

October 2006

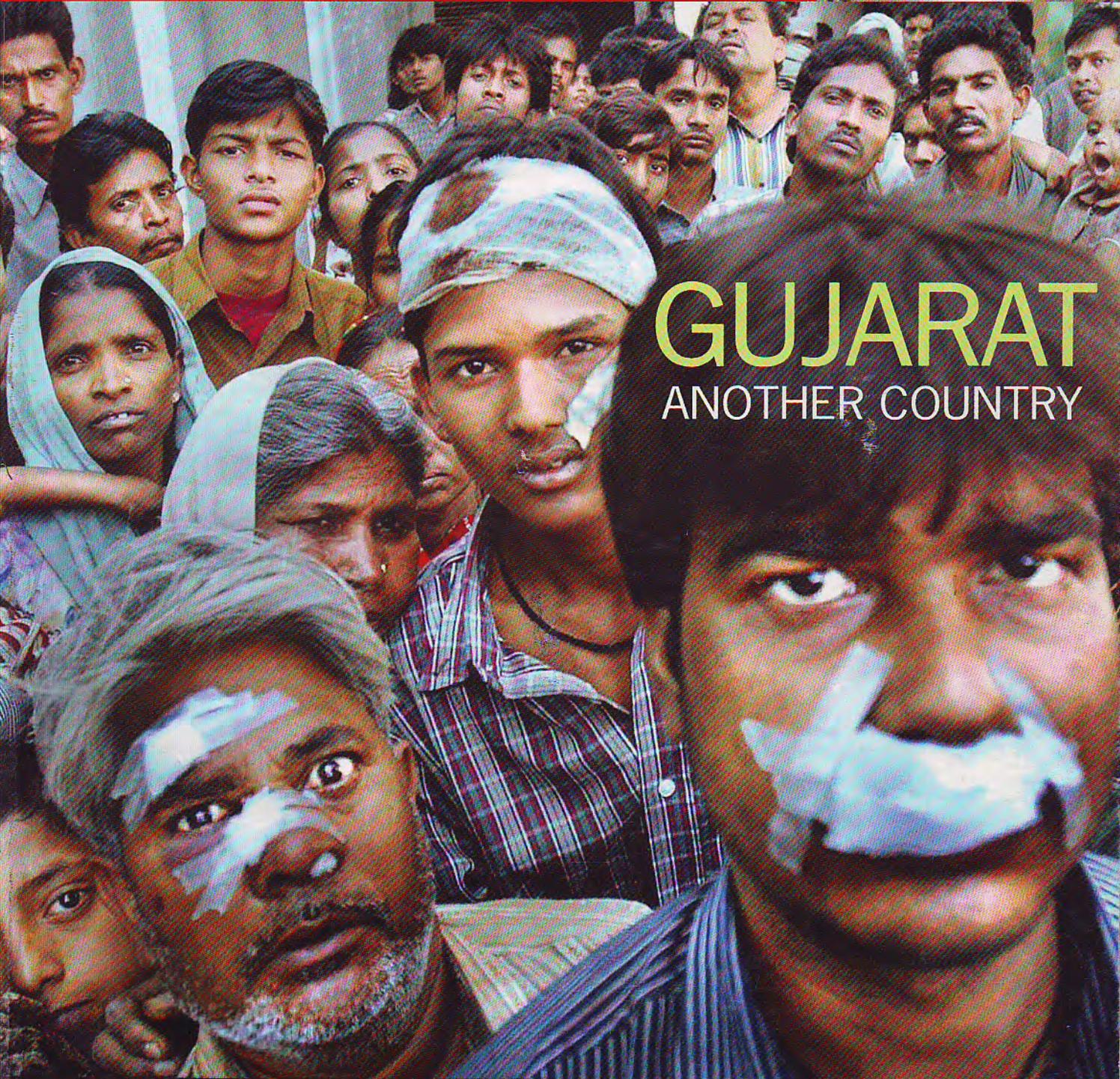
Vol 19 No 7

HIMAL

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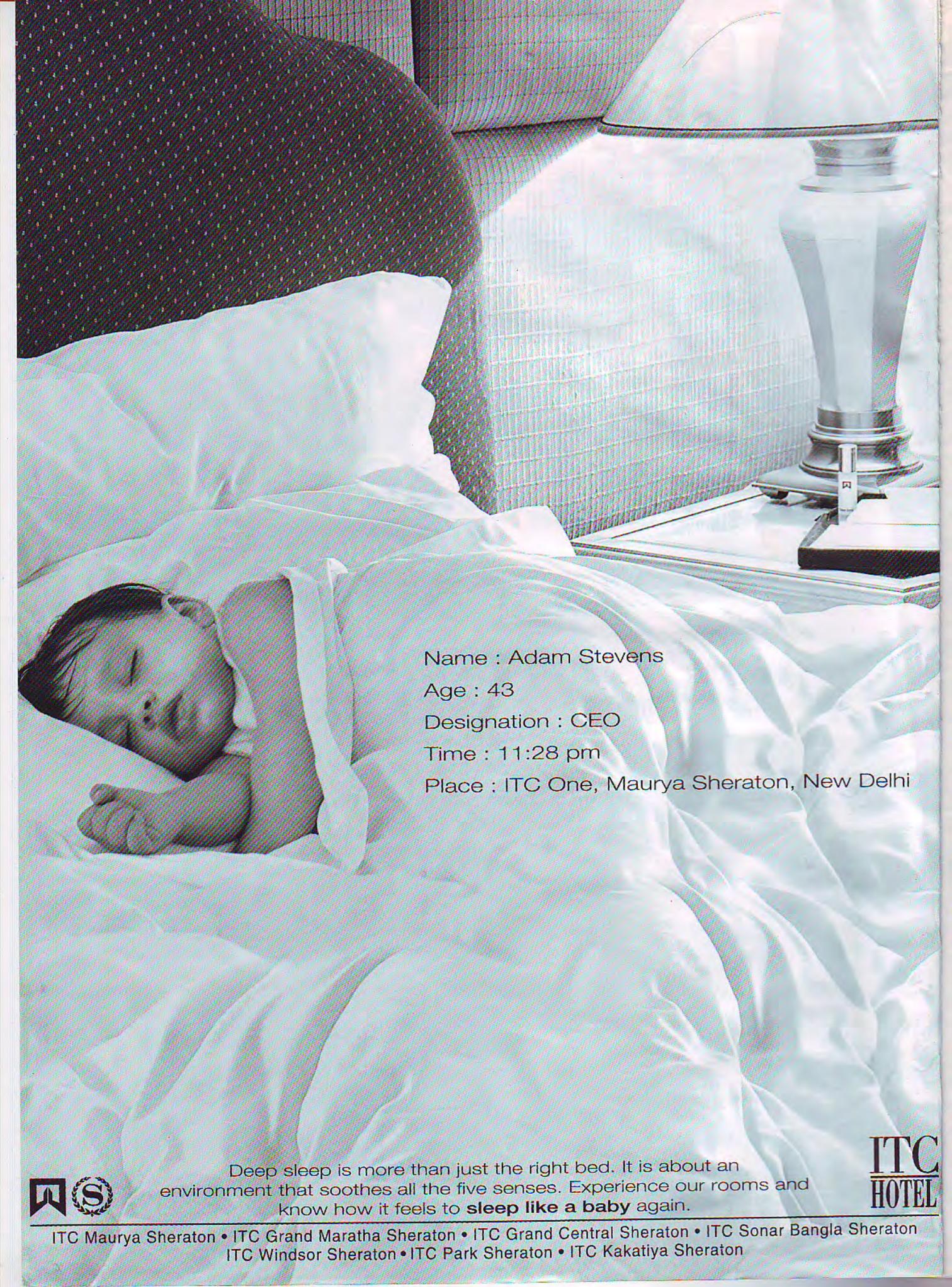
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Gujarat 2006



The Muslims of Gujarat were scared in 2002, when the state sponsored and supported large-scale killings. They are afraid today, when the violence against them takes invisible forms, with broad political and social sanction. The cover image for this issue depicts a group of Muslims after a mob of Hindu neighbours attacked. They are huddled amidst the wreckage of their burnt-out homes. This picture was taken when the riots were at their peak, but the eyes are still fearful today.

Himal's cover story this issue is about this disturbing reality in Gujarat. Beneath the surface calm lies a divided society, a silent underclass and a fascist government. Gujarat 2006 is about how a community is being treated - and the possibility of the fear evident in this photograph translating into anger.

Cover photograph by photojournalist Ami Vitale.

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October 2006 | www.himalmag.com

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Himal Southasian is published by
The Southasia Trust, Lalitpur, Nepal

Office address
Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal

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GPO Box: 24393, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977 1 5547279
Fax: +977 1 5552141
editorial@himalmag.com
subscription@himalmag.com
info@himalmag.com
www.himalmag.com
ISSN 10129804

Library of Congress Control number
88 912882

Image setting: ScanPro
Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Lalitpur, Nepal
+977-1-5547017/5547018

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Cover image by **Ami Vitale**

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Rest of Southasia	USD 18	USD 33
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Allahabad vis-a-vis Purvanchal



Regarding Shikha Trivedi's article ("*Between the grains: Purvanchal circumstances*", *May/June 2006*), it is wrong to include Allahabad in Purvanchal. The Allahabad division - which today includes the Kaushambi, Fatehpur, Pratapgarh and Allahabad districts - is not geographically, historically, culturally, administratively or ethnically a part of Purvanchal. When bureaucrats and politicians reorganise regions, they should take into account these considerations.

Geographically, Allahabad is an integral part of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, as it is situated at the confluence of the two rivers. Found in the southern part of Uttar Pradesh, Allahabad's land is typically Doabi - very fertile, but not too moist, as in Purvanchal. This land is well suited for the production of wheat, which is the major crop of the entire Doab area. The southern and eastern parts of Allahabad are dry and rocky, like its neighbours Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand. At its north and northeast lies the Awadhi region, while to its west are other areas of the lower Doab. For the various imperial forces that arrived here from the east - including the British - Allahabad has been the gateway to the Indian Northwest.

Historically, too, Allahabad has always been an integral part of the Doab, which includes the Delhi region. When the Aryans first settled in India, their territory, which they named Aryavarta, included Prayag/Kaushambi. Since then, Allahabad's fortunes have been locked in with this Doabi piece of land. When Muslims came to the region, Allahabad became

part of the various Delhi sultanates, and rose to prominence once again under the Mughals. Akbar built a fort here, recognising its strategic position in the Doab. Purvanchal's history, on the other hand, followed its own course. When the British came they made Allahabad the capital of the northwestern province of Agra, and it remained so for twenty years. As a distinct region, Allahabad's history is tied with that of the Doab rather than that of Purvanchal.

Culturally speaking, Allahabad has always been the last frontier of the west. In today's UP it is at the centre of the state, forming a cultural triangle with Kanpur and Lucknow. Another cultural difference between Allahabad and Purvanchal is food: the staple in Allahabad is wheat, in Purvanchal it is rice. Likewise, Allahabad speaks Awadhi, while the lingua franca of Purvanchal is Bhojpuri. Purvanchal's important festivals - like the *chath* - are not celebrated here. Ethnically, Allahabadis are not known by the traditional *Purabia*, *Bhaiyya* or *Bhojpuri* identities.

Politically, Allahabad division has always been constituted of the lower Doab districts of Etawah, Farrukhabad, Kanpur, Fatehpur

and Allahabad. Today most of the above districts have been separated from Allahabad division, and have been included in western or central UP as part of the Agra and newly created Kanpur divisions. Part of the reason for this huge reorganisation of divisions is aggressive Bhojpuri politics. The western part of Allahabad District, which is also where Allahabad city is located, was truncated into two parts, out of which the new district of Kaushambi was created. Kaushambi is small, and it was not necessary to make it a separate district.

About 20 years ago, when the idea of dividing UP into eastern and western parts first came up, there were only two zones, which did not pose a problem. But now, with the regions being divided on the basis of ethnicity and cultural affiliation, it would be unethical to put people in mismatching regions. Purvanchal is the most populated region of the entire country. As such, the identity and culture of Allahabad would be threatened. The youth of Allahabad today is already confused about its identity.

Anuj Bhardwaj
Delhi

MNC defenders

Samir Kumar Sinha's report ("*A Gangetic Pesticide Soup*", *Sept 2006*) defends two American soft drink multinationals, the international records of which are murky. This is akin to defending a murder by referring to other murders.

I am not a defender of the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment. Rather, I was among the few readers who



criticised the role CSE played in the 2003 arsenic scare.

Nonetheless, I think the centre's consistent endeavour to expose Coca-Cola and PepsiCo deserves solidarity from all environmentalists. Instead of citing Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring* on the harm of chlorinated pesticides, Sinha should have first perused the Coke-Pepsi scandal. What he wrote could be a separate piece, sans CSE's findings.

Former inorganic chemistry professor Sakti Prasad Ghosh has noted: "Even if groundwater used by Coke or Pepsi has pesticides beyond tolerable limits, why are those impurities not removed?"

Siddhartha Ghosh Dastidar
Calcutta

Send your comments, questions and corrections - or anything else - to editorial@himalmag.com

INDIA

The Hindutva prototype

Gujarat is calm on the surface. People appear to have overcome the trauma of the 2002 killings, business seems back to usual, and the government is grappling with normal administrative and political problems – flood relief, health hazards, foreign investment MOUs, minding matters of legislation. But as we discover in this issue's cover article, the state's social fabric has collapsed. Hindu-Muslim relations are spiralling out of control, as polarisation deepens.

Though it is true that relations between Hindus and Muslims have an undercurrent of tension in India, it is only rarely that a conflagration consumes so many lives and properties. There are occasional riots, some sparked off by an unfounded rumour, others a part of a larger political conspiracy. Polarisation is present across the country, in varied degrees. Gujarat itself has had a history of communal tension over the past few decades. But what we are witnessing here is not a Hindu-Muslim spat, with any one community having an upper hand. Neither is this about a tiny band of extremists from either side trying to arouse emotions.

Gujarat is different because the division within the state is sharp and clear: there is now a Hindu Gujarat, the top dog, and a Muslim Gujarat, the underdog. Many Hindus in the state harbour some of the worst stereotypes about Muslims in their minds; they are, in fact, eager to create a society where the Muslims have as little a role as possible. In terms of social interaction, the two communities are metaphorically and literally barely on speaking terms. One whole group of people – Muslims, who make up 9 percent of the population – feels alienated from the state system. They are targets of systematic as well as subtle discrimination. All this

makes Gujarat stand out, for it comes closest to the vision of what the Hindutva ideologues propose for India as a whole.

Gujarat is a problem not only for Muslims of that state. It is a challenge for all of Southasia. All of us should be fighting for accountability and justice for the 2002 carnage, and the continuing excesses against Gujarati Muslims. What we should be seeing today is a region-wide concern, and the organisation of seminars, sit-ins and protests against Narendra Modi – not only in Madras and Calcutta, but in Kathmandu, Dhaka, Karachi and Colombo. There is a little bit of Gujarat in each of our societies.



RSS ideologues and the Hindutva vision

All Southasia must track Gujarat, follow its record of injustice, understand its evolution, and remind Gujarat's vainglorious power elites that they cannot convert Gujarat into 'another country'.

But what should provide a ray of hope is the fact that political dominance, based only on hatred and demonising another community, is not sustainable. Social coalitions disintegrate, new alliances are formed, economic factors emerge, and issues that concern the common voter change. All Hindus who are today aligned with rightwing outfits are not committed ideologues; they will change preference and loyalty when power equations change. ▲

SRI LANKA

From low-intensity to 'limited' war

For the past 10 months Sri Lanka has been in the throes of an undeclared war, with neither the government nor the LTTE prepared to take responsibility before the people and the international community for starting the fight. Since late July, however, the situation has suddenly escalated into a high-intensity conflict, albeit in limited areas. In Sampur in the east, and Muhamalai in the north, there have been pitched battles that saw territorial control shift in the government's favour. But so far both parties appear unwilling to go in for a full-fledged war.

Despite strong pressure by Sri Lanka's donor countries, peace talks between the government and LTTE at any time in the near future are unlikely. The internationals have released a series of strongly worded statements, including

one in mid-September that urged peace talks during the first week of October, after which the 'donor co-chairs' would meet to discuss progress at the end of the month. But the conduct of the two parties over the past several months would indicate that their preferred option is military rather than political action. One side or the other (or both) must change its mind about the desirability of military action if there are to be peace talks – a change of heart that, at this time, looks far off. Both sides have publicly nullified the donor co-chairs' statements by imposing pre-conditions for peace talks to recommence.

The LTTE has reiterated its demand that the government should withdraw its armed forces from the Sampur area in the east, which it recently captured from the LTTE, and also to move back to its original forward-defence lines in Muhamalai in the north. The Colombo government has rejected the possibility of any such withdrawal, and reiterated its demand that LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran should himself write a letter guaranteeing a cessation of all forms of violence by the LTTE prior to any return to the negotiating table.

The present indications are that the government and rebels are preparing themselves for further military campaigns. While the LTTE's relatively quick retreats from Sampur and Muhamalai were unexpected, it has been characteristic of the Tamil Tigers in the past to retreat in the face of major conventional assaults by government forces. In the present context, though the rebels appear to be considerably weaker than they have been in the past, the possibility of a counterattack remains.

The civilian military training campaign and a spate of particularly cruel child recruitments that are taking place in the northeast by both the LTTE and its breakaway pro-government Karuna group are most likely in anticipation of future battles. The spurt of assassinations and abductions of Tamils suspected to be either pro- or anti-LTTE is also continuing. The inability of the national and international human-rights machinery to deal with these breaches of humanitarian

law has been disappointing.

The most hopeful prospect is the dialogue that has recently commenced between the government and the opposition United National Party (UNP). During the relatively short period in which it governed from 2001-04, the UNP showed that it was possible to rapidly transform a situation of war into one of peace. Although the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement is now much maligned, at the time it was signed it seemed as if a miracle had taken place, when the unstoppable war actually halted in its tracks. This was achieved through political dialogue and supportive international initiatives. With the third round of talks between the UNP and ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party scheduled to take place on 3 October, the possibility of the UNP joining up with the government could bring two crucial missing ingredients to the situation: political dialogue and some original international initiatives. ▲

NEPAL

Hope amidst alarm

Nepal not only looks like it is in turmoil, it *is* in turmoil. The anarchy in the country is near-total, with the Maoists having the run of the countryside and extracting 'voluntary donations' from all and sundry, the state institutions (including the police) cowed and sequestered, and the law-and-order situation just about the worst in living memory. The home minister doubles as the chief of the government's negotiating team, and has not had the time – even if he had the inclination – to motivate the administration and challenge the rebels to keep within the bounds of the law. Prime Minister G P Koirala seems to have the right instincts in terms of bringing the Maoists in from the cold without compromising on principles of pluralism and democracy, but at 84 years of age, he seems not to have the energy to lead the seven-party government as one. Meanwhile, the Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has gone on a media blitz yet again, appearing on television and radio as an accessible, avuncular rebel, clearly seeking to put the stigma of brutality – including memories of 'socket bombs', maimings and *safaya* (eliminations) – behind him, in an attempt to come into aboveground politics.

With the absence of governance in large parts of the country, and the Maoist bravado at high decibel in recent weeks, it might appear that the principles of pluralism may indeed be lost. But the fact is that the peace process in Nepal is very much on track. Holding a Central Committee meeting in a hill district just east of Kathmandu last month, the Maoists decided not to go back to the jungle – even though they claim loudly that the SPA government is prevaricating on its promise of bringing the Maoists into the government, and taking the country towards the constituent assembly. They have decided to fight 'peacefully' through an urban

agitation, and there is no doubt that the Maoists still have the ability to bring tens of thousands of villagers into the Kathmandu Valley on the basis of threat alone. The fact that the Maoist student wing had to truck in schoolchildren to show their strength during a recent convention in Kathmandu is not lost on observers.

Many find cause for alarm in the fact that the Maoist leader, Mr Dahal, talks of an "October Revolution" should the SPA dilly-dally. Towards the international media, the rebel leader is all sugar and smiles; he speaks with home-grown zest on Nepali television. At the same time, he gives radical, rousing speeches to his cadres on preparing for the 'big fight' if the talks fail. Some claim the Maoists are preparing for an urban uprising, having brought armed fighters into the Kathmandu Valley. Others listen to Maoist extortionists, who come to Kathmandu businessmen and threaten them with dire consequences: "When the talks fail and we come to power, we will come looking for you in your homes."

A new evolution

It is more likely that the Maoists are using this as their last chance to fill their coffers, for their rhetoric



Maoists ship in students, 18 September

and public certitude belies an uncertainty about the ultimate destination of the path they themselves have taken. Indeed, having decided to divert from the 'people's war', Mr Dahal and his commandantes have a task of controlling and cajoling the very fighters whom they have motivated for a decade or more with talk of violent revolution and takeover of the state. Given that the Maoist leadership's desire to enter open politics seems genuine, as also confirmed by every politician we have spoken to, it would behoove Nepali society to be a bit indulgent regarding the current Maobaadi rhetoric. All the same, though, it is time for Mr Dahal to begin publicly preparing the fighters, militia and activists for open, unarmed politics. In conditions in which he has not begun to do that, there is the need to be ever watchful. It is important that, in the search for peace, compromises not be made in the planned summit talks between the parties and rebels which would harm the pluralism also demanded by the citizenry during the People's Movement of April.

The Maoists themselves are surely uncertain about whether things will end up as they hope. While there is a hardline group among the rebels who would rather not give up the gun, the leadership seems united on the impracticality of continuing the armed insurgency. But in the meantime, they have to tackle contradictions that have come forth with this shift in their political stand. The Maoists are seeking to come aboveground with credibility and dignity intact, while convincing their followers that this emergence into competitive politics is indeed "a new evolution of communism in the 21st century", rather than a defeat. But the most convincing logic for those who would want to believe in the Maoist

transformation is the India-and-international factor: the rebel leadership understands that it can never achieve state power with gun-in-hand, due, if nothing else, to existing geopolitical factors.

So, for all the bluster, the rebels are looking for a quick entry into the interim government in Kathmandu, which would legitimise them in the international arena and give the cadre the sense of having 'arrived'. Here, matters are stuck on the issue of 'arms management' – to what degree and when the fighters are to lower and sequester their arms, and ultimately to disarm. Though the Maoist rhetoric has reached higher decibels in recent weeks – a ratcheting-up that seems designed to maintain ranke-and-file morale – the road ahead is quite clear. The United Nations Secretary General has sent his Personal Representative, Ian Martin, to Kathmandu to oversee the 'arms management' process, as requested by both the SPA and the Maoists. This course is then to lead towards election of the constituent assembly that is to draft the new Constitution.

By the time this magazine emerges from the press, Nepal will be well into the Dasain season, traditionally the time when political activism takes a back seat as the peasantry of this primarily agrarian country sets about bringing in the harvest. Nothing would be better for the people of Nepal than to receive a Dasain gift from the SPA and the rebel leadership, in the form of movement on 'arms management'. This would mean the strict placement of the Nepal Army in its barracks, and control of its 'royalist' commander-in-chief and top brass; and the Maoists placing their entire armed squads in cantonments, as required under the letter to the UN Secretary General.

INDIA | PAKISTAN

Havana breakthrough

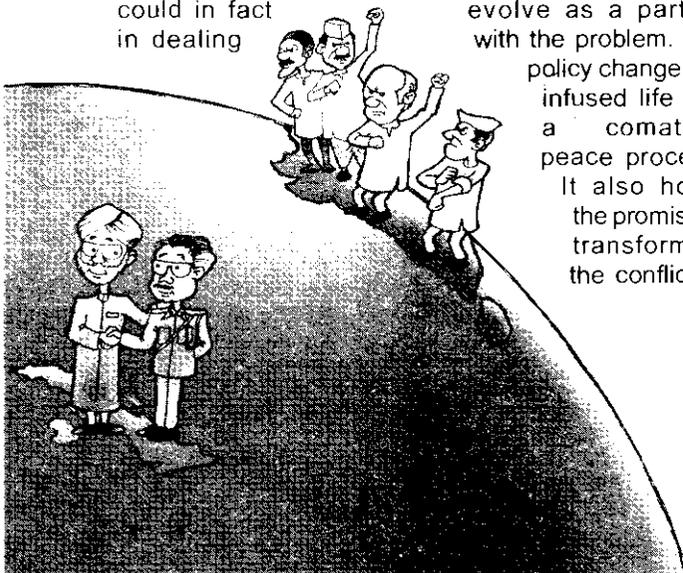
Manmohan Singh has effected a fundamental shift in India's Pakistan policy. From consistently viewing the entire Pakistani state as the perpetrator of terrorism, New Delhi has explicitly recognised that Islamabad is a victim of terrorism as well, and could in fact evolve as a partner with the problem. The

policy change has infused life into a comatose peace process. It also holds the promise of transforming the conflictive

discourse and blame game that has marked relations between the two establishments.

Meeting on the sidelines of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) summit in Havana, Prime Minister Singh and Pervez Musharraf decided to be imaginative, and not let the radical outfits dictate the agenda. The framework was already present in previous joint statements: Pakistan had repeatedly promised it would not allow its soil to be used for terrorist activities against India, while India agreed to discuss all issues in the Composite Dialogue, including Kashmir. However, this agreement was in danger of falling apart. Both countries were increasingly feeling that the other was not living up to its end of the bargain. This was particularly true in the case of India, where the recent spate of attacks, from Benaras temples to Delhi marketplaces and Bombay trains, had led to abundant scepticism about Pakistan's political will to curb extremist militancy.

That is why the decision of the two leaders to put in place joint, institutionalised anti-terrorism mechanisms to identify and implement counter-terrorism initiatives and investigations is an extremely creditworthy achievement. The general-president and the prime minister deserve special praise for thinking



BILASH RAI

out of the box, in particular for realising that India and Pakistan are on the same side. For this reason, the sudden barrage of criticism against the deal amongst Delhi's intelligentsia and political circles is entirely misplaced.

Prime Minister Singh is being attacked by the Bharatiya Janata Party, as well as some retired national security officials, for naiveté in believing that the 'patrons of terror' will ever help India tackle terrorism. At the same time, commentators of the left believe that the shift has come about due to pressure from the US. They do not necessarily have a problem with the text of the agreement, just with the perception that it is symptomatic of the manner in which Delhi is following Washington's diktats.

In all this, what the critics overlook is the internal political dynamic in Pakistan, where the militants and President Musharraf are clearly on opposite sides as of now. They also ignore a simple premise: India cannot hope to solve the problem of militancy,

especially that which emanates from Pakistan-based groups, without Islamabad's help. From a strategic perspective, setting up joint mechanisms can only make the Pakistani government more accountable vis-à-vis New Delhi about the steps it is taking to curb the activities of such groups. Islamabad should be happy as well, for India has at long last publicly accepted Pakistan's denial of involvement in terrorist attacks, as well as reiterated its commitment to finding a solution on the Kashmir issue.

Most importantly, the meeting between the two leaders has ensured that the Composite Dialogue is back on track. The fact that newer avenues of understanding have emerged, and differences narrowed, bodes well for the future. We have consistently argued in these pages that the solution is more engagement between the two countries, not less, particularly on issues that are seen as thorny and divisive. The Havana breakthrough is a good step in that direction.



'Congeries of Lust'

In this piece by Venantius J Pinto, the thrashing body of a charioteer lies beheaded on the ground. Above it are seen the heads of a thousand others, felled before him by his reckless vehicle. They peer out over a landscape left empty and desolate by this force of rampant destruction – perhaps by poverty, drought or state-sponsored communal violence. Above, the daytime sky reflects the mood on the earth: it is an ominous pitch black. If this is day, what will night bring? The chariot of the state has run roughshod over the land, and its driver now joins the ranks of its victims. Some of the thousand faces, though, appear alive and alert. Could it be that they wait in the wings, opportunistic forces of populism ready to take over from the fallen? Are they casualties themselves, or do they stand complicit in this carnage? Perhaps there is no distinguishing between victims and tyrants. There are strips of light at the corners of the picture, framing the black sky. Does the darkness grow or does it recede?

This is part of a regular series of *Himal's* editorial commentary on artwork by Venantius J Pinto. India ink on Hiromi paper. Print size: 38.5"x72".

NEPAL / BHUTAN

Washington, Thimphu, Kathmandu



KUENSEL

Nepal in recent weeks has seen a series of high-level visits by US senators and Congressmen. Interestingly, each of these delegations spent a substantial portion of their time in the country dealing with issues surrounding the Bhutani refugee population. The US policymakers also all flew directly from Kathmandu to Thimphu, where some doled out unusually harsh words to the royal government.

Almost no progress has been made on the Lhotshampa issue in 16 years, since the Nepali-speaking Bhutani

population was unceremoniously kicked out of Bhutan. The past two months, however, have seen a flurry of action. In late July the Kathmandu government for the first time agreed to allow UNHCR to resettle 16 "vulnerable" individuals to the US and Canada, and to allow UNHCR to conduct an official census of the camps – something that has never been completed.

But the refugee leaders are not at all pleased, by the looks of it. The visits have rattled some of them, who have long argued against resettlement options in favour of repatriation. Resettlement,

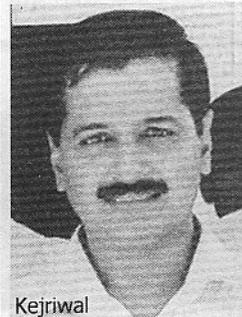
however, has increasingly been the recommended option by UNHCR and some donor governments in the face of Bhutani intransigence. The visit to the camps by one of the US delegations was forced to be cut short due to refugee protests. Nonetheless, upon returning to Washington, Congressman Jim Kolbe said that the US had agreed to take in up to 70,000 of the estimated 105,000 refugees. Australia and Canada

have also agreed to take in lesser amounts.

The question is whether the word of visiting delegations can be trusted, when there has been no formal announcement by any government. On second thought, Thimphu's government would not be unhappy with a verbal lashing, if that came with a US promise to take in a substantial number of refugees. That is a small price to pay for being rid of a thorn in the side.

INDIA / NEPAL

Cataracts and accountability



Kejriwal

When the winners of the annual Ramon Magsaysay awards were announced on the last day of August, the list included the names of two Southasians. Named after the former Philippines president, the Ramon Magsaysay awards are commonly referred to as the Asian Nobel Prize.

This year's Award for Peace and International Understanding

went to Nepali physician Sanduk Ruit, who introduced new techniques for cataract surgery into Nepal, including mobile eye camps that can perform operations throughout the country's rural areas. The Award for Emergent Leadership went to Arvind Kejriwal, an Indian tax officer who founded the NGO Parivartan, which has succeeded in forcing pro-people, anti-corruption reforms within the Indian Revenue Service.

Dr Ruit comes from an ethnic group of Nepal's far-eastern hills, and has achieved fame for his cataract camps in different parts of the developing world, most importantly in Tibet. Kejriwal had previously been known for his work in spearheading, along with activist Aruna Roy, India's Right to Information Act, which was passed in 2005. Although there are rumours of attempts to hobble the Act, Parivartan's achievement has been seen as one of the Right to Information movement's more notable successes.

PAKISTAN / INDIA

A tentative ferry

The long-awaited ferry service linking Bombay and Karachi appears to finally be in the offing. Anwar Shah, the Pakistan director-general of Ports and Shipping, said in late August that Islamabad has already given its go-ahead, and is now awaiting approval from New Delhi.

Although the resumption of a sea-based connection between the two financial capitals would be an important development in the thawing of neighbourly relations, the announcement is for the moment being couched in terms of the ferry service's linkage to Dubai. The service is being described as 'Mumbai to Dubai, via Karachi'. While commencement of the luxury line between Karachi and Dubai is already slated for the beginning of November, the USD 550 price-tag for the two-day cruise will relegate it to high-end tourists only.

Nonetheless, a maritime passage between Karachi and Bombay, twin cities of Southasia when it comes to commercial activity, would be a shot in the arm for India-Pakistan connectivity.

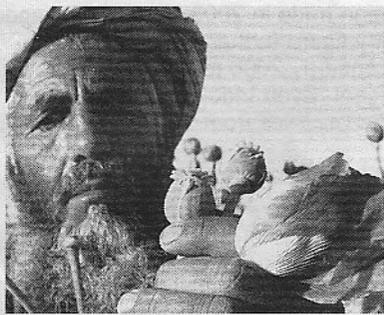


Ruit doing the rounds

MICHAEL AMENDOLA

Opiate state economics

The UN has predicted that 6100 tonnes of opium will be harvested in Afghanistan this year – a bumper crop almost 60 percent larger than previous years.



AFP

Afghanistan supplies more than 90 percent of the world's opium.

Much of the increased harvest is being grown in Taliban-strong areas in the south of the country, where pro-Taliban militant forces have been gaining – and defending – footholds. In the insurgency-hit Helmand province, for instance, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime report says that poppy production has increased by more than 160 percent this year alone. Increases were also recorded in the northeast of the country, where warlords have reasserted their power.

Despite a stringent two-year-old anti-opium campaign, largely led by the US, the estimated USD 2.7 billion drug trade in Afghanistan still accounts for nearly a third of the country's total economic output. While upsetting the trade could have drastic implications for the poppy farmers, Afghanistan seems on the road to becoming a 'narco-state' – not something to be wished on any country, for the continuous instability this would ensure.

INDIA

SEZs and the Ministry

The Indian Finance Ministry in late August tabled a report suggesting that, once the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are activated, the country's national revenue will dip by almost INR 1.8 trillion within four years. To put that in perspective, total revenue estimates for 2006 are only a little over twice that amount – around INR 4 trillion.

The sanctioning of the SEZs is considered one of the most controversial government policies in the post-liberalisation era, and the Reserve Bank of India and the International Monetary Fund have joined in expressing their concern. New Delhi only

opened up the country to the tax- and customs-exempt manufacturing areas last year, and capped the number at 150. Gigantic SEZs are now being constructed across the country, from Kanpur to Kakinada.

New Delhi's Finance Ministry opposes a proposal to develop more SEZs, worrying that they could be a drain on the exchequer. Proponents have hit back, countering that SEZs are a crucial way of luring international investment cash into the country. They argue that, instead of an INR 1.8 trillion deficit over four years, revenue would increase by INR 450 billion.

INDIA

The last frontiers

It may have more to do with New Delhi's national security concerns than with anything else, but India's borderland populations are bound to receive an economic boost with a projected spurt in road-building. The government announced in early September that it had finalised plans to build 862 km of new roads – comprising 27 projects – in the India-China borderlands. INR 9 billion has been set aside for the new phase of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP), which will be finished within four years. In addition, the Centre is also

studying proposals for more borderland roads, on the Indo-Nepali and Indo-Bhutani frontiers.

The BADP currently receives an annual allotment of INR 3.3 billion, but this is being upped to INR 5.2 billion for 2006-07. The Home Ministry has also announced that if the projects are carried out "properly", that amount could be almost doubled to INR 10 billion for 2007-08. The ministry has subsequently asked the governments of all states with international borders to prepare action plans for potential borderland infrastructure development.



PAKISTAN / SRI LANKA

With trade, arms

Islamabad seems keen on deepening its embrace with Colombo. With clashes on the island continuing at a fever pitch and more than half of the International Monitoring Mission led by Norway heading back home, Pakistan's Interior Ministry Secretary, Kamal Shah, announced that Islamabad was looking at "actively" increasing its military ties with Colombo.

Shah told a group of specially invited Sri Lankan journalists in Islamabad that his government wanted to update and step up a 2003 memorandum of understanding between the two countries that dealt with security issues, including counter-terrorism. He said Islamabad would favourably view any request by Colombo to increase the number – currently set at around 200 per year – of Sri Lankan military personnel training at elite Pakistani military institutions.

While the secretary noted that a negotiated settlement would be the best way to end Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, he added that military intervention was sometimes unavoidable. The August assassination attempt on Pakistan's head diplomat to Sri Lanka, Bashir Wali Mohammad, would not affect relations between the two countries, Shah concluded.

Trade across the strait

SUDATH SILVA



Bogollagama

Bilateral trade between India and Sri Lanka currently stands at around USD 2 billion per year, according to Rohitha Bogollagama, Sri Lanka's Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion Minister. This dramatic 80 percent increase over less than a decade has come about since the 1998 signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Free Trade Agreement, and has made

India the island's third-largest export market.

Colombo now hopes to repeat the performance with Islamabad. A free trade agreement between Sri Lanka and Pakistan came into effect on 12 June.

Sri Lanka's burgeoning trade connections do not seem to be the norm, however. A report by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry in India (ASSOCHAM), released the same week as Bogollagama's announcement, found that trade between India and regional blocs such as SAARC and ASEAN has dropped between 2003 and 2006. Beyond the neighbourhood, during that same period India's trade increased with former Soviet states and with the oil-producing

OPEC countries.

