February 2004

HIMAL

SOUTHASIAN

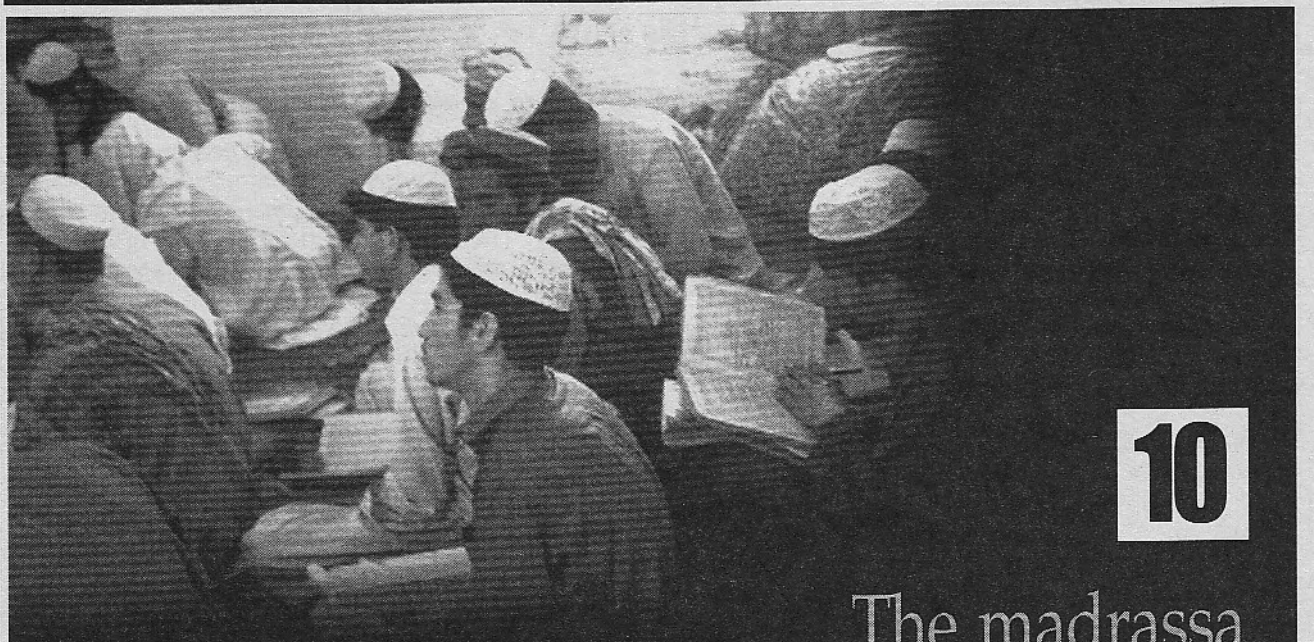
Yes, in our backyard
p.36

The Madrassa and the State of Pakistan

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

HIMAL SOUTHASIAN

Vol 17 No 2 February 2004



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The madrassa

Religion, poverty and the potential for violence in Pakistan

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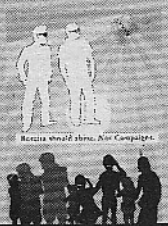

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somehow ratios never shine ...

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

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

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

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subscription rates

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India	INR 580	INR 1125
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Rest of S. Asia	USD 18	USD 34
Hong Kong/ Brunei/Gulf	USD 22	USD 42
Elsewhere	USD 40	USD 75

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India	Central News Agency (P) Ltd., 4E/15 Jhandewalan Ext, New Delhi 110001. *Tel:* +91-11-3670532, 3670534, 3670536. *Fax:* +91-11-3626036 *Email:* subs@cna-india.com or sanjeev@cna-india.com
Maldives	Asrafee Book Shop, 1/44 Chandhanee Magu, P.O.Box. 2053, Male. *Tel: +960-32-3424*
Nepal	Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd. GPO Box: 7251, Kathmandu, *Tel: +977-1-5543333-36*
Pakistan	Ajmal Kamal, City Press, 316 Madina City Mall, Abdullah Haroon Road, Saddar, Karachi 74400 Ph. +92-21-5650623/5213916, email: cp@citypress.cc
Sri Lanka	Lake House Book Shop, 100, Sir Chittampalam, Gardiner Mawatha, Colombo-2. *Tel: +94-1-432105/ 430581/430582*

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FOREIGN FRIENDS AND THE ISLANDERS

From left to right: Adele, Anton Balasingham, Erik Solheim, Milinda Moragoda, Vidar Helgesen, Jon Westborg and Bernard Goonetilleke in an August 2002 meeting in Oslo.

AMONG THE major issues to be canvassed at the Sri Lankan general elections in April 2004 will be the role of the international community. There is an influential section in the country that believes that Sri Lanka's lifeline to peace and development lies through the international community. The question is whether a majority of people would agree with it. Certainly the past two years have seen an increase in the presence of international actors in Sri Lankan affairs, ranging from the Norwegians in the peace process to international NGOs in the reconstruction of the North-East.

The United National Party (UNP, led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe) campaigners are likely to emphasise the close ties they were able to forge with the international community, and in particular with aid-giving countries and multilateral donor agencies. Wickremesinghe's ability to obtain two face-to-face meetings with President George Bush was a remarkable feat considering the relative unimportance of Sri Lanka in the past in the US global scheme. The pledge of USD 4.5 billion at the Tokyo donor conference last year and Japan's singular contribution towards this fund have made the rapid economic development of Sri Lanka a viable proposition. There has been a corresponding negative side as well to the UNP's close association with the international community. The stalling of the peace process between the government and LTTE that took place in April 2003 can be attributed at least partly to this. The LTTE justified its suspension of participation in the peace process by accusing the government of trying to establish an international safety net. The LTTE alleged that such a strengthening of the government's position internationally was to the detriment of Tamil rights, as no government that felt itself strong would be fair to the Tamils.

At the same time, opposition parties have been critical of the UNP government's acquiescence in the policies followed by the United States. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's speech at the United Nations where he justified the US war on Iraq reflected the price that the government was willing to pay for its international safety net. While recognising the importance of having the goodwill of the international community, few Sri Lankans would admit they were willing to pay such a price in terms of national dignity for the support of the international community. Leaders of the opposition parties have taken the stance that Sri Lanka virtually became a colony of the international community under the UNP government. The government's inability to defend the interests of the third world at the World Trade Organisation conference in Cancun in August 2003, and its policy of agreeing to conditionalities placed on aid to Sri Lanka by the donor agencies, are some of the instances given to back this claim. In the past two years the government appeared keener to satisfy the requirements of international donors rather than to show empathy for the plight of Sri Lanka's poorer population.

> There has been a negative side as well to the UNP's close association with the international community.

Opposing view

The chief coalition partner of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which is led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, is the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which represents the extreme end of rejection of all that is foreign. During the 1988-89 period they considered the Indian government, which had sent in its army to implement the Indo-Lanka peace accord, as its enemy second only to the then Sri Lankan government. They banned the sale of Indian goods in shops and even made grocers change the name of Bombay onions to 'Big' onions. In the present period, the JVP appears to have mended its fences with

The JVP marching for 'pre-1505' culture.

India to a great extent and speaks positively of its leadership. Opposing the unfettered open market and foreign entry into the domestic market, JVP spokespersons have quoted Indian leaders with admiration as saying that what we need to import are micro chips but not potato chips. They have rejected any close association with the international community, especially the component that is Western led. China's success in negotiating firmly with the World Bank and IMF is compared to Sri Lanka's more appeasing manner, although the contrast between the bargaining power of China's one billion strong population and Sri Lanka's 18 million is not adequately appreciated.

The JVP's vision appears to lie in recreating in Sri Lanka a society that is free from the taint of Western influence. This is the indication from its spokesperson Wimal Weerawansa's expressed desire to take the country back to its pre-1505 culture and society. The significance of the year 1505 is that it brought with it a Portuguese naval fleet to Sri Lankan shores. In the centuries that followed came other colonising powers, the Dutch and the British, bringing with them the Christian religion. This type of JVP rhetoric is providing the social and emotional background for the series of militant attacks against Christian communities across the country. On the other hand, there appears to be a certain inconsistency within the LTTE hierarchy about the proper behaviour that should flow from its anti-Western attitude. The JVP's supreme leader Somawansa Amarasinghe has spent the last decade in London, where he has educated his family who also presumably live there. If the JVP leader feared for his life in Sri Lanka after the abortive and bloody JVP insurrection and sought refuge abroad it is understandable. But it would make the JVP hierarchy less hypocritical if their leader had sought asylum in a non-Western country such as India or even Myanmar.

The JVP and sections of the SLFP will appeal to the voters on the basis of nationalism and anti-foreign sentiment

Anti-peace activism

The JVP is also taking the position that the Norwegian-facilitated ceasefire agreement is detrimental to the country's national interests. During the past two years of ceasefire the JVP organised several demonstrations, rallies and processions against the ceasefire agreement in general and the Norwegian facilitators in particular. Their demonstrations frequently ended in front of the Norwegian embassy. But while the JVP was engaging in its anti-peace activism, public opinion polls showed that the ceasefire agreement was gaining in public support for having brought peace to the lives of people. The JVP's election campaign at present takes the position that the ceasefire agreement is a traitorous document that needs to be rejected. However, instead of doing away with the ceasefire agreement and getting back to war, the JVP asserts that it will negotiate a new ceasefire agreement with the LTTE. Such a move would be very difficult to implement, and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has cautioned against it. As the leader whose government negotiated with the LTTE, his view needs to be heard. In the event of any effort to negotiate a new ceasefire agreement with the LTTE, it is very likely that the LTTE will stick to the gains it has already obtained and seek further gains. If that fails, there may be no further ceasefire agreement.

While the JVP and sections of the SLFP will appeal to the voters on the basis of nationalism and anti-foreign sentiment, it is likely that President Chandrika Kumaratunga herself will adopt a conciliatory posture that is more in keeping with her position as the Sri Lankan head of state. The president has considerable achievements in the field of international relations. It was during her period of governance that the LTTE lost its advantage in the international arena. It was she who invited the Norwegian government to facilitate the resolution of the Sri Lankan conflict, and who obtained the consent of India for this external intervention. In fact the SLFP-JVP alliance's attack on the UNP's proximity to

the international community is likely to be balanced by the alliance's perceived closeness to India. The hostility to the LTTE that is presumed to drive Indian foreign policy will be used by the SLFP-JVP alliance to reassure the voters that they will be able to secure Sri Lanka's most vital security interests with Indian assistance. President Kumaratunga's takeover of the charge of ushering the prospective Indo Lanka Defence Agreement will reinforce the widely prevalent belief that the Indian government has a special affection for the president and her party.

On the other hand, there are persistent reports that India cautioned the president against going in for a general election at this time. By dissolving Parliament, even when the government enjoyed a stable majority and had four more years to go, the president acted to create an unnecessary problem. There is a very real prospect of a hung Parliament in which neither major party can achieve a majority by itself. This would create new problems, such as dependency on extremist forces, whether they be JVP or LTTE-backed parliamentarians. The enhanced legitimacy such elections would confer upon the LTTE would also make the Indian strategy of containing the LTTE's international influence especially on Tamil Nadu,a more difficult one. The international community that has stopped supporting militant organisations following the 'war against terrorism' would feel much more empathy for the LTTE as an organisation that has performed well at the elections, even if they are not quite free and fair.

It would be advisable for Sri Lankans to keep in mind the old adage that countries do not have permanent friends, they have only permanent interests. The international community has been unanimous in assisting Sri Lanka because it is a relatively rare example of a country that is on the road to solving a long-standing conflict. The international community wants Sri Lanka to be a country that solves its problems and does not cause them problems by spilling its terrorism and refugees abroad as in the past. In other words, the assistance that Sri Lanka will get from the international community is not conditioned upon which political party governs the country. Rather, it is conditional upon whether the political party that forms the government is solving the country's problems without causing problems to others. If a new government were to rashly decide to scrap the ceasefire agreement and find itself going back to war, it will be creating new problems of war, terrorism and refugees. The international community, which includes India, will not be supportive of a government that 'creates' major problems when there was no rational need to do so.

–Jehan Perera

NUKES, SOVEREIGNTY, AND EMPIRE

THERE HAS been an incredible outpouring of public and private emotion in Pakistan over the "detention" of the country's most prominent nuclear scientists, including the best-known among them Abdul Qadeer Khan, the 'father' of Pakistan's A-bomb. In a country where the mainstream political discourse has degenerated to nothingness, it is ironic that the popularly advertised "leaking" of nuclear secrets to countries on the US State Department's most-hated list should incite such nationalistic fervour and impassioned accusations against the government.

AQ Khan.

In theory, the furore (which the sensationalist Urdu press has done its best to create) was understandable. The scientists were detained largely at the behest of the United States, and as with any other such "request" made in recent times, the authorities have paid little attention to even a potentially perceived need to make the initiative contingent on public, or at the very least, parliamentary approval. As a result, it has been easy for anyone and everyone to launch frontal attacks on the government. Needless to say, over the past four years there is an increasing perception in Pakistan that the government has time and again sacrificed the needs and aspirations of the Pakistani people on the altar of US interests.

> Ultimately, the mainstream political parties of Pakistan are united in the fact that none of them is genuinely willing to take on the establishment

But in practice, the whole affair

Martyrs to the opposition's ideas of injustice.

reflected the manner in which Pakistan's prominent political entities operate - inciting nationalist sentiment and exploiting long-standing and regressive state ideologies, and reinforcing such ideas in the popular consciousness even while the real concerns of people remain completely marginal and irrelevant to the mainstream discourse. The nuclear tests in 1998 were followed by much celebration and rejoicing in the country, no thanks to the 50 years of indoctrination that have led most Pakistanis to accept that the perceived threat of Indian domination mandates an extravagant military establishment, and logically, this establishment's monopoly over fundamental decision-making.

The hype was short-lived, because the acute economic squeeze subsequently faced by ordinary Pakistanis highlighted the direct consequence of parochial nationalism in an unforgiving geo-political set-up. As such, since the October 1999 coup that brought General Pervez Musharraf to power, much of the military's sacred aura has been demystified, particularly after 9/11 and the resulting shifts in foreign policy that the military regime was forced to make under American pressure. In fact, the reason for the ordinary Pakistani directing his/her frustration and anger towards the military lies with the simultaneous increases in poverty and insecurity that have come about over the past four years. The economic shocks are a direct result of the military willingly accelerating the processes of corporatisation and large-scale liberalisation that has been imposed upon the country in varying degrees by the international donor community for over two decades. More accurately, it is the deteriorating economic conditions for the majority of working Pakistanis coupled with the wild and ostentatious living of the military high-command and its groupies that has fomented anger and frustration.

The reason for the ordinary Pakistani directing frustration and anger towards the military lies with the simultaneous increases in poverty and insecurity over the past four years

But the impotence of the opposition parties to the military in this country has meant that there has been no meaningful articulation of this frustration and anger, and so the military continues to do as it pleases, or at the very least, do as George W Bush pleases. Is it any wonder, then, that the opposition raises a hue and cry about virtual non-issues such as the 'detention' of government scientists. Ostensibly, the logic is that this is the kind of emotive issue that can generate much popular support and thus severely embarrass the government. And, evidently, the economic hardships of the people do not qualify as emotive and serious political issues in the country. In any case, it is now much harder for either the establishment or the opposition to intoxicate ordinary people with reference to old and reactionary nationalisms, albeit if and when mass information manipulation is necessary the job can still be done.

The Fall Guy

As it turns out, the press has been fed a story making AQ Khan the fall guy for the probably very deliberate and well-directed sharing of nuclear technologies. He has been relieved as special advisor to the president, which gave him powers of a federal minister. But the attempt to make the issue a national outrage when the opposition has itself been privy to what happens within the halls of power on matters nuclear, is even more baffling. No 'leak' of nuclear secrets to an outsider would never have been possible without the involvement of persons from the military establishment. This is equally true of the recent suicide attacks on General Pervez Musharraf. Also, regardless of how much effort is expended to convince people otherwise, there is no great prestige or pride associated with being a nuclear "power", and arguably this is a realisation dawning on many Pakistanis. If nuclearisation simply allows them to pretend that they are

more important and secure than they really are, then it is a deception that the vast majority of Pakistanis can do without.

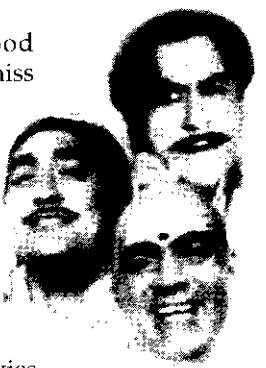
If the opposition were to be truly interested in reshaping the political culture in a meaningful way, it would perhaps point out that this enforced action on the part of the government is only one of many enforced actions. The opposition would point out that the Pakistani state has more or less surrendered sovereignty over even the most basic policy decisions, and acts very much like a 'satellite' state of the United States. There would be uproar over the heart-stopping hypocrisy of the United States and the other big nuclear powers. It would be highlighted that the international donor community has run the economy ragged, propagating macroeconomic recovery while resources and markets are plundered by multinational capital. The opposition would stand with the people whether the sun shines or it rains, and particularly at a time when the state has been unforgiving in its corporatisation and militarisation agenda.

But, ultimately, the mainstream political parties of Pakistan are united in the fact that none of them is genuinely willing to take on the establishment, and that, when push comes to shove, they are the backbone of a national elite that has far too much to lose from any change that is fundamental. In particular, how and why would parties like the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) make noises about the imperial designs of President Bush when they themselves are courting him to approve their participation in the next sham government that comes to power in Pakistan? Today, the forced resignation of AQ Khan is headline news. Tomorrow, it will be something else. But rest assured that there is little substance in any of these political games, at least as far as mainstream politics goes.

The over-extended military establishment had been exposed once before for being anti-people, and that was after the 1971 tragedy and dismemberment of the country. A great opportunity was wasted by then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, when he could have confined the military permanently to the barracks. The members of Pakistan's political elite now need to ask themselves the following question: will they forever be fighting for the scraps that the military tantalisingly dangles in front of them from time to time? More importantly, those who are not part of the state and political elite, constantly pining for a different Pakistan, need to ask how long this game is to be allowed to go on. How long are they to pretend that nuclear capability (or lack thereof) is a source of strength? And when the next artificial crisis is presented to the public, will questions be asked that need to be asked?

–Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

BOLLYWOOD'S CARICATURES

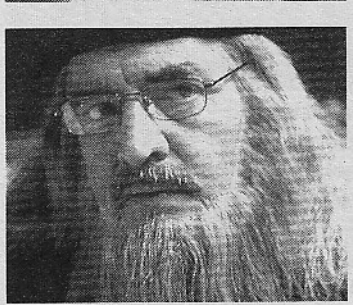


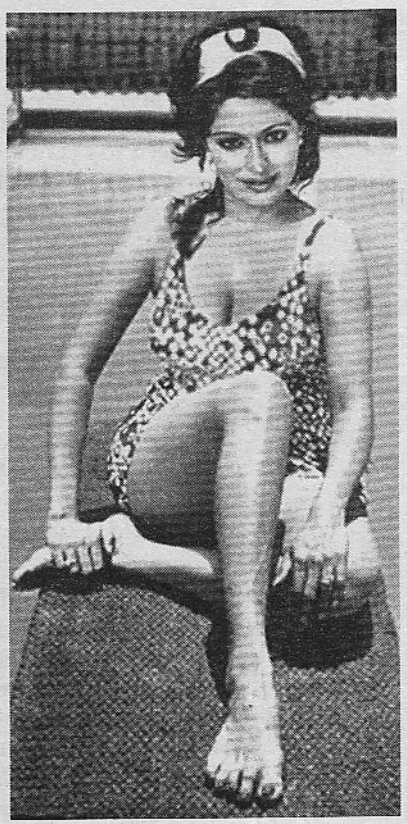
SOME INDIANS consider Bollywood movies as their staple diet; many may miss a meal, but not a new release on Friday. The three hours of solace in the dark and often dingy cinema halls for many is more soothing than visiting a mosque, temple or a church. Truly Bollywood movies are the lifeline for many Indians, their recouping pill to help them grapple with the harsh realities that surround.

However, those who make these movies do not care about the sensibilities of those who go to see them. On-screen characterisation of some real-life characters are so depressing, that instead of being entertained some really feel hurt when they identify with those characters. Hindi movies still have not broken from their clichéd presentations and continue to do so despite all round advancement in the filmmaking techniques.

