democracy backed by an ancient monarchy with its own rituals,

paraphernalia and *modus operandi*. In the midst of this tryout, on the night of 1 June 2001, the society was visited by the most violent tremor imaginable. But despite the Guinness-book proportions of the tragedy within Narayanhiti Royal Palace, not one institution of state faltered even as insurgents stood ready in the hills to take advantage of this sudden crumbling of the most secure institution of state. While the 'handling' of the crisis has been roundly criticised, the fact is that two royal successions were managed amidst the crisis, and the shock and anger of a bereaved and unbelieving public controlled.

Indeed, a critical breakdown might well have overtaken the state following that dark and cloudy night, when a little after nine, King Birendra was murdered and his branch of the Shah dynasty wiped out to the last soul. But Nepal actually weathered this decimation of the monarchy despite the mass bewilderment and public angst. And now, all eyes are on Gyanendra, who has just had the plumed crown thrust on him. Can the new king dig himself out of what at its core is a family tragedy, and establish himself quickly as a constitutional king who can work with government, Parliament and civil society? Can he help bring back peace and a sense of security to a country of multi-hued minorities?

The Nepali kingship has long been transformed into a constitutional entity from its earlier authoritarian garb, and much of the precedents are already in place, the legacy of the just-departed king. However, Birendra was a laid back and retiring monarch, who preferred

not to explore the envelope within which to function. King Gyanendra, on the other hand, will have to be progressive and dynamic, a democrat king to join in on the rescue of the parliamentary system and its possibilities.

The political parties and intelligentsia will be on high alert against royal adventurism and attempts at consolidation of power within Narayanhiti, and they remember well the royal takeover by King Mahendra, whose dour and decisive personality his middle son has inherited. King Gyanendra will have to cross this shoal of suspicion, with a transparent and personally unambitious agenda. The three decades of authoritarian monarchy was a failed experiment, and as modern king of a messed-up country, all Gyanendra can do is to support the parliamentarians and politicians to make this Westminster-by-the-Bagmati democracy function.

## Bonfire of conspiracies

Politically, Birendra's passing was the loss of a personality who represented change and continuity. He inherited the Panchayat system and ruled as absolute monarch for 18 years, after which he reigned as constitutional king for another 12. Reviled by the urban middle class during the end-run of the Panchayat in the 1980s, Birendra subsequently claimed his place in the public heart by remaining resolutely constitutional over the 1990s. With the shenanigans of the commoner party politicians holding centre-stage over the last decade, the palace receded from national glare and the king was transformed into an avuncular and inactive icon. Crown Prince Dipendra's public debut as an enthusiastic patron during the South Asian Federation Games of Autumn 1999 therefore came as a pleasant surprise to a public that wanted more eye-contact.

While King Birendra retreated into the palace after conceding power to the people and Parliament, for a decade, Nepal had continued to sink ever-deeper into the abyss of bad governance. With factional fighting within political parties, street-level agitation by the opposition in lieu of parliamentary debates, buy-offs of parliamentarians, police terror in regions remote from the capital, national strikes and countrywide school closures, an economy in ever-greater tailspin, and a Maoist wildfire through the midhills—by the early summer of 2001 it was as if nothing more inauspicious could visit this society.

But within the walls of the royal palace, a family quarrel was brewing, a developing tension that the public was completely unaware of. Unknown to all but the exclusive circle around the royals, Crown Prince Dipendra was a violence-prone, emotional volcano about to erupt. Given to drink and hallucinogens, Dipendra was battling a headstrong mother and family who used every argument from the astrological to the requirements of lineal purity to keep him from wedding his chosen partner. Further, there was the spectre of having his royal status and right of succession revoked



King Birendra addresses Parliament.

if he went his own way, and Dipendra was also confronted with the imminent betrothal of his younger brother Nirajan. And not so incidentally, as a lover of weaponry the crown prince was evaluating a run of the latest assault rifles for the army, where he came after the king in line-of-respect as 'Colonel-in-Chief'. He kept a rack-full of sophisticated automatic arms on the ready in his bed chamber at Narayanhiti.

Such was the background to the night of 1 June when the crown prince's mind appears to have snapped. In no more than a few minutes of real time, he had descended from his room in combat attire, toting four automatic weapons, and pumped bullets into his father, mother, sister, brother, aunts and uncles, earning for himself a place in the most macabre list of death-dealers in world history.

A traumatised public refused to believe the bizarre information that leaked out over the first few hours and days, confirmed two weeks later by a high-powered investigation team appointed by Gyanendra. With the survivors of the carnage having spoken, and evidence from the bloody palace precincts collected, the finger pointed beyond all reasonable doubt at Dipendra. The



King Gyanendra takes his place, 29 June.

public's emotional rejection was explained by the Paras Shah bad-boy factor (Gyanendra's son, involved in road deaths that had gone unchallenged earlier due to palace pressure), and the fact that Gyanendra's immediate family survived (although the new queen, Komal, survived after a bullet missed her heart by centimetres, and there were 14 family members who survived to the 10 who died). The intelligentsia's reaction was also governed by Gyanendra's reputation as a Panchayatera hardliner, which led imaginative minds to jump to the conclusion that Gyanendra (away in Pokhara inspecting some development projects) must have master-minded an intricate assassination scenario and palace coup.

The investigation committee set up by King Gyanendra and headed by the Chief Justice Keshav Prasad Upadhaya took a little over a week to produce a detailed report, visiting the site of the killing, collecting primary evidence, and recording statements from the royals, guards and retainers. Despite the tension-ridden times, that committee did a commendable and dignified job with its report — except for the buffoonery of its other member, House Speaker Taranath Rana Bhatt, at the report's unveiling press conference. The mass of material resulting from the committee's work, including videotapes and photographs, will take a long time to unravel, but for those willing to wade through its 220-page report the conclusion was clear even if not spelt out as an indictment.

The sheer magnitude of what Dipendra had done, the inability to comprehend the rapid-fire destructiveness of automatic weapons, the confusion and lack of information in the initial days with a royal palace reduced to counting corpses, and the people's distanced impression of Dipendra as a cherubic and affable crown prince, all added fuel to the bonfire of conspiracies. The chasm between the elite royalty and the commoner intelligentsia, which would otherwise have mediated between the event and a disbelieving public, also played a part in the inability—and refusal—to reconcile with what seemed to have happened. The near-total lack of



First eye-contact with the nation, 4 June.



faith had also to do with the sources of information being exclusively royal or military, with the civilian politicians completely out of the loop during those first few days of tragedy. Even till date, Dipendra's motivation remains a matter of conjecture, with little detail emerging from the surviving royals regarding the crown prince's romance and its stonewalling by King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, his alleged violent nature, and his passion for gunnery.

For the sake of the legitimacy of his succession, the new king will have to take the people into full confidence about the tragedy. Distasteful events related to Kathmandu royalty have historically been swept under the feudal carpet, with society having to move along with a less-than-complete version of events. This cannot be so in the present age, nor is it in the interest of the country. The Parliament—in session currently—the government and the royal palace must together move beyond the report of the investigation committee, going further into the evidence, and seeking answers to the question of motivation. This may require delving into interpersonal relationships within King Birendra's family and exploring the crown prince's psychological profile as well as his relationship(s).

These are issues to be dealt with professionally, under parliamentary supervision, rather than at the hands of local journalists, foreign parachutists or hagiographers. Only complete information about the

terrible night and its familial backdrop will inform the public and help it to accept the truth. Trust is an asset for a constitutional modern-day king, unlike the autocratic monarch who can rule by the sword and extract obeisance. The Nepali kingship can and should be salvaged at this time, when the other lofty institutions—the political parties, the courts, the bureaucracy, the army and police, and Parliament itself—are still in need of its potent presence.

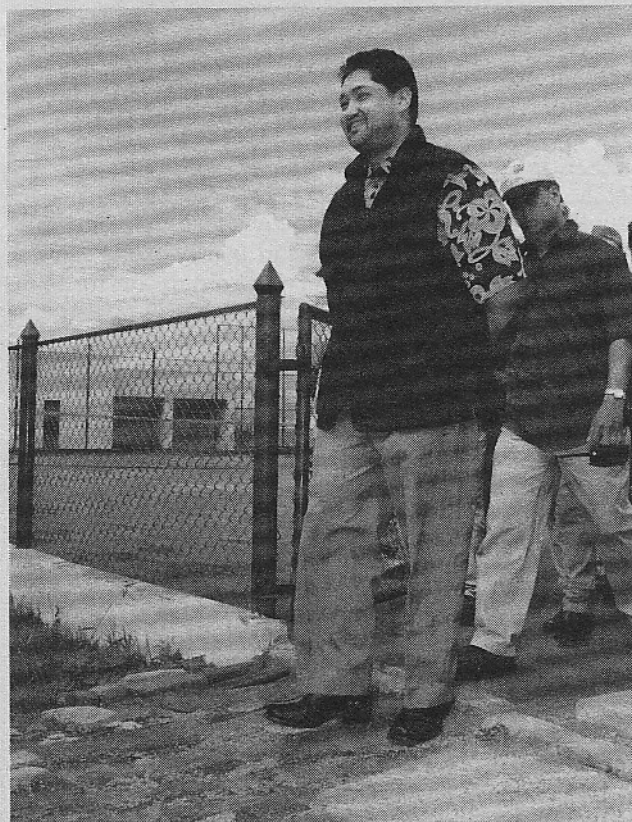
The country would enter a bottomless pit of recrimination and suspicion if the royal palace murders were indeed part of a plan, a coup, a conspiracy—if King Gyanendra had *sought* the bejewelled Bird of Paradise crown. If that were the case, the country and people might as well have done away with the institution of tainted monarchy in one stroke. Fortunately, the reality is clearly otherwise and only needs reconfirming. The people's acceptance that King Birendra was murdered and not assassinated must be based on conviction rather than a fatalistic acceptance of *fait accompli*, for that would never allow for full healing of the national psyche and would surely lead to the hastened demise of the House of Gorkha.

### Form and content

Given that the unthinkable has happened, the Narayanhi tragedy will best be used as a splash of cold water on the nation's face, to make all vanguards of society in politics, academia, business and social activism sit up and re-commit themselves to a country and political system whose promises have long been wasted. If the tragedy shakes up the educated classes enough that they will begin to distinguish the form of parliamentary democracy from its necessary content, and define their thoughts and activities accordingly, this will have given some meaning to the senseless carnage at Narayanhi.

The jolt of 1 June having taken the country so close to the brink, the political parties may henceforth be more circumspect and principled, basing their programmes and inter- and intra-party relationships on ideals rather than on personal and factional ambition. Since each and every matter relating to governance is defined by the manner of politics at the top, if the process is set right there will be improvement right down the line, in bureaucracy, planning, development, and the economic, social and cultural spheres.

The reason the politicians—as well as Kathmandu's 'civil society' and the intelligentsia—have been negligent of the prize of democracy is that it was had rather easily. It was a case of immediate gratification when, in 1990, King Birendra relinquished his absolute monarchy in response to a 'movement' rather than 'revolution'. With little intellectual exposure, inadequate political grooming and quick rise to prominence, the politicians in government and in opposition quickly descended to corruption on the one hand and factional bickering on the other. While their low level of



Dipendra earlier in the day of the carnage, 1 June.

commitment to the parliamentary system was becoming increasingly evident over the years, it was confirmed by the fact that the political groupings did not come together even when the insurgent Maoists declared violent war on the state and system, and moved quickly to establish their presence in large parts of the country.

People do not get the government they deserve. They get the government the middle class thinks it deserves. In the case of Nepal, it is not the masses in the hinterland but the educated classes of Kathmandu Valley that gives the spin to national politics. If the answer to today's doldrums is a qualitatively higher level of political discourse, then it is the responsibility of the Valley's political consumers to extract better performance from the parties. Unless there is a secret authoritarian fixation in this class, unless beneath the professed commitment to pluralism lurks a supine desire for authoritarian rule—either monarchical or Maoists—it is time this class organised to hold the politicians to their promises. Even though the Narayanhiti massacre was an in-house manslaughter rather than a political event in its origin, it could still serve as shock therapy — if it disturbs the country's political and middle classes enough to emerge from their insularity

## Historical bonus

There is nothing inherently wrong in seeking a republican government with a president chosen from the people, but why not use a monarchy when it is available? For a traditional society barely coming out of the age of feudalism, a parliamentary system backed by a constitutional king kept firmly in his place by a watchful intelligentsia is bound to be more useful than a presidency. A kingship, after all, is a bonus available only to countries that have been allowed a continuous history. Doing away with it would be an act of monumental foolishness, one that Crown Prince Dipendra nearly completed for his own reasons. Incidentally, one would have thought that the Maoists would be happy with this weakening of monarchy, but even they have let on their posthumous admiration for the late Birendra and, verily, for the nationalist streak they claim to detect in the Shah dynasty as a whole. As present king, Gyanendra, is exempted from this run of adulation, however, being identified by the Maoists as nothing more than an Indo-imperialist plant.

While mourning the loss of King Birendra, Kathmandu's educated may want to consider how fortunate it is that the dynasty of King Prithvinarayan Shah was not entirely decimated on 1 June, and that there was the lone brother left surviving amidst the fallen. The social cohesion and cultural direction that a wise and astute monarch can provide should not be underestimated, and the symbolism of kingship will of course continue to favour a whole variety of national activities, from the rituals of state and community to cultural activities in a myriad of spheres. From providing a focus for the country's disparate communities in a man-



*Kathmandu reception: lowered flag for the dead king, burning tyres for Gyanendra.*

ner that the politicians will not be able to for some time to come, to serving as an extraordinarily exotic icon for an economy that relies overwhelmingly on tourism, there is no argument about kingships's utility for Nepal.

A constitutional king need not be a passive king, and today the country requires a proactive institution, a facilitator and a mediator in the social, cultural, economic, and even political, arena. It is a role that King Birendra had, by personality and circumstance, not been willing to take on. Working with community leaders, scholars and social scientists, King Gyanendra will have to try to and understand the excruciating time that is the Nepali present, and use his privileged position to nudge and push the society and economy forward.

It cannot be a pleasant experience to be anointed king of a country as materially deprived as Nepal. The rural majority remains shackled in poverty, except that unlike in the past, today it observes the conspicuous consumption of old money and nouveau riche in the Valley. The political system is democratic in form, but

not yet pluralistic in content, with the ethnic groups of the hills, dalits all over, and the people of tarai origin feeling distanced from decision-making. Meanwhile, the headlong rush to consumerist modernity among the middle class is being accompanied by the abandonment of any and all cultural moorings. Joint families are being torn asunder, highways tear up the rural fabric, and foreign satellite television has taken monopoly control of young minds. Age-old traditions, of which Nepal has till this late date been such a proud repository, are being lost in the twinkling of an eye without anything indigenously modern to take their place. Teachers are as lost as the parents, so the youth are without bearing—epitomised in the extreme act of Dipendra's psychopathic desperation.

The country is bounding into the modern era with wholly inadequate leadership from the political classes, the cultural elite or the intelligentsia. Look around, and there is hardly a religious or spiritual leader to guide the flock and provide it with cultural perspective—so much so that King Birendra, reincarnated Vishnu to some, died with a Sai Baba locket on his chest. Everywhere, in the *mandirs* and *gombas*, the form of ritualism crowds out the content of philosophy.

In countries that suffered colonisation, the national economic and administrative elites that emerged have at least served as a cushion during the transition to modernity. Nepal, on the other hand, is leaping from feudal to globalised times without facilitation. As a king who commands at least some of the *ab initio* respect that others have to strive to earn, King Gyanendra can try his hand at pouring cultural balm over troubled waters. He comes to the serpent-backed throne as a mature and worldly 54-year-old, after all, and not as a young adult in thrall of his new seat. If he has the public relations skills and the ability to work with the political, cultural, social and economic leadership, Gyanendra might just be able to join in the task of healing the shattered national psyche and redirecting and energising the collective imagination.

The disadvantage of kingship is that the public cannot choose its man. But if King Gyanendra understands

the moment, then he will certainly discern what kind of king the people need at this hour. From being the aloof and occasionally controversial younger brother of King Birendra, he must emerge as caring, empathetic, proactive—yet simultaneously unambitious. He must descend from the royal pedestal and act as catalyst and actor in the critical areas requiring his presence and patronage.

### King's new clothes

Once anointed as monarch for a few months when but a four-year-old in 1950, put there by a Rana regime near collapse after the rest of his family had fled to New Delhi, Gyanendra lost his over-sized crown when grandfather Tribhuvan returned to take over. The one-time infant king watched his father Mahendra's and then his older brother's coronation. As the once-again king, in late middle-age, Gyanendra is required now to reorient his family life and professional commitments to respond to a new setting. Beyond the questions of perceived legitimacy of his succession, he will have to tackle several personal matters to the satisfaction of the public, including the 'Paras factor', the settlement of his business holdings, and the question of opening up the royal household to public scrutiny and ownership.

As prince till a month ago, Gyanendra was someone with extensive business interests ranging from tea gardens to tourism. In the social sector, he was also engaged in organisations involved with cultural and environmental conservation, and community development. The Soaltee Group, through which Gyanendra holds shares together with many of the recently deceased royals, is by far the most 'corporate' among Nepal's business houses, with collaborations with blue-chip international companies and providing a hefty chunk of the taxes received by the national exchequer. While the holding company itself is in the hands of professional managers, for one who is regarded as a can-do person, the new king's involvement in the Lumbini Development Trust was not able to lift the Buddha's birthplace to become a spiritual centre, other than saddling it with an eternal flame that has to be fed—eternally. As prince, Gyanendra's main public task was running the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, an organisation which carried out most of its innovations during the Panchayat period and floundered in the last decade.

Besides being suspicious of Gyanendra's income generation efforts in the past, including money earned under the privilege of non-competition, the urban middle class, at least, looks at the new king askance for his alleged hardline views during the Panchayat period—no matter that he seemed to stand silently behind his brother during the latter's years as constitutional king. But, most of all, the public is angered by Gyanendra's indulgence towards his wayward son, Paras Shah. This was, in fact, the primary cause for the rampant rejection that greeted his fledgling kingship in early June,



King Gyanendra hands over the investigation report to Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, 14 June.

and there may well come a situation where the monarch will have to choose between the people and his son. However, this is not a question that needs an urgent solution, as long as the young man is not declared heir and crown prince in haste. It is fair to say that, if the son factor is neutralised for the time being, King Gyanendra will receive the space he needs from the people to start working on their behalf.

Rather than staying with the trappings of ritual and tradition, and remote within the walls of Narayanhiti, the king of Nepal must now bring royalty to the people and do away with the aloof identity that it cultivated ever since King Mahendra went all serious behind dark glasses in the early 1960s. Transparency rather than distance should define the royalty's new relationship with the people, responding to the need of the times as well as to protect it from charges of power-mongering. As far as the royal children and cousins are concerned, most of them young and hopefully still capable of grooming, King Gyanendra can ensure their evolution as socially-oriented scions rather than the disco-thumping, smoking-sniffing bratpack that Crown Prince Dipendra and Paras Shah apparently preferred to move with. Without such an effort, the people may not be willing to stay with kingship at the time Gyanendra's reign comes to an end.

The setting up of the inquiry committee into the massacre was the necessary first step — albeit dictated by circumstances — to opening the portals of the royal palace. The decision by King Gyanendra, on the very day he donned the crown, to allow the committee to have the run of Narayanhiti and its denizens was a landmark beginning, which must now be extended to bring the royal palace's affairs more within the purview of government and Parliament.

Openness and transparency of the royal palace are not ends in themselves, however. This proximity is to be used to provide cultural energy to a country beset with problems, and no political party could deny King Gyanendra a role if he decides to actively pursue an agenda to improve, say, the country's education system or its abysmal health care. Indeed, if King Gyanendra wanted to leave a legacy, it could be through a single-minded devotion to improving Nepal's school and college education, a sector that his brother Birendra was responsible for initially damaging in the early 1970s in a misguided effort to 'modernise' it. It is clearly the terrible lack of learning opportunities, over decades of trying under both absolute monarchy and parliamentary democracy, that has brought the country to its knees today, and which explains the society's precipitous fall in nearly every sphere.

Beyond education, King Gyanendra will find a host of issues that can engage him till the end of what will hopefully be, as they have already started saying, "a long and glorious reign". Because the country has been so thoroughly mismanaged under both autocracy and democracy, he will find the door wide open for royal

proactivism in a variety of arena — from tackling the country's shocking child and maternal mortality rates to trying to preserving Kathmandu Valley's cultural heritage; from lobbying for better representation for Nepal's minorities in politics and administration to wildlife conservation and alternative energy; from pushing the business sector to make better use of Nepal's comparative advantage vis-à-vis both the Indian plains and Tibetan plateau, to addressing a wide range of social problems such as trafficking in women, drug addiction, child labour, and all kinds of new-found psychological distress among the populace.

To be part of the agenda of social reform, King Gyanendra will need research and analysis of the kind that the feudocrats in the royal palace's secretariat can hardly provide. In fact, that office even today projects the image of faceless yes-men who help to distribute royal patronage, obfuscate issues on behalf of royalty, and play the occasional mischief with political parties. Gyanendra's palace office will have to shed such an image and role, and transform into a responsive institution open to criticism, and one which relies on social science to study the challenges facing the people and landscape. Such a royal palace would complement and back up the work by the government, the non-governmental organisations, as well as academia.

## Monarch as democrat

The constitutional track is non-negotiable and already largely defined, and the new king himself was quick to confirm his fealty to the 1990 Constitution in his first address to the nation the day he was crowned, on 4 June. But an activist constitutional monarch need not be a contradictory notion, and it is a road that can be taken as long as King Gyanendra understands that his role, above everything else, is to support democracy through Parliament—not to try and amass power around the palace and its hangers-on, to play parties against each other, or to create the straw figure of extreme nationalism to cushion his own throne. This was what Gyanendra's late father, the mentally agile and ambitious Mahendra did as prelude to wresting power from the elected government of B.P. Koirala in the royal coup of December 1960. (A re-reading of history will serve to sensitise both the royal palace and political classes on what kind of monarchical activism to watch out for, and to desist from, in the days ahead. On the other hand, the new king's transparency may finally help rid the Nepali mind of its 1960-fixation and allow the monarchy to get closer to the people.)

Kathmandu's civil society organisations can be expected to be on guard to prevent any slippage into authoritarianism, and there is also no doubt that King Gyanendra will pick up controversies as soon as he comes out of the period of mourning and begins, as expected, to take an interest in the national issues awaiting resolution. But this fear of backlash should not prevent him from trying to make Nepali monarchy rele-

vant to modern times, even while the king steers clear of even the perception of playing power politics with regard to matters such as the balance of strength in Parliament, secretive deals with political groups, or using the army as its own. King Gyanendra will know that if there is one issue that will unite the forever bickering political parties of his kingdom, it will be the threat of a power-hungry kingship.

An insular, feudally-oriented royal palace will not have the dynamism to chart the choppy waters up ahead, but there is no doubt that a dynamic monarchy openly dedicated to parliamentary democracy would be a boon, including as an honest broker between the various social and political forces. If King Gyanendra can shed the distanced airs of his predecessors and command the respect of the public, he may even be able to lift the political parties to a higher threshold of principles. Factionalism within each political group and the displacement of professed party programme by personal agenda lie at the core of the rot that is ripping the fabric of Nepali democracy. As an institution with clout and prestige, the monarchy can work to curb this disease.

The new royal palace should also plan to clear the murk that pervades the role and position of Nepal's army. While the general principle is clear, that the military must remain under the full control of a duly-elected executive, in reality the powerful but untested military of Nepal sees its loyalty lying with the king. The army brass has extreme distaste for the political parties, partly for fear of being politicised and corrupted by the politicians—as happened with the police force -- but also because of the historically incestuous linkage between royalty and the military. Recognising the situation, King Gyanendra will have to help Parliament prepare the ground in which the army's authority is unequivocally transferred to civilian authority. A good place to begin re-evaluating the army's place in the national firmament will be to study the lapses in the security that led to the death of its patron and Supreme Commander on the night of 1 June.

The overwhelming issue confronting the population, one that remains in place like a dark shroud even

as the burning pyres of King Birendra and his family recede in memory, is the ever-present and expanding Maoist challenge to the Nepali state. If the mainstream parties are unable to sink their differences and identify a common platform to confront the Maoists with, then King Gyanendra may be forgiven if he tries his hand at a resolution. If others do not have the standing or the inclination, the king can make an open call for dialogue and see whether the parties will not rise above tactical and factional considerations to consider the Maoists' challenge. Rather than a fight to the finish using the unleashed firepower of the army, it has become urgent to seek ways to coax the Maoists to cash in their underground chips for above-ground political power. A strong government and a believable interlocutor are what have been lacking in trying to bring the

insurgents to the table. The king of Nepal, who is also a Nepali citizen, will not be grudged the space if he takes the initiative.

