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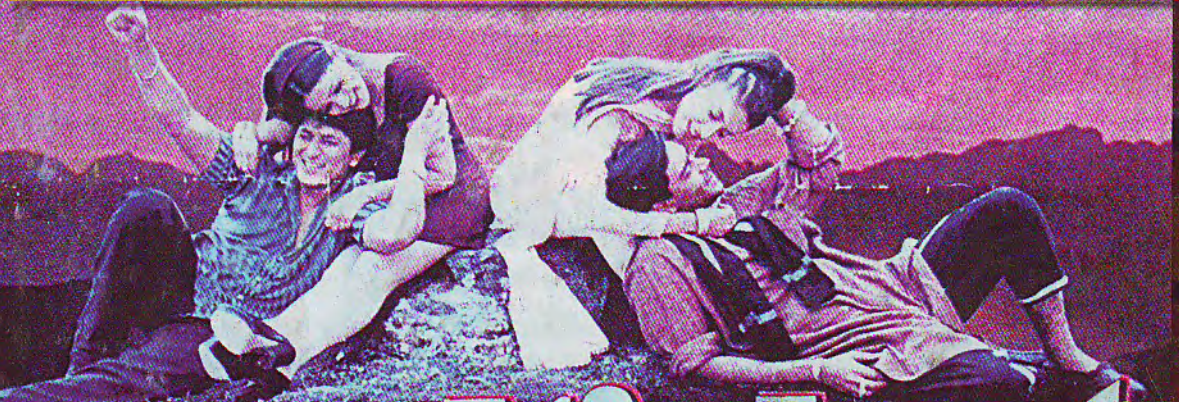
SOUTH ASIAN

September 1999

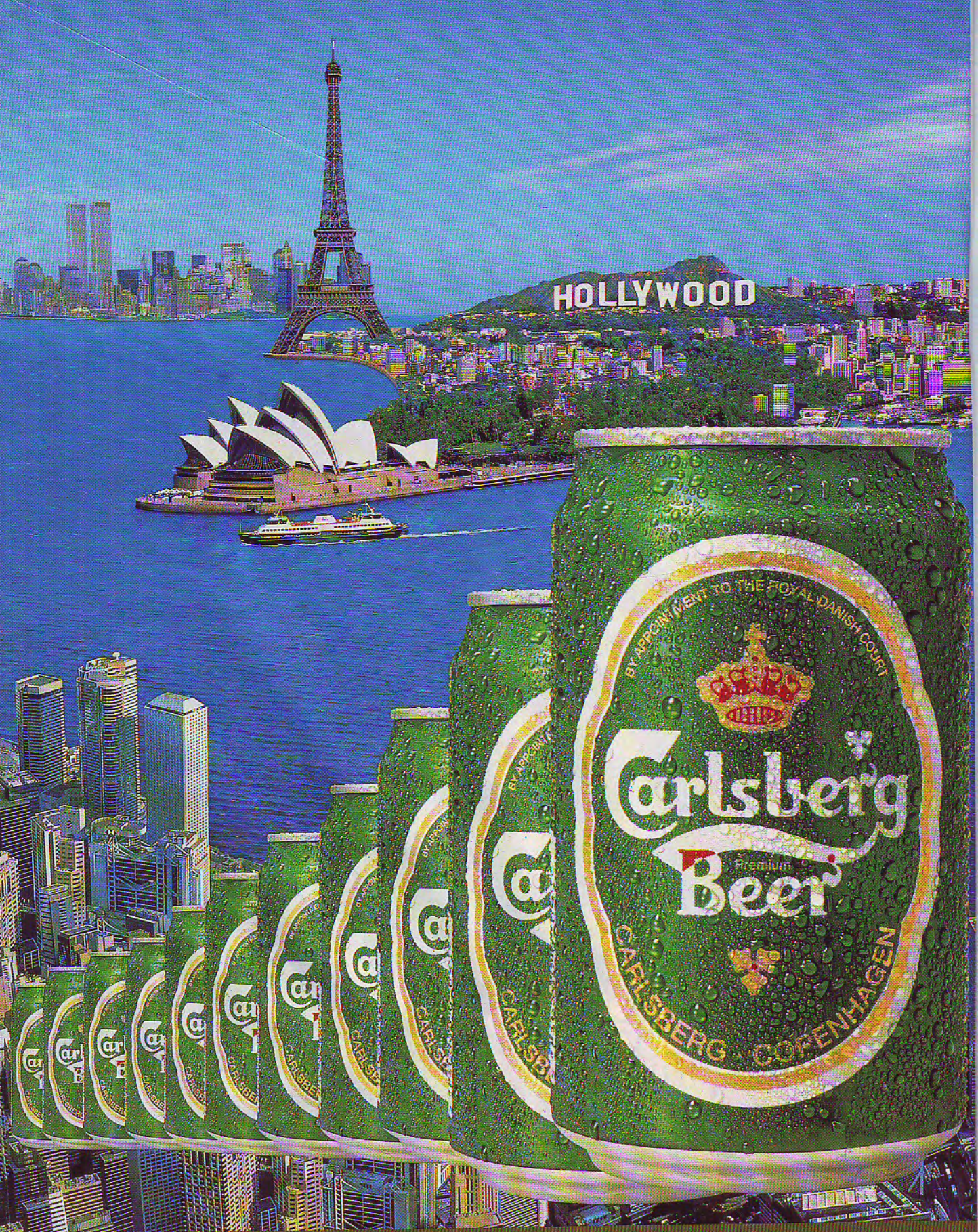
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AND MUSHTAQ GAZDAR TUNKU VARADARAJAN IN

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i Dwar ki loot



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Just adjust

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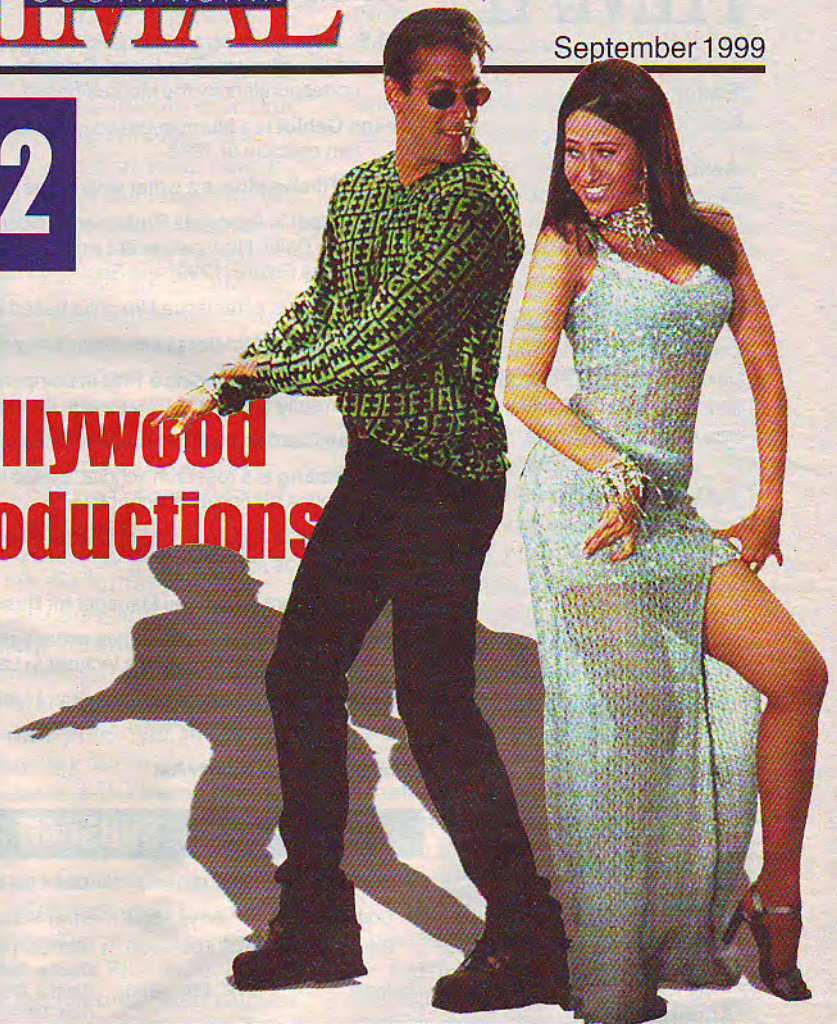
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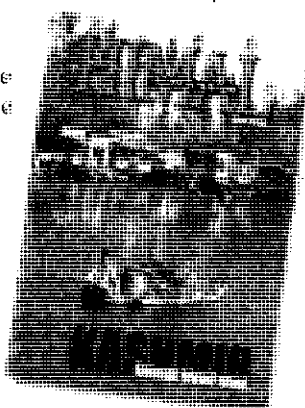
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Facts, not assumptions

I read with interest Dinshaw Mistry's letter "Latin Assumptions" (Himal, July 1999), written in response to my article "The Southern Cone and the Subcontinent" (Himal, May 1999). While fully respecting Mistry's right to have a rather different take on the matter, I do not consider the five differences between the Argentina-Brazil and India-Pakistan nuclear equations outlined in my article to be mere "assumptions", which is how Mistry characterises (and dismisses?) them.



Mistry rejects the notion of an implicit US nuclear umbrella over the Western Hemisphere, and asserts that only the NATO states, Japan and South Korea are sheltered under it. This is clearly disputable. Apart from obvious omissions like Israel and Taiwan, Mistry ignores the fact that since World War II a common security mechanism, the Inter-American Defence System (IADS), has existed in the Western Hemisphere, legally buttressed by the Act of Chapultepec (1945) and the Rio Treaty (1947). A US nuclear guarantee is implicit in the IADS; indeed, it is no accident that the first nuclear-free zone was established in Latin America. But for this common security arrangement, the Tlatelolco Treaty (1967) banning nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean would not have been possible. Viewing the international security scene from Mexico City, as I am currently wont to do, the fact that this part of the world lies within the US perimeter of defence seems almost an axiomatic proposition.

Mistry misreads my analysis of the rivalry between Argentina and Brazil. Nowhere in my article is it stated that since the two countries

have not fought a war since 1828, they "do not have a long history of rivalry". In fact, the Argentina-Brazil rivalry has a heritage that goes back nearly five centuries to the arrival of the Iberian maritime powers in South America. The

central issue here is not the longevity of the rivalry but its nature. As I emphasise in my article, the Argentina-Brazilian rivalry "was never based on a territorial dispute or an identity conflict". On the contrary, it was essentially a competition for influence in South America, and specifically in the buffer states of Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay.

In sharp contrast, Pakistan came into being from the vivisection of India. Apart from the territorial dispute over the Kashmir Valley, the India-Pakistan conflict, from a Pakistani perspective, is about nothing less than national survival. Pakistan, like Israel, considers itself the homeland of an endangered people. It therefore makes perfect sense to expect countries like Israel and Pakistan to renounce their nuclear deterrent only as the last step in a

comprehensive settlement with traditional enemies, and not a moment sooner. Mistry will undoubtedly recall that South Africa, which during the years of white minority rule viewed itself in similar "homeland" terms, renounced nuclear weapons and apartheid at exactly the same time.

My argument that "Brazil has never dominated South America, or even the Southern Cone, in the way India dominates South Asia" is dismissed by Mistry as yet another assumption. Far from being an assumption, even a cursory glance at military and economic indicators in the two regions will reveal that my statement is grounded on essential facts. India's population and GDP are three times larger than that of all its neighbours, and it has 300,000 more soldiers with arms than all the other countries in South Asia combined. The differentials between Brazil and its neighbours are much less overwhelming: its active armed forces are smaller than the combined forces of its neighbours, its population only 80 percent larger, its GDP only 25 percent larger. These are facts, not assumptions.

Furthermore, Mistry disregards the fact that the Brazilian power, even at the height of its



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4. *A Burden of Love*, Maharashtra, 1998, Dir: Priti Chandriani.
5. *California Dreaming: A Film on Indian Bride for Export*, Punjab, 1998, Dir: Meera Dewan.
6. *Dhupang-Ni Solo (An Autumn Fable)*, Assam, 1997, Dir: Pinky Brahma Choudhary.
7. *Don't Pass Me By*, Nepal, 1999, Dir: Sarah Kapoor/Kristi/Christina Lamey.
8. *Duhshomoy (A Mother's Lament)*, Bengal, 1999, Dir: Yasmine Kabir.
9. *Ek Minute Ka Maun (A Minute Long Silence)*, Bihar, 1997, Dir: Ajay Bhardwaj.
10. *Fishers of Men*, Madhya Pradesh, 1997, Dir: Ranjan Kamath/Padmavathi Rao.
11. *Fishing in the Sea of Greed*, Kerala/Maharashtra, 1998, Dir: Anand Patwardhan.
12. *Forced*, Nepal, 1999, Dir: Kiran Shrestha and Bimal Rawal.
13. *The Forgotten Army*, India, 1997, Dir: Kabir Khan.
14. *Goa Under Seige*, Goa, 1999, Dir: Gargi Sen/Sujit Ghosh/Ranjan De.
15. *Hamari Baaten (I Am Just an Ordinary Woman)*, Delhi, 1998, Dir: Nandini Bedi.
16. *In the Eye of the Fish*, India, 1997, Dir: Monica Narula, Sudhabrata Sengupta and Jeebesh Bagchi.
17. *In the Forest Hangs a Bridge*, Arunachal Pradesh, 1999, Dir: Sanjay Kak.
18. *Jibon (Life)*, Assam, 1998, Dir: Altaf Mazid.
19. *Katre Mein Samandar: Bhai Mian (Portraits of Belonging: Bhai Mian)*, Delhi, 1997, Dir: Sameera Jain.
20. *Kumar Talkies*, Bihar, 1999, Dir: Pankaj Rishi Kumar.
21. *Laaj (Veiled)*, Gujarat, 1997, Dir: Rappai Poothokaren, S.J/Ruta Shastri.
22. *A Letter to Samten*, Bengal, 1999, Dir: Alex Gabbay.
23. *Listening to Shadows*, Gujarat, 1998, Dir: Koushik Sarkar.
24. *Mobile Theatre*, Sindh, 1999, Dir: Khalid Ahmad.
25. *Muktir Kotha (Words of Freedom)*, Bengal, 1999, Dir: Tareque & Catherine Masud.
26. *No One Believes the Professor*, Punjab, 1999, Dir: Farjad Nabi.
27. *Padhoge Likhoge Hoge Nawab (Is School the Thing That Makes a King)*, India, 1998, Dir: Vani Subramanian/ Surajit Sarkar.
28. *Pramila - Esther Victoria Abraham*, Maharashtra, 1997, Dir: Asha Dutta.
29. *Pure Chutney*, Trinidad, 1998, Dir: Sanjeev Chatterjee.
30. *Ragi: Kana: Ko Bonga Buru (Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda)*, Bihar, 1999, Dir: Shriprakash.
31. *Rahima: A Victim of Systemic Violence*, Bengal, 1998, Dir: Faud Chowdhury.
32. *Satveni Sendeve Geethaya (Song of the Seventh Evening)*, Sri Lanka, 1998, Dir: Sudath Mahadivulwewa.
33. *Skin Deep*, India, 1998, Dir: Reena Mohan.
34. *A Stranger in My Native Land*, Tibet, 1998, Dir: Tenzing Sonam/Ritu Sarin.
35. *Sundari: An Actor Prepares*, Maharashtra, 1998, Dir: Madhushree Datta.
36. *Sun, Fire, River - 'Ajrak' Cloth From the Soil of Sindh*, Sindh, 1998, Dir: Noor Jehan Bilgiram.
37. *Thin Air*, Bombay, 1999, Dir: Ashim Ahluwalia.
38. *Three Women and a Camera*, India, 1997, Dir: Sabeena Gadiloke.
39. *Voices of Dissent: A Dance of Passion*, Pakistan, 1999, Dir: NoorKhan Bawa.
40. *YCP 1997*, Maharashtra, 1997, Dir: Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar.