Take for instance the depiction of south Indians particularly the Tamilians in Hindi cinema. Their peculiar mode of dressing, eating, talking, all is an object of ridicule in Bollywood. It is not that those who make the movies are unaware of the sensibilities of the Tamils; all the more galling then that they do not tone down the characterisation of south Indians in Hindi cinema. The trend began back when the comedian Mehmood played a 'madrasi' in the movie *Padosan* in the 1960s. The only rationale behind such deliberate portrayals would seem to be to highlight the superiority of north Indians vis-à-vis the southerners. Rarely has the Hindi cinema

> Rarely has the Hindi cinema depicted north and east or north and west divides, the way it does between north and south





depicted north and east or north and west divides, the way it does between north and south.

The coloured Muslim

The other set of clichéd characters of cinema are the Muslims, whose identity is paramount in Hindi cinema but remains locked in certain stereotypes. Muslim men wear Aligarh cut *sherwani*, chewing paan, and women dress in heavy *ghararas*. The men are portrayed either as *hakims*, poet or tailors. Whenever such characters appear on screen, audiences know it is time for a bout of *qawaali*. More often than not Muslims are painted in negative shades. Smugglers are shown dressed in the traditional Arab robe, carrying a briefcase, making lewd gestures at the dancers at the villain's wine and dance party. Then, Bollywood heroes are often shown bashing local rowdies dressed in *lungi* and sleeveless singlet, an image that somehow gets mixed up with characters that live in the old Muslim localities in many north Indian towns. The most common cliché of Bollywood is the characterisation of nautch girls, who often have Muslim names.

The villain in these recent films caricatures 'bin Laden' and looks like a typical Muslim priest holding a rosary in hand, counting beads, and spitting fire against India.

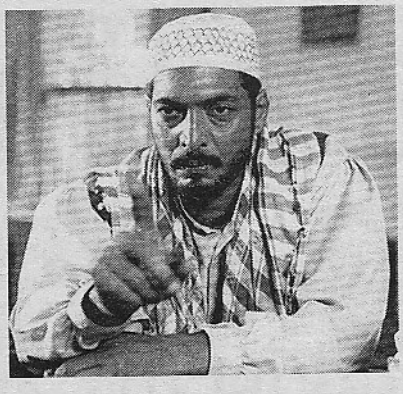
The political agenda have started colouring Muslim characters on the Hindi screen. Most recently, in good-versus-evil plots, Kashmir, Pakistan and the Taliban all have become a symbol of 'evil' in Hindi cinema. Kashmiri militants are shown as gun-toting bearded guys wearing skullcaps and fighting the Indian security forces. The Kashmiri militant linkage moves further in a linear direction to identify with Pakistan and Taliban. Characters dressed up in Afghan outfits with scarve over the shoulder are shown mouthing some Arabic words while scheming to launch *jehad* against India.

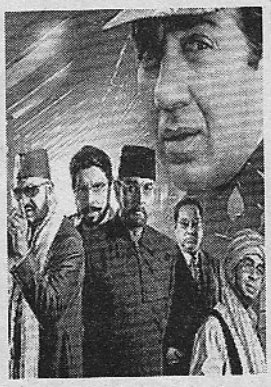
The villain in these recent films caricatures 'bin Laden' and looks like a typical Muslim priest holding a rosary in hand, counting beads, and spitting fire against India. Audiences feel pained when the heroine somehow lands in the clutches of the Talibs and gets thrilled when she escapes from their dragnet. The painting of the Taliban, Pakistanis and Kashmiris are all done with the same brush. Anti-Pakistan movies have been a recent favourite of Bollywood directors who lack the skills and creativity not to follow the crowd. In order to sell patriotism, Pakistan is depicted as the monster in whose defeat rests Indian national pride. These anti-Pakistan movies end up conveying that all Muslims living in India are either black sheep or Pakistani agents.

There almost seems to be a design in such cinematic characterisation to erode the commonalities, which Hindus and Muslims have synthesized living side by side for centuries in India. It was not always this way. Who can forget the powerful portrayal as the compassionate Pathan by Balraj Sahni, in the Bimal Roy classic of the early 60s *Kabuliwala*; or AK Hangal playing a Muslim priest in the 1975 epic *Sholay*. But even an innovative director like Mani Ratnam was unable break the cliché in depicting a traditional Muslim girl eloping with a Hindu boy in *Bombay* (1994).

Mona darling

The treatment of Christians in Hindi cinema again leaves one pondering. In fact, there was a protest in the early 1970s from the Anglo-Indian Christian community when the film *Julie* was released, typecasting the leading lady as a Christian protagonist.





Hindi movies often present 'loose', 'immoral' female characters with Christian names. Vamps are often shown wearing a cross, working as barmaids or cabaret dancers. Helen, the sizzling dancer of yesteryears had Christian names in most of her movies. So did Faryal, Kalpana Iyer and Bindu who all played negative roles. They were all Mona, Rosy or Lily in the movies. These names gained notoriety because 'Mona darling' or 'Lily don't be silly' were often villain Ajit's catch phrase in his movies as were the names of his henchmen, Robert and Peter. Christian names seem now to have outlived their purpose, as new oomph girls have taken over their role as the 'other lady' and have merged it with the central female character. In the first half of the movie today's heroines are attired in the skimpiest of dresses, once reserved for vamps. But in the second half they dress like a typical Indian lady as it becomes time for them to get married and live happily thereafter. The Christian vamp has become redundant as the Hindu girl doubles as vamp and heroine.

The Sikhs too are treated with a slant. They are either shown as dim-witted or possessing hyper-testosterone levels. The Sikh image has come to be synchronised with either the one who is protecting the country's borders or is a truck driver. The moment the Sikh character appears on screen audiences know it is time for a 'bhangra' dance number. The irony is that even though there is much influence of Punjabi culture on Hindi cinema, there are hardly any nuances in the characterisation of the Sikhs.

Since Bollywood is based in Mumbai where the Parsi community is concentrated, the directors are fond of their characterisation. But again Parsis are shown as absent-minded lost people who speak Hindi with an accent and provide entertainment to the audiences. In most movies, Parsis are shown riding a vintage car with their sizeable family; the vehicle breaks down in the middle of the road, leading to verbal duels with other commuters and the films end up depicting all Parsis as buffoons.

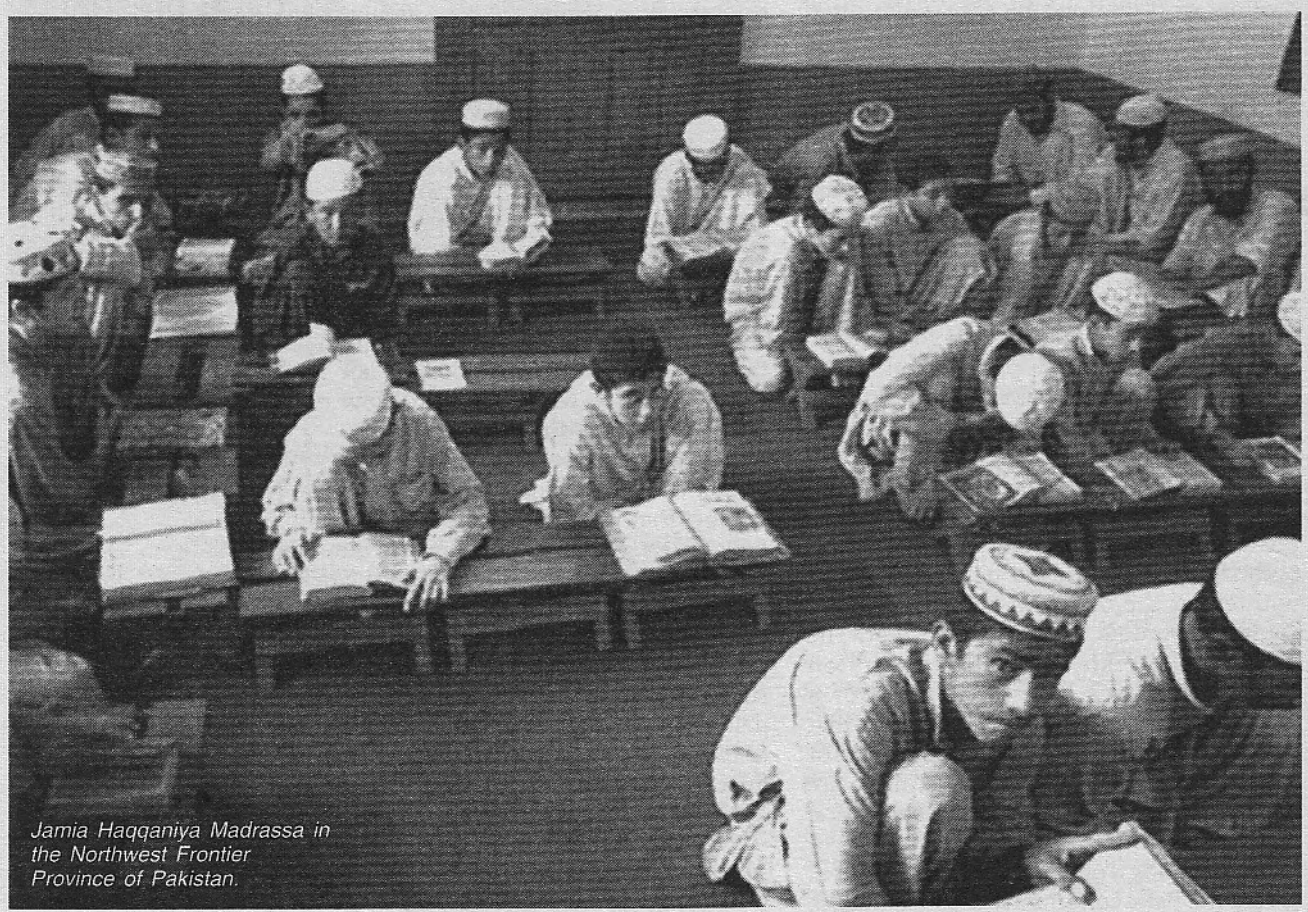
Bollywood finds fun in ridiculing a community to make others laugh. The depiction of the south Indian as licking their palm while eating, or saying "ayyo amma" in a particular accent does not put any Tamilian in splits. Similarly, the portrayal of buxom beauties, wearing a cross and saying "yes boss" does not please people belonging to the Christian faith. Muslims sentiments are hurt when they are regularly shown as ruffians, dancing girls, smugglers or terrorists. Mere tokenism of characters on some occasions - sporting a beard and a cap, a frail good-natured tramp that lives in penury next door - is not enough of a sop to placate. Somehow Bollywood still steers shy of portraying the real life Shahrukh, Aamir or Saif on screen. One cannot dispute the fact that there has to be the 'bad' guy and the 'good' guy in a movie but why this invincible typecasting? If Hindi cinema is meant to be wholesome entertainment then it has to break away from its clichéd presentations. The day Shahrukh Khan as Abdul or Aamir and not as 'Raj' or 'Vijay' delivers a blockbuster like *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jaenge*, Bollywood will have woken up to the times. △

–Syed Ali Mujtaba

Hindi movies often present 'loose', 'immoral' female characters with Christian names. Lately, the Christian vamp has become redundant as the Hindu girl doubles as vamp and heroine

The Madrassa and the

Religion, poverty and the potential for violence in Pakistan.



Jamia Haqqaniya Madrassa in the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan.

The madrassas of Pakistan are said to be the breeding ground for much of South and Central Asian militancy, but for the accusations made there is precious little known about these Islamic seminaries and their students. While conceding the radical bent among the madrassas of Pakistan, and the sharp increase in their numbers, a Islamabad scholar dissects the cause behind these phenomena and locates it – poverty.

by ***Tariq Rahman***

State of Pakistan

Madrassas have come to be associated with the erstwhile Taliban rulers of Afghanistan, some of whom were students of these institutions. These Islamic seminaries have also been much in the news for sectarian killings and supporting militancy in Kashmir. They are considered the breeding ground of the *jehadi* culture—a term used for Islamic militancy in the English-language press of Pakistan.

There was not much writing on the madrassas in Pakistan before the events of 9/11. JD Kraan, writing for the Christian Study Centre, had provided a brief introduction in 1984 and in 1988, AH Nayyar, an academic, had argued that sectarian violence was traceable to madrassa education. Both had used only secondary sources. Later, the present writer wrote a book on language-teaching in the madrassas (*Language, Ideology and Power: Language-Learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*, OUP, Karachi 2002), which also contained a survey of the opinions of madrassa students on Kashmir, the implementation of the *Sharia*, equal rights for religious minorities and women, freedom of the media, democracy, and so on. The seminal work on the *ulema*, and also the madrassas in which they are trained, is by Qasim Zaman. He provides an excellent review of how the traditional ulema can be differentiated from the Islamists who react to modernity by attempting to go back to fundamentalist, and essentially political, interpretations of Islam.

The ulema or the Islamists in Pakistan have been writing, generally in Urdu, in defence of the madrassas which the state sought to modernise and secularise. Two recent books, a survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (patronised by the revivalist, Islamist, Jamat-i-Islami) of the madrassas and a longer book by Saleem Mansur Khalid, are useful because they contain much recent data. Otherwise the Pakistani ulema's work is polemical and tendentious. They feel themselves besieged increasingly by Western and Pakistani secular critics and feel that they should defend their position from the inside rather than wait for sympathetic outsiders to do it for them (as done by Yoginder Sikand in *Himal Southasian* in 2001, "The Indian State and the Madrassa").

Type and number of madrassas

There is hardly any credible information on the unregistered madrassas. However, those which are registered are controlled by their own central organisations or boards. They determine the syllabi, collect registration fees and examination fees. They send examination papers, in Urdu and Arabic, to the madrassas where pupils sit for examinations and declare results.

Central Boards of Madrassas in Pakistan

Name	Sub-Sect	Place	Established
Wafaq ul Madaris	Deobandi	Multan	1959
Tanzim ul Madaris	Barelvi	Lahore	1960
Wafaq ul Madaris (Shia) Pakistan	Shia	Lahore	1959
Rabta-tul-Madaris-al-Islamia	Jamat-i-Islami	Lahore	1983
Wafq-ul-Madaris-al-Salafia	Ahl-i-Hadith	Faislabad	1955

At independence there were 245, or even fewer, madrassas in Pakistan. In April 2002, Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi, the Minister of Religious Affairs, put the figure at 10,000, with 1.7 million students. They belong to the major sects of Islam, the Sunnis and the Shias, but mostly the former, Pakistan being a predominantly Sunni country. Among the Sunni, there are three sub-sects: Deobandis, Barelvis and the Ahl-i-Hadith (*salafi*). Besides these, the revivalist Jamat-e-Islami also has its own madrassas.

The number of madrassas increased during General Zia ul Haq's rule (1977-1988). During the war by Islamic Afghan groups in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, the United States sent in money, arms and ammunition through Pakistan which is said to have been used to support the madrassas. Later, presumably because religiously inspired and madrassa students infiltrated across the line of control to fight the Indian Army in Kashmir, they were supported by the Pakistan army (specifically the Inter Services Intelligence agency). However, both the ISI and the madrassas

Sect-Wise Increase in the Number of Madrassas

Deobandi		Barelvi		Ahl-i-Hadith		Shia		Jamat-i-Islami		Total	
1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002
1779	7000	717	1585	161	376	47	419	97*	500	2801	9880

Source: For 1988 see GOP 1988; for 2002 Report of Sindh Police in *Dawn* 16 Jan 2003. The other figures have been provided by the Central Boards of madrassas. *This figure in GOP 1988 was for 'Others' and not only for the Jamat-i-Islami madrassas. The figure for 2000 given in several sources is 6,761.

deny these links, and it is difficult to ascertain how many madrassas have increased due to financial aid provided by foreign donors or the Pakistan army.

In an analysis paper for the Brookings Institution in 2001, PW Singer gives the figure of 45,000 for madrassas in Pakistan but quotes no source for this number.

The Saudi Arabian organization, Harmain Islamic Foundation, is said to have helped the Ahl-i-Hadith and made them powerful. Indeed, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, an organization which has been active in fighting in Kashmir, belongs to the Ahl-i-Hadith. In recent years, the Deobandi influence has increased as the Taliban were trained in their seminaries. However, contrary to popular belief, it is not the Deobandi but the other madrassas that have either got registered in large numbers since 1988 or actually increased significantly.

However, it should be remembered that the number of Deobandi madrassas is the highest to begin with and they are the ones who are associated with militant policies and revivalist fervour.

Increase in the Madrassas (1988-2000) (in percentages)

Deobandi	6
Barelvi	90
Ahl-i-Hadith	93
Shia	532
Others	Not known
Total	136

Source: Saleem Mansoor Khalid (ed) *Deeni Madaris Mein Taleem*, IPS, Islamabad 2002.

Students at Deoband, Uttar Pradesh.

Sectarian Divide among Madrassas

Because of the disintegration of the Mughal empire and colonial rule, Indian Muslims felt threatened, disillusioned and frustrated. Some, like Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Bareilly (1786-1831), responded militantly but were defeated. Others, like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1808-1898) learnt English, entered the British bureaucracy and became junior partners of the British in the exercise of power. Still others, blaming Muslims themselves for their loss of power, tried to purify Islam in various ways. The Ahl-i-Hadith (also called Wahabis), the Deobandis, the Barelvis among the Sunnis as well as the Shias created madrassas to preserve and propagate what, in their view, was the correct interpretation of Islam (or *maslak* = creed). These madrassas are described below.

Deobandis. The madrassa at Deoband, a small town in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) of India, was founded by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833-1877) and Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1829-1905). While earlier seminaries were loosely organised, Deoband had a rector (*sarparast*), a chancellor (*muhtamim*) and the chief instructor (*sadr mudarris*). Its income was derived from popular contributions and the curriculum was based on the Dars-i-Nizami which had been evolved by Mulla Nizam Uddin Sihalvi (d. 1748) at Farangi Mahall, a famous seminary of a family of Islamic scholars (ulema) in Lucknow. The Dars-i-Nizami emphasised studies based on human reasoning (*maqulat*) but at Deoband the traditional sciences which were transmitted unchanged to the learner (*manqulat*) were emphasized. Thus, Deoband taught much more *hadith* than the Dars-i-Nazami had originally prescribed.

The Deobandis opposed the folk Islam in which intercession by saints occupied a major place, seeking initiation in a mystic order was considered the path to salvation, and miracles and other such phenomena were seen as the crucial and defining attributes of saints and prophets. They did not oppose mysticism altogether but did argue that adherence to the Islamic law (*Sharia*) was the path to mystical exaltation. They also opposed folk practices such as fixing days for distributing food to gain spiritual merit and celebrating the days of religious personages.

The Durul Uloom at Deoband was established in 1867 and after a hundred years it had produced 6,986 graduates and established 8,934 *maktabs* (schools) and madrassas (seminaries) teaching the Dars-i-Nizami. In 1967, the number of graduates from Pakistan was 3,191 (including those from East Pakistan). Today, the number of students exceeds 102,865 and the number of those who appeared in the *Alimia* (MA) examination exceeds 4500. The number of registered madrassas in Pakistan is 7000 which shows how fast they have multiplied in recent years (all the above figures are from the central office of the Wafaq-ul-Madaris, Multan).

Barelvis. The Barelvi movement was inspired by the highly revered Ahmed Raza Khan of Bareilly (1856-1921). The Barelvis justified the "mediational, custom-laden Islam, closely tied to the intercession of the *pirs* of the shrines", as one scholar puts it. They believe that prophet Mohammad (Peace be Upon Him) was made of Divine Radiance (*Noor*) and had knowledge of the unknown (*Ilm ul Ghaib*). Both these beliefs were challenged by the Deobandis and the Ahl-i-Hadith ulema. Relating to this was the debate on the issue of the *imkan-i-nazir* – the question of whether God could make another person equal to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). The Barelvis denied the possibility while the others did not. The Barelvi madrassas in Pakistan also teach the Dars-i-Nazami and appeal to the ordinary folk of the country.

