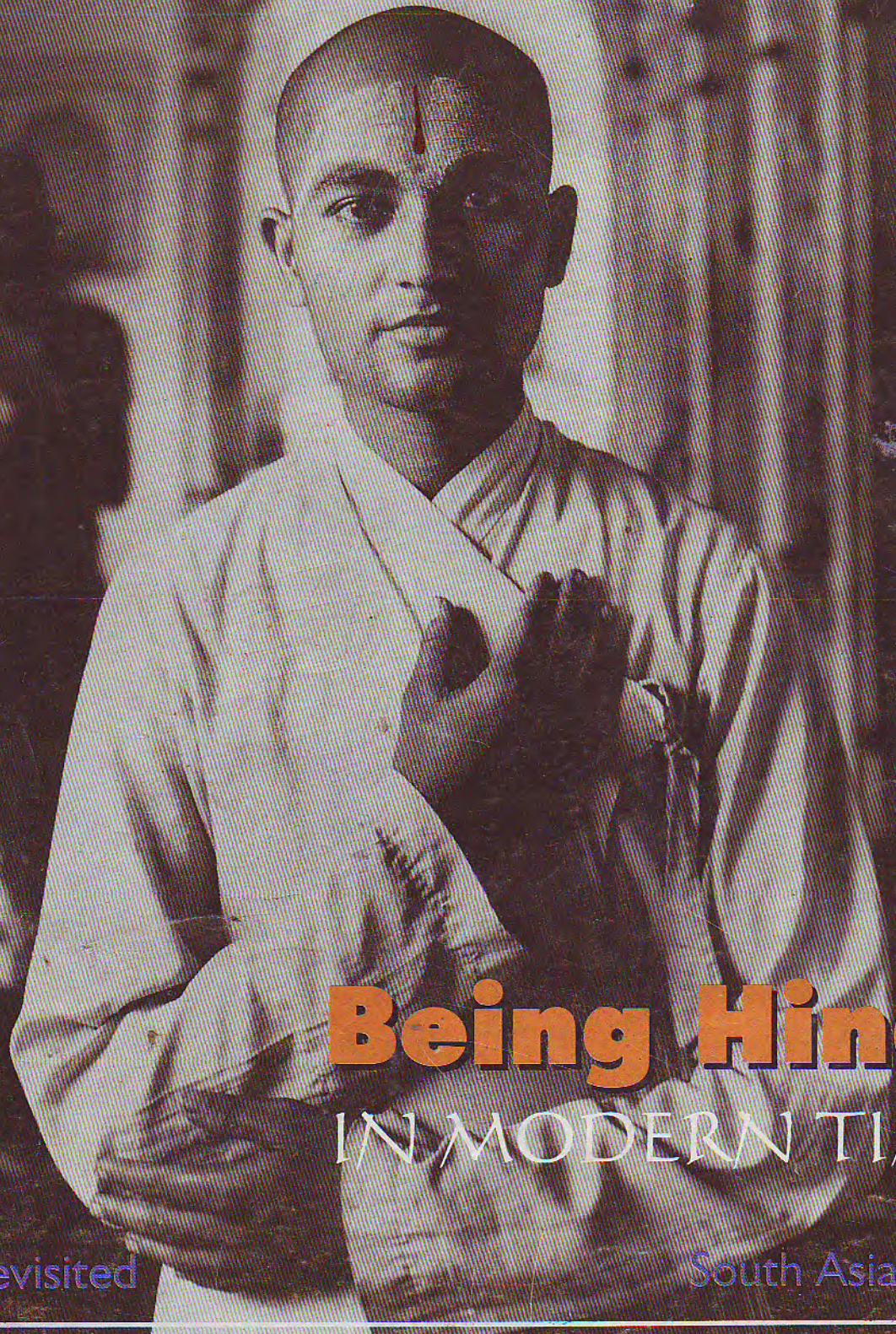


MAY 1996 • Vol 9 number 3

# HIMMAL

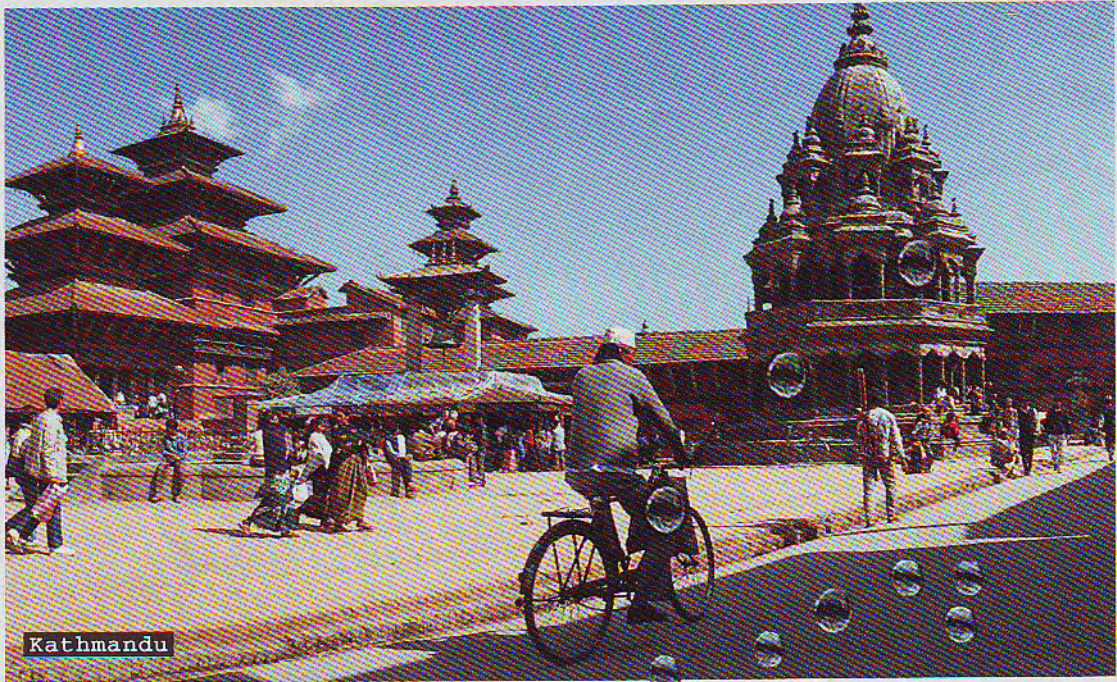
SOUTH ASIA



## Being Hindu IN MODERN TIMES

JVP Revisited


South Asian AIDS



Kathmandu



Also seen in the skies of Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Colombo, Male, Dhaka, Muscat, Kuwait, Sharjah, Fujairah and Ras-al-Khaimah.

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Indian Airlines  
WELCOME ABROAD

# HIMAL

SOUTH ASIA

Vol 9 No 3

May 1996

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### Information for New Readers

Himal magazine was started in 1987 as a journal for the Himalayan region. With the March 1996 issue, the magazine transformed into the first and only South Asian magazine. Every month, Himal South Asia provides readers in the Subcontinent and overseas with reportage and commentary on issues and trends that affect the region's 1.3 billion people.

### We are now on the Web

Himal's latest table of contents, selected articles, subscription information plus other items of interest are now accessible on Internet.  
<http://www.south-asia.com/himal>

For subscription details, see page 54.

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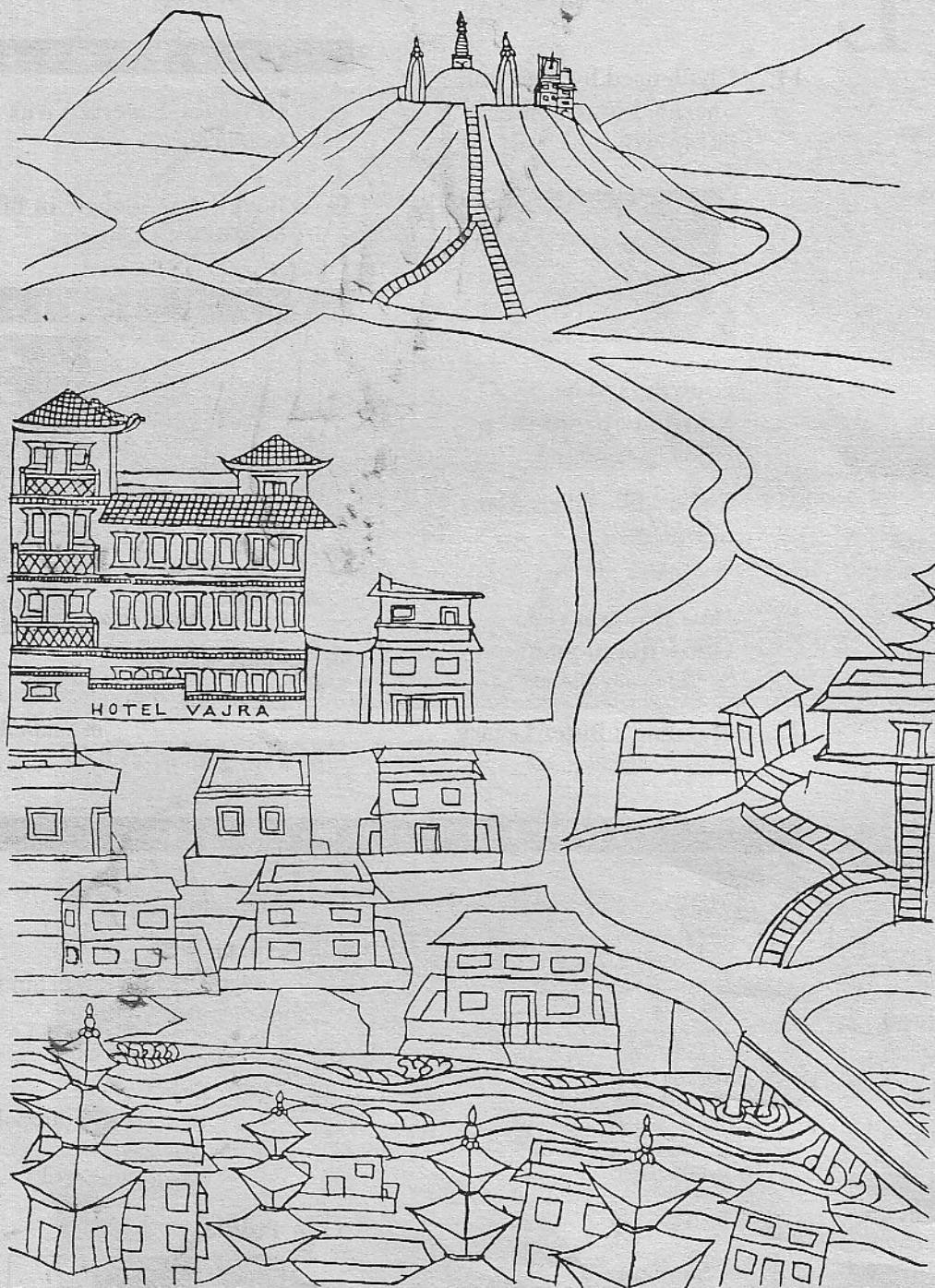
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**Vajra** (literally--flash of lighting), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from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

Ketaki Sheth  
*Inside Outside*

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

John Collee  
*The London Observer*



## in Kathmandu, the Vajra

Swayambhu, Dattu Bijyaswori, PO Box 1084, Kathmandu  
Phone 271545, 272719 Fax 977 1 271695 Telex 2309 HVGHPL



### Twelve Spices

I had the good fortune of having some unknown well-wisher send me a copy of your March 1996 issue. Please believe me, I was astounded at the ground you have covered: South Asia is like a "Bara Masala" (12 spices) dish, each country has its own special flavour but lends one or two of its masalas to accentuate the strengths and weaknesses of the other. India and Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan, Sri Lanka and India, Bhutan and India, and so on.

Hats off to Abominably Yours—the columnist is the Chef of the Cuisine. Congratulations!

Anita Ghulam Ali  
Clifton, Karachi

### Child Abuse

First of all, I would like to thank you for sending the magazine to me on time. I was really impressed by the standard of the magazine, but this is not the end, you can still improve on it. The column Young SouthAsian was really good. I would like to suggest that you include more on child abuse in South Asia. The people in South Asia need to know what is really happening to their "future". The topic of the interaction paper in one of my subjects in school happens to be child abuse, and every week, I read about children who are suffering from injustice. Your magazine can be an eye opener to the people here. I wish you luck with your magazine.

Thank you.

Grishma Bista  
Woodstock School  
Mussoorie

### Feminist Methodology

Sarah Schneiderman felt publicly attacked, though that was not my intention, by my comments on her paper of the Fourth International Conference on Women and Buddhism (Nov/Dec 1995). Perhaps I responded most critically to her paper because its explicitly feminist methodology lies the closest to my own.

Her letter in Himal appears to misread the intent of my paper.

Ms Schneiderman suggests that I make contradictory statements about the presence or lack of Asian women's voices at the conference. I had two different points on this issue. First, I applauded the ability of "several Asian Buddhist women who were eloquent proponents of feminism in their respective Buddhist traditions". However, there were very few *Ladakhi* women who spoke at the conference. In fact, there were more papers by Ladakhi men than women on the issue of "Buddhist Women in Ladakh". These are not contradictory statements: Ladakhi women are a sub-category of Asian women who were under-represented at the conference.

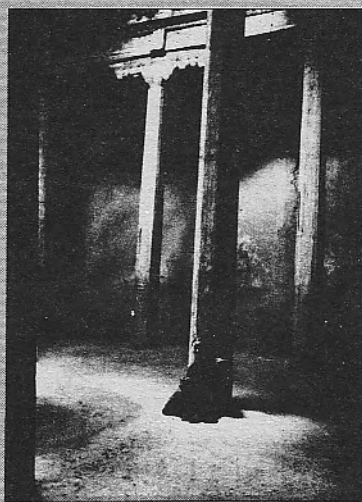
I would like to mention several points I had made which were omitted in the editing. I had noted that Sanghasena's talk had concluded with some statistics about how the price of laparoscopy in India is the same as the price of a girl child in Hyderabad sold into the Middle East flesh trade. I suggested that it was not clear what these statistics had to do with women's rights (the topic of his paper), except to once again remind the weary listener that certain women have almost none. I had also pointed out that the strategic location of the conference at Leh's Mahabodhi Center, which lies more than 10 km outside of Leh city was deliberate but disastrous. The effect of placing the conference in an isolated desert location not

accessible by local buses effectively discouraged informal attendance by local Ladakhis and tourists. The result was a conference with little spontaneous audience participation in which speakers only seemed to be addressing each other.

Kim Gutschow  
Harvard University, Boston

### Past Delight

I enjoyed the new Himal South Asia, though not as much as the uncontaminated Himal. It seems to be a matter of focus. I find it hard to define 'South Asia',



let alone work up an enthusiasm for such a disparate grouping. Whereas the old Himalayan Himal conjured up scenes of ennobling background vistas, 'South Asia' connotes the motley SAARC leaders who, if one were not informed of their status, one might conclude they were suspects in an identification

parade. I wish the new incarnation well but do not expect to be a dedicated reader. But eight volumes of the Himalayan Himal have been a journalistic delight.

Bill Aitken  
New Delhi

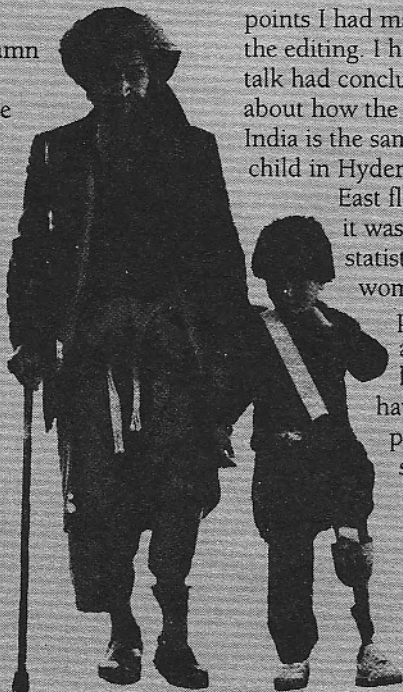
### Tibetan du jour

A recent report on the Concert for Tibet held recently in Berkeley had this to report:

...Another local Tibet supporter is chef Alice Waters of *Chez Panisse*, who has offered to cater a concert-related reception. It turns out she has hired several Tibetans in recent years to work in her kitchen and office, telling Gilbert that they have added a heightened sense of spirituality to her celebrated restaurant."

The clip is illustrative of a particularly American (Californian?) tendency when it comes to the image of Tibet, spirituality, and capitalism. Apparently, the peaceful mountain Buddhists have their use for allowing American entrepreneurs to make huge profits, and helping them feel good while they go about it.

What, after all, does the good chef mean? I am puzzled. Is the labour infusing spirituality into the food itself, or is it more a question of ambience (after all, one does dine in *Chez Panisse*)? Or do they serve tormas? Do the waiters (dressed up in nouveau traditional Tibetan gear, one suspects) come up to the table to say: "Hi, my name is Dolma. I'll be your spiritual element for the evening. The specials are..." Or is it the voice of the phone taking one's reservation who counsels on the importance of non-attachment, emptiness, and all that, when telling one that one will not be





**WWF World Wide Fund For Nature**  
(formerly World Wildlife Fund)  
International Secretariat, 1196 Gland, Switzerland.

Outside the industrialised west, no-one has to be told to respect their elders. It's simply the way society is organised.

Which is why WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature tries to work with older people in the villages of the rainforests. With WWF's help, they learn to teach the younger members of their communities about conservation.

In Kafue Flats, Zambia, it's Chief Hamusonde (93).

Chief Bakary (78), is our man in Anjavimihavanana, northern Madagascar.

In Ban Klong Sai, Thailand, we invoke the Venerable Papasro Bhikkhu, seventy-three year old chief Buddhist monk.

This isn't just expediency, it's how WWF believes conservation projects should be run.

Before you teach someone, we believe you have to learn from them.

We spend years visiting village after village, talking to the people, listening to them, living with them, understanding how they live their lives.

Only then are we able to gain the confidence of the village elders.

Once they realise we're on their side, our elderly converts promote conservation with a zeal that belies their years.

"Uncle" Prom (68), another of our Thai community leaders, tells us that he frequently gets scolded when he starts telling people in the market that they should leave the forests alone. But he gets results.

Uncle Prom and his fellow villagers recently managed to prevent a new logging concession, and set up a community forest where tree felling is now forbidden.

Ninety-three year old Chief Hamusonde also makes things happen.

Income from the Kafue Flats game reserve in Zambia is funding a school, a clinic and new water boreholes for the local villages.

In Madagascar, seventy-eight year old Chief Bakary's village makes a profit by selling fruit grown in their new tree nursery.

More importantly, Chief Bakary's village now takes fewer trees from the rainforest because the nursery can provide firewood and poles for construction.

Not that we don't believe in catching them while they're young. WWF also organises special training courses to help teachers incorporate conservation into the curriculum.

20,000 primary teachers in Madagascar have already taken part.

And WWF produce teaching aids as well as teachers.

We commission educational factsheets, booklets, posters and videos in over twenty different languages.

These are distributed to schools and colleges all over the world.

If you can

help our work with a donation or a legacy please write to the membership officer at the address opposite.

You only have to look around you to see that the world still has an awful lot to learn about conservation.



**HE'S JUST ABOUT OLD ENOUGH  
FOR OUR TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME.**

able to get a table at *Chez Panisse* ce soir?

I think we should be told...

Martijn van Beek  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York

### Liberal Times

The articles in *Himal South Asia* (March 1996) were informative, varied and also very interesting. Petty politics, preoccupation with the past, mutual suspicion and animosities, corruption, and also lack of farsightedness have all hindered progress in South Asia. I am indeed very glad that with your magazine you are now endeavouring to bridge the gap created by South Asian nations themselves, and to create cross-border awareness on cultural, political and social issues from which all these nations stand to gain. My sincere congratulations to you and the entire team!

*Liberal Times*, a quarterly journal conceived and produced by the South Asian Regional Office of the Friedrich-

Naumann-Foundation also deals with South Asian issues and has been in existence since the year 1992. Our objective is to generate awareness about the ideas of modern liberal policy all over South Asia; to motivate leaders, thinkers, policy-makers and the media in South Asia in finding liberal solutions to their respective social, political and economic problems, and to strengthen democratic and pluralist values in

South Asia. We try to generate a South Asia-wide perspective on critical issues such as SAARC/SAPTA, small-scale industries, human rights, political culture and Tibetans in exile.

Jurgen Axer  
Regional Director, FNS  
New Delhi

### You Blew It

You goofed. You blew it. Your last issue—before the change of name and concept—was a sheer delight to read. The articles on porters, Lumbini and Burma were very interesting. I read that issue from cover to cover.

Your present and new issue was so heavily loaded with politics that I skipped reading nearly the whole magazine. There are already too many 'heavy' magazines on the political side. Why don't you go back to writing and producing interesting articles that look in and around the Himalayan area? Like about those foreign-owned trekking companies who, by sending thousands of trekkers in and around Nepal and Sikkim, are devastating the beautiful countryside of flora and fauna.

If you go on like this, I will have to cancel my subscription. Oh, I forgot. I do not have one. So there.

Randolph Arthur Williams  
Margate, England

### Give Me Nepali Himal

When I subscribed to *Himal* years ago, I did so because it was the first really excellent journal covering the area of my research, i.e. Nepal and the surrounding Himalayan region. I was, therefore, deeply

shocked when I read that you wanted to change this superb journal into a kind I would never have subscribed to.

As a historian and anthropologist concerned with Nepal, I am interested in valuable information on Nepal as was provided by the old *Himal*. Your argument that a magazine like *Himal South Asia* had been overdue may be right from a South Asian point of view and your new venture may be a

good one as well.

*Himal*, the Himalayan Magazine, has stopped to exist, and you should drop 'Himal' from the name of your totally new

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in HSA. Letters should be brief, to the point, and may be edited. Letters that are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Include daytime telephone number, if possible.

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email: himal@himpc.mos.com.np  
http://www.south-asia.com/himal



magazine on South Asia.

I would like to transfer my subscription to the Nepali edition of *Himal*. This is because Pratyoush Onta (*Mail April 1996*) points out that the Nepali *Himal* still covers the Himalayan region and that scientists working on Nepal will be able to read about Nepal in the Nepali version of *Himal*.

Karl-Heinz Kraemer  
Hennef, Germany

### Intellectual's Voice

While I was paying the salesman for the *World Executive Digest* and *Harvard Business Review*, poor-selling magazines compared to colourful cine-magazines, I was struck by the creative cover of your publication (the March issue). I picked it up with a touch of cynicism, read the entire editorial, skimmed through the pages and found that this magazine was like a mirror to my beliefs.

However, after I finished reading the magazine I felt that it still has the scope to adopt a unified common strategy to approach regional issues. If the objective of *Himal South Asia* is to act as a platform for South Asian intellectuals to exchange views and act as a catalyst in intra-regional and inter-regional decisions affecting the common mass, then I think the publication needs to decide on its positioning strategy.

The editors should be clear on whether they intend to develop a particular geo-political school of thought, or emerge as a sounding board for differing philosophies.



Whatever the approach turns out to be, the key objective should be to act as an active presence in regional decision-making—a voice that politicians in each of the South Asian countries are forced to heed.

The very first task, then, is to accept realities. There is no use lamenting over the Subcontinent's historical legacies. Today, it is possible for the intellectuals of South Asia to identify our common social, economic and psychological characteristics and to work for an effective approach towards a common objective.

*Khandoker Mahmudur Rahman  
Beximco Management Institute,  
Dhaka*

### Sarconomy Suggestions

While I am disappointed that the original Himalayan Himal is now gone forever, my dismay is somewhat tempered by the increased coverage you have started to give to the economics of the region. The "Saarconomy" section is certainly a step in the right direction. A mere two issues may not be enough to pass judgement on this section, but I would like to make a few suggestions.

When presenting the stock market indices, it would be helpful if the volume of transactions was given as well, since this would give an indication of how important the



exchange is. As helpful would listing the best and the worst performers in the market.

In this region, figures on inflation are not updated frequently, let alone those on GDP. The PPP measures of GDP and HDI rankings change only once a year. Hence, it may not be necessary to include this information every month. You might also wish to consider changing the key economic indicators to present different aspects of the economies every month. Such information could also be made topical: the issue on the airlines of the region, for example, could have included statistics on the aviation sector.

While conceding that the Indian economy is the most important in the region, the problems of other economies should also be highlighted. Admittedly, these are new grounds for the magazine and, hopefully, improvements will be made with each issue. I look forward to the day when students of the economies of this region can turn to Himal South Asia for informative analyses and helpful data.

*Bikas Joshi  
Kathmandu*

### Mahakali Good

Readers should not get carried away by the highly biased opinions of Dipak Gyawali contained in his article "High Dams for Asia: Neo-Gandhians vs Nehruvian Stalinists" (March 1996). The article tries to ventilate Mr. Gyawali's nostalgia for "small is beautiful", but only succeeds in

projecting a confused and surfacial thinking on the subject of water resource development in Nepal.

Among other things, Mr Gyawali wrongly interprets the Indo-Nepal water negotiations, suggesting that Nepal has resisted the Pancheshwar mega project for over two decades "as inimical to its smaller development needs..."

The fact of the matter is that the last two decades of negotiations were not centred on whether or not the Pancheshwar project should be built. The issue was to get the best deal, and Nepal has never put before

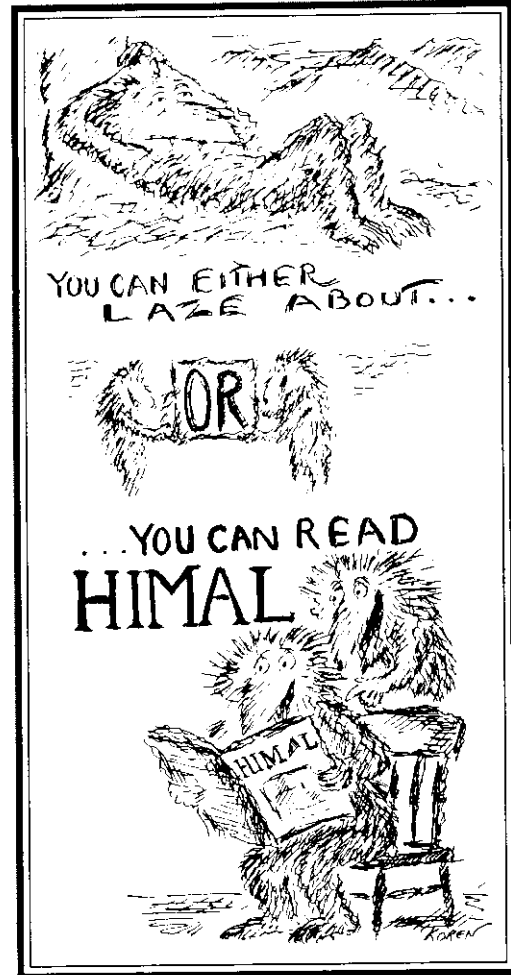
India the argument that she would not like to build mega projects because they are bad. On the contrary, Nepal even went ahead with the study of the Karnali Project and initiated negotiations.

Mr Gyawali knows well that if its water resource is to be a boon for Nepal, it has to use the best sites that nature has bestowed on it. As water is the country's most significant resources and as India is a huge market for energy, Nepal's policy has been to enter into the best possible bargain with India.

Smaller hydropower projects are not necessarily more cheap or environmental friendly, given the need for access roads, the numerous geologically fragile areas, and matters of economy of scale and optimal use.

Nepal cannot afford to engage in unnecessary arguments over big projects versus small projects. It should develop the water resource for its optimal use and enter into meaningful and equitable negotiations with India. The Mahakali Treaty is a good beginning.

*Bikas Man Shrestha  
Asan Tole, Kathmandu*



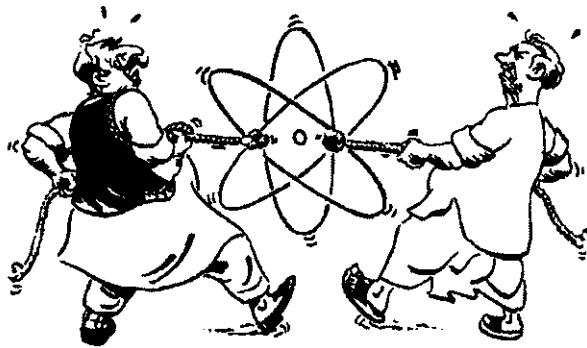


**Commentary**

**Let Us Keep It That Way**

April 1996

The BJP, which might just make the government in Delhi in May, has stated explicitly in its election manifesto, that it would go for nuclear power status. Other parties, however, have decided to be vague on the matter. Meanwhile, Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar, stated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva that India "does not believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security, and we have followed a conscious decision on this regard". According to *The Times of India*, this statement was greeted with dismay by "defence analysts", one of whom stated that the remark "removes any ambiguity about India's defence capability by revealing that it has none." The pundit said that Indian cities



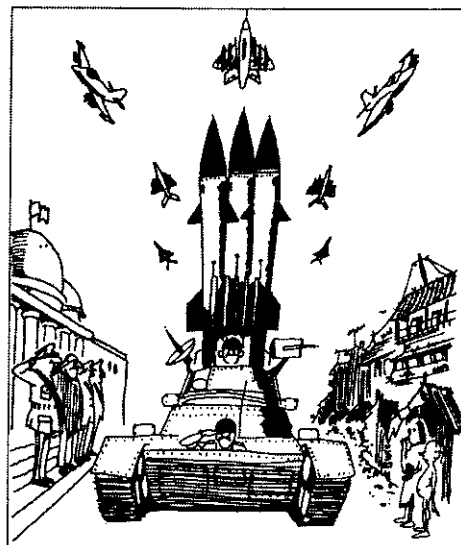
were practically defenseless against Chinese land- and submarine-based nuclear missiles, and that Pakistan was achieving nuclear weapons capability with Chinese help and U.S. acquiescence. One "top scientist" suggested to the *TOI* that Indian nuclear policy was being dictated by "certain bureaucrats who have close links to western agencies." There we go again.

**Cover**

**Alms Race**

March 1996

In its 22 April issue on "The World's Most Dangerous Border", *Newsweek* dealt with the Indo-Pak military rivalry in the conventional and nuclear arena. It repeats the CIA warning that the India-Pakistan border is the most probable site for a future nuclear war, and points out that "none of the mechanisms that helped the United States and the Soviet Union to control the Cold War--summit meetings, nuclear hot lines, arms-control treaties--exist in South Asia." *Newsweek* even drew an opinion from the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen John Shalikashvili, who said: "It is very worrisome, particularly with the capabilities they both possess." Said another senior American official, referring to the fact that missile flying-time between India and Pakistan is too short, "At least we and the Soviets had half an hour's warning time. On the Subcontinent, you'd have none." Meanwhile, Pakistan's "scientist-smugglers" working through phony research institutes and dummy corporations, had by 1987 collected enough information and parts required to



assemble a bomb, says the magazine. Opposition to nuclear armaments in India is confined to a few tiny and powerless civilian lobbies, while "the political parties range from pro-nuclear to rabidly pronuclear." A study by Rand Corporation, the conservative group, estimated that a nuclear conflict in South Asia would deliver a death toll of about 100 million. The article concludes, "The brutal truth is that since India and Pakistan have only enough firepower to destroy South Asia, the rest of the world is paying little attention."

**Cover**

**The Non-Flag Carriers**

April 1996

Among the small-time players that have taken to the skies in response to the opening up of the Indian airways, it is conceded that the airline ModiLuft would get a significant edge over the others if it could bring Lufthansa as an equity partner. ModiLuft did get started with the German airlines' support in training and equipment backup, and it uses Lufthansa colour schemes and comparable logo and writing. The Indian airline has been desperate for Lufthansa to take up to a 25-percent stake in its operations, but the Germans seem uninterested. ModiLuft's Chairman blamed it on the uncertainty related to the Indian general elections, but one Lufthansa source told an Indian paper that the carrier was "not bothered about the Indian elections. It is just not interested in the ModiLuft option at present". Thus, the only big airline that has shown interest in the Indian skies is Singapore Airlines, whose tie-up with the Tatas to operate a large airline in India is expected to take off if the Congress comes back to power in New Delhi, and to stall yet again if the BJP makes it.

**Briefs**

**A Tale of Two Four Wheel Drives**

March 1996

The brief item in *Himal*--which highlighted the incongruous situation in which the chief of a tiny Nepali irrigation project drove around in an air-conditioned Land Cruiser while his Indian counterpart and head of the Kosi Project just across the border in Bihar drove a vintage Willys Jeep--might or might not have something to do with it. But *Schedule 3, para 3 (b)* of a draft loan agreement between Nepal's Department of Agriculture and the Asian Development Bank, contains the following note: The "service vehicles" to be provided under the project, as used in this paragraph and elsewhere in the Loan Agreement, shall be limited to 4-wheel-drive pickups. It shall not include luxury vehicles or sporty 4-wheel-drive vehicles such as Pajeros and Land Cruisers.



Sri Lanka

## BEGINNING OF THE END?

President Chandrika Kumaratunga chose her words carefully when she told a Colombo May Day rally that Sri Lanka's civil war, now dragging on in its thirteenth year, "can be ended" in six months. Too often have leaders of government, both past and present, made pronouncements about a quick end of the conflict, only to have to eat crow. One hopes President Kumaratunga knows what she is talking about, and there are, indeed, indications that her forecast has some basis.