Monarchs are, after all, individual human beings. Good and bad kingships are defined, more than anything else, by the personality, style, likes and dislikes of the person who ascends the throne. One constitutional monarch may want to lean back and let matters take their course, and another may like engaging with the issues. Of which mould will Gyanendra be, and is he sufficiently agile to function amidst the combative political landscape if it is to be the latter? Above all, will he have the forbearance to return to the royal palace as and when the brushfires are put out?

When the dust and ash have finally settled on the royal massacre, and as the

public begins to learn to live with him, King Gyanendra will find that his plate is full as head of state of 23 million Nepalis. To communicate with them, the new king of Nepal must learn to speak extemporaneously, express opinions in open fora, and try and maintain eye contact. Times have changed, as have expectations.

As for the members of Kathmandu's still-unbelieving intelligentsia, they may want to consider one final point. From what we know till now, what if it was Dipendra rather than Gyanendra that had become king?

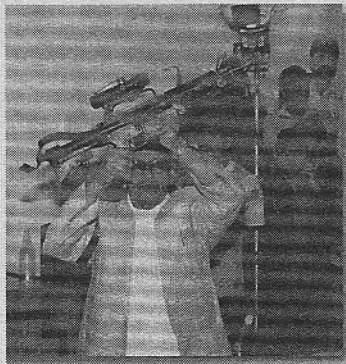


8 November 1950, Hanuman Dhoka. Gyanendra's first encounter with the crown.

FROM SHANKAR PAI SANYAL'S COLLECTION

KATHMANDU AND Nepal got its first mighty exposure to world media in rather tragic circumstances. But wasn't it just that whopper of a high-tragedy story that the media revels in. Of course, everyone went ahead and made their mistakes and assumptions, but such was the nature of the story. For many of the local scribes, it was a rude reminder of how little they knew about the denizens of Narayanhiti Royal Palace, other than perhaps the fact that it was located on Darbar Marg; they simply did not have any 'contacts' in the palace. Well, let them now keep a more watchful eye on the constitutional monarchy because it will probably be a less benign entity.

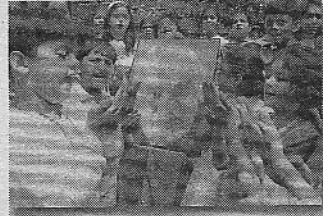
ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, Radio Nepal and Nepal Television showed how good they were at being bad in the coverage of the extended crisis. Indeed both these government-run archaisms have such a depressing old-file air about them, very unlike the sweet parrots that they are supposed to be. (All my sympathies to the newsreaders for the amount of tongue-tiring royalese they had to use.) But the damage they did by way of non-information was as serious as the excesses committed by channels like Star News, which has pretensions of respectability vis-a-vis its competitor Zee. There's something cheaply tabloid about Star News—the sensation-mongering, the 'leading' questions, the young reporter showing to the whole world and mom that he has made it... I almost rather prefer the boredom of Nepal Television to the titillation of Star News.



THIS MUCH more ought to be said about the royal massacre. I have a sneaking suspicion why trouble did not brew on the streets of Nepal after the commission came up with the official report—it was because of the hilarious antics of His Excellency,

Speaker of Parliament, Taranath Ranabhat. An award is due to the man for trying to restore the sense of humour of a devastated nation, although it was not intended that way at all, and even if it was thoroughly misplaced. Now everyone is up to taking on the soul of the poor man. One FM station I was listening to had this spoof where the Speaker's wife is going ballistic about the husband's performance, with the son refusing to go to school the next day. Please spare the man the mockery, especially against his poor English. I thought his rat-a-tat was wonderfully onomatopoeic, and he showed he is just the right man to control the back-bench types in Parliament.

WHILE ALL this was happening and curfews were in place in Kathmandu, there was a small matter of three people being killed in police firing in the protests that followed the massacre. Except for a one-day mention of the incident, the news, unlike the victims, has died a quiet death. At the same time, international media were giving ample play to the injured in Gothenburg's anti-globalisation protests. South Asian media has a lot more to learn, in some areas.



SO WHAT'S with Vajpayee's knees? Why, oh why, does the Indian media have to say so much about the prime ministerial hinges, first one then the other?! If it were a sportsman's knees, like Sachin Tendulkar's, it would have been alright. But to pay such undivided attention to a certain poet's pair of old knees, shows an absurd sense of priority (see picture of school kids and teachers praying). Sometimes, the only way to describe India's Fourth Estate is that it has got its grey matter in them knees.

BUT THIS one has got it where it ought to be. Not for the first time, Chettria Patrakar is highly impressed by the *Folio* magazine of *The Hindu* daily from Madras. Subdued and effective; if, say, *Outlook* is commercial cinema, *Folio* is art. Now if you tell me there is no difference between the two, and there are only good and bad movies, *Folio* definitely makes for a good one.

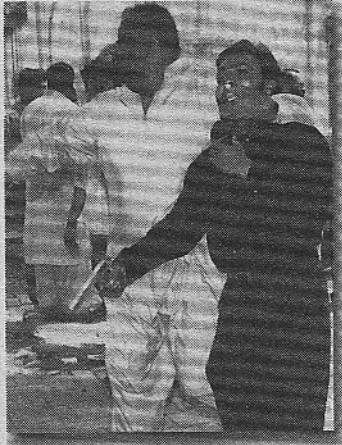


I AM really beginning to take to Pakistan's President-Chief Executive-Chief of Army Staff-etc. For the slot of South Asia's numero uno politician, there's not a better candidate than General Pervez Musharraf. At the risk of chappals from the democrats, let me say he has traits that closely resemble the extinct species of statesman. No one has been more decisive of late in this part of the world than the general. I especially liked the way he ticked off the Indian prime minister for the pre-summit rhetoric (like "PoK will be the main focus of talks"). It's another matter altogether that the Indian media dealt with the issue by running headlines like "India, Pakistan agree to check rhetoric". But if you read the fine print, you will know who prompted the agreement.



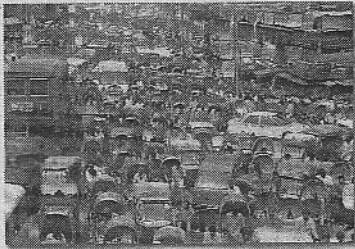
THE COPY writers for Amul cooperative's ads in India have been known to come up with smart ads that tie up with whatever

is the hottest news item of the season. So you have this one on the monkey-man scare (*darr* in Hindi) in New Delhi.



THIS PICTURE is one of the reasons why I am with Musharraf. The action is at a reception hosted by the leader of the dissident faction of Pakistan Muslim League.

HERE'S A genuine concern: what will happen to philately in the age of e-mail? Pretty soon, those postage stamps are going to disappear, and as happens in such cases, their collection might become a rich man's game. That will be a sad event, because philatelists belong to all classes. But on the brighter side, a financially unsound stamp collector could make a fortune if he shows some enterprise in auctioning off those rare stamps, which is bound to happen not too far into the future.

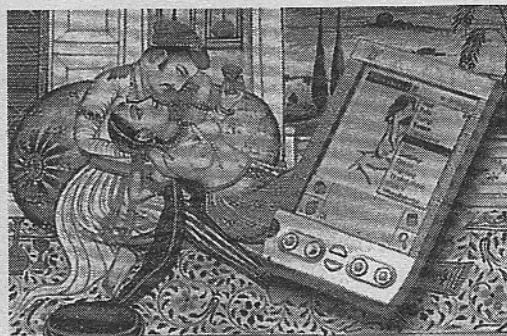


OH DHAKA, I weep for you. If there are no hartals, then there are traffic jams. Mercy my lord, mercy!

KANDY IS a sacred area alright. Young lovers too seem to

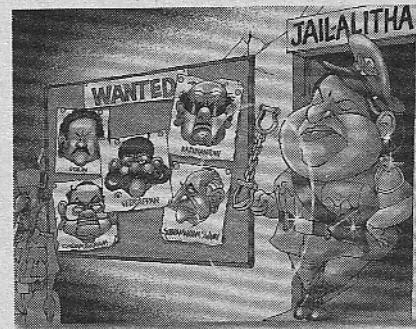
think that way. So the Kandy police, on a fine Saturday morning in early June, rounded up eight under-18 couples, who apparently had left their homes to attend private tuitions. A report quotes the Circle Inspector telling the student-lovers to refrain from making love in public especially in the sacred area because it was not "suitable". He also added that they should not cheat their parents who with much difficulty afford their private tuition fee. Yes of course.

THE NEWSWEEK periscope of 18 June reports this sighting. An updated version of last year's Kamasutra software (slogan: think more sleaze, less Vedic philosophy) for the Palmtop—the Palmasutra 2. It comes in six different languages, features stunning colour graphics and 25 new positions in addition to contortionist favourites like "accordion" and "centi-



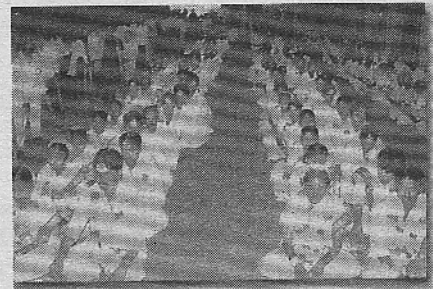
pede". A whole new reason, the brief says, for having sweaty palms. Wonder if the Indian culture police will sweat over this one—a palmful of Vatsyayana.

SORRY TO be so obsessed with Amma, the terrible Jayalalitha. This cartoon in *India Today* by Ajit Ninan captures her in all her dictatorial beauty. Meanwhile, the character with Yama-like moustache, Mr. Veerappan, is again back in the news after we thought everyone had lost interest in him. Now, some 2000 cops are scouring the jungles of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to nab the tusk-master. The force, in what seems like a casting coup, is headed by another handle-bar moustache, Mr Walter Dawaram, and he says online that finding Veerappan and finding a needle in a haystack are much the same thing. Needless to say.



AH, THIS one I have always wondered about. What

does it feel like to be a groom in a Mass Marriage? The picture is of 152 couples at a "free, community marriage programme" in Bangalore. Each bride, says *Deccan Herald*, was given a saree, blouse, nose ring and *mangalya*, while the men got a white shirt and a dhoti, and both got a pair of plates and cups. When I get married, I think I'll go singular...



SHEIKH HASINA and her family now ought to be fully protected. This is courtesy the horrendous sounding 'Father of the Nation's Family Members Security Act 2001' passed by the Bangladeshi Parliament in June. Now who else would push for similar acts? It is already too late for Nepal's late royal family.

THE TALIBAN representative to the United States (there is such a one, apparently), has been quoted as saying that the present slowdown in the US economy has been caused by his government's decision "not to sell heroin to US anymore".

□ *Chhetria Patrakar*

# Untouchability and India's (D)urban Elite

by **Subhash Gatade**

*Untouchability is abolished now and its practice under any form is prohibited.*

*(Constitution of India, Article 17)*

*Despite the constitutional mandate, untouchability is prevalent in 12 states—Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and Pondicherry.*

*It is prevalent in a mild form in 6 states—Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Goa and Delhi and in the Union Territories.*

*(Maneka Gandhi in Parliament, July 1998)*

To those aware of the the scourge of untouchability in India, details of the kind furnished by Maneka Gandhi before Parliament are not shocking. But judging from recent developments it appears that there are many, particularly among the more influential sections of the intelligentsia, who either do not know or do not particularly care about the persistence of such a nauseatingly undemocratic practice. There is no denying the fact that despite half-a-century of constitutional measures untouchability continues in myriad ways and forms. In many places Dalits, to date, are denied entry into temples or served tea in 'special' glasses in hotels and restaurants or are not allowed to draw water from government wells situated in areas where dominant castes reside. Dalit women are driven to prostitution through religious customs like the Devadasi system or are forced to do menial and 'polluting' jobs like scavenging as a hereditary duty enjoined on them by lowly birth. And it is a sign of the durability of this system that despite many superficial changes, partly under constitutional duress and partly induced by the compulsions of modernity, it has managed to maintain intact the core function of insulating caste purity from caste pollution.

Why does the need arise at this point to recapitulate these details of a system that pervades Indian society and violates the country's Constitution every day in numerous ways—a system which, in the words of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, imposed itself not as a "division of labour but as a division of labourers"? These seemingly well known facts bear urgent repetition precisely because of the reluctance displayed by members of the Indian intelligentsia and the government to use



*Separate glasses for dalits in a village in Andhra Pradesh.*

available opportunities to tackle a problem that shames the nation. The issue of caste apartheid or caste discrimination, especially dalit oppression, has now become the focus of attention as a possible agenda at the proposed Durban World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to be held in August-September 2001 under the auspices of the United Nations. The conference has been timed to mark humanity's successful victory over apartheid a decade ago and also to chalk out a strategy to do away with the vestiges or remnants of a similar nature. This has given rise to a debate among India's intellectuals, activists and some politicians, about the inclusion or exclusion of the issue of caste oppression, and especially dalit oppression, at the Durban conference.

The debate has been going on at several levels and has raised questions of various kinds. One of the main disputes relates to defining the agenda of the conference. Whereas there are many who would like the conference to move beyond formal proclamations on racism and engage in serious discussion about discrimination based on "occupation" and "descent" as well, as part of the agenda of the conference, India has taken an intransigent position on the question of dalits. Although it is ready to discuss the Romas of Europe and the Burakus of Japan it has officially expressed strong reservations about the inclusion of

P. SAMANTH/GALERIE



dalit oppression on the agenda.

This position is at variance with the South Asian neighbours, especially Nepal and Sri Lanka. Both countries are ready to include caste oppression as part of the discussion. It may be noted that in Nepal, dalits in the mid-hills and tarai plains are said to constitute 22 per cent of the population which is about the same as the Indian figure. Nepal is candid in its admission of the problem. What stops India from doing likewise? What is even more intriguing is that it was India, an initial signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which had taken the initiative for the inclusion of discrimination based on "descent" at one of the earliest CERD conferences. In effect, India is backtracking on an earlier commitment.

The position taken by the Indian government is that caste oppression is an "internal" issue of the country. This has given rise to the second question in the ongoing debate, namely, what, in such social circumstances, constitutes an "internal" issue of any country and what is an issue that lends itself to "external" scrutiny. The obvious discrepancy between internationalising the issue of race apartheid, in which India took a vanguard position, and sweeping the problem of caste discrimination under the domestic carpet, as a matter to be

## Nepal is candid in its admission of the problem. What stops India from doing likewise?

dealt with internally, seems to have escaped the government.

This in turn has raised a third and fundamental point of debate: what constitutes a nation and what is the nature of the relationship between the nation and its citizens? Does national interest mean the interests of the broad masses of the people or are the basic rights and interests of some sections to be dispensed with in the interest of protecting the nation's dignity.

An unfortunate fourth point has also emerged in this debate and revolves around the peripheral and largely academic question of the similarity and difference between race and caste. That this point is being discussed at length, despite its complete irrelevance to the issue at hand, indicates the extent to which trivial issues are being used by motivated individuals to sidetrack the debate and mislead the ill-informed. A cursory glance at the draft documents of the conference makes it adequately clear that the issue is not as complex as it has been made out to be.

Given the vigour of the ongoing debate what is disturbing is that a majority of the Indian elite has adopted an ostrich-like attitude. Their unconscionable silence amounts to nothing less than tacit support for the government's specious argument that caste oppression as an "internal" matter of India cannot be raised in international fora. The silence is most starkly evident in the

political sphere because it, in effect, represents the convergence of attitudes of the far right, the centrist formations and the mainstream left on the issue. Most political parties have by and large refrained from taking a clear-cut position over an issue which is linked to the real empowerment and dignity of fully a fifth of the Indian population—who, for thousands of years, have been denied that most basic right, the right to live like human beings.

Because of this abdication of responsibility by the more influential sections of civil society, it has been left to a minority—consisting of dalit organisations, some NGOs, and a handful of radical political formations—to question the government's credentials and commitment to the socially oppressed. This small combine has pointed to the stealthy manner in which the government has gone about dealing with the issue. It has kept Parliament in the dark, nor has it consulted the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), a statutory body constituted by an act of Parliament. Perhaps it is the government's view that dalits do not merit parliamentary discussion and civil safeguards. This is how the government deals with an "internal" issue.

Increasingly, the debate over the inclusion of dalit oppression on the agenda of the UN conference is being dominated by the question of the similarity and differences between race and caste. Dalit activists have denounced the narrow definition of caste that dominates the sophist arguments of those who oppose the linking of caste oppression with race discrimination. Such definitional nit-picking is quite pronounced in the arguments put forward by Professor Andre Beteille, a prominent Indian sociologist, who resigned in May this year from the committee constituted by the Prime Minister for drafting India's response at the UN conference. According to him "Race is a biological category having distinctive physical markers whereas caste is a social category. The consequences of this will be to add more divisions in Indian society. We have enough divisions based on language, religion and caste, which we have to address. So we don't need to fabricate or invent yet another based on race."

This seems to be the position that India wants to adopt at the UN conference. Beteille's academic opinion that caste is not race can always be debated at leisure. What is important at the present moment is the simple fact that both racism and casteism are social categories with political ramifications. And this aspect of both problems does not afford us the luxury of leisurely debates. Beteille's stand also completely neglects the proposed ambit of the conference. The draft document of the conference specifically takes into consideration "discrimination" based on "occupation" and "descent". But Beteille is not the only one raising irrelevant objections. Professor Dheerubhai Sheth, a well-known political scientist, while noting, in the *Jansatta* of 12 June 2001, the benefits that will accrue to the dalits if the issue comes up for discussion at the conference, concludes by raising the spectre of the abolition of affirmative action if caste is equated with race.

Leading columnists in Indian publications have also put forward similar arguments.

## Why internationalise caste oppression?

It is precisely because of the indifferent silence and the vociferous opposition that dalit activists want the problems of caste prejudice to be raised at international fora like the UN so that global pressure can be brought to bear on the Indian government to protect lower castes. This has become an important issue because of the actions and intentions of the government of India. At the 57th session of the Commission on Human Rights, Savitri Kunadi, India's permanent representative at the United Nations, clearly outlined the government's stand that the caste system does not fall within the purview of racial discrimination. It was not surprising therefore that the organisers of a Global Conference against Racist Oppression and Caste Oppression in New Delhi in March 2001 had to face official wrath. The Indian government refused permission to many foreign delegates to participate in the conference. Doubts are now being raised in many quarters about whether the Indian government will permit organisations and individuals who have been championing the dalit cause to even attend the Durban conference.

In addition to all this is the long history of the Indian government's responses to international bodies on the issue of caste and race. From the document titled *Perspective of UN Treaty Bodies on Caste*, it is clear that in recent years United Nations Human Rights bodies have underlined the existence and persistence of caste-based oppression in India and many South Asian countries. They have also emphatically drawn attention to the fact that numerous national level legislations have failed to protect dalits from discrimination.

It has taken a long time for the dalit problem to be recognised so openly. Though India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1969, it was not until 1996 that the CERD Committee made its first explicit reference to caste-based discrimination, "untouchability" and scheduled castes. But the Government of India was quick to respond. In its 1996 state report to CERD, the Government of India took the position that caste discrimination did not fall within the purview of CERD because caste was not the same as race and the term "descent" in Article 1 referred exclusively to descent based on race. This was not an argument that CERD found persuasive. In its concluding observations on the government of India's 1996 state report, CERD opposed this position stating that though caste may not be equivalent to race it nevertheless fell within its purview under Article 1 of the Convention.

According to the CERD document A/51/18 Donas339-73, "The Committee states that the term 'descent' mentioned in Article 1 of the Convention does not solely refer to race. The committee affirms that the situation of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes falls within the scope of the Convention." Interestingly, the history of CERD reveals that when the draft of the CERD did

not include the term "descent" in Article 1, it was the Indian government which had insisted on including it. Today, the same government opposes the inclusion of caste based discrimination, in CERD and the World Conference against Racism (WCAR), under the term "descent".

There is an arresting lack of congruence between the government of India's position and the views contained in the Constitution and the various commissions and committees of inquiry instituted by it. A statement released by academics, jurists and civil society groups after the New Delhi conference in March, demanding the inclusion of caste issues in the Durban agenda shows quite clearly how the Indian Constitution looks at the whole issue of caste and race. According to the statement, "...Article 15 of the Constitution of India which outlaws discrimination based on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, treats caste at par with race as a prohibited ground of discrimination. Article 17 while declaring the abolition of untouchability has in effect accepted the existence of caste based discrimination and its effect of untouchability as racial discrimination." Article 341 of the Constitution states that "The president may with respect to any state or Union territory and where it is a state after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be scheduled castes in relation to that state or union territory, as the case may be." According to the statement it can be construed that "...according to the Indian Constitution the



A majority of the Commission's members in favour of including caste in CERD, December 1997.



P. SAMATHIGALERE

concept of SCs is inclusive of the concept of race."

The March 2001 New Delhi conference also looked at a few of the judgements relating to discrimination against Dalits and inferred that many of these judicial decisions recognise caste "as a prohibited ground of discrimination not only at par with race but also as a form of racial discrimination. The different definitions of caste adopted by the several decisions of the supreme court of India show that for the purposes of treating caste as a prohibited ground of discrimination, caste is race in the Indian context [K.C. Vasantkumar vs. State of Karnataka 1985 (supp.) 1 SCR 352]... The 9 judge Constitution Bench in the case of *Indira Sawhney vs. Union of India* [1992 (supp) 3 SCC 217 at 714] defines caste in the following terms: 'a caste is nothing but a social class—a socially homogeneous class. It is also an occupational grouping, with this difference that its membership is hereditary. One is born into it. Its membership is involuntary.' In another judgement the same Supreme court described 'caste discrimination to be more atrocious than racial oppression'."

The National Human Rights Commission has observed in the case of a dalit atrocity in Devaliya, Amreli district, Gujarat (No. 14/6/99-2000) "...[D]evaliya is only a tip of the iceberg of the atrocities flagrantly committed with impunity on the Dalits in the country. Their total dependence on daily earnings is the root cause of their being subjugated to indignities. Due to education and marginal cultural development, when some youths either assert the right to equal treatment or attempt to protect the dignity of their person or of their women or resist the perpetration of the practice of untouchability or atrocities being committed on Dalits, they are often branded as Naxalites and extremists, they are implicated in false crimes and killed in false encounters." The observations of the NHRC echo the conclusions of various commissions and committees formed by the government from time to time to look into the cases of atrocities against dalits.

In the light of the unanimity of opinion expressed by various bodies of the state there can be no justification for the exclusion of caste from the agenda of the forthcoming UN conference on racism. If the matter has to be dealt with internally there have to be appropriate instruments and the necessary will to accomplish the tasks. Unfortunately, the existing instruments do not inspire confidence. There have been instances when

the courts have been less than sensitive to the question of caste oppression. The judgement in the Killevanamani massacre (Tamil Nadu 1969) in which more than 35 dalit women and children were killed in cold blood by the local dominant castes as a punishment for demanding better wages is just one instance. The final judgement of the court in this first organised caste massacre in independent India is shocking. All the accused were allowed to go scot free on the dubious assumption that "...since they are upper caste people it appears impossible that they would have gone walking to the hamlets of the dalits." Given such an approach, by the government, consistently, and the judiciary, intermittently, it seems unlikely that treating the dalit problem as an "internal" problem will yield any meaningful progress.

It is necessary for civil society organisations to take the lead in placing the issue before the world if a government that makes so much of its contribution to South African democracy and the Palestinian cause looks the other way when 200 million dalits are abused and reviled within the country's borders. The forthcoming 53rd session of the UN Subcommission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights ought to play a catalytic role in the emergence of such a campaign.

The 52nd session of the Subcommission, which convened to prepare the agenda for the Durban conference, adopted a unanimous resolution recommending that "The world conference focus inter alia on the situation of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, related intolerance and ethnic conflict, and other patterns of discrimination such as contemporary forms of slavery that are based on race, colour, social class, minority status, descent, national or ethnic origin or gender, including topics such as: a) the link between forms of slavery and racial and other discrimination based on descent. b) the implications of multiple identities (race, colour, descent, minority status, national or ethnic origin, gender..." India was also a party to the decision of that Subcommission's meeting. The same meeting entrusted an expert member from Sri Lanka to prepare a working paper on forms of discrimination based on occupation and descent with special reference to South Asia. He was also to identify those communities which suffered such discrimination, the judicial and legislative measures adopted to ameliorate their conditions, and make future recommendations. The 53rd session of the UN Subcommission will be held in August to discuss the paper.