Ahl-i-Hadith. The movement inspired by Sayyed Ahmed was called Wahabi because, like Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab (1703-1792) of Saudi Arabia, Sayyid Ahmed and his associates also wanted to purify and

reform Islam. They claimed to follow no particular school of jurisprudence—Hanafi, Shafi, Hambali, Maliki—and were called nonconformists (*ghair muqallid* = one who does not follow a fixed path) by their opponents. They used the term *Jama'at Ahl-i-Hadith* for themselves and appealed to the Government of India that the term Wahabi should not be used for them. The government concluded, ordering in 1886 that the term Wahabi be dropped from official correspondence. However it remains in currency. The Ahl-i-Hadith madrassas also teach the Dars-i-Nazami but they emphasise the *Quran* and Hadith and oppose folk Islam and common practices such as the anniversaries of saints, the distribution of food on religious occasions, and popular mysticism.

Jamat-i-Islami. The Jamat-i-Islami is a revivalist political party created by Abul ala Maudoodi (also spelled Mawdudi) (1903-1979) whose life and achievements have been ably described by Syyed Vali Reza Nasr in *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (OUP, New York 1996). Maudoodi believed in borrowing technology and other concepts from the West in order to empower the Islamic community. As such he favoured a more modernist education than the orthodox backers of the traditional madrassas. He did, however, also lay emphasis on refuting Western culture and intellectual domination. Maudoodi's anti-Western critique tends to be more thorough, trenchant and appealing than that of the traditionalist seminarians. The traditional texts are taught in the Jamat's madrassas but politics, economics and history is also emphasised with a view to preparing the young ulema for confronting the ideas of the West.

Besides the Sunni madrassas, there are Shia madrassas too as we have seen. The Shias believe that the successor of the Prophet (PBUH) was Ali Ibn-e-Abi Talib and not the first three caliphs whom Sunnis take to be his successors. They mourn the battle of Karbala, fought between the Prophet's grandson Hussain and the Omayyad caliph Yazid bin Muawiya in 680 A.D. This led to the birth of the supporters of Ali and the rise of Shia Islam which has been described very competently by SHM Jafri in *The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam* (OUP, Karachi 2000).

All the madrassas, including the Shia ones, teach the Dars-i-Nizami though they do not use the same texts. They also teach their particular point of view (*madhab* or *maslak*) which clarifies and rationalises the beliefs of the sect (Sunni or Shia) and sub-sect (Deobandi, Barelvi and Ahl-i-Hadith). Moreover they train their students to refute what in their views are heretical beliefs and some Western ideas. All madrassas teach modern subjects in some measure and with varying degrees of competence. Let us examine the teaching in the madrassas in some detail.

The Curriculum of the madrassas

Before Mulla Nizam Uddin standardised the curriculum known as the Dars-i-Nazami, different teachers taught different texts to students. Shah Abdul Rahim (d. 1718) had made an attempt to create a fixed curriculum which was taught at the Madrassa-i-Rahimiya and emphasized the manqulat (such as hadith). The Dars-i-Nazami, on the other hand, emphasized the maqulat. Thus there were more books on grammar, logic and philosophy than before. According to Francis Robinson in *The Ulema of Farangi Mahall and Islamic culture in South Asia* (Feroz Sons, Lahore 2002):

The significance of the enhanced emphasis on ma' qulat in the Dars-i-Nizamiyya lies in part in the superior training it offered prospective lawyers, judges and administrators. The study of advanced books of logic, Philosophy and dialectics sharpened the rational faculties and, ideally, brought to the business of government men with better-trained minds and better-formed judgement.

> The Dars-i-Nizami has come to symbolise the stagnation and ossification of knowledge. For Southasian students, they no longer explain the original texts being themselves in Arabic.

While this may have been the intention of Farangi Mahall's ulema, it is also true that the Arabic madrassas were much fewer (150) than the Persian schools (903) in 1850, presumably because they offered a more thorough grinding in Persian which facilitated entry into administrative jobs for their pupils. However, Farangi Mahall was established before the British created the category of 'Persian schools' and it does appear that the Dars-i-Nizami educated men were sought for employment outside the domain of religion at that time.

In Pakistan, however, the Dars-i-Nizami has been modified though the canonical texts are still there. In this writer's view, these texts are used as a symbol of continuity and identity. The madrassas saw themselves as preservers of Islamic identity and heritage during the colonial era when secular studies displaced the Islamic texts as well as the classical languages of the Indian Muslims -Arabic and Persian- from their privileged pedestal. Thus the madrassas, despite the desire to reform their courses, did not give up the canonical texts. The greatest critic of the madrassa curriculum was Maulana Maududi who argued that, being based on memorisation of medieval texts, the madrassas were not providing relevant education to the Muslim society.

However, though ancient works like *Sarf-e-Meer* and *Kafiya* remain in the course, easier and more modern books are used to supplement them. Arabic, for instance, is taught through modern and much easier texts than

Madrassa of Haqqaniya, Pakistan.

the canonical works mentioned in the Dars-i-Nizami. The canonical texts are taught in Arabic but, because students do not really gain competence in the language, they are either memorised or understood from Urdu translations available in the market.

The Dars-i-Nizami has come to symbolise the stagnation and ossification of knowledge. It is taught through canonical texts which, however, are taught through commentaries (*sharh*); glosses or marginal notes (*hashiya*) and supercommentaries (*taqarir*). There are commentaries upon commentaries explained by even more commentaries. For the Southasian students, they no longer explain the original texts being themselves in Arabic. They have to be learned by heart which makes students use only their memory not their analytical powers. Indeed, the assumption on which the *Dars* functions is that the past was a golden age in which all that was best has already been written. What remains to the modern age is merely to preserve it.

It was this backward-looking nature of core madrassa texts which made Taha Hussain (1889-1973), the famous blind modernist scholar of Egypt, disillusioned with Jamia Azhar in Cairo. According to Abderlarshid Mahmoudi, the writer of a 1998 work on Taha Hussain's education:

On the collective level, entanglement in what was derivative and purely verbal, meant, among other things, the relegation of major and original works to oblivion. Thus a procedure whose role raison d'etre was to the conservation of tradition, resulted in a grave form of collective amnesia concerning what was best in Islamic culture, namely the classical heritage.

What was true of Jamia Azhar in 1902 (when Taha went to that seat of learning) is judged to be true of Southasian madrassas, or at least the Dars-i-Nizami component taught here, even today — and the judges are Arabic-knowing authorities such as Maudoodi and not only Western critics of the madrassas.

Refutation of Other Sects and Sub-Sects

Refutation (*Radd* in Urdu) has always been part of religious education. However, it is only in recent years that it has been blamed for the unprecedented increase in sectarian violence in Pakistan. According to A.H. Nayyar, who writes of madrassa education frozen in time, 'The madrassas have, not surprisingly, become a source of hate-filled propaganda against other Sects and the sectarian divide has become sharper and more violent'. However, it appears that there was much more acrimonious theological debate among the Shias and Sunnis and among the Sunnis themselves during British rule than is common nowadays. The militancy in sectarian conflict cannot be attributed to the teaching in the madrassas though, of course, the awareness of divergent beliefs does create the potential for negative bias against people of other beliefs.

Students in madrassas learn the theological debate (*munazra*). Barbara Metcalf describes the munazras between the Christians, Muslims and Arya Samajists in a 1982 book on Islamic revival in British India. She says:

> *The debates were, indeed, a form of social event, a public ritual, that took on new form and meaning in the late nineteenth century. In a society largely illiterate and equipped only minimally with modern forms of communication, they came to serve as a new forum for communicating issues at once religious and social (Metcalf 1982: 233).*

These debates could also be very bitter, as the Deobandi-Barelvi munazras of 1928 put together in one collection called the *Futoohat-e-Nomania*, illustrate. Moreover, the pioneers of the sects and sub-sects did indulge in refuting each other's beliefs. For instance, Ahmed Raza Khan, the pioneer of the Barelvi school, wrote a series of *fatawa* (plural of *fatwa* = religious decree) against Sir Sayyid of Aligarh, the Shi'is, the ahl-i-Hadith, the Deobandis and the Nadwat ul-'Ulama in 1896. These were published as *Fatawa al-Haramain bi-Rajf Nadwat al-Main* in 1900. The Barelvis, in turn, were refuted by their rivals. The followers of the main debaters sometimes exchanged invectives and even came to blows but never turned to militancy as witnessed in Pakistan's recent history.

As the inculcation of sectarian bias is an offence, no madrassa teacher or administrator confessed to teaching any text refuting the beliefs of other sects. Maulana Mohammad Hussain, Nazim-e-Madrassa Jamiat us-Salfia (Ahl-i-Hadith), in Islamabad says that comparative religious was taught in the final Almiya (MA) class and it did contain material refuting heretical beliefs. Moreover, Islam was confirmed as the only true religion, refuting other religions. The library did contain books refuting other sects and sub-sects but they were not prescribed in the syllabus. Maulana Muhammad Ishaq Zafar of the Jamia Rizvia Aiz ul Uloom (Barelvi) in Rawalpindi says that books against other sects were not taught. However, during the interpretation of texts the maslak was passed on to the student. Students of the final year, when questioned specifically about the teaching of the maslak, said that it was taught through questions and answers, interpretation of texts and some-

times some teachers recommended supplementary reading material specifically for the refutation of the doctrines of other sects and sub-sects. (Maulana Mohammad Hussain and Maulana Muhammad Ishaq Zafar were the only ones among the many ulema and students who were interviewed for this article who were willing to be named.)

In some cases, as in the Jamia Ashrafia, a famous Deobandi seminary of Lahore, an institution dedicated to publishing, established in 1993, puts out 'only those articles and journals which are written by the scholars of Deoband school of thought. Moreover, in writings, sermons and conversation, the teachers refer to the pioneers of their own maslak so that the views of the sub-sect are internalised and become the primary way of thinking.

However, despite the denials, the printed syllabi of the following sects do have books to refute the beliefs of other sects. *The Report on the Religious Seminaries*, put out in 1988, lists several books of Deobandi madrassas to refute Shia beliefs, including Maulana Mohammad Qasim's *Hadiyat ul Shia* which has been reprinted several times and is still in print. There are also several books on the debates between the Barelvis and the Deobandis and even a 1998 book refuting Maudoodi's views. The Barelvis have included only one book *Rashidiya* (1672) by Abdul Rashid Deewan Jaunpuri under the heading of 'preparation for debates on controversial issues'. In some of the madrassas the other traditional text used for this purpose is the *Sharifiya* (1413) by Meer Sharif Ali Jarjani. It is not true, however, that the students are mired in medieval scholasticism despite the texts prescribed for them. They do put their debates in the contemporary context though they refer to examples on the lines established by the medieval texts. The Ahl-i-Hadith have given a choice of opting for any two of the following courses: the political system of Islam, the economic system of Islam, Ibn-e-Khaldun's *Muqaddamah*, the history of ideas, and comparative religious systems. The Shia courses list no book on this subject.

> It appears that there was much more acrimonious theological debate among the Shias and Sunnis and among the Sunnis themselves during British rule than is common nowadays.

Recently published courses list no book on maslak for the Deobandis. The Barelvis mention 'comparative religions' but no specific works. The Ahl-i-Hadith retain almost the same optional courses as before. The Shia madrassas list books on beliefs which includes comparative religions in which, of course, Shia beliefs are taught as the only true ones. Polemical pamphlets claiming that there are conspiracies against the Shias are available. Incidentally such pamphlets, with warnings on alleged Shia deviations from the correct interpretations of the faith are also in circulation among Sunni madrassas and religious organisations.

Moreover, some guidebooks for teachers note that *Quranic* verses about controversial issues should be taught with great attention and students should memorise them. In one Barelvi book it is specified that teachers must make the students note down interpretations of the ulema of their sub-sect concerning beliefs and controversial issues so that students can use them later — i.e. as preachers and ulema.

The Jamat-i-Islami syllabus, dated 2002, mentions additional books by Maulana Maudoodi and other intellectuals of the Jamat on a number of subjects including the Hadith. They also teach 'comparative religions'.

Refutation of Heretical Beliefs

One of the aims of the madrassas, ever since 1057 when Nizam ul Mulk established the famous madrassa at Baghdad, was to counter heresies within the Islamic world as well as outside influence which could change or dilute Islam. Other religions are refuted in 'comparative religions' but there are specific books for heresies within the Islamic world. In Pakistan the ulema unite in refuting the beliefs of the Ahmedis (or Qaidianis). The Deoband course for the Aliya (BA) degree included five books refuting Ahmedi beliefs. The Barelvis prescribe no specific books. However, the fatawa of the pioneer, Ahmad Raza Khan, are referred to and they refute the ideas of the other sects and sub-sects. The Ahl-i-Hadith note that in 'comparative religions' they would refute the Ahmedi beliefs. The Shias too do not prescribe any specific book. The Jamat-i-Islami's syllabus of 2002 prescribes four books for the refutation of the 'Qaidiani religion'. Besides the Ahmedis, other beliefs deemed to be heretical are also refuted. All these books are written in a polemical style and are in Urdu which all madrassa students understand.

Refutation of Alien Philosophies

The earliest madrassas refuted Greek philosophy which was seen as intellectually invading the Muslim ideological space. Since the rise of the West, madrassas, and even more than them revivalist movements outside the madrassas, refute Western philosophies. Thus there are books given in the reading lists for Aliya (BA) of 1988 by the Deobandis refuting capitalism, socialism, capitalism and feudalism. These books are no longer listed but they are in print and in the libraries of the madrassas. The Jamat-i-Islami probably goes to great lengths — judging from its 2002 syllabus — to make the students aware of Western domination, the exploitative potential of Western political and economic ideas, and the disruptive influence of Western liberty and individualism on Muslim societies. Besides Maudoodi's

own books on all subjects relating to the modern world, a book on the conflict between Islam and Western ideas by Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi is widely available.

These texts, which may be called Radd-texts, may not be formally taught in most of the madrassas as the ulema claim, but they are being printed which means they are in circulation. They may be given as supplementary reading material or used in the arguments by the teachers to be internalised by the students. In any case, being in Urdu rather then Arabic, such texts can be comprehended rather than merely memorised. As such, without formally being given the centrality which the Dars-i-Nizami has, the opinions these texts disseminate — opinions against other sects, sub-sects, views seen as being heretical by the ulema, Western ideas — may be the major formative influence on the minds of madrassa students. Thus, while it is true that education in the madrassa produces religious, sectarian, subsectarian and anti-Western bias, it may not be correct to assume that this bias automatically translates into militancy and violence of the type Pakistan has experienced. For that to happen other factors — the arming of religious young men to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir; the state's clampdown on free expression of political dissent during Zia ul Haq's martial law; the appalling poverty of rural, peripheral areas and urban slums, etc. — must be taken into account.

As for teaching modern subjects, the Ahl-i-Hadith madrassas have been teaching Pakistan studies, English, Mathematics and General Science for a long time. The Jamat-i-Islami also teaches secular subjects. The larger Deobandi, Barelvi and Shia madrassas too have made arrangements for teaching secular subjects including in the latest instance basic computer skills. According to a report in the weekly *The Friday Times* from Lahore the Deobandi Wafaq-ul Madaris has decided to accommodate modern subjects on a larger scale than before. They would make the students spend another two years to give a more thorough grounding in the secular subjects. The Wafaq is also said to have formed committees to devise ways to capitalise on the government's USD 255 million Madrassah Reforms Scheme for the transition. However, at present, the teaching is done by teachers approved of by the ulema or some of the ulema themselves. Thus the potential for secularisation of the subjects, which is small in any case, is reduced to nothing. This might change if the courses are extended by two years and the teachers come from diverse backgrounds but as yet it is too early to say what might happen.

Man studies the Quran at Darul Qura Madrassa, Pakistan.

Socioeconomic strata of madrassa students

In medieval India madrassas were supported by land grants and wealthy patrons. They have always been supporting the poor, and the lifestyles of the ulema were spartan and closer to the poorer strata of society than the affluent ones. Maulana Abdul Ali Bahr al-Ulam of Farangi Mahall, for instance, used in their support all but Rs 40 of the Rs 1000 monthly stipend granted by Nawab Walajah. His 'wife and family suffered and complained, as did those of his grandson, Jamal al-Din, who suffered in a similar way'. Barbara Metcalf in her study of Deoband tells us that the pioneers of that seminary took very modest salaries if at all, and lived as poor men. The average expense of Deoband on each graduate between 1867 and 1967 was Rs 1,314 which is modest whichever way one looks at it. The Ahl-i-Hadith madrassas, which were patronised by wealthy people in British India, also lived in the same frugal manner.

Madrassas in present-day Pakistan are also financed by voluntary charity provided by the bazaar businessmen and others who believe that they are earning great merit by contributing to them. Some of them are also given financial assistance by foreign governments — the Saudi government is said to help the Ahl-i-Hadith seminaries and the Iranian government the Shia ones — but there is no proof of this assistance. And even if such assistance did exist, it would go only to a few madrassas whereas the vast majority of them are run on charity (*zakat* = alms, *khairat* = charity, *atiat* = gifts, etc).

The government of Pakistan gives financial assistance to the madrassas for modernising textbooks, for including secular subjects in the curricula, and in introducing computers into the classroom. In 2001-02 a total of Rs 1,654,000 was distributed among the madrassas which accepted the help. As the number of students is 1,065,277, this comes to Rs 1.55 per student per year. An additional aid of Rs 30.5 million is promised for providing computers and changing the syllabi in 2003-04, which will come to Rs 28.6 per student. However, as all madrassas do not accept financial help from the government the money would not be distributed as evenly as the above calculations might suggest.

According to the Jamia Salfia of Faisalabad, the annual expenditure on the seminary, which has about 700 students, is Rs 4,000,000. Another madrassa, this time a Barelvi one, gave roughly the same figure for the same number of students. This comes to Rs 5,714 per year (or Rs 476 per month), which is an incredibly small amount of money for education, books, board and lodging. The expenditure from the government in 2001-2002 was Rs 1,654,000 for all the madrassas in the country and about 32.6 percent madrassas do not received any financial support at all. What is obvious is that the total spending on madrassas is extremely modest.

As the madrassas generally do not charge tuition fees — though they do charge small admission fees

which does not exceed Rs 400 — they attract very poor students who would not receive any education otherwise. According to Fayyaz Hussain, a student who completed his ethnographic research on Jamia Ashrafia of Lahore in 1994, nearly half the students joined the madrassa for economic reasons, 41 percent for social reasons, and only about six percent for religious pursuit. About three percent said they joined the madrassas in search of education and about two percent described the cause as 'political'.

PW Singer writes, the 'Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania, one of the most popular and influential madrassas (it includes most of the Afghani Taliban leadership among its alumni) - has a student body of 1500 boarding students and 1000 day students, from six-year-olds upwards. Each year over 15,000 applicants from poor families vie for its 400 open spaces'. According to a survey conducted by Mumtaz Ahmad in 1976 'more than 80 percent of the madrassa students in Peshawar, Multan, and Gujranwala were found to be sons of small or landless peasants, rural artisans, or village imams of the mosques. The remaining 20 percent came from families of small shopkeepers and rural laborers'. According to a survey by the Institute of Policy Studies, 64 per cent madrassa students come from rural areas and belong to poor agrarian families. This researcher has also observed that many students, upon probing, confess that their parents had admitted them in the madrassas because they could not afford to feed them and educate them in the government schools. Even such students, while making this confession, insist that they are in the madrassas because of their love for Islam.

The Pakistani government's financial assistance to the madrassas for modernising textbooks, including secular subjects in the curricula, and introducing computers was a mere Rs 1.55 per student in 2001-02.

In a survey conducted by this writer with the help of a team in eight cities of Pakistan in December 2002 and January 2003, madrassa students and teachers were asked about their income. Among those who responded, 76.6 percent belonged to the poorer sections of society. The teachers of the madrassas also mostly (61 percent) belong to the same socio-economic bracket as their students. In essence the madrassas seem to provide sustenance to these economically weak individuals. They are performing the role of providing welfare in a country which does not have a social security net. This being so, the influence of madrassas on rural people and the poorer sections of the urban proletariat will continue to increase as poverty increases.

Poverty and the Roots of Religious Violence

There is empirical backing for the statement that there is a link between poverty and religious violence. The scholar Qasim Zaman reports, for instance, that in Jhang—the birthplace of the militant Sunni organisation called the Sipah-i-Sahaba—the proportion of Shias in the affluent urban middle class is higher than in other areas of Pakistan. Moreover, the feudal gentry too have many Shia families. The Sipah-i-Sahaba appeals to the interests of the peasantry oppressed by the rich and the influential. Indeed, Maulana Haqq Nawaz, the fiery preacher who raised much animosity against the Shias, was 'himself a man of humble origin' and 'had a reputation for being much concerned with the welfare of the poor and the helpless, and he was known to regularly spend time at government courts helping out poor illiterate litigant's', reports Zaman.