The optimism comes in the wake of Riviresa 1 and 2, the code names (meaning 'sunshine') for the two operations carried out by the Sri Lankan army in the northern Jaffna peninsula. Riviresa 1 ended with the taking of the capital city of the rebel-controlled north. The price was heavy, with some 500 soldiers and many more Tigers killed, and by the time the lion flag was hoisted over Jaffna in December, it had become a ghost town. The Tigers had either coerced or persuaded the residents to abandon the city before the troops marched in.

Although less dramatic than Riviresa 1, the second operation was cheap in terms of lives and limbs. Even more indicative of success was the fact that the population did not flee as the military campaign progressed. In Thenmarachchi and Vadamarachchi, two densely populated suburbs of Jaffna that the government was seeking to re-take, the population stayed put. The residents of Valikamam, who had abandoned their homes during Riviresa 1, began returning in large numbers. The government, quoting the International Committee of the Red Cross

**A war-weary population  
has demonstrated a  
determination to stand  
up to the LTTE**

(ICRC), estimated that as many as 250,000 were back at Valikamam and many were still returning in the first week of May.

A war-weary population was demonstrating a determination to stand up to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), and not meekly do as the rebel commandants directed. There were reports of civilians reacting in anger against LTTE cadres who tried to keep them from returning. It is in these acts of the population of the north—showing a desire to finish the war and get back to everyday living—that one has to base the cautious optimism that a turning point has at last been reached.

No reporter was allowed in Jaffna even as the first phase of Riviresa 2 ended, but the defence ministry released an avalanche of photos and video footage to tell a story that seemed credible enough. "We don't want to show you something that's only half over," said Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, who is political boss of the armed forces. "We will take you when the job is fully done."

Neither the government nor ordinary Lankans, however, have any illusion that the Tigers are de-fanged. The LTTE retains a frightening terrorist capability, demonstrated most recently on 31 January when they blew up an entire street in Colombo's plush commercial district. True, they failed in a major attempt on the Port of Colombo two months later, but even government-controlled newspapers admit that that was more due to luck than to vigilance.

Riviresa 2 has seen the Jaffna peninsula totally sealed off, but what must have hurt the LTTE much more is that the blind obedience that it commanded in the area seemed to have vanished. Small wonder, then, that front organisations for the Tigers have begun demanding international mediation and making friendly noises about once-spurned peace negotiations.

President Kumaratunga says she is presently conducting a "war for peace". She has unveiled a generous devolution package, put together with the help of Tamil moderates, which she hopes will satisfy the aspirations of most Tamils. But many among the majority Sinhalese, backed by an influential section of the Buddhist clergy, are steadfastly opposed to many provisions in the package, which is now before a parliamentary select committee (see *Opinion* April 1996). Also, without LTTE participation, any negotiated settlement will be as empty as Jaffna city was when the army marched in.

The coming days will be critical. It is only a matter of time before Velupillai Prabhakaran directs his fighters to start the hit-and-run guerilla warfare at which the LTTE excels. The military is short of manpower and will be stretched in the holding operation in the Jaffna peninsula. Also, troops must remain disciplined in the face of likely attacks from behind a civilian shield. Reprisals against civilians by the army, as was common in the earliest stage of the war, will be fatal in the vital battle for the hearts and minds of ordinary people.

The concentration of troops in the peninsula has considerably destabilised the eastern province, which was reasonably secure in the time of the previous United National Party (UNP) administration. Both sides are taking losses in frequent guerilla-style incidents in these districts. But the people of the east, populated in almost equal proportions by Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, are largely anti-LTTE, which is a big advantage for the government as and when it can spare the troops to improve control of the east.

This, indeed, could just be the beginning of the end of a civil war that has cost Sri Lanka dearly. But President Kumaratunga, now bedevilled by in-fighting within the ruling alliance, has to walk over a lot of thin



ice before consolidating the military's Riviresa gains. Neither she nor her commanders underestimate the LTTE's capability, which is why the time is not for the side shows now taking shape. As the President herself said in her May Day speech, "This is a time to restrain ourselves from making demands of various kinds and concentrate on solving the north-east conflict."

But will she be given that chance, both by the opposition and the partners in her ruling People's Alliance? There are already ominous signs to the contrary.

## India

# PRESIDENT'S RULE

Never in the history of independent India had there been such complete disenchantment of the public with their political representatives. All opinion polls prior to the general elections brought out the total lack of credibility of the political class. "*Sab Chor Hain*" (all are thieves) was the general refrain. And, yet, the public did vote, in overwhelming numbers (more than 300 million), to prove to those who would be their masters that they were behind the campaign to clean up the political stables.

If it was not the office of the Election Commission that was strictly monitoring any excess in poll expenditures and "putting the fear of Seshan" into straying politicians, it was an activist Supreme Court that was seeing to it that the wrongdoings of national-level politicians were properly tackled rather than swept under the rug. The President proved willing to intervene to get a governor to resign for misdeeds committed while a central minister. No more a rubber stamp, it seemed, Shanker Dayal Sharma also returned two populist ordinances sent to him by the Prime Minister for approval just prior to the elections.

While all this shows that the justices, election authorities and Head of State were aware and alert in the run-up to the elections, how long can they make up for inert, ineffective and corrupt politicians without being accused of overstepping constitutional propriety?

For, in the months to come, as in the past, one can expect that Parliament will be repeatedly stalled due to walkouts, vociferous protests and general mayhem. Rare will be the moments when there will be meaningful debates in the House, and one can expect that the Hawala-tainted political parties—which means all the important ones—will do their utmost to undercut the prosecution. This is because almost *all* leading politicians are alleged to have taken tainted money from dubious business interests.

Will the activism of constitutional bodies and exposure of mercenary politicians make a difference as the country settles down to post-election living? Or will it be back to business as usual, which is what the politicians would want?

From the national down to the *tehsil* level, poli-

ticians have stood discredited because of their lackadaisical performances and venality. An opinion poll by Gallup shows that only 25 percent of the people still have confidence in the two houses of Parliament. The same opinion poll shows that as many as 84 percent have faith in the army, while 77 percent repose confidence in the judiciary.

An existential question stares the Indian polity on its face today. Given the kind of politicians it has produced, is the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy suitable for a country of this size and diversity? What are the alternatives?

Some years ago, prominent Congressman and former minister Vasant Sathe had initiated a debate on the desirability of a presidential form of government for India. It did not really take off. Few were interested to discuss the matter, and it died a quick death. While conceding that chances of successfully unseating the Westminster model might be slim, the debate would have been instructive. Why might a presidential system (with direct election of a head of state to run India and of governors for each of the states) work, and why exactly did the present model inexorably lead the country towards opportunistic politics since the day it was activated in 1947?

A look at the experience of neighbouring countries is not very useful, particularly because India is in a class by itself. In fact, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are all themselves struggling with the British

Democracy has been short-  
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 governance which welcomes  
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 and keeps the intelligent and  
**the honest at bay**

model, and they are doing just as badly as (actually, worse than) India. Sri Lanka is engaged in an experiment with the presidential form of government, but the jury is still out on it because the country has not had the stability to provide a proper test of the system.

While every country must evolve its own system, sometimes it is good to copy someone else's. At the very least, let some social scientists do a simulation exercise, using computer projections, and show us the face of India under a US-type presidential system.

The saving grace of India is its democracy, which has taken firm root after 49 years of it (minus a couple for the Emergency years). But that democracy has been short-changed with a system of governance which welcomes the loud and the corrupt and keeps the intelligent and the honest at bay.

If the computer simulation indicates that India has got the multi-party parliamentary democracy it deserves, and that a presidential system is impracticable, then we will just have to go about looking for checks and balances, won't we? △

South Asia

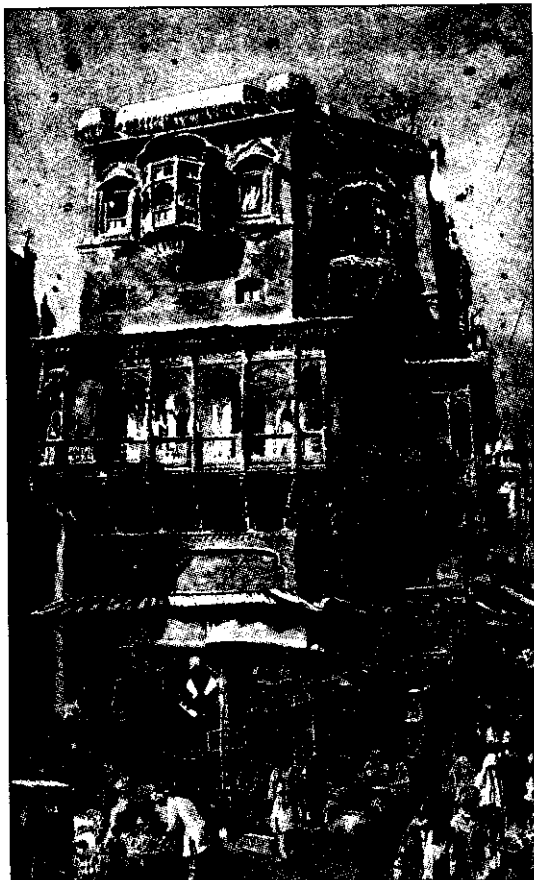
# CITIES OF SUB-SAHARAN ASIA

The last of the great United Nations conferences is upon us: the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, 3-14 June). It follows on the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing.

As with those other great *tamashas*, this time, too, the preoccupation of civil servants and NGOs is to get the sponsorship in order to attend. For Istanbul, too, mayors, municipal workers, NGOs and civil servants are doing the rounds of donor agencies. And if the lacklustre South Asian summit of mayors held in Kathmandu in April was any indication, there is not much to be said for South Asian representation in Istanbul.

Perhaps the mayors and NGOs would do better to stay home and mull over the figures. In its March issue, *Himal* coined the term "The Subcontinent of Sub-Saharan Africa" to refer to the socio-economic tailspin that our region is experiencing. The data presented was stark, and showed that the quality of life in significant areas had begun to trail behind the Sahel—in child mortality, primary education, public health, and so on.

Haveli Mai Moraan in Lahore's Matti Chowk: does it still stand?



KHALID KHAWAJA COLLECTION

Data provided by the United Nations agency Habitat indicates that in urbanisation, too, South Asia scrapes the bottom. A host of problems pressurise the Subcontinent's urban dwellers, and it can only get worse: toxic pollution, dust in the lungs, distance from nature, lack of green space, absence of mass transit. The architectural loss of the old cities, be it Lahore, Kathmandu or Gwalior, is a thing to wonder about. All in all, South Asian cities are losing their character to concrete, while migrants from the countryside continue to be attracted by the city lights and jobs.

The cities are bloated. In 1995, only two South Asian cities made it into the top ten cities according to size (Bombay ranking fifth with 15.1 million, and Calcutta ninth with 11.7 million). By 2015, according to the *Global Report on*

*Human Settlements*, Bombay will move up to second place with 27.4 million, Karachi will be the seventh largest city with 20.6 million, and Dhaka will rank ninth with 19 million. Interestingly, Calcutta does not make the list for 2015, although, of course, it will continue to expand.

With the lack of planning, foresight and civic amenities, it can only be imagined what kind of hellholes the cities will be by 2015—unplanned, congested places where the population lives not a life but a period. According to the same report, a study based on 52 cities worldwide showed the following table in terms of government expenditure on urban infrastructure of water supply, sanitation, drainage, garbage collection, roads and electricity:

Regional Grouping	USD spent per person
The West	656
Eastern Europe, North Africa, Middle East	86
East Asia	72
Latin America and Caribbean	48
Sub-Saharan Africa	17
South Asia	15

As Dr. Mathias Hundsalz, coordinator of the report states, cities have a lot of advantages, and are actually better for the poor than rural areas in terms of life expectancy, lower absolute poverty, and availability of essential services. Given this reality which attracts the poor to cities, it is logical to try to make sure that the cities are able to handle the massive numbers that are involved, in terms of urban transport, open space, housing construction, and public health facilities.

According to one estimate, more than half of South Asia's population will be city-dwellers by the middle of the next century. The attention paid to the problems of the larger cities also tends to divert attention from the demographic, environmental, cultural and economic dislocations being faced by a cumulatively much larger population in the smaller towns and cities. Who thinks, for example, of Multan, Muzaffarpur, Biratnagar or Sylhet?

The South Asian mayors' conference that was held in Kathmandu is not the kind of meeting to instil confidence that the municipalities and governments are up to the task of tackling the massive problems that lie ahead. All the right things about decentralisation of power, autonomy to local bodies, formulation of comprehensive policies for development, technical cooperation among developing countries, etc. were said. But there was a pro forma air about the meeting, and a sense that this was an obligatory exercise on the road to Istanbul.

The late President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka was the only national-level leader we can recall who paid any attention to the need for adequate public housing. Were he alive, he should properly have been the chairman of the Istanbul summit. ▽

## WOMAN'S RIGHT, FATHER'S WRONG

Repressive social norms and traditions continue to stand in the way of Pakistani women's rights and liberties, even those guaranteed by the Constitution. And when narrow-minded interpretations of religion are brought forth as arguments to reintroduce archaic ways, the fight for justice becomes that much more difficult.

There are hundreds of cases to illustrate the point, thanks to a generally pervasive psyche that refuses to accept women as equal humans—even though lip service may be paid to the principle. This was recently illustrated by a case before the Lahore High Court, which captured public imagination and made it to the front pages of Pakistani papers.

Saima Waheed, 22, an articulate MBA student and award-winning debater of a Lahore women's college, secretly got married to Arshad Ahmed, a young lecturer at a government college. She was hardly the first purdah-observing woman from a conservative family to marry against her parents' wishes, but the case gained prominence due to the position of Ms Waheed's father as leader of the highly conservative Ahle-Hadees sect.

When her family learnt about the marriage, claims Ms Waheed, she was beaten and confined to her room for two weeks. Managing to slip away, she sought the help of well-known activist-lawyer Asma Jahangir (see *Profile*, page 53), who had the young woman admitted into Dastak, a shelter for women run by the lawyer and progressive-minded colleagues.

Abdul Waheed Ropri moved the Lahore High Court for his daughter's custody and won an order to transfer Ms Waheed to the Darul Aman, another shelter for women in Lahore, run by an NGO called the Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam. A bailiff and a police party were assigned to execute the order, and they went accompanied by Mr Ropri and relatives. What followed was drama. When Ms Waheed refused to go with them, Mr Ropri tried to physically drag her away. Ms Waheed and her lawyer managed to get into the latter's car. Chased by the Ropris in two Pajeros (the bailiff was left behind and had to follow in a taxi), they rushed to the nearest police station.

Following the incident, an application was moved before the Lahore High Court challenging the decision to remove Ms Waheed to the Darul Aman, which was said to function as a sub-jail. Ms Jahangir contended that this was illegal custody, because the women, who are not criminals, are kept forcibly confined. The High Court justice who heard the case upheld the previous order, but ruled that Ms Waheed's parents could not meet her without her consent.

The case of Ms Waheed and how it will be decided is significant in relation to the fundamental rights and freedoms of Pakistani women, including



CHAITU ARUN

Abba jan does care, but to what extent?

their very freedom of movement. One of the arguments of the counsel for the petitioner Mr Ropri was that although Ms Waheed was legally an adult, "she cannot be left to roam around the Mall Road at will". The question women rights activists are asking is, *why not?*

The issue of the legality of Ms Waheed's marriage to Mr Ahmed, which has been raised by the petitioner, has no bearing. Even if she is not married, the question is whether a woman who is over 18, legally an adult, can be forced to live in her father's house against her will.

Mr Ropri's counsel has argued that the religious sect of Islam that Ms Waheed's family adheres to, the Ahle-Hadees, disallows a woman, even if she is legally an adult, to leave her father's "custody" until she has been married off—by the father—to a Muslim man ("even if she is 60 years old"). The father, he argued, is duty-bound to maintain and protect a daughter until he has contracted and participated in her *nikkah*. If he fails in this duty, the father will be committing a grave sin, for which he will be punished in the hereafter.

At the close of the twentieth century, such arguments have to be listened to, and the heritage they represent respected. But counter-arguments must prevail. The religious authorities cited by Mr Ropri's counsel are countered by others which hold that a Muslim woman who is legally an adult is free to contract a marriage of her own choice, with or without her father's consent and knowledge. The matter, indeed, should be left open to individual interpretations and beliefs.

Without going into the merits or the demerits of the case, it can be contended that according to the Constitution of Pakistan, an adult female (after reaching 18 years of age) of sound mind is free to make her decisions. Also, Islamic law gives this right to a female once she is an adult, that is, on reaching puberty.

One should certainly sympathise with parents whose children rebel against them. However, as traditional values of unquestioning obedience to unrea-

sonable or repressive authority are eroded with exposure to democratic ideas, the sympathy gives way to indignation when a parent goes to the extreme of threatening a child's life and liberty.

Ms Waheed's rebellion is a threat not just to her father, but to all parental authority in the traditional, conservative milieu, just as it is a threat to all those families who want their women to conform to values that are becoming increasingly outdated in a fast-moving world.

Nepal • India

## SEX WORKER MYTHS

Acting on instructions from the Bombay High Court, police on 5 February raided some of the city's brothels. Four hundred and fifty-six girls were rounded up, among them 218 Nepalis. Since there is no law against prostitution in India, it is customary to deal

How either government is going to handle the problem is still uncertain. Kathmandu hopes it can wish the matter away, while there is nothing to stop India from sending the remaining 216 across Nepal's border. But the larger questions of prostitution and trafficking still remain.

One outcome of the as-yet-unresolved episode is that the two governments have been forced to discuss the issue of Nepali girls working as prostitutes in Indian cities. Several Nepali voluntary organisations are also planning to get serious. There are uncertainties that have to be tackled as the discussion finally begins, however.

No one knows for sure the exact numbers involved. The talk tends to concentrate on Bombay. There is no information on how many Nepali girls are trafficked to secondary Indian cities, such as Varanasi, Muzaffarpur, Lucknow, nor about what is happening in Delhi.

Conventional wisdom is that the girls are from districts adjoining Kathmandu. Is this true, or is there a correlation with the immobility of Kathmandu-based non-governmental organisations?

The talk of "forced trafficking" provides ethical legitimisation for NGO work, for fundraising and provides an excuse not to confront the need for major intervention. But, it is not yet clear how many women are forced, how many duped, and how many have 'gone' willingly. With this, there is the myth that women live in horrible enforced misery in Bombay. But many women lose and change their identities, deny their past, adapt, and may even prefer (after an all-too-short period) the city life. No one is willing to admit that prostitution is a profession, even though the term 'sex worker' is now politically correct. Admission would be the beginning of sex worker empowerment.

The vast majority of data, qualitative and quantitative, collected on prostitution is dubious. The 'misinformation quotient' is very high in research because subjects deliberately give wrong information about age, home, history, number of clients, use of condoms, and trafficking history. The patronising approach of researchers and ignorance of 'class separation' has implications for the accuracy of information.

There has been dismal short-sightedness in providing alternative employment to returnee sex workers, or those in danger of being trafficked or entering prostitution. Would-be rehabilitationists offer opportunities such as weaving placemats at fifty Nepali rupees a day, which are just not economically competitive.

The focus on international trafficking has meant that the very real problem of domestic trafficking within Nepal is ignored. The Nepal government is not tackling the problem of official (customs, police) collusion in trafficking. The local media in Nepal is no help either. It has the nasty habit of giving the names and residences of the women who have been apprehended. Such newspapers should be sued. The 218 girls rounded up in Bombay are just the tip of the iceberg.

How can it be proper that  
Bombay (its men and economy)  
takes maximum advantage of  
poor women driven to prostitution,  
and then dumps them the moment  
they are seen as hazards?

with the problem by sending the sex workers back to their home regions, once apprehended. This time, as a large number of Nepalis were also involved, the Maharashtra government notified the Centre, which in turn asked Nepal to take in the Nepali girls. But Kathmandu has been in no hurry to comply and the impasse continues, even as two of the girls have died, presumably through AIDS complications.

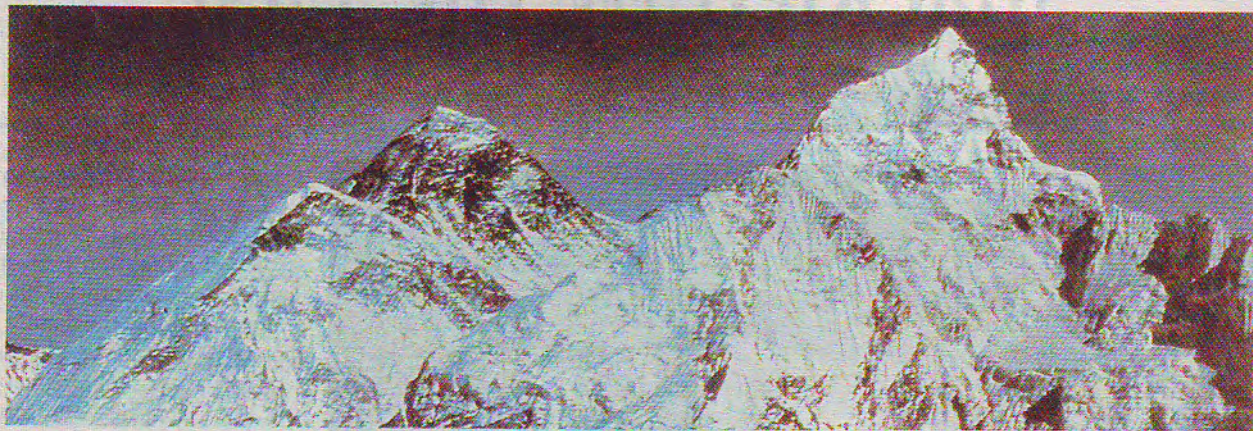
The Bombay High Court was well within its rights when it ordered the police action under the Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act. But it was no moral indignation that motivated the justices. What spurred them was the disclosure by a daily paper that upto 65 percent of Bombay's prostitutes may be HIV-positive. Their solution was simple: send them back to where they came from. Case closed.

Besides the questionable ethics of such a move, how could the learned jurists be oblivious of the wider danger of sending the hapless girls home? If the metropolis of Bombay feels threatened by their presence, what would be the repercussions on the rural areas from where a great majority of these girls come? And how can it be proper that Bombay (its men and economy) takes maximum advantage of poor women driven to prostitution, and then dumps them the moment they are seen as hazards? No one has hothered to ask that question, least of all the Nepali government.



Whose shame is it anyway? Nepali prostitutes are making news internationally. Even *The Nation*, New York-based left-wing magazine which normally features American politics on the cover, did a story in its 8 April 1996 issue.

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## HINDU-NESS

# Challenged by the Future, Shackled by the Past

by Dipak Gyawali

KEVIN BURRISKI



A Nepali idiom for ritual absurdity is *biral bandhney*, or "tying the cat". It tells the story of a Brahmin performing the *shraddha* ceremony for his departed ancestor tying the family cat to a post so that it would not upset the ritual's paraphernalia or pollute it. Years later, his grandsons, reconstructing the ritual from memory, remembered the tethered cat which they thought was an essential item of the ceremony. By this time, the family had no cat, so one was brought from a neighbour and tied to a post for the duration of the ceremony. A practical step by a Brahmin ancestor of yore thus got converted into a silly ritual when sundry cats were ritually collared by his descendants while establishing communion with the departed.

Today, Hindus all over the Subcontinent have to come to terms with many such ritual relics that are caricatures of ancient customs, their rationale long lost, and their accompanying Sanskrit liturgy wholly incomprehensible to the average practitioner.

If Hinduism were only a collection of absurd rituals and social evils, it would be easy to discard it and shop around for some other source of spiritual sustenance. However, Hindu tradition is also rich in methods and philosophy developed by mystics of varied callings, individuals who rejected society in their search for truth. These mystics and philosophers have brought forth a veritable supermarket of spiritual patrimony which the modern Hindu is proud to own. There is everything for everyone—Vedanta for the rational, Tantra and the yogas for the experimental, scores of Bhakti cults



for the emotional, and even theologically neutral "non-attached" work or Karma Yoga for the practical agnostic. In fact, for an inquisitive modern Hindu, delving into these theological aspects is at first bewildering, then numbing and, if that stage is passed, an all-consuming, life-long love affair.

### 100,000 Failures

In the religious supermarket called Hinduism, this freedom of choice is good for individualists and hippies with an inclination for introspection; but for those who cannot, or do not want to reject society, for those who need to work collectively, whether in groups or governments, for worship or community work, the situation is that of chronic anarchy bereft of redeeming social features. If one were to take literally what was said in the *Gita* by Krishna: *Out of a thousand only one wants Me, and of a thousand of these only one finds Me*, then, for every spiritual success, there would be a hundred thousand automatic failures. It is this broad base of the pyramid consisting of confused acolytes, cynical agnostics and the garden variety 'common man' which socially and financially supports an apex handful of holy men, self-proclaimed messiahs and, perhaps, a few genuine mystics. It is no wonder that Hinduism to an outsider looks like a giant social failure.

True, in every religion the genuinely spiritual and the mystics who have achieved buddhahood are only a small number. But, unlike in Hinduism, the other religions and the social systems they spawned do cater to the less enlightened who are served with an organised structure that gives them at least a minimum of spiritual support and a functional moral code for public behaviour. Hinduism is very poor in providing such universally acceptable institutional backing to its army of the confused. The vast majority of today's Hindus have picked up their Hinduism from their grandmothers. They could also have done so from two other sources: the ascetics or the lay *purohits* (priests). The former are well-respected but, as those who have rejected society and remain mostly outside of it, are ill-situated to advise on mundane matters of proper conduct in a conflict-ridden world. The latter, though part of society, are not as respected since they make a living from trade in matters spiritual.

This dilemma is a partial reflection of the crisis of identity a modern Hindu is born with—something which makes being Hindu in these modern times a constant emotional roller-coaster from exhilaration to depression, rarely tolerating any middle ground complacency. No sooner is one elated with the rich philosophical and psychological heritage which several millennia of Hin-

duism has to offer, then in the very next instant, one feels dejected at seeing the senselessness of a fossilised tradition full of inequity, antiquated norms, and sectarianism which respond so poorly to reform. One is inspired by the legacy of some of the most audacious spiritual attainments and intellectual explorations that Hindu sages left behind, but is unable to reconcile this universal with the particulars of everyday atrocities in the name of caste and sect. Being a modern Hindu is to find oneself within this yin-yang tension of defining one's identity within contradictory realities.

There is really no answer to even simple questions such as: Who is a Hindu? or, What makes someone a Hindu? The term 'Hindu' itself is not self-defined but imposed from the outside—by Persians who referred to anyone east of the Sindhu (Indus) as a Hindu; and it covers in one fell swoop everyone from Shaivites to Jains, animists to Vedantists, Tantrics to Vaishnavites. Hindus do not have a collective term for themselves mainly because there is little collective similarity among them. It is easier to define what a Hindu is not: he is not a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew and so on; but even this simple formula begins to fray at the seams when one looks at what is happening on the ground.

Would an American devotee of yoga, tantra, or any of the godmen South Asia produces in abundance, who swears he is not a Christian or a Jew, be called a Hindu? What of the Kathmandu valley Buddhist who devotedly perambulates the Pashupati or Sobha Bhagwati temples? Should Hindus own moral responsibility for Shokko Yoshohara, the Japanese poison gas guru of Aum Shinriku? Should not a blonde, dhoti-clad ISKCON *bhajan* singer in Moscow or a Rajneeshee in Oregon qualify as a Hindu? Orthodox Hindus would say never. But then, by the same count, why should a devotee of the Sufi mystic Sai Baba



STELLA SNEAD

of Shirdi be considered a Hindu?

A Jew and a Muslim have more in common in terms of holy texts and rituals than a goat-serrating worshipper of Kali in the Nepali midhills and a strict vegetarian Vaishnavite Gujarati. These two Hindus, like many others, cannot marry each other; and if the latter landed in the kitchen of the former, he would probably starve to death if he were to observe all his dietary taboos. The first response of any of them, if asked whether they are Hindus, would be mixed. Some would say yes, others would say no and some others would probably query right back: tell me first what you mean by a Hindu and then only can I say whether I am one or not.

If defining one's identity is a daily chore for the common people amidst their struggle for everyday living, if there is a confusing boundary between the insider and the outsider, if purity codes are rigidly strict but comically

repository of the universal truth and the correct lifestyle, why do you not invite me to partake of it?

### Proper Ethical Conduct

In the last century, a stagnant Hindu society in Bengal was forced into an encounter with the West, first with the Christian missionaries and then with Western science and technology, the social carrier of both being the British East India Company. The vigorous debates these encounters generated over such civic and moral questions as described above have been given the rather grandiloquent epithet of "Hindu Renaissance". Its energy, however, has long dissipated, and a lethargy currently dominates this arena at a time when there is urgent need to reconcile modern living with ancient strictures. The reasons for the lethargy could be that the best minds of the day are busy themselves with issues of political, economic or technological struggle. It could also be that the juggernaut of secular science makes it easy for the average, modern "confused Hindu" to become an agnostic, which seems to lead headlong into moral ambivalence.

But one cannot achieve much in the secular fields of economic development unless the essential ethical basis of a society's lifestyle is sound. Perhaps the contradictions and blatant corruption one comes across in Hindu-dominated polity, whether in India or in Nepal, stems from this sweep-it-under-the-rug mentality as regards proper ethical conduct.

This fact alone would seem to prove the point made by Arnold Toynbee that Hindu civilisation has been in decline since the last millennia and has purchased a temporary reprieve only by submitting to forcible political unification in a universal state by outsiders, notably the Moghuls and the British. Almost absent in the Hindu firmament today, especially in the world's only Hindu kingdom, are the necessary moral vigour and vibrant intellectual debates that characterised the period of European renaissance on the nature and purpose of religion in relation to society—in short, a debate on societal ethics which is the point at which abstract philosophy meets down-to-earth society. Such a debate can only be fed by a sense of moral outrage and a propensity to take risks: a very Kshatriya characteristic as opposed to a risk-averse Brahminical one of keeping things under control and not rocking the boat. When rulers are pampered into comfort by the Brahmins behind the throne, when their moral vigour has been sapped by a corrupt lifestyle, stagnation becomes the order of the day.

What a modern Hindu has inherited is a continuous tradition of at least 3,000 years which, like a dilapidated estate, is a mixture of grand vistas and broken-down fixtures enmeshed in cobwebs. Elaborating upon the metaphor, one may think of the magnificent elements as the philosophical and psychological content, and the dilapidated parts as the social features of what goes under the generic name of Hinduism. Very few Hindus have any problem with the mystical edifices, but many are deeply embarrassed by the decay which are mostly the accumulated result of different rulers of the day using religion for self-serving political ends.

In Nepal, for instance, Rana shogun Jung Bahadur promulgated his famous national code, the *Mulki Ain* in 1854. By a stroke of the pen, he classified all his subjects

enforced, something is bound to give, and that is social ethics. Such confusion and nebulous interpretation of the larger social order nudges the average Hindu to recede into a more secure cocoon which is the family as the ultimate unit of social interaction and the clan its widest net. When the village, the municipality or the country essentially becomes the 'outside', a free-rider rapacious mentality towards the larger social order—whether other caste groups or garbage-strewn municipal streets—is inevitable.

Being forced to define identity—individually and collectively, both to an external world and to co-religionists lumped under the generic Hindu label—lies at the core of a modern Hindu's angst. Encounters with outsiders serve as mirrors for self-reflection, and the blemishes that are pointed out to him by all-embracing religions such as Christianity and Islam (to say nothing of the secular scientific West) are not flattering. If religion is about morality and justice, they are told, how is it that you have the inequity of a caste system that is exclusive to the point of having bred itself practically into racist segregation? How is it that you adhere to a social order which preordains second or even sub-human third class status to a vast majority of your brethren? How is it that you do not allow anyone to convert into your faith? If you are the



# How Not to Recognise a Hindu

as *tagadhari* (high caste wearing sacred thread, mostly Brahmins and Chhetris), *matwali* (or those allowed to consume alcohol, mostly the ethnic hill groups, further sub-divided into enslavable or un-enslavable), and the untouchables (grouped into those whose touch pollutes severely, such as sweepers and cobblers, and those whose touch is easily purifiable simply by sprinkling Ganga water, such as the British envoy to the Kathmandu durbar). Kathmandu Valley Newars fell overnight into one single caste group of "matwali but un-enslavable"—small comfort to a culturally rich ethnic group with its own caste hierarchy. It was simply expeditious politics of suppressing the conquered and cosying up to the powerful, a 19th-century Nepali replay of what the *Manusmriti* did in the Ganga plains in the first century AD by encoding the notorious caste system.

## Impure Onions, Pure Tomatoes

The rigidly ordered hierarchy that *Manusmriti* enforced was based on the concept of *dharma* (often translated as 'religion' but meant to uphold one's duty in society based on one's location in the caste order), *artha* (earning the means of living), *kama* (the enjoyment of life, including sex) and finally *mokshya* (or spiritual liberation after "giving up the world"). Such a *dharmic* order could only sustain itself in a stagnant world, but history does not allow such luxury. Because of external onslaught, from Central Asian warriors of Bactrian to Moghul vintage down to the merchants of the Raj, the caste framework could not sustain its sanctity.