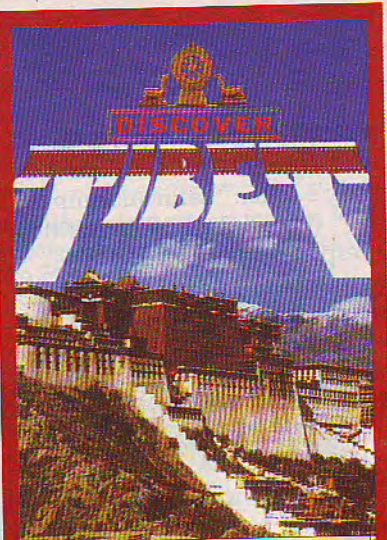
SHORT FILMS

1. *Bringing the New Year to Kutia Vali*, USA, Dir: Leith Gill Murgal.
2. *Do Flowers Fly*, India, 1998, Dir: P. Ganguly.
3. *Ribbons for Peace*, India, 1998, Dir: Anand Patwardhan.
4. *A Time to Unite*, Bangladesh, Dir: Tareque and Catherine Masud.
5. *Two Thick Braids*, USA, 1999, Dir: Swati Khurana.

A separate non-competitive section will showcase productions in various categories, including archival films.

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now-defunct rivalry with Argentina, was always constrained by the regional balance of power system in the Southern Cone, organised around the two "diagonal alliances" of Brazil-Chile and Argentina-Peru. Notwithstanding the occasional grumbles in South Block about being surrounded by "troublesome neighbours", no regional power configuration capable of dampening Indian power has ever arisen in South Asia. It is also worth pointing out that, unlike India, Brazil is not the hegemon in its region; in the Americas, that role has been played exclusively by the US for the last 120 years.

Finally, Mistry asserts that "Argentina and Brazil were just as (if not more strongly) opposed to the "discrimination" in the NPT as India". Not true—unlike India, which has never accepted a regional non-nuclear arrangement, the two South American powers signed the Tlatelolco Treaty declaring Latin America as a nuclear-free zone. Given the different natures of South Asian and South American states, the extra-sensitivity of the former to "discrimination" is perfectly understandable. Unlike Argentina and Brazil, which have been sovereign states in the international system for nearly two centuries, India and Pakistan are post-colonial states. Political leaders in South Asia have experienced the indignity of colonial subjugation in their own lifetimes, which explains the visceral opposition of the Indian elite to discriminatory international arrangements. On non-discriminatory treaties like the CTBT and the FMCT, I am in agreement with Mistry: India (and Pakistan) can, should, must sign on.

Post-Kargil, I readily admit that I was much too sanguine when I suggested that Pakistan's enhanced sense of security based on strategic parity with India could lead to durable peace in the region. But

while the big guns still boom across the LoC, I'd like to suggest that Kargil does not disprove the proposition that nuclear deterrence can work in South Asia. After all, India resisted the temptation of crossing the international border, and Pakistan finally called it a day and pulled out. What Kargil does prove is that nuclear compellence does not work, in South Asia or elsewhere. Nuclear weapons buttress the *status quo*, and are rather poor tools for a revisionist foreign policy, much less the sort of adventurism witnessed in Kargil.

Varun Sahni
CIDE, Mexico City

Puffy profile

The five principal articles of your July issue struck me as Himal at its best, providing balanced, interesting coverage of a war neither India nor Pakistan can report on objectively or can afford to fight. Several of the feature articles also held my interest. In such company, the profile of Akhter Ahsan stuck out like a sore thumb. Claims or apparent claims of healing are allowed to go unchallenged. (What is the reader to make of a sentence like the following:

"During a recent visit to Pakistan, Ahsan treated a young woman suffering from epilepsy using the image of the Hindu god Ganesh"? The sentence does not say that the woman was cured, but implies that she was.)

Dr Ahsan may well be a pioneering psychologist, but journalist Zaigham Khan should be alerted to the need to challenge assumptions, to allow critics to raise questions, and to substantiate statements such as "Ahsan says that ... repeatable clinical experiments seem to back his claim" and that his method is more effective than psychoanalysis. What experiments? Conducted by whom, when? And has anyone else tried to repeat these experiments?

This sore thumb required

medical attention. Or do I mean editorial attention? I think I do.

Jon Swan
Southfield, Massachusetts

Republic of South Asia

As a sympathetic non-South Asian and in good faith I wish to ask a question to which I have been unable to find a satisfactory answer: Why does the idea of re-unifying India not even occur as a phenomenon, however marginal or despised, on the political and intellectual landscape of South Asia? Why is the matter not discussed at all, if only to be dismissed? I suppose the questioner will be told (inevitably, as he is a Britisher) that the notion smacks of nostalgia for the empire and does not correspond to modern allegiances and sensibilities. Rather it should actually be seen as the last phase of de-colonisation. Whose purpose did the Partition really serve, if not the departing colonial power's?

And since the crippling consequences of Partition can be considered a major contributor to the economic and diplomatic weakness of independent India, the

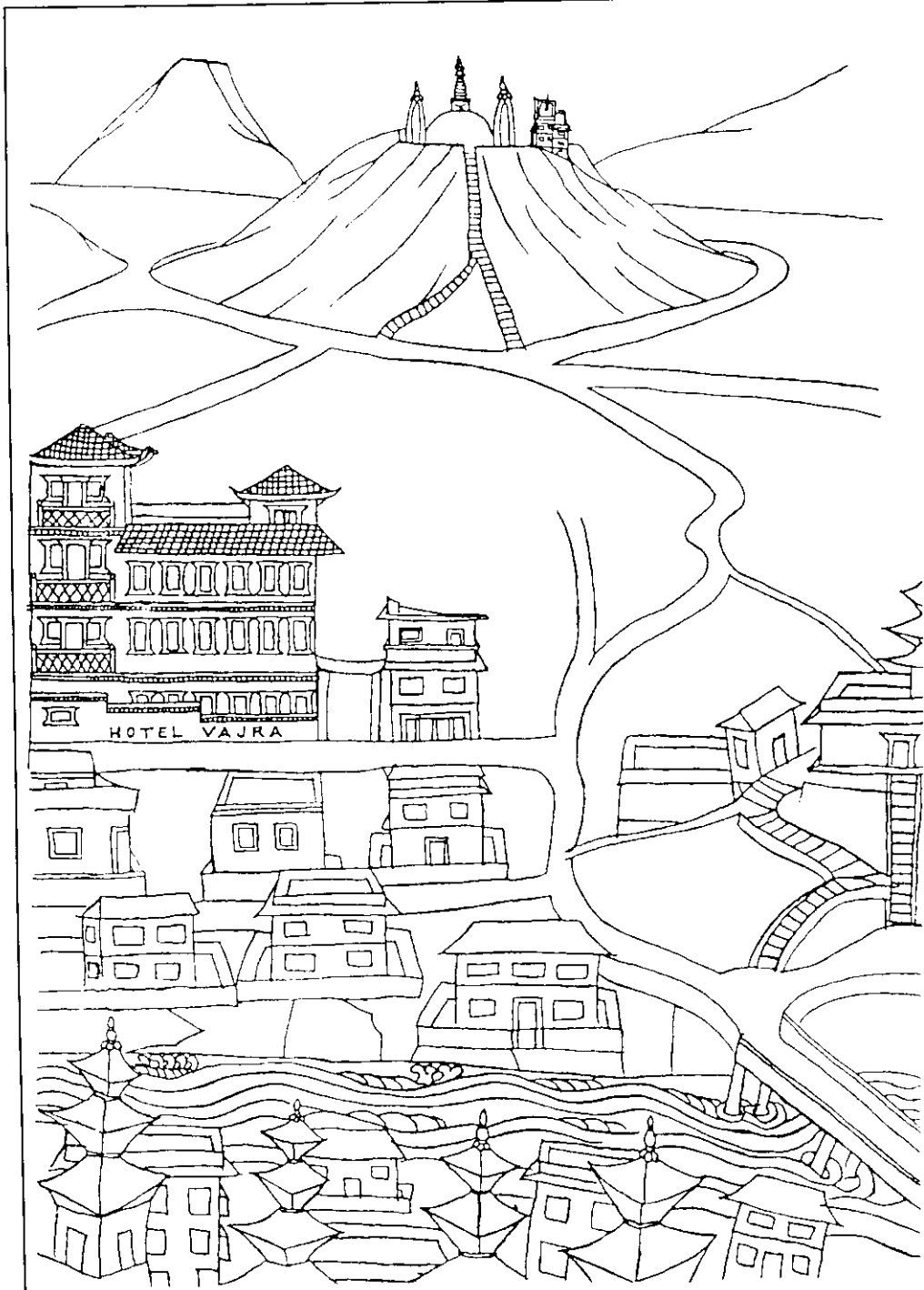
failure to claim its rightful place on the world stage, why is it that re-unification did not become the focus of nationalist aspirations, at least in the post-Cold War period of re-negotiation? It is not as if an alternative is uncalled for, especially

now, at a time when Pakistan is generally referred to as a failed state, even by its own people, and the Republic of India is ruled by 'nationalists' who embody none of the principles on which that state was founded.

Looking to the future, with as much objectivity as I can muster, I would have to say that re-unification is one definite potential prospect, perhaps the brightest, for the resolution of political dysfunctions which are



Akhter Ahsan



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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.

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INDIA • PAKISTAN

JAW-JAW, NOT WAR-WAR

It's never over till it's over. The downing of the Pakistani reconnaissance plane over Sir Creek on 10 August was a swift and troubling reminder that the fallout of Kargil will be felt much farther afield and for much longer than the hostilities themselves. India-Pakistan relations were in a stall after Kargil, and the downing of the Atlantique aircraft helped send relations into a tailspin.

Pakistan's intrusion into Indian airspace appears to have been fairly well-substantiated notwithstanding Islamabad's denials, and that was the original sin. Even Washington, which criticised India for over-reacting, does not take issue with the claim that the plane strayed into Indian territory. Pakistan must therefore be held responsible for a rather foolish act. Foolish, for several reasons. For one thing, the Kargil war (and it must be reckoned as the fourth India-Pakistan war, given the intensity and length of hostilities) had just ended. Feelings were, and are, running high on both sides. Indian forces were, and remain, on a razor's edge in terms of their alert status: nobody wants a Kargil on their watch. Moreover, the Indian elections are just around the corner. Any security lapse at this moment could change the course of the elections.

But for all that, the Indian authorities would do well to re-examine their reaction. The reference here is not so much to the shooting itself, although a review of interception procedures would be helpful. Given the tensions and the significance of Sir Creek/Rann of Kutch, the downing of the plane was not particularly surprising. The Indian government says that Pakistan had violated Indian airspace over 50 times in the past year or so. It also claims that the Pakistani air force had intruded into the Sir Creek/Rann of Kutch area eight times before the Atlantique was shot down. The question then is: why did New Delhi not promptly protest and demand an investigation by the Pakistani authorities as implied in the 1991 agreement on the prevention and handling of airspace violations? If India had made a public issue of the violations as and when they happened, the entire incident could well have been avoided.

The Sir Creek misadventure indicates that the

1991 agreement on airspace violations probably needs amendment. The agreement expressly forbids both sides from flying combat aircraft — including reconnaissance planes — and from operating in a no-fly zone within 10 kilometres of the international boundary. But the latest act suggests that both sides have been fairly routinely violating the agreement.

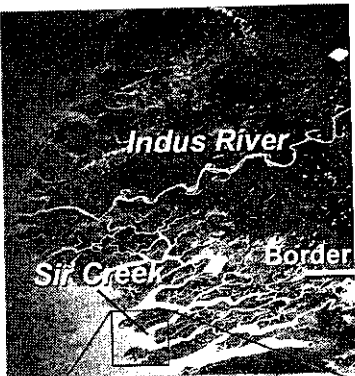
The Indian helicopter flight ferrying journalists to the crash site may also have been such a violation. Brajesh Mishra, the Indian national security adviser, interviewed on TV days after the shooting seemed to say that India had informed Pakistan of the flight (as mandated by the 1991 agreement), but his language was equivocal enough to suggest that perhaps New Delhi had not honoured the agreement either.

What can be done to improve the agreement, if anything? First of all, it may be useful to look at the no-fly zones regime in West Asia, which the Israelis and the Arabs have been implementing rather successfully for much longer than the Indo-Pak 1991 agreement. Secondly, better communication between the two air forces would seem to be indispensable. As things stand, it is not clear how they talk to each other. The 1991 accord mentions that air advisers on both sides should be kept "informed" of flight safety and urgent air operations that affect the other side. But how this is done and with what dispatch, is not known. The agreement also suggests that such matters should be brought to the notice of the other side over the phones at the two army headquarters. This seems a rather tortuous procedure. Can't the two air forces speak to each other directly? And can't they do so, sector by sector, rather than going through Islamabad and Delhi?

Thirdly, Indian planes (perhaps Pakistani as well) should be fitted with more than two communication channels. Air Chief Marshal A.Y. Tipnis admitted after the incident that the Indian MiGs have only two communication channels and these were both in operation during their interception flight. As a result, the Indian pilots could not establish radio contact with the Atlantique on the international communication frequency available for such contacts. The amended 1991 agreement should mandate that both sides carry at least a third channel of communication.