Another leader of the Sipah-i-Sahaba, Maulana Isar al-Qasimi (1964-1991), also preached in Jhang. He too denounced the Shia magnates of the area. The peasants, terrorised by the feudal rich, responded as if the maulana were a messiah. Even shopkeepers rejoiced in the aggressive Sunni identity he helped create. When the Shia feudal lords attacked and burnt some defiant Sunni shops, this identity was further radicalised.

Indeed, Islamist movements from Turkey to Indonesia talk of the poor and the oppressed and sometimes do take up their cause. This has won them votes in Turkey where they have been suppressed by the secular military. Similarly, Muslim radicals in the Philippines too attack social and economic privilege. Poverty and oppression was also a major factor for mobilisation in Iran against the Shah who was seen as being rich, corrupt and decadent. Thus, Islamic militancy—whether by radicalised madrassa students or members of Islamist or jehadi groups in Pakistan—has a strong element of class conflict. In some part, this is a reaction of the have-nots against the haves. This is a dangerous trend for the country because madrassa students are taught to be intolerant of religious minorities and are hawkish about Kashmir. As they are also from poor backgrounds they express their sense of being cheated by society in the idiom of religion. This gives them the self-righteousness to fight against the oppressive and unjust system in the name of Islam.

Consolidated Data of Opinions Indicating Militancy and Tolerance among Three Types of School Students in Pakistan in Survey 2003 (in percentages)

Abbreviated Questions		Madrassas	Urdu medium schools	English medium schools	Cadet Colleges/ Public schools	Govt Colleges (326)	Public Universities (206)	Private Universities (133)
1. Open War	Yes	59.86	39.56	25.86	36.92	46.01	34.95	35.34
	No	31.69	53.04	64.66	60.00	48.47	55.34	57.89
	Don't Know	8.45	7.39	9.48	3.08	5.52	9.71	6.77
2. Jehadi	Yes	52.82	33.04	22.41	53.08	50.00	46.12	34.59
groups	No	32.39	45.22	60.34	40.00	38.04	43.20	57.14
	Don't Know	14.79	21.74	17.24	6.92	11.96	10.68	6.27
3. Peaceful	Yes	33.80	75.65	72.41	56.15	60.43	58.25	57.14
means	No	54.93	18.26	18.97	36.92	22.70	28.64	35.34
	Don't Know	11.27	6.09	8.62	6.92	16.87	13.11	7.52
4. Ahmedis	Yes	12.68	46.95	65.52	41.54	38.04	38.83	40.60
	No	82.39	36.95	9.48	36.92	38.34	49.51	36.84
	Don't Know	4.93	16.09	25.00	21.54	23.62	11.65	22.56
5. Hindus	Yes	16.90	47.39	78.45	64.62	59.20	54.37	69.92
	No	76.06	42.61	13.79	31.54	31.90	38.83	21.05
	Don't Know	7.04	10.00	7.76	3.85	6.89	6.80	9.02
6. Christians	Yes	18.31	65.65	83.62	76.92	72.09	66.99	78.95
	No	73.24	26.52	8.62	18.46	21.17	29.13	14.29
	Don't Know	8.45	7.83	7.76	4.62	6.75	3.88	6.77
7. Women	Yes	16.90	75.22	90.52	67.69	65.34	64.56	76.69
	No	77.46	17.39	6.03	25.38	30.98	31.55	17.29
	Don't Know	5.63	7.39	3.45	6.92	3.68	3.88	6.02

NB: Figures for (3) are uninterpretable because some respondents ticked opinion (1) and/or (2) while also ticking (3).

Opinions of Faculty Members of Different Educational Institutions (in percentages)

		Madrassas (27)	Urdu medium schools (100)	English medium schools (65)	Cadet Colleges/ Public schools (51)	Govt Colleges (127)	Private Universities (44)	Public Universities (127)
1. Open War	Yes	70.4	20	26.2	19.6	20.5	20.5	14.2
	No	22.2	70	64.6	68.6	68.5	63.6	77.2
	Don't Know	7.4	10	9.2	11.8	11.0	15.9	8.7
2. Jehadi	Yes	59.3	19	38.5	39.2	18.1	34.1	26
groups	No	26.6	68	50.8	52.9	63.8	45.5	63
	Don't Know	11.1	13	10.8	7.8	18.1	20.5	11.0
3. Peaceful	Yes	29.6	85	60.0	66.7	77.2	68.2	75.6
means	No	66.7	10	33.9	19.6	13.4	18.2	18.1
	Don't Know	3.7	5	6.2	13.7	9.5	13.6	6.3
4. Ahmedis	Yes	3.7	27	43.1	29.4	32.3	59.1	50.4
	No	96.2	65	36.9	62.8	52.8	29.8	34.7
	Don't Know	NIL	8	20.0	7.8	15	11.4	15
5. Hindus	Yes	14.8	37	61.5	60.8	41.7	68.2	66.1
	No	85.2	58	26.2	35.3	48.0	22.7	26
	Don't Know	NIL	5	12.3	3.9	10.2	9.1	7.9
6. Christians	Yes	18.5	52	81.5	60.2	59.1	75.0	68.5
	No	77.8	42	10.8	33.3	32.3	15.9	24.4
	Don't Know	3.7	6	7.7	5.9	8.7	9.1	7.1
7. Women	Yes	3.7	61	78.5	37.3	66.1	79.6	71.7
	No	96.7	33	13.9	58.8	30.7	15.9	22.1
	Don't Know	NIL	6	7.7	3.9	3.2	4.6	6.3

Militancy Among Madrassa Students in 2003 (N=142) (In percentages)

What should be Pakistan's Priorities?

1. Take Kashmir away from India by an open war?

Yes	No	Don't Know
59.9	31.7	8.5

2. Take Kashmir away from India by supporting jehadi groups to fight with the Indian army?

Yes	No	Don't Know
52.8	32.4	14.8

3. Support Kashmir cause through peaceful means only (i.e. no open war or sending jehadi groups across the line of Control)

Yes	No	Don't Know
33.8	54.9	11.3

Militancy Among Madrassa Teachers (N=27) (In percentages)

1. Open War

Yes	No	Don't Know
70.4	22.	7.4

2. Jehadi Groups

Yes	No	Don't Know
59.3	29.6	11.1

3. Peaceful means

Yes	No	Don't Know
29.6	66.7	3.7

The Worldview of the Madrassa Student

The madrassa students can be considered the most 'intolerant' among the student categories of Pakistan. They are also the most supportive of an interventionist and aggressive foreign policy. In the survey of 2002-2003 for example, they responded to questions about the Kashmir issue by titling in favour of war to free the region from India (60 percent) and supporting jehadi groups to fight the Indian Army (53 percent)

According to the Institute of Policy Studies survey quoted earlier madrassa students are tolerant of the major Islamic sects and sub-sects. About 45 percent, however, considered women to be lesser than men, and only 11 percent considered them equal to men. To the question, 'How can jehad be waged in Pakistan?' only eight percent students agreed with using force. However, 46 per cent Deobandi students favoured the Taliban as their model.

While the survey carried out for the present writers' study gives somewhat different results, it is clear that this is the result of difference in the way questions were put. The madrassas are obviously institutions which have a blueprint of society in their mind. What needs explanation is that the madrassas, which were basically conservative institutions before the Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980s, are today both ideologically activist and sometimes militant. According to Peter L. Bergen, author of a book on Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda group: 'nowhere is bin Laden more popular than in Pakistan's madrassas, religious schools from which the Taliban draw many of its recruits'. Even with the end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the madrassas have plenty of zealous young people who can potentially act as crusaders against both Western interests and the moderate regimes, both military and civilian, whom they perceive as the allies of the West.

The State and the Students

General Pervez Musharraf's military government, in an attempt to control religious extremism, has made two laws to control the madrassas. The first was aimed to bring the madrassas in the mainstream by introducing secular subjects in them. This ordinance, called the 'Pakistan Madrassah Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini Madaris) Board Ordinance 2001' was promulgated on 18 August 2001. According to the *Education Sector Reforms* three model institutions were established: one each at Karachi, Sukkur and Islamabad. Their curriculum 'includes subjects of English, Mathematics, Computer Science, Economics, Political Science, Law and Pakistan Studies for its different levels. These institutions were not welcomed by the ulema. After this another law was introduced to control the entry of foreigners in the madrassas and keep check on them. This law — Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance 2002 — has, however, been rejected by most of the madrassas which want no state interference in their affairs. Indeed, according to PW Singer, only about one-tenth of the madrassas, agreed to be registered and the rest simply ignored the statute.

The madrassas became militant when they were used by the Pakistani state to fight in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation and subsequently in Kashmir so as to force India to leave the region. Pakistan's claim on Kashmir, as discussed by many including the author Alastair Lamb, has led to conflict with India with the Islamic militants entering the fray since 1989. The United States indirectly, and at other times directly, helped in creating militancy among the clergy. For instance, special textbooks in Darri (Afghan Persian) and Pashto were written at the University of Nebraska-Omaha with a USAID grant in the 1980s. American arms and money flowed to Afghanistan through Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence. At the time all this was being done to defeat the Soviet Union. Later, when Pakistan's military kept using the militant Islamists in Kashmir, the United States had cause for alarm — not without reason as the events of 9/11 demonstrated later. It was only after the World Trade Centre attack that the Americans tried to understand the madrassas better. PW Singer, the analyst with the Brookings Institution was one of the experts who became engaged with the subject. According to Singer, about 10-15 percent of the madrassas are 'radical', including anti-American rheto-

ric in their instruction and even imparting military training. No proof for these claims is offered, but they are credible given the fact that madrassa teachers often repeat the line that the United States is at war with Islam.

Apart from the madrassas proper, religious parties—such as Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Harkat-ul-Mujahidin—print militant literature which circulates among the madrassas and other institutions. According to the book *Ideas on Democracy, Freedom and Peace in Textbooks* (published in 2003 by the group Liberal Forum and its "campaign against hate speech"), Ad-Dawah uses textbooks for English in which many questions and answers refer to war, weapons, blood and victory. According to the Liberal Forum, the textbooks have been authored to provide a one-dimensional worldview that restricts the independent thought process of the students.

Although these parties have been banned, their member are said to be dispersed all over Pakistan, especially in the madrassas. The madrassas, then, may yet remain potential centres of Islamic militancy in Pakistan. The government proposes to change this by teaching secular subjects in the madrassas, but change will come only when the level of poverty is reduced so that poor people can afford other systems of schooling. Above all, it will come when there is peace between India and Pakistan. The perception of the United States, as well as other Western powers, oppressing Muslims as in Palestine also plays a role in the reaction within the madrassas. Such global changes which are required to tackle the madrassa-based militancy or the intolerance which creates the potential for such militancy can hardly be brought about by any one government. It is futile to blame one country for a problem that is the product of history, of poverty, and of geo-political games of recent times.

Key

- A *Hadith* refers to all that is narrated from the Prophet, his acts, his sayings, and whatever he tacitly approved, in addition to all the reports which describe his physical attributes and character.
- Ahmedis take their name from Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908), a Punjabi who in 1882 declared himself a mujadid ("renewer") of Islam. The Ahmedis shun jehad as a method of resistance against non-Muslims and believe that Prophet Muhammad was not necessarily Islam's final prophet.

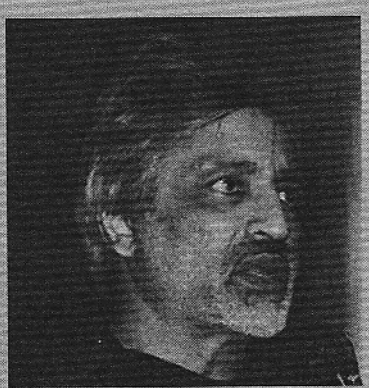
Voices yearning for peace

Even sceptics concede that the current climate of peace between Islamabad and New Delhi must be nurtured. Who knows, peace may arrive from the most unexpected sources.

by ***Beena Sarwar (from Karachi) in Bombay.***

Reshma

Seema Anil Sehgal



Anand Patwardhan

"They are like my two eyes", said the fabled Pakistani folk singer **Reshma**, speaking of India, the country of her birth in 1947, and the country she has lived in since infancy. Similar emotions are echoed by another lauded singer, the Bombay-based **Seema Anil Sehgal**, known as the 'Bulbul (nightingale) of Jammu and Kashmir'. Last May, she dedicated her CD, recorded at the first ever concert in Bombay on the poetry of Allama Iqbal, the man credited with the idea of Pakistan, to 'India-Pakistan friendship'. Sehgal was one of the 235 Indian delegates who attended the Sixth Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy convention in Karachi in December 2003 - the largest delegation of Indians ever to visit Pakistan. Since both countries had snapped air links two years back, they had to obtain special permission from Pakistan to cross the Wagah border in Punjab on foot and then take an overnight train to Karachi.

"No one could anticipate the amazing welcome we received at the Karachi railway station," wrote Bombay-based filmmaker **Anand Patwardhan**, whose anti-nuclear film War and Peace, won the Best Documentary award at the unrelated, privately organized Kara Film Festival held simultaneously. "Outside the station a huge crowd had gathered. A student brass band played, rose petals were showered and pigeons were released as peace slogans rent the air", said Patwardhan. The Karachi convention had taken place amidst an atmosphere of great hope. Barely two weeks later, this hope bore some fruit when the Pakistani and Indian leadership met in Islamabad for the SAARC Summit. In bilateral meetings, they produced a joint statement that paved the way towards a thaw in their relationship. Meanwhile, there was talk of getting a 5000 strong Pakistani delegation across to India for the World Social Forum in Bombay (17-21 January 2004). With the Indian Embassy in Islamabad, the sole visa granting authority in Pakistan, desperately short-staffed (both countries had slashed their consular officers during the tensions of the last two years), this number was pared down to 2000 and finally only some 600 Pakistanis were granted visas. Even so, this was the largest-ever delegation from one country to visit the other. Moreover, the visas were the 'non-police reporting' kind - normally, Indians and Pakistanis visiting each other's

"Let's hope the talks work out, but they've talked before, and every time there is a bit of peace, something happens to shatter it"

"There's a huge burden on both countries because of unfriendly relations. This would ease if the military expenditure was reduced".

countries must report to the police within 24 hours of arrival.

"It would have caused their police a lot of trouble", laughs **Arif Pervez**, a young environmentalist, waiting in the Pakistanis-only line at the immigration counter at Bombay's Sahar international airport. The suspicion with which each government views the citizens of the other is also reflected in the fact that they grant each other visas for up to three cities only, and not for the country. And visiting Pakistanis and Indians must enter and exit from one of three authorised points (Delhi or Bombay by air, or the Wagah border in Punjab by road or rail), which cannot be changed once the visa has been granted.

And so it was that **Karamat Ali**, a peace activist based in Karachi, could not avail of the recently restored air-links to take the direct Karachi-Bombay flight (duration an hour and 20 minutes), since he had applied for his visa before flights were restored. He had to take the hour-and-a-half flight from Karachi to Lahore, cross the Wagah border on foot, then take the train to Delhi, and fly down to Bombay. "I have to take the same route back ", he said. Hopes for peace between India and Pakistan are marred by scepticism as the two nuclear nations gear up for 'composite talks' in February; many are taking a 'wait-and-see' attitude. "It's like two lovers who can't live together but can't live apart either," said young Bombay-based film curator **Shai Heredia** pensively. "Let's hope the talks work out, but they've talked before, and every time there is a bit of peace, something happens to shatter it".

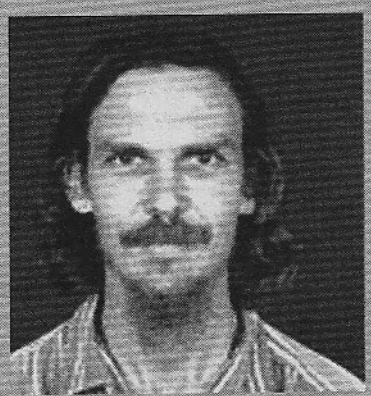
Ali Mir, an economist from Hyderabad, India, who now lives in New Jersey, USA, is equally sceptical. "We've seen this happening before", he shrugged. "It's all a big drama," scoffed his friend from Delhi, the political activist **Shabnam Hashmi**, who runs the non-government organisation, Act Now for Harmony and Democracy. "Ten, fifteen days before the elections, they'll be singing a different tune". Senior Delhi-based journalist **Bharat Bhushan** disagreed. He believes that Pakistani president Musharraf is "riding the tiger of anti-terrorism and can't get off", while Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee "has a sense of history, and is obsessed with settling the issues with Pakistan, including Kashmir". The 'core issue' of Kashmir is never far from the surface while discussing the India-Pakistan dispute. **Subhashini Ali**, a former Communist Party member of parliament who heads the All India Women's Association, welcomed the peace process but feared that "those who believe in using religion for political ends" will spoil things. "How can they come to an understanding on Kashmir?" she asked. But she does believe that both governments are "responding to the tremendous desire for peace by both peoples". And peace, she added, "is linked to the betterment of lives, to economic and social betterment. These areas will not improve as long as our resources are diverted to war".

Jean Dreze of the Delhi School of Economics agreed: "There's a huge burden on both countries because of unfriendly relations. This would ease if the military expenditure was reduced. But some hawks are deliberately trying to keep the tensions up because it also hurts Pakistan's economy". Subhashini Ali was of the opinion that even if the United States pushed India and Pakistan to the talks table, as is generally believed, that was a positive

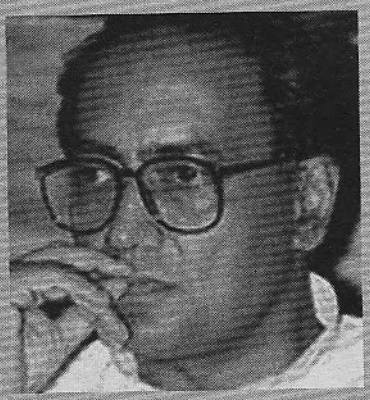
Shai Heredia

Shabnam Hashmi

Subhashini Ali



Jean Dreze



Digvijay Singh

Mani Shankar Aiyar

Medha Patkar

Gauhar Raza

Doris thinks that India and Pakistan should unite, and find a new name that is acceptable to both, if 'India' and 'Pakistan' will not do.

development. Her views were echoed by the Congress party's **Digvijay Singh**, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. "It's a good step, even if it took some outside pressure for what we should have done on our own," he said. He too pointed to the Kashmir dispute and suggested that, "If the Kashmiris want self-rule, India and Pakistan will have to sit together and work out some form of autonomy for them...We are poor countries, we have similar problems, and we have to put our heads together to resolve them. Both peoples want friendship, opening up of trade, commerce and industry".

"We've wasted too many years coming to this point", said another Congress leader, **Mani Shankar Aiyar**, who headed the Indian Consulate in Karachi before it was closed down a decade ago at the same time as the Pakistani Consulate in Bombay was packed up. "What we have just now is yet another paper agreement which doesn't say how the process is going to continue. It's important that the dialogue should be structured so that it is uninterrupted, and un-interruptible. Otherwise it won't work".

The legendary anti-dam activist **Medha Patkar** also questions the peace rhetoric, but like many others, agrees that even if it is happening under pressure, it must happen. "Day by day we see progress towards anti-terrorism and democracy", she observed. "We have to have a peaceful solution to Kashmir, the referendum that was promised should take place, and people should be allowed to democratically decide their own fate". Many ordinary Indians express similar views; most simply want the visa regimes to be relaxed and for ordinary people to be able to meet. But some, like the Delhi-based scientist and poet **Gauhar Raza**, think that the "artificial border", as he termed it, should simply be abolished, "if not in our lifetimes, then for our children. But it's an important vision, a goal to move towards".

"They should just do away with the border so people can meet," agreed **Doris**, a Roman Catholic teacher, talking to this writer while returning from work to Santa Cruz, the northern Bombay suburb where she lives. Doris thinks that the two countries should unite and find a new name that is acceptable to all if 'India' and 'Pakistan' will not do. "A new name that has something to do with peace...Why not? It is possible if the two leaders put their heads together and think about it", she mused. **Abdul Jalil**, an auto rickshaw driver in Bombay echoes a similar sentiment, but disagrees that he is espousing a right-wing Hindu line, which believes in 'Akhand Bharat' or a Greater India. "I don't know about them, but this is the voice of my heart...that we two countries should become as one. Then no one can push us around," he said.