Even religious pilgrimage would not be spared. During the stagnant and slow feudal days, many people rarely travelled beyond their villages and perhaps attempted only one long-distance pilgrimage in a lifetime at the most. Today, such pilgrimage centres are a bus hop away, and everyday encounters with those traditionally considered outsiders—even in a simple act as buying a cup of tea from a road-side or railway platform hawker forces Hindus to question their age-old mundane practices which hitherto had remained unchallenged.

The first thing a young Hindu growing up today in an urban or semi-urban environment encounters is dietary restrictions of aged relatives and their acquaintances that strain the intellect. To some, wild boar is okay but pork is taboo, to others pheasant and venison are permissible but chicken and water buffalo are no-no. Why are some groups allowed to cook everything else for the Brahmin, but rice becomes polluted if they do? Many a young Brahminical mind has been forced either into submissive conservatism or heretic revolt while trying to understand why onions, like eggs, are unholy but tomatoes are not, except on *ekadasi*, the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight, when they become impure.

What then was one to make of one's duty in society? This breakdown in *dharma* moved the spiritually inclined to the other extreme of *mokshya*, or rejection of society and the pursuit of individual liberation. When, therefore, a modern Hindu accepts the label as his identity much like an inherited estate, he has to accept the debris of historical burden as well, unless he chooses to pursue a new identity through a new path much as how a Buddha, a Mahavira or a Nanak managed. However, each of these three major reformers of Hinduism were the product of

THE NEED TO know who is or is not a Hindu is taken to its logical and absurd limits by temple gatekeepers, such as at Kathmandu's Pashupatinath, where a sign warns off non-Hindus.

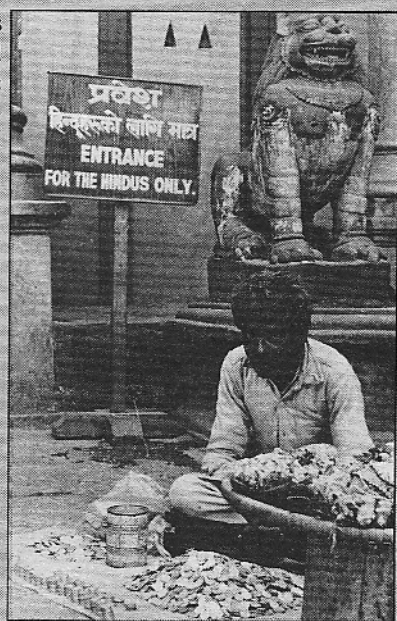
A young journalist, a Brahmin, was stopped from entering the temple, abode of Shiva. His only fault was that unlike an average Nepali, he was six feet tall and lighter-skinned than most. No amount of arguing in his native tongue, showing his Brahminical sacred thread, or even his identity card as a reporter for *The Rising Nepal*, would convince the policeman that he was not an infidel. Sacred threads could be bought in any shop selling *prasad*, said the guard, and he had heard Peace Corps volunteers speak better Nepali.

This simple inconvenience is precisely why a lot of Nepali Brahmins, despite having perfectly good Nepali *thar*, or family names, took on surnames such as Sharma or Upadhyaya. Their ancestors needed the generic Indian names to gain easy entrance to Hindu temples in Varanasi such as Vishwanath Mandir. Recently, a Nepali *bahun* (hill Brahmin) studying engineering in Bihar is said to have felt so hassled in having to explain his *thar* of 'Neupane' that he simply began to call himself a Jha, a Tarai (plains) Brahmin.

On the other hand, there is the tale of Bangladeshi Muslim tourists who, looking more like average Tarai Hindus, managed to enter Pashupati's holy premises, circumambulated the sacred lingam and nearly died of fright when, while admiring sex motifs carved on the temple struts, one of them excitedly shouted, "Hey Abbas, look at that one!" A Muslim photographer of an Indian news-fortnightly is said to have got his darshan of the Shiva lingam by masquerading as a 'Srivastava'. And many Japanese tourists, suitably attired, have entered the portals of Pashupatinath unchallenged, because they looked like Nepalis of 'Mongol' origin.

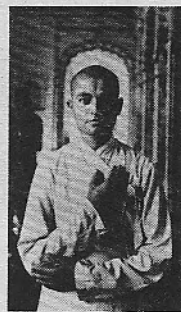
When a religion cannot reform and does not allow seekers to join, the exclusivity merely stultifies. The result is a simplistic descent to ritual, where you try to stop religionists according to whether or not their features read 'Hindu'.

—Dipak Gyawali



"times of trouble", a state of chronic anarchy, where the loyalty of a massive proportion of internal proletariat, society's political underdogs, menials and untouchables, was up for grabs to the first humanitarian who could come by with an all-embracing creed. In the end, these spiritual giants really could not reform Hinduism, much as the Christ could not reform Judaism, and their followers had to claim new identities. If Hinduism is too archaic and incapable of reform, this rejection is one path to follow.

The other path is the more difficult one of reform. In the last 1,000 years of Hinduism, Hindus have not come up with a solution to social ills and contradictions from within the religion's mainstream, if one is to judge from the fact that hardly any Brahmin has ever led a noteworthy



११८  
 \* मनुस्मृति जायाकराय \*  
 इमं हि सर्ववर्णानां पर्यन्तो धर्मयुगम् ॥  
 वदन्ते रक्षितुं भार्यां भ्रातां दुर्वला अपि ॥ ६ ॥  
 सब बर्णों के लिये स्त्री रक्षण उसका धर्म कहा है इसको जानकर दुर्बल  
 पुत्र भी अपनी विधवा की रक्षा करें ॥ ६ ॥  
 स्वां प्रसूतिं चित्रितं च कुलभार्यामामेव च ॥  
 स्वं च धर्मं प्रयत्नेन जायां रक्षन् हि रक्षति ॥ ७ ॥  
 जो पुत्र्य धर्म से अपनी स्त्री की रक्षा करता है वह अपने कुल धर्म  
 भी, धर्म धरणा करिय सब को रक्षा करता है ॥ ७ ॥  
 पतिभार्यां संभार्यय गर्भं भूतेह जयते ॥  
 जायायात्तच्छि जायायां यदस्यां जायते पुनः ॥ ८ ॥  
 पति की रक्षा में जो स्त्री को प्रसू करे वह पुनः पुनः रक्ष  
 करेगा होता है । जाया शब्द का अर्थ ही यह है ॥ ८ ॥  
 वातरां भजेते हि स्त्री सुतं सुते तथाविधम् ॥  
 नमात्यजाविशुद्धवर्षं स्त्रियं रक्षेत्प्रयत्नतः ॥ ९ ॥  
 स्त्री जैसे पुत्र्य का समान्य करने वाली उसी के अस्तित्व उसे संतान दान  
 देता: पुत्र संतान के लिये स्त्री से स्त्री की रक्षा करना चाहिए ॥ ९ ॥  
 न कश्चिद्योगिनिः शुचः प्रसन्नः परित्यजितुम् ॥  
 पतेश्चाप्यगोस्तु शम्भामाताः परित्यजितुम् ॥ १० ॥  
 कोई भी पुत्र्य हट करके किसी स्त्री को राक्ष नहीं सकता । श्रावण करके  
 माता से स्त्री की रक्षा करना योग्य है ॥ १० ॥  
 अयस्ये मग्ने चैनां व्यये चैव निपाजयेत् ॥  
 योग्ये धर्मेऽन्यपर्यायां च परिष्णाहस्य नेत्रेषु ॥ ११ ॥  
 धर्म पकव करने और व्यय करने में, शारीरिक स्वच्छता के रखने में  
 पतिकी संवा करने में तथा स्त्री के धर्मों में, अपनी धरुओं की रक्षा मात्र धर्म  
 में स्त्रीको समा ॥ ११ ॥

\* १ व्याख्यान, स्वयंकार निकरूप \*  
 ११९  
 अरिचिन्ता गृहे रुद्धाः पुष्टीमानकारिभिः ॥  
 आत्मानमात्मना यासु रक्षेयुस्ता सुचिन्ताः ॥ १२ ॥  
 केवल आत्म द्वारा रक्षो दुर्दिवसों की रक्षित नहीं हैं । सुचिन्ता के ही  
 धर्मन आत्मको रक्ष करणो तब परधर्यामती है ॥ १२ ॥  
 पानं दुर्जनसंसर्गः पत्या च विदोऽग्रजम् ॥  
 स्वनाम्यगोहवासश्च नासीदंशुपाणि १३ ॥  
 स्त्री के लिये दुर्जनसंसर्ग से बचना चाहिए फिर वह चाहे कैसा क्यों न हो ॥ १३ ॥  
 नैता रूपं परिचिन्ते नासां क्वसि संस्थिताः ॥  
 सुरूपं वा विरूपं वा पमानिलेव भुञ्जते ॥ १४ ॥  
 ऐसी विधवा न उषाम कर को देखती है न अन्नरक्षा का विचार करती है,  
 जो जो केवल सुख चाहिये फिर वह चाहे कैसा क्यों न हो ॥ १४ ॥  
 पौरुषव्याप्यलक्षितान् च नेःस्त्रीहान्य स्वभावतः ॥  
 रचिता यत्नोऽपीह भवुंश्चिता विक्रवन्ते ॥ १५ ॥  
 पुरुष से सम्बन्ध को रक्ष करके पति की संभारणा के कारण स्त्री-  
 के लिये ही शक्ति है और पति द्वारा रक्षित होने पर भी वह उलटने लग  
 ती है ॥ १५ ॥  
 एवं स्वभावं ज्ञात्वाऽसां भ्रजातिनिसर्गजम् ॥  
 परमं यत्नमातिश्रेयुषो रक्षणं प्रति ॥ १६ ॥  
 ज्ञान जो की शक्ति में शत्रु से विधवा का स्वभाव रक्षा हो उलट रहा है  
 किं दुर्जन हर्षको रक्षण से रक्षा करें ॥ १६ ॥  
 श्यासनमलङ्कार कामकोपमनाजिवम् ॥  
 दोहर्भाव कुचर्यां च स्त्रीभ्यो मनुस्फलयत् ॥ १७ ॥  
 श्यासन, मलङ्कार, काम मोच, बदराला, दोह कर और विविध  
 श्यासन, मलङ्कार, काम मोच, बदराला, दोह कर और विविध

social reform movement. The three mentioned above as well as Vivekananda and Gandhi came from other castes. Reformers have been the by-products of civilisational encounters, such as the Kabirpanthis and the Sikhs who emerged in the Punjab plains to meet the challenge of an ecumenical Islam. Similarly, the Brahmo Samajists and the Ramakrishna Mission emerged in Bengal to face not only a Christianity whose tradition had sprung from its embracing the many-hued slaves of the Roman empire but also a secular Western science which piggy-backed on it.

It is while questioning irrational, unethical or unscientific social behaviour that Hindus have trouble with each other. With regard to what other religions say about Hinduism, the sensitivity of the debate is tempered by the "us vs them" factor. But when disagreements arise among those carrying the same label, when prospective *ayatollahs* of Hinduism tell them how they should behave, emotional chords can be pulled in many directions. Due to sheer diversity of religious traditions that have emerged over the centuries, Hindus have never had only one pope or one holy book. There are texts that accept dualism and texts that reject it outright. Practices that are essential in one school of belief such as blood sacrifice are taboo in another. Devotional worship of symbolic idols which is what the *bhakti* schools are all about is anathema to the *vedantists* or the *yogis*.

In this anarchic collage, attempts by Hindu fundamentalists to enforce a homogeneous identity across-the-board is repulsive to many who are happy to call themselves Hindus, of whatever persuasion. If the philosophi-

cal aspects of Hinduism are bewildering, its day-to-day ritualistic practices are far more confusing with as many contradictory customs as one cares to ask for. Hallowed rituals from birth to death—such as the name-giving, thread, marriage or *shraddha* ceremonies—are crying for rationalisation and re-interpretation. The need to introduce a more ecumenical order that does away not only de jure but also de facto with Manu's anachronistic concepts is not just a moral but a practical compulsion as well. This compulsion is felt more strongly by the urbanised Hindu middle class whose secular scientific exposure is the most efficacious and whose ambit of interaction with the traditional "outside" is increasing day by day. The soil for reform is ready, but what of the seeds? The only variety marketed in an organised manner are fundamentalist brands, opting for which could be a civilisational mistake.

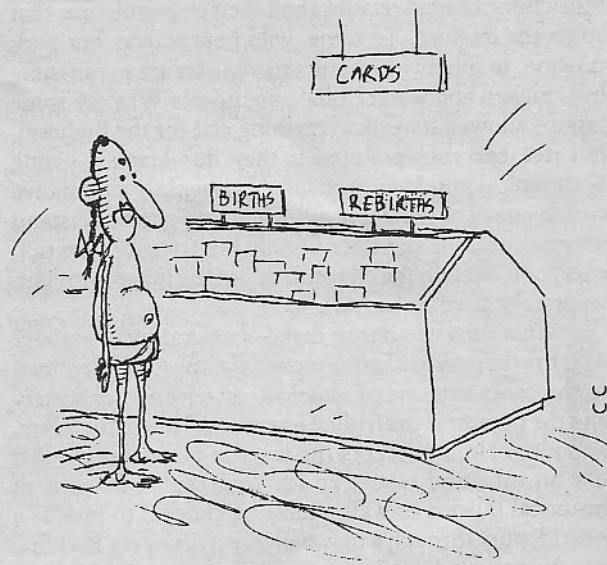
Hindu fundamentalism can be likened to driving a car looking only at the rear view mirror: one may be mesmerised by a glorious vista of the past but the trajectory pre-set by its inequities could be taking the vehicle to a tragic accident up ahead. The disenfranchised in today's society are not going to accept past glories without taking into account past atrocities. And trying to fight Islam or Christianity would be fighting yesterday's archaic battle. On that front, Hindus have a powerful weapon of great proven value: just declare the founders of those religions as *avatars* or *paramhansas* with their own cults, large and powerful albeit but still two amidst the myriad already here, and move on. After all, Swami Vivekananda had already declared a hundred years ago that Hinduism's greatest period was when five Brahmins could polish off a cow, that what South Asia needed was a Vedantic brain inside an Islamic body (implying a social order that embraced its members into a brotherhood and did not segregate them).

The real challenge is to meld the highest in Hindu philosophy with the best in the sciences, and jettison the rest. It would be an audacious exercise, but one already begun by western scientists such as Fritjof Capra (*Tao of Physics*) or physicist David Bohm's dialogue with Krishnamurti. This effort at intellectual synthesis would

Manusmriti, turned to page where the ancient ideology refers to the station of women



The real challenge is to meld the highest in Hindu philosophy with the best in the sciences, and jettison the rest.



help social reform because it would legitimise the rational and help nudge justice to the centre-stage.

In the social field, several things need to be done. The first is that modern Hindus need to rediscover the origins and rationale of Hinduism and its rituals because they are as ignorant of it as anyone. This is probably easier to do so for a modernist Hindu because Hindu literature is now more readily available in English than in native languages or the incomprehensible Sanskrit. The second is that modern Hindus need to reject the archaic, the irrational and the inefficient to make living a Hindu life less full of contradictions. The third is that they need to re-define the religion's sane core in a manner that is not exclusive but allows their non-Hindu neighbours to participate as well.

Finally, and most important, there is a need to assert moral outrage rather than escape into flaccid tolerance whenever justice is being denied. Reforming an anarchic living tradition is probably the hardest thing to do. There is no visible enemy in the form of another religion without, and no pope to attack within. Reform in Hinduism therefore probably has to do with individual assertion of moral courage and backing to individuals who do so. That, after all, was how the phenomenon called Mahatma Gandhi came into being. What is needed in the lethargic

social reform sector is more of such overt expressions if Hinduism is not to remain society's nightmare even as it enjoys the status of a mystic's heaven.

At the close of the last century, Swami Vivekananda, too, was outraged by Hinduism's inequities even as he championed its philosophy. He advised students to "burn the Gita" and take up football if they really wanted to practise spirituality. A bit extreme and perhaps "irrational", maybe, but a small start can be made by morally outraged Hindus today if they too publicly renounce the inequities of *Manusmriti* so that Hindu society can have a chance at rejuvenation.

When modern Hindus finally wake up to the need for religion to have a livable ethics, when they strive to understand rather than join unquestioningly the comfortable embrace of the "fundamentalist", when hundreds of thousands of modern Hindus express their individual outrage against the way their religion languishes amidst ritual and liturgy—at that time we will have begun the real Renaissance of Hinduism in South Asia. △

D. Gyawali is a Kathmandu-based engineer and resource economist.



## Growth Is Slow When Roots Are Deep

by V.R.N. Prasad

**T**he Clash of Civilisations", Samuel P. Huntington's influential and closely reasoned essay, categorically states, "The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilisations." And Huntington identifies religion, customs and institutions as the basis for defining a civilisation. Given the internecine religious strife in the Subcontinent, this ominous forecast was weighing heavily on my mind when the invitation to define my brand of Hinduism reached me. A welter of conflicting emotions stimulated my resolve to take a stand as a modern Hindu.

Maintaining that Hinduism is a movement and not a religion in the strict sense of the term, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in 1926 had stated:

*After a long winter of some centuries, we are today in one of the creative periods of Hinduism. We are beginning to look upon our ancient faith with fresh eyes. We feel that our society is in a condition of unstable equilibrium. There is much wood that is dead and diseased that has to be cleared away. Leaders of Hindu thought and practice are convinced that the times require, not a surrender of the basic principles of Hinduism, but a restatement of them with special reference to the needs of a more complex and*



Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975)

*mobile social order. Such an attempt will only be a repetition of a process which has occurred a number of times in the history of Hinduism. The work of readjustment is in process. Growth is slow when the roots are deep. But those who light a little candle in the darkness will help make the whole sky aflame.*

(The Hindu View of Life: 130)

In these words, the vision of the philosopher acquires the shape of the prophetic utterances of a Hindu visionary. There are, of course, some people who, in the

arrogance of their ignorance, confuse the decadent social practices with credal edicts, and damn Hinduism altogether. Once it is recognised that it is not Hindu religion that is at fault, but certain pernicious social practices, then the problem assumes a clearer perspective. Therefore, it follows that it is not Hindu religion that needs to be reorganised but Hindu society. The distinction is crucial and there is no shame in confessing to errors in certain segments of the society spread over the huge landmass of the Subcontinent. Error is a sign of inexperience, not an original sin.

It is pertinent to remember that India as a whole was never under a single sovereign authority. Even the political unity of *Aryavarta* or North India existed only sporadically during the regime of the Mauryas (3rd century B.C.) to that of Harsha (7th century AD). And it was irretrievably lost in the 11th century due to the Muslim invasion and, thereafter, British colonial rule. Therefore, although Hinduism renewed itself because of the advent of great saints such as Adi Sankara, Sri Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Basava, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi and Mahatma Gandhi, in the sphere of social legislation—at least in some sects and in some geographical pockets—Hindu society continued to be governed by laws that were codified some 1500 years ago.

We thus witness the strange paradox of a progressive religion, with enormous powers of resilience and understanding and great hospitality, permitting social practices that were practically fossilised. The European equivalent of the Renaissance and the Reformation had already taken place in India, but what was absent was the Revolution to bring about changes in Hindu society.

The submission is, now that the state machinery in free India exists to change social institutions and customs by secular legislation, every Hindu is absolved of all atavistic sins. Scholars and savants such as Swami Vivekananda, Sardar K.M. Panikkar and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, through their brilliant commentaries on Hinduism, have exorcised the evil of false assumptions that clouded the pristine splendour of Hinduism. Reading them would save us from the Sisyphean labour of fighting battles that were won decades ago.

Yet, the question about the status of Hindus of the present generation remains. Do they subscribe to the orthodox religious ideology based on the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagwat Gita*, the *Puranas*, and the two great epics? What of *Manusmriti*, the caste system, untouchability, and the role and status of women? Finally, are they taken in by the strident political rhetoric of the

**It is not Hindu religion that needs to be reorganised but Hindu society.**

## Next on HIMAL South Asia



**ORBITAL JUNK**

**The World Bank and South Asia**

**Political Abuse of History**

**Gay Bangla!**



proponents of Hindutva? I reckon that there are no simple answers to these questions. It would be very interesting to conduct a poll on these matters. In the absence of any meaningful feedback, the measure and the tools for any proper evaluation needs perforce to be highly subjective.

Generally, in secular India, Hindus broadly understand the *parampara* (tradition) to which they belong. They know that Hinduism is not a dogmatic creed, but a unified mass of spiritual thought and realisation. Even the lay person knows that the impersonal absolute is called the Brahman and the personal god is Bhagavan. From the Himalaya to Kanyakumari, there is an inner cohesion among the Hindus—a religio-cultural oneness that looks sometimes like a mosaic and at other times a melting pot.

As for social problems related to untouchability, the caste nexus and exploitation of women, the Indian Constitution and the *corpus juris* have outlawed all these evils. The residual remnants of these abhorrent practices, so sensationalised in the media, are marginal and confined to the rural hinterland, and the mainstream of Indian life is by and large free of such social evils.

The so-called rise of Hindutva and the spread of the saffron colour may appear to be rather alarming to those who are not initiated into the arcane mysteries of Indian electoral arithmetics. In reality, there is nothing intimidating in the posturings of some of these political parties, because their oratory is far shriller than their intention. One has the feeling that the Hindu card could be trumped any time by the Supreme Court. But, yes, the BJP-Shiv Sena bark is intended to be worse than its bite! The modern-secular Hindu knows the score and is amused by the tumult that Hindutva has generated in the South Asian neighbourhood.

Finally, given the native genius and the profound wisdom of Hinduism, the future of this ancient land is assured—provided one bears in mind the message contained in the eloquent words of S. Radhakrishnan:

*In those awful moments of life when the soul stands facing a great wrong and is torn with anguish and indignation the Ksatriya exclaims: "Now you shan't do that, I'll kill you," and the true Brahmin will say, "Do not do that, I would rather die." The higher the man, the fewer are his rights and the more numerous his duties.*

(The Hindu View of Life: 119)

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PRIDE NOT PIETY

# The Middle Class Roots of *Hindutva*



Boys headband reads "Say with pride that I am Hindu"

BIKAS RAJANAR

*The rise of political and cultural Hindu assertiveness in India is connected more with notions of pride than any form of religiosity.*

by Sanjay Joshi

When supporters and activists of Hindu chauvinist organisations tore down the 16th-century Babri Masjid in the town of Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, the destruction was billed as an attempt to "restore Hindu pride". This reference to pride clearly indicated that 'being Hindu' to these people meant something quite different from what millions of Hindus have believed or practised as part of their daily lives for centuries.

There is no shortage of evidence to show that the sort of Hindutva being preached by organisations like the



Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is contrary to many of the liberal, humane, and even radical traditions contained within the broad category we call 'Hindu'. It is an inescapable fact, however, that as the twentieth century draws to a close it is precisely their kind of chauvinist Hindutva that is coming to define for many the meaning of being a Hindu.

For this reason, more than merely criticising Hindutva as "false religion", we must try and understand the phenomenon. Especially if we agree that destroying mosques



or inciting riots does not exemplify the meaning of being a Hindu, we need to know how such ideas have emerged in India. We need to identify the people and social groups who propagated these ideas, and explore the agenda that underlies modern Hindutva.

**Modern Hindu-ness**

An interesting aspect of the history of modern Hindutva is that until the very recent intervention of the *sadhus* and *mahants* (heads of monastic orders) associated with the VHP, religious figures did not play a significant leadership role in modern politicised Hinduism. Rather, since back in the 1920s, it was laymen—predominantly the urban, middle class members of the RSS—who provided the cadres as well as the ideological and political leadership to the politics of Hindu assertiveness. Despite the high profile of the VHP in recent years, even the Parishad officials admit that it is the RSS leadership that retains supreme control over the Hindutva programme.

Even with the entry of high-profile religious figures of the VHP in the movement, however, matters of worship and devotion have seldom figured in the agenda. Rather, these *sadhus* and *mahants* have only added their voices to the rising chorus shouting for a revival of Hindu pride, and repeated the anti-Muslim prejudices that characterise the discourse of present-day Hindutva.

There is a history behind the apparent paradox of a movement that deploys religious symbols and claims a religious agenda, but has, in fact, very little to do with forms of worship, or devotion. This history can be traced back to the way early middle-class nationalists came to define the nation as they contested colonial rule. As many scholars have suggested, the late nineteenth-century middle class, which keenly felt the "oppression" of the British rulers, deployed religion in order to create a public identity that was separate from the British. This identity also helped them in generating self-respect in the arena of public sphere politics in colonial India.

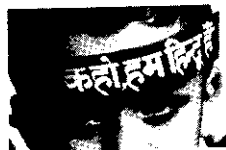
While broad historical surveys are necessary in understanding the larger trends in the intellectual and

political life of the Subcontinent, detailed locally based studies are helpful to explain exactly how being Hindu came to be associated with notions of "community pride". In order to learn what went into these new ways of "being Hindu", and what was left out when Hindu religiosity was brought into the political arena, I located my research in colonial Lucknow and, in particular, on one man.

**Lucknow Man**

Bishan Narain Dar was among Lucknow's most prominent middle class activists in the late nineteenth century. A barrister trained in England, Dar was also a prominent member of the Indian National Congress, being elected its President in 1911. In 1893, Dar was called upon to defend a group of Hindu peasants in the eastern district of Azamgarh, about 200 miles east of Lucknow. These peasants had attacked Muslim property and killed scores of Muslims in order to prevent the slaughter of cows.

In his report on the Azamgarh disturbances, Dar mainly blamed the "meddlesomeness" of colonial authorities for the trouble between Hindus and Muslims. The very prosecution of Hindu rioters represented



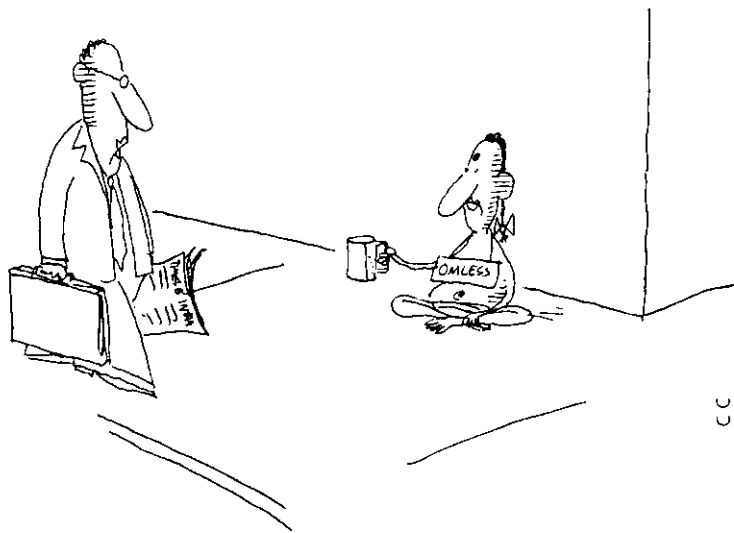
*The movement deploys religious symbols and claims a religious agenda, but has in fact very little to do with forms of worship, or devotion*

"religious persecution, pure and simple", and the whole affair reflected an attitude which insulted Hindu religion and treated Hindu practices with "unconcealed scorn". Wrote Dar: "Hindus have for years and years been treated like the proverbial dog whom any stick is good enough to beat with."

Dar's intervention highlights some important aspects of how religion was brought into the realm of public sphere politics in colonial India. The multiple meanings of 'Hindu-ness' present among the Azamgarh peasantry were totally submerged in Dar's report in favour of constructing a singular Hindu community that could be represented, perhaps mobilised, but most importantly, one whose 'rights' could be defended by middle class activists like Dar.

A close reading of Dar's report reveals that his concerns had nothing to do with religion, or the issue of cow protection. Instead, his rhetoric demonstrates the evocation of a modern Hindu religiosity by middle class activists in the public sphere, as part of their own efforts at seeking a more empowering self-image in colonial India. For instance, though he deprecated the violence that occurred in Azamgarh, Dar noted with pride the actions of the Hindu rioters, because they proved, "that the Hindus are not quite such a meek, unmanly, and contemptible race as they have been imagined".

This way of abstracting religious identities from lived practice, and to relate it solely to notions of pride, was





specifically a middle class project. While the Lucknow lawyer was clearly quite distanced from the "latent barbarism" (his words) of the illiterate peasants of Azamgarh, he also used the opportunity to celebrate "Hindu valour" which had defended "Hindu rights", and to construct an idealised Hindu community.

Dar's interpretation of "being Hindu" was devoid of any reference to actual devotional or ritual practices. Despite copious amounts of public writing that he left behind, much of it stating his firm belief in the importance of "religion", Dar leaves no clue as to his own position on matters of devotional practice. His was an era in which there were fierce debates between orthodox Hindus and reformists, and, in fact, Dar himself had been at the centre of one such dispute when he and his family were ostracised by orthodox Kashmiri Brahmins for having travelled overseas. Yet, Dar's writings never clarify whether, for instance, he advocated the orthodox *varnaashram dharma* (religion based on the four-fold caste hierarchy), or some reformed variant of Hinduism. In his writings, all one finds is condescending or derogatory reference to Hindu devotional practices.

### Middle Class Empowerment

In the 1920s, possibly due to the increasing importance of numbers as a consequence of the growth of electoral politics, the sort of 'empty religiosity' notable in Dar's writings helped create an even more reified notion of being Hindu. There was a need for expanding the boundaries of the enumerated Hindu community.

Middle class politics in colonial Lucknow needed this sort of concretised notion of the Hindu simply because Hindu social organisation—to the extent that such a category existed—was based on principles of hierarchy rather than unity, on caste rather than community. It was only by constructing a Hindu-ness that was free of the divisions of caste, that these upper caste Hindu public sphere activists could, with any degree of legitimacy, claim to represent the rights of a Hindu community.

To successfully represent the 'rights' of Hindus and create a stronger, more assertive Hindu self in colonial Lucknow, it was crucial to the project of Hindu publicists in the 1920s to construct, at least rhetorically, a single 'Hindu community'. To this end, Lucknow's journals in the 1920s published some highly emotional articles in support of the rights of 'untouchables' to enter Hindu temples.

One article in the journal *Madhuri*, for example, compared the situation of the 'untouchables' with children prevented from embracing their father. Another complained that despite the fact that all the castes were originally part of the same "Divine Body", the so-called religious authorities of Hindu temples did not let 'untouchables' worship that divinity.

However, the deep-rooted upper caste prejudices by those advocating Hindu unity always sat uneasily with the calls to create a single Hindu community. While making impassioned pleas to allow 'untouchables' into temples, Lucknow's journals also warned against taking reformism too far. While it was important to recognise certain "Hindu birthrights", argued *Madhuri* at one point, showing 'untouchables' more compassion than was necessary



*The deep-rooted upper caste prejudices by those advocating Hindu unity always sat uneasily with the calls to create a single Hindu community*

would only divide Hindu society and harm the Hindu movement.

However much the editors of *Madhuri* or people like Bishen Narain Dar may have liked to believe otherwise, fault-lines based on caste and class limited the very project of creating a Hindu community.

### Reconstituted Religion

The reason why devotional practices have had so little to do (until recently) with assertive Hinduism is thus explained by the fact that the ideology of *Hindutva* was part of the larger programme of upper caste, middle class empowerment. In fact, V.D. Savarkar, who first coined the term, claimed in his 1922 book *Hindutva* that the term had very little to do with "any particular theocratic or religious dogma or creed". Indeed, his short mythico-historical account of the evolution of *Hindutva* revolves around the themes of Hindu valour, Hindu conquest, and Hindu pride.

Savarkar shared with the middle class activists of Lucknow the complete identification of Hindu-ness with a political community, and the desire to represent this community as virile and militaristic. There was overwhelming concern for self-respect, and a desire to assert a prouder, more commanding presence in the public sphere. It was these concerns, rather than forms of worship or devotion, that drove middle class politics to construct the modern Hindu persona. Thus, the fact that devotion or worship do not play a part in the construction of modern Hindu identities is not an anomaly; it merely reflects the ways in which the discourse of *Hindutva* entered the public arena.

Religion, anywhere, has been connected to ways of exercising power and authority, and middle class Hindu religiosity, though a modern phenomenon, nonetheless needs to be recognised as an important form of religious ideology. In the context of colonial India, the propagation of a modern, public-sphere Hindu religiosity became one way for middle class men to seek empowerment and authority.

This reconstituted Hindu religiosity which sought to transcend divisions of caste, however, revealed the limited social basis from which it emerged. The fact that one of the major political challenges to the *Hindutva* agenda even today comes from parties which seek to mobilise lower and backward castes in North India, points to the inherent limitations of this agenda. △

S. Joshi is a historian. He wrote his dissertation on the history of middle class and Hindu communal identities in colonial Lucknow.





# How Hindu is the Other Hindu-istan?

*The Hindu Kingdom of Nepal, despite the religious signifier, actually has very little 'Hinduism' in its state structure even though the king is Hindu.*

by Sudhindra Sharma

Nepal is said to be the only remaining Hindu kingdom in the world. When a Nepali travels to the Hindi belt of India, he is applauded for being a subject of the one remaining *Hindu rastra* (nation). Yet, the Hindu-ness so boldly inserted in the Constitution of Nepal (1990) is elusive at best, for it is impossible to delineate the Hindu character of Nepal, aside from the fact that an overwhelming majority of the population happens to be 'Hindu'—in the loose sense of the term.