It's always better to jaw-jaw than war-war, especially when there are nuclear weapons around. India and Pakistan can mull over whether and when they want to get down to business *a la* Lahore. Neither side can afford to ride a high horse in the shadow of the bomb.▲

—Kanti Bajpai



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PAKISTAN

SHOOTING THE SHARIF

Credited for putting together almost all the anti-government political alliances in the last four decades, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, the wily old man of Pakistani politics, was at it again. Sporting his trademark red *fez* and holding the *huqqa*, he listened calmly as speaker after speaker unleashed a tirade of accusations against the Nawaz Sharif government at a seminar in Lahore titled "Washington Declaration — A Betrayal of National Interests". Held on 12 August by the Pakistan People's Alliance, of which the Nawabzada is the president, the real aim of the seminar was to bring the opposition parties together on the minimal agenda of forcing the government out of office.

At the end of the meeting, Nasrullah Khan read out a statement that summed up the rhetoric of leaders from 37 political parties: "Nawaz Sharif is engaged in a meaningless dialogue with India. During the Kargil crisis, he repeatedly lied and misled the nation. And when Nawaz lost his nerve, he begged for a meeting with President Clinton and consequently agreed to withdraw the army and mujahideens from the line of control." As punishment for this cardinal sin, the statement demanded the removal of the Sharif government to be replaced by an interim government with "persons of good character and reputation" who shall pave the way for "free and fair elections".

More than the Nawabzada's final statement, the conference became important for a speech by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, chief of the Jamiat-e-Ulma-e-Islam, an influential religious party that enjoys a close relationship with the Taliban. Stealing the whole show, the Maulana gave an interesting spin to the Washington meeting between Sharif and Bill Clinton. He claimed that Sharif had assured Clinton that he would help the US against Osama bin Laden. He also repeated his now-famous fatwa that US citizens in Pakistan would be killed if the US attacked Afghanistan. "If we are not safe in our own country, then no US citizen would be safe here either," he said. All this helped the fiery Maulana from the NWFP province to achieve a consensus that the US would not be allowed to use Pakistani soil for anti-bin Laden activities.

All through the seminar, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the largest party in opposition, took a back seat, but not without its representative contributing his bit to the general

TARIC MEHMOOD



mood of jingoism and talk of Islamic revolution. For all purposes, however, it appeared that an increasingly marginalised and cornered opposition, instead of portraying itself as a democratic alternative to the Sharif government, was trying to hit it where it hurt the most. The seminar also betrayed the opposition's desperation to recover some ground before the March 2000 elections to the Senate, the upper house of Parliament. But it is most likely that the ruling Pakistan Muslim League will garner the kind of brute majority it now enjoys in the lower house.

That may be bad news for the parties looking for a change at the top, but at the same time they wouldn't want to see any arrangement that would put the democratic process in jeopardy. For these parties borrowing the rhetoric of the religious right-wing in their bid to bring down the government may be expedient political strategy, but the fact remains that their interests are clearly at variance with the jihadi groups. And they wouldn't want to see the ascendance of any of the Islamic groups, which have so far proved no threat in electoral politics, although their 'nuisance value' was not to be discounted.

The government too stands on the crossroads of history at this moment. Never before has Pakistan seen a truly one-man government such as Sharif's, and never before has the government been under this kind of pressure from a disarrayed opposition. Sharif now seems to have two options: either to grant concessions to the parliamentary opposition and give it some breathing space; or play the religious card and show himself to be more Islamic than the opposition.

As things stand, both the government and the opposition seem to be content to let the religious parties dictate the rules of the game. And herein lies the real danger: of everyone—the government, opposition, and public—losing the game, with the exception, of course, of the Islamists.

▲
—Zaigham Khan

Out to get Sharif: (l-r) Hamid Nasir Chatha (PML Chatha Group), Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan (Pakistan Democratic Party PDP), Rao Sikandar Iqbal (Pakistan People's Party), Qazi Hussain Ahmad (Jamaat-e-Islami), Imran Khan (Tahrik-e-Insaf).

DEEPA GAHLOT

WHY THE WORLD LOVES HINDI MOVIES



RONALD ARLAND



Once thought to be only meant for the silly ones, Hindi masalas now have fans worldwide not all of them silly.

The global popularity of Hindi cinema crept up and hit the Bombay film industry in the eye last year when Mani Ratnam's *Dil Se* made it to the UK Top 10 in its first week.

Then in August this year, Amitabh Bachchan topped a BBC online poll on the most popular star of the millennium, beating Hollywood demi-gods by a long shot; what's more, Govinda finished tenth on the list.

More recently, Subhash Ghai's *Taal* broke box-office records in the US, mainly because he thought it worth releasing an unheard-of 44 prints in the overseas circuit. The oddest success story is, of course, of Rajnikant's Tamil films bowling over Japanese filmgoers.

Indian audiences used to treat the indigenous film – whether in Hindi or in any regional language, the popular film's form remains the same – as an acquired taste peculiar to Indian culture, a “vice” to be admitted to sheepishly, something to be slightly ashamed of, like paan stains on the teeth and coconut oil in the hair. In spite of a comfortably receptive overseas market, the Hindi film industry was smugly content with the vast audiences it had at its command within the Subcontinent. So unlike Hollywood, Indian filmmakers did not feel the need to expand internationally beyond a few known and fairly lucrative territories that went under the omnibus label of “Overseas”. A clear example of *ghar ka murgi daal barabar* – a piquant Hindi saying which means that people often ignore what is right under their noses. In this case, a unique product and an eminently exportable commodity.

Hindi chic

There was always a small and steady market for Hindi cinema abroad, or wherever there was a sizeable South Asian immigrant population. And their popularity also extended to the native population of the Gulf, some African countries, and, oddly enough, Russia and some East European countries, plus a minute cult following in campuses across the US, the UK and rest of Europe. Raj Kapoor and Mithun Chakraborty

are hugely popular in Russia, Amitabh Bachchan's name can open doors in Egypt, and shopkeepers in Singapore are known to have declined payment from anyone who knows the words to the latest Hindi hit film song.

It is only in the last few years that Hindi cinema – with films like *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jaayenge*, *Dil To Pagal Hai*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* – has come out from its closet of tiny suburban movie halls, video parlours and smuggled pirated VCDs, right into the mainstream. They have got a large-enough audience to figure in the top charts, bag impressive theatre chains and get noticed by critics of upmarket publications. (Till recently, the only Indian filmmaker known abroad was Satyajit Ray.)

The media worldwide has started doing features, photo-essays, TV series and documentaries on popular Indian cinema. It's no longer disgraceful to admit to a passion for the masala movie – even film scholars, researchers and historians now find it worth analysing it as a powerful form of popular culture.

This interest abroad has perhaps coincided with the emergence of a strong Asian subculture in the West, which, as usual, has exported our own Indianness back to us, apparent in the way Hindi cinema has caught on with the hip, urban teen set who earlier used to think that the Hindi *masala* movie was infra dig, only meant for lumpens and bored housewives. Like the dominance of Black culture some years ago, it is the turn of Indian/South Asian culture now – Indian food, yoga, ayurveda, spirituality, are all in vogue. There's bhangra rap in the discos, salwar kameez and saris being accepted as *haute couture*, henna tattoos as fashion; Madonna singing *shlokas* and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan composing for major Hollywood films. Now, Indian films are shown regularly on television all over the world to a multiplying flock of multi-cultural audiences, and not just on ethnic channels.

Bollywood is no longer ghetto territory, but a world to be fancied – not a Hollywood rip-off but an equal; and a means of running around the cultural hegemony of Holly-

wood. The fact that the big Hollywood studios and entertainment conglomerates are fighting for an entry into the Indian market proves that there is something they still have to learn about audience tastes.

"As a result of exposure to quality Hindi films, Indian cinema is no more obscure in the West," says Nasreen Munni Kabir who made *Movie Mahal*, Channel 4's first major series on Hindi cinema, in the early 80s. "The best example of the acceptance of Hindi films in the West is an ad for Powergen that shows a group of Indian villagers watching a song and dance scene when the power goes off. The Powergen is switched on and the film is resumed. This ad would never have happened three years ago. Now India is fashionable in the West, like Black culture was some years ago."

Kabir feels that the Asian sub-culture is seeping into the mainstream with the rise of Asians into positions of influence, while their younger generation is more accepting of other cultures. "Far from repudiating their Asianness, young Asians are more confident and proud of their bi-culturalism," says the producer.

NRI nostalgia

Interestingly, this upsurge of Indian culture abroad has coincided with a back-to-roots traditionalism in Indian society, reflected in the phenomenal popularity of religious and mythological serials on television and films like *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* and *Pardes*, which focus on the traditional Indian family, ancient rituals and patriarchal values. There is doubtless a commercial element involved – everything ultimately turns into a marketing tool – but the Hindi movie is fulfilling a need to cling on to something familiar in a fast-changing world which is sweeping away cultural contrasts and demanding uniformity (and conformity) in the name of globalisation. It has perhaps become imperative for Indian films to depict what is in the Indian mind – an urgency to accept the global, but retain the traditional.

Fortunately for filmmakers, this trend in India goes very well with the nostalgia of the non-resident Indian (NRI) for what has been left behind. While first-generation immigrants yearn for their homeland, the second or third generation does not want to assimilate completely into a foreign culture, and craves to preserve a vestige of their In-

dian identity. The Indian filmmaker capitalises on this homesickness and nostalgia by making films that give the NRI as well as the disconcerted desis a glimpse of their 'glorious' past. Successful films thus are the ones that depict rituals like weddings, Holi, Diwali, and even the outdated Karva Chauth (the fast wives observe for the longevity of their husbands), with a loud splash of colour, custom and music, which is enough to reassure the post-liberalisation Indian as well as the nostalgic NRI that Indian culture is not all lost.

COURTESY OUTLOOK



A *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* or *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* celebrates the Indianness of the joint family, religious rituals, cherished virtues of unselfishness and sacrifice, to cover up for the blatant consumerism, self-indulgence and short-cut spiritualism of real life. It's not all that surprising then, that the trend of violence in Indian mainstream cinema of the late 1970s and 1980s has made way for romance, fidelity, family values and the cuteness of heroes like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan and Govinda, who in spite of their gym-pumped muscles,

Slapstick cops:
BBC poll toppers
Amitabh Bachchan and
Govinda in *Bade Miyan
Chhote Miyan*



come as close to an internationally approved androgyny as a patriarchal society will allow.

The spectacle of ritual, song, dance, sentiment, romance, is obviously as attractive to the non-Indian film viewer, as it is to the escapism-seeking, often poverty-stricken Indian. In an increasingly mechanised, impersonal, troubled and splintering world, the emotionalism, filial and marital loyalty, fantasy and constancy, as portrayed in Hindi/Indian films, is a fleeting source of comfort. One of the biggest Hollywood hits in recent



mainstream cinema is usually as far removed from reality as possible, with no claim whatsoever on authenticity or accuracy, but the die-hard viewer doesn't care about a couple living in Chandigarh singing songs in Amsterdam, a Scottish castle being passed off as a Delhi college or a Swiss chalet as a residence in Mumbai. This unabashed disregard for time, space and geography can only happen in the alternative zone of existence that Indian cinema offers — a relief from harsh reality.

Hindi/Indian cinema demands and gets total suspension of disbelief. It works at the level of ballad, fable, fairy tale and simple morality yarn, where virtue is always rewarded and wickedness punished. To the West this blend of the simple and the outlandish is attractive, while others find resonances of their own lost innocence in the illusory world of the Indian film. This is the only world where there are no doubts or confusion or nasty surprises.

The die-hard viewer doesn't care about a couple living in Chandigarh singing songs in Amsterdam, a Scottish castle being passed off as a Delhi college or a Swiss chalet as a residence in Mumbai.

times — *Titanic* — is an example of the globalisation of the Indian film formula. Romance, music and family duty have also returned to international films, and Indian popular cinema almost has a patent on them.

Suspending disbelief

The undying appeal of the Indian film to the non-Indian viewer from countries and cultures as diverse as Japan, South Africa, Russia, Malaysia, Egypt, West Indies, lies in its core of fantasy wrapped in tradition. The

In real life, you can never know when you might be run over by a car, blown up by a terrorist's bomb or caught by a sniper's bullet; your marriage could break up, parents disown you, kids abandon you. In real life, you will have to deal with illness, redundancy, betrayal, riots. In the usual Bollywood fare, there are no divorces, families stay together; more often than not, kids are deferential, parents indulgent, and neighbours considerate. When characters go through inhuman suffering and emerge victorious, and, mysteriously unscathed, there is a sense of collective catharsis that even the most slickly made Western film cannot guarantee.

Where else do you get a permanent promise of happy endings? In a Hindi movie, almost always, the boy and the girl live happily ever after. ▲

Cinema came to India soon after its introduction in the West, and since among its early backers were Anglicised Parsis, Indian films have always had a form that is a peculiar mix of mythology, historical legends, folk art, Parsi theatre, Shakespearean and Victorian drama. And since there has never been a compulsion to change it, the form of popular cinema has remained unaltered over the century. The art or parallel cinema movement of the late 1960s and 1970s tried to experiment with form, but fizzled out after some initial successes; there is still some offbeat work done by directors in regional languages, particularly Malayalam. Now it is a given that popular cinema cannot exist without song-and-dance, melodrama and high-voltage emotion—violence is acceptable but only within the set formula of romance-family-honour.

Even if the song-and-dance “items” liberally borrow from MTV, and the styles and plots and scene compositions are lifted from Hollywood, the Indian film hero and heroine are invariably monogamous, modern in dress but conventional at heart; the hero (and occasionally the heroine) will resort to violence only when the family—immediate or extended (friend, neighbour, community, country)—is under threat. Like the heroes of the epics (*Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*), it is the duty of the male to protect the honour of the woman/family/community, while it is the woman’s duty to provide succour and support as the mother, sister, beloved or wife, but not to participate directly in the conflict. Like Sita, the heroine must remain chaste even when she is the villain’s (Ravan) captive, and wait for the hero (Ram) to come and rescue her, sometimes with the help of a brother (Laxman) or close friend (Hanuman). It is no surprise then, that the careerwoman has not yet found representation or respectability in mainstreet Hindi films—except, very rarely, in the form of Durga/Shakti where she dons a uniform and picks up weapons to fight evil.