While trade with SAARC countries had stood at 3.4 percent of India's total foreign trade in 2003, that paltry figure further declined by 2006 to just 2.8 percent. Even Indo-ASEAN trade declined from 9.3

percent to 8.9 percent. India's top trading partners in recent years were listed as the US, UAE, China, Singapore and the UK. ASSOCHAM attributed the decline in inter-SAARC trading to political tensions and mistrust. △

TIBET / NEPAL

Next stop

There seems no stopping the Chinese rail juggernaut. Just two months after the line opened, a high-level Chinese official has given assurances to Nepal that the new Golmud-Lhasa railway would be extended all the way to the Nepali frontier.

The chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Qiangba Puncog, made this promise to Nepali Deputy Prime Minister K P Oli. Qiangba said that Beijing is excited at the prospect of connecting China to the Nepali frontier. And now there is also talk of further lengthening the line into India.



The most likely route for the extension into Nepali territory would be through Xigaze (Shigatse) prefecture, through which the only Tibet-Nepal highway runs. Construction on the additional 270 km of rail track into Xigaze is expected to take around three years. It seems only a matter of time before Beijing proposes yet another rail line into Southasia. △

BURMA

Making the agenda

For the first time ever, the United Nations Security Council voted in mid-September to put the issue of political repression and human rights violations in Burma on its formal agenda. The Security Council received briefings on Burma in June and December, but the country had not been included in the formal agenda due to opposition, most notably by

permanent members China and Russia.

The recent inclusion comes following pressure from the United States. The decision has been met with enthusiasm on the part of Burma's struggling democratic forces, and is the start of a process by which the UN Secretariat would report regularly on developments within the country. △

PAKISTAN

A fragile peace

A critical peace deal was finally signed in early September between Islamabad and pro-Taliban militants in the border regions of North Waziristan, where tens of thousands of Pakistani military men have for years clashed with rebels of various hues. Hundreds of people have been killed this year alone in violence in the region, and the situation has heightened tensions between Kabul and Islamabad, with the former accusing the latter of allowing Taliban fighters to regroup on Pakistani soil.

The new deal, brokered by a jirga of tribal elders, urges local tribes to refuse harbour to foreign militants, and to halt crossborder attacks. In return, the military will reduce its presence in the area – withdrawing to barracks and only manning checkpoints. After the signing, militants and military officials reportedly hugged one another in a show of goodwill.

Although many observers were pessimistic about the long-term viability of the accord, the success of a ceasefire signed on 25 July between the government and North Waziristan rebels had already surprised many. The deal was reached just days before Pervez Musharraf traveled to Kabul to meet Hamid Karzai, signifying a further effort by Pakistan to keep the unstable frontier region from further debilitating bilateral relations. △

A revitalised Sittwe



Jairam Ramesh, India's Minister of State for Commerce, says that New Delhi will be investing USD 103 million to redevelop the Sittwe port on the northwestern coast of Burma and to improve navigability on the Kaladan River, which flows to Burma through Mizoram. This is one more attempt to reinvigorate bilateral trade between the countries through the Indian Northeast.

The minister announced the plans on a trip to Mizoram, the southern part of which

would act as a new trading hub for a route that would run between mainland India, the Northeast and – by way of the Kaladan – Burma. The work on Sittwe will begin by 2009, and will be overseen by the state-run Rail India Technical and Economic Services. New Delhi has also earmarked more than INR 40 million to develop a customs point at Zokhawtar in Mizoram, as well as another INR 25 million for infrastructure development on the Indo-Bangladeshi border at Tabung (Demagiri). ▲

BANGLADESH

A Phulbari victory

It is a difficult job planning a mine in a populated country, where the displaced are bound to be too many. The last week of August saw four days of increasingly violent protests against a proposed coalmine in Phulbari, in the northern Bangladeshi district of Dinajpur. Four protesters were killed in clashes with police, after the Awami League-led opposition alliance joined the demonstrations and forced a day-long strike.

The plan by the UK-based Asia Energy would have displaced an estimated 40,000 to 100,000 people from more than 100 villages, although the company had promised that all those affected would be compensated. Before the Dhaka government could authorise the deal, however, the protesters had already dug in their heels. The authorities were finally forced to scrap the deal, and

Asia Energy subsequently pulled out of its operations in and around Phulbari. Meanwhile, the coal that is there will remain underground for now. ▲



LIBCOM

Military and monitors

Amidst an already deteriorating situation, heavy accusations began to fly between the international Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission and the Sri Lankan military. Ulf Henricsson, the mission's head, said that he had obtained confidential information implicating Sri Lankan military personnel in the killing of 17 local employees of the French NGO Action against Hunger in early August.

The aid workers, all but one of them Tamil and working on Tsunami-related programmes, were found having been shot at close range. Henricsson termed the incident an "act of assassination", and said that the episode was one of the most egregious to have taken place anywhere in the world in recent years.

Colombo rigorously rejected the accusations, saying that the SLMM monitors "are not professionals in autopsy or post-mortem."

The altercation between the SLMM and the government came at a time when the majority of the international monitors were pulling out of the country anyway. This was as directed by Tamil Tiger leaders after the EU listed the rebels on a terrorist watch list early in the summer. Of the original 57 monitors, only around 20 will remain, from Norway and Iceland.

None of this can be good for peace on the island, nor for its people. By the first week of September an estimated 60,000 refugees were living in 100 camps in Tamil Nadu, with more than 200,000 having fled their homes due to the increased fighting in recent weeks. The absence of monitors will hurt amidst the undeclared war in Sri Lanka. ▲

NEPAL

Citizenship reform

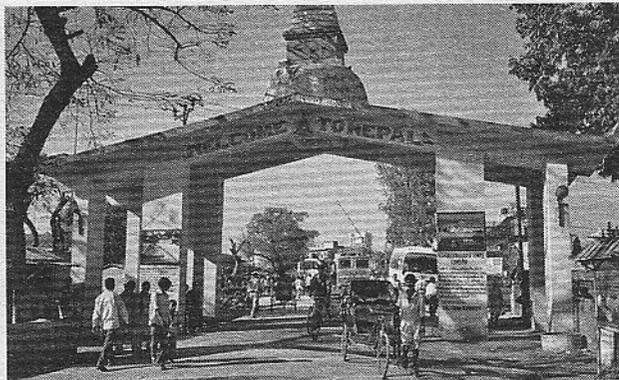
In early September Nepal's council of ministers passed a bill that will help solve long-standing problems with the country's citizenship laws. In order to be issued citizenship, the 1990 Constitution stipulates that any person who was not considered a citizen by the Nepal Citizenship Act of 1964 and whose father does not possess a certificate of citizenship must be a long-standing resident who works in Nepal, and must also be able to "speak and write the language of the nation of Nepal".

Most of the five million or so people currently denied citizenship are of the Madhesi community of Nepal's tarai plains. Under the new bill, any person who can provide written evidence of having lived within Nepal's

borders before 13 April 1990 will be granted citizenship. For those born after that date, one Nepali parent – either father or mother – will suffice.

The tarai has long been marginalised by Nepal's state-sponsored nationalism. The country's new democratic transition, however, brings with it a government more aware of the importance of inclusion than any before it. Analysts point out the need to resolve outstanding problems of citizenship before the Constituent Assembly elections, tentatively slated to take place early next year. The government plans to distribute certificates of citizenship at the village level, so that all 'Nepalis' will soon be able to look forward to heading to the polls. ▲

Nepali thoroughfare



The Kathmandu government has for the first time officially proposed that Nepal be used as a trade corridor between its two massive neighbours, India and China. King Gyanendra had made frequent mention of the possibility during his 15 months of autocratic rule, hoping that this would be his contribution to the Nepali economy.

The announcement came during a summit in mid-August in New Delhi between the Indian and Nepali trade secretaries,

who agreed to commission a study immediately to look at potential routes for such a corridor. The two sides also agreed on a host of strategies to boost flagging Indo-Nepali trade, including the creation of broad-gauge railway links at the border points of Kakarbhitta, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj and Dhangadi. With roadwork on the existing Radhikapur route hampering Nepal-Bangladesh trade, India also agreed to allow Nepali traders use of the Singhabandh-Rohanpur route. △

BANGLADESH / PAKISTAN

From Tata to Dawood

The Bangladesh Board of Investment (BoI) has turned its attention towards Pakistan's Dawood Group for an injection of foreign direct investment. Dawood is currently looking at investing around USD 300 million in fertiliser and energy projects in Bangladesh.

This is a relatively paltry amount compared with the USD 3 billion investment that the India-based Tata Group had been negotiating with the BoI for the past year, however. That scheme had also been looking to invest in fertiliser and energy, as well as steel projects. Negotiations broke down in July when the Dhaka government was unable to come to a decision with an increasingly contentious election slated for January.

Coming straight out of the failure to push through the country's largest-ever foreign investment possibility (with Tata), BoI's executive chairman Mahmudur Rahman called the current investment environment in Bangladesh "excellent". Meanwhile, a free trade agreement between Pakistan and Bangladesh is expected to be signed in the very near future, the first meeting of the Bangladesh-Pakistan Joint Business Council having taken place in late August. △

A doubtful referendum

A historic referendum to decide the future governmental structure of the Maldives was thrown into confusion recently, when the Special Majlis (Constitutional Assembly) voted not to back the creation of a number of special committees that would oversee the countrywide vote.

The surprise announcement of the referendum – which would be the Maldives' first in four decades – came in mid-June, when politicians could not agree on whether to go for a presidential or parliamentary system amidst constitutional reforms. The vote to allow the referendum had included a significant number of MPs from the ruling DRP party, and the approval was seen as a distinct loss for President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

Although the referendum was at first set to take place on 16 September, the Majlis failed to ratify the creation of the new oversight committees, making it logistically impossible for it to take place. Opposition members reacted with fury, accusing unelected DRP MPs in the Majlis of sabotaging the vote. The reaction was so chaotic that the day's session was forced to end early. △

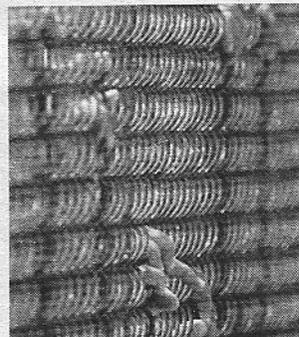
REGION

Disappeared in the 'war on terror'

The fallout of American excesses related to Iraq and Afghanistan seems to have touched Southasia in both direct and indirect ways. Just a week prior to George W Bush's reluctant confirmation that the US Central Intelligence Agency has maintained secret detention centres around the world, Amnesty International released a report that found that the US-led 'war on terror' has led to "new patterns of enforced disappearance" in Southasia.

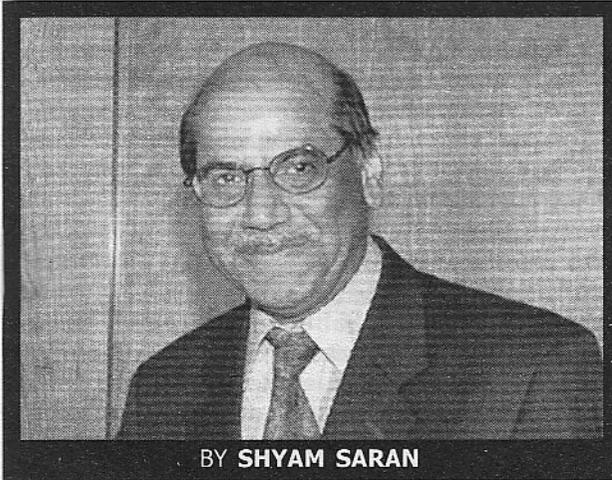
In addition to longtime problems of disappearances in Nepal and Sri Lanka, Amnesty suggests that the context of the 'war on terror' has led to an upsurge of several hundred disappearances in Pakistan, many of which are believed to be in the US prison complex at Guantanamo Bay.

Even in places like Nepal and Sri Lanka, Amnesty reports that disappearances in recent years have increased. Despite the coming of peace to the former, Nepal's National Human Rights Commission reports at least 330 people still missing. In the latter, enforced disappearances have increased since the introduction of



new statutes in August 2005, which gave stepped-up powers to the country's security forces. At least 62 cases of enforced disappearance have been registered by the national Human Rights Commission this year, and a further 183 cases are under investigation of persons missing under other circumstances. △

Connectivity as India's neighbourhood policy



BY SHYAM SARAN

Making India's extensive regional borders 'progressively irrelevant' will not be easy, but it is necessary.

The Indian government's effort has been to construct an overarching vision for South Asia, so that India does not deal with its neighbours in an ad-hoc and reactive manner, but in accordance with policies that fit into and promote this larger vision.

The vision of South Asia as an integrated and single entity is not new. Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had spoken about our aim to establish a South Asian Economic Union on the basis of a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). At the SAARC Dhaka Summit in November 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh elaborated further on this vision. He said that although South Asia is divided by political boundaries, it forms a single geographical and economic unit. It occupies a shared cultural space and inherits a shared cultural legacy. He said that though we cannot erase political boundaries or redraw them, we can certainly work together to make them progressively irrelevant. There should be a free flow of goods, peoples and ideas across our borders in the same manner as in the European Union today. Over a period of time, this would erase the sense of division among our people.

The prime minister emphasised the overriding importance of connectivity to the realisation of this vision. The Subcontinent today is not even as connected as it was before 1947. We must restore crossborder transport linkages through highways, railways, air and sea links, as well as electronic communications. India must start looking at national boundaries not as impenetrable walls which somehow protect it from the outside world, but as 'connectors', bringing us closer to our neighbours. Better connectivity requires a change in mindset.

Border regions, too, must be viewed differently. We must stop seeing them as peripheral, serving only as 'buffer zones' preventing ingress into the Indian heartland. We must rid ourselves of this 'outpost' mentality and accept our border states and regions as being as much a part of our national territory as is the heartland. The idea that such regions must be left largely underdeveloped and remote - as reflected in the outdated system of 'inner line permits', whereby Indians and foreign nationals require permits to enter certain areas - must be jettisoned. Borders connect us to our neighbours, and border regions are extremely important as areas of mutual interaction. This fact should be leveraged for their development. Again, a change in mindset is required.

It is in this context that the prime minister's address at the Dhaka Summit elaborated a different approach to our interactions in the neighbourhood. When the prime minister said, in relation to Pakistan, "I do not have the mandate to change borders; but I do have the mandate to make these borders irrelevant over a period of time," he was enunciating a principle applicable to all our neighbours. To promote the connectivity that will make this possible, it is important to have the best infrastructure possible for easy crossborder movement. We may set up a SAFTA, but unless we have what I would call 'transmission belts' across borders to permit the uninterrupted flow of goods, peoples and ideas, SAFTA would yield little practical benefit. Over the past two years, a major effort has been made to try and bring about such a high level of connectivity.

Another significant component of our neighbourhood policy derives from the recognition of the

crucial diplomatic role of culture and people-to-people contact. There are very strong cultural affinities among the people of the Subcontinent; by giving full play to these affinities we can reinforce a sense of togetherness, a sense of shared identity. We have a plan to set up cultural centres in each and every one of our neighbouring countries. New embassy projects in Kathmandu and Dhaka have incorporated such centres. We are also not insisting on mechanical reciprocity in the promotion of cultural exchanges, adopting instead a liberal and proactive policy of funding exchange of visits of scholars, artists and others.

Politically, our neighbourhood policy is now based on the recognition that what can best secure India's interests in the region is the building of a web of 'dense interdependencies' with our neighbours. We must give our neighbours a stake in our own economic prosperity. This would impart a certain stability to our relations. We want a neighbourhood policy capable of adjusting, of shaping events. There will be moments in history when it may be difficult for us to influence events in our neighbourhood. We should assess when a neighbour is in the midst of a transformational process, and take steps to make ourselves relevant to that change. There will be other moments in history where we may be able to play a more definitive and active role to orient change in a constructive direction. Making the right judgement and adopting policies appropriate to the nature of change is a big challenge to our diplomacy.

There is, for instance, momentous change taking place today in Nepal. We do not quite know in what this will culminate but, in retrospect, by aligning ourselves with the country's democratic forces, by supporting the transformation in progress, we have done rather well.

A major transformation is also taking place in another very close neighbour, Bhutan. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has decided to introduce over the next couple of years what would essentially be a constitutional monarchy. Here, as in some other countries, we will soon be dealing with much more diffuse political structures, instead of with a single powerful leader or an established elite. We must keep ahead of these changes rather than always play 'catch up'. We must identify and interact with emerging leaders and institutions.

The same is true of Pakistan. We are engaging with President Musharraf because he happens to be the current leader of the country. But Pakistan is also undergoing a transformation. We need to reach out beyond the government, to the people in Pakistan, to political forces emerging on the horizon. The policy of promoting people-to-people contacts assumes significance in this regard.

Dense interdependencies

We can claim credit that our policy has been quite successful. Within just two years, traffic across India's border with Pakistan has reached over 200,000 people per annum – an incredible figure given the history of India-Pakistan relations. The train service between Khokrapar and Munabao, connecting Sindh and Rajasthan, was carrying 700 passengers every week. That number is now 400 because Islamabad has restricted the number of passenger bogies. India-Pakistan relations are changing because they are increasingly people-driven. We need to reinforce that rather than set up barriers. Our motto must be that we are prepared to go as far as the comfort level of our neighbours allows.

I will now give you a sense of what we have been able to achieve in the promotion of regional connectivity. The Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service across the Line of Control was inaugurated two years ago. Following this landmark event, we have recently inaugurated the Poonch-Rawal Kot bus service. We have proposed another bus service between Kargil and Skardu, and Jammu and Sialkot. In Punjab, we have the Amritsar-Lahore bus service, the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus service and the proposed service to Kartarpur Sahib.

We have a major plan for the upgrading of border checkpoints and their backward linkages. Thus an Integrated Check-Post (ICP) is planned at Wagah, which will house customs, immigration and warehousing, health facilities, a shopping complex and parking facilities. The road leading from Amritsar to Wagah is also going to be upgraded into a four-lane highway.

A number of ICPs are being planned on the India-Nepal border, as well as the upgrading of highways and the extension of train links into Nepal. We have plans to develop Integrated Check-Posts at Jogbani (Bihar)-Biratnagar, Raxaul (Bihar)-Birgunj, Sunauli (Uttar Pradesh)-Bhairawa and Nepalganj Road (UP)-Nepalganj. The road links to these check-posts from the Indian side will also be upgraded. The Indian government is also working on the development of a 'garland road' along the border for better patrolling, surveillance and border management.

As regards rail links, we are setting up new links and upgrading existing ones between important border towns of India and Nepal. These include the Katihar-Jogbani (Bihar)-Biratnagar line, the Gonda (UP)-Nepalganj line, the Nautanwa (UP)-Bhairawa line, the New Jalpaiguri (West Bengal)-Kakarbhitta line and the Jaynagar (Bihar)-Bardibas line. We are simultaneously working to develop link roads to the east-west highway in the tarai region of Nepal; as

We must rid ourselves of this 'outpost' mentality and accept our border states and regions as being as much a part of our national territory as is the heartland.

well as to implement a pipeline between the Indian Oil Corporation and the Nepal Oil Corporation for channelling of oil supplies between Raxaul (Bihar) and Amlekhgunj.

When it comes to Bhutan, India has invested in the development of road infrastructure within the country, but there has not been commensurate investment on our side of the border. We are, therefore, planning to upgrade several approach roads to Bhutan, including the Rangia-Tamalpur (Assam)-Jhonkar road, the Pathsala (Assam)-Nangalam road, the Santabari (Assam)-Gelephu road and the Baribesa (WB)-Kalikhola road. In addition, we are working on establishing rail links between border towns in India and Bhutan, including between Hasimara (WB) and Phuentsholing, Darranga (Assam) and Samdrup Jhonkar, Kokrajhar (Assam) and Gelephu, Banarhat (WB) and Samtse, and Pathsala (Assam) and Nangalam. There are also proposals to establish ICPs at Jaigaon (WB), and a dry port at Phuentsholing.

With Bangladesh, India shares a land border of more than 4000 km, yet there are at present only a few operational road links between the two countries. These include the Kolkata-Petrapole and Siliguri-Phulbari road link through West Bengal, the Agartala-Akhaura road link through Tripura, and the Shillong-Sylhet road link through Meghalaya. Of these, the most important road link is the Kolkata-Petrapole highway, which carries more than 80 percent of bilateral trade.

The infrastructural facilities on our side of the highway, however, are woefully inadequate, both at the checkpoint and on the highway leading to it. This only hampers the development of economic linkages. We have therefore decided to expedite upgradation of the Kolkata-Petrapole highway, including the building of bypasses and overpasses. There is also a proposal

to establish ICPs at Hilli (WB), Changrabandha (WB), Akhaura (Tripura), Dawki (Meghalaya), Sutarkhandi (Meghalaya) and Kawarpuchiah (Mizoram). We are at the same time working to complete border fencing and construction of border roads for effective border management.

Similarly, with Myanmar, we are developing a network of linkages. These include crossborder developmental projects such as the upgrading of the Tamu (Manipur)-Kalewa-Kalemyo road, and the Rhi-Tiddim and Rhi-Falam roads along the border in Mizoram; the upgrading of the Jiribam (Manipur)-Imphal-Moreh road, and integration with the proposed Trilateral Highway; the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project, which links Mizoram with Arakan province of Myanmar and provides, in the form of the historic port of Sittwe (Akyab), alternative access out of the Northeast bypassing Bangladesh; and the Jiribam-Imphal rail link, which may be extended to Mandalay as part of the Delhi-Hanoi railway.

The border trade point at Nathula in Sikkim has been inaugurated, and the backward linkages on the Indian side are being upgraded. Here, too, we intend to set up an Integrated Check-Post. We have suggested another border trade point at Bumla (Arunachal Pradesh) in the eastern sector, for which a response is being awaited from Beijing. We have approached Nepal for transit to Tibet. In general, there are plans to upgrade the entire road network in the Northeast - including two inter-basin roads in Arunachal and seven roads leading up to the Line of Actual Control - and to review the Inner Line Permit system so that tourism can be promoted.

From a speech given on 9 September 2006 by the outgoing Indian Foreign Secretary to the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. Printed with permission.



The problems of transition in Nepal



KIRAN PANDEY

The interim government in Kathmandu risks becoming a mere caretaker administration in the absence of concrete movement towards a constituent assembly through the adoption of an interim constitution.

BY YASH GHAI

The present situation in Nepal is characterised by a paradox. The king has acknowledged the sovereignty of the people. The Maoists have proclaimed their commitment to a peaceful solution through the political process. The army has declared its loyalty to democratic forces. There is a broad consensus on the ultimate goals of society and state – sovereignty of the people; multiparty democracy, inclusive of all people, communities and regions; gender-equity; recognition of cultural diversity; rights for all, including minorities; social justice and the rule of law. All of these constitute a compelling vision of Nepal. Compared to many other countries that have suffered internal conflicts, Nepal is extremely well-placed to consolidate progress towards these goals.

The Seven Party Alliance (SPA), the Maoists, and the general public are agreed that the new constitutional and political order will be established through a constituent assembly (CA), composed on the principle of inclusiveness. The state would be restructured in a progressive manner through the constituent assembly, “resolving all problems including those related to class, caste, region and gender”. Meanwhile, there would be an interim

constitution to ensure democracy, peace and human rights. It would provide the basis for an interim government. The House of Representatives would be dissolved and replaced by alternative arrangements made through consensus. People’s governments of the Maoists would be dissolved. Decisions on important national issues would be made through dialogue and consensus. The interim constitution would also specify the procedure for the convening and operation of the constituent assembly, including public participation through free and fair elections (“without any fear or threats and without being influenced by violence”).

The paradox lies in the fact that despite agreement on the ultimate goals and this seemingly straightforward roadmap, hurdles have appeared as to its implementation. Difficulties arise in part from the ambitious scope of the interim constitution draft, which nevertheless leaves several critical and controversial issues to be resolved by the SPA and the Maoists. These include the nature of the state, the mode of election of the constituent assembly, and the composition of the interim legislature. It does not sufficiently address the problems of governance in the transitional period. In part, these difficulties arise from differences over the ‘management of weapons’ – particularly the Maoist arms – and from questions as to the conditions under which the Maoists can enter government and under which elections to the constituent assembly can legitimately be held.

There are considerable risks and dangers if the stalemate is not speedily resolved. Sectarian interests will seek dominance over the national interest; parties will increasingly position themselves for the future, rather than try to solve present-day problems of transition; and there may be a reversion to the earlier conflict. Frustration will mount, and there will be further disillusionment with the political parties.

A major cause of stalemate is the lack of trust between the SPA and the Maoists, fuelled in part by some external actors. This mistrust is compounded by divisions within both the SPA and the Maoists, which prevent each from reaching out to the other. The interim period should be viewed as one in which trust is re-established – trust between the parties and the Maoists, and between the people and the government. In order to make democratic and participatory restructuring possible, certain changes in the way the state operates need to be carried out immediately. The worst examples of exclusion must be ended now. People must not be made to wait until there is a new Constitution to be recognised as citizens. Trust requires such recognition.

The interim period is just that – it exists until the establishment of a new constitutional order under a permanent Constitution. This period is best conceived of as a transition leading to a new, definitive and comprehensive national settlement

through the constituent assembly. What happens during this period must be primarily directed towards a successful achievement of that new order. This is also very important in connection to trust – particularly that of the people, who need to see a clear timetable. Otherwise there will be anxiety that the *Jana Andolan* – the People's Movement of April – is in danger of being hijacked.

The interim period is not a time for a radical restructuring of the state. No institution that exists now or that can be established through the interim constitution will have the mandate to carry out such a task. The restructuring of the state is the prerogative of the people in the exercise of their sovereignty. Radical change is likely to be controversial; controversy threatens the fulfilment of the settlement as it may aggravate differences and increase tensions.

The interim needs

The interim constitution was intended to accelerate progress on the political and peace processes. It was to open the way for the inclusion of the Maoists in the executive branch and the legislature, establish the government for the period until the adoption of the permanent Constitution, and provide the framework for the creation of that Constitution through a constituent assembly.

One trouble with the draft of the interim constitution is that the drafting committee did not pay as much attention to the issues Nepal faces in the run up to the constituent assembly as it did to the structure and functions of the interim institutions. It saw too large a role for the interim constitution, and tried to cover a number of controversial matters that should have been left to the constituent assembly. It tried to implement an ambitious reform agenda more suitable for a constituent assembly with the people's mandate than for political bodies (selected by the political parties, including the Maoists) with less than universal legitimacy. It also tried to do this through a process in which there was no participation of the people in the decision-making.

Many of the issues the drafting committee dealt with require considerably more research and consensus-building than was possible in the short time it had – issues such as the choice of electoral system, between federalism, autonomy or unitary state, and the procedure for the creation of the new Constitution. The approach the drafting committee adopted with respect to the monarchy – leaving its status to be decided by the people in a referendum – is better, although with regard to other issues the constituent assembly would be the better institution to make decisions. The draft also raised

unnecessary controversies by proposing the dismissal of court judges and members of other independent institutions, and has not demonstrated sufficient regard for due process and the rule of law.

It is necessary to re-think the purpose of the interim constitution in light of the nature of the interim period. The focus should be on three issues: the arrangements for government for the next 24 months or longer until the new Constitution is made; ensuring accountability and respect for rights and democracy; and the drawing of the roadmap to the constituent assembly, and the making of the new Constitution.

On the first issue, these arrangements must take into account that the government will be a coalition – with perhaps some non-party members – which must operate on the principle of dialogue and consensus. The familiar 'Westminster' majoritarian principle underlying the draft interim constitution is not suitable, and could cause major difficulties. The interim constitution seems to assume that the prime minister would consult with other parties when forming the government. It would be desirable, however, for it to specifically state not only that the government would be a coalition between the SPA and the Maoists but also that the prime minister would consult with the SPA and the Maoists on its formation.

The position of the prime minister should be made less dominant than it is in the draft. The draft gives the PM some of the erstwhile powers of the monarch in addition to those traditional for the head of government; whereas it would be appropriate to give him or her less power than is often found, and to emphasise the collective nature of the cabinet. Creating too powerful a prime ministerial office could trigger divisive and disruptive competition for the post. It would be desirable for the SPA and the Maoists to enter into an agreement on the modalities of decision-making in the government, so as to avoid future disputes.

The primary responsibility of the interim government and legislature would be to facilitate and expedite the constitution-making process, and to undertake making only such legislation as is absolutely necessary, especially to facilitate the constitution-making process itself. One example of necessary legislation would be that dealing with the matter of citizenship. The interim government must re-establish law and order, and rights must be respected. If these things are not done, its role would be reduced to that of a caretaker government. The role of the courts must also be clear, and their independence assured. Other accountability institutions – such as the office of the

The interim period is not a time for a radical restructuring of the state. No institution that exists now or that can be established through the interim constitution will have the mandate to carry out such a task.

auditor-general and the authority for investigating abuse of office – must be in operation, and the legislature should play an important part in ensuring transparency and accountability in government.

Principles and institutions

The interim constitution must guarantee the convening of the constituent assembly. It needs a strong and clear chapter on the constitution-making process, with binding principles, an agenda for the constituent assembly and, perhaps most importantly, timeframes. Here the draft says too much on some matters and not enough on others. It goes too far in dictating the makeup of the body and its decision-making processes, but fails to give a clear timeline.

In brief, there should be a deadline for holding the election or selection process for the constituent assembly. Its composition should not be prescribed, but the principles for representation should ensure the inclusion of 33 percent women members, and proportionate members for other communities. Rules for decision-making should not be made, but some guiding principles should be set – to start with, the bedrock necessity of producing agreement.

It is also advisable that there be a wider and clearer role for what the draft constitution calls the 'Constituent Assembly Public Awareness Committee'. In addition to educating people and seeking their views for transmission to the constituent assembly, it should be specified that such a committee should work those views into a set of proposals to form the very foundation for deliberations in the constituent assembly. The committee's first important task would be to make recommendations as to the format of the constitution-making process – including various functions of the assembly – on the basis of appropriate consultations with the people.

There is a great danger that the SPA and the Maoists will soon take matters into their own hands and attempt to make their own decisions – this at a time when people are beginning to debate the best form of the constituent assembly, and when their views should be collected and incorporated into the process of preparation. A broad agreement on this process is a pre-condition of its success, and a guarantee of people's participation in the political processes that will follow.

The advantage of the early establishment of the Committee on Public Awareness is that it can swing into action even before the difficult questions facing the late September summit (between the SPA and the Maoists) on political process and weapons are resolved. This will be reassuring to the Nepali people, who are beginning to wonder whether there will ever in fact be a constituent assembly. The interim constitution should set out fundamental principles for the new Constitution,

based on the eight-point and 12-point agreements between the SPA and the Maoists. This would not usurp the functions of the constituent assembly, and would reassure the people that things are on track for the creation of a truly democratic Constitution.

The drafting committee has not proposed a method for the formal adoption of the interim draft. Not only are the political parties divided on the subject, the method of adoption also has profound implications for the legality and legitimacy of the Constitution itself. It is more than likely that the legality of the new Constitution will be challenged in terms of both procedure and substance, as it will not be adopted fully in accordance with the 1990 Constitution – it will be adopted, that is, without the participation of the second chamber or the approval of the king, and with the derogation of some especially entrenched principles of the preamble.

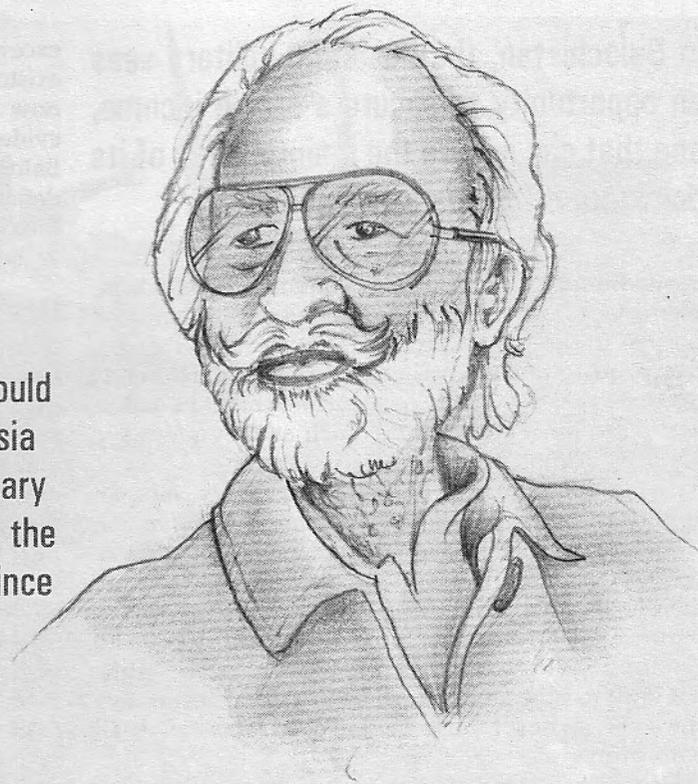
It is true that the drafting committee may not be able to do much about this. Being a committee of lawyers giving careful consideration to the kinds of issues courts take into account when deciding questions of legality in similar situations, however, they should have come up with a firm proposal as to how to deal with the issue. Since the adoption by the House of Representatives would inevitably require scrutiny of the amendment procedures of the 1990 Constitution, it would be best to base both the legitimacy and legality of the interim constitution not on that document but on the people's sovereignty – through a representative assembly of parties, Maoists and civil society. The preamble of the interim constitution should recite the circumstances that led to its adoption, emphasising the people's sovereignty and the necessity of a new constitutional order.

The implementation of these constitutional suggestions will not be effective without the satisfactory resolution of the weapons question, and the exercise of good leadership. The former, coupled with the question of the eventual integration of the various armed forces, has to be handled together with political issues and in a manner both principled and flexible, so that linkages can be established between progress on the fronts of the political agenda and of weapons management. There are lessons to be learned from the debacle in Iraq that followed the senseless decision to disband the existing army wholesale. The management of weapons and of armed forces, together with other issues of transition, will require a leadership with vision and determination. Many a country with prospects of peace, democracy and justice as promising as in Nepal today have squandered the opportunity for lack of such vision, or for the selfishness or timidity of their politicians. If Nepal falters, a large measure of responsibility for the failure will lie with its political leaders.

The only way forward

The killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti should be enough to tell the rest of Southasia and the world how Islamabad's military rulers intend to maintain their grip on the resource-rich and long-suffering province of Balochistan.

BY SHAKEEL IMAM



BILASH RAI

Three days prior to the birth of Pakistan, its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah told his Constituent Assembly members, "The first observation that I would like to make is this: you will no doubt agree with me that the first duty of a government is to maintain law and order, so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the state."

Unfortunately, since its inception Pakistan has been victim to the whims of the feudal elite and its army. The entire mechanism of rule of law has been hijacked by this elite, at times directly and at times with military assistance. Since the Supreme Court decided in 1952 that the principle of necessity was acceptable justification for the violation of constitutional norms, the basic tenets of governance as described by Jinnah have been sidelined. Pakistan's judiciary has become a tool for the ruling clique, while the army has learned the game only well enough to take over the country multiple times.

Three short spells of democracy could not curtail the military's power, neither in political nor in economic sectors. The military is the biggest of all economic players in Pakistan today, with investments secure in such organisations as Pakistan Railways, the Water and Power Development Authority, and the National Logistics Cell; recently, it has even begun oil and gas exploration. For the army, this is good business: it has the capital, an abundance of free labour, and the ability to use the entire state structure to ensure the safety of its investments.

Once it had attained the status of a political group with arms on the side, the military proceeded to destroy the national political discourse, as well as the checks

and balances necessary for a lawful and equitable democracy. This process not only destroyed the rule of law and national institutions, but generated strong feelings of injustice in many layers. Citizens felt there was unfairness in many spheres on the part of Islamabad, one of them being the denial of equal status to smaller provinces in the face of a Punjab-dominated military elite.

Due to the presence of this uniformed clique - bolstered by an endless line of civilian opportunists - Pakistan has failed to perform as a federal state, to adhere to its responsibilities towards its provinces, and to keep its promises of power-sharing and regional autonomy. Smaller provinces, particularly Balochistan, have subsequently worked with increasing fervour in recent decades to demand their rights. While such calls quickly gain momentum among the masses, they are just as quickly denounced and crushed by the military elite, which labels them as separatist or 'anti-Pakistan'. In addition, the ghost of East Pakistan's 'equal access' demands in the early 1970s continues to loom large in the psyche of the state establishment. It was only two years after the 1971 war that the cry went up for an independent Baloch state.