Just as to be a truly Islamic state, the Khalif should govern on the basis of the *Shariat*, to be a proper Hindu kingdom, the king must rule on the basis of the *dharmashastras*, the religious texts. Up until 1963, formally at least, the Nepali state did uphold Hindu jurisprudence. But that was dropped with the promulgation of the new civil code in 1964. Today, the law that is meted out is not Hindu law but common law derived in the main from local customs.

The most distinctive Hindu practice—caste—is conspicuous by its absence in the Nepali legal system. Therefore, the Hindu-ness of the Nepali state today, is like an Islamic state without the *Shariat*—essentially a window-dressing that has been retained for political

reasons. In the absence of the legal backing of the caste system, the modern Nepali state has sought to project its Hindu character by imposing a ban on cow slaughter, sponsoring broadcast of religious programmes in the state radio and TV, declaring a few Hindu festivals as national holidays, and clamping down on proselytisation. In reality, however, Nepal is a secular state, with the most genuine Hindu institution of state being the monarchy.

## Historically Hindu

Formally, the genesis of 'Hindu' as an added attribute of the Nepali state lies in the Constitution of 1962, wherein it was inserted to give Nepal a distinct political identity vis-a-vis India, and to legitimise the active role of the monarchy in the aftermath of the dissolution of the popularly elected government of Prime Minister B.P. Koirala. This move also tapped into the sentiments of those in India who saw the fulfillment in Nepal of their own cherished desire to see India as a Hindu state.

Informally, the roots of the state's Hindu character go back to the thirteenth century. Muslim conquest of northern India undermined the twin pillars of Hindu rule—the



role of Kshatriya kingship and Brahmins as advisers to the king. That very nexus between the king and the priest was then consolidated in the Nepali hills. This relationship worked in unison to isolate Nepal from Muslim and, later, Christian influences permeating from the south.

Thus, by the eighteenth century, when the foundations of modern Nepal were laid, rulers could confidently claim that Nepal was the "asli Hindu Stan"—the last remaining bastion of Hindu purity. Cultural isolationism from India meant that Nepal was also shielded from influence of the nineteenth-century Hindu renaissance. Furthermore, within the territorial bounds of the nation-state, this policy meant aggressive Sanskritisation and cultural integration of hill ethnic communities based on an orthodox Hindu framework.

### Holy Cows

In the pantheon of the Nepali state, the cow is the national animal, and cow slaughter is a crime punishable with life imprisonment. However, this is a hollow achievement in a country where the species receives scant respect. Barren cows and unwanted oxen roam the streets and bazaars, and it is perfectly normal to order beef steak in an upmarket hotel.

The populace—Hindu and non-Hindu—cope with the stricture by slaughtering the cow's immediate cousin, the sad-eyed water buffalo. Another bovine, the hardy yak is thought to be outside the law's protection, perhaps because it roams the Tibetan-speaking northern rimland. Buffaloes are so much in demand in the Hindu kingdom that there is a thriving illegal trade involving the import of the animals from India and Bangladesh. Meanwhile, cows from the Hindu kingdom trudge across the tarai border to slaughterhouses in Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Nepal's state television and radio both air early morning half-hour religious programmes, which comprise of *prabachans* (discourses) and *bhajans* (devotional songs). The programming is organised into a weekly cycle so that each deity has his/her day: Sunday is for Ram, Monday for Shiva, Tuesday for Ganesh, Wednesday for Buddha, Thursday for Krishna, Friday for a medley of these, and Saturday for one goddess or another. Although the on-air sermons deal with a variety of issues including the significance of specific festivals and rituals, the importance of fasting, the philosophy of the *Bhagwad Gita*, and so on, the underlying message is one of conformist Hindu orthodoxy. Interestingly, though, even though the powerful medium of radio has been propagating the *dharma*

in far (non-Hindu) corners for the last four decades, there is no indication that the population is today any more Hindu than it was before.

Nepal abounds in holidays, many of which are Hindu festivals. Among the 22 national holidays that crop up during a year, 17 are religious in character. Among the Hindu festivals, those observed by hill Hindus have the status of national holidays, while those of the tarai Hindus are merely local holidays. Thus, Dasain (Dussehra) receives more importance than the Diwali (Tihar) or Holi festivals.

The Hindu kingdom does not officially recognise the religious holidays of the minority Muslims and Christians, nor the many festivals that are important to individual hill tribes. However, the case of Buddhism, a



minority religion, is different. Not only is the Sakyamuni Buddha's birth anniversary celebrated as an official holiday, some Hindus even assert that Buddhism is part of Hinduism.

Under the Constitution, it is a state offence to be involved in the conversion of faith. While it is virtually impossible to convert a person into Hinduism, someone may be converted out of it. This injunction works in favour of the orthodoxy, due to the fact that Hinduism itself is not a proselytising religion and also because there is then little incentive to reform Hinduism. In spite of this official stricture, however, conversion to Christianity is progressing at an ever-increasing pace, particularly among the less-Hinduised ethnic communities and the Dalits.

In Nepal, as elsewhere, Hinduism has a structural weakness. It has no "pillars of faith" to uphold because what people believe in or don't believe in, does not make them Hindu. One can only be born a Hindu. What a Hindu may choose or not choose to believe may make him an Advaita Vedantist or Dvaitist, a Shaivite or a

World Hindu Federation meeting in Kathmandu on 2 May

**Barren  
cows and  
unwanted  
oxen roam  
the streets  
and  
bazaars,  
and it is  
perfectly  
normal to  
order beef  
steak in an  
upmarket  
hotel.**

Vaishnavite, an Arya Samajist or a Sanatanist. While thus a community of believers does exist within Hinduism at the level of *mat* or doctrine, the divide between the schools of thought is so great that it is simply not possible to construe the essential pillars of faith by identifying the common thread that runs through all of the doctrines.

Given this fundamental difficulty of reconciling the various strands of Hindu thought, it does not come as a surprise that the Nepali state, for its part, has sought to construct Hindu-ness by focusing on such peripheral issues as the cow, festivals and proselytisation.

### Religious Breakdown

With regard to the Hindu religiosity of the population at large, how 'Hindu' they are depends upon where they are located in the folk-classical religious continuum. At one end of the spectrum exists the ideal folk religion of the hill and tarai ethnic communities, while at the other end is the classical Hinduism of the upper caste hill and tarai Hindus. It is not possible to place the bulk of Nepal's ethnic population in either extreme, as most fall in the grey zone in between.

Among the hill communities, the most Hinduised are, obviously, Bahuns (hill Brahmins) and Chettris (Kshatriyas), followed by the Dalits, whose religious observances, along with classical Hinduism, also include animistic/shamanistic elements. Among these communities, the dominant variant of Hinduism is a mixture of Shaivism and Shaktism (worship of Shiva and Durga). Among the hill ethnic communities, the most Hinduised are the Magar, followed by Rai and Limbu. The Gurung and Tamang retain stronger Tibetan Buddhist elements which have been syncretised with Hinduism and animism. Even within one ethnic group, however, various factors such as geographical location and exposure to the outside world are liable to distinguish rural populations that are more or less Hinduised.

The Newar of Kathmandu Valley form a genre of their own, with Tantric variants of Buddhism (Vajrayana) and Hinduism (Shaktism) both being dominant. The Sherpa and Bhotia populations of the High Himalaya adhere to classical Tibetan Buddhism. Of the tarai communities, among the Tharu, folk religion and animism is as pronounced as Hinduism. Meanwhile, the other tarai castes follow the more classical type of Hinduism also found across the border in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. Compared to the hills, Vaishnavism is the more dominant variant of tarai Hinduism.

### More Puritan

Until recently, religion was not a matter of contention in national politics, mainly because of the blurred distinction between folk and classical Hinduism. With the state gradually veering towards a new variant of Hinduism—syndicated Hinduism, that variant of Hinduism now ascendant in India and being championed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad—the religious issue is gradually coming to the fore. This shift on the part of the state is evidenced in the content of the religious programmes aired by the official media, the introduction of Sanskrit news bulletins over Radio Nepal, and the move to introduce compulsory

Sanskrit language curriculum at the higher secondary school level.

The hill-based ethnic communities are increasingly reacting to the imposition of the narrowing definition of Hinduism, by arguing that this brand of Hinduism is foreign to them. Some have gone as far as to reject Hinduism altogether, by pointedly refusing to celebrate the Dashain festival.

Even as the Nepali 'Establishment' goes in for what it considers 'pure' Hinduism, the trend towards asserting their own types of 'pure' religion is also seen among Nepali Buddhists and Muslims. For example, many among the Newar Buddhist, who developed the practice of Vajrayana over the centuries, are now turning to imported Theravada from Sri Lanka and Thailand, supposedly because it is the more authentic form of Buddhism. Similarly, while the religious observances of Nepali Muslims have contained substantial Sufi elements, they are increasingly turning towards puritanical Islam such as Wahabism (made possible through the influx of petrodollars). Sufism is being disowned as un-Islamic.

### Problematic Prefix

If 'Hindu' as an added attribute of the state may have been functional for legitimising the hold of its rulers at some earlier period in history, that very prefix is proving to be dysfunctional today.

Monarchy as an institution has been and continues to remain the most distinctive Hindu feature of the Nepali state. State functions such as coronations, the last being King Birendra's in 1975, are steeped in arcane religious rituals and reading of ancient texts such as the *Vishnudharmotara Purana*. The Hindu underpinnings of the Nepali kingship did not change in its transformation into a constitutional monarchy in 1990.

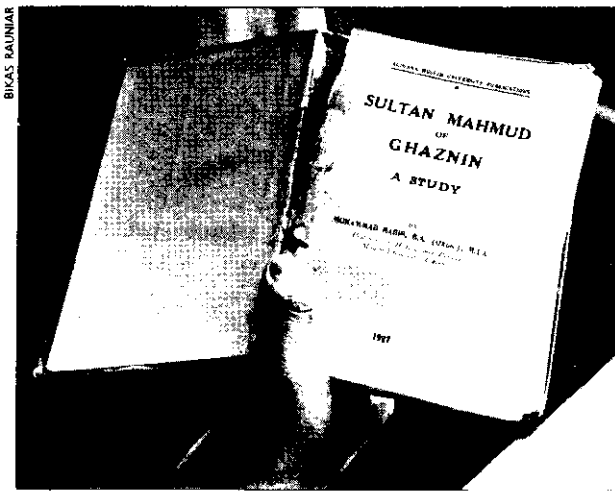
Those who argue for retaining Hindu as the defining character of the Nepali state mention that the terms "Hindu" and "kingdom" are complementary—that neither Hindu republics nor secular kingdoms are conceivable. They also note that the Constitution needs to retain the Hindu label for political reasons: to continue receiving the sympathy of Hindu Indians. This is valuable geopolitical protection which, say some analysts, would be foolish to let go of in order to cater to "pseudo-secular" sentiments.

Whatever the logic behind retaining 'Hindu' before 'Kingdom', the fact remains that Nepal is, de facto, a secular country, which *happens* to have a Hindu monarch. And since the present Constitution already safeguards the position of the Hindu king, by specifying that the latter should be "an adherent of Aryan culture and a follower of Hindu religion", calling Nepal a Hindu state is essentially an empty provocation for those citizens who do not consider themselves Hindu. Either that, or we agree that the reference to religion in the term "Hindu Kingdom" refers to the monarch being Hindu—and not the country.

*S. Sharma is a social scientist who has written extensively on the religions of Nepal.*



## HINDU AND MUSLIM - I



The Hindu-Muslim schism, also reflected in the India-Pakistan enmity, is the most crippling of all South Asian maladies. In order to understand this problem, its origins and ramifications, with this issue, *Himal* begins an occasional column, "Hindu and Muslim". The writer of the first instalment is long departed, but his views reach out across time to begin the discourse. In June 1996, we have Karachi scholar Abbas Husain writing on "irreconcilable differences".

# Mahmud's Bitter Legacy

by Mohammad Habib

*Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin: A Study, from which the following column is extracted, is a 1927 publication brought out by the Aligarh Muslim University, where Mohammad Habib was Professor of History and Politics. Habib's book deals with the Muslim world of the tenth century and the career of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. "I am not aware that I have been inspired by any sympathy or antipathy towards the great conqueror," Prof Habib wrote in his preface.*

No honest historian should seek to hide, and no Mussalman acquainted with his faith will try to justify, the wanton destruction of temples that followed in the wake of the Ghaznavide army. Contemporary as well as later historians do not attempt to veil the nefarious acts but relate them with pride. It is easy to twist one's conscience; and we know only too well how easy it is to find a religious justification for what people wish to do from worldly motives.

Islam sanctioned neither the vandalism nor the plundering motives of the invader; no principle known to the *Shariat* justified the uncalled-for attack on Hindu princes who had done Mahmud and his subjects no harm; the shameless destruction of places of worship is condemned by the law of every creed. And yet Islam, though it was not an inspiring motive, could be utilised as a *posteriori* justification of what had been done.

It was not difficult to mistake the spoliation of non-Muslim populations for a service to Islam, and persons to

whom the argument was addressed found it too much in consonance with the promptings of their own passions to examine it critically. So the precepts of the *Quran* were misinterpreted or ignored and the tolerant policy of the Second Caliph was cast aside, in order that Mahmud and his myrmidons might be able to plunder Hindu temples with a clear and untroubled conscience.

It is a situation to make one pause. With a new faith everything depends on its method of presentation. It will be welcomed if it appears as a message of hope, and hated if it wears the mask of brutal terrorism. Islam as a world-force is to be judged by the life of the Prophet and the policy of the Second Caliph. Its early successes were really due to its character as a revolutionary force against religions that had lost their hold on the minds of the people and against social and political systems that were grinding down the lower classes. Under such circumstances the victory of Islam was considered by the conquered population as something intrinsically desirable; it ended the regime of an aristocratic priesthood and a decrepit monarchy, while the doctrine of equality, first preached in the eastern world, opened a career to the talent of the depressed masses and resulted in a wholesale conversion of the populations of Arabia, Syria, Persia and Iraq.

Now Hinduism with its intense and living faith was something quite unlike the Zoroastrianism of Persia and the Christianity of Asia Minor, which had so easily succumbed before the invader; it suffered from no deep-seated internal disease and a peculiarity of the national character of the Hindus, 'deeply seated in them and manifest to everybody,' was their intense satisfaction and pride in their customs. "They believe," says Alberuni\*, "that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no king like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid. According to their belief, there is no country on earth but theirs, no other race of men but theirs, and no created beings besides them have any knowledge or

\* Alberuni was an Arab renaissance scholar who translated a number of Sanskrit texts into Arabic and was the first to introduce the *Bhagwad Gita* to the Islamic world. His celebrated work on India, *Kitabul Hind*, was written in 1030 A.D.



science whatsoever..." People with this insularity of outlook were not likely to lend their ears to a new message. But the policy of Mahmud secured the rejection of Islam without a hearing.

A religion is naturally judged by the character of those who believe in it; their faults and virtues are supposed to be the effect of their creed. It was inevitable that the Hindus should consider Islam a deviation from truth when its followers deviated so deplorably from the path of rectitude and justice. A people is not conciliated by being robbed of all it holds most dear, nor will it love a faith that comes to it in the guise of plundering armies and leaves devastated fields and ruined cities as monuments to its victorious method of reforming the morals of a prosperous but erratic world.

"They came, burnt, killed, plundered, captured—and went away" was a Persian's description of the Mongol invasion of his country; it would not be an inappropriate summary of Mahmud's achievement in Hindustan. It was not thus that the Prophet had preached Islam in Arabia, and no one need be surprised that the career of the conquering Ghaznavide created a burning hatred for the new faith in the Hindu mind and blocked its progress more effectually than armies and forts. "Mahmud," says the observant Alberuni, "utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed those wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate hatred for all Muslims..."

"The evil that men do lives after them; the good is interred with their bones!" Mahmud's work, whatever it might have been, was swept off fifteen years after his death

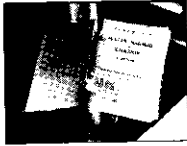
by the Hindu Revival. East of Lahore no trace of the Mussalmans remained; and Mahmud's victories, while they failed to shake the moral confidence of Hinduism, won an everlasting infamy for his faith.

Two centuries later men, who differed from Mahmud as widely as two human beings can possible differ, once more brought Islam to the land. But times had changed. The arrogance of the Mussalmans had disappeared with the conquest of Ajam by the Mongolian hordes. The spirit of the Persian Renaissance had blossomed and died, and the New Mysticism, with its cosmopolitan tendencies and doctrine which did not essentially differ from what the Hindu rishis had taught in ancient days, made possible that exchange of ideas between men of the two creeds which Alberuni had longed for in vain.

Instead of the veterans who had crossed the frontier in search of their winter spoils there came a host of refugees from the burning villages of Central Asia longing for a spot where they could lay their heads in peace and casting aside all hopes of returning to the land of their birth. The serpent had reappeared but without its poisonous fangs.

The intellectual history of medieval India begins with the advent of Shaikh Moinuddin of Ajmere and its political history with the accession of Sultan Alauddin Khilji; the two features which distinguish it from preceding generations are the mystic propaganda started by the Chishti Saint and the administrative and economic measures inaugurated by the revolutionary Emperor.

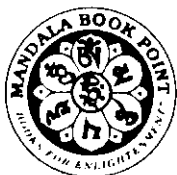
With the proper history of our country Mahmud has nothing to do. But we have inherited from him the most bitter drop in our cup.



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## Sex on the BBC

BBC IS INTO sex. The bastion of propriety, after spending years broadcasting on all conceivable issues, has finally woken up to what is possibly the most popular subject in the world.

Now, before you reach for your dial, it is not sexually explicit audio drama that The Beeb is presenting. Instead, Bush House is running a series of radio documentaries on sex and reproductive health in eight South Asian languages plus English. The largest sex education class ever is being run by the BBC, beaming to 52 million listeners in the region.

The programmes have been commissioned by the Education Department of the BBC World Service, supported by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). For most languages, this is the first sex-education programme ever to be aired. "The national broadcasting outlets would never have done it. Most do not even dare use the word 'condom', which is why, by coming straight out, the BBC has done something tremendously useful," says Afsan Chowdhury, the Bangladeshi journalist who is producer of the series in Bangla.

Working both in Bangladesh and West Bengal, Mr Chowdhury took six months to complete the fifteen episodes, each 12 minutes long, which began broadcasting on 6 March. "Not just on radio, there is no such thing as sex education in Bangladesh, so you can imagine the value of the programme," says the producer.

"There was some concern about the series getting a hostile reception from a traditional Bengali society but that hasn't happened yet," says Manoshi Barua, the Bush House-based producer of the programme. "We have been cautious but not leashed by fears of controversy. Response reports are good."

Mr Barua says a large number of people worked together to get the series off the ground—experts, health workers, journalists and entertainers. Most felt that a sex-education programme was long overdue, more so as a possible AIDS pandemic is increasingly becoming a reality in South Asia.

"When I first heard the programme, I turned it off because I didn't want my children to hear it," said Abdul Haque, a development agency worker in Dhaka. "Now, when the programme starts I walk

out so that the children can listen." Mr Haque says his wife still feels uneasy about the programme but neither does she stop the children from listening.

There have been some complaints, however, that the programme is sometimes too explicit for family listening. "There may be some complaints, but the overwhelming response is positive", says Mahbulul Alam, Assistant Director of Information and Communication of the Family Planning Association of

Bangladesh (FPAB) which, as the IPPF's Bangladeshi counterpart, is doing the follow-up work related to the sex programme.

FPAB's main responsibility is to respond to letters requesting for more information, much of which is contained in a specially produced booklet, says Mr Alam. "We are receiving on an average a hundred letters per day, which is phenomenal. In fact, it is almost beyond our capacity to manage.



Bengalis from as far as Singapore and the Middle East have written to us. Many organisations have asked for bulk copies, and there is keen interest to follow up this initiative with more of the same."

Mr Chowdhury attributes this kind of response to the lack of reliable information on sex in a conservative South Asian society. "There is a mountain of misinformation that is in social circulation, which has resulted in an overload of fear and guilt when it comes to sex and sexuality. We are no more or less promiscuous than any other society, but sex is a big secret, the ultimate taboo. Consequently, the population is highly vulnerable to both psychological and physical ailments. The only treatment is education, which explains the response to the programme."

The issues covered in the Bangla series include puberty, pregnancy, sexual dysfunction, child abuse, homosexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS and contraception. It is BBC for now, but hopefully the national broadcasters will follow suit after they see that there has been no adverse reaction to the BBC effort.

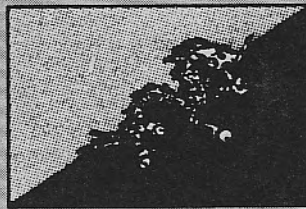
Apart from Bangla, the sex series is also being aired in Hindi, Nepali, Pashto, Persian, Sinhala, Tamil, Urdu and English.

## SAARC, Pakistan and Druk Yul

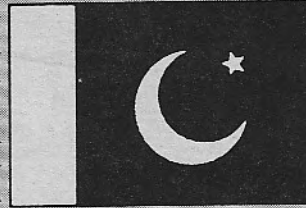
WHILE THERE ARE enough bilateral issues that make South Asian governments froth at the mouth (Kashmir, Farakka, etc), it is rare that a South Asian country pointedly criticises another on a problem relating to a third SAARC member.

Call it honest opprobrium or opportunistic posturing, but the Islamabad government last month, using diplomatic language, criticised the Thimphu authorities by raising the matter of Lhotshampa refugees.

In a press release issued on 11 April, the official spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad expressed its concern "at the refugee problem between two of its friendly neighbours and co-partners in SAARC." Referring to



refugee exporter Bhutan and host country Nepal, who have been engaged in desultory negotiations for the last four years, the Pakistani government hoped "that this problem



would not be too long drawn out and that the two countries involved will be able to put this issue behind and end the sufferings of those forced to live in refugee camps."

"We as a SAARC country urge India, common neighbour to those two countries, from whose territory the refugees have been pushed into Nepal, to exercise wisdom and restraint in this matter," said the Pakistani government. Further, it added, "The number of Bhutanese refugees is put at around 110,000. Going by the population figure cited by the Government of Bhutan, these refugees represent more than 1/6th of the population of Bhutan."

Well, one thing that we will say for the chutzpah that went into drafting the press release in Islamabad. While bilateral (or trilateral for that matter) issues are not allowed by the SAARC Charter, here is a loophole that may be used. You can evoke the SAARC spirit, and who is to deny a government that right?!



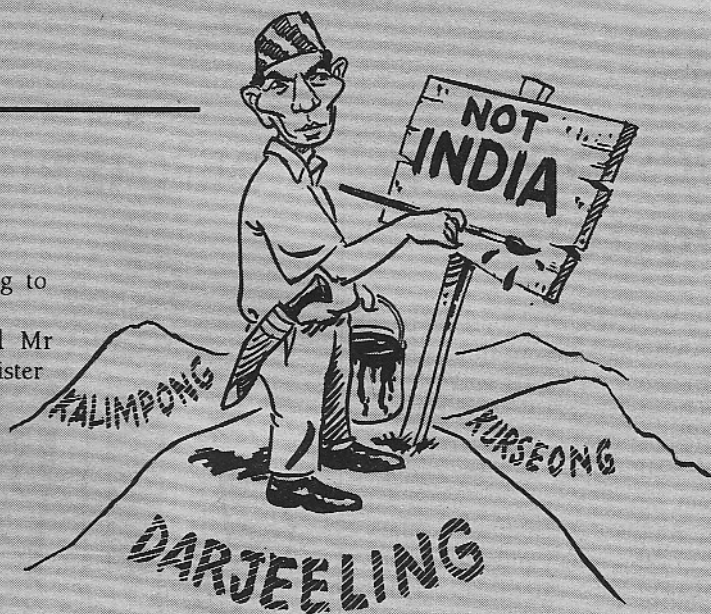
## The Wayward Uncle

NOW, HERE IS a SAARC bone of contention if ever there was one, except that no one is bothering about it. Subhas Ghising, the lion that roars from the Darjeeling hills, says that Kalimpong belongs to Bhutan and Darjeeling is no-man's land.

For long, Mr Ghising has picked on the matter, going over the head of the West Bengal government to gain attention from New Delhi. The justices of the Supreme Court in New Delhi dismissed his petition some time back, but Mr Ghising was ready and willing to raise the issue again in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. The supremo of the Gorkha National Liberation Front asked the largely Nepali-speaking

voters of Darjeeling to boycott the polls.

His call, said Mr Ghising, was "to register our protest against the criminal silence of India and all national parties on the incorporation of our region into the Indian Union." Elections cannot be held in the Darjeeling hills and the adjoining Doars, he told the Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan, until the commission is able to provide



documents proving the constitutional status for the region.

As reported by the *Calcutta Telegraph*, Mr Ghising pretty much accused everyone: "The government of India and parties like the Congress, the BJP, the Janata Dal, the CPI (M) and the CPI are criminals as they have failed to integrate our region into India. They have betrayed the nation created by Gandhiji."

Mr Ghising, presently head of the Darjeeling Hill Development Council, claims that Kalimpong was on loan from Bhutan during British times and its status in India was never regularised. Similarly, he claims that Darjeeling's standing is ambiguous because the British took the hill station from Sikkim on lease but did nothing about it when they left in 1947. Both Kalimpong and Darjeeling, therefore, hang in limbo, says Mr Ghising.

What is more important than the legalism advanced by Mr Ghising—for Bhutan professes no interest in the restitution of these lands and Sikkim is now a part of the Indian union—is the fact that the Darjeeling boss is using the argument for its nuisance value. He wants to use it for maintaining his own profile, while presumably furthering the interests of the Nepali-speaking hills of Darjeeling.

What is most interesting about Mr Ghising's daring is that he has not been hauled over the coals by the Indian establishment or the media for being "anti-national". There is an almost indulgent air among would-be critics, as if Mr Ghising were a wayward uncle who should be allowed to have his say but not be taken too seriously.

No analyst HIMAL South Asia spoke to had a clear answer as to why Mr Ghising was thus being humoured/ignored by North Block and South Block. Obviously, a subject for a seminar, preferably to be held in Darjeeling in mid-summer.

## Powerless in Sri Lanka



Lanka engineer mulls over flowing water

WHILE A SELECT committee of the Sri Lankan parliament discusses devolution of power to the various provinces, another kind of power crisis has crippled the country. A prolonged drought in the central highlands has dried up the giant reservoirs of the Mahaweli Scheme, and what little water they held was used up two months ago to provide continuous electricity to feed television sets during the World Cup Cricket.

Rather than become unpopular islandwide by mandating power cuts while Sri Lanka achieved cricketing glory, the government of Chandrika Kumaratunga decided to allow the turbines to spin away. Today, the country is paying for splurging all that electricity, with daily powercuts that last for six hours at a stretch.

"As long as we're depending mainly on hydro power, we have to depend on the weather," said Tilak Ranaviraja, acting Secretary of the Power and Energy Ministry.

There may be no real respite until the southwest monsoon arrives in late May. The northeast monsoon also brings intermittent thundershowers, but that rain is inadequate to fill reservoirs.

Sri Lanka has a total power generating capacity of about 1,250 MW, 80 percent of which come from hydroelectric plants—mostly from the ambitious Mahaweli Scheme which also stores water to irrigate a massive resettlement

area in the dry northeast. The country's drive to open up the economy and attract foreign investment has driven demand to grow by 10 percent per year. No new power plant has been built in Sri Lanka in the past six years.

The government has also urged consumers to conserve electricity, which could save the Central Electricity Board about 40 to 50 gigawatt hours. With scope for hydroelectricity being limited and dependent entirely on the weather, the government plans to more than double its thermal power generation capacity, an expensive proposition as it will drive up the oil import bill.

A few years ago, everyone had thought that the Mahaweli was a long-term answer to the island's energy and irrigation needs. And today you have electricity managers fearing another Sri Lankan win in cricket. At that point, the country would go into total blackout.

# Desi Spin Doctors

IF YOU THOUGHT bussing babies, waving with your arms rather than only your hands, and dressing to please specific vote banks were the preserve of slick American political candidates, think again.

All these techniques became part of the rough and tumble of Indian politics with the latest Lok Sabha elections. Reeling from a *Hawala*-hangover, and with credibility at an all-time low, Indian politicians turned to 'image management agencies' to improve their electoral prospects in the late April and early May general elections.

Perfect Relations, the pioneer image agency in the country, says it was approached by two major political parties, eight individuals, and two state governments to sell themselves to the electorate. Delhi-based Dilip Cherian, who left his job as an economic journalist to start Perfect Relations, says a confidentiality code prevents him from revealing the names of clients.

Mr Cherian says his company streamlines the strategy and communication skills of clients. "We help them in communication planning like telling them when they should, for example, give a message on the minorities. We also advise them on what kind of speeches they should give and the best way to frame their manifestos." Perfect Relations, and other image-makers who have joined the fray, also train politicians on how to speak to the media, the use of sound bites, and what kind of message to give to different kinds of audiences ("tell them what they want to hear").

The confidentiality clause helps to enhance the success of the programme, says Mr Cherian, since "no one knows who is using you and how". At least 18 people from his agency travelled and worked closely with the candidates to discover their strengths and weaknesses during the elections. They helped build on the strengths of the candidates, while weaknesses were either removed or tucked away.

This is the second time the agency has worked at refurbishing the image of politicians. The first time was in the assembly elections last year when, Mr Cherian claims, their communication strategies and training proved highly successful.

Indian image-makers are departing from

BEFORE



AFTER



the wholesome "mom and apple pie" tack of their American counterparts. They have to take into account the country's complex caste hierarchies, inter-religious sentiments, and its multitude of languages, cultures and idioms.

All said and done, the image managers have arrived on the Indian campaign trail. Whether it will do the Indian public good or bad, is to be seen from the crop of parliamentarians that the latest elections have produced.

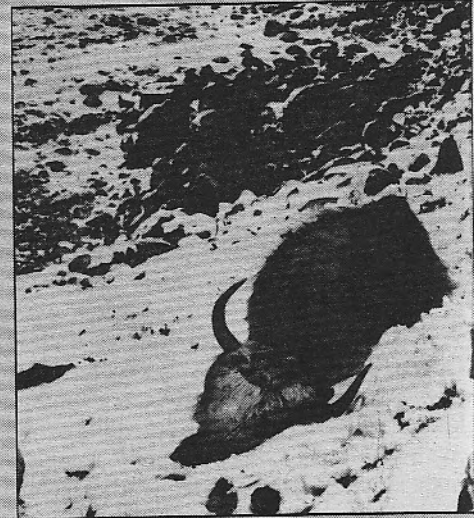
## Yaks Die in Tibet

IT WAS THE worst disaster in half a century. The snowstorm that lashed the Yushu region in Tibet earlier this year left 400,000 to 700,000 yaks dead before it lifted. A third of the 80,000 Tibetan herders in the region saw their entire livestock wiped out. For a people whose life is totally dependent on the yak, the implications were numbing.

All this happened in February, but other than scattered coverage in the international media, the world was unaware of the scale of the devastation in a remote north-eastern corner of Tibet, 800 km from Xining, the capital of Qinghai province.

Yaks provide the inhabitants of this area with practically everything needed for daily sustenance—meat, milk, butter, fuel, wool, and skin. With the beasts all dead, people are staring at starvation and, if that is stalled, hard times, for years to come. Herds built up with care and patience are no more.

"The bodies of dead cattle can be seen everywhere, even the vultures are not in the mood to eat," one government official told *Reuters*. Most of the yaks and their herders were caught unawares by the heavy snowfall and temperatures that dropped down to minus 47 degrees Celsius. Yaks simply froze to death, while thousands of men and women



There were many yaks like this one

suffered from frostbite and snow blindness.

Relief efforts began in earnest with the Chinese army working with local monasteries to distribute supplies. Money is being sent from China's coastal cities, and Hong Kong. The Dalai Lama made a donation of USD 15,000 and called for international assistance to help raise the estimated USD 37 million needed to rebuild the herds. It is doubtful, however, that the money will be raised. If there was a devastating snowstorm on the high plateau, and nobody heard, who is to say that anyone will feel the obligation?

# Women, Children and Religion

A VERY DIFFERENTIATED group of religionists, scholars and social critics gathered in Kathmandu in late March to discuss "Religion, Ethics, Rights of Children and Women in South Asia". Organised by the Unicef Regional Office for South Asia, the workshop provided an opportunity to evaluate the present stage of intellectualism among the "Buddhist, Christian, indigenous, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism faiths."

Said the Secretary of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs of Druk Yul: "Bhutan, being basically a Buddhist country, social discrimination against women and children is not known." The Nepali representative, a professor at Tribhuvan University, said, "In Nepal, there is religious harmony, peace and equality because of tolerance and broad-mindedness of Hindus towards the whole human being."

Quoting from *Manusmriti*, the ancient Hindu code of conduct, the professor maintained that Hinduism had always respected women. Warming to his subject, he went on to state that there was no discrimination in Hinduism even between male or female deities, "as Durga, Mahalaxmi, Mahasraswati, Mahakali, Kumari, Astamatrika, Dashmahabidya (are) equally worshipped as Vishnu or Shiva."