Like Kunti in the *Mahabharat*, the mother is to be worshipped, and like Dasharath in the *Ramayana*, the father is to be obeyed at any cost. Sacrifice, loyalty, submission to patriarchy/authority is desirable at all times. In the romantic arena, the hero still has to go through a test of manhood to pass the heroine’s swayamvar, and the rites of wooing still follow the *chhed-chhad* (teasing) between Krishna along with his bunch of *gwalas* (cowherds) and Radha with the *gopis* (milkmaids).

In folk and Parsi theatre, songs, dances, declamatory speeches, exaggerated gestures and the odd routine of a comedy track separate from the main plot, were accepted norms. Indian cinema still uses the simple linear narrative style of folk oral tradition and drama, and almost always utilises the song-dance and slapstick in the manner of the now-outdated theatrical style. Ironically, Indian theatre has incorporated experimentation, abstraction, realism, taken from the West and elsewhere into ancient folk forms, and come up with a remarkably contemporary language, while Indian mainstream

movies have simply borrowed new techniques from the West and juxtaposed it—not always successfully—with predictable narrative patterns.

The ending of the typical Hindi film, for instance, is illustrative of its immutable derivation from the theatre. In plays, the entire cast assembles on stage to take a bow, in the Hindi film, all characters (the surviving ones, that is) gather together for a group photograph. There is also the blithe certainty of the happy ending (with very few exceptions as in the case of films derived from the classical tragic love story of the Laila-Majnu variety). The hero and heroine will marry, misunderstandings will be sorted out, the villain will suffer death or imprisonment, straying husbands and prodigal sons will return to the family fold. (Straying wives and daughters will, however, meet an ignoble end!)

Perhaps, in the case of the Hindi film, familiarity does not breed contempt. Audiences seem perfectly satisfied with repetitions—with minor upgradations—of a handful of popular plotlines. Boy meets girl, one is rich, the other poor; they confront parental opposition, villainous interventions and other obstacles to reunite happily in the end. Siblings are separated from parents or from each other either by way of natural or man-made calamity; they will keep bumping into one another throughout the film at apposite points, while their stories run parallel. They will recognise each other from an amulet, tattoo or song, and unite to defeat the villain. The noble Pandavas versus the greedy Kauravas in a modern-day *Mahabharat*, ensuring the perennial victory of good over evil.

Another favourite has the hero avenging the killing of a family member. This is sometimes extended to his own oppression at the hands of evil forces (corrupt cops and politicians, criminals, terrorists), at which—pushed to his limits of tolerance—he will resort to means fair or foul and clear his name and uphold the honour of his family.

The latest trend, besides youthful romance, is patriotism. Mainstream films are always quick to catch on to and merrily distort popular sentiment, and after terrorism entered India, patriotism has become an important component of the Indian film. Villains are not just ornery bad guys now, they are international terrorists. And the hero’s duties are no longer confined to saving heroines in distress, but to save Bharat Mata from The Enemy—whether it is the dreadful ISI guys from across the border, or the amoral influences of the Wicked West that threaten to destroy Indian culture.

—Deepa Gahlot

BOY MEETS GIRL...



BOMBAY MASALA, LAHORE CLASSIC

What we today call Bollywood cinema is the common heritage of all those who contributed at one time or another to its growth into what is today the second largest motion picture industry in the world. Soon after the success of the first indigenous Indian film *Raja Harishchandra*, made by the visionary from Bombay, Dada Saheb Phalke in 1913, aspiring filmmakers all over India plunged into the world of dreams and glamour. Besides Bombay, film productions also started in Calcutta, Madras and Lahore.

The first film from Lahore (now facetiously called "Lollywood" and the base of Pakistani cinema) was *The Daughter of Today*, made in 1924, 11 years after the release of Phalke's venture. But it was *The Loves of a Mughal Prince* by the exceptional entrepreneur, Himanshu Rai, that offered Lahore the first real hope of getting into the mainstream cinema market. The film, based on Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj's famous play *Anarkali*, however, failed to take off. This was because the Imperial Film Company of Bombay churned out a quickie, *Anarkali*, and released it hurriedly across the country. Rai's movie, although a much superior and original work, was dubbed a copy and it flopped. The Bombay Masala had sealed the commercial fate of the Lahore Classic.

Film production in Lahore was an unprofitable enterprise and was more of an industry where newcomers tried their hand at cinema without having to live off it. Artists and technicians who made it in Lahore were invariably attracted to Bombay, the showbiz centre which recognised only success. Bombay filmdom lured everyone of substance, and enriched itself at the cost of other film centres, including Lahore. This is seen in the list of artistes who achieved cult status and contributed immensely to the evolution of Bollywood, but who originally hailed from the part of

India now comprising Pakistan: Prithviraj Kapoor, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand, Ghulam Haider, Mohammed Rafi, Balraj Sahni, Kamini Kaushal, Rajendra Kumar, Sampooran Singh Gulzar,

The Pakistani film industry struggles for originality as pirated Indian movies steal the show.

Ramanand Sagar, G.P. and Ramesh Sippy, Nasir Khan, Mumtaz, Pran...

Beauty bazaar

A momentous day for Indian cinema arrived on 14 March 1931 when the country's first full-length talkie, *Alam Ara*, was released in Bombay under the banner of the Imperial Film Company. One of its songs turned out to be a big hit, and business soared as the melody caught the imagination of the country. Maiden Theatre Calcutta followed with its own talkie, *Shirin Farhad*, based on a Persian love lore, with as many as 40 songs. This is how cinema in the Subcontinent developed into a unique entity of dance, drama and song, defying universally accepted classification of the cinema genre.

The acceptance and popularity of Hindi cinema has, ever since, depended heavily on the song-and-dance ingredients. The genesis of this peculiar genre of cinema is linked to the longer-term history of the performing arts in the Subcontinent. Performing arts as a means of livelihood and source of entertainment was recognised at the administrative level in India as early as the 3rd century BC. This is clear from Kautilya's *Artha Shastra*, in which he writes: "The maintenance from the King's exchequer is to be provided to the teachers who impart (to courtesans and female slaves who live by the stage) the knowl-



Hindi movie poster in a Karachi video parlour

edge of the arts of singing, playing on musical instrument, reciting, dancing, acting, writing, painting, playing on the lute, the flute and the drum..."

The rulers of India, irrespective of their religious affiliations, patronised musicians, poets and singers, and had a vast number of them attached to their courts. The middle classes, on the other hand, found a more exotic outlet in the *chakla*. This was the Beauty Bazaar, abodes of dancing damsels and sex workers, a sort of early form of nightclubs. Exclusive areas within the *chakla* were earmarked for the *mujra*—the dance and song repertoire—performed by trained and qualified singer-cum-dancer with good looks and pleasant decorum.

The *chaklas* were the grooming grounds for singers and dancers, where poets and musicians were pampered and could scrape a living. Prodigal sons of rich families found in the *chakla* an opportunity for emotional and physical expression, a fairyland for romance and courtship with real life damsels, a place that led to the fruition of unfulfilled dreams born out of a segregated and sexually frustrating environment.

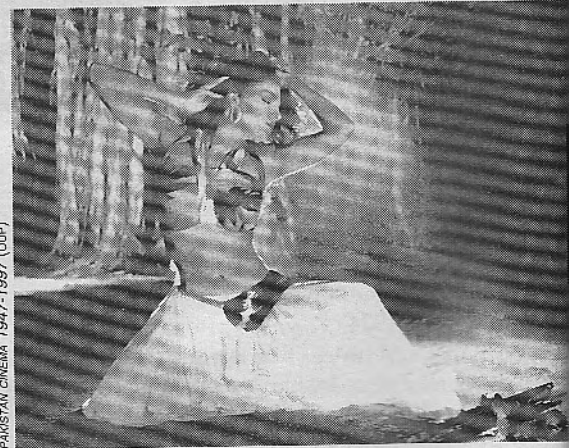
The *mujra* segment of the *chakla* was where women learnt the art of singing and dancing, and the mannerisms of appeasement. It is no coincidence, therefore, that for decades these were the only places that supplied heroines and other women actors for the films. The fun and merriment of the *chakla*, however, were beyond the reach of the masses, which had to cultivate its own folk mediums to express of joy, sorrow, gaiety and gloom. The interaction and articulation in this folk culture was always through lyrically spoken words, which were tuned to the versified passages of religious teachings, songs of harvest, lores of bygone past, dramas and puppetry.

When cinema came to the Subcontinent it was but natural for filmmakers to expound the aesthetic and cultural identity of the people through songs, music and dances inherited from this rich cultural past. In addition, the repertoires of many parts of the Subcontinent were adapted and incorporated into cinema. Cosmopolitan Bombay integrated and blended the best of what it received from all over the region and offered it to people in the most entertaining form of cinema. In the process, it brought together the segregated cultures of the masses and the classes. High and low, mighty and meek, rich and poor, could together watch the same sil-

ver-screen without undermining their social status.

Partition and plagiarism

Talkies also gave a new lease of life to film production in the northern region. Perhaps it was the cultural dominance of Lahore in contrast to the technological advancement of Bombay that brought the change. In the silent era, physical action, mime, magic and slapstick were the main ingredients of movie-making. With sound, the need for a well-written story, dialogues, lyrics and music became imperative. Calcutta and Madras being non-Hindi/Urdu provinces turned to their own regional literature, but Bombay, catering to the need of a hybrid majority of



PAKISTAN CINEMA 1947-1997 (cup)

Navel-gazing in Lahore:
Pakistani star Meera in
her element.

dience, looked towards Uttar Pradesh and the northern provinces for their rich heritage of court and folk culture. Thus it happened that most of the actors, directors, writers, poets, singers and musicians in the fledgling talkie period of Bombay, belonged to the non-native population of Maharashtra state.

With the division of the Subcontinent in 1947 and the communal riots that accompanied it, what advantage Lahore's film industry had enjoyed, quickly disappeared. In the city, film studios belonging to non-Muslims were targetted, partly in revenge attacks and partly because cinema was not considered Islamic in character. The studio-owners left the newly-born Pakistan, and some even took away the equipment. In comparison, Bombay studios remained unaffected as the city remained fairly calm.

Independent Pakistan's film industry was too small to cope with the demand of local theatres, so Bombay films continued to



dominate in Pakistan in the post-Independence period as well. The other factor was that Pakistan cinema lacked established stars in its fold. Except for Noorjahan, others who came from Bombay and Calcutta were either on the downhill phase of their career or veterans good for only minor roles. On the other hand, their counterparts in Bombay — Dilip Kumar, Nargis, Kamini Kaushal, Madhubala, Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand and others — were well on their way to stardom. These Bombay actors enjoyed immense popularity among young Pakistani filmgoers, which made it difficult for the Pakistani filmmakers who had to make do with mostly unknown and fresh faces.

The 1965 war between India and Pakistan generated a surge of nationalism that had only been seen earlier in the freedom movement of undivided India. The Pakistani government placed a complete ban on exhibition of Indian films, even on oldies released

favourites on TV or rented videos of their choice.

Survival strategy

If anything has even remotely served to bridge the divide between Pakistanis and Indians these last five decades, it has to be Bollywood cinema. There may be a blanket ban on Indian films in Pakistan, but walk into any of the 45,000 video shops across the country, and, in the best traditions of piracy, the latest Bollywood films are all there in the shelves. In many of the villages, these video shops even have small, dark rooms spluttering out Bollywood starrers at the princely price of two rupees per show. Then there are the restaurants and small tea shops dishing out the same fare.

To take advantage of film fare on satellite television, which has conquered all of Pakistan, even electricity-less villages remained hooked through battery-run televisions and receivers, tuning into multiple channels. In congested areas of major cities, the cable brigade functions in the most organised and considerate way — it charges PKR 50 (c. USD 1) per month in the lower-income dwellings, while hiking it upto PKR 250 in the posh settlements. The lifeline of these cable operators is the Hindi film.

Producers in Pakistan would have done well to come up with a survival strategy to counter the ready rental and sale of pirated Bollywood in the local market and to get the urban middle class back to the theatres. But, rather unwisely, they have adopted a policy that will only marginalise their audience further. They have begun to offer second-rate Bollywood-ised versions of Bollywood bonanzas to that segment of society which has no easy access to VCR and television. This surely will fizzle out in the long run, as satellite access is extending to even the remotest of areas and all class segments.

Unfortunately for everyone involved, the over-protected film industry of Pakistan bitterly opposes the opening up of film trade of any kind with India for fear of being swamped. It ignores the fact that such a situation already prevails all over the country. Everyone is watching Hindi films, anyway. If nothing tangible is done to improve the quality of local cinema to match the Indian productions in an open market, the battle in the field of motion pictures may well be lost, without even encountering Bollywood face to face. ▲

Walk into any video shop in Pakistan, and the latest Bollywood films are there.

years back (and the ban holds till today). This gave the local filmmakers a protected market and the number of Pakistani productions began to grow considerably. But the films were indigenous only cosmetically, for soon enough, producers and their writers started visiting neighbouring Afghanistan to watch Indian films to get their story ideas. Plagiarism was practised to the hilt, with Pakistani filmmakers remaking Bollywood's box office hits by merely changing the names of characters from Hindu to Muslim ones, and placing them in the local setting.