Economic martyr

Since the early 1950s, struggles for autonomy on the part of Sindh and the Northwest Frontier Province have regularly turned into pointless exercises in political negotiation. Due to the heavy presence of natural resources - particularly petroleum - in Balochistan, however, that province has long faced significantly greater levels of military high-

In Balochistan, the Pakistani military sees an opportunity to secure a stable income, one that can ensure the maintenance of its domination for years to come.

handedness. Although several national bodies have been established to give the appearance that Islamabad is open to discussion on equitable resource-sharing, the production of official recommendations is celebrated by the regime as an achievement in and of itself. The recommendations, such as they are, have never been implemented.

In Balochistan, the Pakistani military sees an opportunity to secure a stable income, one that can ensure the maintenance of its domination for years to come. General Pervez Musharraf's decision to crush the ongoing political struggle in the province can be seen as an attempt to nurture the political and economic wings of the army. At the same time, not once has the government been able to ensure that the real issues facing the province were dealt with properly.

When the state failed to maintain its offices and administration in Balochistan's districts, President Musharraf in 2003 ordered the army to take over and build new cantonments, ratcheting up fears already rampant in the province. The purpose of the government's move was multifold: to use the show of force as a tactic to carry out systematic evictions of owners of land rich in natural resources; to ensure that jirgas and tribal leaders were bullied into stepping in line; and most importantly, to create enough space for the army and its economic enterprise to prove itself to be an 'economical ally' of the US, after having been a failed ally in the 'war on terror'. For the last few years, the Baloch have been pushed into corners to let the army's economic wing gain more and freer access to their natural resources. For this same reason, when former Balochistan governor and militant leader Nawab Akbar Bugti did not cooperate with President Musharraf, he was killed.

As much as Bugti's 26 August death at the hands of the Pakistan Air Force may appear business as usual, the act will have long-term consequences for both Pakistan and its military regime. With Bugti dead and hundreds having been arrested in recent weeks – not to mention the many more who have been disappeared over the past seven months – Islamabad has apparently closed itself down for any further dialogue or negotiation on issues of crucial importance to Balochistan.

President Musharraf is now trying to portray Bugti's death as an instance of his government's successful management of the Balochistan issue – an example of Islamabad's 'proactive' reaction to long-term injustices. But after years of game-playing, the general-president has made a critical error in resorting to

excessive use of force, and eliminating the space that existed for dealing with Balochistan's issues. The fear now widespread in the province and the sudden evident absence of options will inevitably push more Baloch, young and old alike, towards violence and defiance of the law – if for no other reason than to mark their opposition to Islamabad's policies with regards to them.

International intervention

Islamabad's current strategy has in fact increased the risk of creating a civil conflict that will stretch into the indefinite future. It has also given the current fighting a nasty touch, with the neighbouring Pashtun currently being set up to fight against the Baloch. Pakistan's army, which is now so active and comfortable on the economic and political fronts, has lost much of its own fighting 'spirit'. As such, the top brass is likely to bring in another armed group to deal with the Baloch resistance.

Due to longstanding arrogance and the realisation of its physical power, Pakistan's military regime is incapable as well as unwilling to understand the current problem in Balochistan. Furthermore, it would be unable to fulfil the first prerequisite to engaging in dialogue with the Baloch: considering them as first-class citizens of Pakistan. As such, in a situation in which the presence of the state is limited to district and provincial headquarters, the regime will continue with oppressive tactics in order to stifle dissent.

Given this situation, it will fall to the international community to stop the heavy hand of the Islamabad military coming down on Balochistan's people, in particular those tribes that sit on resource-rich lands. The Pakistani system of government has proven itself incapable of dealing with even mundane issues, let alone those as complex as resource- and power-sharing. These questions require a strong state structure subservient to democratic principles and committed to human-rights norms – something that the current structure is not. An outside intervention is needed to solve the Pakistani state's deeply entrenched problems, but who in the international community could play such a role?

One approach would be for donor countries and other interested players to pressure Islamabad to allow an international commission to study Bugti's death, as well as other pending Baloch issues, which would naturally also bring in the matter of resource-sharing between the Centre and the province. While the process would thus begin as a reaction to the killing of the tribal leader, it would evolve into a proactive move to stop all-too-likely attacks on vulnerable tribes. At the very outset, the United Nations must send a Special Rapporteur to Balochistan, and demand information on all who have been 'disappeared' or detained in army camps, in or out of Balochistan. Islamabad must be forced to realise that loss of civilian lives and gross human-rights violations do matter to the rest of the world.



Gujarat as another country

The making and reality of a fascist realm

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY PRASHANT JHA

At a time when a progressive patina is being painted over the rule of Chief Minister Narendra Modi, a reporter visiting Gujarat four years and six months after the pogroms finds a state where Muslims are being thrust forcibly into ghettos. The trauma of the butchery is as raw as ever. The active participation of the Hindu middle class in Modi's agenda, and the silence of the few who think otherwise, will guarantee the social and moral poverty of all Gujarat, even as it secedes from the rest of Indian society. Meanwhile, the wilful turn of the communal wheel will deliver radicalised militants and, thereby, a further marginalisation of Muslims. The Gujarat of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has become unrecognisable. Nothing short of a massive social movement is required to cleanse the state of Gujarat.

Ahmedabad is a divided city. On one side resides fear and anxiety, helplessness and anger. Walk across Jamalpur, Mirzapur, Dani Limda, Kalopur, Lal Darwaza and other parts of the Walled City. Go to Juhapura – one of the largest Muslim ghettos in India. Scratch a little, and people want to talk. An entire community feels under attack, with many resigned to their newfound fate of being second-class citizens. Rights are negligible, and the sense of representation non-existent. What remains strong is the cry for justice, and the knowledge they will not get it – not in Gujarat. Why? “Because”, explains one elder in Shah Alam, “we pray to Allah. That is our transgression.”

There are the borders everywhere. A patch of road, a wall, a turn across a street corner, a divider in the middle of a road – this is all it takes to polarise and segregate communities throughout Gujarat. Each town and city now has countless borders, forcibly making people conscious of their religious identity. Me Hindu, you Muslim. Or one could look at it differently: the borders on the ground merely reflect and reinforce the polarisation that has already taken place in the minds of ordinary Gujaratis.

Yet nothing prepares you for the certitude on the streets of the other Ahmedabad – in Navrangpura, Vastrapur, MG Road, Judge’s Bungalow Road, Satellite, Vejalpur. Many Gujarati Hindus think they have the answers to some of the most troubling questions of our times. The more subtle would say there is a problem among Muslims. Others argue that Muslims themselves are the problem. They look back fondly at the *Toofan*, the 2002 riots, and their reminiscences have a striking thematic unity. *The Muslims deserved it. They are all bloody Pakistanis and criminals. If we had more time, we would have wiped them out. See, they are crushed and scared. We taught them a lesson. And now, the world should learn from Gujarat about how to deal with the miyas.* The one sentiment that is almost wholly absent is remorse. What remains, 54 months after the pogrom, is an all-pervading sense of arrogance among Hindus in the public sphere. Those who think differently possibly keep silent.

The story of Gujarat as a whole, then, is a tale of pride and prejudice on the one side, victimhood and alienation on the other. In control of this divisive agenda is the fascist government of

Narendra Modi, who happily builds on this evolving social reality, and reinforces it. The everyday tragedy of Gujarat, often invisible, is in many ways more telling than the state-sponsored pogroms of 2002. The high degree of alienation among Muslims, the stereotypes and discrimination they face, the fact that a substantial section of society is committed to the Hindutva agenda, the absence of justice and accountability, and the continued secession of the state from its basic constitutional obligations – these are all elements that go into making Gujarat, in the very words of the Hindu Right, its laboratory.

This is happening even as Chief Minister Modi, the principal architect of the 2002 killings, seeks to carve an image for himself as a development leader, and the chaperon of India’s best-governed state. While the former is true – that Modi guided the horrors of 2002 and the subjugation of Muslims in the aftermath – the latter is far from proven. Despite the loud applause that is beginning to be heard in New Delhi and elsewhere, the facts on the ground reveal that Gujarat is neither the embodiment of progress nor of good governance.



Babu Bajrangji Patel

Babu’s bomb

If 2002 was an experiment in the Hindutva laboratory, men like Babubhai Rajabhai Patel of the

Hindutva outfit Bajrang Dal were in the forefront of conducting it. The short, stocky Babu Bajrangji, as he is popularly known, would pass off as an average middle-class trader. He claims to be a social worker. Sitting in his second-floor office in the Ahmedabad suburb of Naroda, Bajrangji talks about his NGO, Navchetan, which ‘rescues’ Hindu women who have been ‘lured’ into relationships with Muslim men. “In every house today there is a bomb, and that bomb is the woman, who forms the basis of Hindu culture and tradition,” Bajrangji begins. “Parents allow her to go to college, and they start having love affairs, often with Muslims. Women should just be kept at home to save them from the terrible fate of Hindu-Muslim marriages.”

Bajrangji’s Navchetan works to prevent inter-religious love marriages, and if such a wedding has already taken place, it works to break the union. When a marriage between a Hindu woman and Muslim man gets registered in a court, within a few days the marriage documents generally end up on Bajrangji’s desk, ferreted out by

Each town and city now has countless borders, forcibly making people conscious of their religious identity. Me Hindu, you Muslim.

functionaries in the lower judiciary. The girl is subsequently kidnapped and sent back home; the boy is taught a lesson. "We beat him in a way that no Muslim will dare to look at Hindu women again. Only last week, we made a Muslim eat his own waste – thrice, in a spoon," he reveals with barely concealed pride. All this is illegal, Bajrangi concedes, but it is moral. "And anyway, the government is ours," he continues, turning to look at the clock. "See, I am meeting Modi in a while today."

One might dismiss Babu Bajrangi as a bombast when he claims proximity to the chief minister, or describes the beating of Muslim boys. But for a man of obvious stature in society he is also accused of burning Muslims alive. As the chief accused in the infamous Naroda Patiya case, one of the worst instances of brutality during the 2002 violence, he is alleged to have led the mob that killed 89 people in the area. It is a burden that rests lightly on Bajrangi's shoulders. "People say I killed 123 people," he says. *Did you?* Bajrangi laughs, "How does it matter? They were Muslims. They had to die. They are dead."

Evidence of Bajrangi's complicity was so overwhelming that even a pliable state administration could not save him from an eight-month stint in prison. "They cannot reduce my hatred for Muslims with that, can they? While in

jail, I demolished a small mosque that was located in there," he says with a sly, childlike grin. Bajrangi's views on what is wrong with Muslims are unabashedly straightforward. "They are all terrorists. Refuse to sing even the national song. Why don't they just go to Pakistan? Now, our aim is to create a society where we have as little to do with them as possible."

Bajrangi is now out on bail. But what has allowed a man accused of such a heinous crime to walk and operate freely? Perhaps it is the manner in which the Gujarat government has, since 2002, consistently violated its constitutional obligations to safeguard life and liberty and provide justice.

After there was fire in a train compartment carrying Hindutva activists on the morning of 27 February 2002 at the Godhra railway station, killing 59 people, Narendra Modi decided to unleash a reign of terror against the state's Muslims as a 'reaction'. The cause of the fire is still not certain, though a central government enquiry committee has reported that it was accidental, and not the result of a conspiracy. In a vulnerable political position, and unsure of future electoral prospects, Modi felt this was the right spark to ignite communal passions through the state, and blamed the incident on 'Muslims'. He instructed senior officers to let the Hindus express their anger – he was essentially asking for the rioters to be allowed a free hand.

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Modi's state machinery and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) jointly planned the attacks, with the police themselves in many places firing on the victims rather than the rioters.

The state's support to the perpetrators of the pogrom has continued through the four-and-a-half-years since the carnage. Out of the 4252 cases registered in connection with the violence that gripped Gujarat in February, March and April of 2002, the files for more than 2100 were closed without the filing of chargesheets. A few senior police officers have revealed the manner in which the state subverted justice at every stage – by distorting and manipulating complaints at the police station, assigning investigations to the very officers accused of assisting in massacres, and allowing the accused free rein to coerce witnesses into changing statements. With several public prosecutors simultaneously in the ranks – or even the leadership – of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates, the prosecution itself silently assisted in getting approval for bail applications. 345 cases have been decided so far, with convictions in only 13 of those cases.

After a severe indictment of the Gandhinagar state government by the National Human Rights Commission, the Supreme Court of India passed a landmark decision in 2004, ordering re-examination by a high-level, state-appointed committee of the decision to close more than 2000 cases. The court also ordered the transfer of investigation from the state police to the Central Bureau of Investigation in select cases, and moved two cases out of Gujarat entirely. Muslims and secular groups are clinging on to these small victories as their last hopes for justice.

And what of the social and economic condition of the victims? The state government's own conservative figures put the total loss of property at INR 6.9 billion. The government has distributed INR 563 million to the affected persons, which makes up about nine percent of the calculated damage. At the peak of the riots, more than 150,000 people were in relief camps, which were summarily shut down by the government after four months. With the state washing its hands of any rehabilitation for the affected, those who could not return home have had to live in resettled colonies constructed by community organisations. Almost 10,000 families are said to remain internally displaced in Gujarat.

Pathological normalcy

Shakeel Ahmed heads the legal cell of the Islamic Relief Committee, an offshoot of the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel), a conservative Muslim organisation. A well-read man who can hold forth as easily on Islamic precepts as on Indian sociology, Ahmed stares incredulously when asked about relief and justice. "It would be so foolish to expect it from the state!" he exclaims. "This was not a riot; it was a systematically planned pogrom. If the accused get prosecuted and if relief is provided, then their entire political purpose will be defeated." Ahmed's suggestion is confirmed from a diametrically opposite direction, that of a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) member of Parliament from Gujarat: "Compensation, relief, regret – these are meaningless issues. We wanted to crush them, and we crushed them. And most Hindus are with us, as was clear from the subsequent elections. Forget about this now." For a man of vehement convictions, it was nevertheless interesting



Juhapura, Ahmedabad's largest ghetto

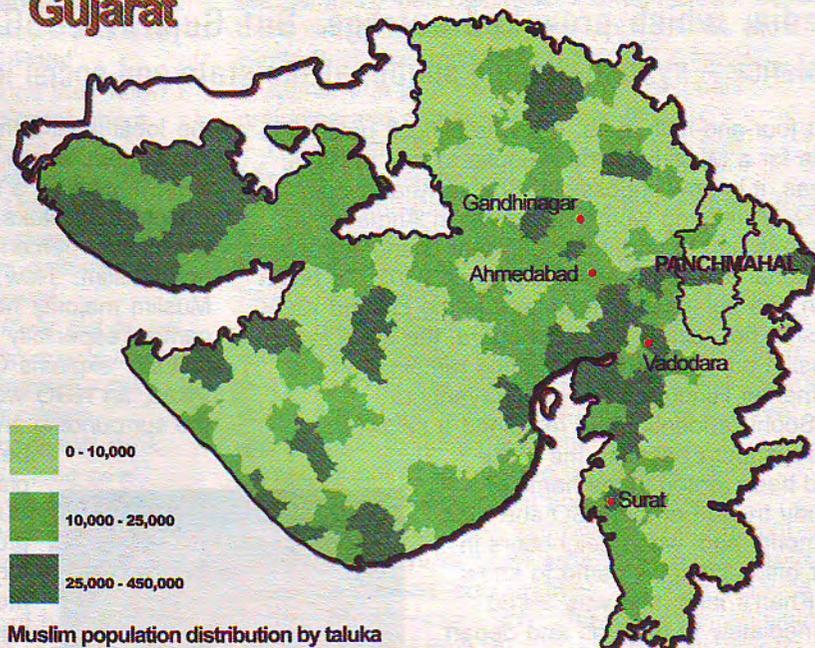
that the MP requested anonymity. He must still fear something.

Memory is a convenient, subjective tool. While Hindu extremists tell anyone who raises uncomfortable questions about the killings to 'move on', they do not mind evoking the *Toofan* of 2002 in the most minute detail in order to get the Muslims to 'behave themselves'. They also evoke the butchery as a 'feel-good' factor among themselves. The continuous discrimination against Muslims is part of the same strategy – and it is not subtle in the least. Explains Ahmedabad-based sociologist Shiv

Vishvanathan: "What happened in Gujarat was a mini Rwanda: your neighbour raped you; people killed between 9 and 6 and went home singing. It was like a football match where the Hindus won. There remains festivity around it, the state denies victimhood, and there is no erasure." State acquiescence and connivance can only partially explain such an overriding phenomenon of exclusion.

Indeed, in the Gujarat of today, among the Hindus it is considered normal to harbour and exhibit hatred for the Muslims. To those who may ask how is it possible to paint an entire state of a population of more than 50 million with such a broad brushstroke, this point is exactly what makes the evolving Gujarat of today different from all other areas where excesses have happened in Southasia. Here, the discrimination against Muslims has the state administration's support without even a fig-leaf of political correctness, as well as broad-based agreement on this matter among large sections of the Hindu masses. Talk to the common Hindu person on the street, from the neighbourhood guard to the autorickshaw-wallah to the shopkeeper, and the refrain is alarmingly deafening: *Muslims are goondas, always doing illegal things. See, they are now bombing people everywhere.* The pathological has become the normal. That is what makes societal evolution in Gujarat unique in India – and

Gujarat



exceptionally lethal.

As elsewhere in India and Southasia, polarisation has always existed in Gujarat society. Since time immemorial, Dalits have not dared to stay inside the village core. Muslims and the intermediate and backward castes have been a bit more advantaged, but have still been kept away from the privileges of the Hindu upper castes. But even if the notion of a composite culture is at times over-romanticised, there was at one time an undeniably pluralist culture in Gujarat. In part, this stemmed from its coastal location and trade-based economy, which inevitably forced diverse communities together for mutual economic advantage.

Achyut Yagnik, influential author of an authoritative book on modern Gujarat, believes that communal polarisation between Hindus and Muslims began after the 1969 riots in Ahmedabad, and accelerated after the *rath yatras* and political mobilisation by Hindutva forces in the early 1990s.

If some had hoped that the national and international condemnation would make Gujarat's communal rabble-rousers (with Modi as their cheerleader) pull back from their extremist agenda, this has not happened. In fact, the polarisation has intensified across the state in the

While Hindu extremists tell anyone who raises uncomfortable questions about the killings to 'move on', they don't mind evoking the *Toofan* of 2002 in the most minute detail in order to get the Muslims to 'behave themselves'.

The 2002 riots were a tragic tale of visible violence, under the glare of the national media, which provoked outrage. But Gujarat 2006 is the story of invisible violence – systematic and subtle, at the state and social levels.

last four-and-half years. If it was difficult before the riots for a Muslim to find a house to rent in Hindu areas, it is now impossible. Sophia Khan would know. A leading women's activist in Ahmedabad, she has had to undergo significant changes in her personal and professional life since 2002. To begin with, the polarised atmosphere in the city led Khan to shift her residence to Juhapura, the city's large Muslim area, although her office remained in the upmarket Hindu locality of Narayanpura.

Sophia's identity had remained a secret in Narayanpura because the office had been rented in the name of a Hindu trustee of the NGO she runs. A month ago, when neighbours in her office complex came to know of Khan's faith, she was asked immediately to pack up and depart. She tried to put up a fight, but gave up in the face of constant harassment. "Imagine, they were not even willing to let me use the lift," she says. Khan moved her office to a flat in Juhapura, but with that came a new complication. A Hindu employee who was working with Khan was pressured by her family to resign, for they did not approve of her going to a Muslim area. She is grim as she intones:

"My house is in a Muslim area. My office is here now. My only Hindu employee is resigning, and my work revolves around Muslims. This is exactly how they want to push an entire community into a corner."

All over, people are beginning to shift to areas in which they are a part of the majority. M T Kazi is a young executive with F D Society, a Muslim trust that runs educational institutions. "Everyone is insecure," he says. "What if a riot breaks out again? Both Hindus and Muslims would prefer to be in areas where they are surrounded by their own kind. That way, the possibility of attack is reduced." But the ramifications of such a trend can be drastic, says Shakeel Ahmed of Jel: "Social polarisation inevitably leads to some kind of economic polarisation. And this will have a more pronounced impact on the Muslim minority, because we are too small to create a self-sufficient unit."

It is not even that the mental and physical dislocation of Muslims is an urban phenomenon, as many think. The rural areas in north and central Gujarat, in particular, are presently seeing a spurt in polarisation. There are 225 *talukas* in Gujarat,

the local-level administrative divisions that encompass about 70-80 villages each. Before the riots, there was a Muslim majority in five to ten villages per taluka, a smattering of Muslims in another 40 percent, and the rest almost completely non-Muslim. "Now, those five villages which had a Muslim majority have become concentration camps, especially in villages in the Panchmahal district," explains Gagan Sethi, who runs Jan Vikas, an NGO working with Muslims. "Muslims in the surrounding area, who feel insecure or have been pushed out of their own places, come to these villages." Such rural ghettoisation is also problematic because it allows for the possibility of easy monitoring of Muslims by the state agencies, adding to the tensions within the community.

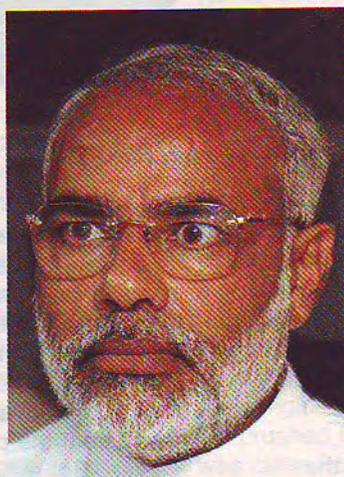
In the cities and towns, the segregation of residential locations has sharply reduced shared spaces at all levels. A visible example is the decline in the number of schools that have a fair mix of Hindu and Muslim students. Children generally attend schools that are close by, which means that these institutions are increasingly segregated. With the

newfound sense of insecurity, parents feel even more strongly about sending their kids to schools with more of "our people". Some reports also suggest the existence of discrimination along religious lines in admission to elite schools. This troubles concerned citizens, who are worried that children may graduate from high school without having made a single lasting friendship with someone belonging to another community. The absence of contact since childhood can only accelerate the evolution of Gujarat as 'another country', where Hindus and Muslims live starkly separate lives and where intolerance becomes the defining characteristic.

Silent underclass

The 2002 riots were a tragic tale of visible violence, under the glare of the national media, which provoked outrage. But Gujarat 2006 is the story of invisible violence – systematic and subtle, at the state and social levels. Prejudice against the Muslims grows by the day.

Salimbhai Musabhai Patel is happy he can introduce himself as S M Patel – at least it gets him an appointment with bankers. "People think I



VISA-VIS

am Hindu that way," he says. A young entrepreneur, he runs the Patel Finance Company, with offices in Ahmedabad and Bharuch. "But that is as far as my initials can get me," Patel continues with a resigned smile. "Once they know I am Muslim, they treat me like dirt. Forget about getting a loan."

It is dusk, and Patel is standing with a group of other Muslim men on 'their side' of Mirzapur in Ahmedabad. Patel's comment unleashes a torrent of similar complaints from the others gathered. *We have no hope of getting a job in Gujarat. Government service is impossible. If we get in, we are relegated to the lowest level. The courts are against us. Muslim vendors are harassed, while Hindus get away with crimes. Even private companies prefer Hindus. The ordinary folk think all of us are Pakistanis.* The riots are long over, goes the common refrain, and sure we are willing to 'move on'. But what do we do about the daily injustice? They want to create a society in which we just don't matter.

This perception among Muslims, of being disadvantaged because of their faith, seems based on the hard reality of daily experience. Being Muslim in Gujarat is now a recipe for continuous harassment if you want to be anything but a member of the silent underclass. Activist Sophia Khan had to wage a struggle to get a phone

connection from the local Tata branch, because the company had black-listed certain areas. Banks have similar systems for loan applications. Most Hindu businessmen would rather not employ Muslims, due to a combination of personal prejudice and pressure from the VHP.

For its part, the government ensures that Muslims are deprived of the most basic of amenities. Juhapura has a population of more than 300,000, with a large middle-class base. Yet it does not have a single bank, its former primary health centre was shifted to a Hindu area, and public bus transport routes now take a detour around the locality. Muslims constitute less than five percent of the high-level officers in the state's police force, and even those officials who serve are shunted to marginal posts.

Yagnik points to how the two influential centres – the bureaucracy and local power structures – have been saffronised in the recent past. Muslims have been essentially ousted from local Panchayats, cooperatives, agrarian produce markets, government schemes and other services. There are more than 20 sub-communities among Muslims categorised as OBCs ('other backward classes') in Gujarat, but they face enormous difficulties in getting the required certificates that would make them eligible for various services. Again and again, it has been revealed how

Country Coordinator - Sri Lanka

I. Background on ACTED:

ACTED, the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development is an International Non Governmental Organization with global operations in Africa, Central Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the Caribbean. ACTED's main areas of intervention encompass emergency response, food security, health promotion, education and training, cultural promotion, economic development, micro-finance, advocacy, institution building and regional dialogue

II. Responsibilities:

The Country Director has overall responsibility of the management, coordination and supervision of ACTED Sri Lanka programs. He/She works on the design and overview of the programmes in Sri Lanka.

- Define the Mission's overall strategy in relation with ACTED Regional Director for South-East Asia and ACTED General Direction in HQ.
- Liaise with donors and government officials
- Establish a long term programmatic dynamic in the country.
- Supervise the design and implementation of projects
- Develop ACTED Sri Lanka programmes
- Mainstream key sectoral issues with a specific emphasis on incorporating best practices and lessons learned emanating from ACTED's experience in other countries.
- Overview the Country mission's internal organisation
- In collaboration with ACTED India's Country Coordinator, contribute to develop programmatic synergies and experience sharing mechanisms between programmes in North – North-eastern Sri Lanka with those in Tamil Nadu.
- Manage expatriate and local human resources
- Coordinate with other agencies working in the area
- Develop and supervise a comprehensive communication strategy within the country of intervention.
- Organise ACTED Sri Lanka's internal training when needed, as appropriate with the regional priorities of the organisation.

The Country Coordinator reports to the General Delegate and the Director of Operations. The position is based in Colombo, with frequent visits to bases

III. Conditions:

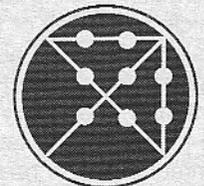
- Salaried status
- Salary according to experience + local indemnity

- Accommodation, food and transportation ensured by ACTED
- Insurances, repatriation covered by ACTED

IV. Applications submissions:

CV, cover letter and references are to be sent to HR department at jobs@acted.org.

V. Duration: 1 year minimum with possibility of extension.



ACTED

municipal action is deliberately used to communalise an issue so as to hurt and provoke Muslim sentiment, which is then used as a pretext for counter-violence. Recent instances of such provocation include the demolition of a dargah in Baroda in May, and the diversion of a sewage pipe towards a graveyard in Radhanpur in north Gujarat in August.

Schools have become sites for propagating hate, with social science textbooks tailored along 'Hindutva' lines. Even public examinations conducted by the state government are framed not to evaluate a student's competence, but to judge his political preferences vis-à-vis the Hindutva worldview. In early August this year, the Gujarat State Public Service Commission conducted an exam to recruit Ayurvedic medical officers. Among the questions asked: "Christians have a right to convert" – who made such a claim?", "Which day is observed as 'Black Day' by minorities and 'Victory Day' by the Sangh Parivar?", and "Babar, who established the Muslim empire, was a devotee of whom?" (the options were Krishna, Buddha, Shiva and Ram).

There is a point of view sometimes expressed against those who see Gujarat as Armageddon – that there are enough traditional linkages among Hindus and Muslims, despite the strains since 2002. Some will point to the fact that a web of economic relationships still binds the two communities, and they will refer to how Muslims and Hindus interact in a variety of sectors, from firecracker-making to *rakhi*-weaving to motor vehicle repair, all of them monopolised by the Muslims. Muslims also make the kites that dot the Gujarati sky on the Hindu festival of Makar Sankranti in January. Sheikh Mohammed Yusuf, a kite-maker for the last 32 years, says that the communalisation has not turned away his Hindu customers. "But that's because only Muslims

make kites. Where will they go otherwise?" While there may be advantages in the economic necessity that has Hindus and Muslims at least nodding at each other, it is doubtful that the perfunctory transactions can act as a bridge in a society as divided as Gujarat has become.

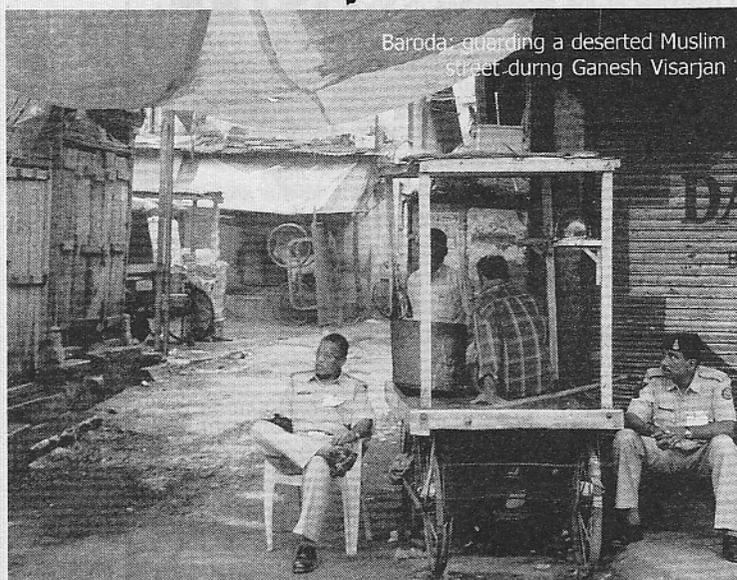
Why here? Why Gujarat?

These instances of polarisation and discrimination are not mere aberrations, or restricted to pockets. The trend spreads across class and caste lines through the entire state, though it is relatively more intense in Ahmedabad, Panchmahal and Baroda – the core areas that shape Gujarat's political discourse. Certainly, there are Hindus who would prefer a society that is not so mired in conflict and mistrust. But what is important, as this reporter found out in his travels through the state in early September, is that this voice is mute. It is the Hindu Right that is setting the agenda for Gujarat, and amidst the extremism the moderate who remains silent becomes irrelevant for his inability to guide events.

What led to such a situation? The Hinduisation of Gujarat has surprised many observers: this is a region that had a pluralist culture; the people are driven largely by a mercantile ethos; it did not undergo the troubled Partition experience as intensely as did some other states; and, despite being a border state, it does not have any special reason to harbour intense bitterness towards Pakistan, a fact that could have led to animosity towards Muslims within. Instead, the answer perhaps lies in its political evolution and economic competition.

If the state is now considered the lab of Hindutva, a century ago a British ethnographer is said to have termed the state the 'laboratory of Indian casteism'. After Gujarat became a state in 1960, carved out from the then state of Bombay, the Brahmans, Vaniyas and Patidars held sway over the political structure. This hegemony was broken in 1980 with the Congress's KHAM formula, which encompassed the Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi and Muslim. The erstwhile ruling-castes retaliated, initially by instigating caste conflict. But they soon realised that the 'lower' castes could not be discarded, and thus began attempting to carve out a broader Hindu coalition where the 'enemy' would not be the Dalit, but the Muslim.

Sections of Dalits and Adivasis were slowly co-opted into the Hindutva-guided system, induced with promises of upward mobility and enhanced status, along with other political and economic dividends. The BJP also seemed like an attractive alternative to these groups because, despite voting for the Congress for five long decades, they had little to show in terms of improvement in livelihood. These developments in Gujarat took



Baroda: guarding a deserted Muslim street during Ganesh Visarjan

place at a time when the Hindutva forces were consolidating themselves at a pan-India level through the late 1980s and 1990s.

The significant organisational work put in by the Sangh Parivar in Gujarat over the previous two decades bore fruit, creating a political base for the BJP that spanned across all sections of society. "While we were writing op-ed pieces and organising college protests against communalism, they were distributing millions of leaflets all over and building a base on the ground," says an introspective Shabnam Hashmi, who runs ANHAD, an NGO that works to build communal harmony. The decline of textile mills, especially in Ahmedabad, destroyed common employment spaces shared by working-class Hindus and Muslims. These changes created an unemployed segment of society looking for a cause, and this provided the foot-soldiers of the Hindutva movement.

There are some other specificities of Gujarati society that made the polarisation easier here than elsewhere. For example, the fact that Gujarati Hindus are publicly and obsessively vegetarian has helped to create a visible marker of difference with the Muslims. First, this creates a social barrier in and of itself, and makes it possible for Hindutva outfits to capitalise on the matter of cow slaughter by Muslims. '100 percent vegetarian' restaurants crowd the market streets of Hindu Ahmedabad, and the very fact that Hindus and Muslims rarely dine together in restaurants drastically reduces the possibilities of social engagement.

While the chief agent of the polarisation was the Hindu middle class, it found its natural ally in the Non-Resident Gujarati. This group constitutes an extremely prosperous section of the Indian diaspora overseas, and flushes the RSS and its affiliates with enormous sums of money. Supporting this dynamic have been the various religious sects and preachers who crowd the spiritual market in Gujarat, as well as large and influential sections of the Gujarati-language press.

The trading culture of Gujarat might have created a pluralist, inclusive environment in the past, but the economic advantages of social cohesion seem to have been sacrificed at the altar of Hindutva. In fact, the relative affluence and stability of the economy is one reason why – based on Hindutva propaganda – a large section of the middle class veered towards religious chauvinism. The well-off had another reason to join the Hindutva bandwagon. They saw it as an opportunity to push their Muslim economic competitors into a corner with hate propaganda. Economics played a critical role during the pogrom in 2002, when those Hindus on the



rampage were keen to destroy the property of some of their rivals.

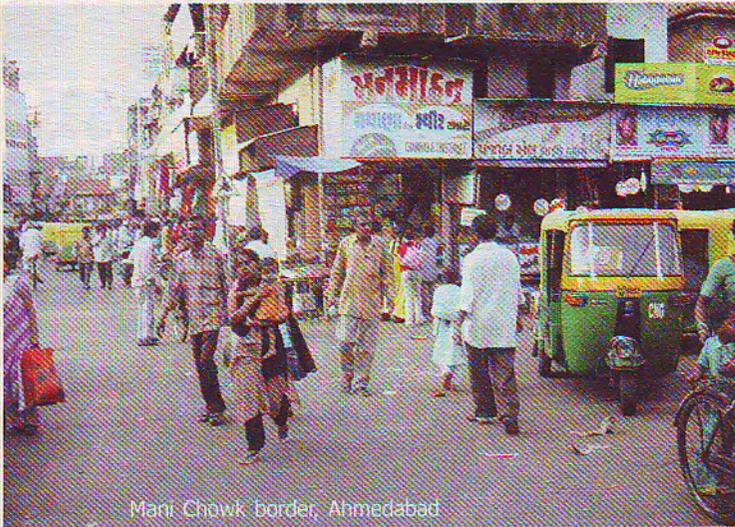
It did not help that, unlike some other states of India, Gujarat does not have a tradition of left, Dalit or even progressive student movements – which not only provided space to the Hindutva campaign, but also ensured that there was no culture of protest.

Muslims constitute around nine percent of the state's population, but have never had an effective political voice, as they do in UP or Bihar – another reason why the Hindu Right could so easily ride roughshod over their basic rights. The Congress Party, since the 1970s and through the 1980s, had taken the easy way out to win the Muslim vote, by encouraging conservative elements among them; it also protected certain hardened criminals who happened to be Muslims. The Sangh Parivar cleverly used this as a pretext to convince the Hindus in Gujarat that minorities were being appeased at their cost. While Muslims were and are being targeted elsewhere in India as well, these factors have combined to create a rather unique situation in Gujarat.

One-man state

The critical state support for communal extremism following the rise of Narendra Modi, the fact that a large section of Hindu society harbours extremist notions about Muslims, and the absence of an

In Baroda in Modi's Gujarat, the Ganesh festival is treated – and exploited – not as a cultural but as a nationalist event.



Mani Chpwk border, Ahmedabad

effective political opposition to this discourse makes Gujarat stand out in the broader Indian context. Fortunately, the particular mix of societal factors that have made Gujarat 'another country' – while they may exist in small areas elsewhere – do not come together at a statewide level anywhere else. Gujarat has gone into its extremist cocoon willingly and alone, and there is the hope and expectation that no other part of India will follow where Gujarat has gone.

The elevation of Narendra Modi as chief minister in late 2001 has everything to do with what Gujarat has become. He provided the match to the communal powder-keg that the state had already become. Political psychologist Ashis Nandy (along with Achyut Yagnik) interviewed Modi in 1992, and Nandy has written about how he was left shaken by the experience. Emerging from the meeting, Nandy told Yagnik that Modi met all the criteria of an authoritarian personality, and was a clinical and classic case of a fascist. A decade later, that assessment proved correct, when Modi systematically engineered the carnage against Gujarat's Muslims.