Compared to the bland Nepali and Bhutanese representations of "all's well in our part of the world", there were others given to a more analytical bent. The venerable Bhikkhu from Sri Lanka criticised the lowly position of "women in India". Placed on a high pedestal by the *Rig Veda*, women were brought down by the time of the *Dharma Shastras*, and stigmatised as being ritually impure, he said.

At times, accusations flew across the table, particularly between Hindu traditionalists and Dalit representatives. A Dalit journalist went about proving that only 15 percent of India's population were 'Hindu', the other 85 percent being made up, he said, of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. Taking liberties with the demography of a neighbouring country, he stated that "it is a minority of Hindus who are ruling in the Buddhist Nepal." For good measure, he added, "Buddha was from Nepal" and that, "Bombay's red light areas are packed with Nepali Dalit girls".

Those who seemed capable of scholarly detachment and self-criticism, and did not feel the need to put down other creeds, were

the three-member delegation from Pakistan. One delegate commented on the tendency to look for all answers in the Quran, which was not "an encyclopaedia". The Holy Book, he said, provided an ethical framework, and you cannot "impute to it a nature which it does not claim."

Another Pakistani scholar's thesis was that there are discrepancies which exist between Quranic ideals and Muslim practice with regards to women's issues. "While the Quran appears to be weighted in many ways in favour of women, Muslim societies, in general, appear to be far more concerned with trying to control women's bodies and sexuality than with their human rights," she said.

Similar levels of introspection were not forthcoming from most of the other participants at the Unicef-organised meeting. A UNICEF representative said that the meeting had had the modest goal of bringing together disparate groups to discuss the well-

**The Kathmandu Declaration on Children and Women's Rights, adopted by the Unicef-organised meeting states, among other things:**

- \* We recognise that the dignity and rights of children and women are violated in South Asia.
- \* We resolve to deepen our understanding and sensitivities to the spiritual, emotional and developmental needs of children.
- \* We will further identify, from the core teachings of our various religions, texts relevant to the international conventions relating to women and children.

being of women and children in South Asian societies.

Whether they might have learnt something or not, the inter-faith group certainly went away with an earful of each other's pet agendas, which did not always include children and women.

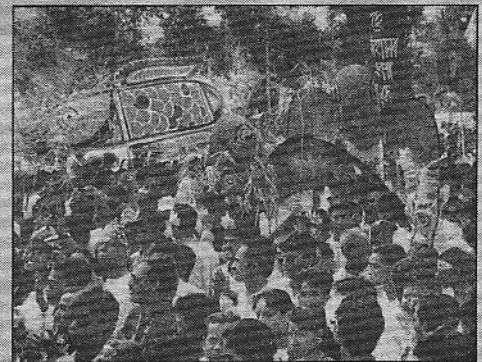
## Happy New Year

ONE OF THE many things that brings Subcontinentals together, without doubt, is their native calendars, which continue to hold their own cultural significance against the onslaught of the Gregorian invader. Mid-April was when many South Asians celebrated the new year by the lunar calendar.

In Nepal, where the government actually runs on the Vikram Sambat (the year dawning as 2053), Baisakh One (13 April) was celebrated with a holiday. In Kathmandu offices, clerks did "*khata puja*", meaning they burned incense and prayed over their ledger books. Meanwhile, constitutional King Birendra came on air over Radio Nepal to wish his subjects well.

In Rangoon, authorities blocked the road leading to Aung San Suu Kyi's home in order to keep her pro-democracy supporters from celebrating the Burmese new year on 16 April. Ms Suu Kyi had planned to walk to the city's most venerated temple, the Shwedagon Pagoda, to release fish in a pond.

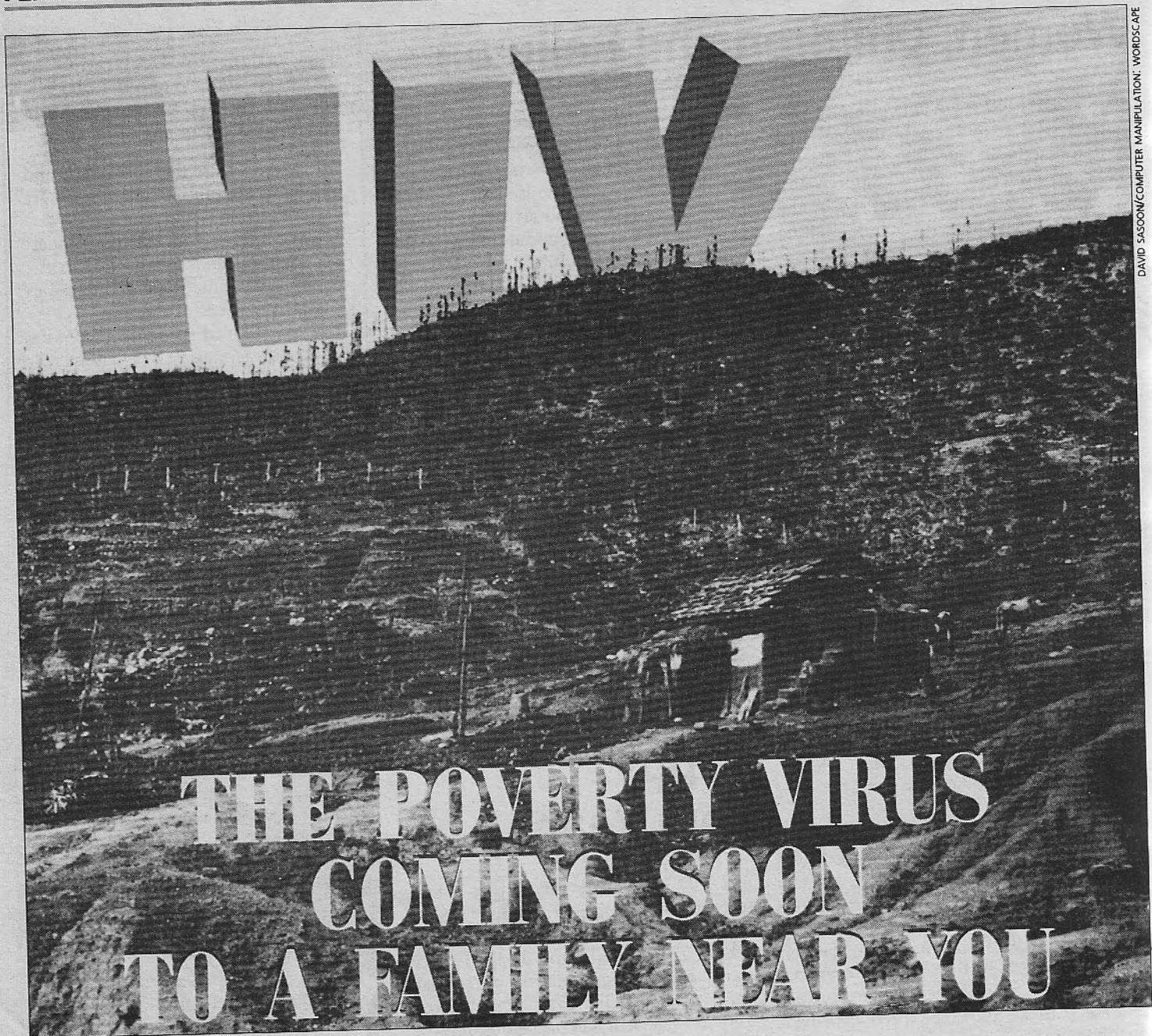
In Sri Lanka, Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte was being given a hard



**Noboborsho in Dhaka**

time at a press conference by reporters who recalled a forecast he had made back in December that the war in the north would be over by the Sinhala and Tamil New Year. That day was 12 April, which led a young reporter to ask the commandant of the Sri Lankan armed forces, "Do you believe that the war will be over by the next new year?"

Meanwhile at the northern curve of the Bay of Bengal, 14 April saw Pahela Baisakh, the first day of the Bangla New Year of 1403. Marked as a holiday in both the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh, the *noboborsho* (new year) was celebrated with Baisakhi melas (fairs). In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengalis "let the old and the decaying be swept away" on this day.



DAVID SASOON/COMPUTER MANIPULATION; WORDSCAPE

## THE POVERTY VIRUS COMING SOON TO A FAMILY NEAR YOU

*AIDS thrives on people's poverty and ignorance, and as the pandemic prepares to spread, it threatens to sap the health of nations as well.*

*by Naila Sattar*

**B**ombay has the largest sex bazaar in Asia. There are almost 100,000 prostitutes working in the city's red light districts, half of them infected with HIV. The prostitutes average 600,000 sexual contacts per day. The chance of HIV transmission during a sexual encounter is 0.1 percent, which means there are potentially 10,000 infections every month from the Bombay brothels. Most of the sex workers come from

Nepal, and the poorer parts of India and Bangladesh, and they take the virus back with them to the remotest corners of the Subcontinent.

The threat is not confined to red light districts. Urban-rural cross-migration into the city from all over the region, especially movement of high-risk groups (soldiers or sex workers in India, Nepal or Sri Lanka) is contributing to the spread of the virus in

rural areas. Truck-stops along India's highway network, where unprotected sex is the norm, is another conduit for the spread of HIV to the hinterland. Given the minimal awareness and poor health care in the region, South Asia's AIDS fuse is getting shorter.

Statistics forecast doom, but there is still time to avert a catastrophe. The epidemic is still in its infancy in the worst-

affected countries of Asia: Burma, India and Thailand, and there is still time to ward off the impending epidemic. For now, government complacency on AIDS is based primarily on the inability to appreciate the magnitude of the danger because of the false sense of security provided by official data.

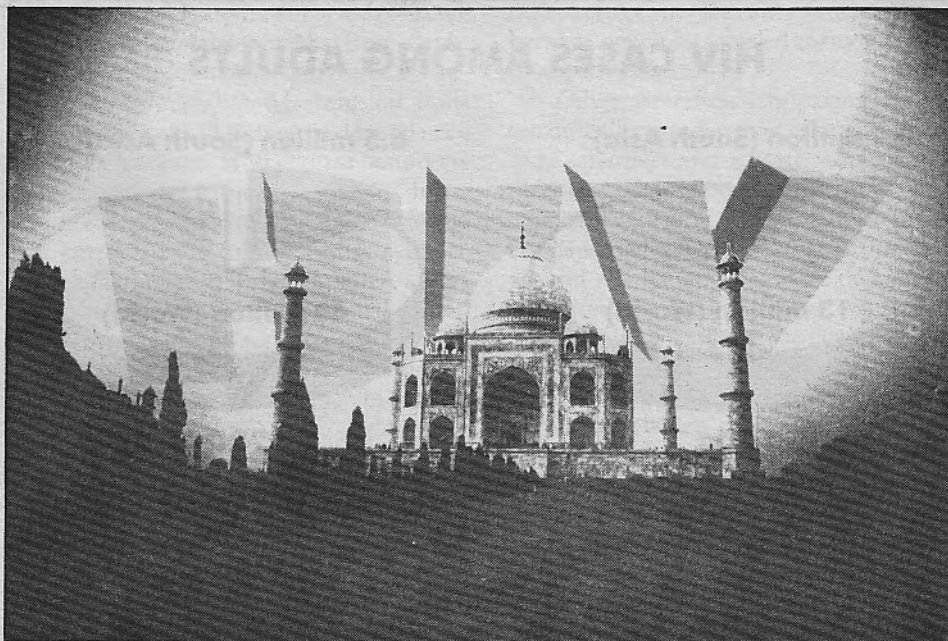
Going by official figures, there isn't much cause for alarm. The number of reported HIV cases in India till January this year was 2312. Sri Lanka had only 173 HIV-positives till March this year. Nepal's National Institute for STDs and HIV reports only 349 cases of HIV infection. Since AIDS was first detected in Pakistan nine years ago, the National Institute of Health had identified about 1,000 cases up to December 31, 1995. Bangladeshi official sources claim that only 49 people have been infected by the virus. Bhutan has tally of zero.

But officially reported cases represent only a fraction of actual incidence, and may have no bearing on reality. On a worldwide basis, only about one out of ten AIDS cases in both adults and children is reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO). In India, up to five million people may actually be infected. Projections show more than 6000 in Sri Lanka and 20,000 in Bangladesh to be infected with HIV. Up to 30,000 Nepalis and anywhere between 30,000 and 50,000 Pakistanis may already be HIV positive, while independent estimates put the number of carriers in Burma to be 500,000. Even Bhutan, which reports no HIV cases, is suspected of having at least 75 HIV-positives.

Even more frightening is that HIV has the potential to spread exponentially through the population if preventive measures are not taken. "Although it came to Asia after Africa, AIDS is beginning to show some real fury here," says David Bloom of Columbia University, who specialises on the economic impact of AIDS in Asia's developing countries. "There is very little question that the centre of gravity of AIDS is moving to Asia, and moving rapidly." With South Asia as the seat of Asian AIDS.

### Epicentre of the Epidemic

The World Bank says that the region's share of the global total of people with AIDS (PWA) rose from one percent in mid-1993 to six percent in 1994. At this rate, the majority of new infections in the world is expected to occur in South Asia by 2000, and India will be at the epicentre of this epidemic. The current PWA population in India is doubling every year, and if HIV continues to spread at the present pace, some studies indicate that by the end of the decade, 160 million Indians—one in every six—will be HIV positive. To put the figure in perspective, in Bombay



BIKAS RAJAN/COMPUTER MANIPULATION: WORDSCAPE

alone, 10,000 people will succumb to AIDS every month by the turn of the century.

If there is no medical breakthrough in the search for an AIDS vaccine, and if proper medical care is not provided to those already infected, the cost of an HIV epidemic could cripple South Asia's fragile economies. "The best time to spend a dollar on HIV control is when you've got no HIV in your country, the cost-effectiveness of control declines markedly as prevalence rises, countries as yet little affected should be investing heavily," says Dr Richard Feachem of the World Bank.

Some experts even forecast a collapse of the region's economies if present infection rates continue. "AIDS is a costly disease but the medical costs are minor compared to the loss of income from morbidity and mortality among the afflicted," warns Dr Bloom. He and his colleagues at Columbia University have calculated the indirect costs of AIDS to be at least ten times the direct costs of medical care for each patient.

For the moment, working out the cost

of AIDS to the social economy is being perceived as a futile exercise for, as Dr A.K. Mukherjee, India's Director General for Health Services puts it, "The numbers are too small to show any visible effect on the economy at present." But, when HIV infection rates soar, and the financial effect of the disease on national economies begin to be felt, it could be too late.

The economic costs of a disease include direct expenses, the hospital costs of doctors, nurses, drugs, equipment, administration, as well as the costs of out-of-hospital care, such as hospices, health visitors and counselling and the indirect costs of labour—and, therefore, of potential income—lost because of illness and death of patients and the task of caring for patients.

AIDS, a disease characterised by intermittent bouts of illness, places considerable demands on health spending. Experts put the present value of income losses due to the death of skilled adults at approximately INR 353,000 each in India. In macro-economic terms, medical care and income losses due

### Incidence and Projections of HIV Infection and AIDS in India, Indonesia, and Thailand.

Country	Reported incidence (Cumulative)		Estimated Incidence (current) HIV+	Year 2000 Projections (Cumulative)	
	AIDS	HIV+		AIDS	HIV+
India	116	7,272	1 million	1 million	5-7 million
Indonesia	24	46	2,500	5,000	50,000
Thailand	2,135	34,545	450,000	500,000	3 million

SOURCE: ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF AIDS IN ASIA

## HIV CASES AMONG ADULTS

0.9 million (South Asia)

6.5 million (South Asia)

13 million (World)

40 million (World)

1993

2000

to AIDS are projected to cost India an annual INR 352 billion before the next century. That represents a full five percent of the Gross Domestic Product.

The main channel through which AIDS will affect economic performance will be in the change in the size of households and decreased productivity levels. Because AIDS tends to selectively affect young adults in their most productive age, an epidemic will be an uncalled-for burden for South Asian countries already struggling with heavy debt loads, fragile economies, high levels of poverty, limited resources, inadequate human capital and an unsure food situation.

### Teetering on the Fringe

The region's rural areas will bear the brunt of an AIDS epidemic. As much as 60 percent of South Asia's population depends on subsistence farming, a highly labour-intensive endeavour. Shortage of able-bodied adults will lower overall agricultural yield. Illness before death and the time other members spend caring for those infected will also reduce productivity, as will medical costs taken out of household resources, otherwise used to purchase agricultural inputs such as labour or fertiliser.

Equally devastating would be the effect of an HIV/AIDS epidemic on the service and industrial sectors. Losses due to absenteeism, followed by eventual death of workers, and replacement costs will prove significant. Expenditures on medical care, pensions, insurance, housing and death benefits will also be considerable. Foreign investors are lured to South Asia by its large supply of inexpensive labour. If present forecasts come true, the reduction in the supply of healthy labour would increase both wages and production cost.

Remittance from overseas labour is crucial to South Asian economies. With the

increasing prevalence of HIV among migrant workers from the Subcontinent, this source of income is sure to be hit hard as labour-importing countries establish elaborate screening procedures. As a taste of things to come, in 1993, 353 Pakistanis were deported from the United Arab Emirates for testing HIV positive.

Meanwhile, increased economic inequality has been predicted for a future South Asia as the region's poor try to grapple with AIDS. Economic regression has always had a disproportionate effect on the poor but that effect is multiplied manifold when a worsening financial situation is coupled with AIDS.

Economic liberalisation, large-scale migration to cities, and urbanisation, all are contributing to a rapidly evolving industrial labour force that teeters at the fringe of sustenance, in a setting far removed from the relative security of village life. Such low-income urban groups have been identified as being most vulnerable to AIDS, both the virus and the attendant economic loss—to the extent that it has become common to call HIV the "poverty virus".

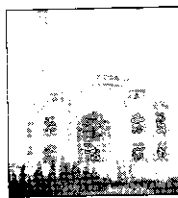
As Dr Bloom points out, "Since public and private institutions, such as health, life, disability and social welfare insurance, will be beyond the reach of the majority of the working class, AIDS will force secondary workers to look after family members who are sick—another productivity loss." The indirect effects of AIDS within households are numerous. AIDS threatens more than the capability of a household to function as an economic unit, the entire social fabric of the family is potentially disrupted or destroyed.

As AIDS claims more and more victims,

there will be a growing number of AIDS orphans. In absolute terms, the loss of a parent is an incalculable tragedy for children. When a mother dies, it doubles the death rate of her surviving sons and quadruples that of her daughters. When both parents are gone, the situation is worse still. Left on their own, children who are not fortunate enough to be absorbed into the family circle of relatives are rudderless and often turn to prostitution or petty crime to survive. They are often pushed to the edges of organised society, have few allies and have negligible access to information and services, and thus are highly susceptible to being infected or themselves spreading infection.

Women will once again find themselves disadvantaged in the world of AIDS. More and more girls are likely to be taken out of school to nurse siblings or to substitute for the reduced productivity of other family members. They may be encouraged to marry early as growing numbers of men seek younger, and presumably, uninfected wives. For AIDS widows, loss of land, shelter and inheritance will force them to migrate to cities where there is a great possibility they will join the urban underclass as domestic help, in underpaid sweatshops, as prostitutes, and so on.

AIDS will also bring about drastic changes in the dependency ratios—the number of children and elderly people dependent on working adults. Most diseases strike the weakest first, the very young and the very old. HIV/AIDS primarily targets adults, leaving children and the elderly without those on whom they traditionally depend. Because of this, and because most nations in South Asia have smaller proportions of their populations in the 15 to 60 age group, the



**The best time to spend a dollar on HIV control is when you've got no HIV in your country**

number of dependents will rise.

In sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS deaths and illnesses in the 1980s increased the number of dependents per 1000 working adults to 1024. In South Asia, the epidemic is growing at a pace reminiscent of sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1980s, but, with a difference. There is greater potential for spread, given South Asian adult population of nearly 500 million as opposed to just 25 million in sub-Saharan Africa.



## No Breathing Space

The biggest impact, however, will be felt by the health sector. AIDS comes to South Asia at a time when easily preventable diseases are still killing children by the thousands. Lack of basic health care means that people die of simple infections. As it is, the sum allocated by South Asian governments for health care is hardly enough even for preventive immunisation programmes, says Dr. Arole Aurore of the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. With the increasing number of people with AIDS, medical costs will rise further due to the association of AIDS with other diseases, particularly, tuberculosis (TB).

The strong link between HIV and TB is complicating the management of both the diseases. TB is the most important single cause of infectious-disease mortality in the world and responsible for one quarter of avoidable deaths given that one out of every three persons in the world is infected with the TB bacillus. The relationship between the AIDS and TB is synergistic and so the combined effect is much worse than their separate effects.

A few years ago, TB was considered a stable, endemic health problem. Now, thanks to antibiotics-resistant strains and HIV, TB is resurgent. Compared to people without HIV, HIV-infected people have up to 30 times greater chance of developing TB as they are already prone to infection simply by sharing breathing space with TB patients.

There is also a great danger of AIDS spreading through sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Where STDs are common, AIDS flourishes, since high prevalence of STDs indicates a certain degree of high-risk sex behaviour among the populace. Moreover, STD sores and lesions act as an easy way in for the AIDS virus as does STD-related genital ulcer which is found widely in Asia and Africa. Studies have shown that the chance of getting AIDS, no doubt another STD, increases fourfold for someone with an STD.

Unprotected sex increases the possibility of getting AIDS—some are lucky, some are not. That is not the case with HIV-infected blood transfusions; the question of luck does not arise. In India and Pakistan, more than a tenth of HIV infections has been due to HIV-tainted blood. Testing does not prevent HIV-infected blood from circulating despite the development of various blood screening methods. There is a chance of getting AIDS even from 'HIV-free' blood since most of the blood that is collected is tested before the six-week "window-period" for the AIDS virus to be detected.

The sizeable amount of blood collected from "professional donors" has been identified as being primarily responsible for HIV infection through blood transfusion. India collects almost half of its annual blood need from such donors. Most of these donors are not screened. Neither are their counterparts in Bangladesh, where one study found 21 percent to be suffering from syphilis. Similar is the case in Pakistan, where a large proportion of the professional blood donors come from among the country's 3.1 million drug abusers, whose addiction itself exposes them to considerable risk of getting AIDS.

## When Squeamishness Kills

Most of the work being done to prevent AIDS in the regional countries is being carried out by voluntary groups. State spending on health as yet does not reflect the urgency that is needed to stem the epidemic. That



*In macro-economic terms, medical care and income losses due to AIDS are projected to cost India an annual INR 352 billion before the next century*

trend, of course, is seen worldwide among developing countries. The turn of the century is expected to have more than 95 percent of PWAS living in the Third World, but current expenditure on AIDS prevention is skewed in the opposite direction. Of the total amount spent globally on AIDS prevention, the developing world accounts for less than 5 percent. India spends a mere two cents per person.

For the moment, anti-AIDS programmes have not proved very effective. Propagation of incomplete information abounds. A Pakistani TV advertisement lists one of the ways of getting AIDS as "from a woman to a man and vice versa" (without specifying how, and without indicating the greater danger for women). Similarly, despite the existence of South Asian homosexuality, the possibility of man-to-man transmission is not advertised in any of the countries. This squeamishness about discussing sex publicly is a major reason why AIDS education programmes have not been effective.

Both religion and the so-called "Asian values" also have much to do with the slow spread of AIDS awareness. Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao admitted as much when, at the International Conference on AIDS, Law and Humanity in New Delhi in December 1995, he stressed the need for a practical approach and "not

take refuge in morality and cultural heritage which has misled many countries to an AIDS catastrophe".

Other awareness campaigns are just too difficult to understand. The main thrust of Bangladesh's anti-AIDS drive has been to place hoardings at busy intersections, some crammed with written information and others depicting skeletons lying in the foreground of what appears to be ravaged villages, with the acronym "AIDS" written in a highly stylised script in one corner.

Even if it were noticed, the hoarding would be lost on 75 percent of Bangladesh's population, which can't read. When AIDS awareness goes on radio, things aren't much different: several of Bangladesh's top performers came together and produced a song for radio and television audiences about a "deadly scourge" that people should try and protect themselves against. One unfortunate flaw in this otherwise noble exercise:

not once was it mentioned what this "scourge" is and how it is transmitted.

## Future Threat

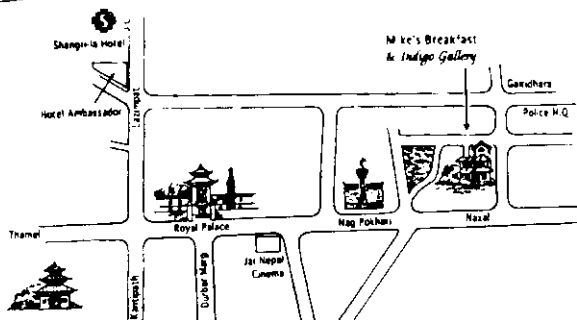
The AIDS scare has remained just that—a scare—in South Asia, and complacency defines the attitude of those with the responsibility of preparing the people and the economy for the devastating invasion to come. Just because you do not see it coming—because there has been no sustained surveillance campaign in any of the regional countries—does not mean that it is not approaching. The threat of the pandemic is also disregarded because it is difficult to correlate a future threat with future economic ruin.

The common South Asian citizen still does not understand AIDS. The average South Asian government is not doing much better. Without data, burdened with unresponsive public health structures, confronted by myriads of other public health problems, and in full denial of the facts of sexuality, South Asians are, basically, sitting back while they wait for HIV to spread. The disease is yet to strike hard, but it will. △

*N. Sattar is a Bangladeshi researcher presently based in Kathmandu.*

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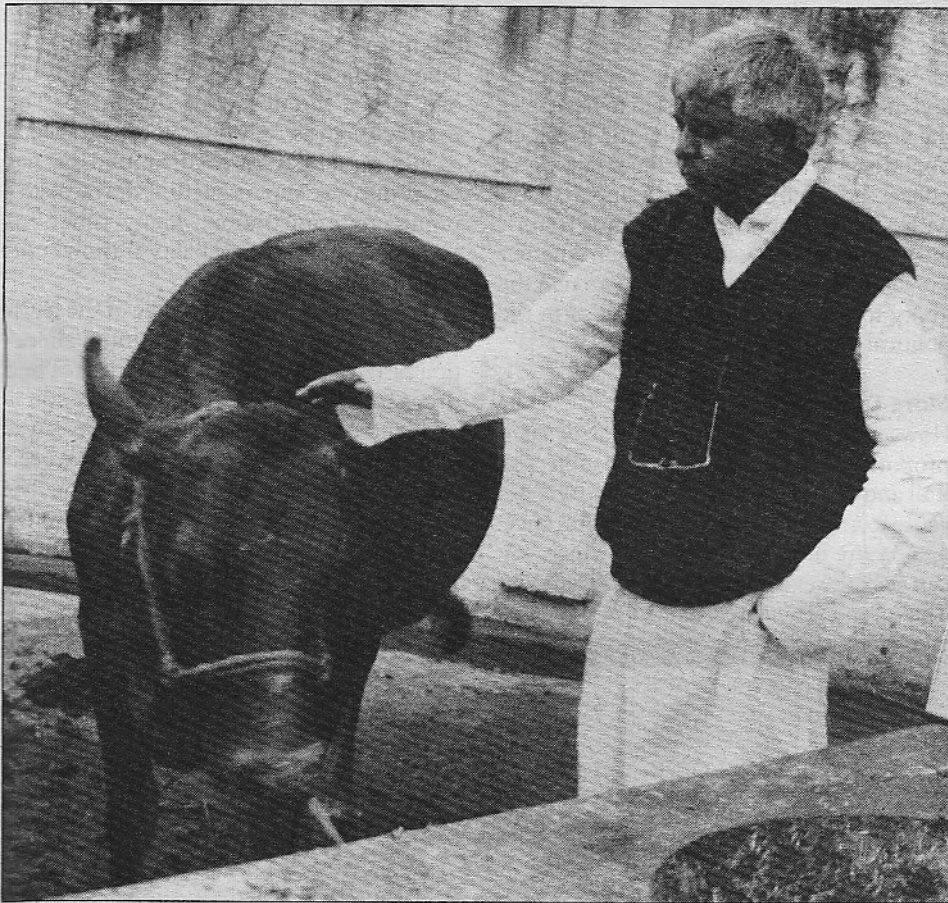
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Laloo Prasad with cow

## A Bovine Boondoggle in Bihar

*How is it that one of the largest-ever embezzlement scams in India, involving unimaginable crores of rupees, occurs in its poorest state?*

by Ramesh Upadhayay

In India, the judiciary struck once in New Delhi, when the Supreme Court asked the Central Bureau of Investigation to take on national-level politicians involved in taking bribes. While the rest of the country was talking about "Hawala", it struck next in Bihar, when the state's High Court directed an enquiry into an affair that goes under the rather unprepossessing title of the Animal Husbandry Department Scam.

Since 1978, it turns out, colluding bureaucrats and politicians of Bihar have siphoned off funds provided by the Central Government for developing livestock in the tribal belt of South Bihar. No one knows yet how much was embezzled, but it could

extend anywhere up to INR 2000 crore. (For the sake of comparison, the annual budget estimate of the state government for the current year was INR 2400 crore, although no more than INR 650 crore is actually spent on average in any given year.)

No one seemed to have been keeping watch over the officials and politicians as the tribals were cheated of two decades' worth of valuable support, and New Delhi seemed content to send in money without demanding accountability. The venality was all the more galling as Bihar is the second-most populous, and the most poverty-stricken, state in Indian Union, one that is continuously short of development funds.

As talk of the scandal percolated through Patna's unkempt streets, it exposed to attack the flanks of Bihar's flamboyantly rustic chief minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav. For a man who has crafted for himself a Robin Hood-like image as champion of the poor and the minorities, the sudden revelation could not have been more inopportune. As the newly anointed President of the Janata Dal, Mr Yadav was just developing prime ministerial ambitions when the livestock affair came up to gore him in mid-stride. Ironically, it was that other scam, Hawala, which catapulted Mr Yadav to the top post of his party after the resignation of S.R. Bommai, who was "tainted" through being mentioned as bribe-taker in the diary of the mercurial businessman, S.K. Jain.

In April, the general-election related excitement served to divert attention of the populace and the SHD scam seemed to recede into the background. However, the newly energised investigative agencies such as the CBI are unlikely to let the matter rest. Mr Yadav faces a no-win situation—he may not be charged with foul play, but his image cannot but take a beating, as a Chief Minister who knowingly or not allows fraud to proceed on such a grand scale. The tragedy, in a way, is all Bihar's.

### CBI Comes Calling

Prior to the livestock scam, news out of Bihar as presented by the Indian national press tended to be restricted to the whims of the Chief Minister, whether ordering a mass haircut session for scavenger urchins in a surprise visit to their hovels, allowing peasants to park their buffaloes in Patna thoroughfares, or milking his personal cow in front of paparazzi to prove his proximity to the masses.

The livestock affair had been brewing for months, and at first Mr Yadav tried to stonewall investigations. After a raid on the Animal Husbandry Department offices indicated the existence of a racket, he did set up a panel, which reported that INR 1127 crore had been overdrawn by the Department since 1980.

A writ petition was filed in the Patna High Court by Mr Yadav's political opponents, seeking a probe by the CBI. The Chief Minister pleaded that it was his government's prerogative to approach the agency, but a Division Bench of the Patna High Court turned him down. The harshly worded judgement of 11 March stated, "It is clear that the excess withdrawals were not isolated acts but they were manifestations and result of a well-knit conspiracy to commit loot and plunder of public money which could not be possible without the support of

highups." The investigations thus far appeared to be slipshod and perfunctory, said the court, and it could not be ruled out that the state government would attempt to influence its own investigators.

The CBI enquiry, as confirmed by the Supreme Court on appeal, is to cover the period from 1977 to 1996, but it has been established that the exchequer was swindled of large amounts during the last five years, coinciding with Mr Yadav's term in office. In 1996 alone, a whopping sum of INR 150 crore was withdrawn from the state treasury for the Animal Husbandry Department, against a budgetary provision of INR 71 crore.

The vouchers that were unearthed by investigators showed cars, oil tankers and even scooters being used to take delivery of and to transport bulls, buffaloes and cattle feed. Payment receipts were faked, and vast amounts earmarked for specific schemes were wholly diverted. All along, the livestock authorities were misusing the mechanism of civil deposits and public ledger accounts, while the auditors in New Delhi were kept satisfied with supposed paper transfers.

The public ledger accounts are those that are placed at the disposal of the state government by the Accountant General for payments related to public sector undertakings, etc. Both civil deposits and public ledger accounts fall in the category of non-plan expenditure, providing (it turns out) enough scope for financial manipulation and swindling of funds. The same is true of central allocations for welfare and poverty alleviation schemes, including the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP, now nicknamed "Integrated Robbery and Dacoity Programmes").

In the High Court's view, the facts as reported prima facie constituted "gross financial indiscipline verging on fraud on the Constitution and the people". It was an irony, it stated, that all this was happening while state government employees were not getting their salary on time, and writ petitions had to be filed for payment of pensions and contractors' bills.

In his defence, the normally boisterous Mr Yadav claimed that the "animal husbandry mafia" had been trying to do him in by keeping him out of the loop. He also blamed the state's Accountant General and the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee. For his part, the Accountant General observed in his report: "The controlling officers failed not only in containing the expenditure within the voted grant but also in making a reasonably accurate estimate of requirement of funds."