Most Pakistanis view such sentiments of unity with deep suspicion, seeing them as confirmation of the long-held suspicion that India has never really accepted Pakistan, and that the larger neighbour's long-term ambitions are covertly to swallow up their country. But most Indians one encounters, like **Shashi**, who drives a car for its owners in south Bombay, simply want the two countries to live in peace. "The Kashmir issue must be resolved peacefully", he said. "It's only the poor people who get killed. India and Pakistan must live in friendship, then we will together be strong and America will not be able to bully us".

India: Farms and jobs
Not much to feel good about

Hunger has emerged as robustly sustainable in the Southasian heartland.

by ***Devinder Sharma***

Sumitra Behera is one of the teeming millions languishing in the countryside. An unknown Indian, somehow surviving against all odds, she recently figured in the news when she decided to sell her one-month-old baby for a mere ten rupees. It did not shock the nation. No one was outraged, none of the newspapers decided to comment editorially on what was clearly a symbol of national disgrace. Not even one distinguished Member of Parliament, including those who swear in the name of one-third reservation for women, stood up to draw the nation's attention to the shame reflected in Sumitra's desperation.

Instead, at that very moment the media was gloating over an egregious 'feel good' factor, a pointer to the historic peak of USD 100 billion in foreign exchange reserves. There was jubilation all around, with corporate chieftains leading the cheer. Meanwhile, news reports said that in the month of December 2003, three other families grappling with hunger in Angul, Puri and Keonjhar in Orissa had reportedly sold their children. The sale of children and body organs is not only restricted to western Orissa or for that matter to neighbouring Jharkand and Bihar. West Bengal is actually the largest 'supplier' of girls, Andhra Pradesh comes next. The rest of the country does no better. You just have to peel off the media façade.

Take Madhya Pradesh. Jai Lal, a landless agricultural worker of Bandali village in Sheopur district in the heartland of India, returned to share the good news with his wife - that he had finally managed to get a petty job with a shopkeeper - she had succumbed to hunger. A week later, graves were dug for his two children, both unable to continue with the prolonged fight against hunger. Call it by any name, acute hunger and malnutrition forces unlucky parents to either sell off their children or to silently dig graves for them. Those who survive, undergo the ordeal of being sex workers; they are also exploited as labourers, drug peddlers and for their organs. Despite all talk and programmes, hunger has withstood the best and worst of times, only to emerge as robustly sustainable.

November 2003. 7.5 million people applied for a mere 38,000 vacancies in the Indian Railways. Thousands of those who applied for the post of 'gang man', one of the 'lowly' jobs in the railways, were

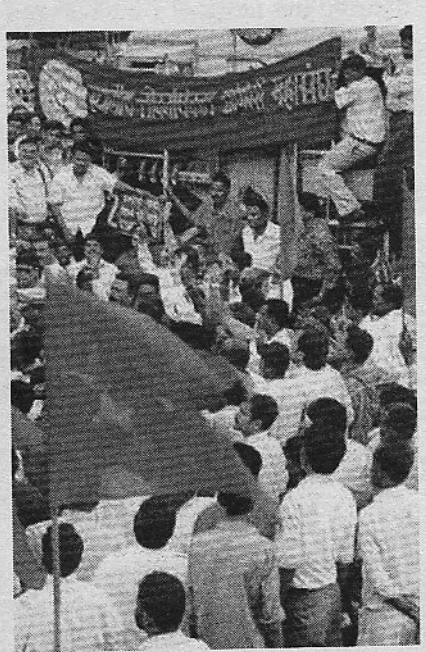
post-graduates; many even had management degrees. That the number of applicants had in fact exceeded the total population of Switzerland, was twice the population of Ireland, and was certainly a third more than the populations of Norway, Finland and New Zealand, should not come across as mere trivia. What followed was even more worrying - 56 dead in the riots that followed, and the 38,000 who eventually got the job left more than 7.45 million of those who were applicants still waiting.

Notwithstanding the exuberance over the 'unprecedented' growth of the software industry, the fact remains that the famed IT industry of India has only created 0.5 million jobs. In the name of software exports, the IT industry continues to milk the state exchequer by way of tax exemptions and 'incentive for improving efficiency', a sophisticated term for the much-abused subsidy. At the same time, the telecom sector continues to be a recipient of the government's largesse. The government doled out a Christmas bonanza of INR 9600 million in 2003 to a handful of telecom majors, essentially to compensate them for the preference it has shown to one company; a year earlier, the government had passed on a benefit of INR 7000 million to a telecom giant, thereby angering others.

The mainline economy

No wonder, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) are excited at the rising foreign exchange reserves. They surely have enough reasons to 'feel good'. For the rest of the country, there is hardly anything bright and shining on the horizon. The paradox of plenty - acute and widespread hunger amidst overflowing foodstocks - exists at a time when the country is poised towards a high-growth trajectory. At the beginning of the millennium in 2001, India boasted of a food surplus of 65 million tonnes while 320 million went to bed on an empty stomach. Strange are the ways of the political masters, that while the country incurred INR 62,000 million to keep the foodgrains stacked in the open, it had no money to distribute it to the needy. Mainline economists in fact have even suggested food exports as a viable way out. And some parliamentarians talked of throwing the food into the sea to make way for the next harvest.

Policymakers, planners and economists have been telling us that even if poverty increases in the short term, this is a price that has to be paid for long-term stability and growth. Hunger is the outcome of increasing poverty and deprivation, and so should not be a cause for fear, they protest. And yet, with every passing year and month, India has been sinking deeper into a quagmire of deprivation and despair. At the national level, more than 135 million people have no access to basic health facilities; 226 million lack access to safe drinking water; about half of India's adult population is illiterate; and about 70 percent of its population lacks basic sanitation facilities. India has the world's largest population of diseased and disabled which continues to multiply. With nearly 52 percent of the population earning less than two US dollars a day, the economic models of growth have only succeeded to extend the poverty line to bring in every year a sizeable percentage of the population within its deadly grip.



A Shiv Sena protest in the aftermath of the railway vacancy fiasco.

It is widely accepted that one of the surest ways to remove poverty is to make agriculture more profitable, and, of course, productive. With nearly 70 percent of the country's population directly or indirectly involved with farming, agriculture should have received the top priority in policy planning. Instead, all efforts are directed at depriving agriculture of its due share thereby aiming at further marginalisation of farming communities. At a time when agricultural subsidies are being gradually withdrawn under pressure from the World Bank/IMF, the government is also toying with the idea of dismantling the food procurement system so as to push the gullible farmers to face the vagaries of the markets.

The minimum support price that is provided for a select number of staple crops is therefore being projected to have reached the 'maximum' limits as a result of which agricultural commodities are priced out in the international market. The support price for wheat and rice has therefore been frozen at 2003 levels. The statutory minimum price for sugarcane, linked to a certain percentage of sugar recovery, too is being lowered so that the powerful sugar industry can pocket more profits.

There is no economic rationale for freezing farm support prices. The government has been misled to believe that the higher procurement prices are the culprit when it comes to farm commodity exports. The international prices for agricultural commodities are low because of the huge agricultural subsidies that North America, the European Union and the other OECD countries provide to their agriculture. The

more the subsidies over there, more is the price slump in the international market. Artificially low global prices therefore are not the real criteria to measure the competitiveness of Indian agriculture produce.

The competitiveness of Indian agriculture has to be seen in the context of its cost of cultivation. This too is being wrongly measured, compared to the subsidised prices that Western farmers are being given. The flaw is clearly evident. Let us work out the cost of producing one kilo of wheat in North America with that in India. Even with the huge farm size that North America is known for, the cost of production is several times more than what the Indian farmer on average manages. There is therefore no justification in depriving Indian farmers of their legitimate source of income. Not paying the farmers a higher price does have a negative impact on the rural economy, which eventually ends up in more food insecurity.

In reality, the government has been seeking refuge under the garb of 'increasing fiscal deficit' so as to deprive the farmers a higher crop price. Last year, New Delhi's Ministry of Agriculture had proposed a hike of INR 30 per quintal in wheat price. The Finance Ministry turned down the proposal saying that the price hike will bring an additional burden of INR 3000 million on the state exchequer. Ironically, fiscal deficit has never been the consideration when the government doles out massive funds for the telecom industry, the IT industry or the new sunrise industry — biotechnology.

The number of applicants for lowly paid 38,000 vacancies in the Indian Railways exceeded the population of Switzerland.

Agriculture, the mainstay of the Indian economy, which essentially is responsible for the higher economic trajectory, is incongruously the most neglected. This downgrading of agriculture has resulted in increased joblessness and thereby more food insecurity. The negative terms of trade against agriculture have to be turned around if the country is to emerge from the hunger and poverty trap. It is time the 600 million farmers too begin to 'feel good', and the resulting domino effect will be truly 'shining'.

Holy cows and a chained watchdog

Impunity to the armed forces make India worthy of a banana republic.

by ***Suhas Chakma***

The government of India in a 'Memorandum of Action Taken' of December 2003 on the 2001-02 annual report of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India has rejected the NHRC's demand for amendment of Section 19 of the Human Rights Protection Act (HRPA) of 1993, citing 'compulsions of fighting cross-border terrorism' and 'widespread politicisation of human rights issues'. Section 19 clearly outlines the procedure with respect to the armed forces while dealing with complaints of violation of human rights and states that:

(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, while dealing with complaints of violation of human rights by members of the armed forces, the Commission shall adopt the following procedure, namely:

(a) it may, either on its own motion or on receipt of a petition, seek a report from the Central Government;
(b) after the receipt of the report, it may, either not proceed with the complaint or, as the case may be, make its recommendations to that Government.

(2) The Central Government shall inform the Commission of the action taken on the recommendations within three months or such further time as the Commission may allow.

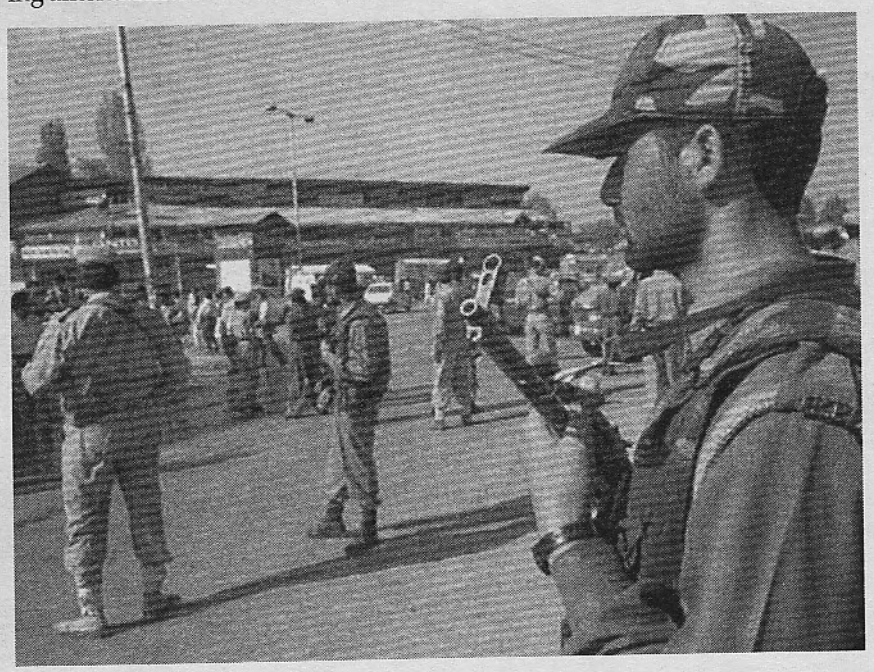
(3) The Commission shall publish its report together with its recommendations made to the Central Government and the action taken by that Government on such recommendations.

(4) The Commission shall provide a copy of the report published under sub-section (3) to the petitioner or his representative.

Thus, the NHRC may seek a report from the Central Government and after the receipt of the report, it may, either drop proceedings or make recommendations to the government. Under this clause, the NHRC basically serves as a glorified post box and it has been demanding amendment of the section for the last few years.

According to the 2002-03 Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India, 14 out of 28 States in India are afflicted by internal armed conflicts. Hundreds of thousands of armed personnel of the para-military forces under the control of the Government of India and the Army have been deployed in various states. There have been consistent and credible reports of serious human rights violations by the armed forces such as torture, rape, extrajudicial executions and death in custody.

The NHRC's annual reports provide some of the testimonies to the human rights violations committed



by the armed forces. In its 1999-2000 Annual Report, NHRC cites the case of the tragic massacre in Bijbehara, Jammu and Kashmir, that occurred on 22 October 1993. Approximately 60 people were killed at and around Bijbehara by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel. The NHRC took *suo motu* action on the basis of press reports and issued notices on 1 November 1993 to the Ministries of Defence and Home Affairs of the government of India and the state government of Jammu and Kashmir. The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the NHRC that 37 persons had died and 73 others had been injured as a result of the firing in the incident. In an order on 17 January 1994, the NHRC, among others, recommended that "Given the gravity of the occurrence in Bijbehara, a thorough review should be undertaken by government of the circumstance and conditions in which units of the Border Security Force are deployed and expected to operate in situations involving only civilian population". In a letter dated 12 November 1996, AK Tandon, Director General, Border Security Force informed the NHRC that "a General Security Force Court [GSFC] trial was conducted in respect of the 12 BSF personnel involved in the said incident, but that confirmation of the trial was being withheld for the time being as additional ROE was to be conducted against Sub-Inspector Mahar on a charge of u/s 302 of the Ranbir Penal Code [RPC] as applicable in the state of Jammu and Kashmir". Tandon also informed that the trial of Sub-Inspector Mahar Singh by GSFC was concluded on 30 October 1996 and the accused was found not guilty.

In a further order on 16 March 1998, the NHRC stated that before taking any final view in the matter, it first wanted to review the proceedings on the issue. It directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to produce the records of the proceedings of the trial conducted by the Staff Court of Inquiry, the proceedings of the trial held by the GSFC and the record of the administrative proceedings. The Ministry of Home Affairs did not honour this request and expressed the 'inability of the Government of India to show records of GSFC to any authority other than those provided under the Border Security Force Act'. Consequently, NHRC was 'compelled to move a writ petition before the Supreme Court, after being denied the records that it sought from the Home Ministry of the trial that was held by the General Security Force Court (SCOI)'. The writ petition was later withdrawn by the NHRC under mysterious circumstances.

Family of the Bijbebhara victims.

The Bijbehara case is not an exception. The NHRC also expressed deep concern that those responsible for the abduction and subsequent killing of the prominent advocate of Srinagar, Jalil Andrabi, are yet to be brought to trial. His body was recovered from the Jhelum river on 27 March 1996 with a single bullet wound to his head, three weeks after he was abducted at gun-point by a group of men allegedly in Indian para-military uniform. In its 1999-2000 annual report, NHRC stated, "It is a matter of despair to the afflicted family, and to those who are interested in the promotion and protection of human rights in the country, that the Commission's insistent call that the killers be tracked down and brought to book has met with little practical response and a single line comment in the Memorandum of Action Taken that was submitted to Parliament in respect of the Annual Report for 1998-99. The Memorandum stated: the matter is sub judice". A similar situation of opacity persists in regard to the 'disappearance' and probable killing of Jaswant Singh Khalra in the Punjab, the perpetrators of the crime remaining at large, to the continuing discredit of the apparatus of State and the deepening concern of human rights activists.

Given such occurrences of enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings, the NHRC requested the Government of India to direct the armed forces, including the para-military forces, to report to the NHRC – as does the police – any cases that might occur of the death of persons while in their custody. It fell into deaf ears of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The obfuscation of justice by the government of India does not end there. Even the Annual Reports of NHRC are withheld and not submitted to the Parliament in time. Not surprisingly, in its latest 2001-2002 Annual Report the NHRC states, "The delays (in making its annual reports public) have amounted to the denial of right to information... The delay in tabling the annual report before Parliament has resulted in a corresponding delay in releasing its contents to the public. In the process, both the elected representatives and the public have, in effect, been denied timely and comprehensive information on the work and concerns of the Commission".

The NHRC rightly urged that impunity to the armed forces brings no credit to the government and the security forces and "it thwarts the purposes of justice and the prime objective leading to the establishment of this Commission, namely the need to ensure the 'better protection' of human rights in the country". The impunity to the armed forces and insinuation against the NHRC make India worthy of a banana republic.

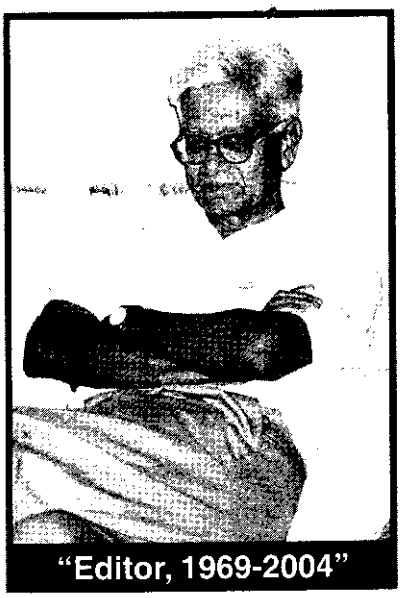
EPW and the Thinking Indian

A magazine that represents an emphatic triumph of content over form has just lost an editor.

by ***Ramachandra Guha***

The British historian EP Thompson once remarked that 'India is not an important country, but perhaps the most important country for the future of the world. Here is a country that merits no one's condescension. All the convergent influences of the world run through this society: Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular; Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or East which is not active in some Indian mind'.

Thompson must have been reading the *Economic and Political Weekly*, the Bombay journal where these thoughts and influences converge and meet. Rich in information and glowing with polemic, its pages are an index to the life of India. On subjects as diverse (and important) as the economy, caste politics, religious violence, and human rights, the *EPW* (as it is fondly known) has consistently provided the most authoritative, insightful and widely cited reports and analyses. Among the journal's contributors are scholars and journalists, but also activists and civil servants—and even some politicians.



"Editor, 1969-2004"

Like other such journals around the world, the *EPW* commands an influence far out of proportion to its circulation. It has shaped intellectual discussion in India, and had a profound impact on policy debates. Can one see it then as an Indian *New Statesman*? Or as a left-wing version of the American *Weekly Standard*? To this less-than-impartial reader the comparison is all to the *EPW*'s favour. For one thing, it has never allied itself (howsoever loosely) to a political party. For another, it does not have a sugar daddy. Run on less than a shoe-string budget, it is chiefly sustained by the goodwill of its subscribers. But perhaps the most vital difference lies in its intellectual weightiness. Within its pages have been published the first and sometimes the finest essays of India's most eminent intellectuals: Jagdish Bhagwati, André Béteille, Amartya Sen, MN Srinivas and the like.

The *EPW* is a unique, three-fold mix of political prejudice, dispassionate reportage and scholarly analysis. The weekly begins with a few pages of unsigned commentary, arch reflections on the events of the past few days. The second part of the journal is taken up with signed reports from around the country. Here we find the 'news behind the news', so to say, stories of conflict between landlords and labourers in Bihar or of ethnic and secessionist movements in north-east India. The journal's back pages are filled each week with book reviews and two or three academic papers, soberly presented and massively footnoted.

To illustrate the range of themes, consider the first issue of 2004. This carried reports on the North Korean nuclear crisis, and a review of communal riots in India in 2003. The 'special articles' (i.e. research papers) section was given over to a forum on globalisation, with essays on its impact on labour, national identities, and trans-national religious movements. Go back ten years, to find that the first issue of 1994 contained reports on an earthquake in Western India and on industrial conflicts, with special articles on the treatment of minorities in the Soviet Union and disease in colonial India. The first issue of 1984 featured reports on the impact of exchange rate fluctuations on Indian exports and on the Chinese claim to Hong Kong. Among the special articles were one on the 'socio-economic roots' of the insurgency in the Punjab, and another on fertility differentials between Indian states.

The *EPW* represents an emphatic triumph of content over form. For no journal I know is more de-

pressing to look at. The cover has black type upon a white background, with a red band on the top left hand corner representing a pathetic attempt at colour. The text inside is printed in nine point size, with 60 lines to the page—these made less readable still by the way they are set in columns. A recent 'redesign' has left the *EPW* looking much the same as before. The type remains small, the paper is still faded, the covers still wearyingly similar: but the articles are as astonishingly diverse and unpredictable as ever.