What will be the Indian representative's stand at that meeting? Can India transcend its alleged "national" interests and be ready to discuss its "internal" matter at a world fora with an open mind? Or will history repeat itself and policymakers and self-serving intellectuals continue to claim that letting others comment on the plight of Indian dalits will be an affront to the nation's sovereignty? Perhaps they need to be reminded of the words of Sarveshewar, the famous Hindi poet of the sixties, "...a nation is not just a map on a piece of paper..."

# Conformist Minds of India

In his fight against the British Empire, Gandhi realised early on that the entity called India was not a nation in reality but merely a geographical expression of historic significance. It was in recognition of a relatively weak political identity that Gandhi forged his message of freedom and emancipation around religious beliefs of pan-Indian appeal. He combined in a single symbol of cultural unity; the concept of non-violence from Buddhism, the faith in the solidarity of the faithful from Islam, the depiction of truth as God from Hinduism, and the dignity of social service from Christianity, and gave it an evocative name from an ancient epic popular in several languages of India—the Ramayan. Gandhi's Ram Rajya is an acceptance of the diversity of faiths prevalent in India.

Meanwhile, Jawaharlal Nehru found seeds of unity in his *Discovery of India* in the Ashokan empire. Nehru's idea of India got its inspiration from the nation-states of Europe that closely resembled the concentration of temporal and spiritual authority in the person

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Symptoms of intellectual withdrawal are discernible in the posturing of opinion makers in New Delhi. Unsure about the role of India in changed circumstances, the Indian intelligentsia is unwilling to forsake the security of conformism.

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of an emperor. Nehru may have been a child of the Enlightenment, educated in the art and culture of the west in some of its finest institutions, but he was a thoroughly oriental Brahmin in his outlook. He aspired to fashion a nation of destiny from the glory of antiquity. It is the Nehruvian idea of India that inspired an entire generation of Indian intelligentsia. With the great minds gone, it was left to the expert, the diplomat, the scholar to manage this legacy and, interestingly, these Indians saw none of the humility but only the grandeur that apparently made up India.

An exaggerated sense of self-worth worked exceedingly well when two super-powers fought for spheres of influence during the decades of the Cold War. But as soon as the disintegration of the Soviet Union pushed the United States on to the pedestal of the sole super-power of the world, the mental map of the Indian mandarins got disoriented. A heightened sense of insecurity drove the Indian foreign policy establishment into the shelter of an ill-defined doctrine of 'national interest', traditionally the fig-leaf of nations too weak to accept or play a global role.

Symptoms of intellectual withdrawal are easily discernible in the public posturing of opinion makers in New Delhi. Unsure about the role of India in changed circumstances where there is no Soviet Union to police the sole policeman of the globe, the Indian intelligentsia is still unwilling to forsake the security of conformism. After all, it makes a whole lot of sense to go with your government when you do not have the crutch of an ideological alternative to hold on to. When such a tendency gains currency, it becomes the norm to seek security in numbers. Such an attitude of conformism is so rampant in the Indian capital that not even the so-called independent thinkers of institutions of international repute are free from it.

The effects of the docile acceptance of official policy can be seen on all issues of importance. Like the mandarins of South Block, even think-tankers and journalists accept the fallacious proposition that all issues of India's foreign relation need to be seen through the prism of Pakistan. An even more absurd extension of this line of logic is the centrality of Kashmir for the stability of South Asia. Instead of shaking the Indian *sarkari babus* out of their hallucinatory trance, India's literati readily buy the argument that Pakistan is bent upon destabilising their nation. Paranoia of Pakistan has become such a fixation of India's foreign policy that even countries like Nepal and Bangladesh are not allowed to remain outside the pointless controversy over a few square kilometres of completely barren icy slopes in Siachen.

Had the intelligentsia questioned Indian adventures in the tear-drop island of Sri Lanka when they learned that India's intelligence agencies were engaged in training and arming Tamil militants, chances are that the slide of Serendip (Jaffna peninsula) into chaos would have been checked effectively. But the learned strategic analysts of New Delhi went along all the way with the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka and helped perpetuate the fire of insurgency.

New Delhi academicians pride themselves on their ignorance of India's own Northeast, and yet they cannot tolerate disinterested intellectual inquiry by outsiders in their affairs. Any question about India's Northeast elicits a stock response in New Delhi—it's a sensitive area so it should not be dragged into controversy. So what one gets to hear about Manipur or Bodos is the same all the time—no matter whether the source of information is the state government, the military headquarters, a member of the academia or a journalist.

I have experienced this astonishing absence of dissent in the New Delhi seminar circuit quite often, but the uniformity in the views of Indian experts at the recently-held Round Table on International Intervention and State Sovereignty was astounding nevertheless. The meeting was called at the initiative of the Canadians, to discuss how appropriate it is in this day and

age for countries to intervene in each other's affairs. Right from I. K. Gujral, the former Prime Minister of India, to the joint-secretary from its external affairs ministry, every one opposed the idea of international intervention in any and all forms in one voice. Irrational fear camouflaged in sermons of high ideology made for an irritating experience.

Be it Major General Dipankar Banerjee of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies in Colombo or Professor Ramesh Thakur, Vice-Rector of UN University, Tokyo, even seemingly independent professionals parroted the official Indian line with different sets of apologies by way of explanation. N. N. Vohra of the India International Centre, former ambassador G. Parthasarathy, General Satish Nambiar and Dr. Manoj Joshi of *The Times of India* too elaborated on the same Indian position of non-interference in the internal matters of sovereign nations, embellished with their own experiences and explanations. No Indian, not even a single one to cite as an exception, raised doubts about the relevance of such an idea of water-tight sovereignty in an age when media intervention through satellite does more damage than a few battalions of foot-soldiers on relief and rescue mission in countries like Haiti or Somalia. Does that mean that the decadence of independent thought has become all-pervasive among India's noted intellectuals? It would seem so at the moment, but times are a-changing.

The coming of age of India's mind is not being heralded by grey cells of the academia or the quiet reflec-

tions of its retired bureaucrats, but by a group of young journalists in India's vibrant media. They have left behind universities and the strategic research institutions in aggressively questioning the 'conventional wisdom' prescribed by the bureaucrats of North and South Blocks along New Delhi's grand promenade. Barkha Dutt questioning the handling of Kargil, even if retrospectively, was so different from the usual practice of veteran Indian journalists falling head over heels for official interpretations of apparently controversial decisions (see Himlal, June 2001). The so-called Defencegate Scam unmasked by the investigative team of Tehelka.com took India by storm precisely because it was in complete contrast to the way 'official secrets' have been handled before by the mainstream media. It is a credit to Tarun Tejpal that he happily sacrificed the holy cow of defence secrecy on the altar of media probity and displayed the carcass of decadent moral values to all of India on TV screens.

It is not unlikely, of course, that even without the new, sensitive and irreverent minds, India always had its supply of critical thinkers, who refused to be cowed down, refused to bow down to a unitary and statist view of India and the world. Most likely, such people never got invited to seminars and workshops to express their truly independent opinion. Most certainly, they were never invited to the Round Table on International Intervention and State Sovereignty.

-C.K. Lal

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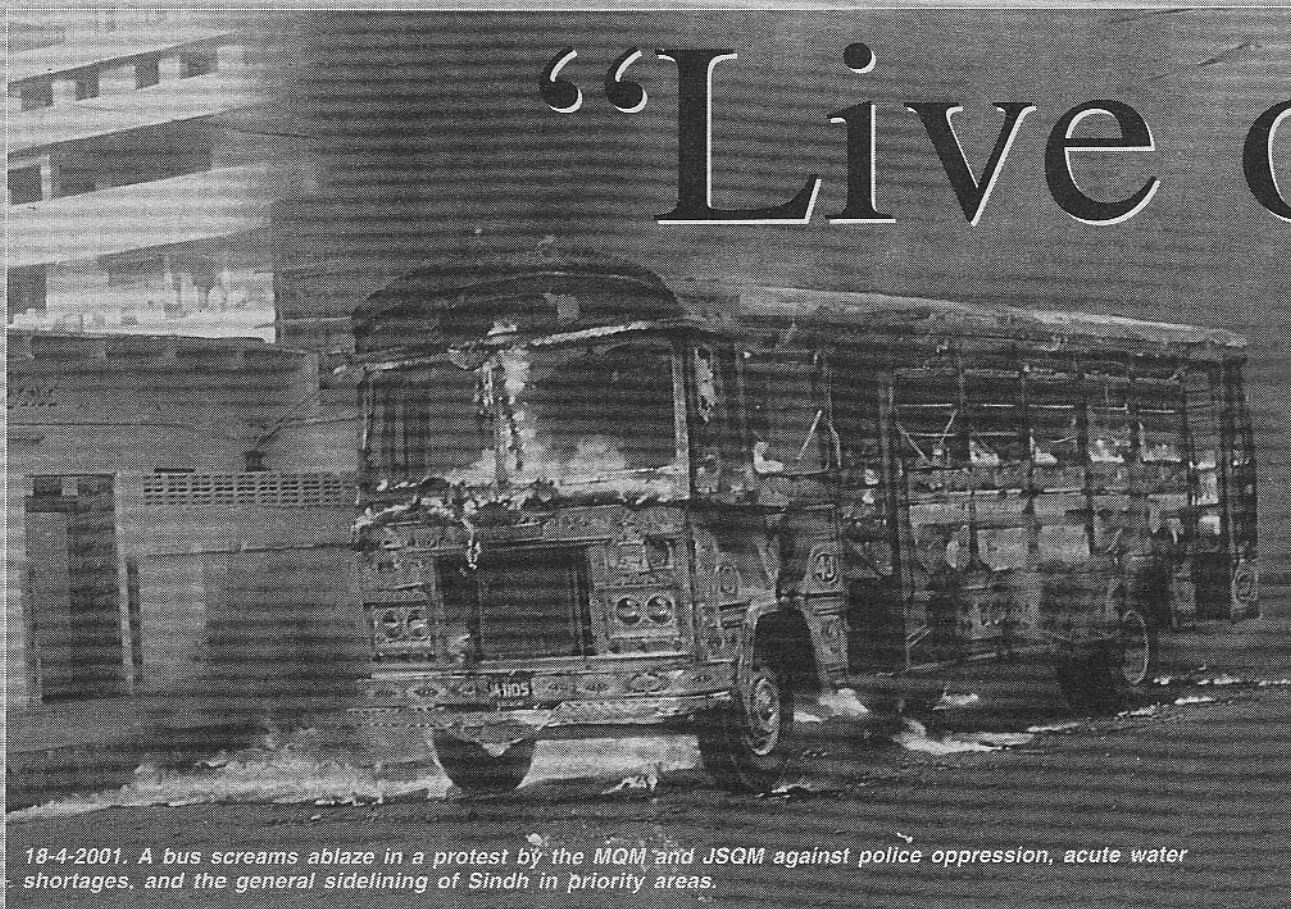
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# “Live O



18-4-2001. A bus screams ablaze in a protest by the MQM and JSQM against police oppression, acute water shortages, and the general sidelining of Sindh in priority areas.

Anis Hamdani / text by Beena Sarwar

*Kolachi.* The old name for Karachi revived by the Mai Kolachi Expressway named for a legendary woman. The expressway connects the bustling food centre at Boat Basin in Clifton with the commercial hub near Queens Road, passing through a marshy reclaimed area, driving through which you can see the skyline built around the bay, growing by the day. Further on, a series of flyovers criss cross, leading to the port, the harbour, the business centre, city centre, highway...

*Karachi.* Until 1725 A.D. just a barren piece of land, washed on three sides by the blue waters of the Arabian Sea. "A few fishermen lived in a small huts on the sunny creek. There was a pool of water on this barren piece of land which was known as Kalachi-jo-Kun. Kalachi was the name of a fisherman whereas 'kun' meant a deep ditch. Therefore, 'Kalachi-jo-Kun' meant the deep ditch of Kalachi, the fisherman."

The city emerged as an important port when the anarchic conditions in northern India made the land route to Central Asia unsafe. The British occupied Karachi in 1839, a few years before conquering all of Sindh in 1843. Karachi was made the administrative centre and it expanded rapidly. Old timers remember it as

being full of charming old sandstone buildings (some of which still remain), with gracious roads that were hosed down every evening, clubs and cabarets, slender coconut palms swaying in the evening breeze... By 1922, the city had a population of 203,000 and during the Second World War, it was a strategic naval base and an important repair stop for warships. It never regained its original calm. In 1947, the city burst to the seams and beyond as millions of refugees from India poured in to change the ethnic and demographic map of Sindh, and Karachi, forever.

The first burst of refugees was not the last. By 1963, almost 10 million people had crossed the border into Pakistan, mostly settling in Punjab and Sindh. Those arriving in Punjab were usually from the same linguistic community, Punjabi, and settled in different parts of the province—leading to their easy and rapid integration into their new communities. But the settlers who arrived in Sindh spoke Urdu, and were mostly from urban backgrounds. They formed a linguistic and ethnic community very different from that of their hosts in the new country. Settled primarily in Karachi and Hyderabad, their numbers soon outstripped the local Sindh population—by design, say critics of Prime Minister

# n, Karachi”

Liaquat Ali Khan, an Urdu-speaking migrant who was trying to build a constituency for himself. In 1951, according to the population census of that year, 80 per cent of Karachi's inhabitants claimed Urdu as their mother tongue. Karachi, the major urban settlement of Sindh, was no longer a Sindhi city.

The refugee influx, along with migrants seeking work from other parts of the country, made Karachi Pakistan's largest city. A city which today houses—in some form or other—over 13 million people and counting (with an annual growth rate of almost 5 per cent, about 50 per cent of this being migrants), forming almost ten per cent of the world's seventh most populous country with an estimated population of over 140 million—and counting.

*Karachi.* A microcosm of the imbalances that have marked Pakistan since its birth. Skewed development priorities concentrated the new country's industry almost entirely in this port city. Job-seekers from all over the country, indeed the Subcontinent, gravitated to this metropolis as life in their own villages and towns became ever harder.

*Karachi.* The 'Dubai' of South Asia. The city of promise and opportunity. Destination for hundreds and thousands of Bengalis and Biharis seeking work. Many of them young women, lured by the promise of livelihood, then prostituted and sold by unscrupulous pimps or *dalals*. False marriages. No way of escape. Police on the take. The flesh trade. Human trafficking. No escape for those who escape—if caught, they have no papers, no passports. They are charged and found guilty of being illegal immigrants. No recognisable address 'back home', no family willing to take them back. Except the *dalals* waiting outside the *thana* or courthouse. Many end up in the Edhi homes, set up by Pakistan's "bearded Mother Teresa". Fed, clothed, sheltered, empty inside.

At the other end of the employment scale for those seeking this 'Dubai'—the 'maids', the 'posh', 'English-speaking' Sri Lankans and Filipinas, giving up their families and children to come to this Mecca, earning over USD 100 a month plus travel

expenses from their countries and one month paid holiday a year. Status symbols of the wealth of their 'English-medium' employers ("They are so much more reliable than the locals, yaar.") Benazir Bhutto had not one, but two Filipina maids. You don't hear the word 'ayah' anymore in these circles.

*Karachi.* Sharp images of violence. Ethnic riots. Language riots. Short-sighted policies by successive rulers insisting on one lingua franca—and that too, spoken by a minority—for a land with several languages, each as strong and rooted as the next. In such a situation, to insist on equating Urdu with Pakistani nationalism, Pakistani identity, the ideology of Pakistan. The British colonisers have gone, only to be replaced by colonisers from within. Domination by two ethnic groups, the Mohajir settlers and the Punjabi, who, even together did not make up a majority of the population.



30-5-2001. MQM women activists raise slogans protesting the arrest of their leaders.



13-6-2001. Army patrol in Karachi following a car bomb explosion which killed a police officer.



25-4-2001. Junkies near a police station, egging on a young one to take a drag from the filled cigarette.



28-9-20001. One suicide in every three days in Karachi, say reports. Here it is an unemployed father of five children.

Karachi. A city with the largest concentration of literates. Hordes of educated unemployed. Ripe for picking by extremist groups. A city of hope, a city of despair.

1980s. Fight for the control of Karachi, for the riches to be had from *bhatta*—protection money. A good way to fund politics. Didn't stop there. Bomb blasts. Torture. Bodies in gunny bags. Apartment blocks in north Karachi pockmarked with bullet holes. Rangers in the university campus. Families selling out at a loss, moving to other parts of the city or country, or abroad. Exodus.

1990s. Water riots. A city by the sea with no natural



1-4-20001. Man, child and beast. A street entertainer playing on his windbag instrument, his son, and a trained bear. At the end of the performance it is the bear, with folded hands, that requests money from the bystanders.





30-5-2001. Commuters eager to reach home after a day's work in the city have to manage this way on the Saddar-Korangi-Landhi route.



water resources. A vast delta of mangrove swamps, the natural protective eco-system threatened by pollution, soil erosion and tidal influx. Drinking water for Karachi's inhabitants piped in from hundreds of miles away. Pipes running dry. Water tanker mafias getting rich in areas where people are used to piped water. Like Defence, where water tankers are a regular fea-

ture. You can order 'salty' or 'sweet' water. Prices differ. Better than poor areas like Landhi and Korangi where community taps run dry and where ragged lines of women and children queue up for hours for their turn to fill their plastic containers. Fights breaking out in the sweltering heat. Taking on ethnic dimensions, depending on the parties involved.



30-5-2001. Girl students pass a lone Raftar on their way back from school in Orangi town during a strike.



And then, in 2001, Mohajir and Sindhi political parties putting aside their differences in the new millennium, teaming up to protest. The same parties who in the 1980s were after each other's blood, unleashing horrendous violence, had thousands killed, tortured, maimed, injured.

Police heavy-handedness. Nothing new. Police are after all, still governed by a law enacted by the colonisers to subjugate the local populace, a duty they still discharge with enthusiasm. But at least they enforced the law in those days, reminisce old people, and at least there was a rule of law. Today, the police are political pawns in the hands of those at the helm of affairs, transferred and promoted at will. Hardly surprising that their first loyalty is not to enforcing law and justice but to pleasing the political master or mistress of the day. More ethnic tensions: much of the police force is Punjabi. Dominating an Urdu speaking city. A task that would be difficult even if discharged with sensitivity. The police's heavy hand. Viciousness. Cruelty. Fuelling even more discontent. More work for the CPLC, the Citizens



29-5-2001. Fundamentalists denounce America in a show of support for exiled Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden.

Police Liaison Committee that has made inroads into crime prevention and into improving citizen and police morale.

*Karachi.* Insecurity. Car snatchings. 'Dacoities'. The chilling secret factor: rape during armed robbery. No one would file a complaint. Who wants it publicly known that a daughter, a mother, a niece, was defiled. So for those who can afford it, private security guards. Gated up neighbourhoods. And to cope with the deteriorating infrastructure: Mobile telephones. Electricity generators. Water filters and water tanker suppliers. Expensive private schools. Individuals taking over the responsibilities of the state to obtain for themselves security, water, electricity, telephones, education



29-5-2001. An old woman seeks alms at a traffic junction. Karachi draws many from interior Sindh who come here and are forced to take to begging for a living.



29-5-2001. Another child, this time from the Quran school.



1-5-2001. A supporter of exiled former prime minister Benazir Bhutto raising slogans for her leader.



Around a million gathered at M.A. Jinnah Road, for the funeral prayer of slain Sunni Tehrik chief Salim Quadri.



A young butcher works away at a cut while flies swarm the large pieces of meat hung on rusty hooks and the pair of scales.

for their children.

A city with different business ethics than the rest of the country, where meetings are known to be held on time, where twenty-somethings join the corporate world speaking fluent English and wearing designer outfits. CitiBank, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, TGIF, Tesco.

Fiesty middle class women fighting the forces ranged against them, against their sons, brothers, fathers and husbands. Working in factories, offices, hospitals, schools and colleges. The double income family. A necessity given the rapid inflation rate and the correspondingly increased desire for upward mobility.

A city where art, theatre, dance have survived and developed amidst and despite the violence, taking on a new significance because of the threats. Karachi. Pakistan's most literate, most vibrant, most 'open' city.

A city where areas still remain under unofficial curfew, areas that taxi drivers will not venture into. Memories of the time when commuters would stay over at hotels provided by their companies in safer parts of town, rather than risk going home after dark. Empty bunkers stand testimony to the time that Karachi was at war with itself. A resilient city, confident and upbeat despite the problems.

The new millenium. A city now no longer just a city of Mohajirs—whether Urdu speaking or otherwise. Three generations down the line, Karachi dwellers now own it. Tina Sani, the popular singer famous for her renderings of the revolutionary Urdu poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz—both of them ethnically and linguistically Punjabi—will sing for free at the newly instituted, forthcoming Festival of Karachi scheduled in September. "I've lived here long enough. It's my city too. Enough of these ethnic divisions." Joining in with hundreds of artists, journalists, musicians, film-makers, to celebrate Karachi. A new phase in the life of this sprawling megapolis. Live on. Celebrate.

## Just a day's talk?

General Musharraf's Indian itinerary:

### 14 July

- \* Arrives in Delhi in the morning.
- \* Ceremonial welcome at the Rashtrapati Bhavan,
- \* Protocol meetings with President K R Narayanan, Vajpayee, Sonia Gandhi, L K Advani and other leaders.
- \* Visits Rajghat to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi.
- \* Visits ancestral home in New Delhi.
- \* Attends "high tea" reception hosted by the Pakistan High Commissioner Ashraf Jahan-gir Qazi.
- \* Banquet hosted in his honour by President Narayanan.

### 15 July

- \* Flies to Agra early next morning.
- \* Day-long summit meeting with the Prime Minister.

### 16 July

- \* Flies to Jaipur.
- \* Helicopter ride to Ajmer Sharif.
- \* Visits dargah of famous Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.
- \* Returns to Jaipur and flies back to Islamabad.

## Home Ministry scholarship

PROF DAVID Shulman, author of the landmark *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrificial Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*, may be well-known in India and abroad for his work on Hinduism, but the Ministry of Home Affairs would be the happiest if he were not to be invited to present a paper the next time Madras University holds a seminar on comparative religion. If the university were nevertheless to insist on his presence, it would have to write to the home ministry and apply for 'security clearance' for Prof Shulman. Only if the MHA certifies that his participation in the seminar would not be a threat to the country or the government—a process that the ministry says can take from four to six weeks—would an Indian embassy abroad grant the professor a visa.

Call it paranoia or a perverse form of protectionism, but under 'secret' guidelines (OM No. 25022/40/97/F.IV) issued recently by the MHA, Indian universities and academic bodies have been told that foreign scholars "should not be generally considered to attend conferences of a political, semi-political, communal or religious nature". In addition, universities organising conferences on subjects "related to human rights or sensitive technical subjects which can be utilised as a platform for any particular line of propaganda or where the subject matter...is of a purely national or local char-

acter" should try and avoid inviting foreign academics. Where invitations are unavoidable, the MHA will vet which scholars may come and which may not.

The MHA's new guidelines, dated 1 September, 2000, are now being forwarded by the HRD ministry to all universities and deemed universities with the advice: "It is requested that henceforth applications in the prescribed proforma (in six sets) complete in all respects may be forwarded...as per revised guidelines at least one month and a half before the commencement of the conference". While a foreign scholar wishing to attend a seminar on a subject other than the above mentioned categories need not be security-vetted by the MHA, Indian university departments planning to invite academics from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh or Afghanistan must get prior clearance from both the MHA and the Ministry of External Affairs regardless of the subject of the conference.

Thus Prof Shuxiong Liu of Peking University, China's leading Iqbal scholar, would have to be screened by the MHA and the MEA the next time Lucknow University wants him to attend a seminar. What happens if he were to come on a tourist visa anyway? S K Das, under-secretary in the MHA and the point-man for the implementation of the new rules, told *The Times of India*, "If he just sits and listens, that's OK." But if he stands up and makes a comment about the poetics of Iqbal and Herder? "Speaking at a seminar (without prior clearance) will mean a violation of the Foreigners' Act and visa rules," Das said. According to Das, the new guidelines are actually "less stringent" than previous guidelines issued in 1986 in that the clearance process has been decentralised. Universities need not apply directly to the MHA but could go through their nodal ministry, HRD. He said the controls were needed to prevent a situation which "may cause embarrassment to the government or to friendly countries".

FROM "CURB ON FOREIGN SCHOLARS ATTENDING SEMINARS" BY SIDDHARTH VARADARAJAN IN *THE TIMES OF INDIA*.