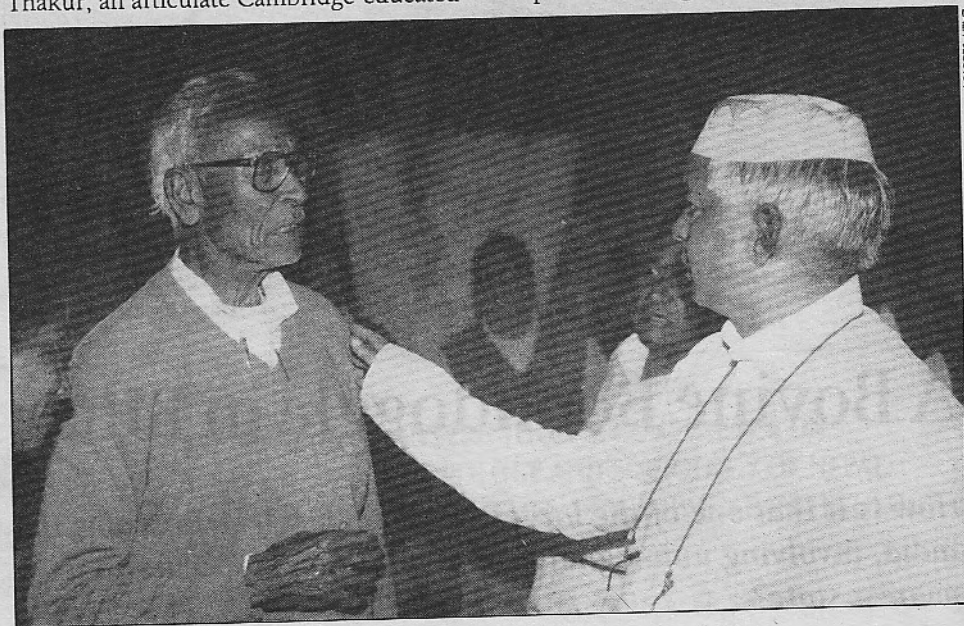
Meanwhile, as many as 75 officers of the Indian Administrative Service of the rank of commissioner, deputy commissioner and district magistrate, are said to have over the years fed in the trough of the livestock boondoggle. The state's administrative and police cadres are a highly pampered lot, with a large proportion of them is notoriously corrupt. It remains to be seen whether the CBI investigators will be able to nab the guilty in the bureaucracy as well as in the political arena.

### More Dungheaps

How come a corruption scandal of such proportions gets acted out on a subject as dull and droopy as animal husbandry? "Because it is an area of absolute insignificance, an obscure hiding hole through which you can suck the exchequer dry," says Damodar Thakur, an articulate Cambridge-educated

For whatever reason the Central auditors turned a blind eye to happenings in Bihar, the animal husbandry scam, it turns out, is just the tip of the dungheap. The livestock loot is only the most outrageous example of all-pervasive corruption that has eaten into the superstructure of the state's politico-administration. Many other instances of multi-crore venality are now coming to light.

The Questions Committee of the legislature has discovered that a Central allocation of INR 103 crore for the supply of free drugs to leprosy sufferers—the affliction is endemic among the tribal population—was misappropriated. There seems to have been a separate racket involving a whopping INR 10,000 crore meant to subsidise tubewells, irrigation pumps and piping, as well as fertilisers and pesticides. Patna is yet to respond to urgent letters from the



The Chief Minister with Animal Husbandry Minister Bhola Ram Toofani

retired professor, and former director of Bihar's Education Department. He adds, "What the long-drawn affair indicates is collusion from top to bottom, a massive rot that exists in the state of Bihar."

Why did the Central Government allow the scam to continue unchecked for so long? According to one view, Mr Yadav's government received protection from P.V. Narasimha Rao because, as Prime Minister, he wanted to have the Janata Dal on stand-by in case he needed a coalition partner at the Centre. There are even those who think that the Congressmen in the Centre themselves consider Congress rule in Bihar (and Uttar Pradesh, for that matter) as inimical to their interests, and hence would rather that Mr Yadav continued unmolested.

Union Rural Development Ministry on the matter.

There are other examples of financial breakdown in a state where the once-prestigious Patna University has mortgaged its library to a commercial bank in order to raise money to pay provident funds and other dues to its faculty. Passenger buses of the state transport corporation were auctioned recently, but there are no accounts of the sales proceeds. There is, similarly, no accounting of INR 65 crores spent on the upkeep of the embankments of the Kosi River.

Meanwhile, allocations for numerous schemes all over the state and amounting to hundreds of crores are being shown as "unspent", but the funds have not been surrendered to the Centre. They have been

either diverted towards salary payments or embezzled, and as much is conceded by senior state government officials who do not wish to be identified.

### The Yadav Also Rises

Laloo Prasad Yadav's rise from penury to chief executive of Bihar is the stuff of myth. One of six sons born to landless, cowherding parents in a village in Gopalganj District, Mr Yadav moved in his early 20s to Patna city, where his hrother served as an orderly at a veterinary college. He became active in student politics, and before long, was elected President of the Patna University Students' Union, on the strength of voting by Muslim and backward caste students.

Mr Yadav capitalised on this same electoral bank when he ran for state office—the Muslims, Dalits and his own community of Yadavs (traditional cowherds, or *gwalas*), who together provided him with an unshakeable 40 percent base among voters. When he was first elected Chief Minister in 1990, Mr Yadav turned the clock on the Congress Party, which had ruled the state for much of the period since Independence. The 1995 Bihar Assembly elections saw the Janata Dal increase its lead from 120 to 160 in the House, while the Congress saw a rout, down from 72 to a mere 29.

Having swept into office for a second time with an even firmer grip on the state, Mr Yadav, the Patna intelligentsia had hoped, would outgrow his weakness for gimmickry and get down to the business of providing good governance. While Mr Yadav did start a campaign to attract NRI and other investments to the state, he did not have much time before livestock scam splattered him and everyone in sight.

Mr Yadav pleads that the scam had its origins before his time, when Jagannath Mishra of the Congress Party (at the time of writing a Union Minister in Delhi) was Chief Minister. There are those who believe Mr Yadav. However, there are others, like Prof Thakur, who are convinced that Mr Yadav is personally corrupt: "You have only to go through the list of *benami* properties he, his family and close relatives have acquired—a house in Calcutta, properties in Patna and Chapra, and all that ostentatious expenditures at political rallies."

Mr Yadav's political opponent, Sushil Kumar Modi, who is leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the state legislature, predictably, has no doubts either. He says, "The needle of suspicion points to Mr Laloo Prasad because of his open patronage of the kingpins of the scam, including officials of the Animal Husbandry Department who

looted public money in collusion with proprietors of fake firms." Besides the Chief Minister, Mr Modi also accuses former Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra and Jagadish Sharma, a Congress MLA, for stalling on the scam inquiry.

The point to be noted, say Mr Laloo's critics, is that there has been a sharp increase in the swindled amounts between 1990-1996, which coincides with his term in office. According to tables available, the "excess withdrawals" were INR 29.3 crore in 1990-91, 70.7 crore in 1992-93, 199.2 crore in 1993-94, 245 crore in 1994-95, and 150 crore thus far in 1996. In comparison, the excess withdrawals in the three consecutive fiscal years previous to 1990-91 were INR 6.9 crore, 6.1 crore and 8.7 crore.

### Ruling by Hubris

All said and done, Mr Yadav's sullied image has dealt a great blow to the Janata Dal in Bihar and for the party's national calculations. Mr Yadav, basically, makes up the party in his state, independent-minded dissidents having walked out to form the Samata Party a couple of years ago.

The Patna elite regards Mr Yadav's provincialism with exaggerated disdain, and the national English-speaking press rarely misses an opportunity to taunt him. However, the poor and lower castes continue to look up to the Chief Minister, if only as a symbol, thumbing his nose at the national elites on their behalf. Indeed, the far Left forces and the Samata Party looked askance during the 1995 Assembly polls as Mr Yadav raked in the votes of the downtrodden, on the basis of sheer hubris. As one analyst wrote in *The Telegraph* of Calcutta, "Laloo Yadav was able to successfully woo the oppressed constituencies, speaking a language easily identifiable by the common masses."

Unfortunately, Mr Yadav does not seem to know what to do with power once he has it in his hands. He has been unable to use the mandate from the populace to bring about some energy and direction in Bihar's governance. Says a Patna University economist, "Laloo has not been able to replace the old elite with something better. He is not able to deliver because his administrative capability is nil. Besides, he is arrogant and he never takes advice."

Laloo Prasad Yadav is said to be at his most efficient when he is on the attack, and easily disoriented when forced to react. The



livestock scam has put him on the defensive as never before in his political life.

### Bihar Paradox

What the tragi-comedy of the animal husbandry episode has done is, it has once again placed the spotlight on India's laggard state. Bihar's development figures scrape the bottom: the largest proportion of people below the poverty line; the lowest per capita income in all India; stagnant agricultural growth; the worst in public health and education; and a wholly inadequate infrastructure. The criminalised, caste-based politics is a Bihar invention and something that social scientists can only marvel at. "Bihar has landed in the trash heap of the national agenda," wrote one editor.

It was not meant to be that way. North Bihar has fertile soil and perennial rivers, providing ample opportunity for the state to rival Punjab and Haryana as the country's green basket, while the southern belt is the storehouse of India's coal and iron. But historical neglect dating back to British times, when the colonial administrators allowed landlords to hold sway in north Bihar, left a state where the feudal legacy acts as a brake on social and economic advancement. And an "equalisation policy" put in place by Nehru and maintained to this day keeps Bihar from receiving market rates for its mineral wealth.

Bihar, the second-most densely populated region in the world after Java, sends out an army of landless migrants seasonally to affluent states like Punjab and Haryana to provide agricultural labour. Others travel as artisans and labourers to Nepal and the Indian Northeast. The rickshaw pullers of



Calcutta are mostly Biharis, although most have now settled there. A tiny slice of Bihar's upper crust is among the most affluent in the nation, while the overwhelming majority is the poorest in the country. The percentage of the state's population that lives below the poverty line has gone up from 43 percent in 1987 to 54 percent in 1994.

The various politico-criminal leagues that call the shots in the state include the coal mafia, the cooperative mafia, the education mafia, the land mafia, the public works contracts mafia, the transport mafia and the floods (embankment) mafia. At least 80 to 100 members of the State Assembly, drawn from all parties, are "history-sheeters". Kidnapping and gun-running are thriving cottage industries.

There are other Bihari woes: the departure of intelligentsia to Delhi and beyond; flight of Bihari capital to industrialised states like Gujarat and Maharashtra; restiveness among the Jharkhand tribals in the south who want to wrest mineral royalties away from Patna; perennial waterlogging and flooding problems to the north; and an education system that has evolved into a money-making racket of fictitious colleges and fake certificates.

"Given the pace of economic degenera-

tion and the mal-governance, there has to be a great famine or an uprising in this state before long," says a Patna University economist.

**People's Court**

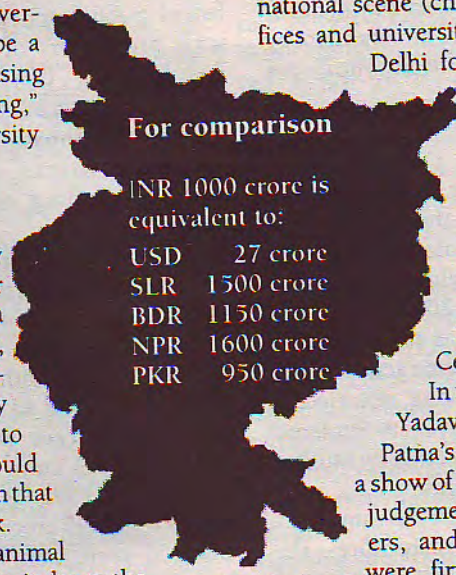
It is powerful irony that a Chief Minister who comes from a community of gwalas, and who flaunts his affinity to the masses by emphasising his links to all things bovine, should be enmeshed in a scam that deals with—livestock.

The matter of animal husbandry is but a reminder to the rest of South Asia as to how totally putrefied is the polity of Bihar, a state which has been left alone to set its own standards, at a level whole rungs lower than the rest of the Indian Union. This land of the Buddha's enlightenment and the seat of imperial power under the Mauryas and Guptas, this producer of coal and steel for all India, and generator of some of the most brilliant bureaucrats and best of intelligentsia in the

national scene (check the government offices and university departments in New Delhi for the Sinhas, Jhas and Mishras), is stuck with little else to show for its efforts than caste wars and poverty on a Sub-continental scale. A state that could vie for the topmost ranks, instead scrabbles around for crumbs from the Centre's table.

In mid-March, Laloo Prasad Yadav called a "Garib Rally" on Patna's great Gandhi Maidan, in a show of force to counter the court judgement, and to convince others, and himself, that the poor were firmly in their place—behind the Chief Minister. The self-proclaimed votaries of social justice used official machinery to seize passenger buses, private cars and trucks to transport the public to the rally site. "We will go to the people's court," thundered Mr Yadav from the podium. There will be time enough for that.

R. Upadhyay, based in Patna, has reported on Bihar for three decades.



**For comparison**

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- SLR 1500 crore
- BDR 1150 crore
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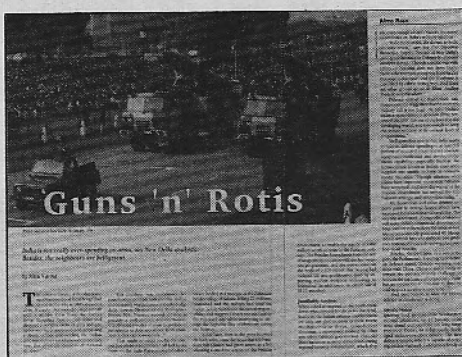


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The picture of Prithvi missiles on parade were, frame for frame, probably the most reproduced shots of springtime. Of course, all the Indian papers carried the image of the killer missiles riding their mobile carriers on the Republic Day march past, but so did *Newsweek*, *Far Eastern Economic*



Himal's Prithvi



Newsweek's Prithvi

*Review* and *Himal*. But why was it that the Prithvi pictures by Himal's Saraswati Chakravorty, *Newsweek's* Pablo Bartholomew and a host of other photographers looked exactly the same? Why, obviously, because all photographers were herded onto the same holding platform by the military organisers!

A dart, as they say, to *Sunday* magazine for **insensitive coverage of forest-dwellers** in a mid-April issue, titled "Beastly Tales". Reporter Amarendra Bose uses accusatory language to lambast the tribals of the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa for doing what they have been doing since long before pseudo-environmentalist urban journalists learnt about conservation and wildlife protection. Check out the terms Mr Bose uses, starting with the caption to a picture "Caught in the act", which might have been the editor's doing. March and April, says the report, are the "cruellest months" at the tiger reserve because the tribals "go on the rampage" in the dense forest. At another place, we're told the 500 tribals "went on a killing spree". On learning about the "massacre", officials arrested 12 hunters with bows and arrows. Deployment of police has apparently prompted the tribals to change their "*modus operandi*". Abandoning their "earlier ploy" of entering the forest following the Sankranti puja of mid-April, the tribals now "conduct their raids" when the police is less alert. Is this politically correct, or what?

Chhetria Patrakar, being male (if that has a bearing), is not above looking at **lightly clad women** peering out of magazines fronts—and the Indian periodicals have become increasingly daring on that count. I do not say that I approve, or that I would not do it if I were an editor, but, as I say, if it is there, I do not look away. This diversion into the day by day bustier Indian magazine culture is by way of introducing

the subject of photographic depiction of females in Pakistani mags. The strictures of the mullah are such that the models are demure, cleavages are firmly behind folds, and hemlines are ankle-length, always. The pose by a beach at sunset might itself be considered suggestive—but the model is fully clad.

Always more sparkling than Indian counterparts, even on the subject of sexuality, Pakistani newspaper columnists can be quite daring, much more than the photo editors. Take the piece by Sarah Ahmed titled "The Shape of Things to Come" in *The Friday Times* of Lahore, essentially a critique of brassieres and the fact that it is men who design women's underwear, which is why bra manufacturers go for "support" rather than "comfort". But the point from which I keep getting diverted: even in an article specifically about brassieres, does the editor dare show bras? Check out the picture alongside.

Ms Ahmed goes on to discuss the theme of the **dupatta and the avaricious Pakistani male**. I quote: "It has always amazed me how the local males' eyes seem to be magnetically connected with that region of a woman's body, especially if she dares to venture out without that vital strip of cloth, her dupatta. Although I am the very opposite of well-endowed, there has been many a dupatta-less occasion on which I have had the strange feeling that men are conversing not with me but with my mammaries." Lest the rest of South Asian male humanity snigger at the discomfiture



of the Pakistani kin, does anyone doubt that this broadside of the Lahore columnist applies to men right from the Khyber to the outermost ridge of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

How many South Asians with access to Indian magazines have been assaulted

by the notorious ad for Tuff Shoes, which exposed **models and live-ins** Milind Soman and Madhu Sapre. The point was to advertise the running shoes (which, to give them credit, Soman and Sapre did wear) by showing a naked man and a naked woman with pythons strapped around them. It seems that the original idea was to have the python put on the shoes so that there would be full frontal nudity, but the snake proved unwilling. While on the subject, in his column "Confessions of a Divorced Mal" in *The Asian*

*Age*, Veeresh Malik makes an interesting observation, "Did anyone else notice that Madhu Sapre's backside is higher than Milind Soman's?" Raise your hand.

In the same column, Mr. Malik suggests that **globalisation and liberalisation** are bringing Indians together. "The one common thread that binds all of us Indians," he says, "are packets of potato chips, carbonated waters and Nirodh ads." Nirodhs are the

subsidised Indian condoms for the mass market, which have been supplanted by better lubricated brands for the upwardly mobile.

Ah, and here's one from the *Asian Age*, whose caption writer for the day was either preoccupied with the Liberty Ad or was too stricken by the implications of impugning tribals on print to be alert to the existence of **intelligence among newspaper readers**. He provided us with an AFP picture with a caption that read: "US President Bill Clinton (waving hand) enjoys the view of the Red Square, standing in front of St. Basil's cathedral." Haha! And besides, the view is on the other side, so why is Bill looking at right-stage. And, does that



look like a picture of someone enjoying a view? Would you wave your hand if you were enjoying a view, be it of the Taj Mahal or St Basil's. Is waving normally associated with enjoying views? These are the kinds of questions that keep me from going to sleep in early summers.

The article header in *Mulyankan*, magazine published by Nepali comrades of the Exxtreme Left, said "Wounded SAARC", and I immediately stopped dozing. What was this? Has some dastardly deed been committed on our fledgling organisation? Who had done it, and should we stand Mr Rao or someone else before the justices at the Hague for not being SAARC-friendly? A second reading indicated that all was well, and the cause of my momentary concern was nothing but the outcome of using acronyms which are accepted

by the vernacular language press as well. You see, *Mulyankan* is in Nepali's Devnagari script, so when it was reporting on an anti-imperialist international conference in Calcutta (held November last), it also carried a report on a play about the final days of the Cuban revolution called "The Wounded Shark". What to do? It is very, very difficult.

In order to do away with this confusion which comes from mistaking our serious-minded South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation with a ravenous creature of the deep, that too one with sharp teeth, I propose that a campaign be started to use the appropriate acronym in each South Asian language to refer to the organisation. Why use the imperialist's tongue when we can confuse ourselves thoroughly with the subtle and not-so-

subtle nuances of native speech? So, while in the beginning we can start with national language acronyms, as the movement gains steam, we can rope in the vernaculars. The SAARC acronym for the North Indian Hindi-speaking and Nepali belt would be (in Sanskrit/Devanagari) DAKSS (for *Dakshin Aesiali Kschyatriya Sahayog Sammelan*) and in the Urdu speaking world it would be JATABAT (for *Junoob Asiayee Tanzeem Barai Alakai Taawan*).

There was quite a bit of hoopla associated with the immersing of **Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia's** ashes in the Ganga at Haridwar by bandmember Bob Weir. Hindus were quite impressed that their river had gained international notoriety. But then what a damper to read this letter from Arun Mitra in the *Calcutta Telegraph*. "...When alive, Garcia had never shown any interest in India and its culture—the sitar strains heard on the studio version of 'Dark Star' can be traced to the then prevailing trend of dabbling in 'exotic' Indian music. Besides, neither the bandmembers

nor Deadheads are likely to be aware why the Ganga is considered holy by Hindus. If anything, they probably have the greatest contempt for things Indian." Which is probably true, if one

goes by the quote from Garcia's former wife, "There was no reason on earth to take Jerry's ashes to India...and sprinkle them into the most polluted river on the face of the earth." Well what does Jerry have to say about all this? Let's ask him.

Why do the regional organisations, from the Secretariat to ICIMOD in Kathmandu to the entire gamut of United Nations agencies, recoil with horror when it comes to showing a map of South Asia? It is for fear of backlash from any or all of concerned governments, particularly with reference the Kashmir front. Credit on this score, therefore, must be given to the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, which

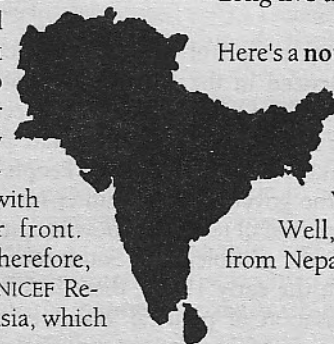
has done a meticulous job of researching the subject, with the help of the United Nations cartography office in New York, and coming up with an imagery which should hold no problems for thinking men and women, either in Islamabad or New Delhi. Besides, the imagery (some of it carried in the March issue of HSA) deals with development indicators, and not geopolitics. One reason that South Asia does not work together is because it does not see itself together on a map.

Meanwhile, there is more than one way to circumvent the problem of frontier lines. One of them is just not to show them! Just **blacken everything** and only show the outermost boundaries of what you consider your South Asia. This is what a Washington-based lobby group called National Advisory Council for South Asian Affairs has done. You will notice, though, Aksai Chin and Arunachal are both firmly within India. Ah, as long as we are all South Asians, let us worry only about Indo-Pak sensitivities!

So, **Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul** has done what many celebrated old men do—run off with a younger woman. The Trinidad-born Englishman of South Asian origin dumped his Anglo-Argentine mistress of many years' standing to tie the knot with a Pakistani columnist. The new love of the 63-year-old Naipaul's life is journalist Nadira Alvi, half his age, whom he met while researching a new book on Pakistan. While on the subject of Naipaul: does he know that he might well be of Nepali descent? There is no surname Naipaul in all of Uttar Pradesh, which is from where the bulk of indentured labourers were exported to the sugarcane plantations of the West Indies. Many Nepalis of 'low caste' use 'Nepal' as a surname, and 'Naipaul' was one British Raj spelling for the Himalayan kingdom. In a manner of speaking, therefore, we might as well bless this marriage of a Nepali and a Pakistani. Long live the SAARC spirit!

Here's a **note** from the back of the room. It says that Naipaul's family is definitely from eastern Uttar Pradesh, and that he has even visited his ancestral village. What do I have to say to that? Well, they probably moved down from Nepal to this UP village.

- *Chhetria Patrakar*





## Sri Lanka's South Still Smoulders

*Twice, the Sri Lankan state crushed the JVP movement and preoccupied itself with the Tamil war in the north and east. In the south, conditions which gave rise to the JVP and its brand of bloody politics fester.*

by Sasanka Perera

The worst period of political violence and terror experienced in the Sinhala-dominated southern parts of Sri Lanka unfolded between 1987 and 1989, in the attempted take-over of state power by the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP, the People's Liberation Front) and the government's counter-insurgency campaign. That period of terror has now become part of the collective history of violence in South Asia.

Through the early 1980s, there had been a steady institutionalisation of political violence in the Tamil-dominated areas of Sri Lanka, with an escalating confron-

tation between state security forces and various Tamil guerrilla groups. This was mostly concentrated in the war-ravaged operational zones in the northeast and the largely-shielded Sinhala population was affected only when bodies of dead soldiers were returned to their kin in sealed coffins.

When the JVP-led insurrection exploded in the south in 1988, it took Sinhala society completely by surprise. But were the JVP and its modus operandi, as well as the ruthlessness of the government's counter-insurgency campaign, all that unexpected?

### Upheaval in Our Midst

Ben Okri, in his 1993 novel *Songs of Enchantment*, writes: "We didn't see the mountains ahead and so we didn't sense the upheavals to come, upheavals that were in fact already in our midst, waiting to burst into flames." The JVP's rise was already heralded by the trends in Sri Lanka's political and social history.

The Sinhala-speaking rural hinterland of the country's south was slowly filling up with unemployed youth, and frustration was peaking. Meanwhile, from the very beginning of its rather long reign the United National Party (UNP) government had institutionalised the use of violence in routine politics. It had taken to openly using





criminal elements to coerce or eliminate political opponents, and UNP leaders who maintained highly dangerous private armies had a role in establishing a gun culture in the country. The UNP, therefore, had already done its part in subverting law and order and in the devaluation of human life, when the JVP revolt erupted.

Politicians and policy-makers, as well as social scientists, were caught unawares by the scale of the terror that swept the south. They had been distracted by the dream of transforming Sri Lanka into a so-called NIC (newly industrialised country) by the year 2000—the talk of the day. Instead, what we had was a country with a large number of angry, jobless youth without a future.

The worst of the violence was over by 1989, almost as suddenly as it had appeared. The rulers claimed that "normalcy" had been restored. JVP violence was "controlled" by unleashing an equally brutal reign of terror by the state. Insurgents and those suspected of terror were eliminated by military and police units, as well as by death squads sponsored by agents of the ruling UNP. The JVP's strength ebbed completely with the army's arrest and extra-judicial killing of its leader, Rohana Wijeweera, and his deputy.

Colombo's politicians and pundits prefer to see the entire JVP phenomenon as an aberration—but only because it took them completely by surprise. But if the violence of the late 1980s itself was an aberration, the contributing factors that lay behind it were anything but that. Those factors have not yet been dealt with.

### A New, Softer JVP?

Soon after Wijeweera and his deputy were killed, hand-written posters appeared in parts of the country with the words: "Simply because two plates have been broken, the hotel will not close down."

In fact, it would now appear that the hotel did not close down. In the Colombo cocktail circuit, amidst political gossip and the gloating over Sri Lankan cricketing successes, in hushed undertones one hears of a JVP re-grouping. And indeed, while the JVP has temporarily removed itself from the terror equation, the organisation is currently active in local universities in Sinhala-dominated areas. In many, they control the student unions. The JVP is also working in areas it had a significant presence in before the crackdown, and it has an MP in the national legislature.

How is it that the JVP is raising its head again, from what appeared to be almost total decimation only five years ago? To comprehend this development, we must try and understand the fundamental reasons that gave rise to the JVP in the first place.

The 'development' activities that the UNP undertook during its 17 years in power, in keeping with its so-called open economic policies, catered mostly to the interests of international capital and the Sri Lankan urban-business elite. Rural areas, like Uva and the Southern provinces, were neglected and became one of the most economically backward areas in the country. This was where the JVP struck its roots deepest.

Speaking in early April this year, a peasant in Moneragala in Uva province gave vent to the deep-seated anger of the rural populace: "Their development is for themselves," he said. "Their development is in Colombo."

The inability of the politicians and policy-makers to comprehend this discontent had led to the JVP's rise.

That discontent persists. And it is in the southern hinterland that one finds indications of a re-emergence of the JVP and the politics of extreme violence that it represents. After all, the angry comments of the Uva peasant were directed not only at the UNP, which was defeated in the general elections in 1994, but also at the present People's Alliance government of Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The new JVP is clearly attempting to distance itself from the savagery with which it is associated. Recently, a JVP activist went to the extent of claiming that much of the atrocities attributed to the movement was, in fact, unleashed by the state. But such opinions are not taken seriously by the average person, and the soft approach merely reflects its realisation that the public mood is totally opposed to violence. The collective trauma of the late 1980s is still a disturbing memory.

### Hardly a Spent Force

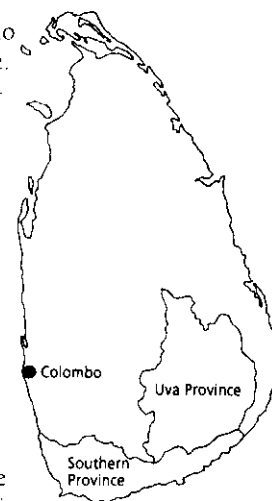
The JVP's activities were considerably weakened by the government crackdown and the lack of a widely recognised leader in the model of the late Wijeweera. Nevertheless, the JVP is hardly a spent force for a number of reasons.

First, irrespective of the disruptions caused to its organisational structure, many of its leaders at regional levels managed to escape the state's campaign of counter-terror. A majority of those killed by agents of the state were mere local level activists, or, in some cases, national leaders. Many other victims were not even linked directly to the movement, but were caught while acting under duress (such as in putting up posters or taking part in demonstrations). Many innocents were killed when they were wrongly identified as JVP sympathisers by informants. Hard-core cadres do exist who can re-organise the movement at the regional level, irrespective of the problems of leadership and organisation nationally.

Second, and more importantly, the frustration and anger of the youth in economically and socially backward areas have not dissipated. The People's Alliance may have replaced the UNP, but there has been no tangible upturn in the average peasant's quality of life. In fact, the cost of living has increased significantly over the past year-and-a-half, with no corresponding rise in average income levels.

Much of the lethargy evident in Sri Lankan polity is due to weak governance, which can be attributed to the nature of coalition politics, where problematic MPs and Ministers have to be tolerated even at the risk of angering the populace. At the same time, given the real and imagined security risks posed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), many politicians of the ruling coalition have distanced themselves from the public. Speeding luxury cars with tinted glass, and cordons of tight security separate the leaders from the masses. While the Colombo analysts may not pay much attention to the symbolic value of such a separation, it matters to people in the provinces who feel terribly marginalised.

The costly and unwinnable war which Ms Kumaratunga's government initiated after the failure of its peace talks with the LTTE has diverted much-needed funds as well as the attention of politicians and policy-makers



**Hard-core JVP cadres exist to the movement at the regional level.**



**The blood on the hands of the JVP has not completely washed off.**

away from the problems of the south. In the economically depressed areas such as Moneragala, Wellawaya, Hambantota and Anamaduwa, the People's Alliance has fallen from its high pedestal. In many parts, the party has become extremely unpopular within a short span.

Third, among many rural youth there is a general lack of confidence in mainstream politics, both of the left and of the right. They feel that the rural sector has been betrayed by the politicians, who will never be able to deliver real advancement. The traditional left is, in any case, a spent force. The UNP, on the other hand, has serious internal problems that retard its attempts at re-organisation, and also has the 17-year shadow of corruption and state-sanctioned violence against it.

The loss of confidence in the traditional political formations has left a sense of hopelessness. While this collective frustration does not necessarily translate into enthusiastic support for the JVP, the existential dilemmas faced by the populace today does provide ample space for youth unrest and the kind of politics which the JVP represented not so long ago to emerge again. Moreover, it is also clear that the Sri Lankan state will not be able to deal with the underlying social instability without first politically consolidating itself. Such a consolidation seems quite unlikely anytime soon in the context of the present coalition setup.

With the widespread popular discontent in the country, and the Chandrika government's singular inability to respond to them, southern Sri Lanka could well become volatile again. The only reason why this might not yet

happen is that the decade-old memory of the JVP-led violence—and the UNP's reaction—is still fresh. This may be why, despite the frustration, people are not flocking to the folds of the JVP. The blood on the hands of the organisation has not completely washed off.

**Not Whether, but When**

On the other hand, certain recent violent actions attributed to the JVP strongly suggest that the organisation has not really learnt from its own immediate history, irrespective of its public attempts to distance itself from past violence.

Perhaps, rather than focus only on the JVP, the proper question to ask is whether, in the context of prevailing conditions, the kind of politics that the JVP once represented can emerge again? On the basis of available information, the answer is 'yes', and it is only a matter of 'when'.

Politicians, policy-makers and influence-peddlers who rarely venture beyond Colombo's air-conditioned malls and hotels, and the community of social scientists engaged in advising providers of international capital on the relative safety of Sri Lanka's investment climate, are likely to underestimate the potential for another phase of sustained violence in the south—with or without the JVP. For many politicians and their advisers, not dealing with a problem is a way of coping.

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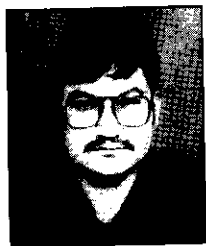
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*Reconsidering a British scholar's quarter-century-old work on caste-ethnic relations in east Nepal, a Nepali social scientist finds reason to make a case against "biased anthropology".*

by Dilli R. Dahal

## The Fallout of Deviant Anthropology

Western scholars have always been fascinated with South Asian anthropology. During the Raj, when this branch of study was developed as an offshoot of British colonial rule with "utilitarian purposes", it was limited to understanding the history and culture of the selected so-called "primitive peoples" such as the Onge, Naga, Khasi, Miri, Kachin, Lakher, Swat Pathan and Kandyan Sinhala. However, with the end of British rule, Western scholars were greatly restricted in terms of access to areas of research, particularly in India and Pakistan.