Faced with the outrage that engulfed India after the Gujarat massacres, rather than take a defensive approach, Narendra Modi has aggressively introduced a potent mixture of Gujarati parochialism and Hindutva to cement his political foundations. His trick has been to construct a four-fold binary – of the insider versus outsider, Gujarat versus Delhi, Gujarati media versus English media, and Hindu versus the 'pseudo-secularist'. Any criticism can be easily deflected by using this matrix.

While manipulation of the mass mindset may have helped Modi turn vilification to advantage, in

intervening elections at the state and local levels the image of the Hindutva ogre is something he has decided he can do without at present. This is because Modi has his vision firmly set on the national BJP leadership, for which he has now to coin a new image for himself – that of a strong, anti-terrorism leader, focused on development and good governance. And this explains the recent brand-building exercise to portray Gujarat as the most developed state in the country.

Gujarat has always been a relatively prosperous state, and for Modi to try to hog credit for the traditional achievements of an entrepreneurial class seems excessive. If anything, Modi can be faulted for *not* being able to build substantially upon this base.

Economists of varied hues have doubts about the idea of Gujarat as a new economic haven, yet another of Modi's propositions as he tries to reposition his image. Investment in the state is largely restricted to a few large players pumping in huge amounts of money in capital-intensive units, which have little trickle-down effect. Gujarat has missed out on the new economy, with a weak Information Technology base and few of the outsourcing units that are all the rage in other successful states. In addition, the state's educational system is in a rut, the crucial local co-operatives are riddled with scams and divisions, and the state is quickly slipping on the human development index scale.

The idea of Modi as a good administrator, too, is a bogey that has its roots in his strong-leader image. In interacting directly with the state's far-flung hierarchy, he has been accused of undercutting the authority of ministers and legislators alike. Modi can be ruthlessly efficient, but only when he wants to see results in his pet projects. "His is the efficiency of the emergency era. This fear-induced work culture is not sustainable, because it is weakening public institutions. Gujarat has become a one-man state," says Javed Chowdhury, a former bureaucrat of the Gujarat cadre. The good-management myth was severely bruised with the late-August floods in Surat, which were entirely due to faulty dam-water management by the state administration.

What Modi's dictatorial style of functioning has done is to create massive dissension within his own party, as well as in the broader Hindutva *parivar*. But while that may somewhat upset Modi's own political trajectory, it has had little impact on Gujarat's communalism. The dissidents are more radically 'Hindu' than even Modi. Their differences with him are about power and patronage – not about Hindutva.

The most positive response would seem to be an emphasis on mainstream, modern education among Muslims as a means of responding to the Modi challenge.

One of the reasons the Gujarati political discourse has been so completely captured by the saffron agenda is the abject political and ideological surrender of the Congress party. Flirting with a variety of soft Hindutva itself, the party's Gujarat unit has decided not to take on Modi's fascist state directly. Congress workers, after all, were also part of the marauding mobs in 2002, and even today the party refuses to take up issues of discrimination against Muslims publicly. This has left Muslims despondent, but they have little choice. Usmanbhai Sheikh, a Muslim activist in Ahmedabad, explains: "Congress treats us like its mistress, knowing we cannot turn elsewhere."

But the Modi government is not invincible. If the Congress is able to put together a proactive, secular agenda, and consolidate an alliance between Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims, it has a good chance of ousting the chief minister and his party, and of reversing his divisive agenda. At the peak of polarisation during the 2002 assembly elections, after all, more than 50 percent of the population voted against Modi – a figure that would have to have included a substantial number of Hindus. A change in Gujarat's government would come as some relief, for the state would not be as active in engineering everyday hatred. But even if the Congress party state unit were to muster the energy to take on Modi, it is doubtful that this alone would help to restore a social fabric that has been left in tatters. The communalism in Gujarat has not only become deeply entrenched, it has become bolted to the plank of fascism. Politics-as-usual can hardly be the panacea; what is needed is a social movement for Gujarat to cleanse itself.

Modified society

It is early September. Baroda is tense. Its Muslims are scared. It is the last day of the Ganesh festival, when Hindus will take part in large processions before immersing their idols. Trouble is anticipated. Only four months ago, the demolition of a dargah had triggered riots here. Security has been beefed up across the city – the state government does not want another blemish on its record, at least not now.

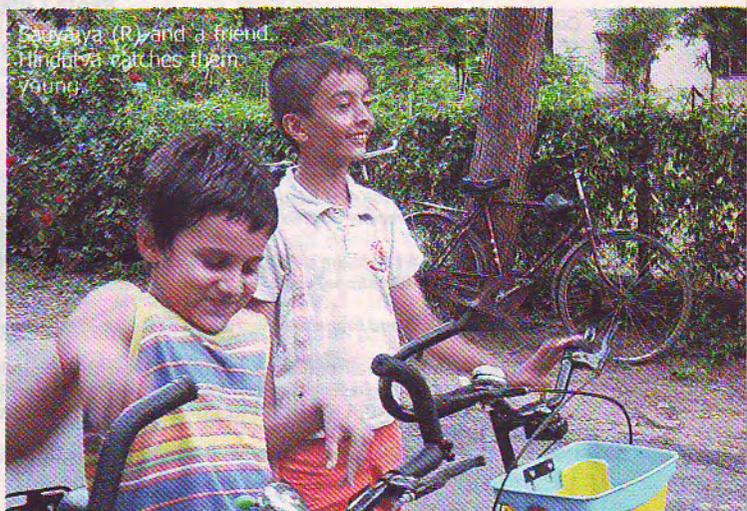
Yusuf Sheikh is sitting in his house in Tandalja – also derisively called 'mini-Pakistan' by local Hindus, because of its Muslim majority. Worried about what might happen, he explains the undercurrent of tension: "If Muslims are out in these areas where processions are being taken out, there is a high possibility that a VHP person will throw a stone at some idol, and blame it on us. Muslims will then be called the instigators and there will be riots." The city's Muslims have shut their shops, stocked up on supplies and huddled down inside their homes.

Sheikh is a ground-level political activist in Baroda. An officer of the central government's

Intelligence Bureau, based in Baroda, pays him a visit to get a sense of the Muslim mood. Sheikh's request to him is to keep an eye on the younger elements in the Ganesh processions. The intelligence official is fairly confident that no incident would occur today. "The state government is determined not to allow violence," he says. The government's decision could have to do with the fact that with no elections around the corner, and Modi seeking to carve a new image, allowing a riot at present would not be politically astute. On the broader communal situation, the officer has a 'realistic' take: "It is ok. See, in UP, Mulayam Yadav supports Muslims, and so Hindutva-wallahs have no say. Here it is Hindu rule. So it is the Muslims who are down."

'Afraid' might better capture the sentiment of Muslims, for the Hindus in Baroda do not seem to be merely celebrating a religious festival. Trucks and minivans carry huge idols, followed by hordes of people. Blaring music resonates from all corners, and those gathered dance aggressively to the tune of hit Bollywood composer Himesh Reshammiya. That in itself would be the nature of a Hindu festival anywhere else in India. But here, the saffron flags seamlessly merge with the Indian tricolour. Harshad, an ecstatic-looking 18-year-old, explains: "We are Hindus. And Hindus are Indians. In our festivals, you will see the Indian flag also."

In Baroda in Modi's Gujarat, the Ganesh festival is treated – and exploited – not as a cultural but as a nationalist event. Those excluded accept their status quietly. Silence and deserted streets greet an observer in Muslim areas of the city. Here, there is a curfew-like atmosphere. A few local elders stand outside to ensure that no trouble ensues, while state police guard the city's invisible borders. But while the day of Ganesh might be one when insecurity among Gujarati Muslims comes forth most visibly, they remain fearful, helpless and alienated throughout the year. *We don't have anyone. This is not our government. Who do we turn to?*



But this is not a saga only of victimhood. When a community is pushed into a corner, there are bound to be consequences. Frustrated youngsters will inevitably react one way or the other. The easiest is to leave the state, but that would entail entering as a member of an underclass in an alien society in another Indian state, and few of the poorly-skilled and -educated Muslim youth would venture forth under such circumstances. Much more likely is that some will take matters into their own hands, to fight the oppression that is an all-pervading reality, or follow the siren call of militant leaders. Where will Narendra Modi be to take the blame when the exclusion of yesterday and today invites the conflagration of tomorrow?

The response of the richer Muslims, who also have nowhere else to turn, has been to try and strike up a deal with the state government. Those belonging to the Bohra and Khoja communities, for example, are trying to see if they cannot run their businesses unhindered in return for offering their political support to Modi. But the most positive response would seem to be an emphasis on mainstream, modern education among Muslims as a means to responding to the Modi challenge. Indeed, Muslims across class and sectarian lines have turned to education as a passport to a self-confident future. "There is a realisation that we must have more skills and make ourselves more useful. That is the only way

out," says M T Kazi of the F D Education Society.

The Gujarati Muslim is realising the importance of education, of learning the language of rights, of asserting his or her presence in the marketplace. But there will remain the question of whether the larger 'Modified' society is willing to accommodate this pool of people when it is ready. And that is why there has been another simultaneous trend in the opposing direction, marked by the increase in the influence of conservative Muslim organisations. "They are all going into the laps of mullahs. Imagine what will happen if all these people get radicalised," says Mahesh Langa, an Ahmedabad journalist worried about the end result of what Modi and his ilk have wrought. The continued persecution, direct and indirect, makes it fairly easy for these outfits to expand their influence among Muslims.

When this reporter, with his longish beard, walked into an elite government colony in Ahmedabad to meet a senior official, three children suddenly got off their bicycles. One screamed aloud, "Terrorist!" *Why?* "Because you are a Mussalman," he responded. *So?* "All Muslims are terrorists. My father is a judge. He will call you terrorist in court." *Really?* "Yes. Now get out of here. This is a Hindu area!" Sauyajya is 12 years old and has not met a single Muslim in his life. No one knows how many Sauyajyas are in the making in Gujarat.

United Nations  Human Resources
GALAXY e-STAFFING SYSTEM

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS : **31 Oct 2006**
ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT : Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
DUTY STATION : Bangkok
VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT NO. : 06-HRE-ESCAP-411392-R-BANGKOK

Human Resources Officer, P-3

Responsibilities

Under the direct supervision of the Chief of Human Resources Management Section and the general direction of the Chief of Administrative Services Division, as well as within the limits of delegated authority, the Human Resources Officer will be responsible for the following duties: Provide advice and support to managers and staff on human resources related matters, particularly those involving staff selection, job classification, and consultants/individual contractors. Prepare reports, policy papers, position papers, briefing notes on issues related to staff selection. Supervise a team of HR Assistants in implementing the staff selection system. Prepare classification analysis of jobs in the Professional and General Service categories. Oversee the engagement/hiring of services of consultants and individual contractors.

Competencies

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QUALIFICATIONS

Education: Advanced university degree (Masters degree or equivalent) in public or business administration, human resources management, education, social science or related area. A combination of relevant first university degree and extensive experience may be accepted in lieu of the advanced university degree.

Work Experience: A minimum of 5 years of progressively responsible experience in any area of human resources management including recruitment in an international organization. Supervisory experience in the field of HR is essential.

Languages: English and French are working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. Fluency in oral and written English is required.

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JESSICA WALKER BEAUMONT

Anti-WTO protest, Hong Kong,
December 2005

Nursing the big boys

As international patent standards come into force in India, its widely hailed pharmaceutical industry is facing turbulence that will likely dramatically raise the price of medicine, at least for the short term

BY ABHAYRAJ NAIK

India's global commitments towards intellectual property rights are dictated largely by the contentious Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) - an agreement between 125 countries, reached in 1994. On account of its status as a developing country, India was entitled to a transitional period until 1 January 2005 to bring its intellectual property regime into compliance with the minimum requirements imposed by TRIPS. Following the promulgation of the Patents (Amendment) Ordinance in late December 2004, India concluded the process of amending its domestic laws so as to meet its TRIPS obligations. The country's pharmaceutical industry has been among the first to acutely feel the ramifications of this new paradigm.

Before the TRIPS agreement came into effect, patents in the pharmaceutical sector represented perhaps the starkest contrast between the policy approaches of the global South and North. Developing countries have long preferred 'process patent' approaches, where only the process of manufacture of the pharmaceutical drug - and not the product itself - can be the subject of a patent. This approach allowed pharmaceutical firms in the developing world to specialise in the manufacture of cheap, generic versions of patented drugs (by reverse-engineering products developed in the North) for supply to their domestic markets, as well as for export to other countries with similar regimes. As a result, drug prices were kept relatively affordable for the largely impoverished populations of the developing world.

Developed countries, on the other hand, typically followed the 'product patent' approach, which entitled patent-holding companies to a legal monopoly over the drugs they created. This then enabled them to price their products well above 'marginal cost', the cost required to continue producing the product. As such, drug companies can more easily recover the large, fixed, research and development costs incurred in developing new drugs.

The superior negotiating strength and economic resources of the North, however, resulted in the minimum obligatory standards under TRIPS more closely approximating those existing in developed countries. Furthermore, patent protection is stipulated to last for at least 20 years from the date of filing the application. For Indian drug makers, TRIPS implied a shift from a patent approach that had previously granted only 'process patents' that lasted for seven years, to one that now provides 'product patents' for 20 years.

Since people in developing countries spend a much larger percentage of their health expenditures on pharmaceutical drugs, the question of affordability of the patented drugs is of vital importance. That aside, the implications of an HIV/AIDS pandemic have focused attention on issues of access and affordability of lifesaving drugs. Not surprisingly, the possible implications of the TRIPS regime have heightened fears that pharmaceutical prices will skyrocket across the developing world, making necessary drugs unaffordable to a large percentage of the population.

Doha flexibilities

One positive element of TRIPS has been to acknowledge that the agreement can be interpreted so as to strike a balance between the short-term interest of maximising access to patented products, and the long-term interest of promoting creativity and innovation. The measures that less-developed countries like India might adopt in the new TRIPS environment to enhance low-cost access to the newest drugs – retaining benefits they enjoyed pre-TRIPS – include several policy options. The most notable of these are compulsory licensing, utilising parallel trade, tiered or differential pricing, enforcing price-control regulations, encouraging the donation of vital medicines, promoting artificial competition to reduce prices, and cooperating in international drug procurement efforts. All of these might be adopted without running afoul of the obligations imposed by TRIPS.

Compulsory licensing refers to a situation in which a government allows an agent to produce a patented product without the consent of the original patent-holder. *Parallel importing* is a scenario wherein the government allows the importation of a patented product that is marketed elsewhere, but at lower prices than in the original market. *Tiered or differential pricing* implies that drug prices be set close to marginal cost in the least-developed countries, with a progressive increase of prices as one moves from low- to high-income countries. *Drug price control regulations* can be used by governments to legally limit drug prices within a particular range, independent of the larger issue of product or process patents. In addition, donation drives of vital medicines for countries that require them, promotion of competition between pharmaceutical manufacturers, along with participation in international drug procurement efforts, are other non-direct mechanisms by which affordable access to medicines can be promoted.

In response to fears that TRIPS may make some drugs difficult to obtain for patients in poor countries, developing countries succeeded in getting WTO trade ministers at the Doha Ministerial Conference in November 2001 to adopt a landmark declaration. The Doha Declaration subsequently affirmed that public health takes precedence over private patent rights, and reaffirmed the rights of governments to use WTO public health safeguards and other available measures to gain access to cheap drugs.

The declaration also contained a number of important clarifications regarding the flexibilities contained in TRIPS. On the issue of importing under compulsory license, the Doha Declaration assigned the TRIPS Council the task of sorting out how to ensure extra flexibility, to ease the process of obtaining copies of patented drugs produced elsewhere. This issue in particular had been contentious, given that another TRIPS article had stipulated that products made under compulsory licensing must be "predominantly for the supply of the domestic market". Although WTO member governments had been in deadlock over the issue, this was broken in August 2003 with agreement on an 'interim waiver'. Last December, the members agreed to transform this waiver into a permanent TRIPS amendment.

The South's medicine cabinet

This decision will significantly impact India's pharmaceutical industry, with its well-established capabilities for the production of generic drugs. Several analysts have subsequently pointed out that

The possible implications of the TRIPS regime have heightened fears that pharmaceutical prices will skyrocket across the developing world, making necessary drugs unaffordable to a large percentage of the population.

the Indian pharmaceutical industry is a prime example of a growing, successful, high-technology industry that is being forced to re-conceptualise its long-term strategies in light of India's decision to open its markets to global trade.

In the past, copied drugs were typically introduced in India soon after they appeared in their original markets. This implies that pharmaceutical multinationals did not enjoy a substantial advantage for having been the first to introduce the drugs; nor did they have a monopoly to establish high prices in selling a newly developed drug in the Indian market. Despite this availability of cheap generics, India – with a large part of its population living below the poverty line, high out-of-pocket expenses towards health care, and highly unsatisfactory overall health indices – still suffers from a significant health crisis. In the short-term, this situation will only be further exacerbated once the full ramifications of the TRIPS regime take effect.

Pharmaceutical patenting in India is also of special relevance to public health across the developing world. Indian drug firms, after all, have been important suppliers of both low-priced pharmaceutical ingredients and finished products to developing countries everywhere. While it is clear that India has a lot of work ahead of it in simply improving the quality of its health delivery systems, Southasian policymakers, particularly in New Delhi, should use the flexibilities available within the TRIPS system to keep medicines as affordable as legally possible, both domestically and when exported. In this, India will undoubtedly have to exercise great care, so as to avoid being dragged into the formidable WTO dispute-settlement process, or into the sights of unilateral economic sanctions by developed countries.

In terms of the Indian pharmaceutical industry, the future could well be bright. Any characterisation of the country's drug companies solely as 'copiers lacking innovativeness' is increasingly inaccurate. Analysts have subsequently predicted that Indian pharmaceutical firms could well become major participants in the global marketplace, including the regulated markets of the US and EU. In the long term, TRIPS and the product-patent regime it has established will undoubtedly stimulate more research, more development and more competition, thereby eventually reducing drug prices. The trade-off is that, for the moment and possibly in the near future, the prices of newly patented drugs in India and the developing world will indeed rise perceptibly. Reduced short-term public access to

affordable healthcare across the developing world subsequently remains a stark reality from which we cannot escape.

The damage done

It is well documented that low-income countries enjoy higher relative economic welfare when they can 'free-ride' on pharmaceutical innovations made and patented in the first world. Global welfare would also benefit from such free-riding, as opposed to the impact of uniform patent laws. Although one of TRIPS's articles urges developed countries to encourage technology transfer to lesser-developed countries, this has not been happening. Instead, most of the developing world remains dependent on products designed to meet the healthcare needs of a few developed countries.

Concerns also remain that diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and dengue – prevalent primarily in the southern hemisphere – will not receive the due research and development attention they need, simply because the people affected by these diseases are not 'profitable'. Despite these obvious shortcomings of the TRIPS regime, moves are already underway from several developed countries to set more stringent intellectual property standards, and to further standardise global patent laws.

TRIPS represents the most significant step in a move towards uniform global patenting laws. These are aimed primarily at maximising profits of pharmaceutical manufacturers, and are undeniably skewed in favour of the interests of the developed world. The damage already done to public health can only be ameliorated through constant vigilance and focused international negotiation on the part of developing countries.

And several positive possibilities do exist. Available flexibilities must be strengthened, public-health exceptions must be further protected, mandatory reviews of the TRIPS regime must be emphasised, and the commitment to technology transfer must be more effectively implemented. Such emphases should remain of utmost priority when the WTO next focuses on TRIPS-related issues. The breakdown of multilateral WTO trade talks in Geneva in June, primarily on account of US intransigence to slash trade barriers, represents a grim portent of the difficult road ahead in amending existing global regimes under the WTO. Towards this end, it remains vital that the developing world presents a unified front, and argues a convincing case for improved access to public health.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is a prime example of a growing, successful, high-technology industry that is being forced to re-conceptualise its long-term strategies in light of India's decision to open its markets to global trade.

Budget air travel, present and future

With the advent of budget airlines, air travel in India has transformed beyond recognition. The extension of low-cost air routes across Southasian frontiers has become a tantalising possibility.

BY **ARIJIT MAZUMDAR**

After making its mark in the United States and Europe, the low-cost airline carrier arrived in India in 2003 with the first flight of budget airline Air Deccan. In the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, the SARS epidemic and a general worldwide economic slowdown, traditional airlines saw a drop in their profit margins and passenger volume, a downturn that also hit India's carriers. Entering the market during this period, the budget airlines have boosted their operations, turning the industry's crisis to their advantage.

Besides Air Deccan, the demand for competitive fares has been filled by SpiceJet Airlines, GoAir and Air India Express, particularly on short-haul routes. The explosion in the number of carriers is spurred by the 25 percent per year increase in domestic air travel, fuelled in turn by the country's economic growth. The number of airline

passengers in India rose from 12.8 million to 19.4 million annually in just three years, through 2004. The market share of budget airlines, meanwhile, has increased by 30 percent since 2003, and the Australia-based Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation projects the figure to be 70 percent by 2010. Air Deccan has already cornered about 21 percent of the domestic air-travel market, bringing it almost at par with the state-owned carrier Indian (previously Indian Airlines), which until the early 1990s had a monopoly over the Indian skies.

The concept of the low-cost carrier (LCC) originated in the United States, where the first successful carrier, Pacific Southwest Airlines, took to the air back in 1949. In order to keep prices low, typical LCC practices include the use of a single type of airplane, thereby reducing training and servicing costs; a single economy passenger class; simplified routes, including flying

to secondary airports; low-frills service, including the elimination of complimentary in-flight offerings; direct sales of tickets, especially over the Internet; and small increases in fares as seats fill up, thereby rewarding early reservations.

Budget airlines are finding the Indian market attractive because ticket prices have traditionally been prohibitive for most travelers. In addition, Indian LCCs have been able to reduce travel time by providing better connectivity - in the form of more flights, more destinations and shorter turnaround times. Passengers flying these airlines generally comprise either public- or private-sector professionals, whose employers prefer that they travel by air for the time saved over a train ride. As airfares remain competitive and more destinations are offered, this trend will undoubtedly continue.

Forsaking road and rail

The domination of state-owned Indian Railways (IR), which moves just under five billion passengers and almost 650 tonnes of freight annually, is now facing stiff competition for its high-end travelers from low-cost airlines. New airlines like SpiceJet are offering fares that can compete with those of both Indian Railways and traditional airlines like Indian (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Lowest fares offered, LCC v rail (July 2006)

Route	SpiceJet Airlines	Indian Railways		Indian
		AC-1	AC-2	
Delhi-Bombay	INR 1699 (Travel time: 2 hr)	INR 3500 (Travel time: 16 hr)	INR 2040	INR 3205 (Travel time: 2 hr)
Delhi-Calcutta	INR 1399 (Travel time: 2 hr)	INR 3565 (Travel time: 17 hr)	INR 2075	INR 3105 (Travel time: 2 hr)
Delhi-Madras	INR 1399 (Travel time: 2.5 hr)	INR 4755 (Travel time: 2.5 hr)	INR 2785	INR 3705 (Travel time: 28 hr)

Sources: SpiceJet Airlines, Indian Railways and Indian

The railways have experienced a significant drop in passengers in luxury classes. This has created a challenge, because IR has traditionally used earnings from its luxury classes to subsidise the fares on second-class coaches, on which 98 percent of its passengers travel. In response to this competition, IR has for the first time in many years cut fares on its luxury classes. Starting this past April, First Class AC prices were cut by 18 percent, and those for AC-2 Tier were cut by 10 percent. At this time, there is no discussion of an increase in second-class fares, however.

Despite the decrease in luxury-class charges, issues such as overcrowding remain disadvantageous to high-end rail travel. During holiday seasons, for instance, reservations need to be made two months in advance, and reserved coaches are often swamped with passengers without reserved tickets. The growth of the LCC industry has subsequently forced Indian Railways to address issues of overcrowding, as well as of passenger safety and high accident rates, in order to remain competitive.

India's network of national highways, which connect all of its major cities and state capitals, make up about 65,000 km of road, 5000 km of which are classified as expressways. Much of the Indian population travels by bus for distances of up to 500 km, beyond which, for overnight journeys, they take the train. Even long-haul luxury-bus passengers, however, are being drawn away by the competitive pricing of new low-cost airlines. *Table 2* compares the lowest fares and travel time offered by both Indian LCCs and luxury-bus companies.

There are several additional drawbacks associated with road travel in India. First, there are no direct bus links between the major metropolises of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Even if

there were, due to sheer distance, road conditions and heavy traffic, the average travel time between any two metros would be two to three days. Heavy highway traffic also increases travel time between cities. Because of the time, expense and comfort involved, few Indians prefer to travel by bus for distances over 500 km. Even on some of these short routes, however, luxury buses are facing competition from low-cost carriers.

The success of the LCC, to the detriment of luxury rail and bus companies - has put a huge strain on India's civil aviation infrastructure and facilities. Pilots, aviation engineers, flight dispatchers, cabin staff and the like are suddenly in great demand. Major airports are congested and understaffed. In January, the New Delhi government approved a crash modernisation program for airports around the country.

Regional connectivity

As yet, the LCCs have not been able to take advantage of crossborder travel in Southasia, which beckons as a lucrative market given the difficulties in surface transport between the various countries. Due to the absence or inadequacy of rail links, budget travelers tend to choose buses over airplanes when traveling from within India to elsewhere in the region where there are bus routes. Going from Delhi to Lahore, for instance, currently costs INR 1250 by bus and INR 7500 by air.

At present, government regulations prohibit privately-owned Indian LCCs from flying to other Southasian locations. According to these regulations, issued in January 2005, an Indian airliner must have five years of continuous operation and a fleet of at least 20 aircraft before it is allowed to fly internationally. Even those who fulfil those conditions are not allowed to fly on the lucrative routes to the Gulf region, which is reserved for state carriers Air India and Indian. Among private Indian airlines, as yet only Jet Airways and Air Sahara, both of which began operating in 1993, are permitted to fly abroad. But with many types of aircraft, multiple classes for passengers, complimentary in-flight services, agent-assisted ticketing and slower turn-around time, Jet and Sahara are not what you would call low-cost carriers. The only budget airline in India that currently flies internationally is Air India Express, a low-cost subsidiary of Air India, which flies to the Gulf and Southeast Asia but not to any Southasian country.

After five years of domestic operations, Air Deccan, SpiceJet and GoAir (which began operating in 2003, 2005 and 2005 respectively) will be eligible to fly overseas. Some airlines, including Kingfisher, which also began operating in 2005, are pushing New Delhi for an amendment to its policy that could allow them to fly overseas well before 2008. Although the government looks set to keep the rules in place for

TABLE 2 Lowest fares offered, LCC v luxury bus (July 2006)

Route	SpiceJet Airlines	Bus Travel (Luxury class)
Delhi-Jammu	INR 699 (Travel time: 1.25 hr)	INR 700 (Travel time: 13-15 hr)
Delhi-Srinagar	INR 899 (Travel time: 1.25 hr)	INR 775 (Travel time: 26 hr)
Bombay-Bangalore	INR 1199 (Travel time: 1.5 hr)	INR 975 (Travel time: 25-27 hr)

Sources: SpiceJet Airlines, Delhi Transport Corporation, Jammu & Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation and Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation

now, it remains open to discussion and is regularly lobbied on the subject.

Jet Airways and Air Sahara already fly to Kathmandu and Colombo. There is little reason to doubt that, once they have passed the five-year threshold, Indian LCCs will also look to extend their operations to the rest of Southasia. With normalcy returning to Nepal, the number of tourists visiting the country is expected to increase, and Indian carriers will be looking to profit from this trend. Budget airlines may also seek to connect Indian airports and smaller Southasian cities such as Pokhara, Biratnagar and Chittagong, and why not Multan, Peshawar and Quetta. Air Deccan links previously unconnected towns and cities all over India, but these connections are waiting to be extended to a regional scale. In the case of LCC flights out of airports in Nepal's tarai, like those in Bhairahawa and Biratnagar, they

provide an opportunity for the population of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to fly out to other parts of their own country.

Though the smaller airports have the potential to generate significant passenger traffic, carriers such as Indian, Jet and Sahara currently fly only to the region's larger cities. With the number of people who fly - and, thus, the number of intended destinations - increasing every year, however, it is possible that these 'secondary' routes will be economically viable from the very start. Moreover, the fact that low-cost carriers have been turning over substantial profits (SpiceJet reported an operating profit of INR 715 million for its first year of operation) means that expanding their operations would not overburden their resources.

Despite the suitability of budget airlines to the economies of the Subcontinent, such airlines are only in operation in a few

countries. In Pakistan, these carriers include Aero Asia International and Airblue, which fly domestically and to the Gulf. Nepal has Cosmic Air, which is offering cut-rate fares domestically and on its flights to Delhi and Dhaka, but it is hampered by its small number of aircraft. It is clear that even more than in India, growth of the LCC sector in Nepal may be hurt by issues such as reduced passenger volume, government regulations, lack of capital and poor infrastructure.

Nonetheless, low-cost airlines in Southasia offer great possibility for increasing connectivity between Southasia's towns and cities. Although the democratisation of air travel that these carriers promise does have rigid economic limits, with disposable incomes rising across the Subcontinent LCCs are sure to play an important role in a future of increased mobility, crossborder interaction and people-to-people contact.

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The heartland values of Bhojpuri cinema

As Bollywood's Hindi productions spin away to cater to the upper classes and NRIs, Bhojpuri films take the audiences back to an era of family values – where the underdog becomes victorious, and where the 'masses' rediscover respect.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **LATIKA NEELAKANTAN**

It is an early monsoon day at Sheetal, a single-screen theatre in Kurla, in central Bombay. An animated audience, part of Bombay's growing population of migrant workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, overflows the theatre's seats at a weekend screening of the Bhojpuri film *Ravi Kissen*. Dancing to catchy songs, clapping at snappy dialogue, whistling and joking, the crowd shows its appreciation for the nice and naughty versions of star Ravi Kishan in the first ever double-role in a Bhojpuri film.

In Bombay's territorial local politics, the *bhaiyya*, unschooled in the ways of modernity, is seen as either a rustic bumpkin or a hired thug, unwelcome but unavoidable. In theatre after run-down theatre showing Bhojpuri films in cities with sizeable migrant populations, one can witness the delirious reclamation of space by people who do not feel entirely at home outside of the theatre's walls. A guard at such an establishment smiles in amusement, saying, "This is nothing. Most of the *bhaiyyas* have gone home to

harvest the crops now. You should have seen what it was like last month."

Going by such scenes - and the profusion of Bhojpuri films playing not just in Bihar and UP, but also in Delhi, Bombay, Punjab, Rajasthan, Hyderabad and even across the border in Nepal - it is easy to understand the current buzz about Bhojpuri cinema. The phenomenon is not easy to quantify, given years of elitist neglect by the trade journals and film magazines, but unofficial estimates put the number of Bhojpuri films currently under production at about 250, up from absolutely nothing during the preceding decade. Film trade analysts are declaring it a symptom of Hindi cinema's historic turn away from the 'masses', while Hindi- and English-language newsmagazines note with surprise the sudden flowering of this new North Indian cinema.

In fact, Bhojpuri cinema is not new - it has been around since 1962, when Kundan Kumar directed the blockbuster *Ganga Maiyya Tohe Piyari Chadhaibo*. Hits like *Maacen*, *Ganga Ki Beti*, *Hamaar Bhowji* and *Bhaiyya Dooj* appeared in the 1980s, but then this was followed by a shutdown of the industry in the 1990s, when new productions ceased altogether. In 2001, *Saiyyan Hamaar* made a star out of drama-school graduate Ravi Kishan, and jumpstarted the industry once again. In 2005, *Sasura Bada Paisa Wala* earned about fifty times its production budget of INR 4.5 million, working a similar alchemy on popular folksinger Manoj Tiwari, who now vies with Ravi Kishan as the most in-demand Bhojpuri film star.

A string of hits have followed, including *Daroga Babu I Love You*, *Panditji Batai Na Biyah Kab Hoi*, *Dharti Kahe Pukar Ke* and *Bandhan Toote Na*. At one point, Bombay film trade analyst Taran Adarsh was prompted to observe that it seemed simple to make back ten times one's original investment on a Bhojpuri film. Many subsequently jumped into the fray of Bhojpuri film production - from Amitabh Bachchan's makeup man Deepak Sawant (who managed to get Bachchan to star for free in the forthcoming *Ganga*), to established Hindi film producers like Subhash Ghai.

Bombay v Bihar

Sunil Bobbna, a distributor in Bihar until he became a producer last year with *Suhaagan Bana Da Sajna Hamaar*, points out that the hype surrounding Bhojpuri cinema obscures the fact that 90 percent of Bhojpuri films fail to earn back their money. But the failures, say Bobbna and others, are typically the work of people from the Hindi film industry who are out to make a quick buck - churning out ersatz, movie-derived depictions of village life. According to veteran director Mohanji Prasad (*Saiyyan Hamaar*), the Bhojpuri

industry died following the 1980s boom because it was swamped by bad films made by outsiders unfamiliar with the culture of the Bhojpuri region - which generally takes in western Bihar, Purvanchal, northern Jharkhand and the central part of the Nepali tarai. Despite the current boom, there is a palpable fear that history is about to repeat itself, and that the bust is not far off.

Authentic, inside knowledge of Bhojpuri culture is an element whose value is emphasised by key players from Bihar and UP. In the cutthroat and increasingly corporate high-budget environment of the Bombay film industry, cultural knowledge may be the only shot at survival for producers and directors who missed the corporate boat. Director Dhananjay, from Bihar, who in his days as a journalist had begun writing a book on Bhojpuri cinema, says that Bhojpuri films "provide a space for those left behind in the Indian elite's embrace of modernity and Westernisation."

This segment of the populace includes not just the Bhojpuri peasantry, but also merchant capitalists used to an older style of doing business. The archetypal Bombay film financier was once the paan-chewing man in a silk kurta, who brought in cloth-wrapped bundles of money from the *kattha* (a medicinal herb) and lumber trade, hoping to obtain a dash of glamour by financing a film. Today's Bollywood Hindi films are far more likely to be funded by conglomerate and corporate finance, even public offerings, with written contracts and sophisticated marketing calculations. Says Benaras director Amit Singh: "Independent financiers have been pushed out of Hindi cinema. They cannot match the high budgets that have resulted from corporate financing and overseas joint ventures. So they turn to Bhojpuri film, where a film can be made for INR 45 lakh."

Yet the talk at Bhojpuri cultural events and among film artistes is not focused on economics and industry structure, but on culture and values. Surrounding the phenomenon of Bhojpuri film, after all, is the matter of Bhojpuri cultural revival. Interested players are on a mission to fashion a worthy identity around this culture, as a favourable contrast to what they see as the decaying values of elite metropolitan Indians. Benaras producer Mahendra Nath Pandey, who wrote his PhD dissertation on the culture and society of the region, emphasises that the real story behind the Bhojpuri film boom is not about money, industry structure or financiers' class profiles. Rather, he says, it is about values. "Bhojpuri films are about the web of social relations, the extended family, friendship, neighbourliness, respect for women, and hospitality - all that the urban, Westernised Indian seems to have lost."

"Bhojpuri films," said Sanjay, "are in the end about the difference between poor people and rich people."

There is something of a consensus between trade analysts, audiences and producers that Hindi films have indeed lost touch with large sections of the North Indian population. "There is a cultural gap which makes these high-society, Hollywood-imitation Hindi films incomprehensible to those in rural districts and small towns," says Vinod Mirani, editor of the trade journal *Box Office*. Audiences and filmmakers alike cite the prevalence of Western-style gender relations, scantily-clad women, urban settings, English dialogue and an absence of the extended family as alienating factors in Hindi film. The point is brought home in the views of 'Chotte', a security guard who hails from Faizabad in UP: "These films cannot be watched with family and elders. I don't understand the language. They don't even look like they are about Hindustan."

Director Dhananjay notes the sense of relief and affirmation that rural and small-town audiences feel when they once again see images that have otherwise largely vanished from Hindi films and advertisements - village scenes, livestock, stacks of hay, the village pond, the riverside *ghat*, rippling fields of grain. "They see these images and say yes, this is our world, our society," he says.

This folk allure is significant, Amit Singh concurs: "Bhojpuri films address a world of fairs and festivals, the *nautanki* [drama], acrobats' performances, traveling musicians, courtesans and drama troupes." Although most Bhojpuri films do contain a bawdy song or two, double-entendre and some saucy rustic clothing, some industry leaders are now keen to make this a 'respectable' genre, one that can draw in a middle-class audience. Director Mohanji Prasad explains: "Rich and middle-class people in Bihar and UP look down on Bhojpuri, and think the films are low-class. This is why these films will never enter the multiplex market."