## Greens hurting the poor

THE WHITE House, taken aback by the global outcry at Bush's rejection of the Kyoto treaty on greenhouse gas emissions, is developing a new strategy to present at the July climate negotiations in Bonn. But in *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Dr Bjørn Lomborg of Aarhus University, Denmark, points out that the treaty will, at best, delay warming by a few years by the admission of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC. Dr Lomborg accepts that global warming is real, but says that the marginal benefits of the Kyoto Treaty would cost around £100 billion annually, possibly twice as much, when half this sum could give all Third World inhabitants access to the basics of health, education, water and sanitation.

For all the talk of global warming as a catastrophe by green groups, "the catastrophe seems rather in spending our resources unwisely on curbing present

carbon emissions at high costs instead of helping the developing countries and increasing the use of non-fossil fuel," said Dr Lomborg. Global warming will mostly harm the Third World, while an initial warming of a few degrees would probably benefit the First World. "Kyoto makes us feel good, but if we really want to do good, we would do better to give the money Kyoto would cost to the Third World," he said.

Calculations by the IPCC show that the cost of the cure is much greater than the illness, he said. "If the world focuses on economics alone, it will make around £600 trillion (thousand billion) in the 21st century. "If it focuses on environmental considerations, that profit will fall by £67 trillion. But the total cost of global warming is estimated to be only about £3.3 trillion, with or without Kyoto, said Dr Lomborg, whose views have triggered a national debate in Denmark about the widely-held beliefs that the environment is in a state of terminal decline.

In *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, which will be published by Cambridge University Press in the autumn, the lecturer in statistics is critical of the way in which many environmental organisations make selective and misleading use of scientific evidence to portray an ecological catastrophe. "An old Left-wing Greenpeace member", Dr Lomborg was provoked to look into the state of the planet by the claim by an American economist, Julian Simon, that many doomsday predictions were false. But his follow-up investigation provided support for Simon's scepticism over "the Litany" preached by organisations such as Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature: the environment is in poor shape; resources are running out; we kill off more than 40,000 species every year. "We know the Litany and have heard it so often that yet another repetition is, well, almost reassuring," said Dr Lomborg. "There is just one problem: it does not seem to be backed up by the available evidence." Dr Lomborg said the Worldwatch Institute, which annually reports on the state of the world, makes "blatant errors with unfortunate frequency."

Studying specific cases, such as GM crops and pesticides, Dr Lomborg shows how many central arguments used by green groups "are based on myths". Well meaning and compassionate environmentalists are convinced that pesticides cause cancer. Yet the link is tenuous and these chemicals may well have decreased the incidence of cancer by boosting production of fruit and vegetables, the consumption of which cut cancer risk.

Rather than lose between a quarter and a half of all species in our lifetime, the real figure is closer to one per cent, Dr Lomborg calculates; acid rain has not destroyed our forests, as was often predicted two decades ago; poverty has declined more in the last 50 years than in the preceding 500; 35 per cent of people in developing countries were starving in 1970 and that percentage fell by half by 1996; in 1900 we lived for an average of 30 years and today we live for 67; and "infants no longer die like flies".

"Mankind's lot has actually improved in terms of practically every measurable indicator," said Dr Lomborg,

though he stresses that "this does not, however, mean that everything is good enough," citing how in 2010 there will still be 680 million people starving, even though more will be adequately fed than ever before. Stein Bie, director general of the International Service for National Agricultural Research in The Hague, said: "Lomborg suggests that there is growing evidence that we may not have got our priorities right and that poor people may suffer." We are morally on thin ice, he said, if the flawed analysis used by Greens leads to the world's rich becoming more concerned about butterflies than they are about the world's poor.

ROGER HIGHFIELD IN *THE TELEGRAPH*, UK

## Truth and Taliban diplomacy

A FEW weeks ago, a soft-spoken "Roving Ambassador of Afghanistan" was on the loose in the United States, trying to explain the erratic behavior of the Taliban. Woefully short on specifics and rich in glossing over details, other than his justified anger at the sanctions imposed on his country, he wasn't very convincing to Taliban's keen watchers. The explanation of destroying the statues was very enlightening. A UNESCO delegation had arrived to mend the monumental statues without worrying about the dying human beings in Afghanistan. Good point. But how do you explain the Taliban's stated reason that destroying historic and abandoned statues is a religious duty? Perhaps the Ambassador's disarming demeanor was too seductive for anyone to ask tough questions.

He tried to push under the rug various issues on which the militia's well-meaning critics and stern foes chastise it and he did so quite successfully. Many gullible people bought his explanations hook, line and sinker. Even some 'moderates' embraced his excuses as genuine. Relieving Taliban from any responsibility for their conduct bordering that of the dark ages, the Ambassador was successful in selling his 'sanctions' theory to justify every ill wrought by the militia.

There were two news stories last week which require another coat of glossy paint by the roving Ambassador who since has gone back to Afghanistan. Taliban's apologists have been giving various explanations of Taliban's treatment of women, especially denial of education to them. One explanation was an outright denial and that it was all western propaganda. There are some 35,000 girls studying in the Talibani schools, they claimed. A convenient proof of 'all is well' are reports of one or another 'Muslim' sister or brother visiting Afghanistan and finding no such problem.

Others were less imaginative and said, yes, there is no education for girls but that is due to lack of resources. They say that war-ravaged and drought-stricken Afghanistan cannot afford schooling of girls. This opinion is in stark contrast to the one noted above which shamelessly claimed that 'all is well' in Afghanistan. In either case, if you notice, Taliban are absolved from any responsibility in the regard.

Many of my readers may wonder—or perhaps have questioned in the past—why do I criticise the Taliban so much? Fair question. First, I don't mind a Christian sect setting up another Vatican and imposing Christian laws to their heart's content. But, being a Muslim, I cannot keep quiet when students of a theological seminary, trained in dogma disguised as doctrine, use the name of Islam and trumpet their zoo as an 'Islamic Emirate.' Our Creator (swt) has given us a clear criterion in Quran and any ruling clan which uses the name of Islam should be judged by it. When one does that, there is no doubt that Mullahs in Kabul practice 'Shariah' of their seminary and not Islam.

Second, Taliban belong to the Deobandi sect, an orthodoxy which opposed Pakistan to the hilt during the nation's years of struggle to get free. Till today this orthodoxy continues to challenge the state within Pakistan and their Afghani counterparts in Kabul support terrorism in Pakistan by providing refuge to sectarian killers—at least.

Third, the conduct of Taliban is a threat to the progressive Pakistani society. Sectarian war in Pakistan and bigotry of the religious groups is on the rise, partly because the Afghani militia is a sectarian bunch itself and its links with the religious extreme in Pakistan are not a secret.

Getting back to the issue of women's education, I wasn't surprised last week when a story in the *Dawn* newspaper revealed the 'real reason' of the Taliban's ban on women's education. It confirmed what I have been saying all along that Afghani rulers simply do not believe in educating their women and it is a core belief of their 'Islam'. According to the story in *Dawn*, by 1996, Taliban had closed women's schools in Hirat and Kabul. When criticised for doing so, they made the ongoing civil war an excuse without elaborating how the two are connected. To cement their decision, they took another step and converted all major women's colleges and schools into 'religious seminaries' for boys. In Taliban's lexicon, such 'in your face' double-talk is 'standing up to the Kuffar'.

As the story says in the *Dawn*, Taliban were taught Islam recently by some scholars in Qatar who told a visiting Talibani delegation that women's education in Islam is mandatory just like that of men. A small minority in the militia supports women's education but the rest fear that any concession on this matter will send a 'wrong signal' to the international community that hardliners have been prevailed upon by alleged 'moderates.'

### Check out their priorities

So it is all clear now. There were no 35,000 girls in Afghani schools and there wasn't any other reason or rationale to close down girls' schools—neither prolonged conflict or shortchanged militia due to sanctions, but the militia's religious conviction. Taliban simply don't believe in women's education. Period.

The second story pertains to Taliban's other victims—minorities. The militia last week decreed that non-

Muslims are required to either attire themselves distinctively, or wear badges identifying them as such. I don't believe in comparisons so leave out the case of the Jews of Nazi Germany who were made to wear distinct clothing. Ask a simple question. Is it Islamic?

One explanation is that the Taliban are asking every Muslim male to grow a beard. Those who don't fulfill this requirement are harassed so this was to avoid non-Muslims getting picked up for the absence of hair-do on their face. This is a clear case of Taliban having gone bonkers, justifying one wrong through another.

A leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Munawwar Hassan, supported the decision saying the Taliban did it on the request of minorities. I am not surprised. My prediction earlier on this year will come true. Take my word for it. Talibani conduct is very much in line with the 'Islam' of Jama'at's founder, Syed Maudoodi. He made beards mandatory and in his medieval 'Islamic state' non-Muslims were only allowed to breathe. Not only that, even those who were born into Muslim households in such a state were to be subjected to harsh punishments, including death, for not following the requirements of Maudoodi's theocracy.

We claim to non-Muslims that Islam liberated women from the clutches of male-dominance and religious discrimination. We showcase tolerance of Islam towards non-Muslims. But isn't it hypocrisy of a tall order? With what face can we say this considering the very champions of 'Islam' actually support everything un-Islamic under the sun as long as it has 'Islamic' label on it. A case of Halal pork may be?

FROM "RAMBLINGS OF THE ROVING AMBASSADOR" BY  
SHAHID MAHMUD IN *PAKISTAN ABROAD*, NEW YORK.

## Imran Khan speaking

**Tehelka:** General Pervez Musharraf is now president of Pakistan. How does this change the political situation?

**Imran Khan:** Well, the main change is that (his) position has changed. The power was there (even then). He was as powerful as chief executive and is as powerful as president. The only significant thing is that he is going to India, and for that he needed that sort of... You know, as chief executive, he was neither here nor there, but as president he has firmed up his position.

*So, you think that politically there is no change even if there is an army ruler as the president of Pakistan?*

As long he holds elections, which he has promised, then, let me say, whatever he does, the elections are really going to be the real arbiter of the destiny of Pakistan. So far, the 1973 Constitution gives the president limited power.

*Is that the reason why he continues to be the chief executive? Is it to ensure that he does not have to amend the Constitution to justify his elevation to president?*

No, no, but the point is this arrangement is only till the elections are held next year. It is a

temporary measure.

*You seem to be very confident that General Musharraf will stick to the schedule of holding elections...*

Well, that I don't know. I mean, I am not sure. I think he has committed himself so often (that) I don't think he would not hold elections. I don't know under what new laws he will hold this elections and what powers he will have. That is the big issue.

*If Musharraf manages the Pakistani economy for the better, will he gain more political legitimacy?*

The people today, all they want to know is how to get their bread. Bread is the issue now. They have already been disillusioned by politicians, by their loot and plunder. I think that Musharraf should have become the president on the first day—October 12, 1999—when he came to power. I mean, the people were all with him and the entire country was with him. The point is that there is too much political uncertainty. There is lot of speculation about who will eventually be the prime minister and what laws the elections be fought under. There is also economic uncertainty and Pakistan cannot afford it. So, its much better to lay down straight what the game plan is. Every one wants a road map today.

*You sound quite soft on the general. Why are you, as a democratic leader, so accommodating of a military leader?*

It's not that I am soft on Musharraf. It's just that it was us—by that, I mean that the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), which was formed to save democracy from Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistan People's Party of Benazir Bhutto—who campaigned on a one-point (issue) against Nawaz Sharif. In hindsight, I realise that we literally campaigned for the army takeover, because there was no constitutional way of removing Nawaz Sharif.

So, we campaigned for him (General Musharraf) to come, for the army to come and pave the way for democracy. So one can't go really too hard on someone once you know why he is there. But there is disillusionment today and I have said it on a lot of occasions that what we expected from him he hasn't delivered. We really expected him to create a level playing field for democracy to come in.

*Is it not paradoxical to expect army generals to pave the way for democracy?*

Well, the other thing is that when we had politicians, it's been an even worse experience. The past 12 years have proved that and so there is no point talking like this because, for instance, poverty has gone up in the past three years—from 15 million under the poverty line to 70 million, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Another example is debt—the total internal and external debt has gone from \$23 billion in 1988 to almost \$80 billion today.

*Democracy has failed in Pakistan. Political leaders have*

*failed in Pakistan. Don't you think that this creates the way for generals to take over?*

No, I think what has happened is that in the (past) 50 years (since independence) we have been going through the process of evolution. I do really believe and am optimistic that we have reached a point where people are ready. They now understand the electoral politics of the past 12 years; (there have been) four elections in 12 years. It has really educated the people about the situation. There's been disillusionment against the politicians but there is also a great desire among the people for change today, and I think that's the positive thing that has happened.

*The fact of the matter is that General Musharraf is president of Pakistan now and he is coming over to Delhi for a very historic visit—(historic) in the sense that he is coming when India is ready to talk about Kashmir. How do you see the summit?*

Well, I think it's a very positive step. Most of us feel very good about it, that at least the first step has been taken towards some sort of confidence-building measures and talks on Kashmir.

*There's a lot of mythmaking between the two countries, but those myths can be broken when more interaction takes place. Is that your thesis?*

Absolutely! It's very easy if you break off all contact, it's easy to identify the enemy, you know, like the Cold War, the way that the Americans built up the Russians in all the films. They were made (out to be) the ultimate savages.

*How do you look at the Kashmir problem?*

I think the only way to solve the problem is that people should be given their right to choose their destiny. That, really, is the only solution. And here I might add that again, for me, it's not a territorial issue. You know, if Kashmir is independent, good luck to them: I would never say that Kashmir should come to Pakistan; I am not from that generation. I think it's a human rights issue, it's the people's right.

*What about India-Pakistan relations?*

That eventually depends on Kashmir. Until the Kashmir issue is solved, I do not really see a solid relationship (between the two nations). We have seen in the past—you know, you try and get closer and then something happens and everything falls apart because of Kashmir. A solid relationship will have to be based on peace in Kashmir.

*People in both countries want the summit to succeed...*

Of course, they want it, everyone is looking for some signs of success in it. And I hope there are some signs because we need to divert our resources towards people.

FORMER PAKISTANI CRICKET CAPTAIN-TURNED-POLITICIAN  
IMRAN KHAN TALKING TO V.K. SHASHIKUMAR AND ZAFAR  
AGHA IN TEHLKA.COM.

## Email to Himal South Asian

Lady Maryam Abacha  
Abacha Court  
Gidado Road  
Kano - Nigeria

Dear Lacey Torge, I am Lady Maryam Abacha, wife of late General Sani Abacha, ex-military head of the state of Nigeria who died on the 8th of June 1998 of heart problems. I contacted you because of my need to deal with persons whom my family and I have had no previous personal relationships.

Since the death of my husband, my family has been subjected to all sorts of harassment and intimidation with lots of negative reports emanating from the government and press about my husband. The present government has also ensured that our bank accounts are frozen and all assets seized. It is in view of this that I seek your co-operation and assistance in the transfer of the sum of US\$50,000,000 (Fifty million United States dollars only) being the very last of my family fund in my possession and control.

The federal government seized all our properties and froze all our accounts both local and international after the death of my husband. But my only hope now is this available US\$50,000,000 cash which I carefully packaged and deposited as photographic materials with a security company in Lagos where my brother-in-law is a general manager.

If you are willing to assist us in receiving this money on our behalf, we shall give you 10% of the total sum. For further information, please contact my brother-in-law Mr. Bello Abacha immediately on telephone number 234-1-7591526 or fax number 234-1-7590845 who will inform you properly on the procedures for execution. Please be informed that this proposal is 100% risk free. However, the confidentiality of this proposal is very important.

Meanwhile, our intention is to invest this fund in your country based on your advice and please ensure to keep this proposal very secret and confidential for obvious reasons and send to us your private telephone/facsimile number for easy and confidential communication. Please treat this as a form of humanitarian service because we are in dire need of your help. We await your immediate response.

Sincerely,  
Lady Maryam Abacha

**Notice:** Please reply to Mr Bello Abacha on these numbers: Tel:234-1-7591526 Fax:234-1-7590845 or to this e-mail address: abacha\_b@mailcity.com.

## Nigerian scam

**Claim:** The government of Nigeria will reward you handsomely if you allow them to transfer "trapped funds" into your American bank account.

**Status:** False.

Example: [collected on the Internet, 2000]

### Request for urgent business relationship

First, I must solicit your strictest confidence in this transaction. This is by virtue of its nature as being utterly confidential and 'top secret'. I am sure and have confidence of your ability and reliability To prosecute a transaction of this great magnitude involving a Pending transaction requiring maximum confidence.

We are top official of the federal government contract review panel who are interested in imporation of goods into our country with funds which are presently trapped in Nigeria. In order to commence this business we solicit your assistance to enable us transfer into your account the said trapped funds.

The source of this fund is as follows; during the last military regime here in Nigeria, the government officials set up companies and awarded themselves contracts which were grossly over-invoiced in various ministries. The present civilian government set up a contract review panel and we have identified a lot of inflated contract funds which are presently floating in the central bank of nigeria ready for payment.

However, by virtue of our position as civil servants and members of this panel, we cannot acquire this money in our names. I have therefore, been delegated as a matter of trust by my colleagues of the panel to look for an overseas partner into whose account we would transfer the sum of USD\$21,320,000.00 (twenty one million, three hundred and twenty thousand US dollars). Hence we are writing you this letter. We have agreed to share the money thus; 1. 20% for the account owner 2. 70% for us (the officials) 3. 10% to be used in settling taxation and all local and foreign expenses. It is from the 70% that we wish to commence the importation business.

Please note that this transaction is 100% safe and we hope to commence the transfer latest seven (7) banking days from the date of the receipt of the following information by tel/fax; 234-1-7740449, your company's signed and stamped letterhead paper the above information will enable us write letters of claim and job description respectively. This way we will use your company's name to apply for payment and re-award the contract in your company's name.

We are looking forward to doing this business with you and solicit your confidentiality in this transaction. Please acknowledge the receipt of this letter using the above tel/fax numbers. I will send you detailed information of this pending project when I have heard from you.

Yours faithfully,  
Dr Clement Okon

Note; please quote this reference number (ve/s/09/99) in all your Responses..

**Origins:** Even as you read this, the world famous Nigerian Scam is parting yet more of the "something for nothing" crowd from their money. Here's how it works:



A letter postmarked Lagos, Nigeria (or, nowadays, an e-mail) is sent. It promises rich rewards for helping officials of the Nigerian government (or a bank or a quasi-government agency) out of an embarrassment or a legal problem:

**Typically, the pitch includes multi-million dollar sums:**

We want to transfer 35 million US dollars out of my country. You would be entitled to 30% of the US\$35,000,000 for providing us a (bank) account. Its author, Dr. Chukwuma Mbaduwa, accountant in the Nigerian Transport Ministry, explains that the huge sum has accumulated in the Central Bank of Nigeria from "over-invoiced contracts." He and his fellow civil servants can't open a foreign bank account themselves, he says, "because of the Code of Conduct Act."

(The names on the letters change as quickly as the names of the quasi-government agencies they purport to be from. You could just as easily be approached by a senior civil servant of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corp.)

Bottom line—if you let this hamstrung Nigerian use your bank account, he'll let you keep \$10.5 million. All you have to do to get your hands on it is fork over your banking information, some blank invoices and signed stationery. If you're not saying "scam" by now, you should be. Should you agree to participate in this international bail-out, something will go wrong. Paperwork will be delayed. Questions will be asked. Money from you—an insignificant sum, really, in light of the windfall about to land in your lap—will be required to get things back on track. You pay, you wait for the transfer... and you never hear from these Nigerians again.

Who would fall for something this obvious? According to a 1997 newspaper article about the scam: "We have confirmed losses just in the United States of over \$100 million in the last 15 months," said Special Agent James Caldwell, of the Secret Service financial crimes division. "And that's just the ones we know of. We figure a lot of people don't report them."

But this is a new scam, right? People are falling for it because they've yet to catch on? Wrong. Very, very wrong.

The Nigerian Scam has been scooping out the pockets of victims since at least 1990. Things got so out of hand, in fact, that in 1991 the Nigerian government felt compelled to issue a statement disavowing its participation in this scheme: The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) said on Thursday that swindlers using Nigerian names had extorted millions of dollars from people in the United States, Asia and Europe under the guise of transferring cash abroad. The elaborate fraud involves fake official approval to transfer up to 15 million dollars in excess claims on bogus Nigerian contracts as well as pledges to cut the claims amount for help in the use of offshore bank accounts.

A CBN statement warned foreign companies and businessmen not to fall for the confidence trick, saying that the bank had been surprised and embarrassed by

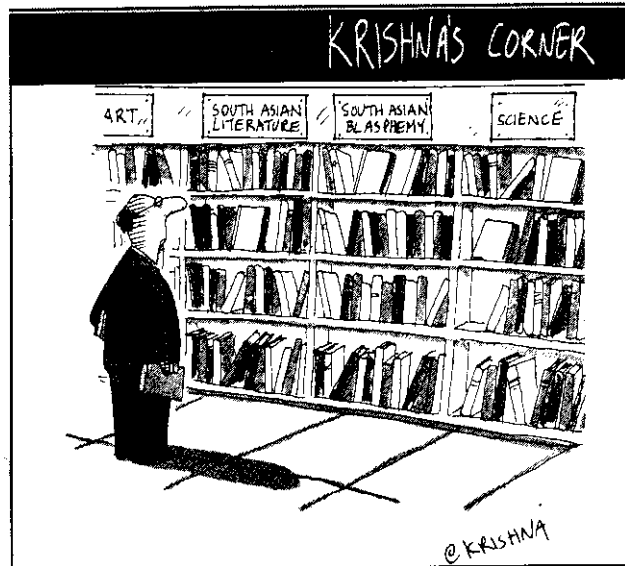
enquiries relating to the fraud. "The bank has no knowledge or record whatsoever of the purported claims or transfers, or even the related alleged contracts," it said.

Ah, but is it the same scheme? You tell me: British companies are being warned against a get-rich-quick scam involving thousands of letters sent from firms based in Nigeria. The letters ask UK firms to assist in the transfer of funds from Nigeria to Britain—by sending signed headed paper, invoices and bank account details—in return for a cut of the sum transferred. Instead of transferring sums, the UK firm's money is removed by the fraudsters. Scotland Yard says that some companies have lost thousands of pounds in this way. About 25,000 letters are circulating in the UK. But the scale of the losses—which could run to many millions according to the Confederation of British Industry—is masked because some victims are ashamed to admit that they took part in such schemes in the first place.

The real Central Bank of Nigeria tries to warn people about this scam, but it's a case of the guy with the broom following the elephant—the elephant always gets there first. A half-page ad explaining the scam and warning off those who might be tempted to fall for it appeared in the 27 October 1998 issue of the Los Angeles Times.

In an interesting sidenote, the Central Bank of Nigeria ad mentions some new variations on the old scheme: A recent variation of the scam directed primarily at charitable organisations and religious bodies overseas involves bogus inheritance under a will. Again the sole aim is to collect the 'advance fees' already described above. A new strategy that has also been used to defraud the 'victims' is to offer to use chemicals to transform ordinary paper into United States dollar bills, which would be subsequently shared by the parties. Should you have occasion to feel something's not quite right about a deal being offered, drop by the websites of both the Better Business Bureau and the National Fraud Information Centre below. Regarding this particular bamboozle, the Better Business Bureau has a Web page about the original Nigerian scam and its high-tech incarnation.

[HTTP://WWW.SNOPES2.COM](http://www.snopes2.com)



Essay

# Media Revolution & "Hindu Politics" in North India, 1982-99

by Robin Jeffrey



Since the early 1980s, two significant trends have confronted anyone who deals with India's society and politics. The first is the media revolution: newspapers in India's major languages have trebled their penetration, and television has become a mass medium. Second, the Bharatiya Janata Party, with its aim of making India a "Hindu state", has trebled its vote in national elections and become the country's governing party.

Can an explanatory bridge be built to connect these two phenomena? If so, out of what? By mapping the media revolution and the growth of BJP support, it is perhaps possible to try and gauge the connections between them.

The role of India's media revolution in transforming society and politics is the most fascinating question one can ponder about modern India. Others think so too. From Kirk Johnson's *Television and Social Change in Rural India*, which looks up from a village in Maharashtra, to David Page's and William Crawley's *Satellites over South Asia*, which takes an earth-orbiting view, scholars, marketers and media moghuls—witness the efforts of Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer—strain to understand what media change means for India. "This TV," an elderly villager tells Johnson, "is the most significant thing that has happened to our village ever".

Since the early 1980s, two significant trends have confronted anyone who deals with India's society and politics. The first is the media revolution: newspapers in India's major languages have trebled their penetration (Table 2), and television has become a mass medium. Second, the Bharatiya Janata Party, with its aim of making India a "Hindu state", has trebled its vote in national elections and become the country's governing party.