This furtive copying came to an end when Lahore began to receive Indian TV, and Pakistanis could watch the originals in the comfort of their homes. This led to some development of original Pakistani cinema, but this period lasted only for a decade till the introduction of home video and later satellite telecasts in the region. Through pirated VHS tapes and satellite channels, Bollywood now began to inflict the most devastating blow to the Pakistani film industry. Local producers of Urdu films lost their audience to Hindi films from Bombay, particularly the middle class urbanised family filmgoers who preferred to watch their Bollywood

MAITHILI RAO

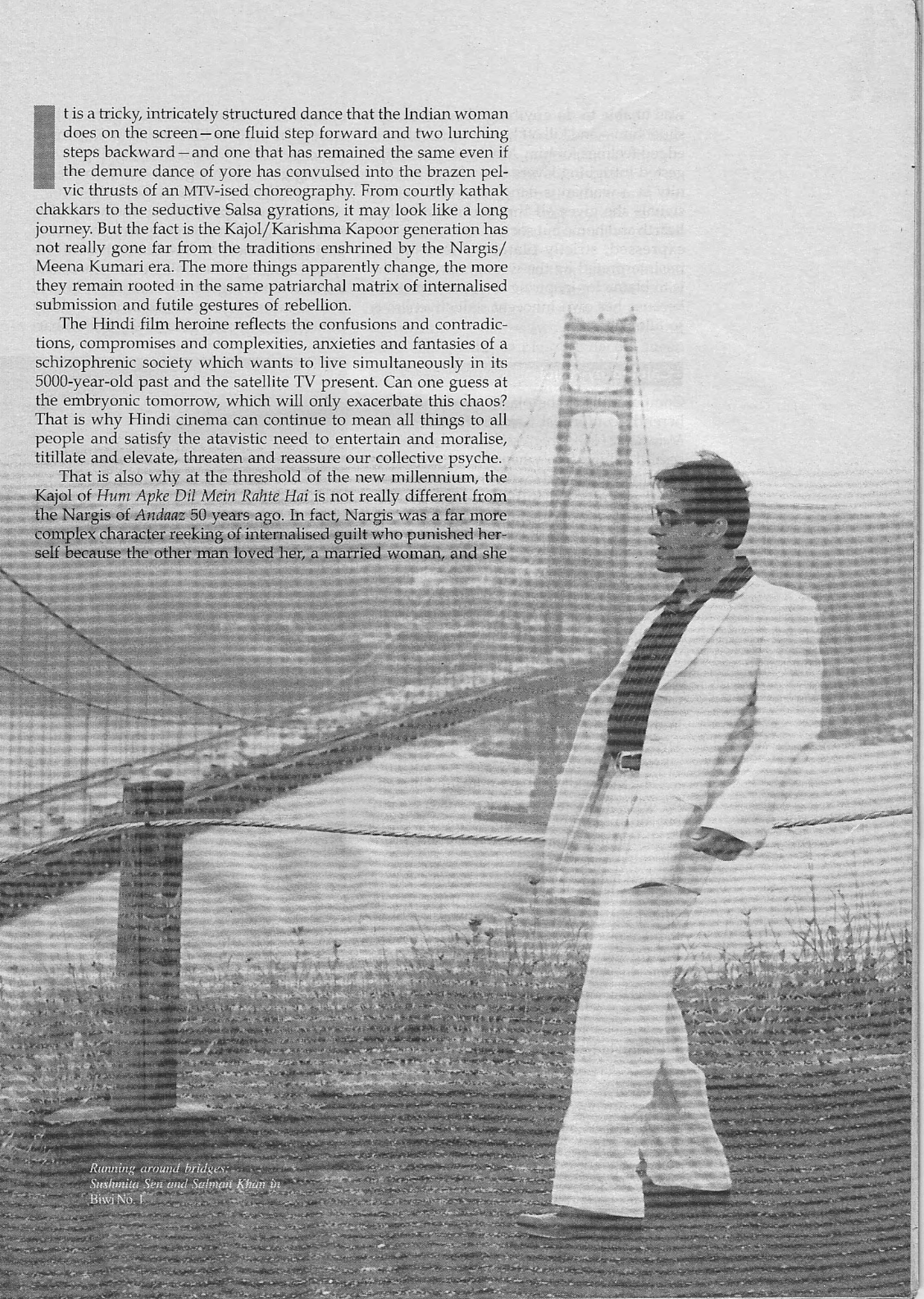
BETWEEN REBELLION AND SUBMISSION



It is a tricky, intricately structured dance that the Indian woman does on the screen—one fluid step forward and two lurching steps backward—and one that has remained the same even if the demure dance of yore has convulsed into the brazen pelvic thrusts of an MTV-ised choreography. From courtly kathak chakkars to the seductive Salsa gyrations, it may look like a long journey. But the fact is the Kajol/Karishma Kapoor generation has not really gone far from the traditions enshrined by the Nargis/Meena Kumari era. The more things apparently change, the more they remain rooted in the same patriarchal matrix of internalised submission and futile gestures of rebellion.

The Hindi film heroine reflects the confusions and contradictions, compromises and complexities, anxieties and fantasies of a schizophrenic society which wants to live simultaneously in its 5000-year-old past and the satellite TV present. Can one guess at the embryonic tomorrow, which will only exacerbate this chaos? That is why Hindi cinema can continue to mean all things to all people and satisfy the atavistic need to entertain and moralise, titillate and elevate, threaten and reassure our collective psyche.

That is also why at the threshold of the new millennium, the Kajol of *Hum Apke Dil Mein Rahte Hai* is not really different from the Nargis of *Andaaz* 50 years ago. In fact, Nargis was a far more complex character reeking of internalised guilt who punished herself because the other man loved her, a married woman, and she



*Running around bridges:
Sushmita Sen and Salman Khan in
Biwt No. 1*

was unable to do anything about it except shoot him – and kill off her own unacknowledged feelings for him. Mehboob Khan suggested intriguing layers in *Andaaz* – modernity in a woman is dangerous because the signals she gives off threaten not only her hearth and home but society itself; her freely expressed, strictly platonic friendship is misinterpreted by the wrong man; and she is to blame for inspiring unsuitable passion because her own innocent seductiveness is so alluring.

Cajoled by Kajol

Compare this to the plastic revolt of an inherently conformist Kajol in *Hum Apke Dil Mein Rahte Hain*, a regressive remake of a successful Telugu film where the *mangalsutra*'s sanctity is reiterated for the thousandth time. Kajol is supposed to be a self-respecting, middle-class working girl who enters a contract marriage with eyes wide open for strictly pragmatic reasons and yet, gets bloodied knees from climbing temple steps abjectly on her knees so that her ungrateful husband can get well. The only novelty is that she plays hard to get when the repentant husband realises that nobody else can make a cuppa as wifey did and further, isn't she pregnant with his baby? Unlike the recent crop of belly-button revealing houris, in this film Kajol wears *sindur*, salwars and saris, with matching glass bangles and the all-important mangalsutra.

The mini-skirted, bare-midriffed brigade has reduced us all to a navel-gazing society but all this contemplation has not made us anything more than avid voyeurs with prudish souls. Sartorially, you can congratulate the new generation: you have come a long way, baahby! At one time in film history, the silken shringar of Meena Kumari's Chhoti Bahu as she beckoned and cajoled her straying husband in a wine-drenched voice in *Sahib, Bibi Aur Gulam* was the acme of eroticism. The screen bimchette now knows that she is a sex object-cum-fashion model and sometimes, her mascara-ed eyes glint with the knowledge of her power and she sashays even more provocatively.

But does this acknowledgement of her sexual power make her aware of her own sexuality? At her raunchiest, she teases us to guess what is beneath her *choli* – definitely not her heart as the camera plays its own game of reducing Madhuri Dixit to a sum of her fractured body parts, while Sanjay Dutt's

eye patch underlines the male gaze. At her worst, she prances like Karishma Kapoor to the capers of a vulgar song, going at the mating game with a gusto to match the indefatigable calisthenics of Govinda.

At her most pretentious, Aishwarya Rai strikes languorous yogic poses in picture post-card scenery to A.R. Rahman's Sufi-inspired music in *Taal*, all this strained aestheticism adding up to derivative kitsch. This demure yogini of the hills is as quickly transformed into the glitzy, belly-button-bar-

The hero and props:
Backed by Bobby
Deol, Kajol taunts
Manisha Koirala in
Gupt.



ing MTV diva who becomes an international star but whose heart still pines for her first and only love. But unless the powerful men who control her fate – her father and the music industry tycoon who is her fiancé – propel her physically and metaphorically, she can't even go to the man she wants to marry. A high flyer with clipped wings is normally her fate if the film is bold enough to make her into a successful career woman.

The screen is to the people's collective



imagination what the courtyard is to a household. This is intimate space where she is worshipped as the sacred *tulsi*; a sacrosanct area into which the threatening, non-conformist modern woman may not enter until she is prepared to sacrifice her individuality; at whose enclosed warmth the reviled *tawaif* (prostitute) looks longingly, to protect herself from the slings and arrows of a censorious world. A woman crosses the threshold that takes her out of the courtyard of safe custom and comforting tradition at

Amitabh Bachchan vacuum of the 80s before the Khan trio of Amir, Salman and Shah Rukh established its supremacy at the box office. Indian feminism was shown to be articulate and seeking to make changes in law, specially those pertaining to rape so that the victim was not victimised all over once again by the process of law.

So it was in the 80s that Hindi cinema made the radical discovery – angels of death in variations of the rape and revenge formula. You saw front-ranking stars clamouring to play the dacoit queen taking to a gun or a female vigilante sworn to vengeance after the trauma of rape. Whatever the setting and whoever the star, this sub-genre immediately dictated its dress code to fit a new formula. Either the heroine or someone close to her is raped by a marauding dacoit or a gang of city goons. She discards overnight her coy village belle tricks, along with constricting lehngas and



The mini-skirted, bare-midriffed brigade has reduced us all to a navel-gazing society but all this contemplation has not made us anything more than avid voyeurs with prudish souls.

girlish braids embellished with tinsel tassels. She quickly finds a male mentor who could be surrogate father or well-meaning lover for initial guidance. Her seductive form is poured into skin tight black leather jeans, high boots and even a whip to chastise the villain. Is that a coy recognition of sado-masochism lurking under all the patriarchal bombast of Indian society? Of course, all the heroines must have names that invoke Kali, Durga and any other form of Shakti. This easy invocation of ready-made mythology is accompanied by the same bombastic rhetoric declaimed by the hero preliminary to destroying the villain-in-chief.

The paradigmatic film of this sub-genre is *Zakhmee Aurat*, in which Dimple Kapadia plays a cop who has to be punished with gang rape for daring to take on male accoutrements of authoritarianism and has the gall to ride a bike – phallic symbol for cinema the world over. More than the usual titillation to which the audience is inured, what is disturbing is the punishment aspect of the rape.

The other film is *Pratighat*, re-made shot

her own peril. So this creature is banished to the art cinema ghetto where she can exist with the courage of her contradictions.

Rape and revenge

Mainstream cinema can at best recognise current social trends, read the headlines of papers with selective interest and intuitively understand the underlying anxieties of the ordinary Indian. This explains the profusion of the female avenger sub-genre in the post-

for shot from a Telugu original. The protagonist is the spirited housewife next-door, who takes on the gangster politico with the help of lower-caste activists and a chorus-like madman. She has been publicly disrobed but has her revenge by beheading her tormentor in public with an axe. She must sacrifice motherhood — by which she defines her own femininity — in order to act like the hero.

Raj Kumar Santoshi's *Damini* is an idealised conscience-rouser of the middle-class out of its congenital apathy to injustice. The eponymous heroine is uncomfortably committed to speaking the truth even when this endangers the reputation of her rich in-laws. Damini has seen her loutish brother-in-law and his friends gangrape the maid during the Holi festival. Her middle-class values subdue her conscience for a

while as she gives in to the combined persuasions of her uppity in-laws and the dilemma that her husband, a really decent man, is caught in.

Following the unwritten law that puts women with a conscience through the mill of sadistic punishment, Damini is incarcerated in a mental hospital where she is terrorised and certified insane. Tapping into the ready availability of mythological reference, the drums of Durga puja send Damini into a frenzied tandav dance and this shocks her out of a near-lobotomised lethargy. The real heart of the conflict — a traditionally brought up Indian woman's dilemma when her principles clash with family loyalty — does touch a responsive chord.

It is this theme that rings true for ours is a society in a state of flux where old certitudes no longer exist and individuals have to find their own scale of values. Damini empowers a woman and celebrates her integrity even though the narrative is enveloped in the usual safety net of conventional morality.

Safe in his arms:
Amitabh Bachchan and
Nafisa Ali in Major Saab.



PHOTOLOOK

Bollywood lollipops

Then came the 90s — a special decade caught in a historical bind. It is a decade burdened by the accumulated history of past decades even as it waits breathlessly on the beckoning threshold of a bright new century. The triumphalist return of tradi-

Between plastic kitsch and hyped high art, where is the space for the Indian woman just to be, a person in her own right?

tional family values is inevitable in a society responding to the push-pull forces of globalisation. These values are encoded in phenomenally successful films like *Hum Apke Hain Kaun*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Raja Hindustani* and *Pardes*. The answer to a straying globalised audience is to retreat into a fundamentalist past, accompanied by a celebration of ethnicity.

Women have always been made the custodians and carriers of values enshrined by feudal patriarchy. The 90s celebrate and perpetuate traditional virtues of obedience, voluntary sacrifice of individual happiness at the altar of family duty. True, family val-



ues are the new mantra for neo-conservatives the world over in the wake of communism's collapse and Fukuyama's theory of the End of History.

If in the West, there is a discernible resurgence of conservative values in a post-feminist and post-structuralist world, in India, reassertion of traditions can be attributed to a whole complex of reasons in the wake of many complementary and contradictory trends. These films capitalise on the felicitous combination of two historical factors — first, a nation's collective yearning for the simple, comforting pleasures of family bonds (more so when the nation, the larger family, is threatened by violent movements for autonomy on ethnic and religious grounds); second, the perceived threat to such familial bonding by the lures of rampant individualism as a result of unchecked westernisation.

The political resurgence of Hindutva and the culturally xenophobic and un-apologetically patriarchal ideology of a triumphalist Hindu right-wing is the context and subtext of these films. *Hum Apke Hain Kaun* marks a watershed in popular culture because all the subterranean anxieties of a threatened society are allayed with persuasive charm and the viewer goes home comforted by simplistic solutions offered for uncritical mass consumption.

The possibility of an educated young woman asserting her individuality is a threat to the feel-good euphoria created by commercial cinema. *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* cleverly subverts this possibility after duly acknowledging this very individuality. First, via Kajol's incipient rebellion and later, its poignancy underlined by Farida Jalal's recollection of how her own impulse for education was suppressed for the sake of her brothers. Director Aditya Chopra is young and savvy enough to dramatise Kajol's spirited rebellion but his ploy, again based on the Punjab folk tradition of the boy working to win the girl's family, reiterates the fact that a girl must be passed on from father to husband.

Raja Hindustani is an unreal fairy-tale reversal of the hackneyed outsider-city slicker falling in love with the innocent village belle. Dharmesh Darshan asks us to believe that a foreign-educated rich young woman can fall in love with a charmingly loutish, totally uneducated taxi driver with the most obsolete ideas of manliness. He crowns the regressive message by showing the discarded wife

faithfully performing the ubiquitous Karwa Chauth that surfaces in so many films.

Pardes capitalises on the love-hate relationship afflicting the Indian diaspora. This is a love-hate relationship which has layers within layers: of native Indians for their rich cousins abroad, compounded with envy and condemnation. Then there is the much-maligned and much-courted NRI who wants to enjoy the best of the materialistic West and keep intact the purity and spirituality of his mythologised India.

Amrish Puri is the visiting NRI tycoon who returns to his village and selects Ganga, daughter of his childhood friend, as the chosen bride of his wayward, totally Americanised son. "We need daughters like Ganga to purify the boys who have been sullied by an American upbringing," he pontificates with gratifying pomposity! Ganga is the flow of continuum which will redeem the Americanised Indian with her core of tradition under the veneer of girlish high spirits.