Even as the decolonised Subcontinent closed up to anthropological research, however, never-colonised Nepal, with its incredible diversity of caste and ethnic groups, opened up to welcome social scientists of various disciplines. Picking up where British residents and representatives like Hamilton, Kirkpatrick, and Hodgson had left off, Western ethnographers began conducting detailed studies of Nepal's many population groups.

Four decades of anthropological research has left a considerable amount of literature on Nepal, and more is being generated every year. There has been an academic free-for-all as unbelieving scholars found the subject of their research, hill tribes, largely untouched by modernisation. What resulted was anthropology both good and bad.

With few Nepalis engaged in the discipline, it can be said that the anthropological portrayal of the "real Nepal" has been a project of Western social scientists. What they have had to say has by and large been accepted with little questioning (in the En-

glish language, for this research is largely unavailable to the native language-speaking subjects themselves).

A serious matter rarely raised is the ethics of anthropological practice. Bound as they are to their own cultural blinders and career-driven as many academics tend to be—in pursuit of the all-important tenure track—Western anthropologists may find it difficult to make ethical decisions once actually in the field. A critical awareness of the inconsistencies and complexities of one's own system seems a prerequisite to the daring next step of making judgements about another's. The honest social scientist must, first and foremost, protect and honour the persons which are the subjects of his/her necessarily intrusive study. All too often, research can jeopardise the very community which has helped advance the career of the scholar.

By picking up for critical review research done 25 years ago by one social scientist, I seek to highlight a problem that is quite widespread. My intention, by focusing on one study, is to caution those who would accept unquestioningly all Western anthropological works which seek to pass judgement on one community or the other.

Of the many works published by foreign anthropologists on Nepal, Lionel Caplan's *Land and Social Change in East Nepal* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) is one of the most widely read. No article or book is complete without a reference to this study and no scholarly discourse can proceed without alluding to it. But this very frequency of citation raises the question: why is the book so popular among scholars of

various disciplines working in Nepal?

Lionel Caplan conducted his fieldwork in Nepal in 1964-65 in Ilam, one of the hill districts of Eastern Nepal, and the work was part of his dissertation research submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. The book, based on 12 months of field study, focuses on Limbu culture, the *kipat* system of land tenure, and Limbu relationships with high caste Hindu groups, particularly Bahuns (Nepal's hill Brahmins).

Caplan's main thrust is simply stated: the Limbu, who were the original settlers of the area and who received their state-recognised land right in the form of *kipat* from the Shah rulers dating from 1774, had their lands gradually "eaten" by the later immigrant Hindu groups, particularly Brahmins, through a process of treachery and other tricky behaviour. The Limbu are characterised as an innocent and naive people, in stark contrast to the Brahmins who are portrayed as cheats or otherwise dishonest in their dealings.

I have no intention of disregarding in its entirety what Caplan has written, for his arguments, assuredly, rest on empirical data. Rather, I want to establish that his truth is at best partial and selective. But, first, more details. Caplan used the case histories of two Brahmin brothers as exemplars of his general model of Brahmin bad faith and cheating.

### Selective Scholarship

I had an opportunity to do research in Ilam in 1980-81, and came upon certain details which were not reported by Caplan and developed certain interpretations with which I feel able to challenge Caplan's general thesis, at the very least to state that the two Brahmin brothers cannot be used generically to define the archetypal Brahmin in his dealings with the Limbu.

The two brothers, with the surname of Bhattarai and locally known as Kahila and Kanchha, although blood brothers and presented as unified in their motives by Caplan, were bitter rivals in their daily life. Kahila was the Pradhan Pancha of the Village Panchayat of that time, while the younger

brother was a *khandar* (a second class non-gazetted officer) in a government office in Ilam Bazaar.

When I was doing my own research, I was told that each brother had been involved in up to 75 litigations. Over time, they had victimised many peasants by appropriating their land in a variety of ways. They were certainly economically and socially powerful Brahmins, as Caplan writes, with direct access to government machineries.

The mistake that Caplan made in his presentation was to ignore the rivalry between the two brothers as he polished his Brahmin-exploits-Limbu thesis. The struggle which Caplan depicted in monotone as one between an ethnic and high-caste group was a much more complex social, cultural and psychological phenomenon. The most important point he missed was that in their nefarious acts of depriving land from agriculturists, the two brothers were competing mightily for economic and social advantage.

Caplan is quite correct when he points out that these two Brahmin brothers were crooks, but he fails to mention that the victims of this fraternal rivalry were both Limbu and Brahmin. Both high caste and ethnic lost their land and property to the brothers. Since Limbus had large land-holdings because of the *kipat* system, they inevitably lost more land when their cases went to court. Moreover, being land-rich rather than rupee-rich, they had to pledge their land to finance legal battles.

Caplan also failed to note that Kahila and Kanchha did not bother about caste and ethnicity when fighting each other. Any trouble, whether between two Limbus or between a Bahun and a Limbu, was taken as an excuse by each to try and out-do the other. And what of other ethnic or caste groups and their local relations? There were, for example, some powerful Gurung families in the area, richer than many local Brahmins, who also loaned money to Limbus and took land from them on mortgage. Yet, Caplan makes no reference to the Gurung. Why? The answer can only be that Caplan had his agenda which could not be muddled.

It is also worth noting that Caplan did not pick other Brahmin exemplars to explore local dynamics, to show in fact the variety among Brahmins, as there is variety in every community. In constructing his thesis, Caplan might have noted the numerous Brahmin households who had never dared to touch Limbu land through foul means, but he didn't.

All this suggests, disturbingly, that the

author of a study which has informed and helped form the worldview of numerous social scientists engaged in the Central Himalaya was selective in his use of the full range of information available. It is difficult not to conclude that the selection was based on his desire to prove a hypothesis he brought with him into the field site.

Did Caplan really believe that by presenting the case studies of two Brahmin families he could generalise the nature and habits of Brahmins everywhere, which is what he does? Could not a similar theory of lying and exploitation be developed for any group in the world?

All scholars whose subject is human society need to critically reflect on the extent to which the accounts of the anthropologist is concerned with the relevant data versus the unstated biases driving the research. In the case of the social scientist bounding across continents and cultures to do a few months' research before pronouncing judge-

ment, the responsibility is to be careful to the point of distraction.

In the case of Nepal, there is no doubt that Caplan's work has had an impact on subsequent studies, and unwittingly he has helped shape the argumentation of many young Western social scientists who came later. Here, then, is the classic case of a society, without social scientists of its own, defined on the basis of someone who is from without.

While asking to be excused for critiquing a work of research a quarter century late, I believe firmly that Caplan's book is a prime example of an anthropological report biased towards a pre-ordained conclusion. It suffers from a methodological fallacy. I do not understand why Caplan's case isn't considered deviant rather than a model of social science research on Nepal.

*D.R. Dahal is a social scientist with the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Kathmandu.*



*The neglect of Tibet by South Asia's intellectuals is insensitive and ignoble. Even if they were to ignore the Tibetans in exile, what of the Tibetans within Tibet?*

*by Tsering Wangyal*

## A Jaundiced View of Tibet

The 10th of March 1996 marked the 37th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against Chinese occupation of their country. Tibetans and their supporters almost all over the Western world organised demonstrations, lectures, seminars, exhibitions and other activities to highlight the plight of their homeland.

Thousands of French, Italians, Germans and Hungarians converged on the Chinese embassy in Brussels to protest human rights abuses in Tibet and to demand Tibetan independence. Similarly, hundreds of Americans protested outside the Chinese embassy in Washington DC. In 25 European countries, 593 mayors flew the Ti-

betan national flag atop their city halls, and the cities of Berkeley, Montreal and Vancouver made similar gestures. People in countries as far apart as Russia and New Zealand expressed their support for the Tibetan cause.

In South Asia, however, the scene was quite different. As has been the case for several years, India, home to the largest number of Tibetan refugees, did not allow the demonstrators anywhere near the Chinese embassy in New Delhi. In Nepal, authorities arrested 100 Tibetans and five Nepali human rights activists who had planned a march to the Chinese embassy on 19 March.

Tibetan demonstrations were not allowed in any of the other South Asian countries. Apart from Bhutan, it is not even certain if there are any Tibetans or supporters of Tibetans in those countries.

Unlike their counterparts in the West, South Asian intellectuals, with a few isolated exceptions in India, have never tried to urge their governments to help, or even to look into the situation of, the Tibetans. Indeed the general belief amongst the intelligentsia in the region appears to be that Tibet is not worth bothering about. The noteworthy exception to this rule seems to be those who have been trained in the West, for example Pico Iyer and Aung San Suu Kyi, to name two of the better-known personalities.

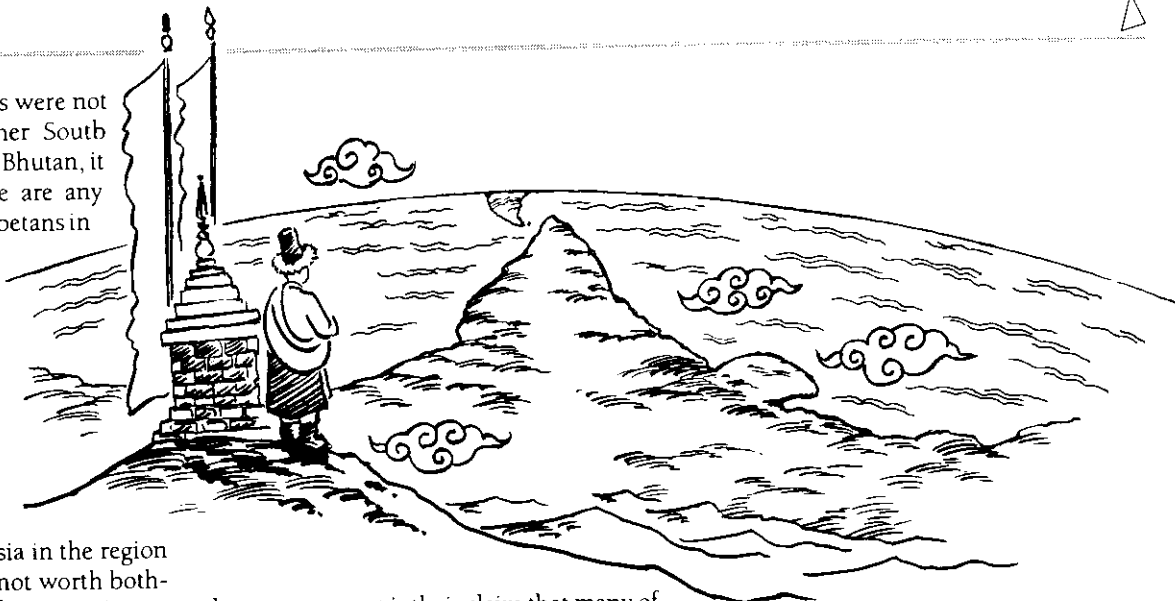
One reason for this intellectual apathy at Tibet's very doorstep is, obviously, China's power. Indian politicians and intellectuals have not forgotten the humiliating experience of the 1962 border war with their northern neighbour. They do not wish to go through a similar experience again. Although some Indians have said they will fare much better the next time, even if they do, the costs would be staggering. Hence, it is best to do as little as possible to offend the Chinese.

Supporting Tibetan independence is not as important as maintaining peace in the region. Such is the intellectual and diplomatic justification. Tibetans try to point out—without much success—that similar thinking on the part of the first prime minister of India resulted in the country losing Tibet as its northern border and gaining China in its place, which later provided the basis not only for the 1962 debacle but also the continuing political uncertainties in the region.

The other countries in South Asia have even less reason to support Tibet: they are much smaller than India and have that much more reason to fear an angry China. Pakistan, for its part, sees much more gain in openly supporting the People's Republic vis-a-vis Tibet, and this is what it has consistently done whenever the question has cropped up during the annual United Nations discussions on human rights in Geneva. No Pakistani intellectual is ever known to have criticised his government on this count.

### Democratic, Colourful India

One reason intellectuals in India proffer for keeping away from the Tibetan indepen-



dence movement is their claim that many of the exiles are much better off and have no desire of returning to Tibet even if it does become independent. So why bother, goes the argument. As recently as 5 April, Batuk Vora wrote in *The Times of India*: "Many of the new generation Tibetans do not want to return to Tibet under any circumstance, after having been born, grown up and enjoyed their life in democratic and colourful India." For this and other reasons, Mr Vora comes to this conclusion: "Both Beijing and New Delhi have tremendous opportunity to develop their ties independent of cold war-style politics. The Tibet issue should not cause any break in this development."

Mr Vora did not cite reasons why young Tibetans refugees prefer India to Tibet, but some earlier writers on this theme have done so. They have said that Tibetans have forgotten their own culture. How so? Because they wear jeans, like pop music and Hindi films—when they should be serving as monks and spending their time meditating in monasteries.

Wherever this view of Tibetan-ness originated, it certainly does not coincide with the one held by Tibetans themselves. It only goes to show how much research work Indian commentators put in on their subject before making lofty pronouncements. For, judging from a study of Tibetan exiles since they have been allowed to visit their homeland in the late 1970s, it seems clear that at least 50 percent will return to a free Tibet, at least 25 percent may choose to have a foot each in Tibet and their current domicile, and perhaps 25 percent will not return at all, except as tourists.

These projections might be a bit off, but it does not matter. Right or wrong, such figures have nothing to do with the movement for Tibetan independence. There are only about 130,000 Tibetans in exile. There are about six million Tibetans in

Tibet. How can one argue that because many of the former do not want to return to a free Tibet, all of the latter should also be denied that right?

It is the Tibetans under Chinese who are undergoing untold suffering. It is the Tibetan culture and Tibetan identity in Tibet that the Chinese are forcibly trying to Sinicise. The cause of Tibet is the cause of the Tibetans in Tibet. The Tibetan independence movement remains valid even if not a single Tibetan exile wishes to return to a free Tibet. Western intellectuals, by and large, have understood this fact.

Some Indian intellectuals, meanwhile, are reported to be bitter with the Tibetan exiles for their (the latter's) infatuation with Westerners and neglect of Indians. One gets the impression that such critics think Tibetans pay huge sums of money to Westerners to support their cause. The truth is that the Westerners attend Tibetan lectures or participate in Tibetan demonstrations on their own initiative and at their own expense. Thus, it is they who end up spending huge sums of money to be counted as Tibet supporters.

There are, of course, exceptions to all generalisations. Some of the Tibet supporters in the West are thought to be in it purely for personal gain, financial or otherwise. Similarly, Tibetans are fully aware of the presence in India and Nepal of some genuine supporters who, if and when the time is right, will be there to support the Tibetan cause. One wishes one could say the same applied for intellectuals in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

T. Wangyal is editor of the journal *Tibetan Review*, published from New Delhi.

# Asma Jahangir

## The Frontline Activist



*"The time for dilly-dallying is over, we need to face the issues up front," says Pakistan's foremost human rights activist.*

by Fawad Usman Khan

TALK ABOUT HUMAN rights in Pakistan and sooner or later Asma Jahangir's name crops up—for some very good reasons. An advocate at the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Ms Jahangir has shot to prominence with the frontline positions she has taken on controversial, sometimes life-threatening, issues. She and the organisations she has founded and worked for have taken up causes ranging from the rights of women, children, religious minorities, bonded labourers, and jail inmates, to civil rights and constitutional reform. Over the last decade, Asma Jahangir's name has become synonymous with progressive thinking and activism for change in the country.

Ms Jahangir's first steps towards activism began when she co-founded Pakistan's first all-female law firm, AGHS (for Asma,

Gulrukh, Hina and Shahla, the founding members) and its Legal Aid Cell in 1980. She was instrumental in establishing the Punjab Women's Lawyers Association and was part of the pioneering group that formed the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in 1981. In 1987, she was among the founders of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), an institution whose credibility and integrity is now acknowledged internationally.

WAF was born in the days of Gen Zia-ul-Haq's martial law, the most oppressive period in Pakistan's history. Besides clamping down on political activity, and resorting to media censorship and television propaganda, the general foisted "Islamisation" upon the country—a move that has had far-reaching effects on the country's

psyche and laws. Few understood the long-term implications of these moves. Fewer had the courage to dissent.

Perhaps the worst-affected by these changes were women, who suddenly found themselves the focus of unwanted attention. Suddenly, anything concerning women was potentially "obscene" and "un-Islamic". Says Ms Jahangir, "Essentially, women were seriously concerned about the designs of the government. The threat of complete segregation was very real, and the experience of Iran was clear to all of us."

Almost alone, WAF took on the might of the military government. The show-down came on 12 February 1983, when the Punjab Women Lawyers Association, made up of no more than ten members, called a demonstration at Lahore's central Mall Road. A platoon of policemen was unleashed on the 150-odd women and a sprinkling of men who had gathered there. The protestors were tear-gassed and baton-charged. Some, including Ms Jahangir, were arrested.

"The 12 February procession had a profound effect on the politics of the country," says Ms Jahangir. "For the first time, women publicly exposed the bogey of 'Islamisation'. For long they had been patronised and treated with indulgence, but for the first time here were women making news."

Ms Jahangir believes that the feminist movement in Pakistan emerged through WAF's initiative, for it unleashed ideas that had been suppressed by social traditions and a male-dominated psyche reinforced by Zia's regime. With the return of democracy in 1988, WAF is currently re-defining its role. "We need to see women's rights as human rights, not in isolation," says Ms Jahangir.

The 44-year-old lawyer believes that even though Pakistan's democracy has failed to reach the people, there are signs of hope as the people are increasingly standing up against injustice. Women, in particular, are gradually stepping forward to fight for their rights—as the hundreds of cases coming before the AGHS Legal Aid Cell testify—whether it is child custody,

inheritance, domestic violence, sexual abuse, recovery of dowry, or maintenance.

**"Blasphemer"**

Besides being a women's rights advocate, Ms Jahangir is also in the forefront when it comes to human rights in general. She was recently re-elected chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. HRCP was at the centre of an international maelstrom sparked by the death of Iqbal Masih, the "child labour leader". Recalling the episode, Ms Jahangir says, "HRCP presented a fair and impartial report. We refused to play to the gallery or dramatise the issue."

But there were vested interests who tried to cash in on Iqbal's dead body, Ms Jahangir maintains, with the Western media playing the discreditable exploitative role. A Swedish television journalist, for example, labelled all Pakistani institutions as either corrupt or compromising and alleged that Ms Jahangir herself kept children in bondage. He found he had taken on the wrong person, for Ms Jahangir went to court in Sweden and got a ruling against the journalist.

The last few years have been difficult for the Lahore-based Ms Jahangir, with some sectarian organisations targeting her as a "blasphemer" and issuing *fatwas* against her, particularly since she defended young Salamat Masih, the 14-year-old Pakistani Christian boy who had been accused of

blasphemy. If convicted, he would have been sentenced to death. During the hearings on the case, her car was smashed by a fanatical mob in the Lahore High Court and armed intruders entered the next-door home of her sister, lawyer Hina Jillani, not long afterwards. Since then, both sisters have been provided armed police protection.

"I am a changed person after these experiences," confesses Ms Jahangir, who received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1995. "With all this pressure and tension I have forgotten how to relax. In the last four years, there has not been a single week when I have not been attacked in one way or the other."

While denying allegations that she gets emotionally involved with the problems of clients, Ms Jahangir admits, "I do identify myself with the causes." And causes there are aplenty, particularly concerning women and religious minorities, thanks to the discriminatory laws introduced by Zia-ul-Haq which remain in the statute books.

**Zia's Legacy**

"Even eight years after Zia's death, we are talking about his legacy. It just shows that to undo the dirt piled up in a decade, it may take three times as long," says Ms Jahangir. "Discriminatory and oppressive legislation becomes dormant when social attitudes change." In Pakistan, the change

is more visible on the institutional level, with fewer convictions taking place under such laws.

Ms Jahangir is eloquent on the future of party politics in her country: "We need to have a new liberal political party in Pakistan, one that is run on democratic lines. The pervasive feudal structure and mindset can be very humiliating for sincere hard-working party workers. We need more educated people and professionals to enter mainstream politics and mobilise the masses. And I strongly believe that women should aggressively seek a mandate from women voters. The time for dilly-dallying is over, we need to face the issues up front."

Lately, there has been some pressure on Ms Jahangir to assume the mantle of political leadership, but she laughs the suggestion away. "I can come out passionately for a cause that I believe in. But I just don't have the finesse and deftness of a political leader."

*F.U. Khan is a Lahore-based journalist.*



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# Nepali Films Back to Square One



*Nepali film producers waste good money and celluloid, but are unable to keep the cinema buff's attention from straying.*

by Ramyata Limbu

It is just one of those ironies that Nepal's most successful film star is Manisha Koirala, but Nepali films are the last thing she is associated with. Although Ms Koirala's silver screen journey did begin with a Nepali film, she knew what she was doing when she moved to Bombay six years ago. Today, she is one of the most saleable actresses in Bollywood whereas her one-time colleagues still wallow in the uncertainty of 'Kollywood', Kathmandu's shineless film industry. By her own admission, Ms Koirala has not seen her debut film, the eminently forgettable *Pheri Bhetaula* (Till We Meet Again).

Nepalis love cinema. Theatres are put up wherever the road reaches, and where

conventional halls are not practical, video houses do good business. In the remotest of mountain hamlets, pictures of film stars vie for space with posters of deities and family portraits. Film magazines do good business all over and everyone can hum the latest hit tune. Unfortunately, most of this fan following is reserved for Hindi films; Nepali filmmakers have not been able to take advantage of this infatuation.

All that had seemed about to change when, in 1991, the action-packed family drama *Chino* broke all box office records. There were declarations that after decades on the road, Nepali cinema had finally arrived. Prior to *Chino*, which featured Nepal's established stars, Shiva Shrestha, Bhuvan

KC and Kristi Mainali, well-received Nepali films had enjoyed only modest success.

Following *Chino's* success, businessmen of all hues plunged headlong into film production. There was a flood of releases. Whereas the number of productions had averaged two to three a year previously, a hundred Nepali films hit the market in the last five years.

There was overkill, and no one was watching out for quality. And so, as suddenly as the boom began, it was over. Kollywood has taken a nose-dive since last winter.

"There has been a total reversal," says Indra Prasad Shrestha, president of the Nepal Film Association, the body which looks after the interests of producers, distributors and exhibitors. "Previously, a producer would collect two million rupees on a film, and now it is difficult to raise even fifty thousand."

Why has the industry experienced such a sudden up and down? The 'up' is explained by producers wanting to repeat the success of films like *Chino* and a few others. That was a film which understood that the Nepali public—fed on a steady diet of Hindi films for 40 years—had to be given comparable themes and quality. And so the producers provided the familiar "father murdered, brothers separated, reunion and final retribution" theme and ensured that the film's finished quality compared with that of a Bollywood product.

The 'down' is explained by the fact that there was over-production, poor quality, and an inability to recognise trends and technology change. The gaggle of producers had only money to spend. In fact, 'speculators' might be a better term to describe their carpetbagger motives and absence of cinematic experience. To almost the last, they failed to match *Chino's* standard, and killed each other through competition. They stuck to the old Bombay formula (which had worked so well for *Chino*) when Bombay was already into a different genre of well-made films with good story lines—*Roja*, *Hum Aapke Hai Kaun*, and *Rangeela*.

Besides Bombay's sophisticated competition, the Nepali film industry also fell

victim to the sudden spread of satellite television, which is a phenomenon of the last five years. The fact that you could watch torsos wriggling to music without leaving home kept quite a large number from the theatres.

### Training Ground

Bombay has long been both a boon and a bane for the Nepali film industry. Manisha Koirala was not the first Nepali aspirant to enter Hindi filmdom; dance director late Gopi Krishna and singer Udit Narayan Jha preceded her. B.S. Thapa and Prakash Thapa, known to be among the better Nepali film directors, trace their roots to Bombay, as do numerous film technicians working in Kollywood. But, while Bollywood has long been a training ground for Nepali film professionals, this association has not been without its drawbacks.

The staple Kollywood Nepali film is but a Hindi *masala* movie adapted rather crudely to Nepali; couched in a different language, locales and customs, and complete with the ingredients that typify Hindi *masala* movies, macho heroes, nubile heroines, lecherous villains, parted siblings, revenge, bloody brawls, romantic romps (on degraded slopes), and divine intervention.

Reliance on India goes beyond plagiarism of themes and importing technicians. Producers still have to flock to Bombay for processing and mixing facilities. Even film songs, one of the principal factors that determine whether a film will run or not, are recorded in Bombay using Indian playback singers and orchestras, as this turns out to be cheaper than flying singers over from Kathmandu.

Not that films that break the mould have not been made. Two are notable from among the hundred that were produced during this period. *Prem Pinda*, the first Nepali period film won both critical and popular acclaim, and almost as impressive has been this year's release *Rajamati*, a Newari-language film which draws on a folk tale of love. *Prem Pinda* was directed by Yadav Kharel, known for his 'relatively qualitative' taste. However, the man behind both these films is well-known actor and director Neer Shah. Mr Shah is critical of the bent of Nepali film producers: "The Nepali audience is used to Hindi formula films. If we are

intent on copying these formula films, even though we have neither the resources nor the technology, it is no surprise that our films flop."

Not dissimilar are the sentiments expressed by a downtown Kathmandu theatre manager. "The Nepali films being produced nowadays offer the same stuff and are not

technicians and stars alike.

Shiva Shrestha, the most successful Nepali actor, with 18 Nepali and 23 Pakistani films to his credit, receives around NRS 70,000 per film, which can be considered paltry. He supplements his income by running a family farm in the eastern Nepal town of Biratnagar. Young and pretty Melina

Manandhar is popular with Nepali producers. Her fee stands between NRS 30,000 and 40,000 but she admits doing many of her films free of cost as favours for friends. She is a part-time model.

"Indeed, what can you say about the glamour pretensions of a film world where you can see a star buying vegetables at the local vendors?" asks a Hindi film fan.

The reason the pay is low is that the market is limited, confined as it is to 148 theatres within Nepal and a few in the Nepali-speaking areas of India like Darjeeling. Last year, the Nepali theatres screened 20 Nepali films, compared to the 124 Hindi films.

Besides, the films are not made for a paying audience. Audiences who would appreciate a good product have stopped going to the cinema, says director Deepak Rayamajhi. "We make films for the lower classes. Films made for the middle class would bring the producer immediate financial ruin."

### Spilt Celluloid

Still, it is not proper to underestimate what the Nepali producers have achieved. The industry is sizeable, and employs about 10,000, comparable to the film worlds of Australia, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka.

Says a Nepali magazine editor, "Our tragedy, right at the beginning, was to begin by trying to copy Indian films, when we knew we could never match the money, the glamour, the technology. If we had had a Satyajit Ray to point us in the right direction back then, maybe the audience taste would have developed in a different direction. But it is all spilt celluloid."

Since *Aama*, the first black-and-white film produced in Nepal in the mid-60s by the Ministry of Communication, the Nepali film industry has come a long way, but is in desperate need of a fresh formula. And, even today, there is no Nepali Satyajit Ray in sight.

R. Limbu is a reporter for Everest Herald daily.

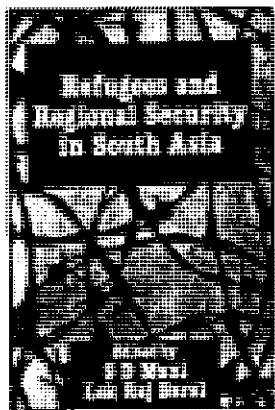


Sunny Rauniar in period piece *Prem Pinda*

worth watching," says the manager. His hall had continuously screened Nepali films for the past three years. But when he decided to show *Rangeela*, one of last year's biggest Hindi hits, its success was something no one could have imagined. *Rangeela* had a long run of five months and even left the Nepali landscape full of girls wearing red knit berets a la Urmila Matondkar, the film's heroine. According to some, this response is explained by the fact that the audience had been starved of sophisticated cinematography, unavailable in the Nepali releases.

Poor quality is also explained by several other factors. Most films are shot in 16mm and then blown up to 35mm for screening, which severely affects visual quality. Professionalism is lacking because the pay packet is slim, for

# Unwelcome Guests



## Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia

S.D. Muni & Lok Raj Baral, eds.  
 Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo  
 and Konark Publishers, Delhi, 1996  
 INR 275  
 ISBN 81-220-0420-2

by Lalita Panicker

In impoverished and politically volatile South Asia, the problem of refugees and migrant movement have come to pose a serious threat to regional stability. This has led to drastic policy changes by governments on this subject. Many have come to believe that social stability must supersede liberal notions on the revitalising role of the incoming populations and the host's duty to grant asylum. Unfortunately, the trend in population movements is likely to increase in the future, what with growing religious and ethnic ferment and the rising phenomenon of economic migration.

The case studies presented by South Asian scholars in *Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia*, edited by Jawaharlal Nehru University's S.D. Muni and Nepali scholar and presently Nepal's ambassador to India, Lok Raj Baral, are clear on one issue—there are no easy solutions at present nor indeed any possibility of a regional approach to solving the crisis. In fact, the SAARC organisation does not allow for discussion of bilateral issues, so there is little hope for solving inter-state problems through that channel.

South Asia has within it a host of "push-factors" which generate refugees, including inter-ethnic strife and religious fundamentalism. In his study of ethno-nationalism in South Asia, Shelton U. Kodikara traces the origins of these deadly trends to colonial policies which encouraged communal representation in India and Sri Lanka and redrew administrative boundaries for political considerations. But one aspect Mr Kodikara appears to have overlooked in his study on India is that the resurgence of ethnic and religious fundamentalism in Kashmir with the collusion of an external power has led to the generation of refugees within India. Internal refugees, in fact, are a

category that is regularly overlooked in studies on the refugee problem, as are those displaced by developmental projects, such as large dams.

India is the largest receiver of refugees in the region. With its easily accessible borders, democratic polity and myriad ethnic and cultural groupings, it has attracted refugees from most of the countries in the region. The presence of such people on Indian soil has had implications not just on domestic politics but also on foreign policy. According to the Tibetan scholar Dawa Norbu, the presence of a large number of Tibetan refugees has not really worked as a bargaining chip for New Delhi when dealing with China. The reason for this, says Mr Norbu, is that China holds most of the aces on the matter.

### Refugees in South Asia

(As of 31 December 1993)

Host Country	Numbers
Source of Refugees	
<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>35,000</b>
Tajikistan	35,000
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>199,000</b>
Burma	198,000
Others	200
<b>India</b>	<b>325,600</b>
Sri Lanka	119,000
Bangladesh	53,500
Afghanistan	24,400
Bhutan	30,000
Burma	1,600
Others	700
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>99,100</b>
Bhutan	85,100
Tibet	14,000
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>1,482,300</b>
Afghanistan	1,480,000
Others	2,300
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>2,140,600</b>

From: *Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia*, and sourced to *World Refugee Survey 1994*.

Unlike India, which is primarily a receiver of refugees, Bangladesh is both a refugee generator and host. While India has time and again expressed its unhappiness with the influx of Bangladeshis in search of food security, New Delhi cannot escape partial responsibility for this development. For, in the first place, it used the refugee crisis to actively control and finally conclude the liberation struggle in Bangladesh, in the process redefining its equation with Pakistan and emerging as the regional power.

Meanwhile, impoverished Bangladesh grapples with the problem of refugees from Burma, mainly the Muslim Rohingyas. Bangladesh cannot hope for an early solution, writes University of Dhaka scholar Imtiaz Ahmed. The military regime in Burma is in no mood to accommodate any form of dissent at a time when it appears to have things under control on the domestic front, the democratic challenge from Aung San Suu Kyi notwithstanding.

In contrast to the relative levels of accommodation shown by India, Bangladesh and even Nepal to incoming populations is the harsh manner in which the Bhutan government has tackled the problem. Today, it looks with suspicion at any attempt at assertion by the Nepali speakers within its borders, and it is the intensification of the one-people, one-nation campaign which has led to the creation of refugees presently to be found in UNHCR camps in southeast Nepal. The imposition of a cultural code of conduct, language strictures, and so on, is in the long run likely to have a bearing on the fate of the monarchy and add to the problems in the Himalayan region. India, which enjoys close ties with both Bhutan and Nepal, will willy-nilly be mired in the problem of Bhutanese refugees if it is not resolved quickly.

### Afghan Burden

Nowhere is the chaos created by population influx more evident than in Pakistan, where the Afghan crisis and refugee outflow has created immense security problems. There has been a sharp growth in terrorism and the introduction of ethno-demographic imbalances within the country. Normally such crises created by external circumstances have a unifying effect on domestic politics, but the opposite has happened in Pakistan. Pervez Iqbal Cheema sees a link between the arrival of Afghan refugees, the social tensions, and economic problems in Pakistan.

The drug menace has been one of the most dangerous fall-outs of the refugee crisis in Pakistan. What began as trafficking to feed the Western market is now a problem of drug abuse within Pakistan. There ap-

appears no end in sight to the Afghan crisis which could encourage the refugees to return—a fact which must cause little comfort in Islamabad.

There are some similarities between the Afghans in Pakistan and the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India. Beginning with the magnanimous accommodation on the part of the Indians, with an eye to a greater role in Lankan affairs; the Indian government has now had to blot its relatively clean copy book regarding refugees by forcibly repatriating many to war-torn Sri Lanka. The manner in which militants misused Indian soil for their criminal activities has had the unfortunate result of having had a negative impact on genuine refugees who deserve sympathy and support.