It is tempting to see links between these two developments. Indeed, Arvind Rajagopal's sweeping and stimulating *Politics after Television* is focused on this very pursuit. But, contemplating this problem, I see a gaping canyon—the media revolution constituting one cliff and the profound political changes of the 1990s, the other. Can an explanatory bridge be built to connect them? If so, out of what? By mapping the media revolution and the growth of BJP support, it is perhaps possible to try and gauge the connections between the two.

### Media Revolution

The story of television in India is well known. The Congress Party of Jawaharlal Nehru disdained trivial entertainment and did not see sufficient educational potential in television to invest in it. As a "socialist" party, often inspired by British examples, it did not entertain ideas of permitting capitalists to run radio or TV

stations. Government endorsed an experimental station in New Delhi in 1959, but by 1981, Indian television was still black and white, confined to seven cities and reached six per cent of the geographical area of the country containing 15 per cent of the population. There were 1.5 million private TV sets among a population of 683 million.

Indira Gandhi's government introduced colour television in 1982 to enable the Asian Games, held in New Delhi, to be broadcast internationally. The decision at last to go to colour and to extend TV across the whole country coincided with the rise of Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv as her assistant and successor. An airline pilot and lover of technology, Rajiv Gandhi embodied India's younger, frustrated middle class which yearned for the comforts the relatives living overseas enjoyed. To be sure, colour television was long overdue. By 1990, there were 22.5 million television sets, and coverage extended to more than half the area of India containing three-quarters of the population. By the late 1990s, land-based television signals were available in close to 80 per cent of India containing close to 90 per cent of the population. Table 1 traces this growth.

The central government controlled this system through its national television agency Doordarshan, which was detached from All India Radio in 1976. In 1984, Doordarshan introduced a second channel for the big cities and permitted cable operators to transmit locally made programmes to fill gaps in the schedule when Doordarshan was not on air. These cable operators grew from a few hundred in the mid-1980s to more than 20,000 by the late 1990s. They came into their own from 1991 when foreign satellite transmission became available over India, especially with the launch of Zee TV in 1992. Broadcasting in Hindi and based in Hongkong, Zee TV transmitted into India by satellite. Privately owned, its formats were livelier than the ponderous programming of Doordarshan. Because Doordarshan had begun to accept and depend on advertising from the mid-1980s, it had to try to respond to the



Scene from tele-serial Mahabharat.

popularity of Zee TV and other satellite broadcasters. By 1998, 11 different satellite-based companies, transmitting from outside India, though with Indian business and production centres, were estimated to reach about 15 million homes.

This transformation was not confined to towns and cities. A survey in 1995 estimated 270 million regular television viewers throughout the country, of whom more than half were rural (though we need to remember that 75 per cent of Indians live in the countryside). By the early 1990s, something like one Indian out of every five was a regular viewer, and most Indians were becoming increasingly aware of television. Ten years earlier, *no* rural homes, and few urban ones, had television.

In other countries, the growth of television has usually meant a contraction in newspaper circulation. In India, on the contrary, newspapers have grown simultaneously with television. Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, penetration of newspapers, measured by the number of dailies for every 1000 men, women and children, increased by nearly three times—from about 15 dailies per 1000 to about 43. This is, to be sure, a far lower ratio than those in industrialised countries, where figures are in the order of 200 dailies per thou-

sand people. But, based on the experience of other times and places, it appears that a ratio of more than 30:1000 is a signal of important political change.

In India's largest state, Uttar Pradesh, where literacy and economic development are below national averages, circulation of newspapers grew by more than five times between 1980 and 1995, from 1.1 million to 5.4 million copies a day. The rough penetration figure grew by nearly four times—from 11 dailies per thousand UP people in 1981 to 42:1000 in 1996. In 1996 for a population of 153 million, UP dailies produced 6.48 million copies within the state. UP also imported newspapers each day, especially from New Delhi. Weekly magazines grew similarly: from 1.1 million in 1980 to 6.5 million in 1996—a growth of more than five times. UP's access to television had also grown. Surveys in 1990 estimated that a quarter of the rural households and two-thirds of urban households in UP watched television. These media in UP were increasingly in the Hindi language, the mother-tongue of most people of the state. The proportion of Hindi dailies grew from 81 per cent of all dailies in 1981 to 87 per cent in 1996.

Thus by the 1990s, even in the countryside and in states not experiencing notable economic prosperity, Indians were exposed to more information in images and print than ever before—indeed, far more than had been available even 15 years earlier. They were five times more likely to see a newspaper; and television, a dream in 1980, was now a reality for close to one-quarter of Indian homes.

Do political consequences necessarily flow from such a transformation? Did they in India? From the political developments outlined in the next section, it is tempting to infer that they did; but the canyon is grand and before trying to leap it, we should consider what materials are available with which to build a bridge.

### “Hindu Politics”

The rise of the BJP from the mid-1980s has been as striking as the revolution in media. The bare numbers of Table 3 disguise many subtleties, but they nevertheless point to a fundamental shift in the allegiances of voters,

especially in northern India. In the space of seven years, the party virtually trebled its vote and moved from two seats in Parliament and apparent impending oblivion to 86 seats and the capacity to bring down governments. By the late 1990s, the BJP had become the party of government and was able to count on 20-25 per cent of the votes cast in national elections.

The party's strength varied greatly from state to state

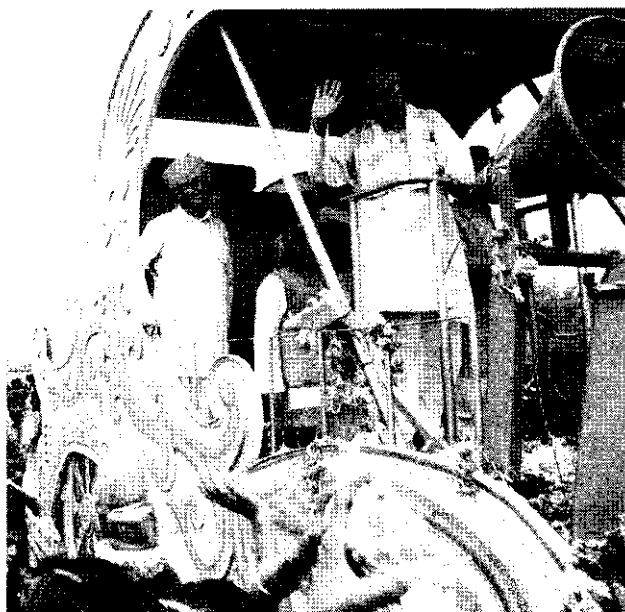
TABLE 1: Television in India, 1960-99

Year	TV sets	% of India covered	% of pop. in coverage area	Estimated viewers	Transmitters (all kinds)
1960	40	<5	<1	< 100,000	1
1970	25,000				
1975	455,000				
1980	1,550,000				18
1985	6,750,000				172
1990	23,000,000	54	75	150 million	519
1995	45,000,000	68	85	270 million	est. 550
1998	58,000,000	72	87	448 million	897

Sources: *Mass Media in India, 1991, 1994-5 and 1998-9*, (New Delhi: Publications Division); *Press and Advertisers' Yearbook, 1996-7* (New Delhi: INFA).

of course. It was strongest in north India, but by 1999, it was making gains in the south as well (the BJP won seven seats in Karnataka, seven in Andhra Pradesh and four in Tamil Nadu), and flexible alliances enabled it to lead a multi-party coalition to a comfortable majority of about 300 seats in a Parliament of 542 seats.

The pace of political change accelerated with the coming to power of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984. The direction seemed to be towards religious-based, "Hindu identity" appeals. Such emphases were not new. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, assassinated in October 1984, had become increasingly eager to use religious symbols to cultivate votes and sympathy. Though religious affiliation had long been a building block of public politics, it appeared that Indira Gandhi was making more of such things than in the past. Her political instincts, often superb, may have led her to sense that social differences of caste and class were becoming more keenly felt. Gaps between lower and higher-status people, accepted almost unthinkingly in the past because there was no reason or way to challenge them, were leading to the



L.K. Advani on the rath yatra, 1990.

**TABLE 2: Daily Newspapers in India (all languages), 1960-98**

Year	Circulation of dailies	Dailies per '000 Indians
1960	4.8 million	12
1970	8.2 million	16
1975	9.3 million	15
1980	14.4 million	22
1985	19.7 million	29
1990	22.0 million	29
1995	35.3 million	39
1996	40.2 million	43
1997	45.6 million	48
1998	58.0 million	60

Sources: *Press in India* (New Delhi: Registrar of Newspapers for India); *Statistical Outline of India, 2000-2001* (Mumbai: Tata Services Ltd).

**TABLE 3: BJP Seats and Vote % National Elections, 1984-99**

Year	BJP Seats	BJP % votes
1984	2	7.4
1989	86	11.5
1991	120	20.1
1996	180	20.3
1998	176	25.5
1999	182	23.7

Sources: David Butler et al. (eds), *India Decides: Elections, 1952-95* (New Delhi: Books and Things); *Statistical Report on General Elections, 1996* (New Delhi: Election Commission of India); *Frontline*, 17 April 1998; Times of India News Service, 13 October 1999.

formation of new political blocs. One way to overcome such division, at least for a few weeks at election time, was to remind people of greater bonds—religion, for example—that they shared and to convince them that voting in a particular way preserved or strengthened those bonds.

If such an analysis is valid, then the media revolution, which had barely begun in the early 1980s, played only a minor part up to this point. What is undeniable, however, is that preoccupation with religious affiliation grew among politicians in the 1980s. The insurgency in Punjab, which bloodied the decade, crystallised a sense of difference between many Hindus and Sikhs and led some public figures to proclaim the need for their "community" to unite to defend itself.

In the fatal year 1986 when Rajiv Gandhi's feet of clay became too big for his boots to hide, attempts to "balance" the interests of "the Hindu community" and "the Muslim community" dramatised the changing political context. The circumstances have become clichés in Indian journalism, and this in itself suggests we should treat the versions we often read today with caution. Nevertheless, the events of 1986 merit a brief recounting. On 26 January, Rajiv Gandhi's government resiled from its agreement with the Akali Dal and refused to transfer the city of Chandigarh to Punjab state. The "Punjab agreement" collapsed, and violence in Punjab intensified.

On 1 February, K. M. Pandey, the district judge of Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh ordered the locks, installed in 1949, removed from the Ram shrine in Ayodhya which had come to occupy the same premises as a Muslim mosque, the Babri Masjid. And on 28 February, Rajiv Gandhi got the approval of the Congress Party to introduce legislation exempting Muslims from the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code under

which a Muslim woman, Shah Bano, had been granted alimony from her former husband in December 1985. All of this happened in the year Rajiv Gandhi and his government were being dragged into the high-level bribery scandal in the purchase of Bofors howitzers for the Indian Army.

Each of these events can be interpreted as a too-clever-by-half political stratagem. The Punjab decision was influenced by impending elections in Haryana, Punjab's neighbour and rival claimant for Chandigarh. The removal of the locks was interpreted as an attempt to please "Hindus" and thereby "balance" their displeasure at the "special treatment" about to be accorded to traditionalist Muslims by acceding to the latter's demands for exemption from secular divorce law. The precise and genuine motivation for these decisions is less important for long term political processes than the fact that such crude motives were widely believed to have prevailed. If whole categories of voters were thought to be winnable by such gestures, the nature of political participation and allegiance was changing. And most of this, it is worth repeating, happened only as the media revolution in India was beginning. The media revolution might accelerate and deepen processes already at work, but it did not generate them.

The state of Uttar Pradesh illustrates the ways in which the "rise of the BJP" and the growth of religious-identity politics coincided with the media revolution from the mid-1980s. Uttar Pradesh's 170 million people make it critical for national politics as a whole: it returns 85 members to the national parliament (15 per cent of the total). Potential prime ministers must come from UP or make their peace with its leaders. UP's population shares Hindi and its dialects, but is divided among religions and castes. Scheduled castes (dalits) make up 21 per cent of UP's people and Muslims close to 20 per cent.

In the 1984 general elections, the BJP could not win a seat in Uttar Pradesh and took less than 7 per cent of the vote. In 1989, it improved its vote slightly and won 8 seats. But by 1991, the party's position was transformed: it won a third of the votes cast and 51 of the 85 seats. It retained this position in the elections in 1996 and 1998 before its rivals engineered a more effective series of alliances against it and reduced its vote by nearly 9 per cent and halved its seats in 1999.

The timing of the BJP's rise as the dominant party in UP suggests plausible connections between the media revolution and "the rise of Hindu politics." The BJP's ascendancy occurred after the defeat of Rajiv Gandhi's government in 1989 and against the backdrop of V. P. Singh's coalition government of 1989-90. Two dramas were being played out at that time. First, the BJP focused on the Babri Masjid and Ram temple in Ayodhya from which the locks on the Hindu shrine had been removed in 1986. BJP politicians and their allies in various Hindu fronts proclaimed that they would "free" the temple, demolish the mosque, build a new temple and vin-

**TABLE 4: BJP Seats and Vote %, in UP (General Elections), 1984-99**

Year	BJP Seats (Total: 85)	BJP % votes
1984	0	6.4
1989	8	7.6
1991	51	32.8
1996	52	33.4
1998	58	36.4
1999	29	27.6

Sources: David Butler et al. (eds), *India Decides: Elections, 1952-95; Statistical Report on General Elections, 1996; Frontline*, 17 April 1998, 5 November 1999.

dicate the country's honour. Second, to counter the BJP effort to build a "united Hindu community"—a guaranteed election winner if it could be made to work—V. P. Singh in August 1990 declared that the government would reserve 27 per cent of its jobs for members of "Other Backward Castes" (OBCs). (Reservation of government jobs for OBCs was recommended in the report of the Mandal Commission of 1979-80.) OBCs are not untouchables, but they are lower castes. Though precise numbers are not known, they comprise perhaps 40 per cent of India's population— again an election-winning combination if they could be induced to vote as a bloc.

In September-November 1990, outraged upper castes demonstrated against the OBC reservations and more than a dozen high-caste adolescents burned themselves to death to show their outrage. At the same time, the BJP engineered a "rath yatra"—a "chariot journey"—around India, led by the party's most redoubtable figure and home minister in the current union cabinet, L. K. Advani. It was to climax at Ayodhya in front of the disputed mosque and shrine.

Advani was arrested before he got to Ayodhya, and police opened fire to disperse demonstrators who reached the town. More than a dozen were killed. V. P. Singh's government fell, and in the elections of 1991, though the Congress Party scraped back to power, it was wiped out in much of north India, especially in UP (it won 5 seats out of 85) and Bihar (1 out of 52).

Advani's rath yatra, a stroke of powerful propaganda, drew on Mahatma Gandhi's salt march of 1930 and brought colour and excitement to towns across north India. It assumed a central place in ex-



Ramayana—Ram and Sita: a scene

planations of events that were presumed to have happened in less than a year to north Indian politics. Commentators noted that Advani's "chariot"—a Toyota van—was decorated to make it look like the chariots in the recent television version of the great Hindu religious epic, the *Mahabharat*. Indeed, people who turned out to cheer Advani sometimes came in costume, mimicking the televised heroes of the *Mahabharat* and its predecessor on Sunday morning TV, the *Ramayana*, based on a version of the other great Hindu myth, celebrating the triumph of Lord Ram, the central figure in the religious pantheon that is dear to the BJP. The latter was still more appropriate since the mosque in Ayodhya was said to be built on the very birthplace of Lord Ram.

What role had India's first nation-stopping TV serials—and the media revolution generally—played in changing the nature of politics?

### Leaping from Media to Politics

The half-hour episodes of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat* were shown on Doordarshan over about 90 Sunday mornings between 1987 and 1990. North India stopped for that time; the streets were deserted, servants crept up to windows to watch employers' televisions from respectable distances; people reportedly dressed in their best clothes and said prayers before switching on. One survey claimed that the *Mahabharat* was seen by 92 per cent of all people with access to television. The media trade journal *A&M* put the figure more modestly at 80 per cent. The popular response to these serials was of such a huge magnitude that it inspired several studies, among them Ananda Mitra's *Television and Popular Culture in India. A Study of the Mahabharat*. The *Ramayana* is at the heart of Rajagopal's, *Politics after Television* and is prominently covered in Nilanjana Gupta's *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India*.

For some analysts, the epic serials had two effects. First, they homogenised a host of different versions of

the epics into a single version, frozen on and stamped with the authority of the videocassette. The television serials, according to this view, began to create an "authorised version" of the epics that would ultimately pulverise the numerous, perhaps hundreds of local variations performed and recounted in every corner of India. The second argument related to the first. It held that this process was creating a unity of sensibility among Hindus of various castes and traditions, especially in north India. Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma, in *Print Media and Communalism* wrote:

For the first time all Hindus

across the country and at the same time listened to the same thing: the serial in fact introduced a congregational imperative into Hinduism.

Was such an outcome planned? Was it part of a conspiracy? No one, so far as this writer knows, has argued on these lines. However, "the consecutive approval" by Doordarshan for the two epics to run one after the other has been taken as evidence of "the ruling religious connections that are being reproduced in India now—around a Hindu centre." Such an interpretation suggests that the medium of television, controlled by the central government through Doordarshan, allowed the upper-caste Hindu elite that dominates government and public life to embed its favoured version of the great and once-diverse stories.

Such an argument is *not* saying that in the 1980s members of Hindu militant organisations took control of key cultural institutions like Doordarshan. What is argued, however, is that stories and values, broadly shared among upper-caste Hindus, pervaded the new medium of television. By its very nature television enables single, shared, visual experience for tens of millions of people who have never experienced such exposure before. All the power of this new, highly centralised medium, disseminated taken-for-granted cultural practices of an upper-caste elite. In other times and places, "That's the way they do it on TV" has been a telling influence on people's habits. Are there reasons why India should be any different? "The arrival of television," Kirk Johnson writes of Maharashtra, "has dramatically altered the structure of daily life in the village household."

Prominent political events dovetailed with the telecast of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*. The final episode of the latter was shown in July 1990. In August, V. P. Singh announced reservations for OBCs based on the Mandal Report's recommendations. In September, Advani set off on his rath yatra to Ayodhya to restore the glory of Lord Ram's temple. As the political scientist Zoya Hasan has pointed out, there is a crucial "variance between notions of a permanent majority defined ... [by] the census definition of a Hindu" and the "majorities" determined by periodic elections. Thus, two strategies of political mobilisation were colliding, each trying to build on social foundations—on deeply felt, daily facets of people's lives. The V. P. Singh government aimed to provide symbolic rewards (reserved government jobs) for the 40 per cent of the population, especially in north India, which could be included within the bureaucratically created category of Other Backward Castes. If the scores of *jatis* (castes) that fell under the OBC umbrella could be persuaded to vote as one, the party that reaped their gratitude would win elections. Such a formula was poison for the Bharatiya Janata Party. The core of its support and ideas, which had sustained it as a vigorous entity from the 1950s, lay among upper-caste north Indian Hindus, who constitute no more than 20 per cent even of north India's pop-



from the sub-social

ulation. The BJP's strategy was to stress "Hindu-ness"—Hindutva—and to proclaim that Hindus must stand together against threats from sinister secular politicians and Muslims. Convincing Hindus to unite politically would also win elections. But both strategies cannot succeed simultaneously: if Hindus unite, barriers between OBCs and "forward castes" fall (at least for a time) and "the OBC gambit" fails.

It is not difficult to see the role that the media revolution could be deemed to play in these events. It can be portrayed as creating the essential conditions that enable—or, indeed, force—people to take on new ways of thinking about themselves and what it is that characterises friends, Indians and countrymen and women.

Nor should we confine this discussion to television alone. The effect of print—of newspapers—has also been widespread. Indeed, some analysts consider print to be more influential than television in creating these new conditions in which "Hindu politics" and "Hindutva" have been able to flourish. According to Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma

"... it has been the print media which has truly brought to the forefront the symbiotic relationship between the Hindu organizations, dominant culture and ideology and the media.

The "Hinduization" of the press has thus led to the portrayal of the upper-caste Hindu's view as the only and true reality."

Critics held that English-language newspapers reflected these tendencies, but that they were even more pronounced in the growing Hindi-language press of north India. Rajagopal, for example, suggests the idea of "split publics"—a "public" composed of the English-reading elite and a new, different, Hindi-reading "public". Though 40 per cent of Indians are Hindi-speakers, circulation of Hindi newspapers was paltry until the 1980s. They overtook English-language newspapers in circulation only in 1979, but from the mid-1980s, coinciding with the growth of television and the political struggles over job reservation and Ayodhya, the circulation of Hindi dailies grew by 250 per cent in ten years. (See Table 5). These Hindi dailies were often portrayed as being in the control of upper-caste Hindu families who saw to it that their views of events were reflected in the pages of their newspapers. Thus as more people read these newspapers, more people were led to believe—"I read it in the newspapers"—that this was the authoritative, accepted view of the world.

To sum up this line of argument: people from the mid-1980s were increasingly exposed to print and electronic media. These purveyed, to audiences larger than ever before possible in India, an upper-caste Hindu view of the world as if it were the only view possible. Out of

such conditions emerged the newly powerful BJP and its associated organisations.

What is the evidence supporting such an interpretation?

### Connecting Media and Politics

In the previous section, I tried to leap the canyon to link the media revolution and the rise of "Hindu politics." My point was to illustrate the tempting "causal" links which lead analysts to embark on the long jump. But is there a genuine connection - a solid bridge, made of hard evidence? Out of what sort of evidence might such a bridge be built? In this section, I try to replace long-jumping with bridge-building. I believe there is a bridge, but it is not a New Delhi flyover; it is made of poles and

ropes, sways in a challenging breeze and needs to be used with caution (and faith).

The evidence for connecting the two comes from two broad areas: first, an examination of north Indian newspapers, their owners and their coverage of one or two events. Then let me compare recent experience in north India with that of south India. I shall be trying to suggest that the *pervasiveness* of a medium—or of media—has subtle influences as well as gross propaganda ones and that there is a threshold at which political activity becomes affected and starts to happen differently.

The owners of north India's largest newspapers are upper-caste Hindus, who might be described as belonging to "the trading castes". Indeed, their

urban, upper-caste origins are the same as those on which the BJP's foundations are often said to rest. Table 6 makes this point. It lists nine of the top-selling daily newspapers in the languages of north India. Their combined circulation came to more than 5.25 million copies a day, and all are owned by "trading caste" families. (The table omits three leading Hindi dailies run as adjuncts of English-language chains - *Navbharat Times* (*Times of India*), *Hindustan* (*Hindustan Times*) and *Jansatta* (*Indian Express*). All three groups are owned by Marwari families—the Jains, Birlas and Goenkas respectively.)

Owners, journalists and media analysts debate the extent to which ownership colours what media do. In the case of these newspapers, however, ownership very often means hiring journalists similar in background to the proprietorial families themselves. I have elaborated on this process in my recent book *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press, 1977-99*. Journalists usually have little security, and they quickly learn the world-view of their proprietors. It is worth emphasising that dalits account for 15 per cent of India's population or about 150

**TABLE 5: Hindi Daily Newspapers, 1960-98**

Year	Circulation
1961	0.7 million
1970	1.3 million
1975	1.9 million
1980	3.6 million
1985	6.3 million
1990	7.8 million
1995	14.3 million
1996	16.1 million
1997	19.8 million
1998	24.3 million

Sources: *Press in India* (New Delhi: Registrar of Newspapers for India, relevant years).



million people; but there are no senior dalit journalists on any major daily newspaper in India.

The affections of a number of these owners lie broadly with the "Hindu politics" of the BJP and its allies. Members of the Kulish, Gupta (*Dainik Jagran*) and Chopra families (see Table 6), for example, have been honoured by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or stood for election with the support of the BJP (or its forerunner, the Jana Sangh). A younger member (born 1968 and partly educated in the USA) of one of the major western Indian newspapers expressed his views to me in an interview in 1999:

"You have to articulate the spirit of the people ... [English-language newspapers] want to project an image of liberalism. Now liberalism is fine, but when the majority of the population is Hindu, you have to take that thing into consideration too.

In the early 1990s, he continued, the brother of a state chief minister was killed in communal rioting. The *Times of India* ran a brief story under the headline "A Man Killed in the City".

If you go and read *Times of India*, you feel everything is quiet on the city front ... You can get killed ...! Okay, [you assume] there's no violence—you go in the city. ... We took this incredible picture, This huge body ... lying ... dripping with blood ... we took that picture [and used it] That same day the *Times of India* says, "Keshubhai's brother is killed"—a single small little thing!"