Patriarchy continues to reign supreme even in a tasteful lollypop wrapped in designer wear. At the heart to *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, the bubble-gum entertainer par excellence, both Kajol and Rani Mukherjee enshrine Indian womanly virtues — Kajol as she grows up from tom boy to chiffon-clad desirability and Rani, breaking out into the devotional *Jai Jagadeesh Hare* in spite of her mini skirts and Oxford education. *Hum Dil Dechuke Sanam's* self-conscious ethnicity allows Aishwarya Rai to rediscover the sanctity of her marriage when the nobly self-sacrificing, *pucca desi* husband seeks to reunite her with her first love who is an insouciant, half-Italian Romeo.

You can take the modern Indian woman to the trough of tantalising independence but to make her drink its liberating water is impossible. The heroines, with the exception of strikingly individual Kajol, roll off the assembly line wearing the same pout, Manish Malhotra dresses, flaunting designer tresses, pirouetting their aerobicised bodies to the MTV beat, like so many Indianised Barbie dolls. At the other end of the spectrum is the lyrical celebration of Madhuri as the timeless Apsara by none other than M.F. Hussain, India's most high-profile painter. Between plastic kitsch and hyped high art, where is the space for the Indian woman just to be, a person in her own right? In a mirage? ▲

A KISS IS NOT JUST

In 1954, 13,000 women of Delhi presented a petition to Jawaharlal Nehru asking him to curb the evil influence of films as it made their children play hooky from school, acquire precocious sex habits, and indulge in vices. Responding to this petition, the prime minister stated: "Films have an essential part to play in the modern world. At the same time it is true that any powerful medium like motion pictures has a good effect and a bad effect. We have to take care therefore that we emphasise the good aspect of it."

For Nehru, films were linked to the project of modernisation. However, this technological medium and its owners needed to be subordinated to the state so they did not work against the interests of the government. This concept of film censorship, along with the requisite routines and procedures, was established by British colonial administrators ostensibly to guard the morals of the natives and to prevent them from sinking into depravity, religious bigotry and/or ethnic strife.

In 1918, despite objections on grounds of liberty from the Indian members, the country's legislative council passed the first Cinematographic Act which addressed the licensing of cinema houses and the certification of films declared suitable for public exhibition. In 1920, Boards of Film Censors were set up in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Rangoon. At first, these boards functioned without any rigid rules—later the Bombay Board drew up a list of suggestions in the form of the General Principles of Film Censorship for guiding the Inspectors of Films. These rules were based on the censorship rules drawn up by the British Board of Film Censors.

All through the 1920s, there were strong protests both in England and among English residents of India against the kind of films that were being shown in India. Individuals and citizen groups demanded tighter control and stricter censorship because they were concerned about the way whites were being represented in these films, in particular the sexualised representations of white women. They felt that these representations

would be detrimental to England's moral authority. They also feared that Indian men might think that white women were sexually available and, more importantly *accessible to them*.

Besides concerns regarding their moral authority and their women's well-being, the British were also interested in protecting their financial interests. In the year 1926, 80 percent of the films shown in India were American and 10 percent British. The British wanted to reduce the exhibition of American films and, in their place, show their own productions. The British hoped to literally censor/ban American films on the grounds that they violated the censorship rules. Unfortunately, this was not to be after the 1928 Ranagacharia Committee Report found no major differences between the effect of American and British films on the "natives". In fact, they suggested that all white people appeared the same to the natives. To the British claim that they wanted to limit American films because they wanted to promote the "indigenous film industry", the Committee responded that if that were true they should help the natives—not themselves.

After independence in 1947, the Indian government amended the Cinematograph Act and created two categories of censorship certificates: 'A' for films restricted to adults and 'U' for universal unrestricted exhibition. This act created a distinction between films for adults and films for children with the only difference that the 'A' category was defined by the amount of sex and violence in them.

In 1969, following concern over the rise in sex and violence in films the government set up the Khosla Committee to inquire into the working of the existing procedures for the certification of films for public exhibition and related matters. The committee made many recommendations with regard to the principles of censorship, but the debate focused solely on the representation of sexuality with the committee advising the Censors that "If, in telling the story it is logical, relevant or necessary to depict a passionate kiss or a nude human figure, there should be no question of excluding the shot, provided the theme is handled with delicacy

A KISS

The regulation of female sexuality in film has always been central to defining India's national identity.

and feeling, aiming at aesthetic expression and avoiding all suggestion of prurience or lasciviousness."

A flurry of articles and interviews seeking to (re)define Indian tradition followed the Khosla Committee report. The proponents of censorship contended that representations of sexuality such as kissing and 'exotic love scenes' were 'un-Indian', with its opponents arguing otherwise. This is an example of the fact that the battles over Indian national identity are continuously waged on the terrain of sexuality as revealed by the list of objectionable visuals and the history of censorship debates over the years. It is the female body which is overtly and overly marked as the sexual body—and the body which must bear the burden of Indian tradition and family values.

Both the proponents and opponents of censorship heatedly debate whether depiction of sexuality is part of Indian tradition or not. Whether "double-standards" for judging Indian vs foreign films maintain Indian values, preserve colonial puritanism or reinforce a patriarchal status quo, and whether this national prudishness in any way affects the state's (and a portion of the public's) much desired goal—to be modern and democratic. A debate that demonstrate that the regulation of female sexuality is central to national identity.

That the relevance of female sexuality as an organising principle of Indian national identity recently has been illustrated by the debate over Subash Ghai's *Khalnayak* (1993). The controversy centered on the song "Choli ke peeche kya hai? (What is behind the blouse?)" which was nearly censored for its 'obscene' lyrics. As the supporters and the detractors of the film song competed to define Indian tradition, questions concerning sexual ethics emerged.

Both sides attempted to produce a so-

called Indian 'tradition'. Some supporters characterised the song as a 'folk' song and therefore, a part of India's long tradition of sensuality which can be traced to the *Kama Sutra*. They claimed that the current puritanism is a colonial legacy which was imbibed and propagated by leaders like Gandhi. Conversely, its opponents contended that the lyrics are 'obscene', 'vulgar', and 'un-Indian.' They claimed that such lyrics are part of the West's immoral influence.

What complicates the debate on Indian tradition further is the specific function the film industry assumes in a growing capitalist market. In *Khalnayak*, the film song is a conduit for the commodified presentation of the female body. As Ganga dressed in the controversial blouse struts across the floor, the camera salaciously focuses on different parts of her anatomy. This body is presented as a sexy package which is sold in theatres and video stores for huge profits.

But after all is said and done, it is just plain ironic, that the act of censorship only generates public desire to view the censored film and ends up increasing the film industry's profits. Thus, on the one hand, these effects are contrary to the state's objectives: of guarding public morals and limiting film industry's profits, and on the other, they support a less visible state objective: the maintenance of patriarchal systems. Censorship remains central to national identity, even as it generates desire, profit and corruption all the time.



Under prying eyes:
Nandita Das and
Shabana Azmi in *Fire*.

COURTESY OUTLOOK

Years from now, when my back is bent double with age, I shall tell my grandchildren that I once went to a concert by Lata Mangeshkar. What is more, I shall tell them with pride that I survived the ordeal.

Lata performed last autumn at the Nassau Coliseum in Long Island, the usual East Coast venue for the popular, Bollywood-inspired extravaganzas that seem always to touch a special chord with ex-patriots from the Subcontinent in the US. The Coliseum is an indoor stadium where ice hockey matches are fought out, and can normally seat up to 18,000 beer-swilling, hot dog-munching Americans. On "Lata Nite", the place was packed to the rafters with *desis*—Sardars, Sylhetis, Pathans, Gujaratis, Sinhalese, Malayalis, Kashmiris, the works—all eating samosas, vadas and dhoklas dunked in tart tamarind chutney.

This being an Indian event (and given our puritanical fetishes), there was absolutely no beer on sale, only Coca Cola, Sprite and a variety of other effervescent drinks. Those in search of any fizz that night would find it, alas, in those drinks alone, for the evening's star was as flat as a *papad*. And given that she is in her 70th year, her voice was just as brittle. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, Lata sounded awful, and only marginally better than the handful of jokers she had brought with her as her support act.

As you may have guessed, I am not a fan of Lata Mangeshkar. In fact, I have always disliked her singing. Her little girl's voice, the relentlessly high octaves, her excruciating humility and the unyielding plainness of her aspect—I have hated them all. I do not need to tell you, by the same token, that a legion of men would have lynched me in a trice had I expressed any of these views aloud in the queue for the restrooms, or the line for the popcorn. (The lyncher-in-chief would surely have been Kanu Chauhan, the real estate dealer from Queens, in New York, whose Rajsun Megastar Entertainment flew Lata to America. By my crudest calculations, the concert made about a million dollars at the box-office.)

Prudently, I kept my thoughts to myself that night. But here, under the protection that this column affords, I will say this: Lata has been bad for Indian music. More than that, she has been a disastrous influence on Indian cinema.

Certainly, Lata is not short of veneration. Glancing at the flyer for the concert, one notes that Amitabh Bachchan once said that "when the voice achieves per-

fect harmony with a note, it is as if the soul has soared up to become one with the supreme being. That's how I feel when I listen to Lataji". The normally measured Ustad Amjad Ali Khan is the author of this hyperbole: "If the Taj Mahal is the Seventh Wonder of the world, then Lata Mangeshkar is the Eighth." Gulzar, given to greater excess, penned this gem: "Lataji's voice is a

cultural phenomenon of our times. It's a part of our daily intake. We pass no day without hearing that melodious voice at least once—unless one is deaf." (My first prize for the most risible quote, however, goes to the late Nargis, who once gushed that "I never needed to use glycerine while emoting to sad songs rendered by Lata Mangeshkar".)

Had it not been for Lata's presence—she began singing for films with *Majboor* (1947)—Hindi cinema might have taken a different path. Producers came to be so utterly reliant on her voice, and the spell that it appeared to cast over the great Indian public, that the growth of any other type of film but the "musical" was doomed to failure in Bollywood. Of course there were other singers, such as Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Hemant Kumar and Asha Bhosle: but Lata was the bedrock of film *sangeet*. The Indian film-wallahs are notoriously conservative. Having observed how she "made" hits for them, they were unwilling to abandon a lucrative formula. A fortress-like genre was built around her voice, that of the musical block-buster, ensuring that "re-

alist" film-makers would forever be in the doghouse.

As if that were not bad enough, Lata's success gave rise to a style of singing that was blindly imitative. Across the country, women sought to match her voice, producing ersatz Lata-esque sounds that grated more than they gratified. Pakistan may not have much of a film industry, but at least that country's female singers have character.

Each one sounds different, each has her own voice, her own *andaaz*. In India, for years now, all chanteuses have sounded exactly like Lata. The grande dame has killed off all originality. Don't misunderstand me: I do not wish Lata ill. I desire for her, instead, a long and healthy old age. But I do wish that she would retire now, and rest on her laurels. As she showed us at the Nassau Coliseum, the sparkle has gone. Let us move on to the next chapter, and the next voice.

A version of this article appeared in *India Today* (North American Edition).

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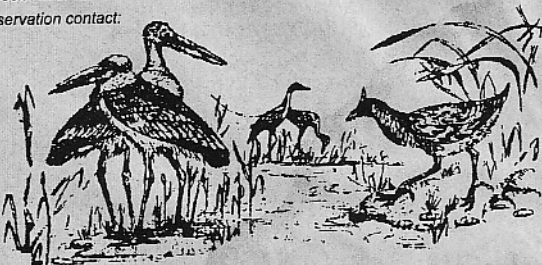
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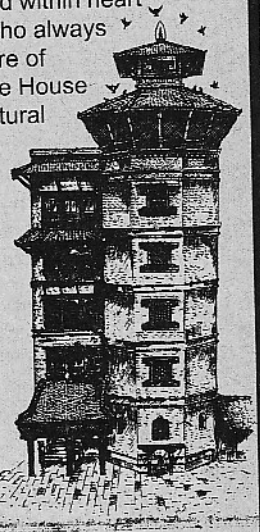
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WINTER SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE FROM 28TH OCTOBER 1998/1999					
FLIGHTNO	DAY	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR
OS4444	Thursday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900
OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900

DEATH OF DEVOLUTION



The devolution package means all things to all people in Sri Lanka, while the cynical pursuit of peace continues.

by D.B.S. Jeyaraj

Some weeks ago in Sri Lanka there occurred an event with heavy political overtones that went largely unnoticed by the media. A mock funeral ceremony was staged by an assorted group of Sinhala Buddhist hardliners, including monks, in the southern city of Matara. The 'corpse' in this case was the devolution package, the constitutional reforms proposal that aims, among other things, to introduce maximum devolution amounting to quasi-federalism for the island. All the ritualistic exercises of a traditional funeral ceremony were observed but there was one crucial difference: instead of eulogising the dead person as is customary at funerals, speaker after speaker expressed glee over the death of the devolution package.