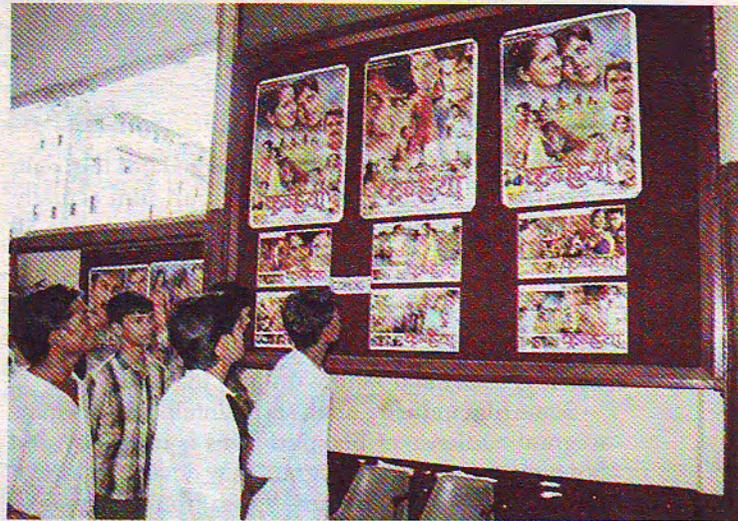
Folksinger Manoj Tiwari's 'high-culture' view of the heartland may help to change this. "I have always believed Bhojpuri culture to be comparable in variety, richness and genius to any of the great cultures of the world," he says. "Everything worthy in Hindustani classical music derives from Bhojpuri melodies that every village child knows." Bhojpuri screenwriter and lyricist Vinay Bihari grew up in a village without electricity in Bihar's Champaran District, in a Rajput household that did attend song and dance performances but ostracised him for performing them. He sees some vindication in ensuring that the dazzling variety of Bhojpuri song, dance and drama is accorded respect via the film-driven promotion of this culture.

Home and the street

Urban theatre managers and distributors are not thinking about classical music when they discuss the Bhojpuri film boom. The granting of industry status to just the Hindi film world in 1998 set in motion a gradual up-scaling. With multiplexes being provided 10-year

tax holidays, they began to spring up everywhere, with ticket prices shooting up to average INR 100. With the prospect of massive revenues from multiplexes, Hindi films bypassed single-screen theatres, with their taxed ticket prices of INR 20-30. It was the arrival of Bhojpuri films that saved many such theatres, pulling in people who had abandoned film-going due to the price and the intimidatingly glitzy atmosphere of the multiplexes.

In early June, while prowling around rundown theatres in Bombay, this writer was suddenly surprised at a viewing of *Hamaar Gharwaali* by a dramatic visit to the theatre by the film's female lead, Rinku Ghosh, accompanied by the director and supporting actors. The audience cheered wildly, to



which the management responded by banging on the floor with stout lathis. The overwhelmingly male, working-class audience suddenly turned remarkably shy up close to the stars, doing little more than asking for autographs. The lead actress urged them to bring their *gharwaalis*, or wives, to the next screening - to which the largely migrant audience giggled coyly, with some wisecracking, "Can't bring what we don't have!"

Later, the artistes, director and distributor dissected the event for clues about the fate of *Hamaar Garwaali*, and about the Bhojpuri film industry in general. The discussion encapsulated the contradictions within this industry, the growth of which is driven in large part by male labourers who migrate to the large metropolises from the agrarian belts of Purvanchal (Eastern UP) and Bihar. In *Hamaar Gharwaali*, for instance, the female lead rejects her suitor because he has not passed high school. After being molested by alcoholics with college degrees, however, she sees his innate goodness and changes her mind. The hero uses violence only reluctantly (partly due to the expense of filming fights); instead, quick wit and gentle decency are his main selling points.

However, the distributor of the film said that what sells in Bombay is fighting, chest-thumping and action.



Javed and Zia

The director, on the other hand, pointed out that only a quarter of the revenue of a Bhojpuri film actually comes from Bombay, while Bihar accounts for 40 percent. Industry representatives and audiences often speak of the extra-large extended families, including children and grandmothers, who go to watch Bhojpuri films in Bihar – and in both this state and in UP, it is social and family dramas that sell.

Some film industry analysts maintain that the male migrant audience of Bhojpuri films is necessary, but not typical. Indeed, the migrant may develop ‘suspect’ tastes in harsh city environs, away from the morally salubrious influence of women and elders. And Manoj Tiwari says he is often asked to do bawdy songs, but refuses because “60 percent of my people are in the home, and I will not cater to the 40 percent on the streets.” Film distributors refer to the overall Bhojpuri audience as “the masses”, but define the migrant audience as “third-class” and “C-grade” – both morally inflected descriptors of economic status. The anxious crowd-control efforts of the Bombay theatre managers betray a view of rural migrants as an unknown and disordering threat.

The stars themselves take a more positive view of their audiences’ bodily exuberance. Ravi Kishan recalls the ecstatic reception he received while shooting in the Nepali town of Birganj, as well as in rural locations in Bihar. “Village people don’t have the unfortunate shame that urban viewers do,” he says. “They touch me, hug me, fall at my feet, bless me. I’m the rebel hero – I do both romance and rifles. To them, I am a son of the soil.”

The physical behaviour of audiences within the theatre space also communicates vital facts to the Bhojpuri film industry. One distributor explains: “Where do they clap? Which songs do they dance to? What comments are they making? How many sit in the balcony, and how many in the stalls? We

look at all this, and then get an idea of what kind of film will run.”

Cheering is certainly a valuable barometer of audience sentiment, as this writer witnessed during Aslam Sheikh’s *Pyaar Ke Bandhan*, which starred Manoj Tiwari. Like Mohanji Prasad, Sheikh is one of the few Bhojpuri film directors who made films during the 1980s, and appears to have a reform-minded sensibility akin to that of the old socialist filmmakers of Hindi films. In a key scene in *Pyaar Ke Bandhan*, the heroine – the spoiled daughter of a landowner – insults the cobbler (played by Tiwari) in English, while throwing money at him. The cobbler then stands up and lectures her in Bhojpuri-accented English about the value of education in improving one’s character – not in degrading it, as has happened in her case. The audience erupted deafeningly at this scene, with applause and whistles lasting several minutes. It later turned out that this same sequence was to be found in many of Tiwari’s films, beginning with his first, the 2005 blockbuster *Sasura Bada Paisawala*. Explains Aslam Sheikh: “The point is to show an image of what can happen when the cobbler learns English. Many Scheduled Castes are now educated.”

The allegorising of social conflict as romantic and familial drama is inherent to melodrama, and a common feature of popular culture in societies with feudal remnants. Yet something more is at work in the many Bhojpuri stories where class and status alike become curiously gendered, with an educated and empowered – but somehow lost – heroine being won over by a less privileged, more vernacular and often less educated hero. With large numbers of single men migrating to far-off cities, women in the agrarian belts of Bihar and UP often venture into previously male spheres, whether in terms of agricultural wage labour or negotiating with local officials. Men too encounter a world of unaccustomed gender relations in the metropolitan hubs. Indian metros teem with women in Western clothes, who speak sharply to rickshaw drivers in English – the very women that Manoj Tiwari is so well-loved for lecturing in his films.

Javed and Zia, young *zari* workers from Jehanabad in Bihar, say they like Manoj Tiwari “because he has a village voice, and because he criticises scantily clad women.” The anxiety around the new gender relations coming into play is reflected in Bhojpuri film posters and images. While these often show spirited female characters posing like avenging deities, they sometimes hold domestic implements in place of weapons – a broom, for instance, or a rolling pin.

Whose culture?

Many of those participating in the Bhojpuri film boom believe that the rural culture of Bihar and UP has

values worthy of emulation, values lost to the loud minority that constitutes metropolitan India being catered to by the new crop of Hindi films. Nevertheless, this culture is also recognised as feudal. This entails a certain balancing act on the part of the filmmakers, keeping in mind that the 'masses' who currently view these films are at the lower end of the socio-economic hierarchy. Bihari producer Sunil Bobbna sums it up by noting simply, "The poor man likes to hit at the rich man, in any way".

In fact, economic status is part of the story, but not all of it. Studies of migration patterns out of Bihar note that upper-caste migrants can be found in large numbers in urban locations, willing to do the kind of work in cities that they would consider humiliating back home. Thakur village, a migrant locality in Kandivali, Bombay, has slums inhabited largely by Thakurs, with the most recent migrants claiming that they prefer to follow caste-segregated living in the slum. While they may be united in class and culture with other Bhojpuri-speaking migrants, within that world they try to preserve the hierarchy from back home.

The sensibilities of filmmakers vary as much as those of the 'masses'. There is a certain type of Bhojpuri film, such as Sanjay Sinha's *Maiyya Rakhia Senurva Abaad*, that centres on the vicissitudes of land division and internal disintegration in landowning families - a story that resonates with many Thakur youth. The film ejects out of history, reverting to the timeless structure of myth

- the Ramayana, in this case: there is a scheming sister-in-law, a loyal servant, a pure wife, exile and devotion to the mother goddess. While dissolute landlords - who drink, wield guns and watch dancing girls - are portrayed with censure, the religious and united landowning family is seen as a bulwark against chaos.

Aslam Sheikh's films, on the other hand, tend to adopt a perspective located outside the feudal structures of the landowning and patriarchal joint family. He says he has been accused of harbouring a grudge against Thakurs. Some distributors derisively note the "improbability" of a cobbler sending his son to a good private school, as in Sheikh's *Pyaar Ke Bandhan*. But others have come specifically to look for this element. Sanjay, a student from Faizabad, had come to a theatre to watch *Pyaar Ke Bandhan* along with his extended family, including delivery men, carpenters, tile salesmen and flour-mill operators. The youngest member of the family, someone pointed out, attended an English-medium school.

"Bhojpuri films," said Sanjay, "are in the end about the difference between poor people and rich people." Kamlesh Gupta, a carpenter, touched his heart and elaborated on this sentiment: "Poor people understand respect. They understand respect because they always have to bow down." The ambiguity inherent in that statement, with its ironic recognition of the way necessity becomes virtue, signals that a part of this film-going public is thinking, even as it dances.



International Relief & Development

Finance Manager - Afghanistan

Closing Date: October 30, 2006

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We seek a finance manager for our program located in Kabul, Afghanistan. The incumbent will be responsible for the management of the finance operations for the Human Resource and Logistical Support Program funded by USAID. The Finance Manager will ensure that adequate and appropriate internal controls are in place to meet generally recognized accounting standards. In addition, he/she will manage all accounting, bank accounts and cash flow to ensure sufficient funds are available for effective and efficient implementation. She/he will track all project expenses and will prepare monthly financial reports for HQ. She/he will also prepare monthly and yearly budget projections and will maintain data on expenditures by line item, as well as produce and analyze budget variance reports.

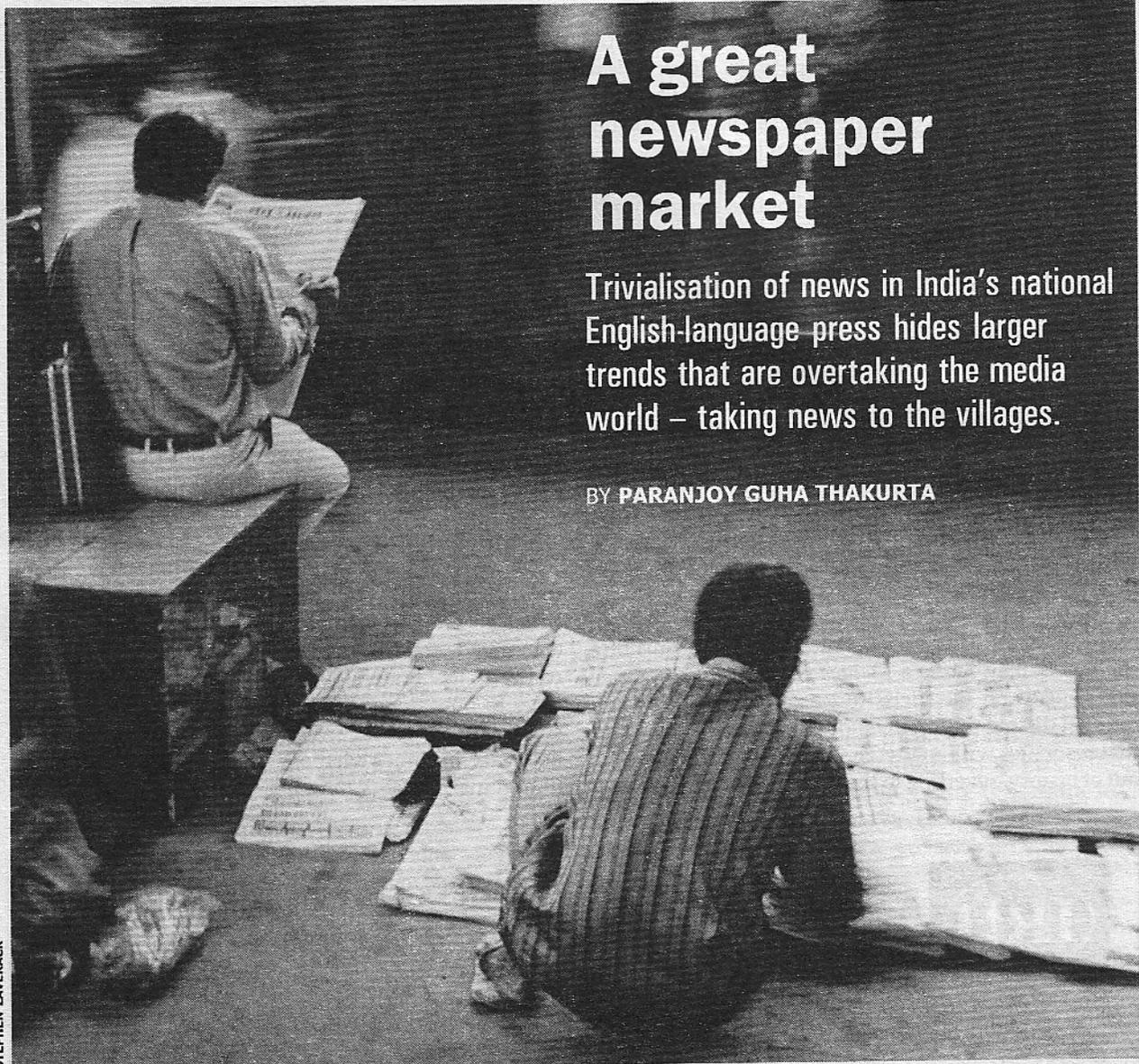
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3. Prior experience as director of finance for an INGO or an international company
4. Proven ability to provide timely and accurate financial reports
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To apply: Please submit your cover letter, resume with salary history/requirement, and three references, including e-mail and other contact information to careers@ird-dc.org by **October 30, 2006**. Please reference: Finance Manager Afghan in the subject line. Applicants will be asked to complete a USAID 1420 bio data form. Only selected resumes will be contacted. No telephone inquires please.



STEPHEN LAVERACK

A great newspaper market

Trivialisation of news in India's national English-language press hides larger trends that are overtaking the media world – taking news to the villages.

BY PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA

In the second most-populous nation state on the planet, the world of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and the like – in short, the print media – epitomises the size and diversity of the country's billion-plus population. India's press reflects not just the plurality and heterogeneity of the country, but also the deep divisions that exist in its highly hierarchical society. On the one hand, without its many active presses India could hardly be described as a democracy at all. On the other hand, the country's print media portray some of the most crass, crude and commercial aspects of capitalist consumerism.

There are currently close to 60,000 publications of various kinds registered with the Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI), which functions under the government's Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. Currently, 1900-odd daily newspapers are published in the country – 42 percent in Hindi, 8

percent in English and the rest, a full half, in dozens of other languages and dialects. The total annual advertising revenue earned by all newspapers in India totals around USD one billion. Until the early 1990s, the RNI's main tasks were to register names of publications, and to allocate then-scarce imported paper at subsidised rates. With imports of newsprint being subsequently deregulated, the RNI's role has diminished considerably over the past decade.

The Indian press includes a mind-boggling variety of publications, ranging from neighbourhood free-sheets, to school magazines, to massively read newspapers like the *Times of India* (TOI), which claims to be the world's most widely circulated English-language daily. But while all of the TOI's editions currently sell more than 1.2 million copies every day, there are at least ten other Indian dailies – none of them in English – that individually sell more daily copies than TOI. Such newspapers

include the two largest Hindi dailies, *Dainik Jagaran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, as well as the *Malayala Manorama*, the *Thanthi*, the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (ABP) and the *Eenadu*. Not only do many of these newspapers print multiple editions from different locations, at least one, the *Manorama*, also prints outside of India, in West Asia. ABP, meanwhile, is not only the most widely circulated Bangla-language newspaper, but also has the distinction of being India's most widely read single-edition publication.

No city in the world publishes as many newspapers as does Delhi, with more than a dozen English dailies alone. Delhi's two largest English dailies, TOI and the *Hindustan Times*, account for roughly three-fourths of the total circulation of all English newspapers printed in the city. Why then do so many other newspapers exist in the capital, when quite a few evidently lose money? This may have something to do not just with individual or organisational egos, but also with the fact that many newspaper organisations are sitting on expensive land that was given to them decades ago by the government on long leases. In comparison to the revenue earned from printing publications, many of these newspapers make a significant return by simply renting out their premises.

All in the family

Despite its size and diversity, much of the Indian press is controlled by a handful of families. When five decades ago Jawaharlal Nehru talked about the "jute and steel press", he was referring to two families in particular: the Jain family, which controls Bennett, Coleman & Company Limited (BCCL), TOI's publisher and former jute millers; and the late Ramnath Goenka, who used to head the *Indian Express* group and who had made an aborted attempt in the late 1960s to control the Indian Iron & Steel Company. What Nehru was alluding to was that, at the time, publications were often a side business for newspaper proprietors, who would use their presses to lobby for their main business interests. Things have changed substantially since then.

At present, most of the families that control India's largest media conglomerates – the majority having moved beyond print to radio, television and the Internet – focus on media as their main activity. This transformation is due to the media as a whole having rapidly expanded in recent decades, often almost twice as quickly as has the country's economy. Some of the important family-dominated media organisations in India include the Madras-based *Hindu* group (controlled by the Kasturi family), the

Living Media/*India Today/Aaj Tak* group (the Poorie family), the ABP group (Sarkars), the BCCL/TOI group (Jains), *Dainik Jagran* (Guptas) and *Dainik Bhaskar* (Agarwals). A notable exception to the exclusive media focus is the family that owns the *Malayala Manorama* group – the most widely circulated newspaper chain in Kerala – which also controls MRF, a tyre manufacturer.

As these large media organisations expand, they are increasingly challenging one another's market hegemonies. After the *Hindustan Times* (HT) successfully conducted its initial public offering of shares and, together with the upstart *Daily News & Analysis* (DNA), decided to compete headlong with the TOI on its Bombay home turf, *Time* magazine in 2005 described India as the world's "last great newspaper market".

While publications have, by themselves, become big business for these family-controlled conglomerates, the growing commercialisation of the press has brought with it constraints typical of market-driven journalism. These go beyond the influence exercised by large advertisers on editorial content, although that is still a crucial issue. Advertising revenue accounts for between 75 and 90 percent of the gross revenues of large media groups, thereby ensuring that a subscriber's payment has no relation to the cost of production.

Vanita Kohli Khandekar, a journalist who writes on the media, observed in her 2003 book *The Indian Media Business*: "It is routine for advertisers to pull out entire campaigns if there is even mildly objective reportage on them. It happens not necessarily to critical stories, but ones which analyze the financial performance of the company and report market perceptions of its weaknesses."

In the 1980s, after Sameer Jain became the executive head of BCCL, the rules of the Indian media game began to change. Besides initiating cutthroat cover-price competition, marketing was used creatively to make BCCL the most profitable media group in the country – it currently earns more profit than the rest of the publishing industry in the country put together. In the process, many believe a stiff price has been paid, by sacrificing good journalistic practices and ethical norms (see *Himal August 2006*, "The Times of India's final frontier"). With careful planning, newspapers like TOI and the *Economic Times* now focus exclusively on upper-crust readers. For the TOI owners, its readers are citizens of the 'Shining India', who want to read about luxury, entertainment and, not least, themselves.

Besides initiating cutthroat cover-price competition, marketing was used creatively to make BCCL the most profitable media group in the country – it currently earns more profit than the rest of the publishing industry in the country put together.

Sell the news

This transformation is going back on a long and crucial history of the Indian press. A number of newspapers that are now into their second century of publication were integral to the country's freedom movement. For Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Nehru and many others, newspapers were the only means of spreading their messages to large numbers of people. During the 1950s and 1960s, a few publications (including *Blitz* weekly) had well-deserved reputations of taking on the establishment and exposing acts of corruption.

For the first and only time in the history of independent India, during the 19 months of Emergency in the mid-1970s, the Subcontinent saw its press severely censored by an oppressive state overseen by Indira Gandhi. Wiser with hindsight, her most ardent admirers would concede that press censorship was a major mistake, and one that contributed to her electoral defeat. Today's newspapers in India, however, deploy more subtle forms of censorship – those driven by the market, or by those in power who can bribe journalists with subsidised housing or lavish international junkets.

At the same time, media houses have become less censorious about what they are portraying as newsworthy. The media phenomenon that has perhaps caused the most outrage in recent times has been BCCL's 2003 decision to start a "paid content" service called Medianet, which, for a price, openly offers to send journalists to cover product launches or personality-related events. When competing newspapers pointed out the blatant violation of journalistic ethics implicit in such a practice, BCCL's bosses argued that such 'advertorials' were not appearing in TOI itself, but only in the city-specific colour supplements that highlight society trivia rather than hard news. There was another, more blatant justification of this practice. If public-relations firms are already 'bribing' journalists to ensure that coverage of their clients is carried, BCCL argued, what was wrong with eliminating the intermediary – in this instance, the PR agency.

Besides Medianet, BCCL has devised another 'innovative' marketing and PR strategy. In 2005, ten companies, including India-based Videocon and Kinetic Motors, allotted unknown amounts of equity shares to BCCL as part of a deal to enable these firms to receive discounts for advertising in TOI-owned media ventures. The number of companies said to have become part of the scheme has since gone up considerably, and many observers say the relatively audacious move will further serve to undermine TOI's competition.

Mohalla correspondents

Not every aspect of the Indian print media is so bleak, and several important trends are taking hold that could balance out the negative aspects of an increasingly commercialised press. Even as

newspaper sales are declining in most developed countries – reportedly by 5 percent a year in the United States – the Indian newspaper industry is growing robustly. The sector is projected to grow by 10-12 percent per year until 2009, against an overall growth rate of 7-8 percent of the Indian economy as a whole. The nearly 60,000 registered publications in India currently receive around 40 percent of the country's total advertising expenditure – although this proportion did come down from 63 percent in 1993, during which time television's share of advertising expenditure doubled to around 48 percent.

A large part of this growth in the print media is on account of rising literacy rates. In addition, those with disposable incomes are increasingly buying more than one newspaper. Niche magazines have also suddenly exploded; few could have imagined even a just few years ago that India would soon have magazines devoted to pets, parenting, golf and housekeeping.

In 2002, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government reversed a 1955 decision that had barred foreign investment, allowing for foreign ownership up to 26 percent of the equity capital in Indian companies publishing newspapers. In June 2005, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government lifted the ban on printing foreign newspapers in India, after the *International Herald Tribune* exploited a grey area in the law by printing in Hyderabad. Contrary to earlier fears, there has not been a flood of international players to India. Current government policy still does not allow non-Indians to hold key editorial positions in print organisations, and no major policy shift is expected.

One of the less discussed trends has also been the growth of regional-language publications, and the spread of newspaper readership in rural areas. Thanks to modern technology, more Indians living in villages are receiving information in their newspapers that is of special interest to them and their region. At the moment, some newspapers may have extended the logic of localisation too far, by depending on stringers or *mohalla* correspondents for news. These are often not only ill-paid, but also the most vulnerable if their investigative reports hurt the interests of local elites. Nonetheless, the expansion of editors' horizons and readers' interests can only strengthen the Indian press – and India itself – as a whole.

The Indian media in general and newspapers in particular have often been accused of being excessively insular or inward-looking. But this trend may undergo important changes with greater coverage of regional, national and international news, as readers continue to widen their mental horizons. The localisation of news coverage, meanwhile, will mean publications putting greater emphasis on development issues that concern the proverbial common person, rather than focusing on titillating trivia.

Singer and rebel Bant Singh has inspired a new empowerment movement of Dalits and landless farmers in Punjab – and the state's feudal remnants have taken notice.

The Dalit sword of Mansa

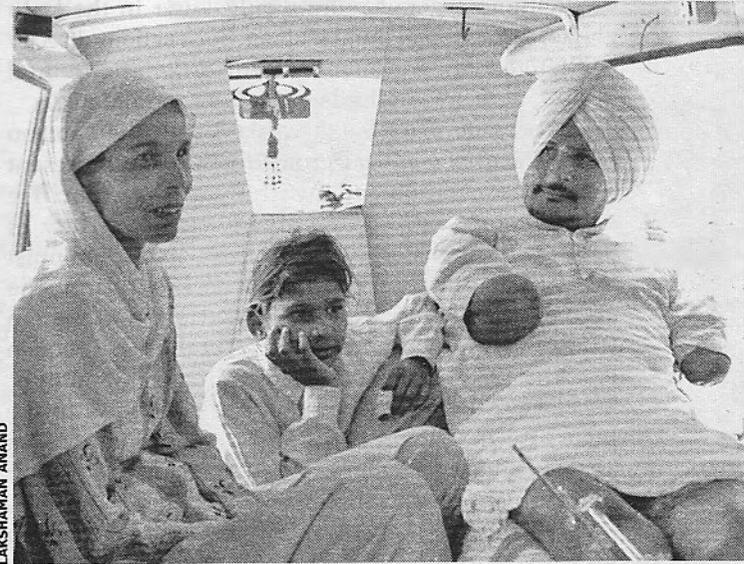
BY AMIT SENGUPTA

“I want to go and sing and campaign and rally the poorest of the poor. I want to work 30 days of the month, perhaps stay for two days in my village and then travel, meet people, hold rallies and mobilise the poor. I want to do things quickly and not wait eternally. I want my people to be liberated. I am becoming impatient. I want to walk. I want to walk. I want to run. Just help me a bit, I will show you I can run.”

Bant Singh, his two lower-arms and one leg gone, is sitting in the Mansa Civil Hospital, a torso flaming with anger and celebration. He laughs and jokes like a little boy as he cajoles his wife, Harbans Kaur, to make *nimbu paani* for his visitors. He takes calls on a cell phone given to him by friends, urging, “Carry on the fight, I’ll be there the moment the doctors let me be.” His wife and his eldest daughter, Baljeet, say they want to help Bant Singh with his political work among the region’s Dalits – making them aware of their rights, fighting for justice – because this is “the path he has chosen”. It is a path that has led to Baljeet’s rape, and the brutal loss of Bant’s arms and leg. But it is also one that has led to a new sense of empowerment for many of Punjab’s most oppressed communities.

Bant Singh is a Majhabi Sikh Dalit, a rebel and a singer who had long rendered ballads of dissent, breaking historical taboos. In his village of Burj Jhabber in Mansa District of Punjab state, he has been something of an invisible legend – while people may have been afraid to follow him, many were nonetheless drawn to Bant, perhaps believing that his path could lead to Dalit liberation.

Mansa is situated in the once-prosperous Malwa region. Stories stalk the landscape here of thousands of debt-ridden farmers who have committed suicide, consuming the same pesticide that has contributed to the failure of their crops. Drug and alcohol addiction



LAKSHMAN ANAND

is rampant, female foeticide is almost a norm and violence simmers in the by-lanes. Activists argue that these social conditions are a recipe for a leftwing revolution, or else the reassertion of a Khalistan-type rightwing ideology.

Expensive irreverence

Burj Jhabber offers the archetypal situation of the position Dalits hold in Indian society. Here, as in most villages, not a single Dalit family owns land. Government funds for Dalit upliftment are usurped by the upper-caste members of village panchayats. The local Dalits live in small mud-and-thatch huts, and toil as either daily wage labourers or bonded labour for pay far below minimum wage. Dalits are also often forced into debt traps; many women work under the *begari* system, whereby they try to pay back small loans through years of hard labour. In this relatively prosperous village, Dalits are exiled to a corner that has no water, no health centres, schools or toilets. If any Dalit deigns to lodge a protest or refuses to work under such conditions, the landlords have an announcement made from the local gurudwara: *No Dalit man, woman or child will be allowed to make ablutions in any part of the village.*

It is because such a system makes protest nearly impossible that Bant Singh is such an aberration. He had refused to work in the landlord’s fields, instead starting a piggery and a small poultry farm, and selling toys in nearby villages. He also refused to go to the local gurudwaras, where he said Dalits were humiliated; when he visited the neighbouring villages’ gurudwaras, he would bring back the leftovers of the *langars* (communal kitchens) to feed his pigs. He took those pigs to the landlords’ farms, to the village pond, to the local veterinary clinic, to the fields where the Jat Sikh kids played cricket; in each place, he would refuse

to move when told to do so. Bant Singh even took on the landlord's goons, who would loiter in the Dalit ghetto, eve-teasing young women. Such actions directly challenged the fundamentals of dogmatic, feudal history, and the landlords were fully intimidated.

For a while, Bant Singh worked with the Bahujan Samaj Party, a political group founded to represent those disenfranchised by the caste system. He subsequently became involved with a variety of political fronts before finally joining the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, the aboveground Naxalite organisation that began working with the poorest of the rural Bihari poor in the early 1970s, and also took on the region's landlords. The CPI (ML) Liberation now has six MLAs in the Bihar Assembly, and is strong in and around Mansa as well, although the group had expanded to Punjab prior to Bant Singh's involvement.

But Bant Singh's biggest 'crime' came later, when he successfully organised small-scale and landless farmers - particularly Dalits - of 12 villages in a mass organisation called Mazdoor Mukti Morcha (MMM). In the face of his successful membership drive, in June 2002, the area's landlords began to wage a nasty counter-war.

That was when they had Baljeet raped. Bant Singh fought back. "This was no time to turn back," he recalls. "We had to find justice, at any cost." He organised protests, the CPI (ML) Liberation led a resistance movement, and the area villages were galvanised in solidarity. But although the rapists were arrested and jailed, the intervention by the law did not end the matter.

In early January 2006, as Bant Singh was cycling home after an MMM membership drive, he was attacked. While the perpetrators - young heirs to landlords and lackeys of village sarpanchs - did not want to kill him, they did want to send a clear message to anyone else in the region who would dare to defy the feudal code. After covering Bant's hands and legs with several layers of cloth, the attackers used cast-iron handles of hand-pumps to break each of his limbs. Bant Singh says that he beseeched his attackers, "Kill me, but don't leave me like this." To this they demanded, "So, will you ever again tell the boys not to loiter in the Dalit areas when your girls are around?"

Later, the thugs called a former sarpanch, and told him to go find Bant Singh where they had left him in the fields. The man rushed Bant to the 25 km-distant hospital, but the doctor refused to touch him without first being paid INR 1000. By the time the money was collected, gangrene had set in. Bant Singh ultimately had to lose both of his lower arms and his left leg.

Inquilabi

The resistance began. The CPI (ML) Liberation, together with 14 other organisations, led mass protests.

The story of Bant Singh spread from village to village, and the Dalit rebel became a living legend in Punjab. For many, his struggle for dignity seemed to move beyond the clichés of political discourse, becoming instead an essay on humanity and liberation. Bant Singh became an icon of Dalit resistance, and the landlords retreated as the poor advanced.

Bant Singh's assailants were arrested and jailed. The Punjab government gave him INR 10 lakh, and ordered the suspension of the doctor who had refused to treat him. His children, among the rare Dalit children who go to school, would not have been able to stay in class without a wage earner, but have now been allowed to remain. Bant receives hundreds of visitors every day at the hospital; they come to see him, talk to him, listen to his ideas, hear his revolutionary songs.

The Mazdoor Mukti Morcha has also become a force to reckon with, taking up individual cases of atrocity and exploitation. "We won't take it lying down anymore," says Roop Singh, a village elder in Burj Jhabber. "We want the money that the government allots to us, which the landlords usurp. We want space in the gurudwara. We want equal wages for men and women."

The new dynamic has also led to a situation in Punjab similar to Bihar's syndrome of militia violence. There are confirmed reports that wherever the movement of landless, small-scale farmers and Dalits is becoming strong - as in Mansa District - landlords are creating private vigilante armies along the lines of Bihar's Ranvir Sena. Recently, large landowners held a meeting to discuss how to counter the movement inspired by Bant Singh. But the Dalits are ready, says activist Jasbir Kaur: "History moves in predictable cycles. And we are here to change history. The Dalits have suddenly realised that they too can walk with their heads high."

Bant Singh smiles when he talks of history. "History is in our hands," he notes. "My life is in my hands. My people's life is in our hands. If we don't fight back and demand our rights and identities, we are doomed. We have no option but to dream." Then he sings a song by the legendary folksinger Sant Ram Udasi, his guru and idol. Bant Singh - who has come to be known as Inquilabi, a nickname referring to the revolutionary legend he has become - sings in a soft, lilting melody, his eyes like a forest in flames, his body still, his half-arms moving like a warrior's sword. He sings:

*Brave brothers, you must struggle for your rights.
Mother Earth,
Bring them back from your womb again;
Give birth to them in this land,
Where they will come from the slaughterhouses
And the spits of history
With the hope of humanity.*

Srinagar's martyr's graveyard

BY PEERZADA ARSHAD HAMID

Kashmir's 17-year-old insurgency has seen many unique developments, but one of the oddest has been the abrupt conversion of parks into cemeteries. The first of these parks-turned-graveyards in the Valley came up in the traditional Eidgah grounds, in downtown Srinagar. Around 1000 people now lie buried here, all of them having fallen victim to the conflict. This plot of land, now encased in concrete and iron, used to be part of a vast playground.

The identity of the first person buried at the Eidgah 'martyr's graveyard' is not known; the epitaph on that grave simply reads *Shaheed-i-Namaloom* (martyr unknown), dated 20 January 1990. Habibullah Khan, caretaker at the cemetery, says he knows little of the identity of that first arrival: "They had brought the body from Uri. He was probably a militant belonging to JKLF, which was then the only militant outfit operating in the state."

Immediately to the right of the *Shaheed-i-Namaloom* lies the second grave – Mushatq Ahmad Malik of Srinagar, who was buried here on 21 January 1990, the day after the unknown martyr was interred. According to locals living in Eidgah's vicinity, a signboard announcing *Beehist Shuuda* (Martyr's Heaven) was erected at the former park in the early 1990s, as the eruption of armed insurgency killed more and more people.

"It was presumed that whoever would fall prey to the bullets of Indian forces in Kashmir Valley would be buried here, and that the process would continue till freedom was achieved," recalls Mohammed Shafi, a local knowledgeable about the martyr's graveyard. "However, this did not work for the people living in far-off villages, and people began to bury their dear ones in their respective localities. For city dwellers, too, the spirit of bringing

martyrs to Eidgah died down slowly. Today you have a martyr's graveyard in every nook of Kashmir. There are said to be some 300 such graveyards in Kashmir."

At 70 years of age, caretaker Khan has watched the transformation of the open green field of Eidgah. He has devoted himself to the service of the graveyard, and several times a day can be seen making his rounds, tending the flowers blooming on the graves. He can remember most of the dead and the circumstances under which they were brought here. Two-year-old Saquib Bashir was hit by a bullet in the chest while his mother was breastfeeding him. And then there is 102-year-old Ghulam Mohammad Magray, who now lies beside hundreds of youths.

Caretaker Khan says he does not know what has kept him going, having assisted in more than 1000 burials here.

Chasing peace

Eidgah is where Srinagar's Muslim population used to gather on Eid to offer prayers. In a sense, the cultural significance of Eidgah has only grown since the area has become a site for offering *Jinazah* and *Fateh Khawani*, prayers offered during the last rites.