He explained his view of current social concerns: "I'll take a very small example of a house. In a house there are two brothers. One of them, let's say he is weak [and] he is favoured more. That's okay, but each and every time, if he starts getting favoured more, the other chap is going to say, "What is this?" It is the same thing in India—like Hindus and Muslims."

We cannot infer the repeated daily content of major newspapers from a single interview; but we can conclude that journalists know their proprietor's views.

Newspaper coverage of two other events—the

"Aligarh Hospital murders" of 1990 and the "dead monkeys" of 1998—provide more material linking the media and Hindu politics. The two stories differ: the first became notorious; but the second, by its very ordinariness, suggests the "subliminal charge"—to use Marshall McLuhan's phrase—that lies each morning in millions of north Indian daily newspapers.

As a newspaper story, the "Aligarh hospital murders" was part of the overall coverage of Advani's rath yatra of September and October and the conflict over the mosque and shrine at Ayodhya. Coverage of Advani's journey and the subsequent rioting was imaginative and wild. Later, when the Press Council of India examined complaints, it condemned the following:

- ♦ at the Varanasi edition of *Swatantra Bharat*, an unidentified person inserted—by hand on the offset plate as the paper was going to press—a "1" in front of "15" to make a headline on 2 November 1990 read: "Firing on kar sevaks in Ayodhya—115 dead, dozens injured," thus increasing the death toll by 100
- ♦ another daily inserted—by hand, presumably with a grease-pencil—bars on the windows in which a holy man was pictured to make it look as if he was in prison when he wasn't
- ♦ exaggerated or untrue headlines included: "Rivers of blood flow through Ayodhya" (*Swatantra Bharat*, Varanasi, 2 November 1990) "Consider every village as Ayodhya and fight [strike] out" (*Dainik Jagran*, Lucknow, n.d.) "Ram mandir [temple] demolished in Ayodhya" (*Aj*, Kanpur, 11 November 1990) "Ram bhakts beat up DIG, revolt of magistrates, DM goes on leave" (*Aj*, Bareilly, 4 November 1990) "If they have not become martyrs [i.e. been killed], where have these 307 kar sevaks gone?" (*Aj*, Kanpur, 11 November 1990)

Two aspects of background to be clarified. First, the government of Uttar Pradesh in 1990 was led by

**TABLE 6: Owners of Major North Indian Dailies and Circulations, 1999**

Daily newspaper	Language & headquarters	Circulation, Jan.-June 1999	Owners
<i>Aj</i>	Hindi (Varanasi)	877,000	S. V. Gupta family
<i>Amar Ujala</i>	Hindi (Agra)	453,600	Maheshwari family
<i>Dainik Bhaskar</i>	Hindi (Bhopal)	328,600*	Agarwal family
<i>Dainik Jagran</i>	Hindi (Kanpur)	822,000	Gupta family
<i>Gujarat Samachar</i>	Gujarati (Ahmedabad)	861,000	Shreyans Shah family
<i>Punjab Kesari</i>	Hindi (Jalandhar)	777,000	Chopra family
<i>Rajasthan Patrika</i>	Hindi (Jaipur)	225,000**	Kulish family
<i>Rashtriya Sahara</i>	Hindi (Lucknow)	224,000	Subrata Rai
<i>Sandesh</i>	Gujarati (Ahmedabad)	657,000	Falgunbhai Patel family

\* Three editions not included because circulation not verified  
 \*\* Claimed, 1996. Not a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations, January-June 1999

Mulayam Singh Yadav, an OBC who drew support from Muslims and whose government opposed Advani's rath yatra and eventually used its police to prevent the demonstrators from damaging the mosque. For the BJP and for upper-caste newspaper owners and their employees, the treatment of the demonstrators was especially objectionable. Second, the target of Advani's journey was a mosque. Muslims were the objects of fear and distaste, a means by which to unite "the Hindu community" and overcome divisions between "forward" and "backward," accentuated by politicians like Mulayam Singh.

Anti-Muslim focus sharpened in the notorious invention of the "Aligarh hospital murders" in December 1990. In the aftermath of the police break-up of the demonstrations at Ayodhya, rioting swept India. On 11 and 13 December 1990, the Agra edition of *Aj* carried stories that 32 non-Muslim patients had been killed in the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital of Aligarh Muslim University. *The story was totally false.* However, though the District Magistrate of Aligarh denied it on television on 12 December, *Aj* repeated the story on the 13th along with an editorial claiming that the district authorities had confirmed the murders. *Amar Ujala* picked up the story and ran it in one late edition but later carried a correction. *Aj* chose not to appear before the Press Council which found all the charges substantiated: "the newspaper made a mockery of journalistic ethics." *Aj* got away with just the Press Council's censure. (When I visited *Aj* in Varanasi in 1994 a representative said headquarters in Varanasi was unhappy about the occurrence but that these things happened in a big decentralised organisation.)

The point is not to highlight events surrounding the first Ayodhya march in 1990. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that newspapers were more circumspect in 1992 when the mosque was actually destroyed. That circumspection, however, did not prevent rioting and murder throughout large parts of India. The point of examining the "Aligarh hospital murders" story is to provide evidence for the contention that an upper-caste-Hindu view pervades many of the largest Indian-language newspapers in north India. The "hospital murders" story parades that view openly. My final example shows it in a more day-to-day, ooze-of-oil, subliminal-charge way.

On 12 April 1998, *Dainik Jagran* in its flagship edition from Kanpur topped its front page (with three photographs of the monkeys' bodies on an inside page) with a story about the deaths by poison of "more than 200 monkeys" in a village in Bareilly district. The headline reported "ten-

sion" and smaller headlines noted:

"Suspicion that the rotis were poisoned, investigation ordered, report against one person, police stationed in area, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Jagran front and Shiv Sena threaten to launch campaign."

The story hinted at religious antagonism. Why were militant Hindu organisations like the Bajrang Dal upset? Readers might infer that anti-Hindu forces were insulting those who venerated the monkey and Lord Hanuman. As the story eventually unfolded, however, it proved that though 46 monkeys had indeed been poisoned, it was by a Yadav (lower-caste Hindu) whose banana crop they were eating. The story provides evidence of the way in which agricultural news may become political and inter-religious news. It is evidence too of the beneath-the-surface, perhaps even unconscious, influences which lead newspapers to present the day's stories with emphasis on particular themes.

What we cannot be sure of is the effect this pervasiveness has on the people who read the newspapers and watch television. There is a surface logic to the contention that new readers and viewers, receiving this kind of newspaper and these sorts of television programmes, will become attuned to the views purveyed. The upper-caste Hindu view of the world, which underwrites "Hindu politics," will be spread well beyond upper-caste Hindus. The argument is that media influence people both directly and unconsciously. For instance, *The Times of India* of 12 November 1992, cited a report from the World Congress of Social Psychiatry in New Delhi about a study of 22 adolescents who burned

themselves to death to protest against the implementation of the Mandal Report's recommendations in 1990. This study found that three-quarters of them, "more time than usual", had followed the anti-Mandal agitation in the media. A quarter of them burned themselves immediately after watching or reading about the agitation.

### Bridge-Building or Canyon-Leaping?

We can show a tremendous growth in television and print media and their availability to people in north India since 1982. The surge in support for "Hindu" causes and for the Bharatiya Janata Party since the late 1980s is also clear. A link between the two facts—between the two walls of the canyon—is often asserted. As far as television is concerned, the circumstantial evidence for such a link lies in the popularity of the religious-epic TV serials of 1987-90 and their apparent influence on the imagery politicians chose to use. One might also cite the spread of anti-Mandal "hysteria" in 1990 (e.g., the adolescent suicides). For print, the evidence



Hindu politics.



Anti-mandal agitator in flames.

rests on the caste backgrounds and political statements and preferences of proprietor families, the dependence of their editorial staffs and the nature of the coverage appearing in many of the largest Indian-language newspapers of north India. I have used one or two examples of such coverage in the discussion above.

None of this, however, *proves* connections or

even suggests, in a step-by-step, empirical way, how such connections might work. What sort of research and evidence might we need? I can imagine a study that sought to find people born about 1970 into poor, little-educated families in rural UP. A study of this kind would try to track such people and would look for evidence to suggest that, even though they remained in the village, they acquired basic literacy, got to watch television after it came in 1982, become devotees of the *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* television serials and as a result contributed to Ram shilanyas (volunteer brigades and material for the construction of the Ram temple)

sent to Ayodhya in 1989. They would have voted for the first time in the elections of 1989 and we would expect that vote to have been cast for the BJP, even though the person may not have been upper-caste. Such a story would contain the makings of convincing evidence—convincing raw materials out of which to build the bridge. And if you had a few hundred such stories, you might then be able to make statements about cause and effect with some confidence. *That* would be evidence.

One could conduct other local-level research. One could identify parliamentary constituencies in UP where it was possible to date the arrival of television and the growing purchase of newspapers. One could follow the fortunes of local politicians and parties—changes in voting patterns, attendance at rallies, perhaps even membership and participation in political parties or their campaigns (including the marches on Ayodhya in 1990 and 1992). We would probably still fall short of “proof”, but “proof” and “truth” will always be goals to seek, not possessions to own, in the social sciences.

I strongly suspect that the media revolution and the growth of “Hindu politics” are linked; but for now, the links, though plausible, are circumstantial. The effects of media change on the political ideas and actions of millions of people are worth struggling to understand.

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# Double jeopardy

by Hemant Babu

MID-SUMMER this year, a village in Kutch on the western-most tip of India resolved to divide itself. About 40 families, out of a total of 70 odd, gathered their belongings and moved eastward, closer to a tar road, by whose side the grazing camels scatter at the approach of the occasional motor vehicle. The older women of the village shed silent tears as long-time neighbours walked away without turning back. Children, untouched by the emotional baggage of a splitting village, helped the elders in their new venture of getting nearer to civilisation.

This is a story of Julrai village that broke up into two, barely three months after the earthquake that brought almost every brick and mortar structure all over the western region of Gujarat to the ground. In Julrai today there are houses with roofs caved in and there are walls cracked so wide that stray dogs can walk through them. There are freshly painted windows and doors that open out on to nothing in particu-

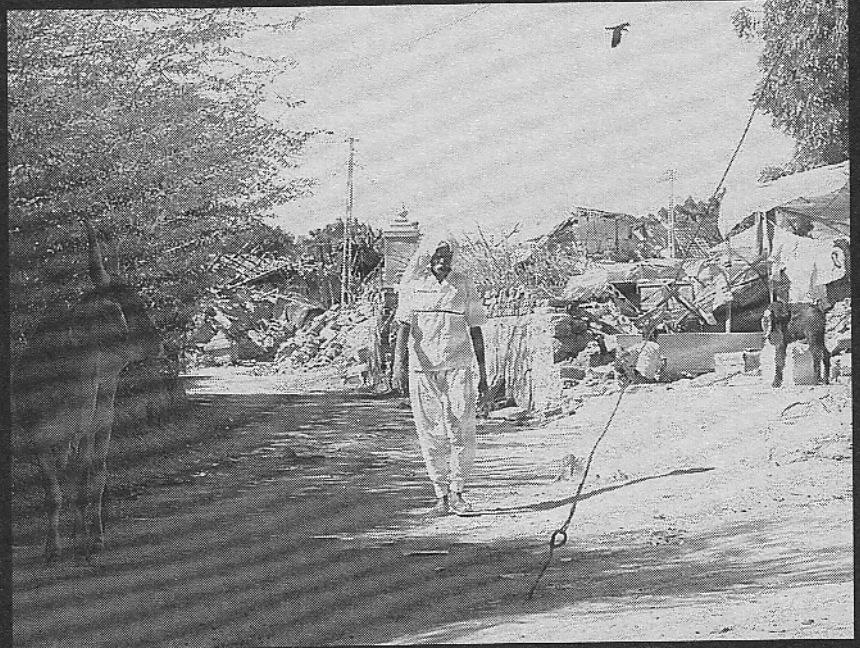
lar. There are the remnants of rooms with no walls. There are houses whose external form has survived the quake. But peep through a half-opened window and the sights and sounds of seismic devastation present themselves—the eerie creak of broken beams straining to collapse or a section of roof waiting to be detached from its mooring and fall to the earth. And then there are heaps of rubble, remains of what used to be houses. These were once the homes of people who now live in tents less than 60 metres from these narrow lanes of desolation.

Julrai qualifies to be reconstructed by the government of Gujarat. The criterion for such bureaucratic recognition is the magnitude of destruction. The government is committed to rebuild those villages which have sustained more than 70 percent destruction in the earthquake. In addition, an NGO called Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and a government owned mining company, the Gujar-

at Mineral Development Corporation (GMDC), were both willing to reconstruct the village.

GMDC and SEWA, quite naturally, had dramatically different approaches to rebuilding the village. The sequence of events that followed forced SEWA to withdraw, leaving Julrai in the hands of GMDC and the government of Gujarat.

Julrai's fate, in fact, was written about 400 years ago when a group of shepherds, called Rabari, chose to settle down on a stretch of land that had soft soil and enough vegetation to feed their livestock. However, they did not know that beneath the land they settled on was a huge stock of lignite, which GMDC would discover some time in the 1980s. GMDC has been energetically pursuing the people of the area, trying to get them to relocate, so that the corporation can go ahead and convert the area into an open-cast mine. The earthquake that devastated lives provided GMDC the opportunity to clear the land of people without



# in a Kutch village

compensating them adequately.

The story of Julrai sounds familiar. It bears the stamp of modern times. It involves a powerful state machinery, the expropriation of defenceless people, democratic deceit, organised betrayal and ultimate marginalisation. It seems like the familiar charade staged by elected democracy in which the victims of eviction are asked, by the governments they elect, to pay for the 'development' that deprives them.

Julrai is some way into the interior. The road from Narain Sarovar to Julrai cuts through the saline winds of the Koree creek. Then, moving across the salt-water lake, it takes you to a desert terrain where the road disappears behind dunes. The camels walking in the distance emerge into view head first. Strange, fierce-looking reptiles dart across the tar road whose vapours blur and distort human vision. To reach Julrai you turn right at a point where there is no apparent turn. Not more than 50 metres from that inconspic-

uous turn the landscape changes. Dune after dune of soft soil—all numbered—screen from view the large pits, from where half-clad miners look up at passing vehicles. The serpentine route through the bentonite (a clay formed by the decomposition of volcanic ash, which has the capacity to absorb large quantities of water and expand to several times its normal volume) mines quite often crosses the path of the *chinkara* (Indian antelope), a graceful animal that has been declared endangered. Some years ago the government built a sanctuary around them. Some years later the government built these mines inside the sanctuary.

The day before Julrai was to formally split, a group of young girls, with some children in tow, walked through the village to offer samplings of a wedding feast to the goddess who appears to the older women in their dreams and guides the villagers. Behind them followed a Rabari groom, dressed in a long *ach-*

*kan*, skin tight at the chest and loose and flowing like a frock up to his knee, a turban decorated with silver coloured threads bright against his sunburnt face. A girl wrapped in a bright red, beautifully embroidered cloth then came running to announce it was time for the feast to commence. This was the first time after the earthquake that the village witnessed a festivity. It was also the last festivity of the undivided village.

On the outskirts of the village, where only shrubs grow and sustain the pastoral economy of the village, a few young men sit under the meagre shadow of a *babul* (acacia) tree, unmoved by the festive happenings in the village. They had their goats, languidly eating leaves from thorny shrubs, and some gossip from a distant village, to see them through the summer day.

Everything seemed pretty normal on the surface. But trouble was brewing. The village folk were divided into two camps—one group wanted to shift and brave the rigours that



life presented in the new location, while the other wanted to stay where they had lived, suffered and survived the earthquake. An observant outsider cannot see much material gain in either proposition.

The villagers' dilemma had begun about a month after the killer earthquake struck. A vehicle loaded with officials was guided to the village through the maze of dirt tracks by the *talati*—a man who, as the last and lowest link of Indian bureaucracy, is responsible for actually interacting with the people. They were introduced to the village elders as senior officials of the GMDC, which was going to reconstruct the village, house by house. A few chairs were promptly produced for the officers and a meeting was quickly convened. Villagers were told that the company was planning to reconstruct New Julrai, about three kilometres to the east, very close to the tar road where 'progress' was assured and inevitable. Jivra, a young man in his 20s, showing off the site for New Julrai says, "Sitting here on this hillock you can see several vehicles passing by during the day." Progress indeed, and not very far away. You could actually see it from time to time. No matter that it was merely passing by and quite infrequently at that.

For the earthquake ravaged villagers, the GMDC officials looked like the blessing they were waiting for. "We know that when GMDC comes to our village it means god has arrived," one person told the officials in a meeting. Let us therefore know this god. GMDC was once a fully-owned corporation of the government of Gujarat, with exclusive mining rights all over the state. Then, in the brave new world of liberalisation, in a daring feat of disinvestment, the Gujarat government let go of 26 percent of its equity to private investors. Presently, the corporation holds mining leases for approximately 62 million tonnes of lignite spread over 2366 hectares. The corporation also holds additional leases for an area covering 25,000 hectares, containing an estimated 525 million tonnes of lignite. Julrai is a small dot on the map of this leased area.

The corporation, now accountable to its shareholders, is keen to grow in leaps and bounds. It has filed applications for mining leases in Valia, Tadkeshwar and in Bhavnagar covering over 7000 hectares of land, bearing lignite deposits to the tune of 200 million tonnes. Thus, the corporation will have secured mining rights for 935 million tonnes of lignite in the state.

The meeting between the village

elders and the GMDC officers ripped open the façade of democracy at the grassroot. The GMDC officers spoke at length of the economic progress of society. They spoke of the role the corporation promises to play. They spoke of success stories. Referring to Panandhro, a town GMDC acquired a decade ago and converted into a hub of lignite mining, a GMDC officer told the meeting "those who were walking miles are now riding motor bikes... those who were labourers are now shop keepers". The villagers were given the choice of opting for the path of progress as the GMDC defined it or living a decaying life, with the threat of being eventually evicted by a court order thrown in for good measure. To the people of Julrai the path to progress had never before seemed so completely devoid of alternatives.

This 'humanitarian' intervention by the GMDC sparked off a series of seemingly contrary responses among the villagers. General distrust over the government's ability to deliver the promised post-earthquake rehabilitation package drew them to the GMDC-engineered pipe dream of living nearer to the tar road, where state transport buses and trucks plied. On the other hand, they had a lurking suspicion of a raw deal from the corporation, which was not willing to give them



on in the devastated village. Soon some other families followed the trader's option. This, after all, was the most rational choice.

That being the case the question then arises, why did the entire village not follow the trader's path of maximising gain and insuring against deceit? Why did some people choose to stay on despite the odds? Equally, what were the new stakes that enabled some people to forget 400 years of communal fraternity? Village elders say that every man in the village is a part of one founding family that multiplied into a village over a few hundred years. The last question is answered easily enough in familiar and intelligible terms. Simple economic motives of survival and expectations, tempered by past experiences, guided them in the difficult and risky choice they were called upon to make. The decision, irrespective of whether it will turn out right or wrong, is based on principles that correspond with the realities of the new world in which they live. But this framework of pragmatic, material calculations alone cannot penetrate or make intelligible the sum of the responses of the village.

There are other perceptions and views of the world, possibly repugnant to the 'rational' mind, that also motivate and determine decisions. The Rabari community prays to a goddess called Momma. Each Rabari village has its own messenger to the goddess. At critical moments, Rabaris consult Momma through the messenger, who seems to get 'possessed' pretty much at will. Unfortunately for Julrai there were two people who laid claim to being the village's divine messenger and both carried contradictory messages of what Momma wanted the villagers to do. One messenger advised villagers to move to the new location while the other told them to stay put.

The sum of all the factors that cause villages faced with the choices forced by 'development' to fracture in this fashion are generally hidden to the opaque abstractions that concentrate only on the rationally intelligible aspects of a pro-

cess. Probe a bit into the social psyche and many grey areas begin to emerge. In the current age of 'result-oriented' political, non-political or apolitical activism, deviations from the presumed rationality that is supposed to govern choices tend to get ignored. The Julrai experience may also be an eye opener to all those who, in their struggle against social, economic and political marginalisation of people, have forgotten to look at the many shades of meaning and motivations among communities that face the threat of eviction, displacement and relocation.

In Julrai all the different shades combined to produce three camps in the village. Some shifted bag and baggage, some refused to move and a few partook of both the old and the new. But in the end this situation was not acceptable to GMDC. "Unless you all move, the GMDC will not be in a position to do anything," the officials had clearly stated at the very beginning of the exercise.

The village has split—into Julrai and New Julrai—but to no one's particular gain, except perhaps the trader's. Julrai is now half of what it was after the earthquake. But what of the progress at New Julrai? To go to New Julrai you do not have to turn right like you must to reach Julrai. You do not have to negotiate the bentonite mines or go through the chinkara sanctuary. It is right there by the road, on a small mound. Yet the settlement is almost invisible. You do not see houses of bricks or mud. All that you see are some tents fluttering violently in the wind. No matter what time of the day or night you visit the village, you will see someone fixing a tent. The trader has opened a makeshift shop in New Julrai as well. In the evening, youngsters who could not find employment for the day in the bentonite mine sit on the mound watching the clean and deserted tar road. Of late, the GMDC officials have stopped showing up. ▽

anything in writing. The corporation's representatives had shown them a piece of land in the vicinity of the tar road and suggested that it could be the location of New Julrai. But the corporation had not moved the government machinery to even acquire the land for relocation, leave alone constructing the new village.

The frequent visits by the GMDC officials and their persuasive and/or coercive skills convinced some of the villagers that the only way to secure a kind of livelihood was to get out of the way of GMDC. But others questioned the wisdom of this course of action. "At the moment we are sitting on a large stock of lignite. If we show even the slightest willingness to move from here no one is going to care for us," said Paba Rabari, the young and articulate leader of those who have been refusing to budge from their ancestral land.

The only trader in the village, Shantibhai Shah, however had a different approach, one that is perhaps appropriate to his calling. It neither forsook the possibilities of a beckoning opportunity, nor did it abandon the going concern. In the world of speculation, this is called "hedging the bet". He came up with the idea of having a foot each in both the places. He sent his younger brother to settle down at the new location while he continued to stay

# Indian wheat & Bangla chaff

In India, journalists are not afraid of taking on their military-security establishment.

by *Subir Bhaumik*

IRFAN AHMED'S pontification on journalistic principles (Response, June 2001) is not backed by exposure of new facts or points of analysis. His dismissive attitude towards the bombings must have blown up in his face in view of the latest bomb attack at Narayangunj, where an explosion ripped through an Awami League office killing 22 people and injuring over a hundred including the local Awami League MP. The huge bomb of Kotalipara had "military origins" according to Ahmed, but how is he so sure it was not planted by Islamic terrorists? If he accuses me of using intelligence sources who I cannot name because that would jeopardise their jobs, can I not accuse Ahmed of using "foreign experts" who could obviously be named but have not been named.

Bombings by Islamic terrorists have been rampant in the entire arc between the West Asia, erstwhile Soviet Central Asia, even China, all the way to India and Bangladesh and beyond. What objective evidence can Ahmed provide to prove that the Kotalipara bomb was not planted by Islamic terrorists like Harkat ul Jihad—unless of course he is keen to shield them. I am astounded by Ahmed's assertion that the "Breda conspiracy has disappeared from Dutch papers". It was never reported in the Dutch papers in the first place.

But I have the transcript of the conversation between two ISI officials, one sitting in Brussels after the meeting at Breda and the other, his boss, in Karachi. When I broke this story in the *Sunday Times*, the Pakistanis did not contest it. Just as they had greeted the transcript of the conversation between General Pervez Musharraf, while on a visit to China with his chief of staff, Lt General Aziz at the peak of the Kargil war. I have the expertise to pick the wheat from the chaff. I have exposed many a conspiracy of intelligence agencies of my own country—one has only to read my book *Insurgent Cross-fire* to get an accurate account of the RAW's involvement in fuelling the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. No Bangladeshi, I can challenge, can match the depth of my expose on that issue—unless all they do is speculate. But I have contacts in Indian and other intelligence agencies of this region and have very often got my facts crosschecked by playing off one's version against another's. That is where the skills of the reporter come into play. My recent exposure of how Indian

military intelligence betrayed the leading Arakanese rebel group in Burma has upset many of our top brass but should I care? After all, in India, reporters are not afraid of taking on the military-security establishment, unlike our colleagues in Bangladesh.