Economic Weekly

The *EPW* began life in 1949 as the *Economic Weekly*. Its founder was Sachin Chaudhuri, a Bengali grandee from a talented family. One brother was a successful film-maker; another, a celebrated sculptor. Sachin himself was by turns a nationalist volunteer, an ascetic in the Himalaya, a PhD student in Economics, and a market researcher. He was even, for a time, general manager of the pioneering film company, Bombay Talkies.


Sachin Chaudhuri

The *EPW* is a unique, three-fold mix of political prejudice, dispassionate reportage and scholarly analysis.

This experience came in handy when Chaudhuri decided to start a journal. His timing was exquisite, for India had just become independent. The *Economic Weekly* quickly emerged as the focal point of intellectual arguments about the shape of the new nation. As befitting the times, much of the debate was about economic planning and development. But from the beginning the journal was about more than the dismal science. Thus in its first few years it ran a series of essays (later collected in a book) on Indian villages, which demonstrated the continuing influence of caste on social life.

In August 1966 the journal changed its name to the *Economic and Political Weekly*. By the end of the year Chaudhuri was dead. He was succeeded by the economist RK Hazari, but within a couple of years Hazari left for the Reserve Bank of India. The job was now handed over to one of the Assistant Editors, Krishna Raj. A Malayali from Kerala, schooled at the Delhi School of Economics, he had worked with Chaudhuri since 1960. His tenure as editor was even longer than the founder's, extending from 1969 until his death on the 13th of January this year.

I never met Sachin Chaudhuri. But I knew Krishna Raj well. Unlike his mentor he was a man of few words. But his devotion to the journal was ferocious. Between them the two editors helped construct a community of the thinking Indian. It was through their weekly that one kept in touch with the work of one's friends, as well as one's enemies. In its pages, and nowhere else, were to be found the best of India's social scientists: across the disciplines, and across the political spectrum as well.

Getting the journal by post every week was excitement enough. But more thrilling by far was to get a letter from the editor. These were typed, and sent in a specially printed inland letter form, coloured pale green. In recent years Krishna Raj had so far forgotten himself to take to email; no doubt a gain on the side of efficiency, but a matter of some regret for his writers. The inland letter had printed on it the journal's address: 'Hitkari House, 284 Frere Road, Bombay 400038'. In time the names of the street and city and the pin code all changed: to Shahid Bhagatsingh Marg, Mumbai, and 400001 respectively. But inside, the editor stayed the same. Visiting the offices of the *EPW* was a secular pilgrimage. Hitkari House lay between Victoria Terminus and the Reserve Bank of India: in a part of Bombay dense with memory and history, and, above all, humanity. The two grand buildings were joined by a street chock-a-bloc with shops, the road overrun with cars and cycles and pedestrians.

It was with some relief that one turned away from the street into the building that housed the journal. A dingy lift took one upto the sixth floor. It opened out into the *EPW* office; a mass of cubicles linked by a narrow passage. Right at the end lay the cubicle of the editor. It was like any other; six feet by four feet, with a humble desk and still more humble chairs. There was, of course, no question of airconditioning; the only luxury was a window which on a good day allowed in elements of a breeze.

The austerity went beyond mere appearances. For Krishna Raj insisted that his own salary must not be more than five times that of the lowest paid employee. In 2002, after thirty years in the job, the editor was paid INR 12,000 (roughly USD 250) a month. In that year the Trustees of the journal doubled his salary, to match that of a university professor's. It was still shockingly inadequate, when one considers the significance of the work, or the fact that he put in at

least twice as many hours as did the most conscientious academic in India.

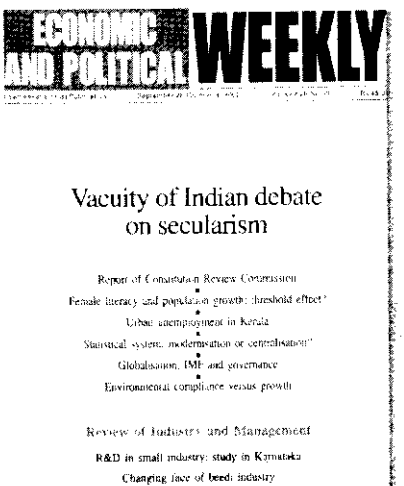
Over the years I must have made perhaps a dozen trips to the *EPW* office. Krishna Raj was a handsome, oval-faced, white-haired man, with inquiring eyes peering out from behind his spectacles. On his desk there was a pile of papers two or three feet high: submissions to be considered or rejected. On a shelf was a row of books, one or two of which would be offered to the visitor for review.

Political spillover

It was lucky, if no accident, that the editors of this remarkable journal came from Bengal and Kerala. For these are, in an intellectual sense, the most vigorously active states in India—and also the most disputatious. In both states the communists have enjoyed long spells in government, placed there by the ballot box. They have been bitterly opposed from the Left, by those who think that the road to revolution lies through armed struggle. And they have been opposed from the Right, by liberals and conservatives dismayed by their attacks on liberty, property and tradition. The polemical nature of these debates in Kerala and West Bengal has spilled over into the rest of the country. A prime vehicle for this spread has been the *EPW*. Had its editors been from other parts of India, perhaps the journal would have been more genteel, but scarcely more readable.

When the *Economic Weekly* began, India was ruled by Jawaharlal Nehru, a man who was socialist in his economic beliefs but liberal in his political outlook. Most times, his commitment to the procedures of democracy outweighed his commitment to the ideals of socialism. This was not to the liking of the younger Indian intellectuals, and the *EW* inevitably became the vehicle for their views. If industry was still under monopoly control, they argued, or if the progress of land reforms was slow, it was owed to the class character of Nehru's Congress party, dominated by landlords and funded by the bourgeoisie.

As I have said, the journal has never been allied to a single party. But its orientation has always been politically charged. Under Sachin Chaudhuri's editorship, the contributors divided themselves almost equally into two camps: the liberals and the leftists. Chaudhuri's own credo may be summed up as: 'We admire Nehru, but do not necessarily follow him'. Revealing here is an editorial he wrote in August 1966, in the inaugural issue of what was now the *Economic and Political Weekly*. Nehru was dead, but his aura lingered on. 'Many underdeveloped countries in the post-War period', said Chaudhuri, 'have had a brief spell of elation or whatever we may call it, induced by the charisma of a leader and a concatenation of circumstances but how many have maintained their pace, and how many fallen by the way? Circumstances may throw up such leaders but it is thinking men and women who aspire and do not acquiesce, who alone can mould a people into a nation and keep them going'.


ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY

Vacuity of Indian debate on secularism

Report of Constitution Review Commission

Female literacy and population growth: threshold effect?

Urban unemployment in Kerala

Statistical system: modernisation or centralisation?

Globalisation, IMF and governance

Environmental compliance versus growth

Review of Industry and Management

R&D in small industry: study in Karnataka

Changing face of beedi industry

Quality silk production: economic issues

Kanpur's leather industry: business-society interlinks

Project management in the Caribbean

The little men who now rule India may think they can afford to disregard the *Economic and Political Weekly*. For the rest of us, however, it remains indispensable.

Within a few years Nehru's liberalism had been seriously challenged—by, as it happens, his own daughter. As prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi crushed dissent within and outside her own party, expanded the role of the state in the economy, and promoted partisanship among judges and civil servants. These developments culminated in the notorious Emergency of 1975-77.

Among Mrs Gandhi's critics were old-fashioned liberal democrats and right-wing Hindu conservatives. Under Krishna Raj, the *EPW* threw in its lot with a third class of dissenters: the Marxists. The editor himself was deeply impressed by the idealism of the young Naxalites, who, inspired by China, were challenging the parliamentary orientation of the established communist parties. Among the gains of the journal's left-ward turn were the detailed reports on human rights excesses by the state. Among the losses was the excessive space devoted to doctrinal dispute: to exegeses of what Marx or Lenin or Mao really said or meant.

When I first came to read it, in the early 1980s, the *EPW* gave space equally to the Old and New Lefts. Soon it was profiling the work of the Newer Left, as contained in the environmental and feminist move-

ments. All this put off some previously loyal supporters. In 1991, the historian Dharma Kumar, who had been a friend of Sachin Chaudhuri, called for an end to Marxist hegemony in the journal and a return to the old catholicism. Her letter, printed in the *EPW*, brought forth howls of protest from the Left. Particularly noteworthy was a letter signed by about two dozen Western academics, the product of some frenetic trans-Atlantic phone-calls, which suggested that Professor Kumar's protest was part of the larger IMF-World Bank conspiracy to destabilise India. But there were also some letters of support. These asked Indian Marxists to take heed of the winds of liberalism then blowing through Eastern Europe.

As ever, the *EPW* was happy to give over its pages to intellectuals abusing one another. The debate continued for months, but its ultimate effect was salutary. For Krishna Raj realised that it was not just Russia that had changed. So had China, and India. The 20th century had conclusively demonstrated that, compared to the State, the market was a more efficient agent of economic change. Liberal economists once more began to find their voice in the *EPW*. At the same time, the journal also reached out to younger historians and sociologists, who unlike their teachers were unburdened by Party dogma. But the *EPW* was careful not to go to the other extreme. Advocates of globalisation had their say, but so too did its critics.

This diversity of views is a key reason for the journal's astonishing longevity. Its life has been more-or-less coterminous with the life of India. Through these six decades, it has been a veritable salon of the Indian mind, the place one goes to eavesdrop on the most arresting and unusual conversations about this bafflingly complex land. No journal I know generates a comparable possessiveness among its readers and writers, to whom those three letters—'E, P ,W'—denote sparkle and controversy, but also quality and relevance.

The fact that it has maintained its influence for so long decisively marks out the *EPW* from some of its global competitors. The heyday of the *New Statesman* ran from, roughly, the mid-forties to the mid-sixties. Ever since then it has been somewhat of a fringe publication. Or consider the French journal *Le Temps Moderne*, which was founded at the same time as the *Economic Weekly*. For its first decade it was at the cutting edge of French intellectual life, but as the credibility of its founders faded so did its own influence.

The *EW*, and later the *EPW*, has encouraged writers of all ages and all nationalities. The journal has always been international in its orientation, as well as in its cast of writers. In its early years the distinguished Cambridge economists Joan Robinson and Nicholas Kaldor were contributors. More recently, veteran American leftists marginalised in their own milieu have found a haven in the *EPW*. Here, and nowhere else, do Indian and Western writers and scholars converse on an equal footing.

Another reason for the journal's enduring influence is the TISNA factor – there is simply no alternative. Indian newspapers have become progressively more superficial. Focusing on food, fashion and films, they have little room for books and ideas. At the other end, there does not exist a dense enough mass of scholars to sustain specialist disciplinary journals (and where these do exist, they are, as elsewhere, coterie journals written in arcane academic prose). Thus the appeal, to both readers and writers, of the unique hybrid that is the *EPW*.

In recent years, the *EPW* has returned to being what Sachin Chaudhuri intended it to be: a broad church of intellectual opinion in India, from right-wing liberalism to left-wing Communism. However, there is one kind of perspective that the journal has consistently excluded: that of religious extremism. In this sense it is not wholly representative of the political spectrum, at least not now, when Hindu chauvinists are in power in New Delhi. But these chauvinists are not especially keen to have their say in the *EPW* either. In this they are much like their counterparts elsewhere. (*Liberation* will not commission an essay by Jean Marie Le Pen, but then Le Pen doesn't want to write for *Liberation*.) In spreading their word, Hindu chauvinists would much rather use the medium of oral gossip and innuendo than a journal printed in the language of the elite, English.

The little men who now rule India may think they can afford to disregard the *Economic and Political Weekly*. For the rest of us, however, it remains indispensable. Of course, it is also at times impossible. I have myself fought with the *EPW* twice, on account of its seeming bias towards the Marxists. Both times, I swore not to write for the journal again. Each time it was I who sued for peace. The *EPW* could comfortably live without me. But I cannot now live without the *EPW*.

Krishna Raj himself had to step into a pair of somewhat outsize shoes. His own successor will have no easy job of it, but she or he will have the support of a loyal staff, a devoted readership, and a stable of able and willing writers. Early signs are heartening. The day after the editor died I called the office, to be answered by a voice resolutely saying: 'This is the *EPW*'. The next issue, I was told, had already gone to press. The subsequent one, with tributes to the departed editor, was being planned. The *EPW* will carry on, and so, after a fashion, will India.

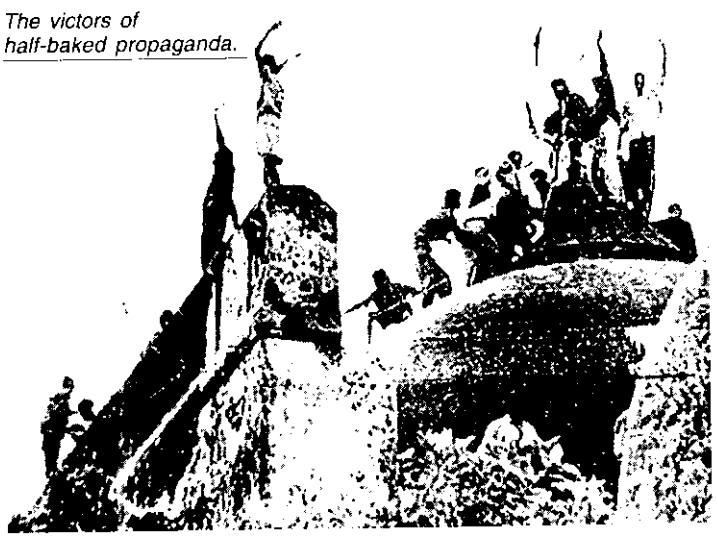
Iconoclasm: Not a Muslim Monopoly

Both Hindu and Muslim conquerors destroyed temples of their opponents as acts of political vendetta.

by ***Yoginder Sikand***

In recent years, ever since the campaign to destroy the Babri Masjid was launched, people in India have been fed with the constant propaganda that the destruction of places of worship was a fine art that Muslims, fired with an irrepressible iconoclastic zeal, had mastered. Historical records show that some Muslim kings did indeed destroy Hindu temples, something Muslims themselves would hardly dispute. In assessing the historical record, however, it is important to draw a distinction between Islamic commandments and the acts of individual Muslims. The *Quran* in no way sanctions the destruction of the places of worship of people of other faiths.

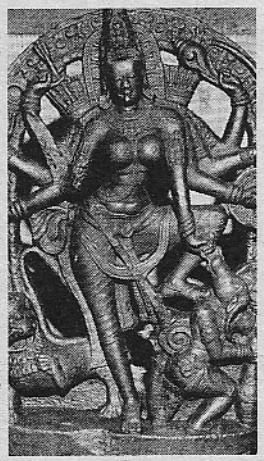
For the most part, Muslims have abided by the *Quranic* injunction that 'There is no compulsion in religion'. For instance, after Muhammad bin Qasim, leading the first Muslim army to India, had subdued Sind, he granted the local Hindus and Buddhists full religious freedom and guaranteed the protection of their shrines. When Sultan Sikander of Kashmir, egged on by his Brahmin prime minister, Suha Bhat, set about pulling down temples on a large scale, the leading Kashmiri Muslim Sufi, Hazrat Nuruddin Nurani, bitterly protested, arguing that Islam did not sanction this. This opinion was shared by several other Muslim 'ulama and sufis. Thus, the Tabaqat-I Akbari tells us that when they heard that Sultan Sikander Lodi (r. 1489-1517) was planning to destroy some temples, a group of high-ranking 'ulama protested, saying, 'It is not lawful to lay waste ancient idol temples'.



The victors of half-baked propaganda.

Caution must be exercised in accepting the narratives provided by medieval writers about the exploits of kings, including their 'feats' of temple destruction. Most historians were employees of the royal courts, and they tended to exaggerate the 'exploits' of the kings in order to present them as great champions of Islam, an image that hardly fits the facts we know about them. Thus, for instance, the author of the late eighteenth century Riyad ul-Salatin claimed that Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji demolished several temples in Bengal when he captured the province in 1204, although there is no evidence to suggest that this had indeed been the case. In his book *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, the well-known historian Richard Eaton points out that of the sixty thousand-odd cases of temple destruction by Muslim rulers cited by contemporary Hindutva sources one may identify only eighty instances 'whose historicity appears to be reasonably certain'. Eaton clearly shows that cases of destruction of places of worship were not restricted to Muslim rulers alone. He recounts numerous instances of Hindu kings having torn down Hindu temples, in addition to Jain and Buddhist shrines. He says that these must be seen as, above all, powerful politically symbolic acts.

Typically, cases of shrine destruction are reported in the wake of the overthrow of a powerful enemy and the annexation of his territory. The royal temple of the enemy was often pulled down to symbolise the enemy's defeat. Thus, for instance, historical records speak of the seventh century Hindu Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, who looted an idol of Ganesha from the Chalukyan capital of Vatapi. Fifty years later, the Hindu Chalukyan army brought back with them idols of Ganga and Jamuna, looted from temples of their fellow Hindu enemies to the north. In the eighth century, a Bengali Hindu army is said to have destroyed an idol of Vishnu belonging



FRONTLINE

Left to right: The Tamil inscription at the base of the sculpture, seized by the imperial Cholas in 1045 from their Chalukya enemies reads 'This is the door gaurdian brought by Lord Vijayarajendradeva after burning the Chalukya capital Kalyanapuram. (Institut Francaise d'Indologie, Pondicherry)

Image of Durga seized from the Chalukyas by Rajendra 1, Chola King (1012-1044) and taken to his capital. (American Institute of Indian Studies, Varanasi)

Vijayanagara, A.D. 1430. Devarajapuram copper plate inscription showing the signature of Vijayanagara's state-diety Virupaksha in Kannada script while the rest appears in Sanskrit. (Collection of R.S.R Archaeological Museum, Rajahmundry)

to their imperial foe, the Hindu king Lalitaditya of Kashmir. In the tenth century, the Hindu Pratihara king Herambapala defeated the Hindu Shahi king of Kangra and looted a solid gold idol of Vishnu from the Kangra royal temple. In the eleventh century, the Chola ruler Rajendra I furnished his capital with idols of Hindu deities that he had captured from his enemies, the Chalukyas, the Palas and the Kalingas. The sixteenth century Vijaynagara ruler, Krishna Deva Raya, is reported to have looted an idol of Krishna from Udaygiri after inflicting on it a crushing defeat. He is also said to have looted a Vittala idol from the famous Pandharpur temple.

Besides looting idols from the temples of their fellow Hindu enemies, several Hindu kings are reported to have destroyed the royal temples of their vanquished foes to signal their victory. Thus, the tenth century Rashtrakuta king Indra III destroyed the temple of Kalapriya at Kalpa, after defeating his dreaded enemies, the Rashtrakutas. Likewise, Kapilendra, founder of the Suryavanshi Gajapati dynasty in Orissa is said to have sacked several Hindu temples in the course of his military campaigns in the Tamil country. These are instances of Hindu kings looting Hindu idols and destroying Hindu temples for political purposes. The number of Jaina and Buddhist shrines destroyed by Hindu kings must certainly be much greater. Because royal temples served as powerful political symbols and centres—where often kings were worshipped as forms or incarnations of various deities—they seem to have been the particular object of attack by invaders, irrespective of religion. As Eaton remarks, 'It is clear that temples had been the natural sites for the contestation of kingly authority well before the coming of Muslim Turks to India. Not surprisingly, Turkish invaders, when attempting to plant their own rule in early medieval India, followed and continued established patterns'. He further adds that 'Whatever form they took, acts of temple desecration were never directed at the people, but at the enemy king and the image that incarnated and displayed his state-deity'.