For scholars of the region, this book is of immense value, since it is one of the first attempts to examine the issue of population displacement on a regional scale. One disadvantage is that it deals exclusively, as the title suggests, with the security implications of refugee movements. The editors make no attempt to deal with the humanitarian aspects of the issue or, indeed, the extent of alienation and deprivation which drives people to move from a situation of poverty to another situation of poverty. Hopefully, this book is a start, and it will encourage other scholars to examine the humanitarian angle of population displacement.

L. Panicker is senior assistant editor with the Times of India.

general amnesty which leaves their victims with the problem of coping with the past, and the continued existence of the murderers of loved ones on the streets and villages.

The other nine essays cover a wide cultural spectrum of contemporary Sri Lanka. All of these, besides providing the context for the two essays mentioned earlier, look at the nature of post-colonial society and role of the academics in such societies. The last one expresses Perera's concern at the 'silence' of Tamil intellectuals and their failure, with notable exceptions, to address the violence and terrorism of LTTE rule in the north, while another looks at ways in which the Ravana story has been used by both Sinhala and Tamil factions.

Perhaps of much greater importance are Perera's attempts to reformulate his own sense of identity in contemporary Sri Lanka—of what it means to be Sinhalese and what it means to be Buddhist. He takes issue with those "self-confessed patriots" who accuse others with whom they disagree as unpatriotic. Similarly, he criticises those who would deny that Sri Lanka is a plural society and seek to assert the hegemony of Sinhala Buddhists to the extent of referring to such entities as "Sinhala Buddhist Muslims".

## An Insider Look at Violence



### Living with Torturers

and Other Essays of Intervention:  
Sri Lankan Society, Culture  
and Politics in Perspective

by Sasanka Perera

International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

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by R.L. Stirrat

### Language Imperialism

Perera is also concerned that most academic writings on Sri Lanka are in English and therefore inaccessible to a large portion of the population. This, he points out, can involve a form of language imperialism, and, in post-colonial societies, language can be used by local elites as a form of social exclusion to protect their position.

The problem is not just one of making academic debates accessible to non-academics, but also of making these debates accessible to those who do not have command of international languages. The difficulties for such an undertaking cannot be underestimated. In the preface, Perera writes that, originally, he had planned to publish in widely accessible newspapers and journals, but even "the most liberal and radical editors in one context turn out to be ruthless censors in another". The problems of ensuring access to non-English readers would be much greater.

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concerned with violence, the most moving and most significant essays are concerned with the present conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE, and the aftermath of the confrontation between the state and the JVP.

Two of Perera's most powerful essays address the problem of how survivors of terror deal with the past. The opening essay, which deals with the discovery of mass graves at Suriyakanda in January 1994, provides a starting point for a discussion of how those who are left deal with the disappeared. In another, which provides the title for the collection, he discusses how the living cope with the continued existence of the killers and torturers of their kin. Drawing not only on Sri Lankan materials but also parallel situations from Latin America, he points out that while there may be loud cries for justice, it is extremely unlikely that such justice will be achieved, and that while there may be 'show trials' for an audience of international human rights organisations and major donors, the likely outcome is a

For many academics from the North, scholarly examinations of violence have become something akin to a voyeuristic fascination with a pornography of violence. But, a similar academic voyeurism is not easy for those working within contexts of violence; violence cannot be associated with a distant 'other' but rather has to be addressed as part of their lived experience. Not surprisingly, understandings of violence which assert the primacy of culture are much less popular in such a setting than in the countries of the North. Violence, and its causes and consequences, have to be engaged with rather than treated simply as a spectacle, or as an object to be interpreted, explained or otherwise distanced.

Sasanka Perera's study from the 'insider', *Living with Torturers*, represents one of the strengths of a section of Sri Lankan academia: the willingness of writers to address their comments to the general public rather than limit them to a narrow academic audience. Although the book is not only

# ESCAP on SAARC

## Scorecard on Fiscal Reforms and Investment Regimes

The *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific (1996)* was released in mid-April by the regional UN organisation the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It provides an economic overview of Asian economies for 1995—albeit based on data provided by member governments. This year, ESCAP's economists paid special attention to the role of the private sector in economic development. Below, we present *Survey's* compilation of fiscal and investment-related policies as they have evolved recently in the major economies of South Asia.

### Direct Indirect Taxes

**Bangladesh.** Deregulation and lowering of tax rates were taken up in an aggressive manner. The highest marginal rate for individual taxpayers and registered firms was reduced significantly. The value added tax (VAT) system was strengthened. The exception limit of the wealth tax was raised. The income tax rate for publicly traded companies and other companies was reduced.

**India.** Reforms in the direct tax system concentrated on removing procedural complexities and incentive measures. A five-year exemption from income tax for industrial enterprises and power generation/transmission projects located in certain areas was enacted. A similar exemption has been granted in notified technology parks. Specific rules were introduced for the taxation of income and capital gains of foreign institutional investors. Exemptions of gift tax were increased and a system of modified value added tax was introduced and extended to cover many products.

**Pakistan.** Company tax rates were reduced. Exemptions were introduced or extended for capital gains on disposal of specified shares, and certificates, as well as for profits of certain types of Pakistani companies and from deemed income for bonus issues of own shares. Five-year tax exemptions were granted in respect of income of fruit-processing undertakings and individuals making toys. The withholding tax applicable to dividends paid by companies set up for power generation was reduced.

**Sri Lanka.** The process of rationalising the tax structure along with further measures to deregulate the economy continued. It was proposed that tax rates for all companies should be merged into a single rate replacing the existing regime with its different rates for small companies and for all other companies with a view to creating an atmosphere of non-discrimination. Tax credit for employees was increased. New enterprises engaged in exporting specified non-traditional products and services were granted tax concessions.

### Deregulation of Interest Rates

**Bangladesh.** The process of deregulation began at the end of 1989. The interest rate structure was

replaced by a matrix of interest rate bands for all deposit and lending categories. In March 1992, the bands on most lending categories were abolished.

**India.** Deregulation began in 1991. In October 1994, lending rates of scheduled commercial banks for credits of over 0.2 million rupees were freed. Rates were prescribed for credit limits below this limit to protect small borrowers.

**Pakistan.** From July 1985, banks switched from interest-bearing loans to Islamic modes of financing and rates of return based on a profit/loss-sharing approach. Regular auctions of government debt were carried out to allow the switch between administered interest-rate settings and market-based interest-rate settings.

### Foreign exchange repatriation

**Bangladesh.** 1991: foreign investors were not only free to remit profits but allowed to trade shares and transfer proceeds abroad without prior approval. 1992: the annual foreign exchange retention quota for exports increased from 2-2.5 to 10 percent of free-on-board export earnings. Goods with a high import content have a retention quota of 5 percent. No part of this quota may be used for investment abroad. Banks may remit the savings of expatriate personnel when these leave the country.

**India.** 1991: all exporters and other recipients of inward remittances were allowed to keep up to 15 percent of receipts as foreign currency with banks out of the 60 percent share of the total amount surrendered at free market rates.

1992: foreign investors in the stock exchange were allowed to repatriate profits and exchange money at market rates.

**Pakistan.** 1991: permission was no longer needed to remit dividends and dividend proceeds. The government has lifted virtually all foreign exchange controls.

**Sri Lanka.** Most types of transactions can be remitted freely.

### Access to domestic finance

**Bangladesh.** 1990: Individual banks were permitted to set interest rates with prescribed banks. 1992: Foreign investment companies could borrow working capital from commercial banks

as term loans. Some interest-rate subsidies are available.

**India.** 1991: foreign companies had (unconditional) access to credit.

### Restricted sectors for foreign direct investment (FDI)

**Bangladesh.** Four local industries are restricted: arms, nuclear energy, forestry and railways; and regulations on drug manufacturing effectively prohibit corporations from this industry.

**India.** There has been a substantial cutback in areas reserved for public undertakings since 1991.

**Pakistan.** 1990: the Government cut down the list of sectors closed to foreign participation to two: defence and items subject to religious bans.

**Sri Lanka.** Five sectors are reserved: pawnbroking, moneylending, retail trade with capital less than USD 1 million, personal services other than tourism, and coastal fishing.

### Foreign Ownership restrictions

**Bangladesh.** 1991: foreign private investment could be undertaken either independently or as a joint venture. 1991: 100 percent foreign equity was allowed on all investments, not only those in special zones.

**India.** 1991: The ceiling on foreign ownership was raised from 40 to 51 percent in 34 designated high-priority industries. Other industries remained with a 40 percent foreign equity ceiling. Equity participation of up to 100 percent will be allowed in certain industries for companies wishing to invest over the long term.

**Pakistan.** Foreigners can now own up to 100 percent of the equity in business.

**Sri Lanka.** 1991: 100 percent foreign equity was allowed.

### Licensing/Approvals, rules and procedures

**Bangladesh.** No formal permission was required to set up a company with foreign investment.

**India.** 1991: the obligation to seek prior approval (i.e. a licence) for the expansion, acquisition and establishment of subsidiaries was abandoned. The Government has abolished all industrial licensing requirements except for 18 industries.

**Pakistan.** 1990: licensing was eliminated.

**Sri Lanka.** 1989: the Government abolished all industrial licensing requirements, quotas and controls, except in areas such as manufacturing ammunition, explosives, military vehicles and hardware, poisons, narcotics, alcohol, toxic and hazardous materials, and printing of currency. 1991: the free and automatic approval of foreign direct investment was introduced.

### Performance requirements

**Bangladesh.** for all export items, the prior permission of the Bangladesh Bank to open back-to-back letters of credit has been waived as long as such exports conform to guidelines for adding domestic value.

**India.** The government has dispensed with local content requirements.

**Pakistan.** No formal local requirements apply.

# What They Said at CII

The timing of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) session on the eve of an election may have ushered a new era as far as acknowledging the role of business and commerce in Indian politics is concerned. Never before had such a jamboree of political leaders taken place in which they were expected to lay out their economic agendas before the captains of industry. Politicians have realised over the years that election manifestos have become a joke and that the influence of business houses is paramount. A hung parliament stares at the politicians and they look forward for the corporate world to bail them out.

The BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee was impressive when he spoke at CII, but the other leaders were clearly uncomfortable in talking brass tacks before businessmen. It was clever of Vajpayee to have harped on the *swadeshi* plank,

defined and adapted for the ears of Indian tycoons. At a time when lots of Indian business houses are succumbing to the onslaught of multinationals, they have found solace in the *swadeshi* slogan. What is clear is that while former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh has shouted himself hoarse in calling for liberalisation, the large protection lobby of business houses has not gone away. And it is this lobby within the CII, breaking decorum to speak out last month, which might define how the reform process in India is going to unfold.

The coming five years shall determine whether or not India will become an economic superpower on the basis of its reforms, and how soon the government can get out of running business and industry. It is clear that reforms will not take place at the pace that Mr Singh generated these last five years. Since other economies


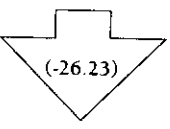
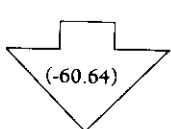
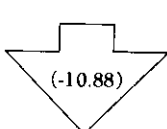
in South Asia have keenly followed, and emulated, the Indian experiment with liberalisation in varying degrees, reforms in the other countries will also definitely slow down. Hence, can we see a South Asian deceleration, which will leave it as a whole even further behind the Chinese and the Asian tigers?

While referring to the CII meet, I must note with some chagrin that not one political party saw it necessary to focus on the regional economy—meaning South Asia's economy as a whole. While India might have remained, and wants to remain, insular, market forces are bound to force it to look at economic relationships with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and—on a different plane—Pakistan. When the entire world is busy forming trade blocs, the delay in doing so in South Asia may be detrimental to the regional countries, although it is true that this insularity will affect the smaller economies like Bangladesh or Nepal than the larger two.

The bull run started by the FIIs on the eve of an election shows healthy signs as far as their trust in the Indian economy is concerned and reiterates the de-linking of politics, human rights and economic issues that is visible in the case of China. This clearly indicates that, slowly but definitely, economic agendas, and other 'non-political' issues are having more of a role in the Indian politics than before. Perhaps the time will come when the politicians will also deign to look at neighbouring economies. Is the new government in Delhi listening?

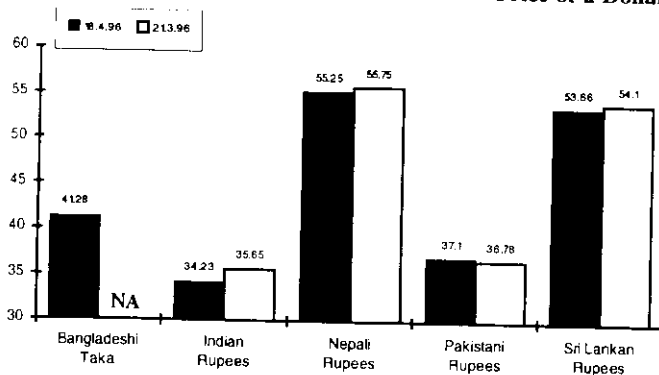
—*Sujeev Shakya*

## STOCK EXCHANGE INDICATORS

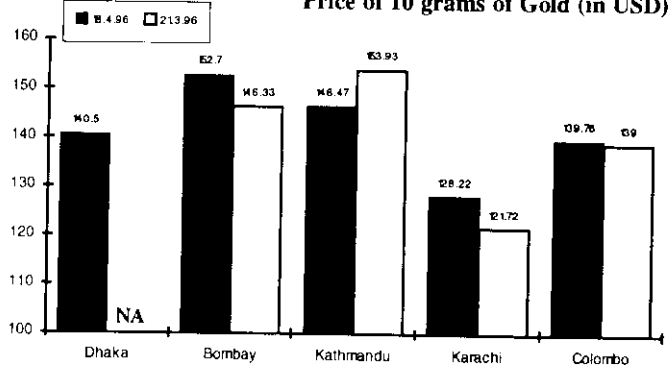
 (+445.93)	 (-26.23)		 (-60.64)	 (-10.88)
3737.86	661.9	815.85	1521.15	182.69
BOMBAY	COLOMBO	DHAKA	KARACHI	KATHMANDU
BSE SENSEX	COMPOSITE CSE	DSE INDEX	KSE 100 INDEX	NEPSE

As of 18 April '96 compared with 21 March '96. Figures for Dhaka were not available on 21 March.

### Price of a Dollar



### Price of 10 grams of Gold (in USD)



## KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	GNP USD b	GNP per capita USD	GDP (PPP) per capita USD	INFLATION %	HDI RANK (Human Development Index)	PRIME LENDING Rates (%)
BANGLADESH	24.80	220	1230	7	146	14
INDIA	274.20	300	1230	8	134	15
NEPAL	3.40	190	1170	8	151	15
PAKISTAN	54.30	440	2890	10	128	16
SRI LANKA	9.90	540	2850	11	97	14

Young Hindu boys and girls have a rich cultural heritage which they must try to understand as they prepare for life. In this article, an American friend who has lived and worked in Nepal's hills and tarai plains for a very long time describes how modernisation has changed even rural lifestyles. He thinks that religion's role in society has suffered. This Young SouthAsian column deals with Hindus, who make up a large proportion of South Asia's population. In future, we plan to carry similar articles on other faiths such as Buddhism and Islam. Meanwhile, we encourage young readers to write in with your comments and suggestions, as Grishma Bista has done from Mussorie, in the hills of Garhwal, India (see the mail section at the front of the magazine).

## IS IT ENOUGH TO BE BORN A HINDU?

by Stephen Truax Eckerd

WHEN, AS A PEACE Corps volunteer, I first came to Nepal, nearly 30 years ago, to work with young people in agricultural development, I was astonished to discover a living culture with roots so deep it seemed at times that I was participating in the living reenactment of events that had happened long ago. When a young village Brahmin friend would read and translate for me stories from the *Ramayana*, I could visualise the action taking place around me. Young people were so very sure of who they were, and of what they were born to do.

Every activity of daily life began and ended with symbolic acts of praise and thanksgiving; they poured water to quench the thirst of Surya the Sun before bathing, they circled their plates with drops of water and offered a pinch of rice to the gods before eating, they touched the feet of their parents before entering the house, and spoke to their elders and respected persons with honorific pronouns. They were careful to do nothing that would infringe on the rights of other occupational castes and even more careful to avoid eating or doing anything to lower their own ritual and social status. Arranged marriages were not only accepted but staunchly defended on the grounds that their parents would make the best choice for them.

The Hindi cinema was an occasional foray to the district centre, and a lassi at the local restaurant was the drink of choice. In the village, the young and the old entertained each other. A little boy would come many mornings to sit at the foot of my bed

and play a small drum and sing for me. The students would spend weeks rehearsing and several days presenting the *Ramayana* at the time of Durga Puja. Our local blacksmith would recite for evenings on end the great heroic epic of North Bihar, *Allah Rudal*, with bells on his wrists and fantastic drumming on the *dholak*. Boys and men would circle dance with fighting sticks, girls would sing in groups at night around the wells with baskets filled with oil lamps and, at weddings, would harass the bridegroom with bawdy songs.

Many village boys played the flute and on hot summer nights a song would be picked up and carried from rooftop to rooftop across the village. Life seemed to be an endless cycle of festivals and trips to local *melas* (fairs) where everyone seemed to have a different version of the story of what the god or goddess had done to warrant so much attention. I would often join the young men at evening time in chanting at the village temple and if a wandering sadhu was present we would engage him in intense debates often lasting into the night. It was a way of life steeped in Hindu customs and traditions.

### Hindi Cinema or Hindu Culture?

When today, I survey the cultural landscape, if I hadn't photographed and tape-recorded what I saw and heard 30 years ago, I would swear I had just imagined it all. On a recent trip to videotape girls dancing and singing "Sama", a village tale of two love birds, I was greeted by an all-male troupe, half-dressed as girls, who had been hired by the village girls to perform

well choreographed songs and dances from the Hindi cinema. When I wanted to tape flute music under the dome of a once-magnificent but now crumbling temple, no one could be found in the village to play for me. Hindi cinema music blaring from giant megaphone speakers now drowns out what little remains of village folk songs at weddings and festivals. Where dancers and dramas once entertained guests at weddings and crowds at fairs, VCRs and TVs are set up and I don't have to tell you what they are seeing.

Only women and children and old people remain in the villages. The young men have deserted their native places and their traditional occupations and left for the cities in search of more lucrative jobs. Everyone fantasises a "love marriage" and when they return to the village to marry, it is a Nepali version of "disco dancing" that leads the procession. People who would have thrown up at the thought of eating an egg now eat meat regularly, and few, even among the Brahmins, try anymore to hide the fact that they enjoy alcohol.

Contemporary Hindu society is facing all the social problems besetting every "developing" and "developed" society; alcohol and drugs, sexual promiscuity, hooliganism and vandalism, declining educational standards, unemployment, overcrowding, and a widening gap between rich and poor, just to mention a few. The generation gap in a joint family between grandparents steeped in orthodoxy and their grandchildren in black leather jackets and out riding around on motorcycles is mind-boggling. The new generation of



educated professionals with the husband and wife both holding well-paying jobs leaves little time for raising children. Children sent off to boarding school and college see little of their parents, look to mass-media personalities for role models and are increasingly subject to peer pressure.

Amongst the world's great religions, Hinduism is particularly handicapped in its attempt to respond to these social problems and provide moral guidelines and ethical standards in a rapidly changing social environment. Fragmented into countless sects, Hinduism has no Pope or Synod, no central organisation or moral authority to interpret, re-define and make ancient teaching relevant for a modern age. Hinduism, unlike Judaism, Islam and Christianity, has no weekly service where rabbis, mullahs or priests read from, elaborate upon, and explain the meaning of religious texts and sacred books. Whereas young adults in other major religions undergo often long and rigorous training and religious education before being accepted as adults, the young Hindu boy of the upper castes gets away with a *mantra* mumbled in his ear and a day of rituals in a language he does not comprehend.

An hereditary priesthood and severe restrictions on access to or even overhearing the most sacred texts of Hinduism has left the vast majority of even the most educated Hindus largely ignorant of the subtle truths and deep philosophic insights contained in the *Puranas* and even more so in the *Upanishads*. Most young people have never even heard of the *Panchatantra* and only know of its delightfully witty and wise tales of animals in the borrowed versions retold in the West in Aesop's and Fontaine's Fables.

Today, for every Brahmin who knows a smattering of Sanskrit, a hundred have mastered 'Lotus' and 'WordPerfect' computer programmes. The traditional guru has become a jet-setting celebrity catering to a largely Western audience. Those that stay home seem more interested in politics than the *puranas*. Temples have become tourist attractions, the epics soap operas for television, and religious festivals a time to stay home and watch television.

### Young, Hindu, and South Asian

What does being a Hindu mean to young readers of Himal South Asia? Parents of young readers, I have been talking with your children. This is to say, I have been

having conversations with the children of well-educated urban professionals whose last names identify them as having been born Hindu. Recently, I sat down with 8th grade students from one of Nepal's most progressive private schools. Not surprisingly, they were all Bahun (Brahmin), Chhetri (Kshatriya) or Shrestha Newars, the three groups that have dominated the politics and economy of Nepal for the past several centuries.

I wanted to know their ambitions and goals and more particularly where they turned to for guidance, for advice and for inspiration. I should not have been at all surprised by their answers. The answers were basically the same as those I get when I talk with young people in the United States. Nothing said could be remotely



Two Nepali Brahmin boys prepare for *Bratabanda* sacred thread ceremony

interpreted as reflecting a traditional Hindu point of view. Some of the students' answers were consistent with traditional Hindu values, yet at no time did any student give traditional sources as inspiration.

No scriptures or sacred text was referred to, no guru or priest turned to for advice, no pilgrimages were planned, no temple visited, no *puja* a part of daily life. When questioned, such traditional aspects of Hindu social order as hereditary professions, arranged marriages, and daughters-in-law staying home to serve their mothers-in-law were firmly rejected. While quick to point out the evils of discrimination and the subservient role of women in Hindu society, these young Nepalis were hard-pressed to come up with any specific aspect of Hinduism they thought should be maintained and preserved.

The students' optimism, self-confidence and desire to do something to help their country and serve others was so genuine that it hurt. Again and again, students turned to parents, relatives, teach-

ers and friends as their primary sources of guidance. Several mentioned people who suffer and the belief that they could and would be able to help relieve the suffering of others less fortunate than themselves as the inspiration to do and be their best.

### Boring Rituals

When asked who or what would guide them in making difficult moral decisions, the answers included, "I'll do what I think is best for me," "What I think is right deep down inside," "My instincts," "My want and will," and "What will benefit me." None of the young students I interviewed and few, if any of Himal South Asia's young readers, have yet to have had to make the terrible choices between the lesser of two evils, knowing that whatever one does others must suffer.

The young Hindu students I interviewed all turned to parents, teachers and their peers for guidance. Unfortunately, many of the parents and teachers of our young Hindu readers are themselves the products of English language private boarding schools, where speaking their mother tongue might have been forbidden, local festivals ignored, visits to nearby temples and shrines not part of the social studies curriculum, and excellent English translations of the Hindu classics strangely missing from the school library shelves.

If for our young Hindu readers, being Hindu is going to be anything more than family history, boring rituals and school holidays, parents are going to have to rediscover their own cultural heritage and share the experience with their children. Having a good family library of the best books, tape-recordings, movies and videotapes that Hindu culture has produced would be a good start. Exploring such a treasure-trove a family affair would give added meaning to life for all involved.

Parents must likewise look for educational opportunities for their children that include in the curriculum Hindu literature, cultural experiences and an opportunity to examine and explore their personal beliefs. Our young Hindu readers should be aware that Hinduism offers penetrating insights into human nature and our place in the universe. All they need is someone to guide them, so they can set out on their own along the path to self-discovery.  $\Delta$

S.T. Eckerd is an educator and social scientist from West Virginia.

# Abominably Yours

It was as the Rajdhani Express approached Bombay at dawn that I realised just how much we take for granted the morning formality that unites us as a species. After all, kings and presidents do it in the privacy of their privies, your favourite VJ does it, and even female yetis do it. But, by and large, we pretend it just doesn't happen!

However much we try to flush the matter down the tubes, the product of the daily rites of passage of hundreds of millions of South Asians keeps amassing volume. Gazing out at the blurred rush of male hind quarters from the speeding Rajdhani (women take the pre-dawn first shift), walking under the flyover at Nizamuddin, or bivouacking on the South Col of Mt Everest, we keep on being reminded of the continuing relevance of the digestive tract to the well-being of humankind.

We try very hard to brush it aside, some of us, by locking ourselves up to sit in our throne rooms to read the latest issue of *India Today Plus* while listening to *Vivid Bharati*, masking the bouquet of decay in all manner of diversionary odours, and using ten litres of chlorinated water to send yesterday's *murgh makhani* gurgling all the way down to the Arabian Sea. But try as we might, the sights and sounds and smells will not go away, because They are Us.

After all, as Bindeshwar Pathak, the Subcontinent's foremost expert on the subject and the inventor of the Sulabh Toilet, reminds us rather delicately: "In India, how can one ignore the subject of toilet when the society is faced with human excretions of the order of 900 million litres of urine and 135 million kilograms of faecal matter per day with totally inadequate system of its collection and disposal?" Well, when he puts it like that, it does sound like a lot.

With his single-minded enthusiasm for the subject and laudable attention to detail, Mr Pathak has set up the world's only Toilet Museum in New Delhi (Mahavir Enclave, Palam Dabri Road). The museum traces the glorious history of personal hygiene in the Subcontinent from the Indus Valley civilisation during which time, it seems, we were far ahead of the rest of the world in terms of squatting engineering. Mohenjodaro excavations have yielded proof that our ancestors were the first in human history to use private

toilets connected to an urban sewage system.

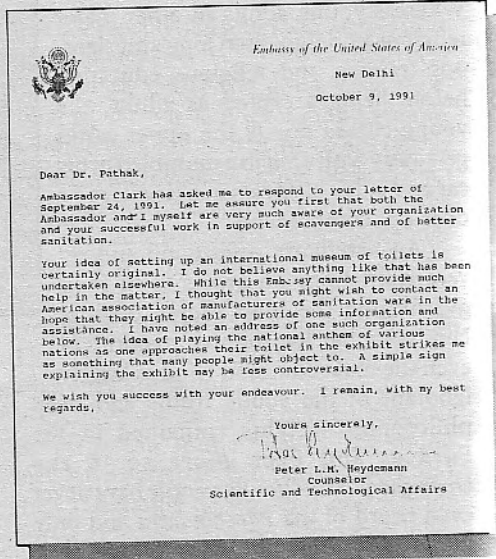
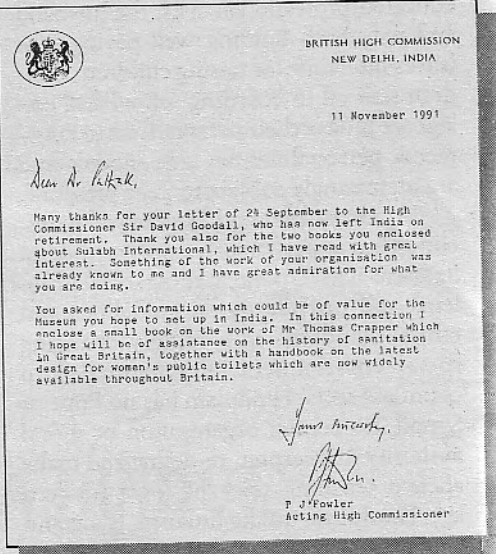
In hindsight, the moral is: you can have the most sophisticated toilets in the world, but the gizmos will not save your civilisation from collapse, much like biodegradable mush. This should provide food for thought to the Japanese engineers who have designed a state-of-the-arse facility that sucks, pulverises, incinerates and gently blow-dries with a contraption that looks like a cross between a washing machine and a cyclotron. What do our Japanese friends have up their sleeves next: a battery-operated version you can wear inside your pants? Hai.

I have a gut feeling about all this technology gone berserk. It signifies decay and decline. Just look at the Romans: it was when the Terme de Caracalla became so comfortable emperors started attending to affairs of state while attending to calls of nature that their empire collapsed. In more recent times, France's King Louis XV (uttered the famous words "*apres moi, le deluge*") had a commode with a trap-door under his throne. And he lost Canada to the British.

What I am trying to get at is that South Asians don't have to be ashamed that they sit on embankments closely watching trains go by, in fact it could be the sign of ascendant civilisation. Precious nutrients are restored to the soil, there is no problem of mass sewage disposal, and consider this: if every South Asian had a "modern" water closet we would need 30 billion litres of water *extra* just to flush toilets every day! Better to go dirty than thirsty.

Our national leaders need to set a personal example by switching from sitting WCs to squatting latrines. If such events are broadcast on national television, ordinary people will be convinced that sitting is not old-fashioned. But governments seem to have a posterior motive in allowing joint ventures with Western toilet technologists to market fancy water-intensive futuristic WCs that look like space shuttle launch pads.

Alongside public urinals, we need to build a nationwide network of arsenals. Studies have shown that a quarter of the Subcontinent's population at any given time is suffering from bum stomach. We cannot ignore their plight. Mr Pathak has the right idea:



creating awareness about an issue that we'd rather not think about even though it stares at us in our faeces every day.

The toilet museum has benefitted from advice of international experts such as Mr Thomas Crapper of Great Britain (see excerpt of letter). And despite what the counsellor at the U.S. Embassy feels, we have no objections to the national anthem of various nations being played as one approaches the toilet bowl of that nation. Only by instilling a sense of national pride will we begin to bring about a paradigm shift in this particular area of human endeavour.



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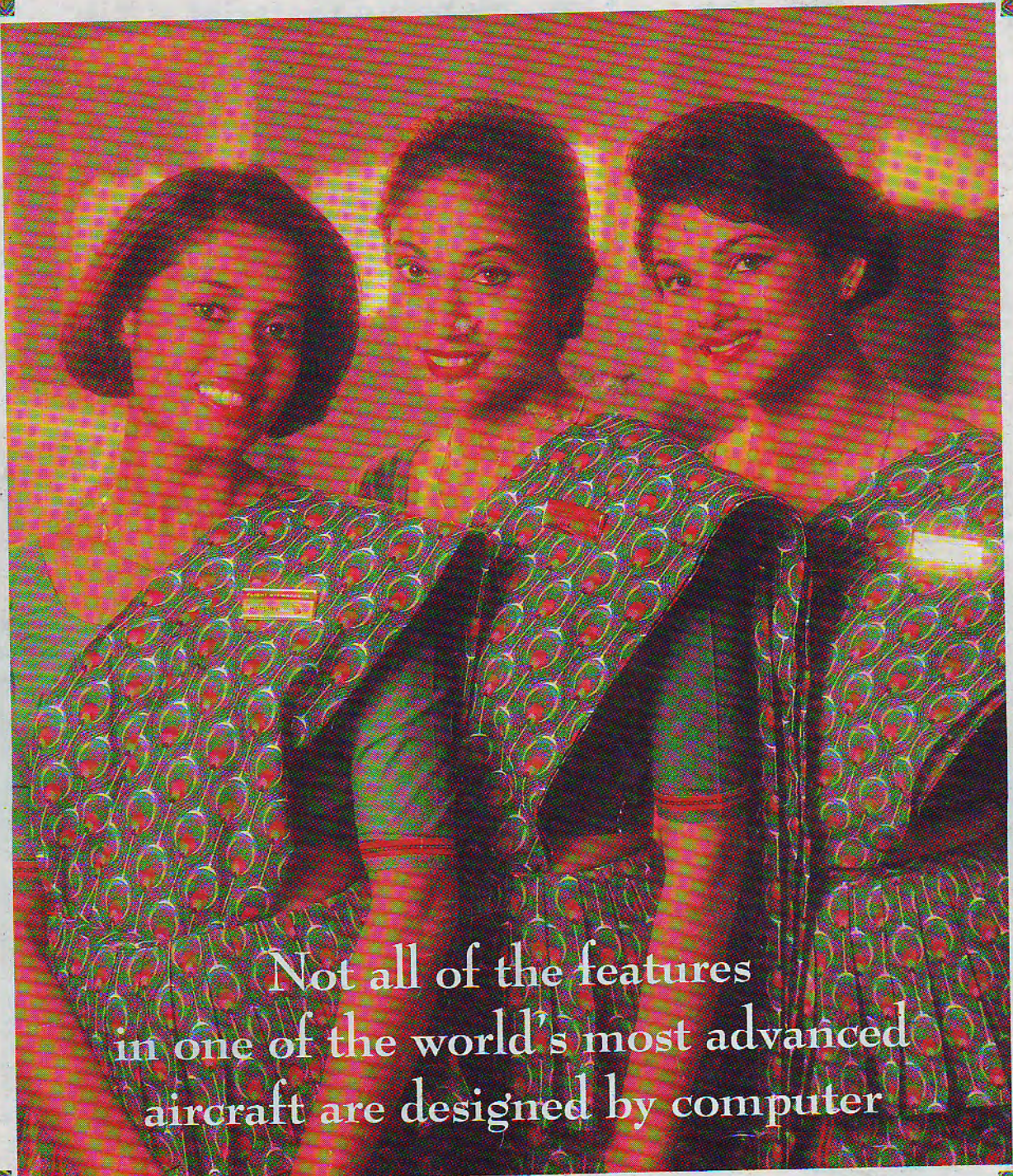
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