For Sinhala hawks, the very idea of devolution or power to the periphery has been anathema. They believe that any form of devolution

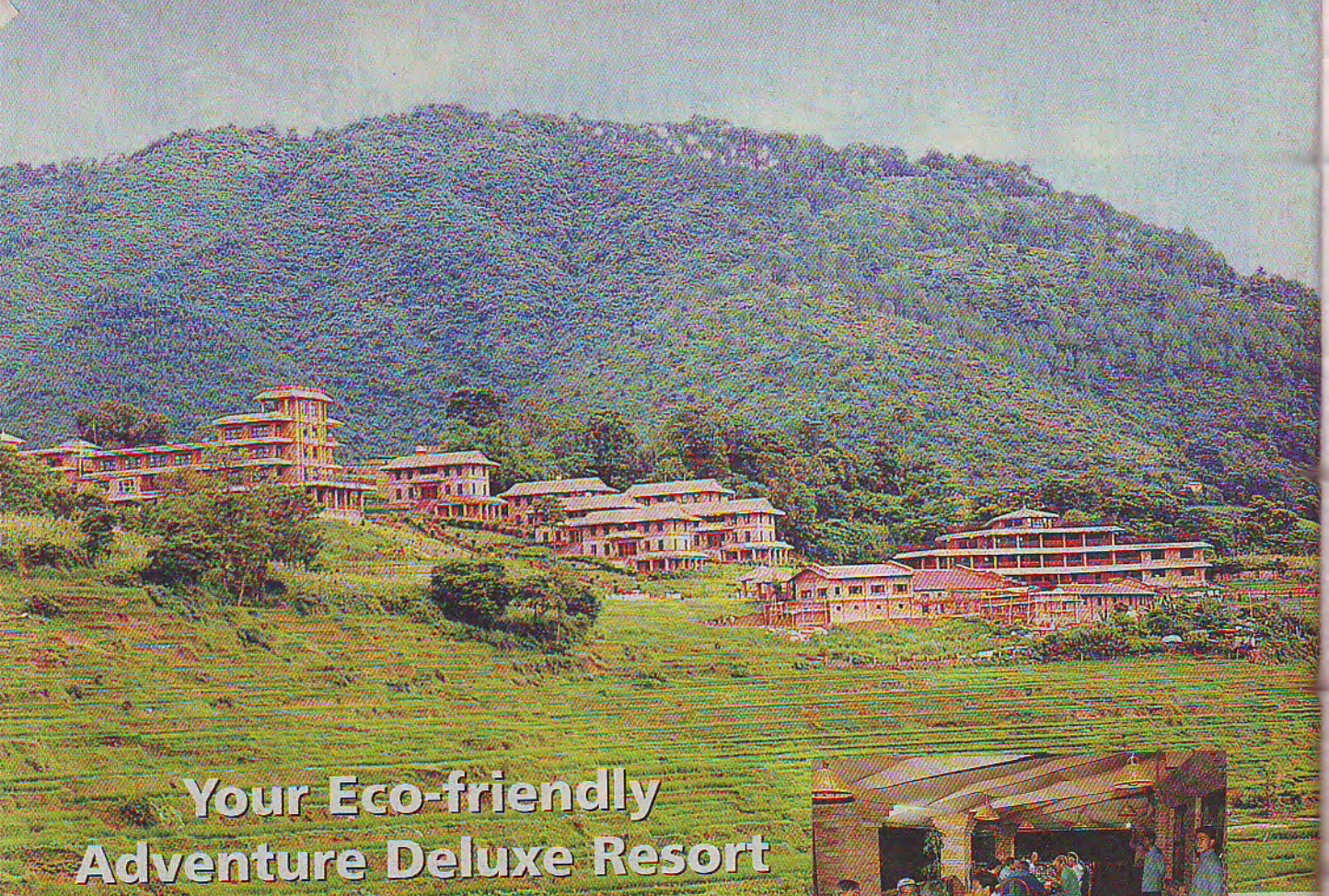
will weaken the centrist state and strengthen Tamil separatism, ultimately leading to the division of the country. The mock funeral was therefore a jubilant manifestation of Sinhala hardline perception that the envisaged devolution package was not going to materialise as effective legislation. And they have reason enough to exult.

The constitutional reforms scheme, first publicised in August 1995, is more or less ready to be presented in Parliament. There, it has to be passed by a two-third majority, after which it would have to be ratified at a nation-wide referendum before becoming law. Since the ruling People's Alliance (PA) does not command a two-third majority, a bipartisan consensus with the chief opposition, the United National Party (UNP), is necessary. The UNP, however, has been evasive over the issue of lending support, while other

minority parties have been expressing reservations over certain provisions of the package.

Faced with this uncertainty, the government has been threatening to resort to other constitutional means to get the reform bill passed. These measures which, according to President Chandrika Kumaratunga constitute a "constitutional revolution", consist of three options: 1) to go for a snap presidential election which the PA hopes to win because of the popularity enjoyed by the charismatic Kumaratunga over her chief adversary Ranil Wickremasinghe. The proposals would then be presented in Parliament seeking UNP support, failing which the Parliament would be dissolved and polls announced

Sri Lankan soldiers at a lamp vigil for missing comrades in Colombo.



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seeking a two-third majority on the issue; 2) to stage a consultative or non-binding referendum on the devolution issue, and win well. Thereafter, the devolution package would be submitted in Parliament with the expectation that the UNP would be morally bound to support it. If the UNP persisted in non-compliance, fresh elections would be called; and 3) to submit the constitutional reform proposals in Parliament now, and inveigle a section of the UNP into supporting it. Failing that, both presidential and parliamentary elections were to be held on the assumption that favourable results will emerge.

War for peace

The Kumaratunga government's twin-track policy towards the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) continues apace. This strategy, described as "war for peace", consists of seeking a consensus on greater devolution to isolate the LTTE politically, while at the same time, conducting a war aimed at weakening the Tamil Tigers militarily to ultimately pressurise the rebels into accepting a political settlement.

In the earlier stages, this approach had gone down very well both internationally and nationally. But gradual disillusionment set in as expected progress could not be achieved. Militarily, the LTTE continues to be a resilient force, and unconquerable in spirit, despite having lost territory. Politically, the UNP continues to prevaricate, nullifying in advance the presentation, and passage, of the devolution bill in Parliament, with Wickremasinghe even recently stating that the party was opposed to the scheme. There is thus a stalemate, politically as well as militarily.

Meanwhile, the Tamils have become increasingly alienated from the State. The ongoing war has caused unprecedented hardship for them. The government can argue that this phase of the conflict is due to the intransigence of the LTTE, but it is not an argument that is going to appeal to the Tamil community. It is

the consequences, and not the causes of the conflict, that are felt and remembered. Moreover, the Tigers have in recent times launched a series of assassinations against Tamil political leaders supportive of devolution, including that of the co-architect of the government package, Neelan Tiruchelvam who was killed on 29 July. A climate of uncertainty has arisen among Tamils over what their role should be if and when the devolution package is presented in Parliament.

The government had been hoping for some convincing victories over the LTTE in the North. This, it was felt, would influence voting patterns in the Sinhala south, which would not stand in the way of devolution if it was perceived that the package was passed after the government had established a position of strength on the ground. They would be unlikely to support devolution if they felt that it arose out of compulsion. But the tardy progress of the military, coupled with sporadic reversals at the hands of the Tigers, has delayed political action on this count.

While the government dilly-dallied with its political strategy, the UNP was making headway in terms of the minority, notably Tamil, votes. This vote bank had deserted the UNP en masse in the presidential stakes of 1994, enabling Kumaratunga to win a record 63 percent of the votes. Recent local and provincial elections, however, demonstrated that the minority votes were now shifting in favour of the UNP.

This shift in itself is paradoxical as one would expect the Tamils to support Kumaratunga, since it was her government that formulated the far-reaching devolution proposals while Wickremasinghe's UNP has obstinately blocked its passage. But the reality is that, rightly or wrongly, the Tamil people has veered around to a state of mind that sees only two things as crucial to its interests. First, it wants the war stopped and secondly, it wants negotiations to be resumed with the LTTE for, in spite of their track record, the Tamils gener-

ally perceive the Tigers as being amenable to a negotiated settlement. The UNP has realised this general sentiment and is exploiting it to the hilt. Its stated position on the ethnic issue now is that the war should be suspended and negotiations with the LTTE reactivated.

This was the precisely the platform on which Kumaratunga had campaigned in 1994. Today, the tables have turned and the UNP is using Kumaratunga's own mandate against her, even though it is clear that the UNP is resorting to political gimmickry and not articulating a principled position. The UNP has rejected several attributes of the devolution package as being too concessionary to the Tamils, whereas the LTTE has dismissed the package as falling far too short of Tamil aspirations. Talks between the two parties which are so diametrically opposed on the fundamentals are doomed to lead nowhere. Nevertheless, most Tamil people, straining under the effects of a military campaign, seem to prefer an immediate mirage to a distant oasis.

Cynical peace

Of more immediate concern to the PA is the fact that both the presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2000. Recent provincial councils in the seven Sinhala-majority provinces show that the PA only enjoys a thin-edge majority over the UNP. Resurgent political forces like the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) are also gaining in strength. It seems that without a crushing military victory over the Tigers—a highly unlikely proposition at the moment—there are no chances of the Sinhala voting pattern shifting in the government's favour.

That is where the Tamil vote turns vital, and which also explains why the PA is revising its strategy. The first indication of this came when the government went back on its word that the devolution proposals would be presented in Parliament before 19 August. With Tiruchelvam dead, there remains no

one from among the Tamils with the stature to effectively exert pressure on the government to do otherwise. The Kumaratunga regime is now preparing to emulate the UNP and go in for talks with the Tigers as a prelude to presenting the devolution proposals.

Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, a senior minister, has gone public saying that the LTTE should be consulted before the devolution package is presented in Parliament. Other ministers, including Kumaratunga's trusted lieutenant Mangala Samaraweera, have participated in a massive public demonstration calling for peace talks. An initiative begun by sections of the business community is also being actively supported. It envisages a bipartisan consensus to be achieved between the PA and the UNP before 30 September and then a delegation to go to meet the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Recently, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, himself an ethnic Tamil, hastily summoned a press conference, announcing talks with the Tigers at an "appropriate juncture". Even the army is showing signs of de-escalating military activity. It is also showing flexibility in reaching a negotiated understanding with the LTTE on opening a direct land route to Jaffna, instead of trying to establishing one through force as in the

past. All these clearly point to a directional change.

The LTTE has not failed to seize the moment. It has sent out feelers that it is ready for talks. The organisation's political adviser, Anton Balasingham, has relocated to London, where he is engaged in seeking the good offices of various countries and organisations to act as third-party facilitators and mediators for negotiations without preconditions. So tremendous has been this push for peace talks by the LTTE that several influential members of the Sri Lankan peace lobby have openly interpreted the killing of Tiruchelvam as a declaration by the LTTE that they too want to be part of the devolution process.

Sceptic's Prabhakaran

It is now clear that the government will not proceed on the devolution path without talking to the Tigers. This is where the real danger to the devolution exercise lies. Analysts who have observed the LTTE and Prabhakaran, find it difficult to believe that the 'Tigers want a participatory role in the devolution process. It is more likely that the LTTE wants a reprieve that would nullify the devolution exercise permanently. The LTTE supremo is not one to ever compromise on his ideal of a separate country and no amount of devolution can compensate for this.

But even those who understand this well, hesitate to argue against peace talks because no right-thinking person wants to be viewed as being anti-peace.

The talks that will be part of this cynical pursuit of peace by both the government and the LTTE will be flawed from the very beginning because they will have been necessitated not by principled positions, but by practical expediency. The end-result would be a rigid hardening of positions after the fling for peace is over, leading to a vigorous demand from the southern side that all attempts at devolution be halted until the Tigers are routed.

Should such a victory be achieved, however unlikely it may seem now, the Sinhala hardliners will triumph, and insist that devolution is redundant. Leaders like Tiruchelvam strove ceaselessly to try and ensure that such a scenario did not unfold. But the extreme forces that have appropriated the political leadership of the Tamils will have none of this. They are intent on pursuing a dangerous dream of trapeze artistry without the safety net of devolution that Tiruchelvam and others were trying to set up. As long as the artistes are flying high, everything appears fine, but if and when a fall occurs...what then? ▲

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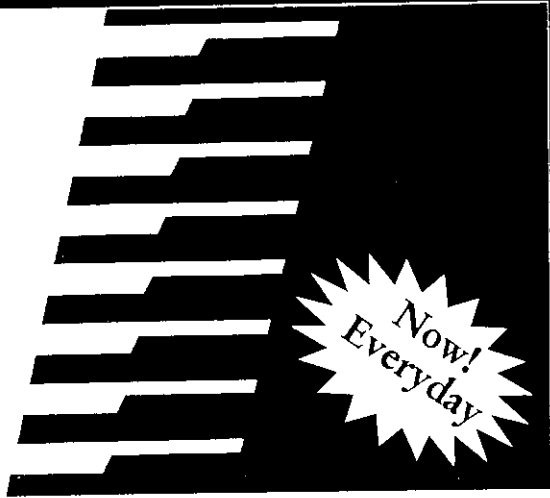
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Lies out of control

A couple of months after the Kargil conflict, some intense soul-searching by the Indian print and electronic media is revealing that much of the national press meekly toed the government line and fanned war hysteria at the cost of objectivity and professional ethics. Prominent journalists have come out with scathing indictments of the Indian media and their contents are indeed shocking for what it portends.

The Times of India's Siddharth Varadarajan writes that Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh's allegation — made at the height of the Kargil conflict — that the bodies of six dead Indian soldiers were "severely mutilated" by Pakistanis, was never substantiated. "Virtually every newspaper carried the gory details released by an Indian wire service without waiting for independent confirmation. Such confirmation never arrived... During the war itself, at least two newspapers received information that the allegation was highly exaggerated — probably only one of the bodies bore signs of mutilation. But the journalists who received the information, chose to remain silent."

Varadarajan has also revealed that a newspaper and a magazine received reports from its correspondents at the war-front that Indian soldiers had mutilated the dead bodies of Pakistani soldiers in retaliation. But after heated editorial debates, it was decided to kill these stories — at least until the fighting was over.

"The Indian media was on test as to how fairly it would report and interpret. But overall, it failed miserably," says columnist Praful Bidwai. "The general style of reports was: '50 Pakistanis killed and 11 gallant Indian soldiers laid down their

lives'. So our boys became dedicated soldiers and Pakistanis barbarians; our leaders are mature politicians and theirs prisoners of dark forces. It is upto the government to say all that. Why should the media?"

N. Ram, editor of *Frontline* magazine, said that the distinction between the reporter and the armyman was blurred during the fighting. "Objectivity was the biggest casualty in the coverage of the Kargil conflict," according to another weekly, *Outlook*, which also said that journalists chose to become participants instead of remaining objective observers in the revered war correspondent tradition.



Analysts have also accused 'independent' TV news channels of becoming a propaganda wing of the state by suppressing the truth and glamourising war. Giving instances of censorship and manipulation, Bidwai said that recycled stock pictures were frequently presented as live footage.

Another commentator, Sagarika Ghose, wrote that no attempt was made by print or TV journalists "to scrutinise the role of the military from the citizens' point of view". TV, she said, has a duty to make sure that legions of jobless young men don't unthinkingly give themselves to the army in order to die for their coun-

try because of a false bravado. "We were shown [puzzlingly] brave parents promising to send more sons to the front if need be. What about parents who were sad? What about parents who cried and said I want this war to stop and I don't want my son to die?"

Analysts said that even if soldiers in Kargil couldn't voice their doubts about the war before television cameras, reporters should have dutifully paraphrased their fears to project a balanced picture. The Indian media also failed to question the official figure of 410 dead and 594 injured in six weeks of intense fighting in one of the world's most treacherous battlegrounds. "How is it possible that casualties on the Pakistani side were higher — as India claims — when they had all the advantage of higher ground? The Indians should have suffered higher casualties than the Pakistanis," said Arthur Max, New Delhi bureau chief of Associated Press.