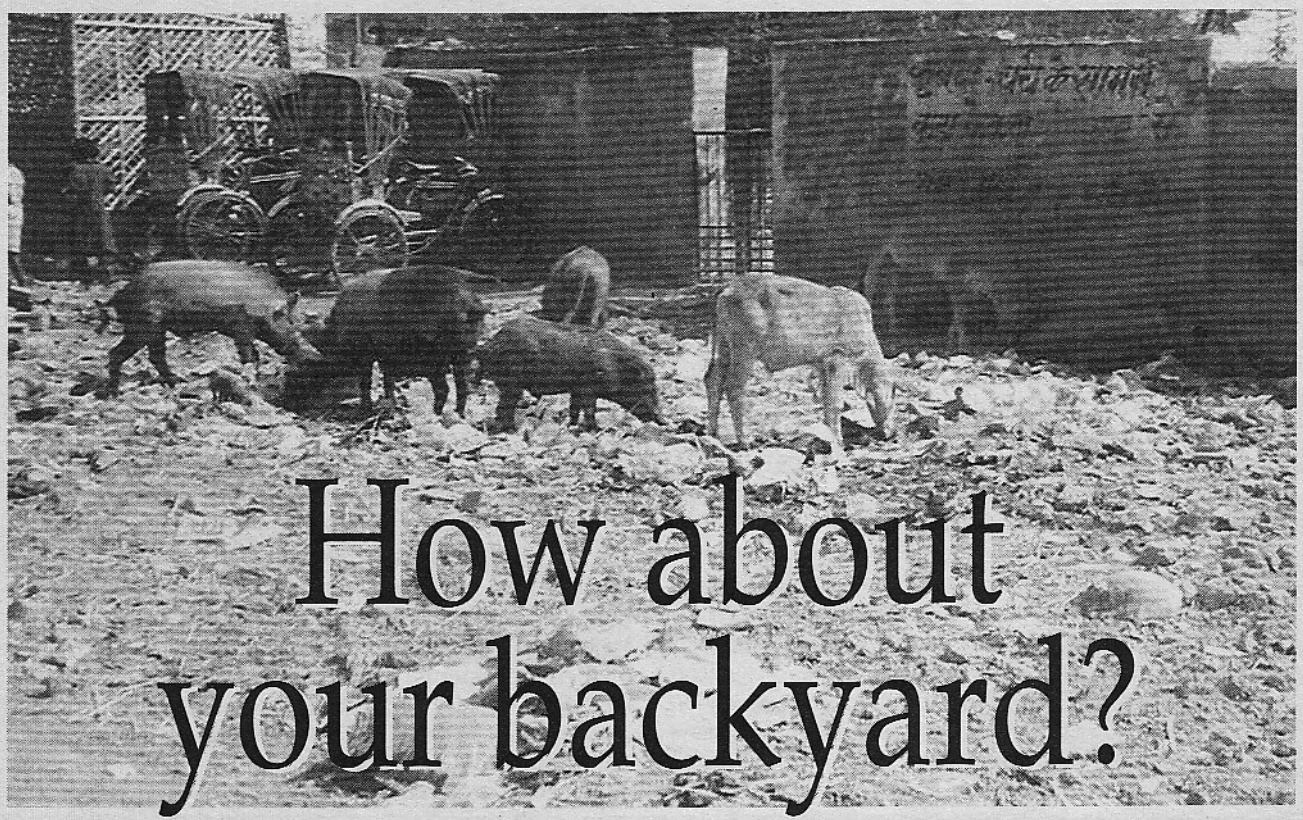
As in the case of Hindu rulers' attacks on temples, Eaton says that almost all instances of Muslim rulers destroying Hindu shrines were recorded in the wake of their capture of enemy territory. Once these territories were fully integrated into their dominions, few temples were targeted. This itself clearly shows that these acts were motivated, above all, by political concerns and not by a religious impulse to extirpate idolatry. The essentially political, as opposed to religious or communal, nature of these acts is clearly suggested in the details that the historical chronicles provide. Thus, for instance, we hear of the army of the Muslim Sultan of Golconda, led by the Marathi Hindu Brahmin general, Murahari Rao, which conquered a large swathe of territory up to the Krishna river. Rao is said to have sacked the famous Ahobilam temple, and looted its ruby-studded idol, which he presented to the Sultan as a war trophy. Likewise, we are told that Sultan Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal dispatched an army to Orissa against the Hindu Gajapati Raja to punish him for entering into a pact with the enemies of the Sultan, the Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Pathan Ibrahim Sur. The army, after defeating the Raja, then set about looting the Jagannath temple, the main royal shrine. As Eaton shows, it was usually the large royal temples that were targeted, for not only were they symbols of political power, but were also richly endowed with jewels, gold and other precious metals. In the wake of these attacks on enemy power, ordinary people were rarely targeted. Thus, for instance, when a Mughal army attacked Kuch Bihar in northern Bengal and destroyed the idol of the state-deity of Raja Bhim Narayan, the chief Mughal qazi of Bengal, Sayyed Muhammad Sadiq, issued an order to the Mughal soldiers that, 'nobody should touch the cash and property of the people', laying down that those who infringed this order would have their hands, ears or noses lopped off.

If the destruction of temples were, above all, powerful political acts, so too were instances of patronage extended to temples by rulers, Hindus as well as Muslims. Thus, in addition to Hindu rulers, many Muslim kings endowed temples with large land grants. A fourteenth century Sanskrit inscription records that thirteen years after his annexation of the northern Deccan, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq appointed a Muslim official to repair a Shiva temple at Kalyana. The much-maligned Aurangzeb, who is said to have destroyed some Hindu temples, is also known to have made extensive grants to other Hindu shrines. Thus, in 1659 in a royal order issued to his officers in Benaras, he wrote:

In these days, information has reached our court that several people have, out of spite and rancour, harassed the Hindu residents of Benaras and nearby places, including a group of Brahmans who are in charge of ancient temples there. These people want to remove those Brahmans from their charge of temple keeping, which has caused them considerable distress. Therefore, upon receiving this order, you must see that nobody unlawfully disturbs the Brahmans or other Hindus of that region, so that they might remain in their traditional place and pray for the continuance of the Empire... According to the Holy law (shari'at) and the exalted creed, it has been established that ancient temples should not be torn down'.

Cases of destruction of places of worship were not restricted to Muslim rulers alone. Several Hindu kings are reported to have destroyed the royal temples of their vanquished foes to signal their victory.

Eaton, after closely examining the historical record, shows that the temples whose destruction Aurangzeb had ordered had been associated with his political rivals. If temples belonging to Hindu political rivals were targeted by Muslim kings, they did not desist from similarly brutally attacking their fellow Muslim foes and rebels. The history of Muslim rule in India is replete with stories of Muslim kings fighting among themselves, and some of them are even said to have destroyed mosques in the territories of their opponents. Hindus and Muslims alike, then, have been equally guilty of destroying places of worship, and, in this regard, as in any other, neither has a monopoly on virtue or vice.



How about your backyard?

The problem of waste is not north-south, but between the powerful and powerless everywhere.

by ***Lila Rajiva***

Summers at home in India pass in a precarious time warp. I can fax, chat on the net or make a cell-phone call abroad but when I walk over to my nephew's house, only a mile and a half away in a rural campus, my journey has a Victorian arduousness to it. I have to pick my way gingerly through the dusty path cutting across the field, alert for dozing vipers, lantana thorns, cantankerous goats tethered to the bushes, and random puddings of animal and human excreta. At first, it is a mystery where these come from because the villages are a good bit away. But distance does not dim the force of NIMBY (not in my backyard) which until recent years has been the motto of Indian civic life.

And so houses are walled and gated here without apology. Our wall, solid grey and concrete, was supposed to have been a formidable seven-and-a half feet, but it sank to six after it was built. Still it's not enough. A neighbour's son shins up a tree on their side, leans over, and plucks the mangos on our side. Every so often, cricket balls, clods of earth, stones, and other less identifiable flying objects land on the lawn that my parents weed and cut every week with missionary zeal. Across from our house on an empty piece of land, someone's garbage shows up with mysterious regularity no matter how often we clear the space. Waste water from the gutters spills over onto the streets every time it rains. Little ones and sometimes not so little ones wander off into the fields to relieve themselves with innocent nonchalance. But the houses from which they saunter out, though they encroach on the streets far beyond the prescribed limits, are themselves immaculately clean, the earth in front swept, washed, and decorated with ritual white-powder *kolams* (patterns and designs). NIMBY.

Cultural factors underlie problems exacerbated by over-population and poverty. The cities of an early Indian civilization in the Indus river valley had complex sewer systems and some of the oldest extant toilets that date back 4,500 years. But over time, Hindu religious teachings forbidding defecation near dwelling places as polluting to one's caste made the cleaning of "night-soil" (a Southasian euphemism) the work of "untouchables".

Until Exnora came here, my parents, retired medical professors, were fighting a losing battle with community sanitation unable to get neighbours to cover open

ditches or to dispose of their garbage on their own property. An acronym for Excellent Novel and Radical, Exnora is the brainchild of MB Nirmal, a bank official turned civic activist who founded it in 1989 to clean up Madras, capital of the southern state, Tamil Nadu, and the fourth largest metropolis of India, which was disintegrating under massive problems of pollution and sanitation. Now, my father tells me, the Exnora man comes by on his cycle every week to collect the garbage sorted out beforehand into recyclables and wet waste which they compost to provide cheap high-quality manure used, among other things, to reforest the denuded pre-Cambrian hills that ring the campus. The municipality has talked of greening for years, but only Exnora, an NGO, had actually taken steps.

Almost a third of India lives in the city, and about half the population in the major cities is concentrated in slums. Lack of sanitation accounts for 80 percent of Indian health problems from polio, of which half the world's reported cases occur in India, to diarrhoea which kills half a million children annually, that is, as many children who have died from sanctions in Iraq in a decade.

In Madras, a study by Exnora shows that a crucial reason for the unsanitary conditions in the city is that over 267 million litres of sewerage is discharged everyday into the city's waterways because of malfunctioning sewage pumping-stations and treatment plants. According to experts, sewerage-connected toilets remain out of the reach of the majority of Indians primarily because the sewerage system needs not only a sufficient quantity of running water, but also a regular supply of water for waste disposal, the cost of which at the rate of USD 150 a unit would be USD 500 billion. As of now, there are no sewerage and sanitation services for more than half the population living in cities. Toilets are not available to about a third of urban residents and proper waste collection services have yet to reach almost three quarters of the population in Madras.

This means that the problem of waste must be central to the issue of sanitation. Exnora's goal of "zero waste" is based on its philosophy of waste as a type of "wealth" to be managed rather than eliminated. "Zero waste" programs separate garbage when it is collected into recyclables, hazardous waste, and wet waste (the largest component). Wet waste is taken to special sites (only 20 by 40 feet per 500 families) where it is compacted and turned in 40 days into dry manure by the introduction of earthworms. Vermiculture is odourless, bio-friendly, and inexpensive and it is only one of Exnora's grassroots operations which also include citizen monitoring of polluted waterways, tree planting, and community education.

From a local initiative, the NGO, now a member of the environmental group GAIA, has grown into hundreds of 'civic exnoras' affiliated with an 'international exnora' and has been cited as one of several hundred 'best community practices in the world' by the United Nations. Its example has been followed in Sri Lanka and Hong Kong and its approach to tackling

Labourers at the Bombay Port scrapping area.

pollution is in line with the most progressive in the West where for some years incinerators, especially medical incinerators, have been regarded as the source of pollutants like cancer-generating dioxins and have been closed down, held to higher standards, or in Europe replaced by autoclaves and microwaves.

The global garbage business, however, has its own form of NIMBY both at home and abroad. In the UK, the group Communities Against Toxics was outraged when after six years of spreading highly contaminated ash from its incinerators around Newcastle, at the end of a law suit Byker Combines Heat and Power Plant was only penalised with a small fine. In New South Wales, Vivendi, a French multinational notorious for its corporate practices, was implicated in creating the "big pong" of 1997 (the stink that spread over Adelaide from the Bolivar sewage treatment plant). Defying the so-called "rationality" of the market, Vivendi-owned companies are responsible for providing filtered water from the very same dams and water tables next to which Viviendi subsidiary, Collex, dumps waste. Paid by the ton, Collex has little incentive to recycle and thus reduce its output. These instances indicate that although activists often treat the export of waste as a north-south issue, it is more accurately an issue of the powerful and powerless whether at home or abroad.

Still, developing nations do bear the brunt of global NIMBY. Batteries, PVC plastics, genetically modified foods, multilayer packaging, obsolete weapons, and even ships are sent overseas to poor countries to be broken down and recycled in horrendous conditions. Obsolete technology that has been discarded in the West tries surreptitiously to resuscitate itself in a climate that is environmentally less rigorous. In the 1970s, trash was dumped in Africa with the help of local middlemen until an international outcry stopped the trade. More recently, electronic wastes from phones and computers are being sent to India, Pakistan and China, where they are disposed off in highly dangerous conditions. At least 30,000 tons of scrap from the World Trade Center wreckage has been exported from the United States to Sabari Exim Pvt Ltd. in Madras, raising concerns in Greenpeace, India, and other NGOs. Still, the Basel convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal (adopted in Basel, Switzerland on 22 March 1989) which has in effect banned hazardous exports from the developed nations has so far not been signed by the United States.

Inefficiencies of scale

There is, however, one crucial difference between corporate and peasant NIMBY. My parents can always retreat behind that gray wall and enjoy sanity and sanitation no matter what happens outside. But there is no private sphere into which a community can retreat once corporations enter the picture. Far from being conservative in culture, multinationals are inherently radical, disrupting, dislocating, and creating new inefficiencies of scale, while, turning semantics on its head, the so-called 'radical' organisations like Greenpeace and Gaia try to 'conserve' local resources and local networks. This is no 'free market' – the MNCs come armed with the big guns of national and international (IMF and World Bank) subsidies. The NGOs, truly private entrepreneurs who are actually filling consumer needs, operate on a shoe-string.

In Madras, for instance, the Exnoras have become the latest victim of the MNCs. Again, it is Vivendi and a

subsidiary, Onyx, who are repeating their Australian rob-Peter-to-pay Paul act, dumping right next to the most important water table in the city from which they are simultaneously drawing water. Again, paid by the ton, Onyx has no incentive to recycle, with the result that Exnora's carefully built up system of separation at the source as well as its crucial public education effort have been undermined. Onyx in fact had been guilty of disrupting local recycling in Egypt in 2001. When it signed its seven-year contract, Onyx was supposed to be bringing in the latest technology. And those who were happy to see the garbage off their streets but not especially concerned with where it went after that pronounced themselves satisfied. However, it was soon apparent to everyone that the whole operation, involving the transport of unsegregated waste in uncovered trucks, was medieval.

The story gets worse. Madras generates 1400 tons of waste per day which, like 80 percent of Indian garbage, is organic, moist, of a low calorific value, and best handled by compacting not burning, as even Onyx has conceded, as high-cost waste-to-energy technologies that involve burning are not only inefficient and costly but extremely hazardous. Incinerators release chlorinated organic compounds and large quantities of carbon-dioxide which is one of the major contributors to temperature rises that have plagued south India for the past few years. Acid gases from combustion and elements in the garbage interact with oxygen or hydrogen leading to acid rain, metal corrosion, and the erosion of buildings. High temperature burning of chlorinated substances creates potent furans and dioxins that even in low doses produce an enormous variety of adverse effects in humans and animals. An international symposium on dioxides in Seoul in 2001 revealed the highest levels of dioxin related substances in the breast milk of women living close to the Perengudi site where Onyx was dumping, and studies of nearby families showed a higher incidence of early death, asthma and skin rashes. The displacement of the Exnoras by MNCs was one of innumerable cases presented at Hyderabad, India, at the Asian Social Forum (ASF) in January 2003.

Strange that it should be the so-called left which is demanding local solutions, decentralisation and downward devolution while soi-disant free traders endorse corporations whose economically nonsensical diktats and sprawling, incoherent operations would have put the Politburo to shame. Vivendi and the other MNCs are not private businesses in any Smithian sense at all. Cartelised and subsidised they are impervious to the market and feed off the public trough through bids that are not genuinely competitive and contracts skewered by kickbacks, overlaps, PR campaigns, and conflicts of interests. The costs of their operation – transportation, public health, education, adminis-tration, policing — and the dangerous bio hazards produced by it are all borne by the public or 'socialised'. But the profits are 'privatised' and siphoned off from the public domain. The Exnoras are no match for the combined weight of the state and such behemoth cartels. As for the public, which public is it - the masses, the middle class, or the elites? The voices in the business press demanding more globalisation, the activist green groups demanding less, antiquarians nostalgic for rural India or the modernists fast forwarding to a technological nirvana?

Even China is not spared: a woman hammering a cathode ray tube from a computer in Guiyu.

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The fate of the Exnoras should be a warning to market fundamentalists that those who miss the reality of what is taking place in the Global New World Order by fixating on the classical meaning of labels such as 'private', 'free' or 'market' are liable to become as obsolete as the cumbersome, dangerous technology of the global sewerage system.

The SAFTA mirage

Free trade and investment within Southasia will help usher peace and prosperity, but a lackadaisical SAFTA treaty will not take us there.

by ***Abid Qaiyum Suleri and Bhaskar Sharma***

SAARC trade ministers could not manage to meet even once between the November 2001 Doha Ministerial and the August 2003 Cancun Ministerial Conference of World Trade Organisation (WTO). There is no such thing as a 'common SAARC position' at the gatherings of the WTO, and this is because the trade interests of the WTO members from Southasia vary a lot. Against this backdrop, the adoption of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) at the January 2004 SAARC summit in Islamabad could be considered a landmark decision. SAFTA is supposed to open a new vista of regional economic cooperation and integration. SAARC member states seem to have, to some extent, set aside their parochial interests and apprehensions and decided to move forward with an open mind towards creating a free trade area. First, the sense of urgency for SAFTA is laudable. Second, the normalisation of India-Pakistan relations becomes very critical for the operation of the free trading regime in its true sense.

SAFTA is slated for launch in 2006, with a ten year period for full-fledged implementation. The treaty has taken up some of the issues with very clear provisions including those on tariff reduction and the procedural aspects of the application of balance of payment and 'safeguard' measures, as well as a dispute settlement mechanism. The treaty has clearly stipulated the actions that contracting states can take while facing balance of payment difficulties, during import surges or in the case of disputes. Likewise, the treaty has also laid down a clear path for tariff reduction, which spans ten years, beginning 2006.

This meeting also took environmental issues as a priority area. In the Islamabad Declaration adopted at the meeting, ministers recognised the need to "undertake and reinforce regional cooperation in the conservation of our water resources, environment, pollution prevention and control as well as our preparedness to deal with natural calamities". Ministers also encouraged the establishment of a Coastal Zone Management Centre in the Maldives. Five out of seven SAARC members have long coastal zones and this management centre would study the nature of problems such as tidal surges, cyclones and the greenhouse effect. Ministers

furthermore "stressed the early submission of the State of the Environment (SOE) reports to expedite the preparation of SAARC State of Environment report and the commissioning of the work on drafting a Regional Environment Treaty". It is pertinent to mention here that a "State of Environment of Pakistan Report", prepared by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) for Pakistan's Ministry of Environment (MOE) before the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development could, however, never get approval from the MOE apparently due to the hard facts and critical analysis presented in the report about the state of the environment in Pakistan. One wonders if such a report for SAARC would be digestible to our relevant environmental ministries. Anyhow, the good news is that environment is on the SAARC agenda now and if implemented in letter and spirit, the Islamabad Declaration could be a fruitful juncture for 'trade and environment'.

Despite the historic adoption of the SAFTA treaty, the treaty itself does not incorporate all components that are essential for the effective functioning of a free trade regime. There are some apprehensions that need to be immediately, or at least in the near future, addressed. These apprehensions arise due to the fact that the SAFTA treaty has some confusing provisions and gray areas. Besides, many issues that should have been addressed in the initial treaty itself are lacking. It seems that the negotiators have not learnt their lessons from the failed South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) which was inked in 1993. The flaws in

SAPTA such as the issue of 'rules of origin', 'non tariff trade barriers', etc., need to be meticulously looked into for the purpose of realising optimal benefits from SAFTA.

Some of the important and apparent deficiencies in the SAFTA treaty arise out of the inability of the member states to draw concrete consensus on certain issues namely - revenue compensatory mechanism, rules of origin, sensitive lists, and technical assistance for least developed members, among others. Moreover, rules and regulations for the effective implementation of the Trade Liberalisation Programme and granting of special and differential treatment to the 'least developed members' (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal) have not been clearly spelt out. These issues form the crux of the treaty, and until concrete and constructive negotiations are concluded on them, the future of SAFTA would remain uncertain.

Southasian LDCs

While many of the deficiencies highlighted above have been left for future negotiations and finalisation, the deadlines for completion of negotiations have not been mentioned in most of the cases. The only case in which a deadline for completion has been specifically mentioned is in Article 11(e) that relates to rules and regulations with regard to a revenue compensatory mechanism for the benefit of the Southasian LDCs. The rules and regulations are to be finalised before SAFTA is formally launched in 2006. Likewise, on other issues such as the harmonisation of legislation, identification of special needs of the LDCs, the number of products under the sensitive list, areas of technical assistance for LDCs and rules of origin, the treaty makes no mention of deadlines. This is likely to create complications in the actual implementation of the treaty, unless of course the proposed actions are completed before the implementation of the Trade Liberalisation Programme (phasing out of tariffs and quantitative restrictions).