Besides hundreds of civilians, many Kashmiri political leaders have also been buried at Eidgah, including Mirwaiz Moulvi Mohammad Farooq, Abdul Gani Lone and Peer Hisamuddin, as well as renowned activists such as Jaleel Andrabi and Dr Ahad Guru. A grave with a black epitaph also awaits an occupant: that of JKLF (Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front) founder Mohammad Maqbool Bhat, who was executed at Tihar Jail in Delhi in 1984. As soon as the Indian state

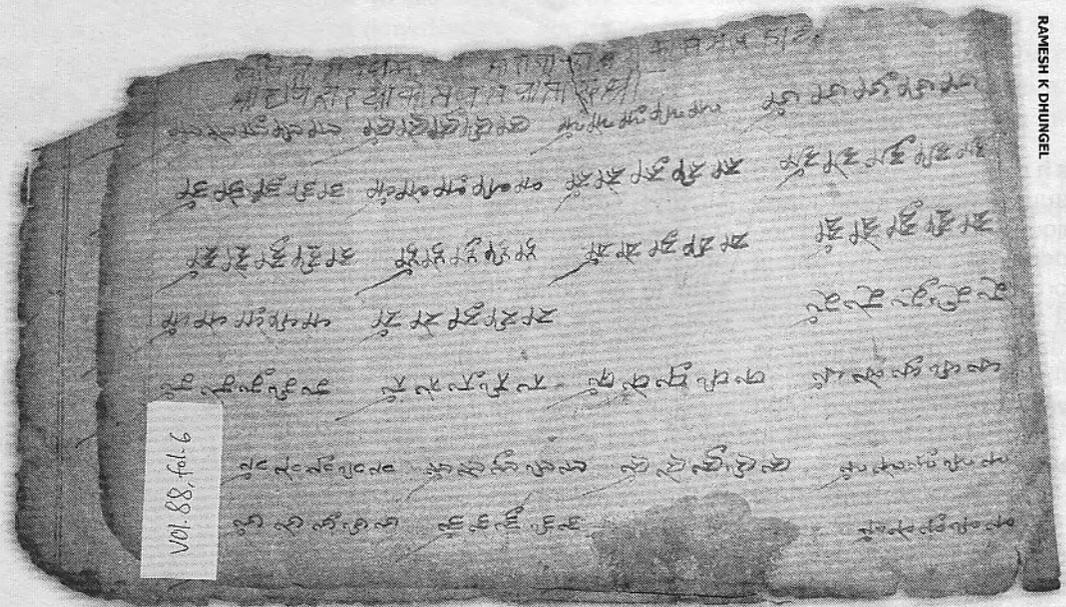


provides the body, it will be transferred to Eidgah for burial.

During the 17 years it has been in existence, the cemetery has twice needed to be enlarged. Its initial 120x120 ft space was quickly filled to capacity, and was subsequently doubled, then quadrupled. With the continuation of unrest, Habibullah Khan says he foresees the graveyard being extended yet again. Graves are not dug at Eidgah, but rather soil is raised around rock plinths. Even today, more than 30 graves have been kept ready to hem in the fresh ones. Khan says that at times, so many bodies have needed burial that he has had to dig joint graves, interring three or four bodies together.

Walking the lines of graves at Eidgah, the successive epitaphs delineate a clear timeline of the conflict in Kashmir since 1990. Relatives and friends continue to throng the graveyard, offering prayers, shedding tears, showering flower petals and rice grains on the tombs for the peace of the departed souls.

Despite his dedication, however, there is little peace here for Habibullah Khan. "Once, I buried nine people in a day. Once, it was 20. It was painful, burying the young people." ▲



RAMESH K DHUNGEL

The long-ago fight for Kirant identity*

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the eastern Himalayan region was a hotbed of conflict as the indigenous communities pitched themselves against Tibetan Buddhist and Gorkhali hegemony. Hitherto unstudied manuscripts afford a new understanding of these rivalries, and of the life and work of a man who laid the ground for a Kirant revival.

BY RAMESH K DHUNGEL

Historians today are convinced that a widespread cultural conflict took place in the eastern Himalayan region between the indigenous inhabitants – called the Kirant – and the Tibetan migrant population, reaching a climax during the 18th and 19th centuries. Another wave of political and cultural conflict, between Gorkhali and Kirant ideals, surfaced in the Kirant region of present-day Nepal during the last quarter of the 18th century. A collection of manuscripts from the 18th and 19th centuries, till now unpublished and unstudied by historians, have made possible a new understanding of this conflict. These historical sources are among those collected by Brian Houghton Hodgson – a British diplomat and self-trained Orientalist appointed to the Kathmandu court during the second quarter of the 19th century – and his principal research aide, the Newar scholar Khardar Jitmohan.

For over two millennia, a large portion of the eastern Himalaya has been identified as the home of the Kirant people, of which the majority are known today as Rai, Limbu, Yakha and Lepcha. In ancient times, the entire Himalayan region was known as the *kimpurusha desha*, a phrase derived from a Sanskrit term used to identify people of Kirant origin. These peoples were also known as *nep*, to which the name *nepala* is believed to have an etymological link. The earliest references to the Kirant as principal inhabitants of the Himalayan region are found in the texts of *Atharvashirsha* and *Mahabharata*, believed to date to before the 9th century BC. For over a millennium, the Kirant had also inhabited the Kathmandu Valley, where they installed their own ruling dynasty. As time passed, however, those Kirant now known as the Limbu settled mostly in the Kosi region of present-day eastern Nepal and Sikkim.

*Research assistance for this article by Sonam Rinchen Lepcha, and previous translation work by Imansing Chemjong and Bairagi Kainla.

From around the 8th century, areas on the northern frontier of the Kirant region began to fall under the domination of migrant peoples of Tibetan origin. This flux of migration brought about the domination by Tibetan religious and cultural practices over ancient Kirant traditions. This influence first imposed shamanistic Bon practices, which in turn were later replaced by the oldest form of Tibetan Buddhism. The early influx of Bon culture to the peripheral Himalayan regions occurred only after the advent of the Nyingma, the oldest Buddhist order in Lhasa and central Tibet, which led followers of the older religion to flee to the Kirant areas for survival.

The Tibetan cultural influx ultimately laid the foundation for a Tibetan politico-religious order in the Kirant regions, and this led to the emergence of two major Tibetan Buddhist dynasties: in Sikkim and Bhutan. The early political order of the Kingdom of Bhutan had been established under the political and spiritual leadership of the lama Zhabs-drung Ngawang Namgyal. Consequently, Bhutan used to be known in the Himalayan region as the 'kingdom of [Buddhist] spiritual rule' (in old Nepali, *dharmaako desh*). The Tibetan rulers of Sikkim were also known as *Chogyal*, or spiritual rulers.

Both of these kingdoms adopted policies of suppression of indigenous practices, replacing them with those of Tibetan Buddhism. Bhutan's religious rulers established a tradition of appointing religious missions to other Himalayan kingdoms and areas, through which they were able to establish extensive influence in the region. Bhutan's ambitious missions were sent as far west as Ladakh. Even before the

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founding of modern Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha in 1769, Bhutan's rulers were able to establish spiritual centres in several parts of what was to become the former's territories, including Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Gorkha and Vijayapur in the midhills, and Mustang, north of the central Himalayan range.

Sikkim had long been home to Lepcha Kirant people and culture. Under the guidance of Tibetan Buddhist lamas, however, their self-rule and cultural independence was suddenly taken away. Sikkim kings were even able to subdue the entire far-eastern part of the Kirant region – historically known as Limbuwan – for at least a short period of time. Here, the new rulers adopted policies of religious and cultural subjugation, encouraging Sikkim lamas to travel to places of strategic importance in order to establish monastic centres.

But the indigenous population did not easily surrender themselves to this cultural invasion. Limbu and Lepcha manuscripts collected by Brian Hodgson in Darjeeling indicate significant resistance by the Kirant against Tibetan Buddhist rule and cultural domination. On the basis of information found in these

Box 1

Vol 73, fol 155-56 –
Colophon of a Limbu manuscript that describes the assassination of Sirijanga by the Raja and Lamas of Sikkim.

Let the wisdom of the Yakthung Hang [the Limbu king] be victorious! He [Sirijanga] wrote the scripture of the Yakthung Hang! Please be informed, the very foundation [of Limbu upliftment] is now raised or laid! The Great Guru [Mahaguru] who can even bring and halt the wind and storm has now got the enlightenment of written knowledge of the Limbus! Once you have got the foundation [of the scripture] you must read and understand it.

... Please notice, Oh Limbus! He [the Mahaguru, or Sirijanga]

found the scripture written on leaves [wild leaves?] and floral petals while he was in his dream! Having rewritten those scriptures, he brought them as if he found them miraculously. However, when he had not even got to finish the writing of the scriptures and while he was just looking [visiting] towards the kingdom of the Bhotas [for dissemination and publicity of the scriptures he had composed and was composing, basically among Limbu and Lepcha communities] having thought that the Bhotiya king's kingdom would collapse if the tenets or scriptures of the Limbus were to flourish and, also having heard a similar version from the Lamas [Tasong Lamas of Pemayonchi], they [the Bhotiya authorities of Sikkim] killed him [Sirijanga]!

[Thus,] Oh Limbu brothers! You are advised to please chant the prayers [that Mahaguru wrote] every day and night! You should know that on the earth Phaktalung [the Kumbhakarna Himal and the areas around its foothills] is the naval [main source] [of human being], the main body is God Mahadeva, who resides above it. You are standing alive [protected by our deity] and now there is the Limbu tenet above you [available for your protection and betterment]. Limbus' guru is the Mahaguru [Sirijanga], queen of your mind [Kevalani, Mubokwama or Ningmaphuma and the scriptures collected, rewritten and composed by Sirijanga]! 'Let the Limbu wisdom be always victorious! This in fact is the prayer of the Limbus!

Box 2

Vol 88, fol 6 recto (see image) – *Mention of the name 'Rupihang Raya' and Sirijanga's contact with King Jayaprakash Malla of Kantipur. The original is in 18th century Nepali.*

Hail! Let it be auspicious everywhere! Let Maharaja Jayaprakash Malla be victorious!

Let the everyday services or greetings of this Sri Rupihang Raya [offered to Jayaprakash Malla] be perfected or be turned into truth!

manuscripts, the Limbus appear to have put up a more vigorous resistance than did the Lepchas. While much of this struggle consisted of attempts to strengthen cultural awareness, there were also violent engagements between Kirant communities and their new rulers. The manuscripts contain clear expressions of grievance and anger at Tibetan cultural hegemony (see Box 1).

Sirijanga Singthebe and Kirant revival

Limbu society's first known literary figure and reformer was a talented young man from Tellok, in present-day Taplejung District of far-eastern Nepal. Born around 1704, he was formally known as Sirichongba, but his more popular name was and remains Sirijanga. Hodgson and Jitmohan's manuscripts have uncovered significant details of Sirijanga's life, including his education and his movement towards reformatory activities. A Limbu-language instruction book found in this collection reveals Sirijanga's real name: Rupihang. The *hang* part of the name is a common Limbu term indicating a family of high or royal origin. In the Lepcha language, Limbus are referred to as *Chong*, so 'Sirijanga' seems to have been a corruption of the Sanskrit-Lepcha compound *Shree chongba*: the great hero of the Limbus from Limbuwan.

Sirijanga had accepted his Lepcha nickname by claiming to be the incarnation of a legendary figure also called Sirijanga. It has been widely believed that it was this supposedly 9th century hero who invented the ancient *chong* or Limbu script; but many now feel that the Sirijanga legend was most likely created by the 18th century Sirijanga himself, with the intention of making the Limbu and Lepcha people more ready to believe and follow his teachings.

Sirijanga Singthebe re-invented the old *chong* script, and also developed a new Kiranti alphabet, today known as Sirijanga. With the use of his newly developed script he collected, composed and copied huge amounts of Limbu literature pertaining to history and cultural traditions. He traveled extensively through remote regions, attempting to amass sources of Limbu knowledge and culture. Eventually, he began going from village to village, publicising his findings

and establishing centres of Limbu Kiranti learning. In doing all of this, Sirijanga laid the foundation for a Kirant ethnic revival, and contributed significantly to the resistance against Tibetan Buddhist cultural domination.

Sirijanga preached that acquiring broad cultural knowledge and experience was the key to the revival and enrichment of the Limbu community. In an attempt to trace the sources of his culture, he at first studied with local Tibetan Buddhist lamas, who at the time were the only means in the region of connecting to a learned tradition. Sirijanga was also witness to the influx of the Hindu-based Khas culture from the western hill districts of today's Nepal. As such, along with his preliminary studies under the local lamas, he also practiced reading and writing in contemporary Khas, now known as Nepali.

In order to better understand the dynamics at play in the region and to gather support for his movement, Sirijanga traveled far and wide to establish contact with rulers and powerful personalities. In one of these adventures, it seems that he had either contacted or met King Jayaprakash Malla of Kathmandu. A manuscript found in Hodgson's collection contains a description of such an encounter in what appears to be Sirijanga's own writing in Limbu and Nepali (see Box 2 and image).

This multi-lingual and multi-cultural exposure to Buddhist and Hindu standards enabled Sirijanga to grasp the fundamentals of both of the region's dominant cultures. He used this exposure as inspiration in developing the Limbu alphabet and the tenets of his own moral and religious teachings. His ultimate goal was to re-invent the Limbus' traditional cultural and religious understanding, by producing a vast treasure-chest of Limbu literature. He emphasised to his followers that the main cause of Limbu backwardness and impoverishment was the people's ignorance, and that this could be cured only by education (see Box 3).

During Sirijanga's life, the Bhutani and Sikkimi quest for greater control over the eastern Himalaya led to many wars between Limbu and Sikkimi Bhotiya (*Bhotiya* indicating Tibetan origin) authorities. In due time, the lamas of Sikkim were able to extend their monastic centres into the northern areas of that part of Limbuwan that now lies in Nepal. After a time, this cultural encroachment enabled the Bhotiya rulers to repeatedly subdue and take control of the entire Limbu Kirant territory.

The root of this state of conflict can be seen to lie in the politics of culture and knowledge at play in the region. Sikkimi Tibetan rulers and Buddhist spiritual leaders were able to subjugate the entire far-eastern Kirant region by means of their hold over the established learned traditions and the systematic spiritual culture of Buddhism. It was realisation of this that led Sirijanga to emphasise the necessity of a

peaceful, knowledge-based movement. In present-day terms, Sirijanga's ethnic movement can be said to be one of Kirant-Limbu empowerment through education.

Sirijanga's movement came to represent a significant threat in particular to the Sikkimi Bhotiya rulers and their spiritual gurus. The man's writings and teachings, his Kiranti alphabet and the literary texts he collected, attracted significant numbers of Limbus and Lepchas, and led to the start of an ethnic awakening. Sirijanga was able to establish centres of Kirant-Limbu cultural and religious learning in many places throughout the eastern Himalayan hills. The Sikkimi authorities felt enough under threat to want Sirijanga eliminated. He was killed in 1741, somewhere near the Pemiyongchi monastery in Sikkim. The Kirant learning centres were subsequently destroyed, and Sirijanga's disciples murdered or brutally suppressed.

In both life and death, Sirijanga was known as *keba lama*, the lama or preacher of Limbu tenets. A popular Limbu text of moral teaching called *Sapla Munthum*, also found in Hodgson's collection, indicates that he would sometimes introduce himself as such. Due to his early association with Tibetan Buddhism and the 'lama' title to this particular name, some scholars have been led to believe that Sirijanga was a Buddhist. The sense in which 'lama' is used here, however, indicates a teacher, a learned person or a guru. Sirijanga came to be *keba lama* because he was revered as the discoverer, worshipper and follower of *mubokvama-ningnaphuma* or *kebalani*, the goddess or mother of Limbu wisdom, knowledge and learning. In these scriptures, he is also addressed and idolised as *mahatma* (a great soul) and *mahakulu* (a great guru).

The Lepcha case

The Kiranti movement pioneered by Sirijanga also appears to have had a strong influence over the Lepchas of Sikkim. Since Sikkim's large Limbu population had close contacts with the area's Lepchas, and since the two communities found further bonds in their shared state of hegemonic suppression by Tibetan Buddhist culture, this influence was inevitable.

The conquerors demanded that Gorkhali rule be obeyed and Gorkhali traditions be followed.

In an attempt at resistance, both developed their own scripts, writing and literary tradition. The Lepchas of Sikkim were not only comfortable entering Sirijanga's tutelage and studying Limbu texts under him; they even offered him financial and physical help for the promotion of Kiranti writing and Limbu literature. It was by following Sirijanga's direct example, too, that the Lepchas developed their own script.

A mid-18th century Lepcha text found in Hodgson's collection and titled *Lepcha Dungrap* or *Samtinyetring Chho* contains historical and contemporary descriptions of the rivalry between the Lepcha and Sikkim's Tibetan Buddhist authorities (see online appendix). This particular Lepcha manuscript seems to have been a section of a historical text known as *Dungrap*, the traditional genealogy-based legend of Sikkim. The document includes a description of the early rivalry between the Tibetan Buddhist authorities and local Lepcha leaders, known as *Muns* or *Bonthings*.

Towards the end of the *Samtinyetring Chho* is another interesting statement on the early Lepcha-Tibetan rivalry, major incidents of which are described while laying the ground for a spiritual 'forecast' about the cultural and political future of Sikkim. The text highlights the suppressive and discriminatory policies of the Tibetan authorities against the Lepcha, and concludes with the story of a new hope of Lepcha emancipation from this state of domination. It also predicts the ultimate downfall of Tibetan Buddhist rule, and the revival of indigenous Lepcha values (see online appendix).

Sources other than these literary references have also been found with regard to the Tibetan-Lepcha conflict, which reached its height during the early 19th century. With the Sikkimi authorities

Box 3

Vol 88, fol 1 – *Colophon of the textbook of the Kirant (Sirijanga) script and language by Sirijanga.*

Sri Om! I advise you to keep reading [the Limbu scriptures] every morning and evening!

I advise you to please keep the scripture of the Yakthung Hang [the Limbu ruler] properly/safely!

I advise you to please ask for a copy of the scripture of the

Yakthung Hang [if you do not have one already]!

Om! I prostrate myself before Sri Tolingsomu camen-bhumen-bhime!

Om Sri! This is the scripture [*sastra*] of the Yakthung Hang!

Please note that I, Sirijanga, brought this text into light [discovered or wrote]!

Oh, the Sun God! I prostrate myself before you!

Please note that I, at first, brought a serious thinking into my

mind [of producing a scripture] and made [or wrote] the scripture of moral teachings of the goddess of knowledge or learning [*Mubokvama* or *Kevalani*]!

Om! I am speaking the words of Mubokvama: I wrote the story of the origin of the Sun and the Moon and also wrote about the origin of the planets and stars...!

Om! This is the tenet of goddess Mubokvama! I, Sirijanga Hang, wrote it! I advise you all [Limbus] to read it [always]!

In present-day terms, Sirijanga's ethnic movement can be said to be one of Kirant-Limbu empowerment through education.

increasingly worried about their continued supremacy, they adopted brutal anti-Lepcha policies. In 1826 King Phyug-phu Namgyal assassinated his Lepcha chief minister, Karthak Chanjok Bolod, along with all of his immediate family. But Chanjok's nephew Yuklathup, also a minister in the king's court, escaped the killings and took asylum in the Limbuwan district of Ilam in Nepal, taking with him family members and about 800 other Lepchas and Limbus.

Due to similarities between their cultures, the Limbu elites of Ilam welcomed Yuklathup and his large, multi-ethnic party. For this purpose, the Limbu elites had also coordinated with the government of Nepal. It is said that a massive suppression

of the Lepcha in Sikkim had occurred before and after Yuklathup's asylum in Ilam. Lepchas who arrived in Nepal in the wake of such suppression were to become strong followers of Gorkhali traditions: they observed the festivals of Dasain and Tihar, and even came to worship Hindu gods and goddesses. Those who thus assimilated into the dominant culture came to be known as *sampriti* Lepcha. Among the Lepcha manuscripts in Hodgson's collection is a religious scripture titled *Sampriti-Lepcha Muithum*.

The asylum-seekers were also called *sukhumbaasi*, or people from Sikkim. It was from this that the Nepali word *sukumbaasi* developed, which is used today to refer to a landless person. Similarly, the Nepali term for thumbprint came to be *hyapche*, it is said, because most of the Lepchas in the largely illiterate group of refugees had to use their thumbprints to sign the formal request for asylum. Manuscripts in Hodgson's collection corroborate information found in official records of the period as to these etymologies.

Gorkhali hegemonies

The next phase of military and cultural threat faced by the Kirant people was at the hands of the Gorkhali expansionists of Nepal, shortly after Sirijanga's death. The nature and intensity of this hegemony was to prove significantly different from that of the earlier Tibetan one, however. From the very beginning, the Gorkha court's intention in the region was not the extension of its Hindu-based culture. Rather, Gorkha's was a clear military campaign of territorial expansion.

After the completion of the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769, the Gorkhali army marched east towards the Kirant territory. The Sen rulers of eastern Nepal, known as *Hindupati*, had

established a weak rule in the Kirant region by adopting a policy of mutual understanding with the local Kirant leaders. The Gorkhali military campaign, in contrast, brought with it a forceful and brutal occupation. During the conquest, the invading authorities adopted a harsh divide-and-rule policy: they first asked the Kirantis to surrender, assuring them that they would retain local rule and their traditional order. After many took up this offer, however, the conquerors instead demanded that Gorkhali rule be obeyed and Gorkhali traditions be followed. Manuscripts in Hodgson's collection make mention of Kirant men, male children and pregnant women having been murdered in great numbers (*see online appendix*).

The Gorkhalis ultimately divided the Limbu Kirantis into two groups, the *sampriti* and the *niti*: the former were those who had surrendered to Gorkhali power and cultural traditions, while the latter maintained their own traditions. The Gorkhali authorities naturally favoured the *sampritis*, killing the *niti* Limbus or forcing them to flee their lands. As a result, much of the *niti* population migrated towards Sikkim and Bhutan.

But Gorkhali wartime policy changed, particularly after the conquest of the territories of Kumaun and Garhwal far in the west. By the end of the 18th century, the authorities in Kathmandu were in need of more state revenue, and implemented a policy to bring people into Nepali territory in order to make barren land arable. The Kirant who were ousted from their lands during the Gorkhali military conquest were also asked to return home, albeit under the condition that Gorkhali rule and traditions were strictly followed. Relatives and friends of those who had fled were recruited to call them back, and people moved again between the state-given identities of *niti* and *sampriti*.

Gorkhali and Tibetan hegemonies and the resistance to them have left their mark on the cultures of the eastern Himalaya in complex ways. The papers of Brian Houghton Hodgson, lodged at the British Library in London, help us to approach an account of this evolution, and to create a better historical understanding of this one corner of Southasia. Understanding of the hegemonic cultures that encroached upon the Kirant living space, and the conflicts and subjugation that ensued, can be said to be yet at a rudimentary stage. Extended study of these papers among others will be followed by a deeper understanding that will also help further strengthen and consolidate the process of ethnic assertion afoot today in the eastern hills of Nepal as in other parts of the country. Knowledge of the deep past will help in better comprehension of the present, and so also serve as a guide for the future.

Additional manuscript excerpts available at www.himalmag.com.

Their vengeance

DILIP D'SOUZA

The crowd breaks repeatedly into good-natured applause and cheers, led by a moustached man with a cordless mike on the road below us. He has a sonorous way of bellowing slogans from time to time, which of course we all bellow back at him. He periodically points to someone in the audience and urges that someone to yell, but curiously, every time he points, he also runs his hand quickly over his chin, indicating a beard.

Again and again he shouts: "You over there with the beard! Bellow up!"

But why does he single out guys with beards? I mean, considering this is Punjab, there are indeed plenty with beards around me. In fact, I would say the great majority of the males are bearded. (Many have turbans too.) So of what use is it to indicate a beard to pick someone out of a crowd?

Later, several khaki-uniformed men march up to the gate and back. I use that word *march* advisedly, for what they really do is a quick strut. Like wind-up clockwork dolls, the crests atop their turbans shaking angrily, they zip in formation along the road, due west into the sunseting haze, turn abruptly at the gate and zip back on the other side of the road. As they turn, I notice that a similar posse, but in black and with marginally larger and angrier crests, is doing the same on the other side of the gate.

Two men, one from each side, throw the gates open with almost contemptuous flourish. Two more men, one from each side, approach the gate simultaneously in the same triple-quick strut. They halt abruptly to do high kicks that would do a Moulin Rouge can-can dancer proud. Then they continue towards each other, to end up nearly nose-to-nose.

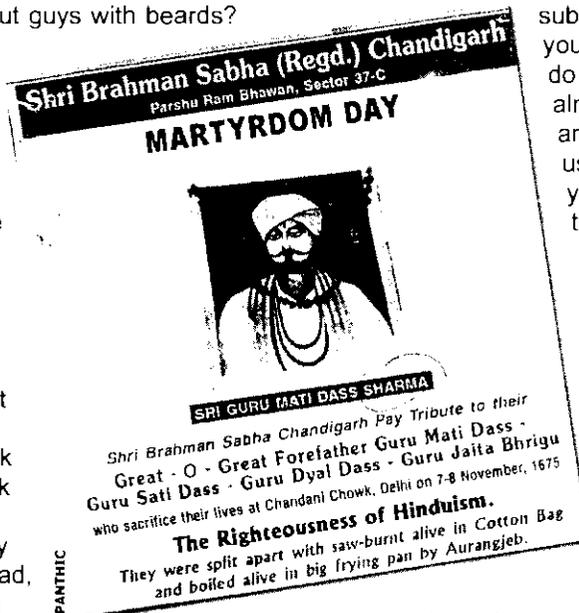
I am reminded of nothing so much as the cockfights I once spent a day watching in rural West Bengal. The quivering crests these men wear underline that impression. Where did this elaborate, choreographed hostility come from? What about it makes us all cheer and clap and shout slogans praising our country?

Wagah, of course, that border in Punjab, that ceremony where you come oh-so-close to those 'other' people, where you can steal a peek and wonder just who they are and what spices up their dal-roti, and then go back to shouting slogans praising your country. Yes, those other people are easily visible, just beyond the gate. Just too far to see faces clearly, but close enough that you know binoculars would let you identify them if you knew them, close enough that you could shout out a

conversation if there was substantially less hubbub around you. Many standing beside me do look over every now and then, almost in longing wonder. Who are those guys? They look like us, cheer like us, yet they're chanting different things! Waving a different flag!

So close, as the cliché goes, and yet so far. So much like us, and yet ... wait, are they really like us? Are we like them? I can see them, but what do I really know about them? It's just a gate, yes. Yet there's a canyon there. Invisible, but deep.

Well, no time for all that. Gotta feel good about my country!



Remember the violence

Wagah is beguilingly strange, but the infectious enthusiasm that suffuses the place renders any question immaterial. This is showtime! Remember to collect your cynicism on the way out.

And so, on my visit to Amritsar and its surroundings it wasn't really Wagah where I brushed up against ideas of patriotism and country. That's what I had thought would happen, but Wagah was like going to a cricket match.

The Golden Temple, on the other hand...

Make no mistake, the Golden Temple is a vision of cleanliness and peace. You can almost see those qualities wafting from the great tank. Then you start seeing the inscriptions everywhere.

In loving memory of Sergeant Uday Singh, US Army, 23 April 1982 to 01 December 2003. Killed in action in Habbaryyah, Iraq, during operation Iraqi Freedom. First Sikh who laid down his life in the war against terrorism.

In memory of brave soldiers killed in action in 1965, The Poona Horse ...Washer Man Chuni Lal.

Soldiers remembered, washermen remembered ... and then, and then, there's the museum.

The museum is a vista of blood and mutilation and weaponry. Here is a painting of a man being sawn in half, the two grim sawers going at it and the two halves peeling off, bending over like slices of butter. There is a painting of a man with half his head cut off, looking up at the chopper who holds that half. A man being boiled alive. A man "being martyred [sic] by mutilating his joints one by one". Men strapped onto huge wheels, like gears, and crushed between them. Photos of 13 men, bloody in a 1978 incident, garlanded and robed and very dead.

A blood-soaked history, this. And there's a twist to make you think of a something a little more than blood and death.

Along one wall, just above those 13 bloody men, are large paintings of Bhagat Singh, Udham Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabhai, with brief descriptions of their heroism. All called *shahid*, or martyr – as you might expect, for these are men we grow up revering in our history lessons.

On the adjacent wall is a painting of the Akal Takht in ruins. Dome fallen down, walls shattered. This paragraph below it:

Under the calculated move of Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi, military troops stormed Golden Temple with tanks. Thousands of Sikhs were massacred. Sri Akal Takht suffered the worst damages. Sikhs rose up in a united protest. Many returned their honours. Sikh soldiers left their barracks. The Sikhs however, soon had their vengeance.

And to the right are paintings of three men, titled:

Shahid S Beant Singh Ji (1949 - 31 Oct 1984)
Shahid S Satwant Singh Ji (1967 - 6 Jan 1989)
Shahid S Kehar Singh Ji (1940 - 6 Jan 1989)

The first two were Indira's guards who shot her

that October morning; Beant was shot dead almost immediately. The third, sentenced for being part of the conspiracy, hanged along with the second on that January day.

These three men, up on this wall and called *shahid*, exactly like other revered martyrs from our history. In this place that remembers so much blood; that doesn't mention, but manages to put in your thoughts. the long nights of even more bloodshed – such as 3000 slaughtered – in the wake of Indira's assassination.

Peace and vengeance

I walk down from the museum and step back into the Golden Temple. The serenity after the memories of great violence, the sense of peace and welcome that extends to every visitor who comes to this magnificent place, is almost overwhelming.

Yes, I have never been in a place of worship that is so clean and inclusive, that is so peaceful, that lets you be yourself so fully. Yet my mind is consumed, vibrating, taut with the horrific violence remembered upstairs.

And my mind is consumed, too, with inchoate thoughts of nation and patriotism. Now, I never cared for Indira Gandhi, and I believe history will eventually judge her harshly for the long list of Indian troubles we can lay at her door. Yet she did once lead the government of this country that I, and this Golden Temple museum, belong to. Yet this museum actually refers to her killing as the "vengeance" of the Sikhs. It actually remembers and reveres her killers – exactly as it remembers and reveres the heroes of India's freedom struggle.

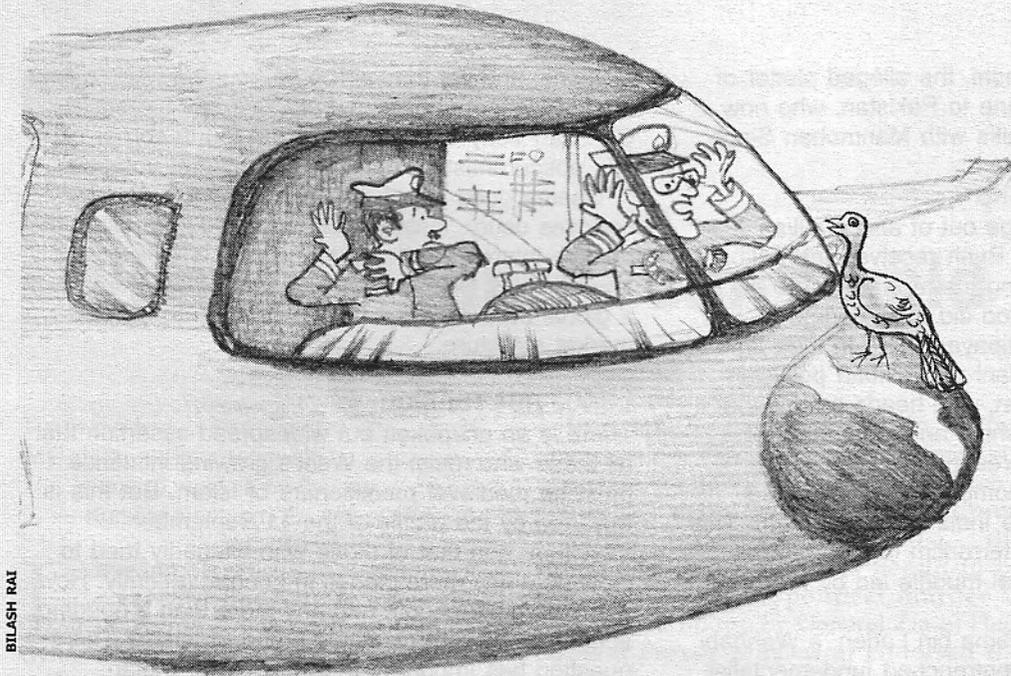
How's the ordinary Indian visitor to this place to reconcile these things?

Yes, I have never been in a place of worship so clean and inclusive. I have also never been in a place that raised such troubling questions about the country I live in. By then Wagah has already faded a bit in memory...

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BILASH RAI

Who hijacked whom?

Aircraft hijackings took place for a long time in India without anyone pointing the finger to 'Islamic fundamentalism'. The tendency to see the world through the eyes of George W Bush will always lead us away from the true nature of extremism.

BY JAWED NAQVI

The global hunt for terrorists has spoiled a sumptuous picnic in India. Decades before America's neo-cons reheated Ronald Reagan's "war on terrorism" – then a catchphrase for targeting Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and other assorted leftists – and before President George W Bush mutated it into a war against 'Islamic fascists', airplanes were being hijacked in India as frequently as people fly kites. Even so, India's Muslims, Christians and Parsis had not then, and have not till now, been part of the procession. Everyone else has had their share of fun. That is how terrorism was seen until someone rammed commercial planes into the two tallest buildings in New York City.

On at least two occasions, the hijackers in India were Brahmins. Bhola and Devendra Pandey commandeered an Indian Airlines plane over Lucknow in 1978 to demand the withdrawal of Emergency-related cases against Sanjay Gandhi. That incident catapulted the brothers into politics, both becoming Congress MLAs in Uttar Pradesh. Another Pandey gentleman hijacked a plane simply because he wanted Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then an opposition leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, to request him to come down. The demand was met and the incident ended peacefully. In 1994, Dalit Buddhists hijacked a plane to demand that

Marathwada University be renamed after Dr B R Ambedkar. Sikhs have commandeered Indian planes on two or three occasions in their quest for Khalistan. Four college students in 1993 even took off on a packed plane to demand the resolution of problems plaguing the Lucknow Arts College!

Of course, the illustrious history of aviation piracy in India began with Kashmiri Muslims in 1971, but the issue of Kashmir should not be mixed up with the ongoing profiling of India's 130 million Muslims, accelerated by July's blasts in Bombay. These two groups never saw eye-to-eye on most key issues, after all, including separatism. While Vajpayee humoured his Brahmin constituent in Lucknow, he did so at a time when the so-called War on Terrorism was merely America's domestic affair.

But Vajpayee's BJP colleagues, L K Advani and Jaswant Singh, followed this tradition of releasing hijackers after the definition had widened at the international level. Both freed alleged terrorists that had been ensnared by previous Congress governments. While Singh received poor grades during the 1999 hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Kandahar, few know that Advani also has a history in this department. He too has freed hijackers: the seven Sikhs brought back from Dubai by Indira Gandhi in a diplomatic coup, for which she probably paid with her life; as well as

Kashmir's Hashim Qureshi, the alleged plotter of India's first hijacked plane to Pakistan, who now participates in peace talks with Manmohan Singh.

Free-market worship

All this resembles a page out of an Orwellian fairytale. As George W Bush received the Taliban in Texas before declaring them of no use to his vision of the world, so too did Indian prime ministers Singh and Vajpayee. Both in their time warmly received Pakistani pro-Taliban politician Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who heads groups that keep popping up in Kashmir and London terror alerts. By contrast, representatives of secular parties from Pakistan complain they are often given short shrift by the Indian establishment. This expedient approach to terrorism is cut from the same cloth as the global muddle led by Messrs Bush and Blair.

Take the case of Osama bin Laden, a Wahhabi Muslim from the most entrenched fundamentalist sect in the world of Islam, Saudi Arabia. Osama was a favourite of the American establishment until he made a disturbing request: the head of the King of Saudi Arabia on a platter. Subsequently, he wants it known that the king was a stooge of the Americans, and that the other Gulf rulers have been equally corrupted by the West. When you really get down to it, it is this ongoing standoff between the protagonists of two Wahhabi factions that has come to be known as a global war on terror, a clash of civilisations, and other such empty catchphrases. Do two medieval practitioners of a common sect represent two diverse civilisations?

Of course the Americans have always had strategic interests in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi rulers have long been required to guarantee the inviolability of this relationship. Therefore there was a genuine fear that if Osama bin Laden did usurp power in Riyadh, the Saudi national oil company Aramco, along with countless other American standard-bearers, would be liquidated in no time. Is that why Osama wanted the king removed? Perhaps, but he also wanted to implement in Saudi Arabia a more rigorous form of Wahhabism called Salafism.

The kingship of Saudi Arabia is no less obscurantist than the world's most wanted fugitive. King Abdullah did not visit Mahatma Gandhi's shrine when he came to Delhi in January this year, because doing so would have been 'insulting' to Islam – a view that the Indian government evidently accepted. Thankfully, Pervez Musharraf did not have similar concerns about Islamic purity when he paid homage to India's founding father in 2001.

King Abdullah had been in Delhi a few weeks before President Bush was to arrive to meet Manmohan Singh, India's first pro-free-market prime minister. All three men follow different

religions, and yet they agree on how the world's market system should operate. The born-again Christian Tony Blair brings up the fourth corner of this obscurantist platform of free-market votaries.

Osama does not share their perspective. He opposes usury, insofar as it is forbidden in Islam to receive interest on bank deposits. It is difficult to see how this Islamic edict would ever square with a global banking system, the first step to a free-market structure.