I can only say that I have hard information on the conspiracy to kill Sheikh Hasina. Last year, the Mujib-killers managed to get the LTTE to agree to perform a suicide bombing on her for ten million dollars. The money was to reach the LTTE through an Indian software magnate who was bumped off by Indian intelligence and the money stayed frozen in his account without reaching the LTTE, who then backed off in the absence of payment. I have two reports—one of the Indian Intelligence Bureau and the other of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) of Bangladesh—on how this conspiracy was foiled. These are original reports ferretted out through painstaking effort, not plants offered over a bottle of whisky. I got some of my BBC colleagues in South Asia to check the details of these reports. They testified to their accuracy in terms of names, places, activities.

The border incident was an attempt to catch Hasina in a Catch 22 situation. I have it from my sources in the Bangladesh intelligence that she had no option but to back the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) chief. Certainly, the BDR chief is a staunch nationalist and a capable soldier, and his tough handling of the Naaf river crisis must have convinced him that he had to act tough with the Border Security Force (BSF) as well. But the Padua situation was certainly aggravated by local commanders, many of whom are strongly anti-Indian. Now I can, of course, see very good reasons why many Bangladeshis feel very upset with the way India treats them. As a Bengali, I also feel very upset with the way things happen between India and Bangladesh. At the peak of the Padua crisis, I was asked by a Zee TV presenter about what more should be done to chastise Bangladesh. I was very angry and this precisely is what I said in response: "If Delhi wants to fritter away diplomatic and political gains made over the last five years in five days of border clashes over five hundred metres of disputed territory, the choice is India's. If India is not just happy with the trouble it gets from Pakistan and wants Bangladesh to go the same way, the choice is India's. But if



the Bengalis of Bangladesh did not tolerate the non-sense of Pakistan, they will not tolerate Indian high handedness as well. I am as much of an East Bengali with firm roots in Bangladesh as Ahmed. And, I don't need Indian intelligence to tell me what's going on in Bangladesh. There is still a strong section of repatriate officers in the Bangladesh army who feel strongly for Pakistan and against India. After all that Pakistan did to the Bengalis in 1971, the Jamait argued for undivided Pakistan. Now they talk of the lack of democracy in a country they never wanted to emerge in the first place.

How preposterous to think India engineered the border crisis to strengthen Sheikh Hasina's hands. India added to her woes by aggravating the crisis by opening the attack at Boroibari because the BJP had its own domestic compulsions. The party wanted to win the elections in Assam and that was more important to them than protecting Sheikh Hasina's interest. If the death toll was the reverse of what finally happened and if more of the Bangladesh BDR people died than India's BSF, Indian home minister LK Advani would be beating his chest in rally after rally in Assam about how the bad and troublesome Bangladeshis had been taught a lesson. The BJP's vote would go up. The score on body count went wrong, and so did the BJP's fate in Assam. Actually conspiracies often have a very bad habit of achieving effects quite the opposite of the intended ones.

Targetting Bengali secular cultural groups like Udi-chi or Chayanat has been a old practice with Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh. Has Ahmed forgotten the Rairbazar massacre of the eve of Bangladesh's lib-

eration? The people killed by the Razakars and Al-Bardars were not freedom fighters with arms—they were poets, writers and intellectuals, who undermined Pakistan by their role in the emergence of the strong Bengali identity. That brand of fundamentalist politics is still in existence in Bangladesh. A recent report by a respected Bangladesh journalist detailed the fresh efforts made by such religious groups to reorganise.

I am aware of problems within the Sheikh family. Conflicting ambitions, corruption and political feudalism exist in the first family of Bangladesh, but to overlook the fact, yes fact, that the killers of Sheikh Mujib continue to plot is something no journalist can afford. Before the Kandahar hijack of the Indian Airlines Airbus, airports across eastern India had been alerted by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) about a possible attempt to hijack a Bangladesh Biman plane to secure the release of Colonel Farook and his sidekick Major Bazlul Huda. I have a copy of that BCAS order which was issued at the behest of RAW. This was no plant to the press, it was an official memo released to all concerned.

Intelligence agencies do plant a lot of disinformation, but Ahmed can trust me more than many of his countrymen to pick the wheat from the chaff. My tenure in Northeast India, far from "colouring my views" gave me tremendous exposure to the way these agencies function. In my book, I detail the operations of most subcontinental intelligence agencies and try to expose them. Ahmed seems to be aware of my reporting from Assam but not of my main research work. He will do well to read it.

## Some musings on the Mahakali Treaty

by S B Pun

IT IS with interest that I read Dipak Gyawali and Ajaya Dixit's "How not to do a South Asian Treaty" (April 2001). Equally interesting was Ramaswamy R. Iyer's response "Delay and Drift on the Mahakali" (June 2001). Such articles on important issues by well-known thinkers from both sides will definitely help to bridge the yawning gap between Nepal and India. I am adding my own thoughts to those two excellent articles, in this instance related to water sharing, on the much hyped Mahakali Treaty, one which is literally in the "Kumbhakarna" stage of hibernation.

**A. Nepal's right to say no:** Iyer is right when he says that even if India did want the treaty and pushed hard for it, Nepal, as a sovereign nation, had always had the right to say "no" to a document that it was not satisfied with. This right of the sovereign nation was amply demonstrated by Canada when, despite the signing of the Columbia River Treaty on 17 January 1961 by the heads of states of Canada and the United States, the Parliament in Ottawa refused to ratify the treaty. It was only

on 16 September 1964, after a lapse of a full three years and eight months and the "manner of implementation was defined through a Protocol and arrangements were made to sell the first 30 years of Canada's Entitlement to the power benefits arising from each storage project", that the Canadian Parliament finally ratified the treaty with the United States.

**B. Nepal's inability to say 'no':** One has got to back-peddle to the period of the early 1980s to know the environment and circumstances to understand why Nepal could never utter that simple word 'no'. It is here that Gyawali and Dixit have done an extremely commendable job in their "forensic deconstruction of the Mahakali Treaty of 1996 between Nepal and India .....the larger neighbour as bulldozer and the smaller one as hapless and internally divided. Just how not to do an agreement for the sharing of a common resource ....". The two writers have, much to the discomfiture of many in India as well as Nepal, explained the chronology and nuances of events that included the unilateral construction of the

Tanakpur Barrage, the gifting away on a platter of the 2.9 hectares of Nepalese land at Jimuwa, through an *understanding* that the Nepali Supreme Court subsequently termed as a *treaty* for being "*persuasive and long term*", Nepal's ill-fated upmanship in converting the Tanakpur issue into the broader Mahakali Package Deal, and the final closing-in for the kill on the hapless and much divided coalition government in Nepal. Ironically, the Mahakali Treaty was signed at a time when Prakash Chandra Lohani was foreign minister and Pashupati SJB Rana water resources minister, the same stalwarts of the Panchayat era who may have on an earlier occasion said *no* to the same Tanakpur Barrage!

**C. Ratification or non-ratification:** I am in full concurrence with Iyer's view that there can now only be ratification or non-ratification of the Mahakali Treaty. There is no question that the conditional ratification with "*strictures*" (the *sankalpa prastav*) will be applicable only to the Nepali government and not the government of India. This is why I have been compelled to state that the Mahakali Treaty has technically achieved the "*Kumbhakarna*" status. So far, India has been the sole beneficiary of the agreement, with the formal legalisation and utilisation of the unilaterally constructed Tanakpur Barrage. Nepal's attempt at one-upmanship of linking the Pancheshwar Project in the Mahakali Package Deal has failed miserably, although hopefully for the time being only.

**D. The differences:** Iyer has very eloquently elucidated the differences that have emerged between the neighbours on the following five issues :

*i. The Kalapani Issue:* However, here, Iyer has misunderstood the Nepali sensitivity when he very clinically argues that the Kalapani border issue "*has nothing to do with the implementation of the Mahakali Treaty.*" He cannot be faulted too much on this, of course. Nepalis may not be in a position to understand the sentiments of India on the recent Boraibari/Padua incidents on the Indo-Bangladesh border, or for that matter the Indo-Pakistan Kargil skirmish. One principle clearly demonstrated and stood firmly on by India both with Pakistan and Bangladesh, was its stand on the pre-conflict "*status quo/line of control*" position. It is exactly this internationally accepted principle of the return to the

status quo position that Nepal wants India to abide by on the Kalapani issue. I believe this is the government of Nepal's position. That is, the categorical return of India's armed personnel to the pre-1963 position and then as stressed by Mr. Iyer "*...a matter to be resolved with reference to old records, documents, maps, survey points etc.*" Nepal vividly remembers the Mahakali/Sutlej territories it ceded to the East India Company in the 1814-16 Anglo-Nepal war for its reluctance to cede 22 mealy villages in the Tarai to the Company!

*ii. The Boundary River Issue:* On the matter of the Mahakali being a "*boundary river on major stretches*" and basically "*a border river*", Nepal's then water resources minister, Pashupati SJB Rana, went categorically on record to say that they have the same meaning. I believe Nepal has no problem with the sacrosanctity of the treaty on this issue.

*iii. Equal Sharing Issue:* It is here that Nepal, I believe, would have major differences of opinion with what Iyer believes is the Government of India's position. He, too, concurs that there is a "*clear divergence of views here*". He terms the ownership of half of the Mahakali waters as "*Nepali innovations not easily derivable from any international law or principles.*" I would like to humbly state that the unilateral construction of the Tanakpur Barrage by India on "*a boundary river on major stretches*" without informing/consulting Nepal was similarly an Indian innovation not derivable from any international law or practice. This is probably the reason why Gyawali and Dixit use the term "*bulldoze*", which Iyer has difficulties with. But I do fully agree with the latter that nothing is "*gained by taking a dogmatic position on this issue; this is a matter for discussion between the two countries with a view to arrive at an agreed position.*"

*iv. Protection of Existing Consumptive Uses:* Here, too, the two governments are at serious loggerheads. Iyer states, "*India has claimed that there is such an existing consumptive use at the Lower Sarada, but the Nepalis question this on certain grounds.*" It is on this existing consumptive use issue that Nepal's Parliament has unanimously passed its strictures, interpreting this to mean equal rights to all the waters of the Mahakali. If I understand the Nepali government's position on this issue correctly, then this "*respective existing consumptive uses of the waters of the Mahakali River*" emanates from the treaty's paragraph 3 of Article 3 which pertains to the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project and not the Mahakali River itself. I do not pretend to be a lawyer but I believe this interpretation may keep our parliamentarians happy. But the implication this may ultimately have on Nepal's cost-sharing mechanism in relation to the Pancheshwar Project needs to be carefully ascertained by our bureaucrats. Iyer refers to the Helsinki Rules on the "*fair and equitable*" sharing of common resources and also the new UN Convention on which, if I am correct, India abstained from voting. I might add here that, internationally, these rules and conventions are preached more than they are actually practised. There is no doubt that this existing consumptive use issue is the major stumbling block in the



implementation of the Mahakali Treaty.

v. *Power tariff*: Nepal's then minister for water resources, Pashupati SJB Rana, exhorted the joint session of Parliament on September 11, 1996 to ratify the Mahakali Treaty because Nepal was successful in convincing India "to accept the principle of displaced cost of alternatives in the evaluation of electricity benefits." In this context, Iyer has clearly spelt out the Indian position that "there are many possibilities (other hydro-electric projects, thermal projects, gas-based projects etc), and thermal generation need not be assumed to be the only alternative available." He is probably referring to the 3.3 US cents per unit gas-based generation in Bangladesh. There is a tendency here in Nepal to gloat over the "avoided cost principle" victory. This could be the Pyrrhic victory pointed out by Iyer. He has also quite rightly stated that if the generation cost at Pancheshwar is lower than the alternative then this gain will surely have to be shared between the two countries.

**E. Conclusion** : If the Mahakali Treaty is to wake up from its present anaesthetised status, then there is the urgent need for sagacious leadership on both sides of the border. In their "way forward", Gyawali and Dixit

have rightly stressed "...Nepalis should stop reflexively blaming the Indians..." and equally that "...there cannot be a way out unless there is also a change of perspective in India's approach."

Again, consider what Nepal's then water resources minister, Pashupati SJB Rana, assured the joint session of Parliament on 11 September 1996 while exhorting it to ratify the Mahakali Treaty, "From now onwards, no project like Tanakpur will be constructed unilaterally. It is a great achievement for Nepal that projects in future can be developed only on the basis of bilateral agreement." This has become a hollow statement, far removed from the truth, when one considers the ongoing Indo-Nepal duel on the Laxmanpur Barrage on the Rapti River. Issues like these are the ones that touch the raw nerves of Nepal in the furtherance of a cordial Indo-Nepal relationship.

Like Iyer, I too would like to end on an optimistic note. I believe that wisdom will ultimately prevail on both sides and our differences be amicably resolved in order to develop our vast water resources. This is in the larger interest of the poor and hungry masses on both sides of the border.

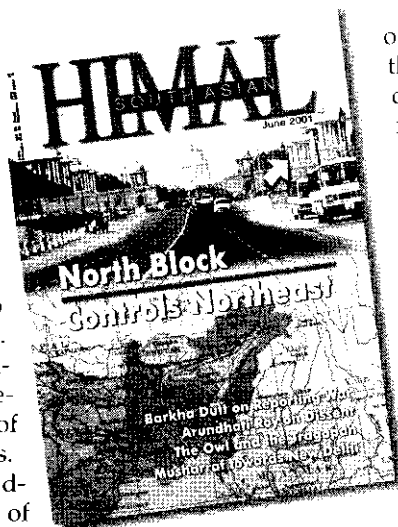
## FOLLOW-UP

# Nagaland and the Northeast

by Sanjib Baruah

THE INDIAN government's announcement in June 2001, of the extension of the five year old Naga ceasefire by another year and enlarging its scope to cover not just the state of Nagaland but also all the neighbouring states which have Naga populations has elicited strong opposition from the states of Assam and Manipur. More than anything else the violent opposition to the Naga ceasefire suggests one thing. There are limits to trying to end insurgencies through secretive deal-making between Indian bureaucrats and leaders of one or the other insurgent organisations.

There is a real possibility that the leadership of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Issac-Muivah), the Naga signatory to the ceasefire agreement, is willing to settle the conflict on honourable terms. But since the idea of Naga independence from India will have to be given up, the Manipuris, Assamese and Arunachalis fear that the quid pro quo for a face-saving compromise maybe the idea of Nagalim—a Nagaland that would include



other Naga-inhabited areas lying in these states. The idea of extending the ceasefire to areas other than Nagaland is thus seen as an indicator that such a concession may be made. What is amazing is that, in a democracy, all this action and reaction is based on rumors, fears, anxieties—things that could have been handled by a more open and participatory mode of conflict resolution, say through a peace conference where all interested parties might be represented.

The reason that Manipuris have always had more anxieties on the issue than anyone else lies in the history of the Manipuri kingdom. In some ways Manipuri fears about creating a Nagalim is not unlike Assamese fears about what a Bodoland might do to the territory of Assam. To elaborate, the Manipuri kingdom's historical relationship with some Nagas: in the article "Generals as Governors" (June 2001), I wrote about the political rituals of the Manipuri kings. The installation ceremony of the

# Response

Manipuri kings called for the queen to appear in Naga costume; the royal palace always had a house built in Naga style; and when the king travelled he was attended on by two or three Manipuris with Naga arms, dress and ornaments. This even led a colonial official, James Johnstone, to speculate that like the Manchus of China, the Manipuri kings may have been Nagas who adopted the civilisation of Manipur.

It is not surprising then that the fear that the Naga areas of Manipur might be lopped off to constitute a greater Nagaland evokes enormous anxieties among all Meities. But who has time for such history? Least of all the Indian home ministry bureaucrats, who are thinking about their next plum appointment in Washington D.C. A few Manipuris or Assamese killed in the process. Oops—they forgot to think of that.

What they refuse to understand is that a more open peace process has the potential to bring all contending parties to at least a minimal understanding. Consider this Calcutta dateline report in *The Times of India* titled "Naga students lend sympathy to Manipuris" by Nirmalya Banerjee:

"Surprising as it may sound, some Naga students here actually sympathise with the people of Manipur over the extension of the ceasefire with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) to a large part of Manipur. 'I think the Manipuris are justified in their grievance,' president of the Naga Students Union

Imsupongen said on Tuesday. The union is an affiliate of the Kohima-based Naga Students Federation. He said the Centre had by-passed the Manipur government while taking the decision on the extension of the ceasefire. 'Every state government has the right to have its say on affairs within its territorial jurisdiction.'"

This news item points to all the possibilities offered by doing things a different way. Naga students have seen the merits of the Manipuri point of view. It illustrates what can be achieved if you trust people and democratic processes. If you have everybody with a stake in the Naga question represented in one room with skillful conflict mediators, have a dialogue over a period of time, people can learn about each other's point of view and might be able to arrive at compromises. Not that everyone would agree to that idea initially. But at least that can be a worthwhile goal to aim for if we are interested in ending insurgencies in the Northeast.

As things stand, the rules of the game are that if you can cause enough disruption and mayhem, the powers that be in Delhi might give in to your demands. So the incentive for each insurgent group is to cause enough mayhem in support of their demands. And as New Delhi gets close to giving in, you will have these massive outbreaks of dissatisfaction from other sections of society that have an obvious stake in the issue. Obviously, there is a world of difference between peace conferences, round-table conferences, and secret deals. ▲



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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.

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*Inside Outside.*

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**John Collee**  
*The London Observer.*

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*Time.*



## in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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# Off-shore provocateurs—Trinidad



Trinidad and Tobago, the southernmost islands of the Lesser Antilles, contains the continents and confounds purists. In this amalgam of Africa, America, Asia and Europe there is little that is not hybrid. Lying to the east of Venezuela, it was initially inhabited by Amerindians—the Arawak of the Orinoco and the Carib of the Amazon. They had the misfortune of being discovered by the grasping mariners of mercantile Europe. Spanish freeloaders followed Columbus and set up plantations. Catalan Capuchin missions followed some time after. The planters drafted the ‘natives’ for plantation work. New diseases and the demanding regimen of labour began depleting Amerindian numbers. The Capuchins worked their way through the remaining populace, converting them spiritually and transforming them racially, doubtless adopting the prescribed missionary position. Women bore the brunt. Little is left today of the original race or culture, barring a few place names, of which is Tunapuna, made famous by CLR James, the historian, cricket connoisseur and an early Caribbean litterateur.

The Atlantic slave trade of the 16th and 17th centuries rescued the planters and replenished labour for

changed many hands. The European Reformation prompted the Spaniards to invite French Catholic settlers from the other islands, who showed up with their slaves. French patois came with them. Courlanders took over Tobago for a period. The British finally took possession of both islands. Inevitably, some of the white mixed with some of the black and a bit of brown had begun to sprout in the islands.

In 1834, in a moment of conscience, the British Parliament abolished slavery. Trinidadian planters suffered the inconvenience only briefly. By 1845 the system of indentured labour was in place. Labour was imported from India in large numbers until the early years of the 20th century. They too were drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds, predominantly from Bihar, but also from the Punjab, the Bombay Presidency and the Madras Presidency. Many opted to stay on after the period of indenture and in a few generations, barring the idea of the homeland, a few dietary habits, a dash of Hindi and their religion, the new settlers too forgot much of their original cultures and became part of the Trinidadian hybrid. In the meantime, a few thousand Chinese labourers too had arrived, many of them without women. They settled down to become the Chinees of Trinidad. Syrian and Lebanese traders added to the mix as did the Portuguese and Surinamese who made their way there.

Such a concentration of races on a mere 4828 square kilometres of island territory makes for an alluring proximity. At a mean annual temperature of 27 degrees centigrade the consequences are predictable. In Trinidad’s ethno-demographic profile, aside from the 41 per cent Afro-Caribbeans and 39 per cent Indians, there is an intriguing 20 per cent “Others”, the racial strands of most of whom it will be impossible to unravel. What the missionaries and planters began cautiously, and on

## *Pure Chutney*

Trinidad and Tobago, 1998  
Colour, Beta-SP/PAL 42  
English, Direction Sanjeev Chatterjee; script  
by Amitava Kumar

*reviewed by Bela Malik*

the plantations. Men subsequently elevated to high office and dignified in the national mythologies of Britain, France and Spain made their fortunes and their heroic reputation abducting tribes from West Africa, the Sahel and Madagascar. The slaves died fast in inhuman conditions of transport and work. As the slaves died the trade prospered and Europe got its supplies of sugar, cotton, tobacco and cocoa. An Afro-Caribbean population soon took root. They had come from diverse tribes and cultures in Africa. On the plantation they lost the memory of their original cultures, except the syntax of their languages, with which they inflected the ‘white’ languages to create the distinctive Caribbean Creole. The drums of Africa too remained in this historical memory. The two combined to produce a genre of music that is unique to the West Indies, a genre that defies permanent description because its forms keep changing periodically.

Trinidad during this period

the sly, the "Others" have carried on with hectic abandon.

Such goings on are not expected to hold universal appeal, least of all to the Hindu revivalists of India, some of whom are hidebound enough to attempt the retrieval of the original cultural core from so advanced a hybridity. That is precisely what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has set out to do among the Indians of Trinidad, and that is perhaps what has prompted the making of the film *Pure Chutney*, else there is no other explanation why a film made by Indians based in the United States of America focuses solely on the Indians of Trinidad, unless of course it is the Indian diaspora's known penchant for gazing at itself with endless curiosity and fascination. In the case of *Pure Chutney* the latter does not seem to be the case.

Judged in its context, there is not much that is wrong with the film, except perhaps the narrator's occasional tendency towards an excessive flamboyance. In many ways it is a bold and sensitive film, portraying the mixed identity of those of Indian origin in Trinidad. Technically too, the film is competent. It begins on a light note and then proceeds to the more serious aspects of the issues it probes. Amitava Kumar, the narrator, is quite deft in his role, mixing easily with people of different classes and sensibilities. Most importantly, the film does not confine itself to the spectacular or the arresting locales, but looks beyond the main thoroughfare to capture life on the plantations, where some Indians still work. And the neat editing ensures that the people interviewed in the film move in and out of the camera's focus in a well-ordered thematic sequence.

Clearly, the makers of the film, unlike the VHP, celebrate hybridity, for that is its main motif and those interviewed in it include Muslims, Hindus, expatriates who have settled in other countries and religious activists, many of whom come across as being educated, articulate, and aware of the history of their own ancestry, at least the Caribbean part of it. These descendents of indentured labourers are no longer

overwhelmingly a population of plantation workers. Transcending their working class origins, they have over the last century diversified into many occupations.

The escape from the relative ethnic seclusion of the plantations has meant a greater interaction with the other communities of Trinidad, particularly the Afro-Caribbean culture that evolved in more urban circumstances. A fair degree of cultural exchange followed. Their songs are a delightful blend of Bhojpuri and Calypso. They participate in Trinidad's legendary pre-Lenten Carnival. They have innovated with Afro-Caribbean musical forms, most recently the Soca, to create an Indo-Caribbean variety, appropriately called Chutney Soca.

The other half of the hybridity lies in their attachment to things Indian. They keep up with the latest Hindi film songs, this despite being largely ignorant of the language. The residues of their ancestral language and cultural base include a smattering of words for addressing elder relatives (*nana*, *nani* for the grandparents, *chacha* and *chachi* for uncle and aunt), the names of some condiments and kitchen items, and some social practices and religious rituals. That this much survived through the generations is itself remarkable. Racial distinctiveness is sought to be preserved by marrying within the community. But attempts to stick to constructs of a purely Indian way of life are not always successful. The cultural and social fusion has gone on far too long for the pure form to survive. A man called Kismet, whose name means "fate", interviewed while attending the cremation of his father, believed that his name signified "faith". Clearly the remains of the homeland are not strong enough to attempt any authentic retrieval of the past.

But this is not a constraint for Indian revivalists who intend to undo history with such meagre resources. The VHP accepts only ancient history. It cannot tolerate more recent history, particularly of the kind that Trinidad has gone through. It has disrupted religious

harmony in India and it has now come to camp among the Indians of the island. Typically, the VHP cultivates its Hinduism among Hindus who know their religion the least. Hence it has a large base among the Indian diaspora. That is where much of its funds come from, that is where many of its publicity strategies are developed.

Unfortunately for Trinidad, the VHP has found a base among some Indians seeking an authentic cultural identity and *Pure Chutney* traces both the process and its effects. One person interviewed did not know what exactly was wrong with the Muslim rulers of medieval India, just some vague notion of "many Hindus converted", of the "widespread demolition of temples" and the imposition of "a jiziya tax". The trouble comes from pretending to have a homeland and not knowing its history. In Trinidad, among families of Indian origin, it is not uncommon to have one child adhering to Islam and another to Hinduism. The film brings out starkly how this religious plurality now stands at risk with the VHP propaganda. All the stereotypes that revivalism specialises in are thrown into the ring. The Carnival is "western" and has to be shunned. The black population is of course "debauched", possibly even polluting, and must be kept at a safe distance.