For years we were fooling ourselves by giving concessions to neighbouring countries on commodities which they do not produce or trade in at all.

Likewise, there are some ambiguous provisions in the treaty which need to be eradicated if the treaty is to be a legal and binding document. For example, Article 3(2) (f) states that the special needs of the LDCs would be clearly recognised by 'adopting concrete preferential measures in their favour on a non-reciprocal basis'. Due to the lack of deadlines and concrete plans for the identification of the special needs of LDCs, this provision is ambiguous. Besides, the treaty has no concrete provision relating to anti-dumping, subsidies, countervailing duties, technical barriers to trade, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures. These issues are pertinent while a region moves into a free trading arrangement.

It is a fact that world over, except in Southasia, the trade between neighbouring countries runs up to high levels of volume. The trade within NAFTA is 60 percent of the total trade of the regional countries; similarly 55 percent of the total trade of the EU is within the European region; this figure is 30 percent for ASEAN, whereas it is only 5 percent for the SAARC region. It is expected that SAFTA has the potential to increase regional trade manifold, but to reap these benefits our political leadership would have to be pressed to make SAFTA stronger. We have to work for:

Free movement of people. Movement of capital and goods would be useless unless there is free movement of people. Our leaders would have to work for a regime where simple things like obtaining a visa to travel to any of the SAARC countries would not be a big task.

Trade in Services. Service sector contribution to Southasian GDP is increasing. One aim must be to increase the trade in services.

Improved physical infrastructure: It is natural that increased movement of goods/services/persons would require improved physical infrastructure.

Need of harmonisation: For us to really reap the benefits of SAFTA, harmonisation of custom, banking (including a Letters of Credit system understandable to bankers and acceptable to businessmen) and effective insurance systems are all necessary. There is also a need to harmonise the quality standards within the SAARC region.

Finally, it must be kept in mind that trade follows investment. Trade volumes cannot increase significantly in the absence of investment. Hence for SAFTA to be meaningful there is a need to work out a regional arrangement or a framework for investment promotion as well as protection. Critically speaking, SAPTA, meant for preferential trade, did not lead to any real gain. For years we were fooling ourselves by giving concessions to neighbouring countries on commodities which they do not produce or trade in at all. Now we have SAFTA and we must try to make it successful by being realistic, for surely increased trade and investment in the region is the key to lasting peace...

It is imperative to conduct empirical research on pros and cons of implementing SAFTA to make it a win-win situation for all. WTO watch groups and a network of civil society organisations including Pakistan's SDPI, have already started studying these aspects. With similar studies from public, private and the non-government sector, the shortcomings in the treaty would be identified and our policy makers would be equipped with the knowledge to rectify those shortcomings in order to move towards an effective free trade regime rather than a mirage.

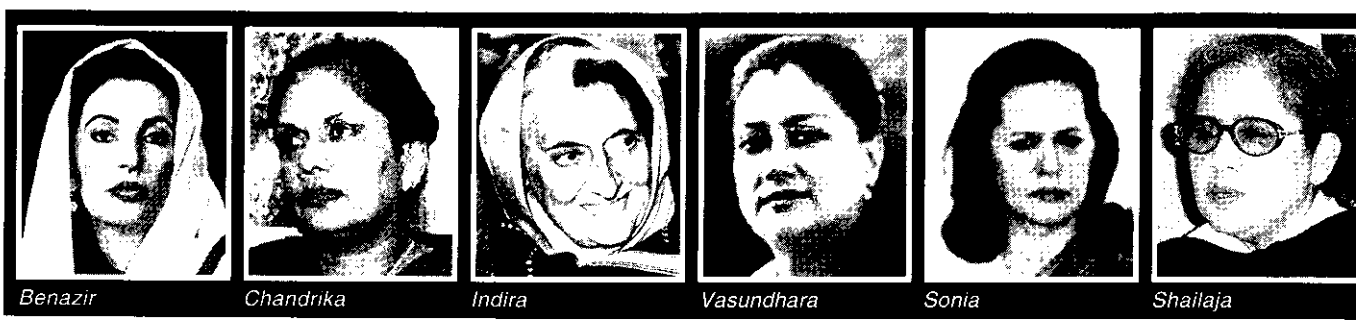
The rice and roti routine

The last roti is for her
With which
She has to craft
The next day's sun.
—Premranjan Animesh in Pichhali Roti

MAO ZEDONG is believed to have said that the more chillies you ate, the more revolutionary you became. Judging from the fire in the press statements of the Maobaadi commissars of Nepal, they must have bitten fistfuls of *jyanmaras* (killer chillies) in their childhood. But like most Nepalis, they too must have grown up eating loads of the staple rice as well. Despite tall claims of the Maobaadi leadership about the emancipation of women, indications are that the lot of the 'fairer' sex among insurgents is no fairer than their fate in the society at large. If we are what we eat, something is seriously wrong with the Southasian staple—rice and rotis.

Eating mountains of rice with streams of *daal* flowing over is bad enough in terms of gender sensitivity for mal. More than 16,000 Afghan women die at childbirth every year, the world's worst maternal mortality rate outside of sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the Beijing propaganda ("Statistics show that in recent years a Tibetan woman in urban areas spends on an average 800 Yuan or more each year on cosmetics, approximately half the monthly salary of a government worker in Lhasa."), Tibetan women in and outside Tibet are no better off than their other Subcontinental sisters, even though they work a lot harder than their men.

According to recent Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre statistics, female economic activity in Pakistan is only 15.4 percent compared to 57.2 percent in Bangladesh, 85 percent in Nepal, 43.5 percent in India, 41.6 percent in Sri Lanka and 28.6 percent in Maldives. But it is the scale of desperation in India that is *Bharat* is most shocking. Devinder Sharma wrote recently in the *Hindustan Times* that a baby girl was sold by her parents in Orissa for INR 10, less than the price of a bottle of mineral water. Perhaps it was the poor wom-



we all know who does the cooking, but the roti-eating male of the species seems to be gastronomically programmed to be a male-chauvinistic-you-know-what. The female resigned to the fate of rolling rotis and boiling rice. Rabri Devi, the Chief Minister of Bihar, claims that she still loves to spend some time in the kitchen, specially rolling *chapattis*, for her husband-cum-party president Laloo Yadav. Women's rights is nowhere on the agenda.

Not that this reluctant 'leader' is an exception in South Asian politics. Sheila Dixit has miserably failed to make New Delhi safer for women. She can claim that law and order is the responsibility of the central government. But then she failed to get her party to even raise this issue in the Indian parliament in an effective manner. The time and effort the Congress (I) spent in fending off the onslaught on the foreign origin of its president Sonia Gandhi could have been better utilised to project her as the hope of half of the population of the biggest democracy in the world. But Sonia's (wo)man-Friday, Ambika Soni, seems to be too busy projecting her boss as the 'he-man' of her party. With women like these at the helms, why bemoan the attitude of the male of the species?

The status of women in Southasia is of course abysan's alternative to female foeticide, the procedure of choice of the comfortably off in the wheat belt of Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, parts of Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. Selling girls into the thriving sex market of the Southasian metropolis from the disadvantaged section of Nepali and Bangladeshi population is a curse that is giving nightmares to the health workers worried about the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in the region.

However, all of this has not stopped us Southasians from electing some high profile presidents, prime ministers, chief ministers, parliamentarians, and legislators. Sultan Ahmed writes, of Pakistan: "It is easier to let more women sit in the assemblies and the Senate than enable them earn a living to feed their children and tend the ailing". Sadly, the situation elsewhere in Southasia isn't much different. Aung San Suu Kyi is the Nobel-prize winner and a symbol of democratic struggle all over the world, but that hasn't made the Burmese junta more respectful towards their women.

Traditionally, mountain and hill women of the Himalayan region work much harder—and hence command more power—but even they bow to the male au-

thority almost unquestioningly. The monarchies of Bhutan and Nepal are yet to amend their succession laws in favour of the first-born irrespective of sex.

The model for women who seek power—and get it—is a male figure. Southasian female leaders are more 'manly' in their minds than most of them would care to admit. Many women leaders have inherited political legacy from their fathers and husbands, and are groomed to behave like their mentors. Zulfi and Mujib's daughters (Benazir and Hasina) or Zia-ur Rahman and Rajiv's widows (Khaleda and Sonia) have inherited the male image and are trying to live up to it.

The political pedigree of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is a little more illustrious and complex. Her father was a prime minister. And her mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike had become the world's first female prime minister back in 1960. Yet, she seems to draw her inspiration from her father, who was assassinated by a Buddhist monk when she was just in primary school.

Dynastic succession, even through democratic processes, seems to make women behave like men. But even those who have come up the social ladder on their own—like the glamorous sanyasin Uma Bharati from Bundelkhand or spinster Shailaja Acharya of Nepal—suffer from an acute masculinity syndrome. It is hard to see how they are any different from their male colleagues on the all-important question of empowerment of women.

Dowager Ammas

There is a very long tradition of dowager begums and maharanis ruling small fiefdoms, on behalf of their little ones, in Southasia. Surrounded by men in their courts, these women had to measure up to male expectations. They did so by becoming more like them. From Razia Sultan to Jhansi ki Rani in the battlefield and from Jayalalitha Jayaram to Mamata Banerji in the electoral arena, *khoob ladi mardani* (fought like men) has always been the ideal of women in statecraft and politics.

No wonder, Indira Gandhi aspired to be an Alfa male, and managed to become the only 'man' of all her cabinets after 1971—masculinity understood by her as the epitome of aggressiveness, imperiousness, intolerance, and the dispenser of patronage. The way things are, there is no reason why the women of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Tamilnadu, and Bihar should rejoice that they now have *Bhabhi* (Vasundhara Raje Scindia), *Behanji* (Uma Bharati), *Dadi* (Sheila Dixit), *Amma* (Jayalalita), and *Chachi* (Rabri Devi) as their chief ministers.

Begum Khaleda 'entered' politics in 1981, when her husband, Zia-ur Rahman, a former general-turned-president, was assassinated by rebel military officers. Ever since, the sole purpose of her politics has been to prove her late husband right by running down Begum Hasina, daughter of assassinated prime minister Mujibur Rehman. Benazir has failed to grow out of the shadows of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who had vowed to eat grass but build the nuclear bomb at any cost. President Chandrika of Sri Lanka prefers to walk the razors edge of communalism like her father, but times have changed since 1959. Shailaja Acharya—the most illustrious Nobody of Nepali politics—too likes to allude to the mid-seventies' conciliatory politics of her late uncle and mentor BP Koirala, without realising that there is no Cold War rivalry anymore to sustain the world's attention on any public figure in competition with the monarch.

There is little doubt that we need many more female Southasians in academia, media, business, diplomacy, and politics. But our common experience shows that matriarchal leaders are mirror images of their patriarchal predecessors. The women who succeed in life become as insensitive as men. The challenge then is how to get more feminine, if not feminist, women in public life in Southasia.

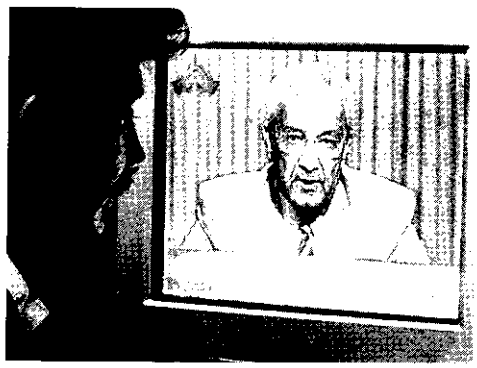
Several likely solutions are suggested by TV Talking Heads, print Big Foot pens, and radio Loud Mouths. Most of them end up stressing the supposed role of education in the emancipation of women. That is a suggestion that can never go wrong. But given the snail's pace of spread of female education in the region, it will be quite a while before we will get women-like-women in positions of power and authority. Meanwhile, why not tinker with a change of diet to free our Maa *jis* and Ammas from rolling endless number of rotis for the insatiable hunger of the ever increasing brood? Did you know that the three of the eight biggest countries of the world (in terms of population) are in Southasia, and that the rate of population increase in Pakistan is close to 2.7 percent?

We must eat less rotis, and go back to gruels like Dhindo (maize), Dalia (pulses), or Khichadi (rice and pulses) before we mature into eating sprouts that set the women free from the chulha-chowka (hearth and wash) routine. The earthen bowls must return to replace the grain-plates that we eat from.

–CK Lal

PTV and Mr. Khan

The days when people in Pakistan sat glued to their television sets watching 'Waris' on PTV have given way to moribund 'broiler chicken' productions lacking the punch to hold viewer interest through even one full run. Salahuddin Tino might have won an award for his acting skills at the 12th PTV awards held last October but his performance or that of his counterpart Farha Nadeem was not good enough to up the consistently falling viewer interest in PTV. Even a survival attempt by PTV to launch PTV World could not wean the viewer – the content lacked originality. While the famed 'family dramas' on PTV have lost their lustre to the host of new channels airing game shows ('Maal Ka Sawaal' on Indus Vision), entertainment shows ('Hum Sab Umeed Say Hain' on GEO), current affairs pro-grammes ('Question Time Pakistan' on BBC World) and even drama serials ('Umrao Jan Ada' on GEO), the AQ Khan apology earlier this month on television was a clincher all the way. It was the mother of all reality-TV shows for Pakistan, only this time PTV got lucky.



"I have much to answer for. The investigations have established that many of the reported activities did occur and these were inevitably initiated at my behest...I was confronted with the evidence and findings and I have voluntarily admitted that much of it is true and accurate...I have chosen to appear before you to offer my deepest regrets and unqualified apologies to a traumatised nation", said Khan. This was followed by a presidential pardon on the recommendation of the cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali.

While the craft of 'sweeping it under the carpet' was on accurate display, a 'carpet fibre' syndrome emerges in this case as well. It goes back to the mid 1970s when a certain Zulfikar Ali Bhutto vowed that his country would "eat grass", if necessary, to develop nuclear weapons. This was after the Indian side tested its first nuclear device. Even in the second half of 2001, President Musharraf warned in not-so-unclear terms, regarding threat of Indian aggression, that Pakistanis had not worn *choodiyaan* (bangles; gender insensitive metaphor for spineless) and his references on other occasions to 'wars which would no longer be conventional'.

One element that comes clear from all of this about the nuclear status of Pakistan is that - for Pakistan the bomb was much more than a strategic leverage, it was a matter of pride. The iconic status accorded to AQ Khan is nonpareil especially if one sits to compare the Pakistani public's perception of him, as opposed to state-felicitation, to nuclear scientists elsewhere so much so that Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri was said to have said that 'nobody in Pakistan can "touch" Abdul Qadeer Khan'. When a tactical weapon reveals more than ammunition value, heroes are created and AQ Khan was one such hero.

For such attachment to the weapon, it seems rather surreal that the weapon of pride or parts/designs thereof could be shuttled around without the knowledge if not assistance of the military. When former Pakistani army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg's clarifies on BBC World's 'Hard-talk Pakistan' that the army has 'never been in control' of the country's nuclear programme, except in times of military rule, it seems even more out of place. Interestingly the prodigal son they are talking about had a XXX (Vin Diesel's spy thriller) streak from much before. That he allegedly managed to steal blueprints for making uranium enrichment centrifuges from the Physics Dynamics Research Laboratory (known as FDO) in Amsterdam that conducted research on behalf of URENCO, a British-Dutch-German nuclear engineering consortium and for which a Dutch court sentenced him to four years' jail in 1983 after he was convicted in absentia of nuclear espionage is less known. The decision, however, was overturned on a technicality and Khan still denies the allegations.

The revelations which sparked off the reality-drama on PTV had a pan Asian sweep. Khan is alleged to have had an associate called Tahir in Sri Lanka who in turn had alleged links to the Malaysian prime minister's son who in turn had a company manufacturing centrifuge parts which in turn sent this particular consignment to Dubai from where it was to reach Libya. Everyone it seems took turns, including AQ Khan on TV, President Musharraf and even GWB talking of AQK on TV and now the whole world in turn has no clue as to why anything to do with the 'N' word was hushed up in this manner.

Coming back to PTV, they have nothing less than a Bond movie in their hands. They had the locales and now they have a story idea. A crime thriller with an international star-cast would be an ideal beginning to regain ground lost to the other channels. About time that the scriptwriter gets to work!

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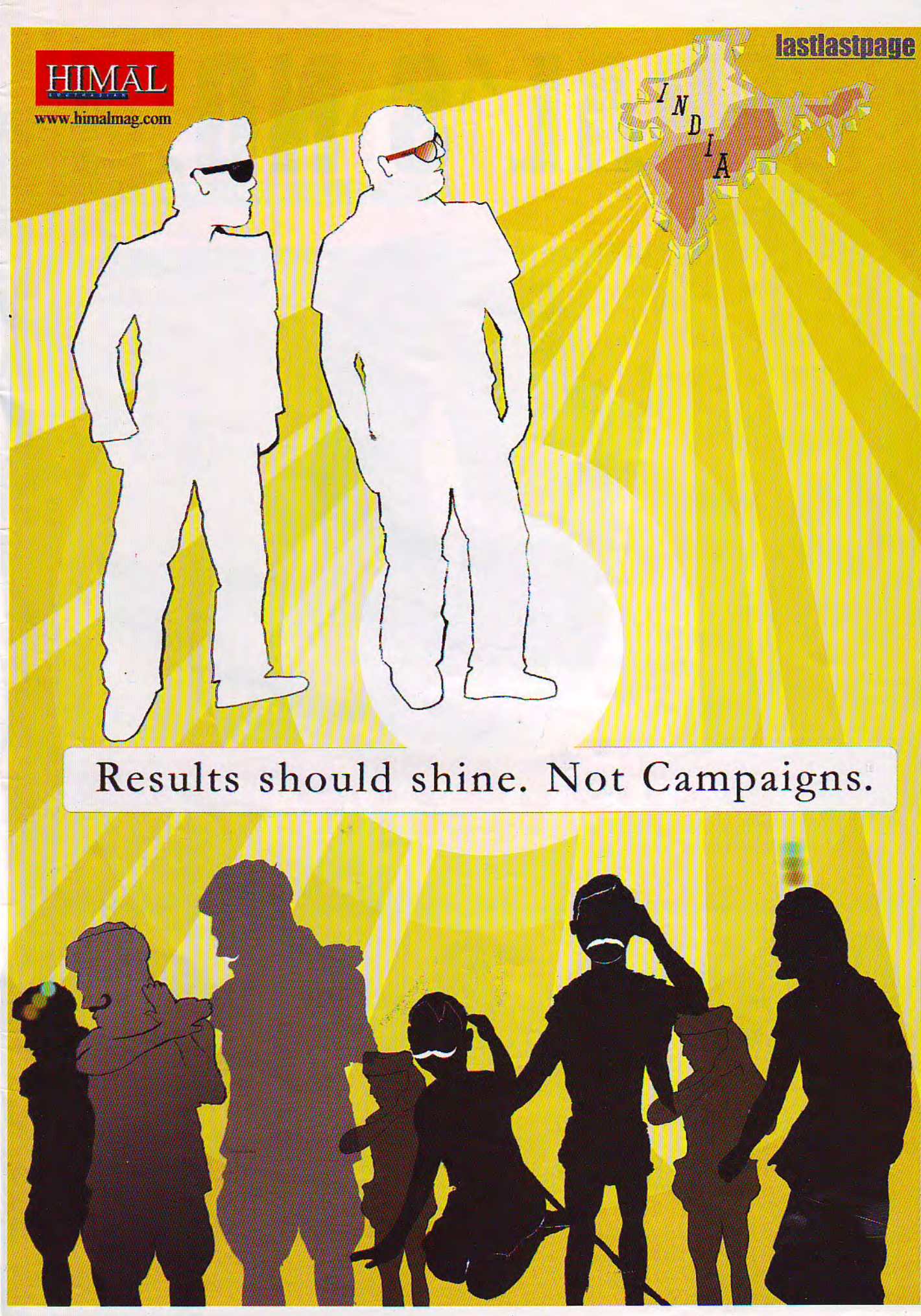

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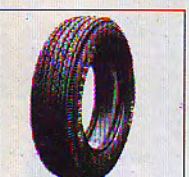

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