Land, not religion

There is an unspoken but widespread assertion that all those who resist the West's growing influence must be medieval practitioners of Islam. But this is thwarted by the profile of the 11 September attackers, and that of those who allegedly tried to blow up a few more planes in London recently. How many of these people had any more than a nodding acquaintance with Osama's brand of Islam? This question has important implications for Indian Muslims, whose pursuits and loyalties range from communism to communalism. Politically, they are followers of the Congress, even of the rightwing Hindu BJP, and of every other party sandwiched in between.

US professor Robert Pape has conducted a study on global suicide missions that took place between 1980 and 2003, which included profiles of those who have attacked Western targets in Lebanon. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Pape says, Hizbollah is principally neither a political party nor an Islamist militia, and evidence of the broad nature of the group's resistance to Israeli occupation can be seen in the identity of its suicide attackers.

Hizbollah conducted a broad campaign of suicide bombings against American, French and Israeli targets from 1982 to 1986, altogether involving 41 suicide terrorists. Of those, Pape's team was able to collect detailed personal information for 38. "We were shocked to find that only eight were Islamist fundamentalists," he writes. All the terrorists were born in Lebanon, fully 27 were members of leftist political groups, and three were Christians, including a woman schoolteacher with a college degree. What these suicide attackers shared was "a specific secular strategic goal", which was spurred not by "religious or political ideology but simply a commitment to resisting a foreign occupation".

Although religion is rarely the root cause, Pape says it is often used as a tool by terrorist organisations in recruiting, as well as in service to broader strategic objectives. Religion was not the motive in any of India's hijackings. Nor, dare we say, will it be found to have been a motive in the killing of 200 commuters in Bombay on 11 July. The picnic days for India's intelligence community are over. It is time to do some real soul-searching, with an open mind.

What the centre can't hold

I'm enmeshed in a strange fix.
My ability to hate intensely,
Has begun to weaken by the day.

— Kunwar Narayan, *Ek Ajib si Mushkil*

Love impels artistes to create timeless creations. But hate is much more powerful. It has made and unmade dynasties, expanded or contracted empires, and caused almost all the great upheavals of history. Life without love is terrible, but to live without hate is to endure the hopelessness of never rising above the mundane. The misery of a person without love or hate is so intense that it can force even a 79-year-old to take to the ravines.

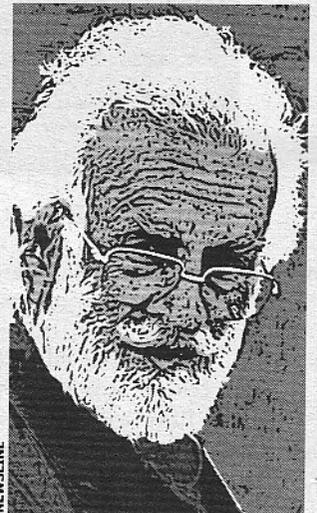
By all accounts, Nawab Akbar Shahbaz Khan, the *tumandar* (chieftain) of the Bugtis, was not a nice man to know. His love for his people was superficial. And unlike the other two chieftains of Balochistan – Nawab Khair Bux Marri and Sardar Attaullah Mengal – he did not hate the establishment in Islamabad intensely enough to seek independence. All he wanted was a measure of autonomy traditionally granted to the nominal rulers of frontier tribes by the erstwhile Raj. That made him secessionist in the eyes of the Pakistani military; but at the same time, he was also condemned by his critics for being a pro-government opportunist, always on the lookout for a favourable deal.

Had the *tumandar* died in a family feud or of old age, he would have remained one of several colourful anomalies of Pakistani society – just another arrogant chieftain who claimed superiority on the basis of colonial-era land grants. Instead, the place, time and manner of his execution and burial have turned him into an icon of autonomy in an increasingly volatile Balochistan. The manner of Nawab Akbar Bugti's death has transformed him into a martyr for all Balochs. Alive, he was an instrument of legitimacy for the centre. Even his rebellion was an indirect affirmation of faith in the idea of Pakistan; unlike other sardars, he never questioned the fundamental premise of a religion-based nation.

In death, he has succeeded in adding one more question mark over the viability of a state bound by very little other than a common religion and conditional American largesse. Already, the *tumandar's* execution has begun to be compared with the political murder of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto by General Zia-ul-Haq. General Pervez Musharraf endorsed the comparison by congratulating the executioners of a sardar from a region where embracing death on a matter of principal is a mark of honour. In Balochistan, a hero is someone who stands up to power, while an idol is the one who dies defying central authority.

It will be a little early to conclude that Balochistan, too, will go the way of Bangladesh. But if aspirations of autonomy are not sympathetically addressed, power alone cannot keep Pakistan together for all times to come. The grievances of the Baloch – or any other population group, except perhaps the Punjabis of Pakistan – are genuine. Balochistan forms almost 42 percent of the landmass of the country, its population is only 7.5 million, and its natural gas is the mainstay of the national energy system; despite these factors, it is one of the most backward provinces, with negligible presence in national defence forces, bureaucracy, diplomacy, trade and industry.

The legitimacy of a state that survives on the basis of brute force can be extremely fragile – half the nuclear arsenal of the world could not keep the Soviet Union together. Only that unity that is forged on the basis of political consensus and widely-shared common destiny can hold. The idea of Pakistan should have been reinvented right after the December 1971 break-up and loss of the eastern wing. In all heterogeneous societies, federalism is the *sine qua non* of national unity. But Bhutto's vanity ("we shall eat grass but build the bomb") and the military's guilt-induced ferocity propelled the country instead on a confrontationist course. By becoming a proxy in the US's covert war in Afghanistan, its elite amassed enormous fortunes.



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Unfortunately, the lucrative drugs-for-guns deals destroyed the moral fibre that helps people of various ethnicities rise above their sectarian interests for the common good of the country. When everyone in authority is busy feathering his own nest, marginalised communities acquire the legitimacy to call for secession.

In diverse societies, voices of unrest, no matter how seemingly unreasonable or unjust, need to be heard with patience and understanding. But despite his sherwani and self-declared presidential presumptions, General Musharraf is no politician. He decided to do what he has been trained to do all his life as an elite commando commander. He decided to "sort them so fast, they wouldn't know what hit them". Well, they did not know, but the rest of the world does, and this does not augur well for the future of Pakistan. The general-president will be long gone from the pinnacle of power when hapless politicians of Pakistan's past and future are asked to deal with a secessionist western wing.

Centre shock

European models of autonomous individuals and centralised states – born out of fierce battles between ambitious warlords on the one hand, and all-consuming wars between nation states on the other, over several centuries – are difficult to replicate in Southasia. Despite a shared Indic civilisation, this is a region where *boli* (dialect) changes every four *kosh* (6.4 kilometres), and there is a different *baani* (lifestyle) every 10 *kosh* (16 kilometres). No empire of the past in Southasia – neither the Mauryas nor the Mughals – succeeded in forging a uniformity similar to China, where over 92 percent of the population is ethnically Han.

Ashoka could not make all Southasians Buddhists. The Shankaracharya failed to convert the entire Subcontinent to Shaivism. Bhakti and Sufi masters consented to create harmony in the diversity of faiths, rather than forcing their followers into exclusivist cocoons. The British tried to make English take the place of Sanskrit, but they too failed to penetrate different layers of indigenous cultures. All of this proves that states that do not respect the inherent multiplicity of the region and its sub-regions are doomed to fail.

Sixty years is a long time in the life of an individual, but amidst a civilisation at least 150 times older than that, modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are nothing more than mere experiments. Their structures need to be studied to learn lessons for improvement, not to stick dogmatically to

models produced by England-trained barristers of the 1940s.

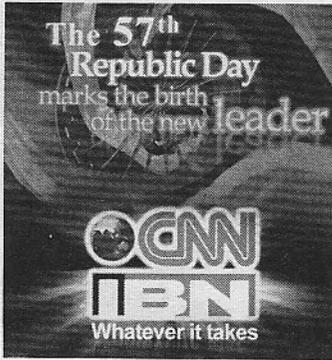
The function of the political centre in a pluralist society is necessarily complex. It has to be the moderator, facilitator and coordinator between diverse groups with conflicting interests. This requires so much effort and concentration that, in order to be effective, no central government can afford to spread itself as thin as do the establishments in Colombo, Dhaka, Islamabad and Kathmandu.

New Delhi has tried a different formula, but with varying degrees of success over time. In the Hindi heartland, the satraps of the Centre enjoy a fair degree of independent authority. But the imperial mindset on Raisina Hill is too well-entrenched to allow its far-flung possessions in Kashmir and the Northeast any real autonomy. India's achievements in local government are noteworthy: the number of elected representatives in Panchayati raj institutions is said to be more than the population of Norway. However, unless provincial governments are equally empowered, local government units alone cannot meet the self-governance aspirations of the diverse population groups of India.

In the future, any central government in Southasia will have to learn to limit itself to four areas: protection of the commons, regulation of currency, improvement in communications, and the function of coordination. It may sound ironic, but provincial governments in 'centralised' China enjoy far more autonomy than the so-called 'states' of the Indian Union. In military-run Pakistan, provinces are showpieces put in place to maintain the façade of democracy. Had the Sinhala majority agreed to a power-sharing arrangement with the Tamils, Sri Lanka would have saved itself from one of the fiercest insurgencies of modern times. Despite its apparent demographic homogeneity, Bangladesh too must learn to create sub-centres, to protect its territory from the peccadilloes of the vainglorious ruling class of Dhaka.

Gandhi tried, but hate proved to be stronger than his resolve to build a society based on love. Since hate cannot be wished away, there is only one way to reduce acrimony within and among nation states: devolve power, so that the capacity to inflict damage by a strong central establishment on others – as well as unto itself – is reduced to the minimum. Maybe then we shall begin to discover the goodness rather than the strength of each other. And only then we too shall discover the delectable pain of losing the ability to hate.

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NDTV's monopoly over the English-speaking classes in India is over. Ten months after it was launched, India Broadcast News (IBN), in collaboration with CNN, has decisively emerged as a leading competitor for English television

news. Headed by prominent journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, who quit NDTV after a decade's stint, CNN-IBN has captured a sizeable segment of the urban upper- and middle-class viewership. But NDTV will not be shoved away so easily: the channel has a massive network, and has recently spruced up its look and quality of reportage. Bearing the brunt of NDTV's established credentials and IBN's success has been Times Now, from the *Times of India* stable, which has shown dismal ratings. But those who were hoping that the war for news would boost standards of journalism and introduce a new culture of television reportage will be a tad disappointed. For the viewer, it is more of the same.

Kuldip Nayar has seen it all. From the times of Partition and Gandhi's assassination, through the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s in Indian politics, to the entire gamut of India-Pakistan relations, the veteran journalist knows Independent India like few others do. So when this man decides



to tell all, Southasia listens. Nayar has just released a book of his scoops. But the big one is yet to come - he promises a fuller memoir called *The Days Look Old* soon. While we wait for that one, *Chettria Patrakar* cannot but think of the senior journalists across Southasia, who have reported and been involved in events that have shaped the contemporary history of the region - Ayub's coup, the

Dalai Lama's exile, the 1960 takeover by King Mahendra, the Sino-Indian war, Bangladesh's liberation, the beginnings of Tamil nationalism, and many others. History would be unforgiving if the experiences of the hacks of those years are not well documented.

Media regulations in Nepal are set to be drastically overhauled. A High-Level Media Commission (HLMC), appointed two months back, has now submitted its recommendations to the government. And if Prime Minister G P Koirala's assurances to the members of the HLMC are anything to go by, this

is one commission report that will have an impact. Suggestions include detaching the government's control over government-owned media, limitations on cross-ownership, and allowing up to 49 percent foreign investment in print media, provided decision-making remains with Nepali citizens. The committee has also asked the government to recognise the digital medium as mass media. Other recommendations centre on the state's advertisement policy, and creating an inclusive media. Let's hope this gives a boost to free and responsible journalism in the country after the heady days of the People's Movement of April, which owed so much of its success to the reporters and editors..



As Nepal tries to institutionalise the notion of press freedom, it could teach some lessons to its mammoth neighbour up north, which has yet again showed its scant respect for democracy. Beijing might pretend to have turned a new leaf by opening up Tibet, and introducing more participation. But the farce is apparent. China has banned all reports distributed within the country by foreign news agencies until they are cleared by the state. The government has resorted to the old trick of using the most broad-based definition - protection of national unity, social stability, economic and social order - to decide what reports must be controlled. But the real decision is said to have been motivated by more specific concerns - state news agency Xinhua's aim to edge out competitors, especially financial news providers, as well as anger at the policy of foreign agencies not to completely toe the official Chinese line on Taiwan. But in this wired age, the wise men of the People's Republic are fooling themselves in thinking that various forms of censorship can keep their people in the dark about the world outside.

In the flurry of editorials and opinion pieces that have tried to explain the significance of the Havana meeting between Pervez Musharraf and Manmohan Singh, one stood out for its lucidity and clarity. On 18 September the *Daily Times* of Lahore welcomed

the resumption of talks, and drew some key lessons from the meet. Its editorial suggested that whatever the provocation, there should be no talk of disengagement; that terrorism requires cooperative mechanisms; that India must introspect about other causes that give rise to militancy within; and that Pakistan has an obligation to clamp down on such groups. Sober, balanced and thoughtful - the paper's take on bilateral relations was a refreshing read.

Journalists are back to living dangerously as hostilities resume in Sri Lanka. The press in the country has always been sharply polarised - categorised as either Sinhalese-nationalist or pro-LTTE. In the last two months, two journalists and two newspaper distributors have been murdered, while a news manager was abducted and released. Reporters and editors from both sides have been in the line of fire. If the two sides have decided they would prefer war to sanity, there is little others can do to prevent it. But a dirty war is unacceptable, including one that targets the messenger. *Chettria Patrakar* would hope that the medley of the international players in the island nation would ensure that, at the very least, the basic codes of humanitarian law are respected by both sides.

What's wrong with Indian editors? Have they forgotten their role of reporting with diligence and leaving heavy opinion for the editorial and op-ed pieces? Some of Delhi's editors have long thought of themselves as agenda-setters and direct participants. Some newspapers have a defined ideological stand, with every report viewed according to this prism, and wherein their journalists have no hesitation in framing stories tailored to this agenda. *The Asian Age* does not like proximity to the US, and detests the present foreign-policy establishment. So after the Havana meeting, we saw the paper go all over town with speculation - in the news reports, mind you - about the US hand in the deal. On the other side, *The Indian Express* is the leading advocate of engagement with the US and hates the left. So its bureau chief in Delhi decides to go to Israel while Lebanon was being bombed, and wrote stories about how the Indian comrades should draw inspiration from the Israeli left, which was supporting the invasion. Uggh, give me Bhutan's *Kuensel* anyday!

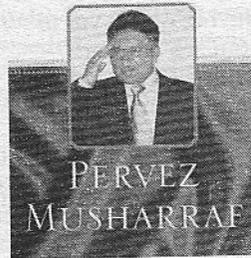
Once in a while, Bombay directors can sense the pulse of the people just right. And Hindi cinema must be lauded for these few times when people can really relate to it. This year's biggest hits, *Rang De Basanti* and *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, were entertaining movies with contrasting messages; while the former



used violence to solve present ills, the latter rediscovered M K Gandhi for the urban youth and India Shining crowd. But there was one similarity that added another level of welcome - the use of radio to pass on the central message of each film. At critical turning points, and in the both the films' climaxes, the protagonists relied on radio broadcasts to convey their messages. Not television screens. Not online chatting. Not mobile text messages. And that struck a note, for most Southasians are radio people, turning to these ubiquitous little transmitters for information and entertainment. Radio remains our most important and empowering tool, but it is an idea only a few policymakers understand well. And that explains why radio still has not received the attention it deserves. Perhaps Bollywood movies will succeed where decades of activism has failed in rejuvenating radio.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

A MEMOIR



Author-publisher contracts have just gained a new sanctity. And who else but Pervez Musharraf to have brought them back into vogue? He would like us to believe that an agreement with a New York-based publisher has sealed his lips. After having raised a furore by revealing that the US had threatened to bomb Pakistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, President Musharraf suddenly went mum on the issue when questioned during a recent joint press conference with George W Bush. "I would like to - I am launching my book on the 25th, and I am honour-bound to [publisher] Simon & Schuster not to comment on the book before that day," said the man who has thought little of backing out on honourable promises made about Pakistan's democracy timetable. Whether deft diplomatic manoeuvring or a publicity stunt to boost his book sales, President Musharraf is one smart Southasian.

- Chettria Patrakar

The two Punjabs: Drifting apart?

People-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan will mean nothing if commerce does not pick up. An appreciation of Indo-Pakistani prospects requires looking at Punjab-Punjab.

BY HARTOSH SINGH BAL

Once again, with Manmohan Singh and Pervez Musharraf meeting in Havana, we are likely to get back to the slow business that defines the peace process between India and Pakistan. Amidst the rhetoric about people-to-people contact, talk will yet again veer back to initiatives that can bring the two Punjabs closer.

But so far, what is remarkable about the process is the extent to which symbolic gestures that reach across the Atari-Wagah border have substituted for any real achievement. In between the only two definable achievements – the Delhi-Lahore bus in 1999 and the Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus in March 2006, as far as 'Punjab' is concerned – the peace process replicates the cooperative belligerence of the 'beating retreat' ceremony at Wagah (*See accompanying story, "Their vengeance"*). Over the years, jawans on the two sides of the border have learned to march in step for the ceremony, mirroring every gesture of aggression the other summons, much in the fashion of the expulsion and counter-expulsion of diplomats that takes place here after every round of violence in India or Pakistan.

Spectators on either side of the Wagah border exhort their jawans throughout the ceremony, but once the charade is done for the day they wander as close to the border as they can, to peer at their counterpart citizens. There is little to separate the two – the faces, features and languages are the same, perhaps a few more *sherwanis* on one side and a few more turbans on the other. And on this similarity, nostalgia has created an edifice of 'people-to-people' contact that really amounts to very little.

The fact is, much of the cultural contact has been based on myths that some people on either side of the border are content to sustain. Even if we leave aside the traffic generated – both across the border and in the media – by the select few journalists and artists who seem to form a part of every official and unofficial peace delegation, there is much that we get

to hear about cultural commonality and shared heritage that does not stand up to scrutiny.

Bonhomie, and nothing more

It is sufficient to look at the efficacy of the people-to-people contact in the context of the two Punjabs, because if it does not work in this setting then the chances of success on the larger scene are remote. The shared heritage, the composite culture of Punjab, is often cited as a basis for this process. But this Punjabinity did not come in the way of the massacres of Partition; if anything, it is far less relevant today. To ignore this is to ignore what has transpired on both sides of the border over the past 60 years.

In the Indian Punjab, the politico-religious Akali rhetoric, when it seeks to consolidate Sikh votes, revolves around a history of oppression and resistance that ties together Mughals and Muslims. With elections due in the state early next year, such language will be prominently displayed. It is precisely this rhetoric that explains the ease with which the Akalis have established and maintained an alliance with the BJP. A party that rightly made much of the violence unleashed by the Congress against the Sikhs in 1984 has remained unmoved by the active connivance of the BJP government in Gujarat in the mass murder of Muslims.

This is particularly important because the Punjabi identity in India has increasingly become identified with the Sikhs. The Hindu Punjabis over time have distanced themselves from the language, a process that started with the Punjabi *suba* movement, which sought statehood on a linguistic basis but at the same time was structured such that a territorial unit could be carved out where the Sikhs would be a majority. Moreover, in a state where the language was largely identified with the rural Jat peasant, the urban Hindu shirked from an open affiliation with a culture that was largely seen as rustic.

Irrespective of who may be to blame, the singing of ghazals in the aftermath of the Bombay blasts is a meaningless act, but surely no one would object to the passage of food grains across the border.

This distancing was exacerbated during the years of militancy and terror in Punjab, in the 1980s and 1990s. The movement for Khalistan, always a minority movement even among the Sikhs, was fuelled by an increasing narrowing of vision, which failed to see the Sikhs as rooted in an Indian context.

In fact, the only positive change that has come about in this attitude has largely been a result of the spread of cable television and mass media. Motivated in part by the popularity of Punjabi music, it is suddenly no longer considered unfashionable for the urban young to speak the Punjabi language. It is still too early to say, however, just how far-reaching the ramifications of this shift will be.

Across the border, the situation seems to be worse. The state of Pakistan is inseparable from the Punjabi Muslims who control every aspect of the nation state's functioning. But in a schizophrenic act rooted in the very ideas that led to Partition, Punjabi itself was given short shrift. An entire population that continues to term itself Punjabi has no access to schooling in the language itself, and there is no major Punjabi newspaper in Pakistan, whereas there is a surfeit in Urdu and Sindhi.

In fact, if the reality of this Punjab-Punjab divide were to be measured, the diasporas in England, Canada or the US would provide more than enough evidence. Nowhere has the gulf between Punjabis on religious terms been bridged by the notion of a shared cultural identity. There is nothing preventing the intermingling of the Muslim Punjabi and the Sikh/Hindu Punjabi communities in those countries, but the fact is it has not taken place. Recent events have even seen Sikhs in the West making greater efforts to distance themselves from Muslims – Punjabi or not – in order to avoid hate attacks or security screening at airports.

When Punjabis from India and Pakistan meet in London or Toronto, there is generally genuine warmth and a desire to speak a common language; yet every such encounter is still marked by subjects neither chooses to discuss. These issues continue to divide Punjabis where they are – the bonhomie remains just that, leading to nothing substantive, as is increasingly the case with the Indo-Pakistani peace process.

Economics, not travel

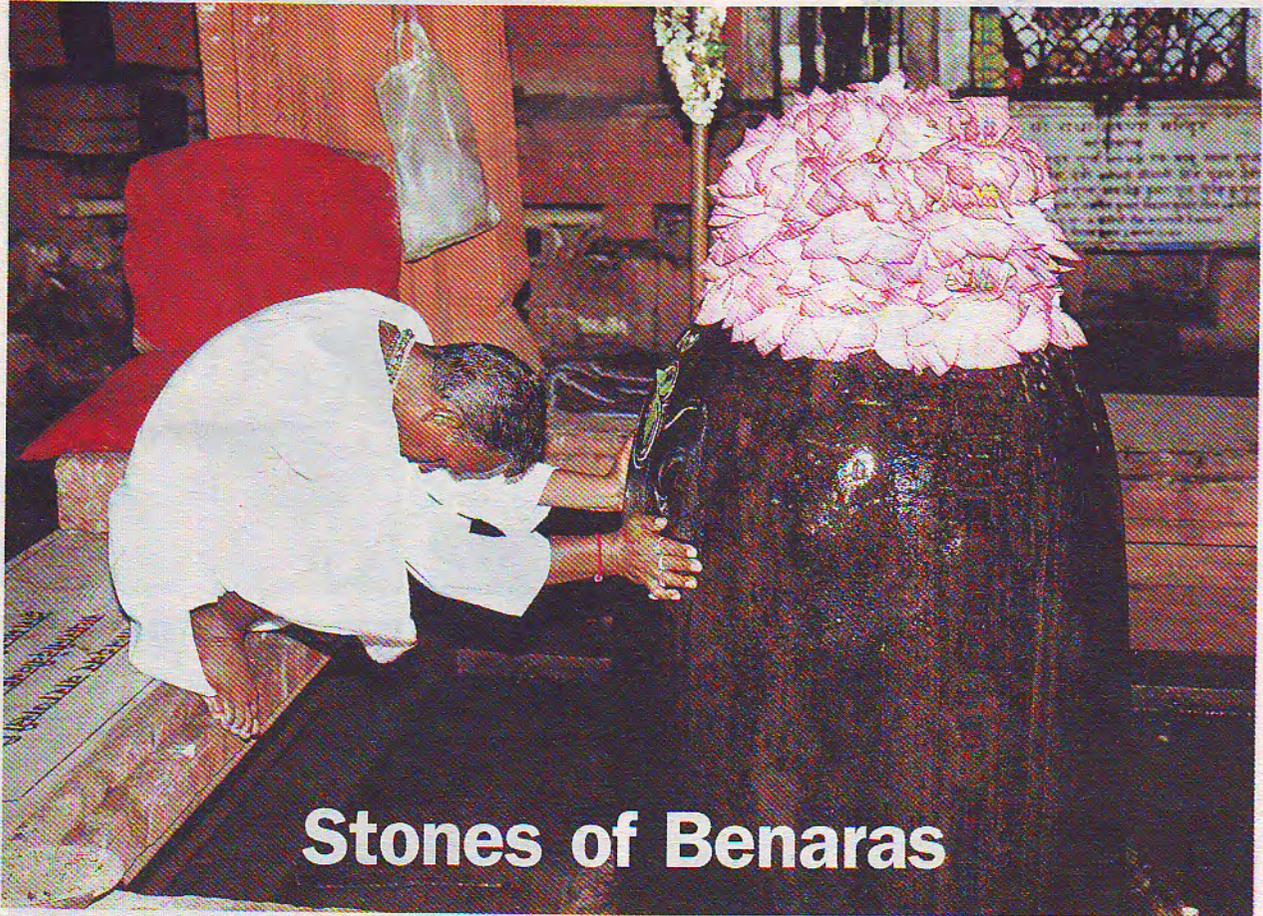
But would this imply that people-to-people contact is meaningless? Not quite – it is just that it remains peripheral, and there is no reason to put much store by it in the absence of other longer-lasting efforts at inter-linkage. In the existing climate, the euphoria generated by sentimentality can be no real basis for a peace process. Neither does this argument claim that there was never a basis for a shared culture; it is a statement that, under the existing circumstances, there is none.

The area where progress can be made, and on which there should be no real disagreement on either side of the border, has to do with economic linkages as opposed to the mere people-to-people contact by peaceniks and artists. Perhaps the best example of this is the Majha region of Punjab state. This is the area around Amritsar that lies north of the Beas River. Before Partition, the two cities of this region, Lahore and Amritsar, were respectively the cultural and financial centres of all of Punjab. While Lahore has retained its pre-eminence in Pakistani Punjab, Amritsar found itself a trading centre on a closed border. A region that had linguistically, politically and religiously dominated Punjab sank into insignificance. That terrorism in the state – a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to any one straightforward explanation – was largely confined to the Majha region was no coincidence.

But over the past four years there has suddenly grown an air of optimism in the Majha, one that is not generated by the prospect of being able to travel to Lahore. The possibility of trade across the Wagah border has sent land prices soaring, and this is not to be seen only as a speculative measure related to local concerns. This has brought in money and investment from outside that is already affecting the so-far moribund economy of the region. Every hiccup in the peace process is today greeted with anxiety in the Majha. Some trade, though limited, has begun across the land route to Lahore. Thus far, however, it has been Islamabad that has been reticent in allowing substantive progress on this score.

Curiously, even when President Musharraf argues for a peace process that can continue through the incidents of violence, he does not realise that he is making the strongest case for trade ties. People-to-people contact will be a natural calamity of any violent act in the two countries. Irrespective of who may be to blame, the singing of ghazals in the aftermath of the Bombay blasts is a meaningless act, but surely no one would object to the passage of food grains across the border. Even Indian hawks do not object to a process wherein the balance of payment is naturally in India's favour. For Pakistan, this creates a durable process of the very nature that the Pakistani president is arguing for.

Trade ties create linkages that are resistant to the periodic fluctuations in the Indo-Pakistani relationship. In the absence of any real progress on the Kashmir issue – and it is difficult to see where that progress can come from in the short term – commerce between Punjab and Punjab, and between India and Pakistan, remains the only guarantee of real achievement. Today, the irony of the fact that the Majha is the most significant backer of the peace process should not be lost on anyone. It was on this soil, after all, that the bloodiest and most significant battles of the 1965 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan took place.



Stones of Benaras

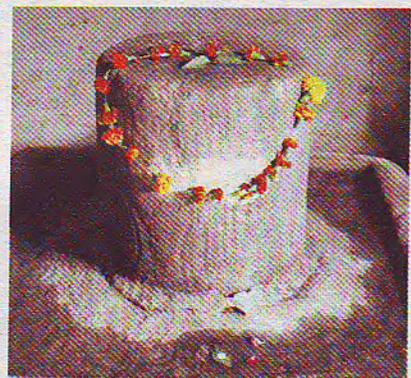
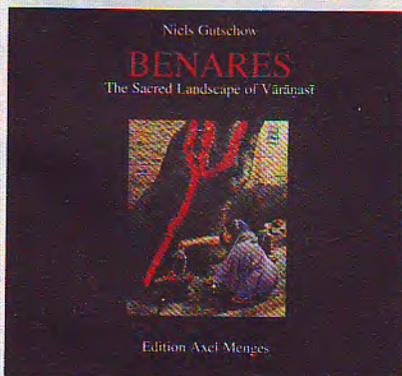
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **NIELS GUTSCHOW**

Niels Gutschow has worked as a conservation architect and an architectural anthropologist in Nepal, Orissa and Benaras. He currently divides his time between Bhaktapur, Nepal and Heidelberg, Germany, where he teaches Southasian urban rituals at the University of Heidelberg's South Asia Institute. In his most recent book, *Benares*, Gutschow studies the "locative aspect of religion" in the holy city,

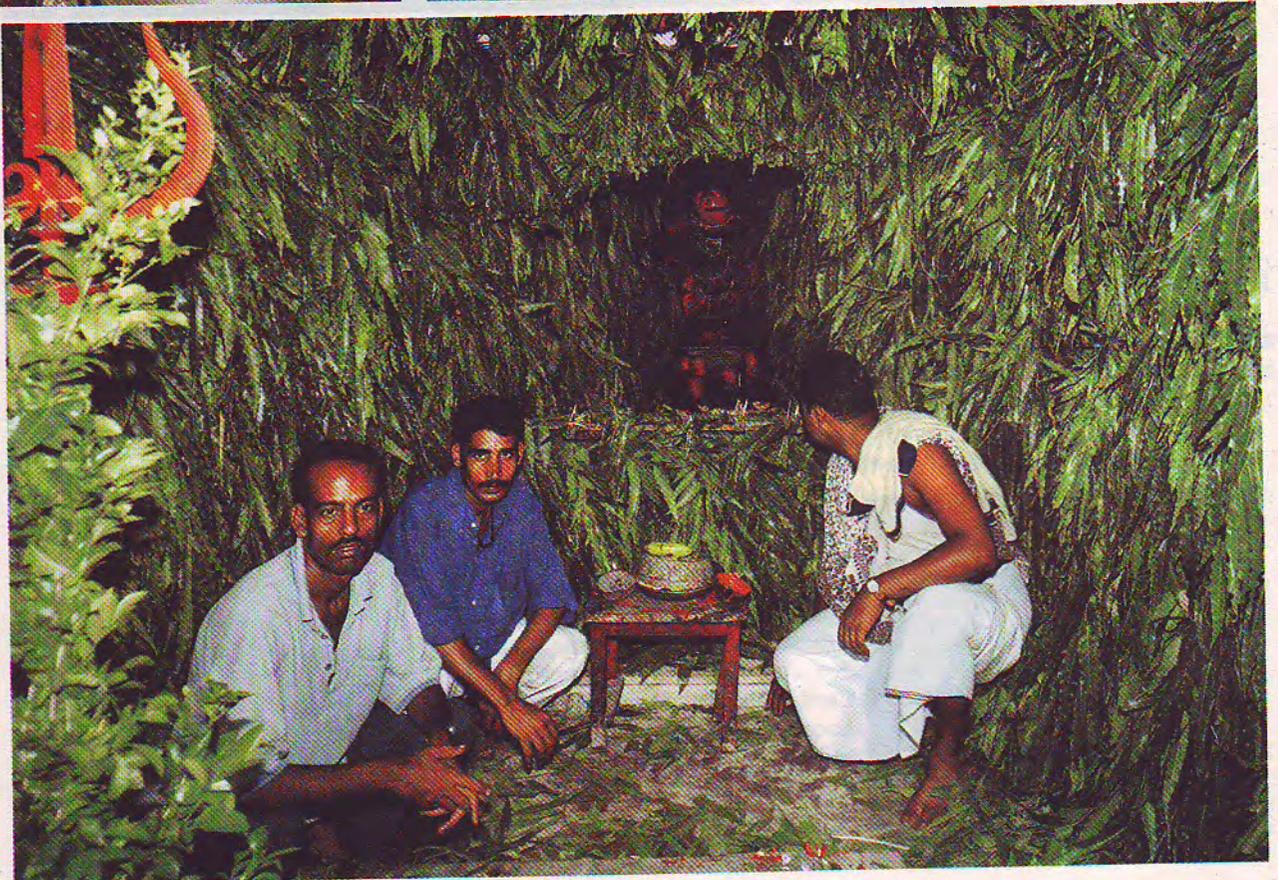
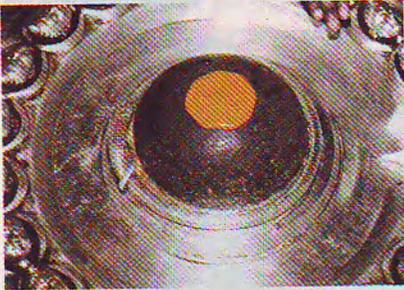
presenting the reader with a variety of ways in which Benaras's sacred spaces have been documented. These include 'indigenous pictorial maps' from the 18th century, depictions that seek to represent both symbolic and built realities; 'built maps', in which Benaras's sacred landscape is reconstructed in three-dimensional form in temple complexes far from the city; panoramas, both pictorial and photographic; and modern topographical maps of Western cartographic origin. Gutschow's study "obsesses" over locating places indicated in these documents.

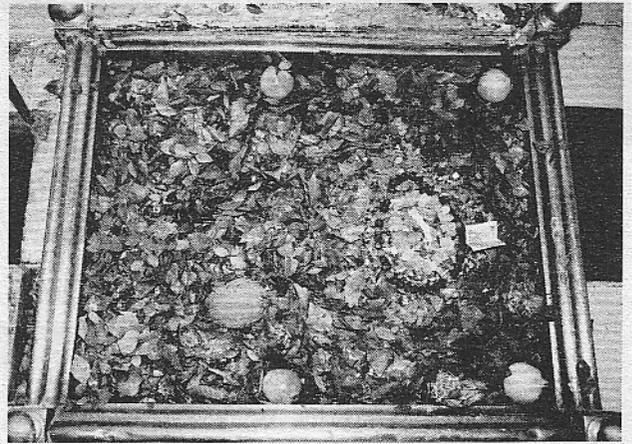
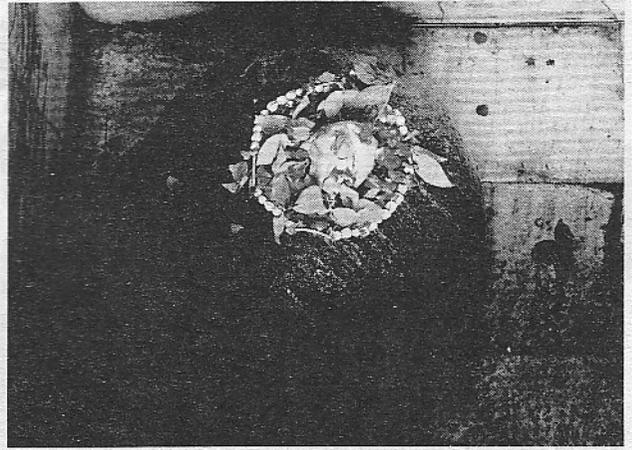
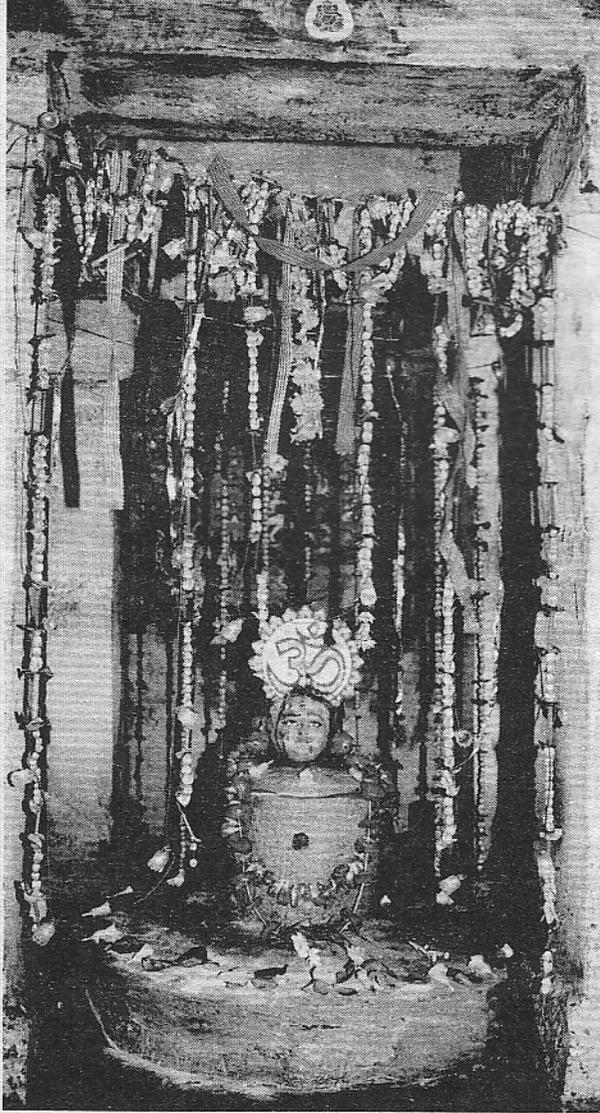
The photographs presented here are of *lingams* found during this search, initiated at first when Gutschow received a rare copy of Pandit Kailasnath Sukul's 1876 *Kashidarpana*, a picture map rich

with symbols and text associated with historical documents and contemporary Benaras topography. Benaras, he writes, "abounds with stones. Beyond individual stones, which are either treated as 'self-existent' *lingas* or as installed ones, innumerable, preferably egg-shaped stones seek the company of fabricated ones as if to demonstrate the limitlessness of Shiva's presence and power." ▲



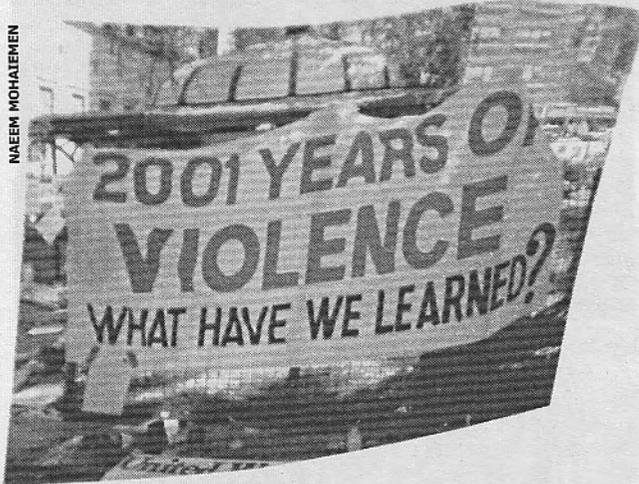
LONDON: EDITION AXEL MENGES 2006





Go West, young Muslim

NAEEM MOHAIEMEN



Go West, young man, and grow up with the country.
 – John Soule, *Terre Haute Express* (1851)

BY NAEEM MOHAIEMEN

A few months after the Afghan war, I was sitting in the Dhaka office of Sajjad Sharif. Sajjad is an art critic and associate editor of the Dhaka-based *Prothom Alo*, a progressive newspaper often under attack from Islamists. The regular tea circle was assembled (artists, poets and journalists), talking about the ‘Muslim street’ (that elusive creature!).