While focusing on these and other aspects of the VHP's Trinidadian outing, *Pure Chutney* invites attention to what is happening in the United States where South Asians do have a radical counter-culture in cities like New York, which opposes the agendas of the VHP and similar outfits. This counter movement seems to be missing in Trinidad and Tobago. Historical and sociological reasons entailing varying patterns and moments of migration lie behind this difference. Consequently, films such as this are necessary if Trinidad is not to suffer the designs of off-shore *provocateurs*. In the meanwhile, it is hoped that the "Others" of Trinidad will get on with their job more purposefully and erase all traces of original culture and pure blood.

# Valuable social history

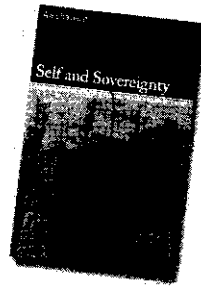
Islamic Studies as an academic discipline had in the past tended to focus largely on the West Asian region. That situation is gradually changing and quite justifiably so. In recent years, numerous scholarly works have appeared on Islam in South Asia, home to more than half of the world's Muslim population. The Pakistani scholar Ayesha Jalal is one of the most noted contemporary analysts of South Asian history and has published on a range of issues concerning India, Pakistan and Partition. She has now come out with a detailed study of the changing notions of the individual and the community among Muslims in South Asia in the last century and a half, a period of crucial significance for community identities and politics in the region.

Jalal's first book, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (1985), invited the wrath of many Pakistanis for suggesting that Jinnah did not really want a separate Pakistan, using it merely as a threat to bargain for a greater voice and role for the Muslim minority. She also argued that Partition was the outcome of this strategy gone awry. Her other books include *The State of Military Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (1990), and *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: a Comparative and Historical Perspective* (1995) in addition to books co-authored and co-edited with Professor Sugata Bose.

In *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, Jalal's main thesis is that the decline of Mughal political authority meant a radical realtering of perceptions about what exactly it meant to be a Muslim in India. In the absence of a Muslim ruler, a struggle began between the ulama, on the one hand, and modern, western-educated middle-class Muslims, on the other, both of whom put forward rival claims to the leadership of the community. The book

explores in considerable detail the emergence of this new leadership among the Muslims of South Asia in the British period.

Jalal points to the observable differences between the notions of community that prevailed in pre-British times and in the colonial period. In Mughal times and earlier, there seems to have been no notion of a



**Self and Sovereignty**  
Individual and Community in  
South Asian Islam Since 1850  
by Ayesha Jalal, Oxford University Press  
New Delhi, 2001 Pages: 630 Rs875

**reviewed by Yoginder Sikand**

pan-Indian Muslim, or, for that matter, Hindu, community. Sectarian, tribal, caste and *biraderi* (kinship) identities, as well as loyalties to one's own city or region, were of paramount significance compared to that of religion. Colonial rule brought in a complete transformation to these community identities, Jalal argues. The census, in particular, played a crucial role in this regard, enumerating Indians, for the first time in 1851, on the basis of religion. Access to the crumbs of colonial largesse was in many ways determined by the numerical strength of religion-based communities. In the process the colonial authorities participated in the making of religion as the primary identity in the public realm for many Indians. Increasing education, the growth of communications and the press, as well as the emergence of reformist, revivalist and chauvinist movements among both Hindus and Muslims, all com-

bined to crystallise sharp boundaries of identity between the two self-consciously evolving communities that do not seem to have existed in Mughal times.

Colonial legal policies also made for the drawing of sharp boundaries between Hindus and Muslims. Customary law was steadily replaced by codified law, which in many cases involved a textual understanding of Islamic or Hindu law for respective communities. Many scholars have pointed out that the judicial climate of customary law makes for greater diversity of legal principles and interpretations so that the numerous social units are governed by equally numerous legal regimes. With laws of more or less uniform application incorporating the differentials of religious communities, such diversity gave way to more rigidly constructed identities that coalesced around, among other things, the codified law. Thus, Muslims would come to have their social and cultural transactions governed by a Muslim code and so was the case with Hindus.

All this meant a completely new understanding of the "community". It also meant a new vision of the role of the individual as a member of the community. For Islamic reformist movements that emerged at this time, no longer was it enough to be born into a Muslim family to be considered a 'true' Muslim. Rather, a Muslim was one who actually strove to live up to the commandments of his or her faith, based on an understanding of its primary sources, the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet.

The loss of Muslim political sovereignty and their perceived backwardness as compared to the upper-caste Hindus made for a growing suspicion among Muslim elites of the claims of the Congress to represent all Indians. Jalal substantiates this by backing her thesis with ample quotations from sources of that period. The emergence of militantly right-wing upper-caste-led Hindu movements, such as the anti-cow slaughter agitation, the movement against Urdu, and the Arya



Samaj's "shuddhi" or conversion movement among the Muslim Rajputs, only further accentuated the Muslims' sense of alienation, forcing the issue of a separate Pakistan into the political arena.

Jalal examines the genesis of the Pakistan movement in the two key provinces on the political map of India—Punjab and the United Provinces (today's Uttar Pradesh). In both cases, she shows how a combination of the Muslim elite's interests, fear of upper caste Hindu domination, the growing strength of the militant Hindu right wing, both outside as well as within the Congress, convinced many Muslims of the need for a separate country of

their own. In her concluding chapter, Jalal raises the pertinent question of what the establishment of Pakistan has actually meant for the Muslims of South Asia. Has it indeed solved the communal tangle as was the proclaimed intention, or has it actually further compounded the problem by internationalising it? Has Pakistan really proved to be the ideal Islamic state that some of its most passionate advocates had envisioned it to be? These pertinent questions may well be the subject of yet another book.

As a social history of the Muslims of South Asia over the last century and a half, this book makes a valuable contribution. Readers are,

however, sure to find its many repetitions more than a little tedious. This voluminous tome could have made its point more concisely. Another shortcoming is that while the book does provide us valuable insights into the minds of leading Muslim writers, poets, Sufis, ulamas and political activists of the period, it tells us little, if at all, about how ordinary Muslims, the vast majority of the community, saw the world as it changed around them. These obvious limitations apart, this book is essential reading for those interested in the history of the Muslims of South Asia or, indeed, of the history of modern South Asia itself. ▲

## Dissecting the American *Desi*

During the years of slavery in America, there was a hierarchy of blackness. 'House niggers', those slaves who curried favour with their white masters, were allowed to live in the plantation home and enjoyed a higher status of slavehood than their brethren who worked the fields. That house niggers were usually fairer, after generations of 'intimacy' with their masters, further contributed to their status and to the lessening of their blackness.

It always paid to have a bit of 'cream in your coffee'.

In *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2000), Vijay Prashad explodes the myth of South Asians as a 'model minority', and argues convincingly that they perpetuate racial inequality in the US, precisely because of their willingness to play this role of house nigger. Preposterous, you say? Read this book and you may be convinced otherwise.

While sociologist W.E. Du Bois once asked America's blacks: "How does it feel to be part of a problem?", Prashad asks his fellow *desis*: "How does it feel to be part of a solution?" He points out how South Asians are a select group in the US—courted by right wing Republican politicians seeking to prove that anyone, regardless of race, can make

it in America. They are held up as the 'model minority'—successful in professions, business, and now the high tech sector.

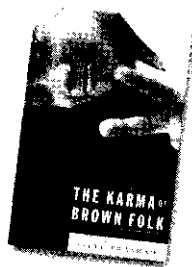
Who are South Asians held up in comparison to? Usually American Blacks, a racial minority which consistently demands affirmative action (i.e., employment equity) and social programmes, a community that continues to face a host of social issues associated with poverty and disadvantage. The unwillingness of the Republican Right to address these issues is compounded by the voices

of *desi* success, such as Dinesh D'Souza, who attribute Black America's backwardness to civilisational collapse rather than historic discrimination and marginalisation.

After the racism of British colonialism and that experienced as immigrants in America, the average South Asian is only too happy to be at long last praised by the white man. They would far more prefer to be associated with the winners (whites) than the losers (blacks). Along the way, Prashad points out, the average South Asian fails to understand and appreciate the history of racism against blacks. Thus desensitised, the *desi* is deployed by the American Right in its war against Black America.

"South Asian Americans prefer to detach themselves from the minutiae of democracy and to attach themselves solely to the task of capital accumulation. All the while, there is a sentiment that we will be praised by white supremacy and left alone to do our work at the society's margins."

It is ironic that South Asians are deployed precisely *because* they fail to engage themselves politically or,

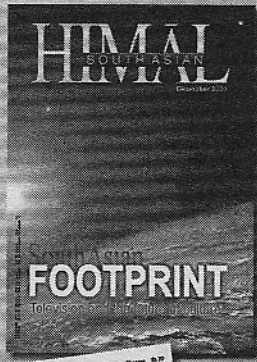


**The Karma of Brown Folk**  
by Vijay Prashad, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

reviewed by **Tarik Ali Khan**



Sly Baba



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if they do, because they engage largely with the American Right. Prashad writes: "In the United States, the bulk of the desi community seems to have moved away from active political struggles toward an accommodation with this racist polity. The bargain revolves around the sale of the desi political soul in exchange for the license to accumulate economic wealth through hard work and guile. They seem oblivious of their decline into a realm of pure commerce, one that leaves them politically powerless (disorganised and without allies). They live in America, but they are not of America."

Prashad then proceeds to rip apart the great paragons of desi success such as Deepak Chopra, M.D., current guru to the stars or what he terms a "Sly Baba". He blames both Yankee Hindutva and Chopra's mushy new age remedies for a lack

of effective political engagement on the part of desis and complicity in a racist system, pointing out that "... the Hinduism imparted in the United States was deeply conservative, since it taught those interested to 'desire *mukti* (liberation) but hug their chains', that is, to want spiritual peace, but not social justice".

In *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Prashad breaks new ground on a number of other fronts as well. He provides a thorough analysis of American Orientalism, the construction of 'spiritual' India by America's circuses, early films, religious ideologues and writers of the nineteenth century. He reveals the historic relationships built between desis and blacks, from Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi and W.E. Du Bois. And he critiques US immigration policy which, until recently, has selected mostly bred-for-success desi professionals who con-

tribute to the model minority myth.

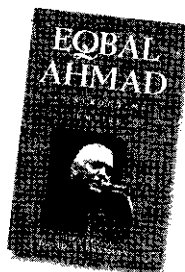
What's missing is something prescriptive at the end. One would almost expect a guide or some basic principles for social action. The ending, a 'workers unite' type of a call for colour-labour solidarity offers few real examples other than the 1998 strike by the New York Taxi Workers Association and at that point the book peters out. The author provides little else in terms of direction for the would-be American desi activist.

The chapters of *The Karma of Brown Folk* read like a series of compelling essays, each one a fresh and incisive look at the desis of the West. It is a long overdue challenge to those 'bought over' and seeking self-serving compromise with the Right as 'persons of colour'. It asks important questions about who we choose as allies and the history we choose to ignore.

# Eqbal Ahmad: Confronting Empire

Inevitably, reading Eqbal Ahmad's words evokes the presence of the person, treasured friend, trusted comrade, counsellor and teacher. The unforgettable voice, beautifully captured in these interviews, is rich with learning, understanding, and compassion. It is a voice of steely dedication, but free from dogmatism. Though "harshly secular", as he describes himself, Eqbal—like others who knew him, I cannot bring myself to refer to him more formally—is quick to praise elements of religious thought and practice that he found admirable: among them, the work of the great Islamic religious scholars of India who opposed partition and the idea of nationalism, which they regarded as an anti-Islamic ideology that "proceeds to create boundaries where Islam is a faith without boundaries".

For Eqbal, "the perils of nationalism" compare with the curse of religious fanaticism, taking on a still more virulent form when the pathologies merge in the post-colonial state—a configuration that is a



## Eqbal Ahmad: Confronting Empire

Interviews with David Barsamian. Foreword by Edward W. Said. Published by Pluto Press, 345 Archway Road, London. ISBN 0-7453-1713-8. 177pp Rs495

**reviewed by Noam Chomsky**

harsh image of what came before, he argues. The deep failure of the anti-imperialist movements, Eqbal continues, was to embrace the western ideology of nationalism, forgetting the warnings of those who were most revered: Rabindranath Tagore, for one. There is tragic irony in the fact that "Tagore, an anti-nationalist, ended up providing the national anthem to two countries of South

Asia", which have suffered bitterly for rejecting his lessons. Eqbal sees comparable irony in the depiction of Muhammad Iqbal as the father of Pakistani nationalism, quoting his words that, "In the whole world there is no country better than our India": the only national anthem he wrote "that could have been adopted would have been India's". Adapting Iqbal's image, Jinnah "suggests a vision of Pakistan as having open borders with India, at peace with all its neighbours".

The twin curse of nationalism and religious fanaticism has trapped the national movements in a deadly embrace, Eqbal warns, marching towards self-destruction under the leadership of "mediaeval militaristic minds" that are "no more modern than the Clintons and the Bushes".

Eqbal quotes Franz Fanon, with whom he worked closely, on *The pitfalls of national consciousness*. That is the title Fanon gave to his "enlightening last thoughts", which Eqbal strongly endorses. Fanon "saw with

clarity the pitfalls of nationalism, the kind of structure it will produce, the dependencies that develop, the post-colonial state that will be nothing more than a new instrument of imperial domination", with "the emergence of a collaborative elite" who will be "the golden boys of airlines, of the jets". Eqbal himself saw the post-colonial state as "a bad version of the colonial one", with the same structure of "a centralised power, a paternalistic bureaucracy, and an alliance of the military and landed notables". The new elite are the inheritors of the old: the propertied classes, the intelligentsia, the bourgeoisie, "as heartless in its lack of concern for the poor, in some ways even more so, as the colonial state".

"They are building a system of apartheid in which the poor are separated from the rich and the rich are connected to the west, to the metropolis." There is no "recolonisation" because there was no true decolonisation. Production-consumption structures have barely changed, though the dependency relations have become more diversified. In the BBC documentary that Eqbal directed on South Asia as seen through his own eyes and experience, he includes a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, "who was so prescient in catching the mood of disillusionment with the decolonised post-colonial states".

There are few illustrations more painful than the Arab world, which the US government recognised 60 years ago to be "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history". But the extraordinary wealth, Eqbal observes, "has been separated from their people", flowing to the west through the medium of a post-colonial elite that the British rulers, in their day in the sun, derided as an "Arab facade" behind which the British would exert real power.

The post-war history of west Asia spells out these principles with grim exactitude. Unless they find a way to take their fate in their hands, the 200 million people who have been separated from their wealth face "autogenocide" of unimagin-

able proportions when that wealth is exhausted, leaving no viable societies. The picture extends to a good part of the world. In the internal record of US post-war planning, we read that Africa was offered to Europe to be "exploited" for its own reconstruction. The former imperial powers have laboured to ensure that the structures of power and exploitation remain largely in place, bequeathing a legacy of shame and horror.

In US domains, leading scholars recognise frankly that Washington's "democracy enhancement" programmes were designed "as a means of relieving pressure for more radical change, but inevitably sought only limited, top-down forms of democratic change that did not risk upsetting the traditional structures of power with which the United States has long been allied" (Thomas Carothers, surveying Reaganite policies in which he participated). The misery of the region reflects those imperial choices in close detail. There are distinctions. Among the most dramatic are two potentially rich regions, East Asia and Latin America. Scholarly studies reveal that patterns of consumption and elite "status competition" are quite different: in Latin America, "foreign-produced luxury goods for western-oriented elites contrasted with the home-grown status goods orientation of Asian societies serviced by larger and more decentralised skill craft sectors"; Asia concentrated on "building up the physical and human capital base prior to turning to consumer durable production".

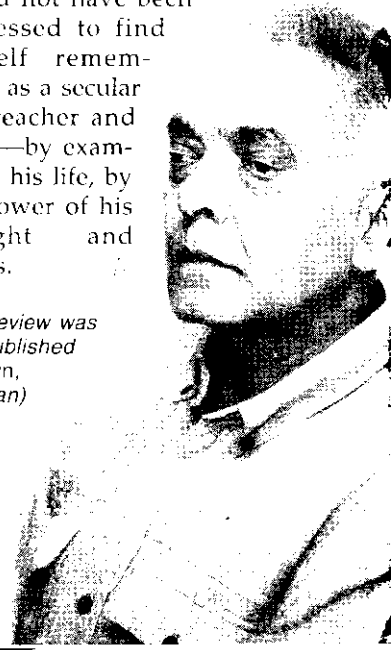
In Latin America, where the rich are exempt from responsibility, the problem is not "populism", a prominent Brazilian economist points out, but "subjection of the state to the rich". East Asia differs sharply. The difference of outcomes was enhanced during the past quarter-century of "globalisation". Reviewing the decade of "liberalisation", the director of the Economic Commission for Latin America observes ruefully that Latin America is the region where the "economic reforms have gone the farthest" and growth

rates sharply declined, while the fastest growth was recorded in East Asia, which deviated most sharply from the western-dictated rules.

Eqbal's review of the contemporary world and its origins avoids no suffering or dangers, but is nevertheless suffused with his unshakable optimism. Interlaced with his harsh critique of developments in Pakistan is his admiration for the achievements of the feminist movements and progressive NGOs, and of the press, "probably the liveliest in the third world". The last years of his life were devoted to the founding of the Khaldunia university, which he hoped would "produce a modern, progressive, secular, educated class of people who know the traditions and take the best of it". They would, he hoped, join with activists working locally to construct "alternatives that empower people and make alternative plans for economic growth", constructing a functioning democracy from below that will not simply caricature the word.

Eqbal describes with warmth and feeling the Sufi tradition that he remembers from his childhood in a village in Bihar, where Sufi worship united Hindus and Muslims. Simple and unpretentious, "they preached by example", living "by service and by setting an example of treating people equally without discrimination". They appealed to the most oppressed, offering "social mobility, as well as dignity and quality to the poor". I think Eqbal would not have been distressed to find himself remembered as a secular Sufi teacher and guide—by example in his life, by the power of his thought and words.

(This review was first published in Dawn, Pakistan)



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# The Wet Embrace

Clouds roll overhead. At the time of writing, the monsoon, having made its turnaround northeastwards over Bangla country, is extended as far as western Nepal. Before long, it will have taken in the two Punjabs and Sindhs, completing the conquest of the Subcontinent.

The respite from the sun and heat is real, and the hassle of floods is yet some time away.

People of South Asia love the arrival of the Monsoon/Barkha/Barsaat/Sawan/Srawan.

Someone go tell the television weather wo/men of CNN and the BBC that. We LOVE clouds down here. We do not care that there is that "bit of good weather" coming our way if it means a "patch of sunshine". You can move that patch over to your part of the world, and we ask you not to transport your cultural weatherwise predisposition to us 1.4 billion over here.

Floods, you say? You mean we should hate the rains because they bring floods? And landslides? The causality is irrelevant, actually, or, in other words, the good and the bad on this score are more than balanced out. The rains are lifegiving, floods enrich the topsoil, landslides have always happened in their 'dynamic' mountains. Whatever is extra in

Whether it is the thundering cumuli towering over the plains, or the soft touch of the fog on the mosses of the cloud forest of the Himalayan midhills, this is what helps makes us, us.



modern times is manmade—embankments, which raise the flood level all over, badly aligned roads, and so on. So don't blame the water from the sky.

The monsoon evolved with the geology of the land, over the hundreds of million years that it took the Himalaya to be born at the union of the Asian and

Indian plates. In a yearly love duet that is as old as the continents, the courtship starts with distanced eye-contact while the moisture is still brewing down in the Sea of Arabia. Cutting northeasterly across peninsular India, the Monsoon makes as if to head across to the Hengduan mountains of southern China. Over Cuwahati, it decides to go with the Himalaya instead, and, aided by the spin of the earth, abruptly changes course and heads east. This is when the embrace of the Monsoon over South Asia is complete.

This is when the clouds gather and water pours down in subcontinental ecstasy. Children frolick, the raindrops pattern the ponds in the plains, as captured by Satyajit Ray in *Pather Panchali*. The hills, meanwhile, are alive with the sound of water, water which comes down in a variety of onomatopaeic expressions caught splendidly in the Nepali language—from the *simsim* of light rain to the *gandyangundung* of a gorged river.

The Monsoon rains evolved with geology, but humans evolved with the rains. The Monsoon is part of being South Asian, this yearly spell that has us reaching up to meet the drops on our face. The green of paddies and darkness of the luscious vegetation are burned into the South Asian's psyche. The clouds permeate our minds.

Sure we like sun, but only because it creates clouds. Whether it is the thundering cumuli towering over the plains, or the soft touch of the fog on the mosses of the cloud forest of the Himalayan midhills, this is what helps makes us, us.

*Kamakhya Dixit*



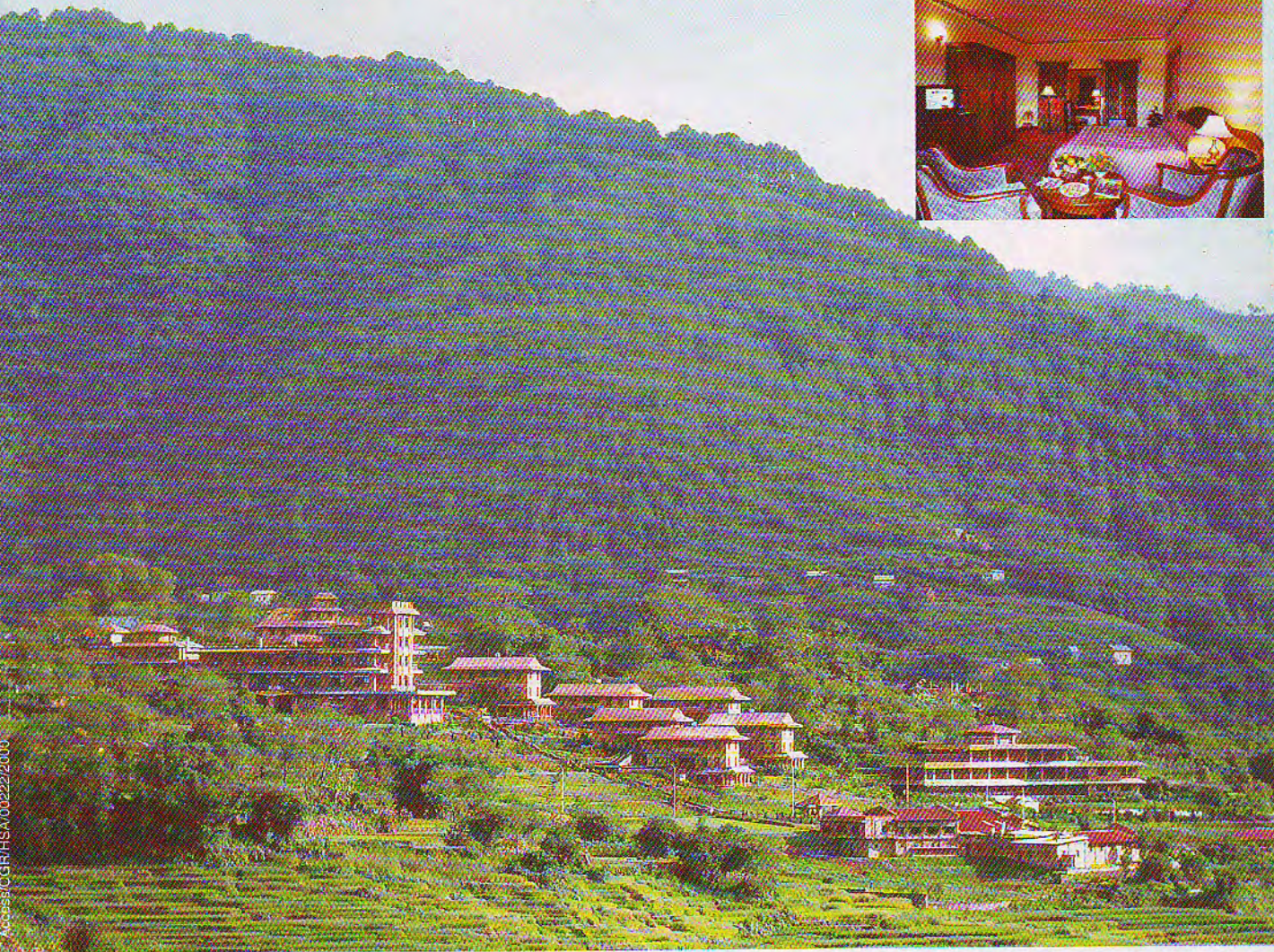
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