For years, my personal dual existence between New York and Dhaka had been fairly unremarkable and unremarked upon. Now there was suddenly a desire to boil everyone down to their ‘essence’. I was supposed to be some sort of reflective surface for ‘the American street’ – a farcical concept that I rejected.

In the middle of a heated debate, Sajjad lightened the mood with a popular street saying of the time:

“Tomorrow, if Osama said, ‘All my jihadi brothers, come and join me!’”

“Yes?”

“10 percent of Bangladesh would leave for Afghanistan.”

“Bolen ki bhai?”

“Yes, it’s true.”

“But if the next day, Bush announced ‘Jobs for everyone’...”

“Hya?”

“90 percent of Bangladesh would line up in front of the American embassy!”

This joke reminded me of many more-prosaic encounters in the houses of various Dhaka ‘seniors’ that I am obligated to visit. The conversation always

veers to, “*Oi desh e pore thako kibhabe baba?*” (How do you live in that country?). But soon after *cha-biscuit*, there is also the revelation that their eldest son or daughter will be taking the US college entrance SAT in the near future. “Do you have any advice about applying to American colleges?” they ask.

These observations are not meant to minimise or trivialise the varied opposition to the new imperialism project. But we can at least complicate the conversation by looking to the revulsion and fascination projected on the same surface. A similar sentiment seems to be at play in the European *idee fixe* about American power and culture.

Things are of course not quite so simple. Nor will they stay the same. Thoughts about America will be replaced by other focuses, including India Shining, China Rising and all the rest. Al-Jazeera or Zee TV may yet replace CNN as the most-watched television channel; indeed, CNN is already not well-watched in many parts. Then again, certain shifts may be temporary. Recall the obsession with Japan for a brief moment during the ‘80s, when Japanese buying sprees of American institutions inspired paranoid fantasies like Sean Connery’s *Rising Sun* – 007 always knew where to go for the next big threat. Only a fool, or Nostradamus, makes predictions without caveats.

Dar al-harb?

I was thinking of all this as I was studying new data released by the US Department of Homeland Security, which is also responsible for immigration. A new report shows that, contrary to many expectations, Muslim immigration to America has increased, after an initial drop, since the attacks of 11 September 2001.

Of course, not every statistic gives a full picture. Professor Moustafa Bayoumi points out that other factors, such as the post-9/11 overhaul of the immigration system, may have allowed for faster processing of new immigration applications. But the numbers are still startling. In 2005 nearly 96,000 people from Muslim countries became legal permanent US residents -- more than in any year in the last two decades. More than 40,000 arrivals from Muslim countries were admitted into the US in 2005, the highest annual number since 2001. The greatest number of admissions came from Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Muslim immigration to the US initially increased during the mid-1960s, after immigration quotas were removed. In contrast with Europe, Muslims who came to the US tended to be more educated, reflecting an immigration system that also had preference for white-collar migration. A larger portion of immigrants from

Muslim countries had graduate degrees than did American citizens, and their average salary was 20 percent higher. This trend paralleled the high levels of achievement of other educated immigrant groups, as well.

A photo that illustrated a recent *New York Times* story on this topic was taken on Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn, once again a bustling centre of Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants. This is the same Coney Island Avenue targeted when 'special registration' and immigration raids went particularly after Pakistanis, and to a lesser extent Bangladeshis. At that time, writers evoked *Krystallnacht*, the German anti-Jewish pogrom of 1938 – a comparison that raised hackles, but also pointed to shared struggles between Jewish and Muslim migrants. That same Coney Island now wears a hopeful look in this photo. Fluttering American flags in the background, hugging *Musollis* in the foreground. It looks for a moment like a moon alignment that brought together Eid and the Fourth of July.

What is the social position of Muslims in these countries, where they are in the minority? Swiss philosopher Tariq Ramadan has explored a new definition of *dar al-harb*. In the consensual view, a country is *dar al-harb* when both the legal system and government are non-Islamic. *Dar al-harb* translates in one formulation as 'Abode of War'. If law and political systems define this, then even a country like Bangladesh, the majority of which is Muslim, is still *dar al-harb*, as are Indonesia, Malaysia and the like. This is meant to infer a territory where Muslims are neither protected nor able to live in peace.

A competing vision argues that it is the condition of populations, and safety of the same, that defines *dar al-harb*. Ramadan argues that: "Muslims may actually feel safer in the West, as far as the free exercise of their religion is concerned, than in some so-called Muslim countries."

Ramadan's view can be interpreted to say that America and Europe, having large Muslim populations that maintain – even after all recent events – some measure of religious freedom, can also be defined as *dar al-islam*. This is also a partial conflation of freedom of speech with other freedoms. Ironically, some of London's most fiery preachers would not have the same leeway back 'home'. Political Islamist theologian Sayyid Qutb, who inspired many generations of radical groups, was brutally tortured by the Egyptian state. It was, in fact, this experience that expanded his focus from the West – an object of loathing after his time in America – towards advocating assassination of Muslim leaders who failed to follow traditional doctrine.

If Muslims feel at least some form of safety in the West, Muslim immigration will continue and will eventually create a hybridised Islam, as postulated in Ramadan's "To be a European Muslim". But there is another aspect to consider. If the West is not *dar al-harb*

as per the old definition, militant groups' manifestos to attack the West loses a key theological underpinning. This is not to say that militants will read Ramadan and change their strategy. But it can outline the beginnings of a counter-debate, one that looks at the roots of Islamic theology to counter the bastardisation of the same.

Frozen history

We have two visions on display in recent discussions of 11 September's legacy. One is the dark, apocalyptic view encapsulated in a recent essay by the US journalist Roger Cohen:

The United States has grown darker. Two wars lurk on a leafy street. Fear haunts the political discourse. A century that dawned brightly now offers conflict without end. Beyond US borders, no longer those of a sanctuary, the fanatical group called al-Qaeda that turned planes into missiles has morphed into a diffuse anti-Western ideology followed, in some measure, by millions of angry Muslims. They are convinced the United States is an infidel enemy bent on humiliating Islam. Anti-Americanism has become the world's vogue idea.

Now, if "millions" had truly joined the jihad, there would be very few buildings left standing. But never mind that – the man is writing with a flourish, and can be allowed a moment of hyperventilation. Let us turn now to an article written by another US journalist, Andrea Elliott, about the new report on Muslim immigration:

[Muslims] have made the journey unbowed by tales of immigrant hardship, and despite their own opposition to American policy in the Middle East. They come seeking the same promise that has drawn foreigners to the United States for many decades, according to a range of experts and immigrants: economic opportunity and political freedom.

In years past, in a more navel-gazing state of mind, on every 9/11 anniversary I found myself writing pedestrian, sentimental entries about my own experiences as a New York resident: biking downtown after the towers collapsed to look for my then-partner (she had been evacuated), tracking down Bengali victims' families, losing a fond memento at airport security, and the like. These are not unique experiences, nor are they – after thousands of memorial stories – particularly emotive today.

I wrote in a naive state of mind about the end of technology in the face of box-cutters. That sense of a frozen history has been blown away by subsequent wars, detentions, rising tensions and revenge attacks. On the fifth anniversary of that event, it is time to look beyond only these stories, and to formulate theory, vision and trajectory for a more humane future – a shared world, beyond wars without end.

The new reasoning of Gendun Chopel

BY FELIX HOLMGREN



Angry Monk
 Directed by
Luc Schaedler, Switzerland
2005
 97 minutes

The first few shots of the documentary film *Angry Monk* effectively shatter the common images of Tibet as either an otherworldly spiritual haven or a communist wasteland inhabited by a broken people. In their place, the juxtapositions of the film's opening sequence suggest a universe similar to those familiar from a certain class of representation of post-Independence India: a world of endlessly mutating forms; of ironic overlap of hi-tech and superstition; an amalgam of the medieval, the bombastically modern and the timeless.

The Swiss director Luc Schaedler attempts to survey 100 years of Tibetan experience, in all its trauma and contradictions. The film is scrupulously free of nostalgia and awestruck overtones, and is unsentimental whether discussing the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, the narrow-mindedness of pre-communist feudal Tibet, or the plight of the modern Tibetan diaspora. *Angry Monk* presupposes that its audience has already heard all about the ancient, exalted and unique culture of Tibet, and the film positions itself as a corrective to the admiring sigh that threatens to keep Tibet forever in a one-dimensional realm, sidelined from the changing map of history and geopolitics.

Schaedler portrays this 'other Tibet' by retracing the steps of Gendun Chopel, a man who died more than a half-century ago, having exerted little influence during his lifetime either in or out of Tibet. He was a brilliant and original scholar, but would have been remembered by few had it not been for his extensive travels in Southasia, and his numerous written accounts of his many years on the road.

By roughly sketching Chopel's life story, *Angry Monk* traverses considerable geographic and intellectual territory, from the remotest reaches of the Tibetan plateau all the way to Sri Lanka; from the provincial monastery where Chopel baffled his fellow monks with his unconventional views, to the turmoil of India's Independence struggle and the formation of the 1940s Chinese-friendly Tibetan Progressive Party.

While following this route in the linear manner of a road movie, the film nevertheless weaves an intricate pattern where past and present, personal and public, regional and global reflect each other. As Chopel's dissent from Tibet's political and religious establishment grows, culminating in his imprisonment by the Lhasa government, the film delivers its critique of Tibetan society in the form of an insider's view – an evaluation that otherwise, given Tibet's tribulations and the director's inescapable identity as coloniser, could have come across as rather odious.

Indeed, some have seen *Angry Monk* as an act of violence against an already downtrodden people. The film in no way paints a full picture of Tibet's modern history or Gendun Chopel's life and oeuvre, but it does grant the Tibetans the dignity of being treated as inhabitants of the same planet as the rest of us – a nation among nations, for better and worse. The main complaint – albeit an unfair one – that can be levelled against *Angry Monk* is this: had it been made by a Tibetan, it would have represented a milestone in Tibet's struggle for a renewed identity.

Hero of our age

Although the figure of Gendun Chopel is somewhat secondary to *Angry Monk's* agenda, the choice of protagonist is almost self-evident. Chopel's reputation has been growing steadily for several decades; he is now not only widely regarded as one of the most important Tibetan intellectuals of the last century, but has also become a cultural hero for a generation of Tibetans. The Dalai Lama is only one among many admirers who name Gendun Chopel as their intellectual predecessor.

Wherein lay his greatness? One of Schaedler's interviewees expresses it succinctly: "He introduced a new kind of knowledge to Tibet." (Schaedler himself excessively dubs Chopel "the initiator of critical and intellectual thought within Tibetan society.") Present from an early age, Chopel's faculty for empirical and objective reasoning seems to have matured under the influence of Rahul Sankrityayan, a multilingual traveler, scholar, writer, Marxist and Independence fighter whom Chopel met in Lhasa in 1934, and with whom he subsequently traveled in Tibet, Nepal and India.

Sankrityayan, who had become a Buddhist monk in 1923, introduced Chopel to the circle of the Maha Bodhi Society, the single most important organisation in

the early history of the Buddhist modernist movement. The Society worked energetically to revive pilgrimage to recently discovered ancient sites of Buddhist worship in India (such as Bodhgaya), and its ideology emphasised Buddhism's compatibility with modern science and ideals of social equity. Chopel was greatly impressed by the writings and deeds of the Society's then recently deceased founder, the Sri Lankan Anagarika Dharmapala, and adopted the rationalist and ecumenical programme of Dharmapala and his followers.

During his time in India, Chopel started writing articles and letters trying to offer other Tibetans a glimpse of the marvellous things he had seen and learned, and to urge them to study and accept the advantages of "the new reasoning", as he called science. He chided them for refusing to recognise that the world is round, and for failing to use rigorous logical reasoning to establish the location of ancient holy sites. (His own guidebook to Buddhist pilgrimage sites in Southasia included a chapter with information on relevant railroad routes and fares.) But his tone was often glum, and in a late poem he summed up his misgivings about the Tibetans' ability to accept change: "In Tibet, everything that is old / Is a work of Buddha / And everything that is new / Is a work of the devil / This is the sad tradition of our country."

Chopel, then, was Tibet's first apostle of scientific rationalism – not an achievement that necessarily stirs up more enthusiasm than can be contained in a footnote in a history book. Rather, it is Chopel's romantic sense of loneliness, his taste for iconoclasm and his victimisation by the Tibetan authorities, in conjunction with his novel ways of thinking, that make him an important point of reference so long after his death. For Tibetans dealing with the realities of occupation and exile, and for Tibet aficionados who find few figures in Tibet's cultural pantheon with whom they can identify, Chopel seems to have left a secret trail across the Himalaya. He is a hero not of his own age, but of ours, the age of partial and painful globalisation: an "outsider who was always open to new things, he eventually became a stranger in his homeland and homeless in foreign lands – a wanderer between worlds," in the words of *Angry Monk's* press kit.

One episode, recounted in many versions, relates how Chopel was once approached by a group of Tibetan scholars who wanted to debate points of philosophy with him. When they arrived at the appointed location, they found Chopel smoking a cigarette, and dropping the ashes on the head of a Buddha statue. Chopel, who all his life had been known to be impossible to defeat in debate,

proceeded to argue with the group of learned men about whether or not such behaviour was proper. With reportedly impeccable logic, he proved that indeed it was, and his opponents left bewildered and disgusted.

Such stories not only reinforce Chopel's oddball image. They also suggest a much-cherished Tibetan cultural type inherited from Southasian Tantrism: the "crazy yogi", who transforms his consciousness through spon-taneous behaviour and the deliberate breaking of taboos. While some conclude that Chopel was most likely such a highly advanced yogi, others ascribe to him almost superhuman abilities, or consider him a demon in disguise.

No eternal truths

Beyond cosmopolitan or spiritual projections, Chopel was nothing if not a stubborn seeker of truth, a 'wanderer between worlds' of knowledge. With the publication of *The Madman's Middle Way*, US Buddhist scholar Donald Lopez, Jr's long-awaited translation of *The Adornment for Nagarjuna's Thought*, Chopel's treatise on the nature of knowledge, English-language readers will be able to deepen their appreciation of Chopel's synthesising genius. Devoid of the formulaic cool characteristic of virtually all Tibetan philosophic writing, *The Adornments*'s 250 short paragraphs – many quirky and witty – proclaim epistemological and metaphysical insights accumulated during 20 years of monastic studies and more than a decade of travel and research.

The power of Chopel's vision was not to be found merely in exhortations to Tibetans to abolish their old ways and emulate the West; he was, after all, as critical of European colonialism as he was of Tibet's feudalism. It also lay in the complete openness that allowed him to penetrate to the core of the canons of foreign thought he encountered during the course of his travels, and to that of his own intellectual heritage, while stripping away all that was inessential or antiquated. When using logical analysis, Chopel said, one should be like a goldsmith who throws everything – ore, sand and whatever else – into the furnace, confident that in the end only gold will remain.

"The intelligent person should accept, from any source, whatever he sees as well explained, regarding it as if it were his own. Such truths do not belong exclusively to anyone, since they are equally objective for all ... as sunlight, for instance, works impersonally for everyone with



The Madman's Middle Way: Reflections on reality of the modernist Tibetan monk Gendun Chopel

by Donald S Lopez
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2006

sight." These words were not written by Gendun Chopel, but by the 7th century philosopher Chandrakirti. They reflect a half-millennium of inter-sectarian debate between Vedist, Jain and Buddhist thinkers, in the course of which the necessity of accepting the ultimate authority of logical reasoning became obvious.

Curiously, however, Chandrakirti is remembered and studied (in particular in Tibet, where his influence is of monumental importance) not for his objectivist pronouncements, but for his resolute and elegantly argued refusal to accept the existence of any objective basis for human beliefs and practices. This might seem inconsistent with the quote above, but for Chandrakirti and other Mahayana Buddhist philosophers, uncertainty is the necessary complement to rationality. For them, there is regularity and causality in the world only inasmuch as the things we experience are interrelated.

And where everything is interrelated, there is only flux, with no room for eternal truths and foundations. Therefore, Chandrakirti says, let us use reasoning, and realise that all is fleeting, as in a dream.

It is this heritage – a sort of inverse of modern rationalism – that Gendun Chopel builds on in *The Adornment*. The text's discussions belong to a tradition that is distinctly Tibetan, but the flair and originality of their presentation lack precursors. In *The Madman's Middle Way*, Lopez's detailed commentary and inspired introduction open up the text's many historical and philosophical dimensions to patient readers new to the topic. Until Chopel's extensive travel writings are translated and published, this book is likely to remain the most important non-specialist English-language source for the study of Gendun Chopel and his thought.

Kaise jeebo re?

BY RAKESH KALSHIAN

A visit to a mall can be a rather schizophrenic experience. Even while delighting in the wonderful cornucopia of temptations, one cannot help but feel a vague disgust at one's hedonism. This feeling of self-loathing is joined with one of absurdity at the sight of the starving beggar outside, seeking morsels of generosity from the more fortunate. The conscience winces at the sight of abject poverty in the backyards of modern temples of consumerism.

These are two importantly different reactions. The first is an aesthetic revolt against conspicuous consumption; the second, an ethical shiver in the face of conspicuous deprivation. Nature or environment, however, rarely triggers such guilt pangs, because there is a complete disconnect between the city and nature. Urban, capitalist society does not encourage knowledge of the origins of the products sold in its shops. Indeed, for all we know, things that we derive pleasure from – computers, clothes, books – could well be made from materials carrying the bloodstains of some indigenous tribe or the scars of a decimated forest.

Such inchoate feelings will undoubtedly find resonance with many readers. But the acquiring and honing of a sophisticated environmental consciousness is a difficult task: it requires sustained thinking through the politics of the competing desires of communities, classes and nation states, in search of diversity, sustainability and

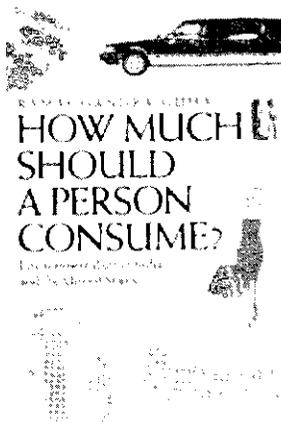
equity in an increasingly interconnected world. Ramachandra Guha's anthology of essays is just such a journey – a fascinating if sometimes bumpy ride through towns, villages and forests of ideas about that most enduring philosophical question: How should one live (*Kaise jeebo re*)? Or, to couch it in ecological terms, how does one reconcile the modern ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity with the fact of an increasingly fragile and imperilled environment?

Most of the pieces in *How Much Should a Person Consume?* are expanded versions of previously written essays and lectures, the overarching theme of which is a comparative history of environmentalism in India and the US. Guha knows of what he speaks; he has been a teacher in several American universities, and has had a long engagement with environmental movements in India. Although he began his scholarly career as a Marxist, he is quick here to repudiate allegiance to any ideology. Instead, one of Marx's popular maxims is inverted to proclaim Guha's motto:

"Environmentalists may wish to change the world, but environmental historians should seek merely to understand and interpret it."

Battling the omnivores

Throughout Guha's narration of the topography of environmental history in these two countries, readers meet with an endless stream of interesting personas, while the author elicits from each their musings on ecology. The entire journey revolves around three utopian philosophies of nature and development, each of which places its emphasis on a different locale: the wilderness, the village



How Much Should a Person Consume?: Thinking through the environment by Ramachandra Guha
New Delhi: Permanent Black 2006

and the city. Guha dubs these three as primitivism, agrarianism and scientific industrialism, and characterises each as both romantic and chauvinistic – as unable to offer the world an alternative that is both socially progressive and ecologically sustainable.

Guha describes the American preservationist John Muir's save-the-wilderness movement as the dominant theme of environmentalism in the US. He contrasts this with India's environmental movements – Chipko, for instance, or the Narmada Bachao Andolan – which he says are essentially radical critiques of received notions of development, as well as a defence of people's rights over their environment.

Two essays included here, "Authoritarianism in the Wild" and "Democracy in the Forest", narrate the clash of ideas over control of India's forests, relating how the conservationists sought to oust Adivasis from reserved forests, and how peoples' movements fought to restore the indigenous peoples' rights over their lands. This disagreement between conservationist and humanist goals remains far from over, as thousands of forest-dwellers continue to be displaced from their homes. *How Much Should a Person Consume?* is particularly harsh on wildlife conservationists.

Equally interesting is Guha's account of the Gandhian brand of environmentalism, which rejects the West's industrial model, instead adopting the village as the sustainable unit of economic life. He contrasts Gandhian ecology with the impassioned critiques of rural life by people like Dalit leader and Indian Constitution architect B R Ambedkar. In a speech during the Constituent Assembly debates, Ambedkar had said, "I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India ... What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?" The ripples of that contest are now turning into waves as, to use Guha's coinage, 'ecosystem people' and ecological refugees join hands to battle over land, water and forests with the omnivores, the all-consuming beneficiaries of the market economy.

Guha's three favourite ecological thinkers each inhabits the intellectual borderlands between the three utopias described above. The first is the Scottish scholar Patrick Geddes, who conceived of the city as an organic extension of the countryside. He came to India in 1914, and was involved in the planning of several cities, including Madras. The second is the American philosopher Lewis Mumford, who during the 1930s wrote prescient ecological histories of the city, tracing its evolution in relation to technology and ecology. Guha writes: "Mumford is rare, possibly unique, among environmental philosophers, in his ability to synthesise and transcend partisan stances on behalf of wilderness, countryside and city." Guha's third favoured ecological thinker is the ecologist Madhav Gadgil, with whom Guha co-authored two books. A PhD in Ecology from Harvard, Gadgil combines a passion for fieldwork with a commitment to solving practical problems – a talent that eventually resulted in a more democratic framing of environmental policy in India.

Sensible bromides

Having given the reader a taste of a wide variety of ideas on the environment, Guha finally tackles the book's titular question: How much should a person or a country consume? If we reject – as the author does – the three environmental utopias, what are we left with? Any attempt to strike a golden mean between equity, sustainability and diversity would deliver a hopelessly complicated mess, amidst a web of individual and national desires. From this perspective, one can certainly sympathise with the utopian turn of a John Muir or a Gandhi, or even some modern economists who, like Mumford, believe that a 'humanising technology' – that is, a technology that is subordinate to human values – could eventually broker a lasting harmony between the city and the countryside.

Guha's question is not merely ecological; it challenges us to think about ethics, aesthetics and the politics of living together. It forces us to consider whether capitalism, which thrives on multiplying desires, may not be fundamentally antithetical to the environmental cause. Of course, this is not to say that a state-controlled economic system would treat the environment any better; but as we are living in an age of triumphant capitalism and globalisation, the context is inescapable.

As for what the future holds for his readers, after moving through a fascinating tour of ecological history Guha lets the delicate tension between the activist and the scholar burst into a six-commandment sermon. While his prescription sounds sensible, it resembles a refrain of familiar bromides – participatory democracy, greater literacy, land reform, health care. All of this sits rather uncomfortably with his call for the privatisation of the production of goods and services, although he does say that social and environmental costs must be taken into account.

At the risk of sounding cynical, such platitudes will not be of much help to those Southasian readers who are as confused as this reviewer when it comes to real-life dilemmas. Should we, for instance, allow extractive industries to flourish, despite the fact that they are socially and ecologically disastrous? Should we continue to build large dams, despite mounting evidence that they cause irreparable damage to the environment? Should we build more nuclear reactors just because they emit less carbon than do thermal power-stations? Indeed, can we continue to grow at annual rates of up to ten percent without irreparably compromising our environment?

Guha's reflections on ecological history make for an excellent introduction to this complicated and crucial subject. But while his optimism – clearly inspired by the pragmatism of the heroes he discusses with such empathy – with regard to a liberal, democratic solution to ecological problems is admirable, it is not reassuring to the perplexed. Perhaps this reviewer came to *How Much Should a Person Consume?* looking not just for a historian who could excavate the past to illuminate the present, but for a philosopher who could enlighten us about where we should be heading.

In the ruins of empire

BY A S PANNEERSELVAN

Globalisation is such a fascinating and powerful idea that it never fails to evoke a strong reaction, either supporting it with a missionary zeal or opposing it with the passion of a suicide bomber. In the avalanche of rhetoric, facts inevitably get blurred; false hopes and dreams hold sway among some, while paranoia and nightmare grips others. To make sense of the ongoing churning, one needs to move away from these two extremes – to look at the fact more closely, provide a historical perspective and caution the rest of us about the pitfalls. Senior journalist Prem Shankar Jha has now taken up that task. While the neo-evangelists of globalisation may term his voice as that of a doomsday prophet, a closer reading of *The Twilight of the Nation State* reveals that Jha is fulfilling the first rule of good journalism: that of a timely whistleblower.

The post-Cold War transformation of the global economy and politics has centred on three utopias: democracy, liberalisation and globalisation. Jha brings to the fore his concern for the unsaid – the pain of transition, and the inherent contradictions in the transformation. Drawing heavily from the works of historian Eric Hobsbawm (who provides an

introduction to this volume), as well as social scientists Giovanni Arrighi and Fernand Braudel, Jha places globalisation within the context of the development of capitalism, and helps readers appreciate how much wishful thinking actually underlies the belief in human progress.

Westphalian meltdown

The Twilight of the Nation State pays particular attention to those thinkers who have realised the failure of the current global politico-economic model. "This is not how it was supposed to work," Jha writes. "For generations, students were taught that increasing trade and investment, coupled with technological change, would drive national productivity and create wealth." But instead the opposite was happening, and few in the developed economies seemed to have noticed the reversal.

Jha poses a series of questions for which economists do not yet have definitive answers:

If the neo-classical theory on wage flexibility had been correct, it still evaded answering the key question: How had the US and Europe achieved very high rates of economic growth with very low rates of unemployment in conditions of equal or greater wage rigidity between 1945 and 1973? What had changed since then? What was the engine that had driven high economic growth in the earlier period but ceased quite suddenly to do so in the 70s?

The chapter "Growing Obsolescence of the Nation State" is also a grim reminder of the limitation of the Marxist reading of the dissolution of the nation state in favour of a proletarian regime.

The nation state is weakening not in favour of proletarian capitalism, the author says, but in favour of neo-conservative capitalism.

The present idea of the nation state flows from the Franco-Spanish treaty signed at Westphalia in Germany during 1648 to end the Thirty Years' War. Almost three-and-a-half centuries later, the end of the Cold War started the erosion of the Westphalian nation state. But instead of a rollback in military bases belonging to the sole remaining superpower – the US – more began to sprout. In addition to US bases that

*The Twilight of the Nation State:
Globalisation, chaos and war*
by Prem Shankar Jha
New Delhi: Vistaar Publications
2006

Foreword by ERIC HOBSBAWM



introduction to this volume), as well as social scientists Giovanni Arrighi and Fernand Braudel, Jha places globalisation within the context of the development of capitalism, and helps readers appreciate how much wishful thinking actually underlies the belief in human progress.

Like any good storyteller, after expounding the basic template of the book Jha moves into two narratives. First, a chronological account starting from the emergence of city-state capitalism in Italy during the 14th century, to George W Bush's extreme form of unilateralism seven centuries later. Second, the author punctuates this chronology with a discussion of the systemic chaos the world is witnessing today. This provides an immediacy that both allows insight into

After 11 September 2001, three cities in Pakistan – Jacobabad, Quetta and Pasni – have become US airbases. During the Afghan war, the US acquired three airbases in that country, at Bagram, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar.

were created during the Cold War, from NATO bases to Japan to South Korea, the first Gulf War gave birth to an American military presence in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Egypt and Djibouti. The break-up of Yugoslavia led to more US bases in Kosovo and Bosnia. The collapse of the Soviet Union helped the US to open bases in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. After 11 September 2001, three cities in Pakistan – Jacobabad, Quetta and Pasni – have become US airbases. During the Afghan war, the US acquired three airbases in that country, at Bagram, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar.

Jha takes pains to explain the intricacies of the US's military expansionism, and contends that the NATO air strikes on Serbia were in fact a rehearsal of empire-building. According to the author, the 350-year-old Westphalian international order came to an end on 19 March 2003, when the US and UK invaded Iraq.

Despite the desire of Washington, DC to exert its global hegemony, the US empire is facing a gradual erosion of power. Instead of creating an alternative space for stability, peace and mutual dependence, Jha

notes, this erosion is generating anarchy and chaos. In the face of the world's darkened future, the author pins his hopes on two particular documents – *In Larger Freedom*, produced in 2005 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and the International Labour Organisation's 2004 *A Fair Globalisation: Creating Opportunities for All*.

At this point, however, *The Twilight of the Nation State* suddenly fails to live up to its full promise. Although these two documents are denouements of the US's neo-conservative policies, they are not potent enough in their imagination to make even a symbolic dent in the empire's armour. The soft, liberal political-correctness that governs the narratives of *In Larger Freedom* and *A Fair Globalisation* softens their critique, offering the usual homilies about development, security, human rights and the rule of law. The lack of vigour, passion and political sharpness – which could hypothetically create an international movement that could dissolve the empire – makes these dissents tame. Ending on such a flat note also gives an unfortunately anticlimactic end to an otherwise a path-breaking book.

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Royal humiliation

Who is the most humiliated man or woman in Asia? Some would suggest Thaksin Shinawatra, ousted by the Thai military for being a bad man. Which he was, as an egotistical wheeler-dealer, an Asian Berlusconi, who ran roughshod over all sensibilities. But the coup was a bad idea, and it leaves the deposed prime minister with a victim-hero image.

Perhaps Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif could vie for the most humiliated duo, for having run a corrupt and inefficient state at different times, but more so for having been exiled and only being able to bark from a distance while the generalissimo runs the country as though he were born to rule. But the passage of time and the turbulence that has suddenly hit the Musharraf aeroplane has largely wiped away the stain of disgrace on the two.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga perhaps, for the ease with which she has dropped from the headlines after being a mover and shaker for so many years. The rise of Mahinda Rajapakse led to a complete eclipse – and there is probably some story in there – but the humiliation is obviously not complete.

Ahh, Saddam Hussain, perhaps? The dictator of Iraq achieved the pit of disgrace when he was discovered by the hated US Marines in a hole in the ground. The subsequent tape of his medical examination showed us Saddam's unkempt hair, provided us a peek down his throat, and a view of the Y-front undergarment he seems to favour. But today he holds forth on television, suited and manicured, humiliating in turn the string of judges that have come and gone.

No, the most humiliated person of Asia today is Gyanendra, as yet king of Nepal. It all started when he decided that he was an 18th century feudocrat who could exploit a Maoist insurgency to bring back absolute kingship. He forgot that today was another time, another century. He used the army for his putsch, and insisted repeatedly on showing his disdain for the people and political parties alike.

Here was a king who believed rather idiotically that the kingship was his property, to do with as he pleased. And so he proceeded to dismantle it. He did not have the intellectual or managerial skills to run the dictatorship he was trying to establish, but managed to rally a few quislings, sycophants and generals for the purpose.

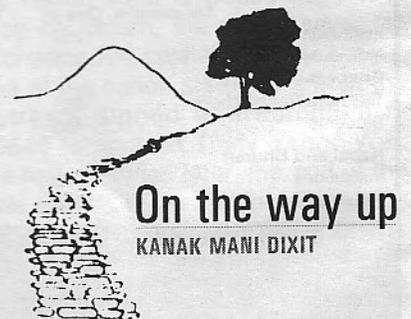
Gyanendra was humiliated by the people of Nepal in the April People's Movement, when millions rallied by the millions and smashed his ambitions. He must have felt like the stupidest guy in the world. Thereafter, parliamentary proclamations have one-by-one taken away Gyanendra's powers and privileges.

His limbs have been clipped so that only the torso today remains. Gyanendra is no longer Supreme Commander of the Nepal Army, no longer the chancellor of assorted universities, his great commandments are no longer on the public hoarding boards, his wealth is now taxable, and the lawmakers are off on an investigative spree regarding his land holdings.

His Majesty's Government is now the Nepal Government, and 'Royal' is off everything else – leaving you with the Nepal Army, the Nepal Airlines, the Nepal embassies, the Chitwan National Park and so on. A whisky named Royal Challenger is said to be facing some difficulty of image, but look at the sorry state of the government-owned pharmaceutical company, Royal Drugs. It is now just 'Drugs'. The dour visage of Gyanendra still marks the rupee notes however, which even the Maoists are forced to accept in their extortion spree for want of alternative legal tender.

Gyanendra's disgrace would have been merely personal had he not, in the process, destroyed the standing of the entire Shah dynasty – going back to his 12th ancestor and 'unifier' of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah (the Great, as the Panchayat autocrats liked to call him), whose vandalised statue remains covered with cloth outside the central secretariat in Kathmandu. The public opinion polls show the monarchy, as expected, plummeting in the public's esteem. Even while some may like the idea of retaining monarchy in some form, however, no one wants this king, nor his desperado son, Paras.

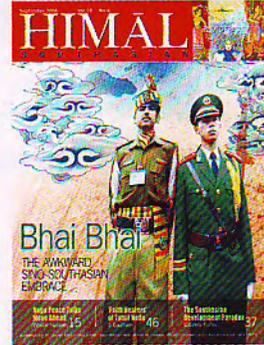
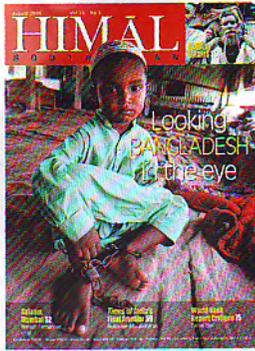
There was once a man who inherited a kingship – one that was at the time relatively whole – from his murdered brother. In all of five years he ran it into the ground. This man was thought by some to be shrewd and wily, but it was only the distance of royalty that had given that false impression. When this man became active, he managed to destroy a historical institution of nearly three centuries' standing. Some historian writing on the demise of monarchies will say that the man was more a fool than a trickster. But when it comes time for mythmaking, there are others who will say that Gyanendra was sent down by providence to dismantle a kingship, in the realisation that the citizenry was quite capable of moving along without a monarchy in the year 2063 (Bikram Era).



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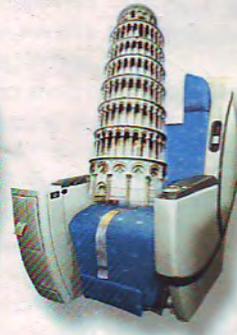
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