Another senior journalist of *The Times of India*, Jug Suraiya criticised the coverage of the shooting of a Pakistani plane in the Kutch region soon after the Kargil conflict. Wrote Suraiya: "Was the wreckage of the Pakistani reconnaissance aircraft really retrieved from Indian territory or, as circumstantial evidence indicated, was it salvaged from across the border to give the prime minister a vote-catching photo opportunity?"

"The suppression of truth...and the dissemination of half-truths and innuendoes did not save lives. All it did was undermine the reputation of the Indian media," warned Varadarajan. Perhaps the most insightful comment came from Seema Mustafa, political editor of *The Asian Age*, who pointed out that the Kargil conflict exposed the warts and the moles the Indian media has managed to camouflage over the years.

—S.N.M. Abdi

PARDON THE certitude, but two years after the fact, I can only say I told you so. The topic is serious: violence against women. Chhetria Patrakar had suggested that a Unicef report was mistaken in showing a picture of a man leaning (very Southasianishly) against a wall as if to indicate that he was hitting the woman standing by him. The editor of said report had sent an angry note, printed in Himal's January 1998 issue, but CP had stood his/her ground. Now, this information from Dhaka. The Drik Picture Library, which has put up the same image on its web site (www.drik.net), provides the caption: "An old man leaning on the wall with his arm raised, pursues a young prostitute who shies away from him. Kandupatti brothel, Dhaka, Bangladesh." Violence all right, but not the kind originally proposed.



I WISH South Asian royalty (those that are left—in Bhutan and Nepal) could be this informal and "of the people". The picture shows Jordan's new King Abdallah, his Queen Raina and brother Prince Ali cheer for the country's soccer team after it defeated Iraq 2-1 on 25 August. Of the two South Asian kings, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Drukyl certainly mingles more with the people, but spontaneity seems lacking and there seems to be cool media-savvy calculation behind everything, including sitting down for lunch with the juniors at high school or playing basketball. But then, he runs a small country so it may even be feasible to seem more in touch with the subjects. King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal, who used to venture occasionally to regional durbars where he mingled after a fashion, has for the past decade of democracy kept quite aloof inside the silver-gilded railings of the Narayanhiti Royal Palace.



THE CLAXON must sound for all South Asian education, if what was reported in *The Deccan Herald* regarding the abysmal proficiency level of government schools in the Bangalore South Zone is true, as it must be. A study of 55 Kannada-medium schools showed that 68 percent of the students in seventh grade could not write properly in the Kannada or English alphabet. More shocking, fully four percent could not distinguish between "living and non-living things", reports the paper. Now, when students cannot differentiate between a blackboard duster and the miss at the head of the class, it is time to get worried.

SELSAME DAILY News has this picture of a boy and cow together with a writeup entitled "Abundance and happiness in Rakwana's hills". Obviously the modern-day Garden of Eden lies in Sri Lanka, for the front-page story goes: "On the fertile and beautiful hillsides of Rakawana, life treats peasants better than it does on the plains below. The cows here are better fed for the lush grass they feed on, the children are healthier and happier for the creamier milk their cows give. Little Arumugam is bilingual. He goes to an estate school close to his home. The water he drinks is pure and from a tumbling waterfall close to his home. Arumugam owns a hen that lays orange yolked eggs. His parents—who are estate workers—have a vegetable plot, and while they eat fresh, home-grown vegetables they also supplement their monthly incomes. Where nature is kind, everybody is happy." Ahh, South Asian Eden.

GOING BACK to the scale of human development in South Asia, I refuse to believe that Bhutan is as low down the charts as the charts as the international agencies consistently show it to be. I suspect that this poor showing (which probably suits Thimphu just fine for the foreign aid that it can still attract) has to do with the GDP being divided per capita in a country which has evicted roughly a seventh of its population. The country's standing would obviously be much better if the state's annual income were divided among the fewer Bhutanese that presently live within Bhutan.

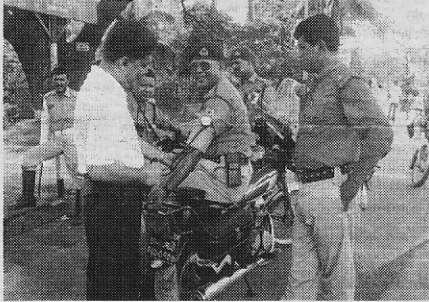
I TOO would be proud of my country if the UNDP's Human Development Report, recently released, were to indicate that it had the highest standard of living in the region. I would even give it top billing and a large-size headline. What I might not do is give it a lead which says that all this is "due to the pragmatic economic policies pursued by the People's Alliance Government led by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga". FYI, Sri Lanka is now in the "medium development" category, ranking 90 among 172 nations, followed by India (132), Pakistan (138), Nepal (144), Bhutan (145) and Bangladesh (150).

Lanka has highest living standard in S. Asia - UNDP report

THERE IS a sense of make-believe when discussion turns to ISI infiltration into India, via the Indo-Pakistan border, the Line of Control, the virtually open Bangladesh-India border, or the fully open Nepal-India border. While the Indian government is fully within its rights to give news about ISI infiltration, what I would like to ask is why is the Indian government not making a bigger deal of it if it is true to the full extent claimed? Why is it not raised publicly as a major point for discussion when the two governments meet? I can

understand diplomatic niceties stopping New Delhi from placing "ISI and related matters" on the formal agenda, but this topic definitely does not seem to get the amount of time it needs when the two sides meet. *The Assam Tribune* headlined the fact that tightened security on the western Indian frontier post-Kargil had led ISI to seek passage to Kashmir via Bangladesh. An ID card of an alleged Pakistani infiltrator, Md. Javed Wakhar, was also produced and printed. As things stand, the subject will die there, with no follow-up within India, and certainly Pakistan is in no hurry to come up with its own version of wherefore might lie the truth.

GOOD NEWS photography. It is hortal day in Dhaka, and a peaceful one at that. Police saheb has nothing to do, and a doctor friend passes by. The most natural thing to do is to have a blood pressure check, right? Right.



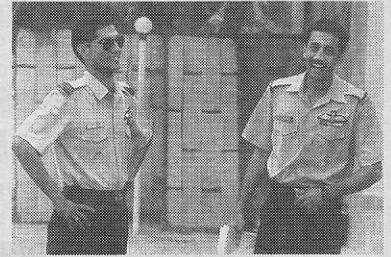
"South Asia Nari Progati Sangha, a women rights organisation held a rally lighting candles at the Central Shaheed Minar for peace and security of women in South Asia on Friday." That's from *The Dhaka Observer*. The other one, from *The Independent*: "Bhola: A procession brought out in Bhola town to mark the Fish Week." I like it that Bangla ladies are concerned for all South Asian womanhood, and I also like the fact that fish are receiving some respect, at last.

BHUTANESE DEGENERATION to the level where grand old and isolated Druk Yul will come down to the level of all of us South Asian plebs is obvious from "A Fashion Show" advertised in *Kuensel*, sponsored by Motorola and Acer and Druk Air and River View Hotel (this being Bhutan, the river view must indeed be splendid). The show will feature Madhu "Sapree", Manpreet Brar and 14 unnamed top models from Delhi and Bombay. Boy, this is a show just made for the Dashos, the Ashis and the expat crowd of Thimphu. Enjoy!

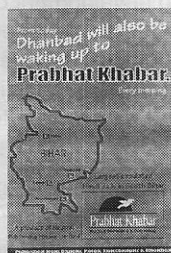
HOORAY FOR the female students of Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh who, when the university authorities would not act in evicting "rapist groups" forcibly staying in the university dormitories, banded together (all 500 of them) and raided the said dormitories and ousted the said rapist groups. Now if the female species showed as much organisation (it takes a lot of

that to get 500, if the reported number is indeed correct, acting in unison) and gumption in all other social matters, they would indeed be bringing some change in this male-dominated Subcontinent of ours.

TWO INDIAN Air Force jets were involved in the engagement that shot down a Pakistani military reconnaissance aircraft which may well have been "intruding" into Indian airspace. If I were the IAF, for the sake of decency and not stoking fires any further than they need be, I would have not made the two top guns, Squadron Leader P.K. Bundela and Flying Officer Sanjeev Narayan, available for smiling, chest-out photographs. Sixteen people died when they brought down that Atlantique aircraft. They may have been Pakistanis, but remember all of them spoke with the same accent as officers Bundela and Narayan. A point I cannot help but repeat.



WHY IS Rangashri Kishore, librarian for Unicef at Lodhi Estate in New Delhi, sending a letter for printing in the letters column of *The Independent* of Dhaka, announcing that s/he has received "this year's Ascla Exceptional Service Award from the American Library Association", given "Primarily recognising my work towards serving the mentally ill and also providing library and information support for the disadvantaged"? Why has this letter been sent to Bangladesh, and why did the editors see it fit to print?



I HAVE nothing but good wishes for *Prabhak Khabar*, "the largest circulated Hindi daily in South Bihar", now printing in Patna, Ranchi, Jamshedhpur and Dhanbad. This is just what we need in South Asia, proliferation of vernacular media, and the more competition the better. However, what I like about *Prabhak Khabar* is the fact that it is "a product of Neutral Publishing House Limited".

AH, WHAT a day, when the premier Buddhist state of South Asia, Sinhala-dominated Sri Lanka, debars the Dalai Lama from paying a visit to the emerald island. A foreign ministry official did not assign any reason for the ban, but the *Daily Mirror* ascribed it to an apprehension that China would disapprove. And so fear of Beijing fells yet another sovereign South Asian state in its dealings on Tibet. Could it be, also, that the Mahayana-esque bent of the Dalai Lama's Buddhism is somewhat at odds with the Hinayana/Theravada brand practised in Lanka? Oh, shush!

—Chhetria Patrakar

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Assembly-line sisters

The 'Nepali women' you get to know from the development blurb are conveniently homogenous. All are equally poor, illiterate and oppressed.

by Seira Tamang

In the struggle against patriarchy, the idea of 'sisterhood' has been the key political force. However, since the 1970s the idea that "all sisters are equal" and that all women suffer the same oppression simply because they all are women, has come under serious criticism. The works of African-American, Latino, Asian and other Third World feminists have shown manifold vectors—class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation—that structure the way oppression is experienced. Such work has enabled us to not only see the dangers of ignoring differences among women, but also to see how the major systems of oppression are very much interlocked with each other.

To take an example, Betty Friedan's theorisation of the American women's oppression in the otherwise path-breaking *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), has been revealed to be woefully inadequate in explaining the lived realities of the poor, single, black mother struggling to survive in the ghettos, based as it was on the experiences of middle-class, white suburban women. The recognition of differences, the awareness of the difficulty in generalising 'women's problems', and the need for reflexivity (in terms of thinking about the position from which one speaks) have been and continue to be, contentious issues in feminist theorisations and practices.

In the US, black and other women of colour continue to accuse white 'sisters' of being racist and not being able to understand the double oppression they face being non-white and female in American society. The rise of autonomous *dalit* women organisations in India, asserting their differences with both the brahmanism of the Indian feminist movement and the patriarchal practices of Dalit politics, speaks to similar concerns. The issue is the manner in which a certain template of 'feminist/women's concerns' has been constructed and authorised by certain elite women.

Based on their own very specific historical, social, cultural and material realities, this process of authorisation has had the effect of including and excluding specific knowledge claims and establishing the

boundaries of what is to be rendered 'the truth' and 'the reality' of women's lives. Thus, pivotal to the issue of a re-conceptualisation of more inclusive feminist theories and practices includes recognising the differences between women. It is these very concerns that feminists in Nepal appear as yet to be blissfully oblivious of.

Stereotyped womanhood

Since the path-breaking studies in the late 1970s to the 1980s on "The Status of Women in Nepal" undertaken by the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA) at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University, two things have been very clear: women in Nepal and the work that they do have been statistically under-represented and peripheralised in the development process; and women in Nepal are not homogenous.

Of these two findings, however, the fact that women in Nepal are a heterogeneous group has, for some reason or other, been largely sidelined. Indeed, it is a mystery of sorts that while practically every report/paper concerning women and development in Nepal begins with remarks about the ethnic heterogeneity of the population, the rest of the piece unproblematically continues with a discussion about 'Nepali women'. It is as if the obligatory blurb on ethnic and other differences needs to be included but is in the long run irrelevant to the discussion of 'Nepali women' and their gendered realities.

With the discourse about women in Nepal remaining at the level of 'Nepali women', issues of class, caste, religion, and age, as well as ethnicity, have been rendered irrelevant. Reports, conference presentations and speeches continue to evoke the image of the 'Nepali woman' as poor, illiterate, uneducated, choked by patriarchal domination and oppressed by tradition and superstition. For consumption in the international arena and for political sloganeering, such generalisations are useful. The problem is these very reports, articles, etc, are also being produced for research and other uses in Nepal.

Clearly, the utility of such reports in the national

arena is questionable. Such facile generalisations are of no practical use in a country, where, to give an example, the lives of an entrepreneurial Sherpa woman living in the mountain region of Solu Khumbu and the middle-class Bahun (hill Brahmin) housewife, contain considerable gender-related differences. The latter tend to be regimented by strict Hindu notions of sexual purity and pollution which restrict her freedom of movement beyond the home, while for the Sherpa woman, her involvement in the market economy is much valued.

Given such contexts and the fact that socially constructed notions of 'being a woman' are intertwined with other societal identities as race, ethnicity and religion, the continual use of "Nepali women are..." or "Nepali women need..." speaks of the creation and propagation of a fictive 'Nepali woman'. Most conducive for international "sisterhood bonding" against the evils of patriarchy, easily targettable for development projects, and meshing quite nicely with official nationalist notions of the ideal (Hindu) 'Nepali woman', it is this caricature which reigns supreme.

With 'Nepali women' being framed as homogeneously poor, illiterate, in need of 'empowerment' and having their 'consciousness raised', many claims are made concerning what 'Nepali women' require and want in their lives. A lack of reflexive thinking on the matter of 'who speaks for whom' is inextricably linked to the nature of the development industry in Nepal. An elite group of native informants has appeared in all sectors to communicate findings about the "poor, uneducated, illiterate and undeveloped natives" to non-Nepali-speaking donor agents. Hitherto unquestioned in their authority — being Nepali and being female — to produce information about 'Nepali women', the reports, etc. of these elite women hardly acknowledge the relative positions of power and privilege from which they speak. The problem of speaking for others does not appear to be a problem for them.

Historical circumstances have meant that those who currently have the educational levels necessary to belong to this elite, are most likely to be from the 'upper-caste' Bahun and Chhetri (Kshatriya) families. This means that their experiences of being a woman in Nepal is circumscribed by a very specific ethnic, caste, class, and religious milieu. By not acknowledging the limitations in their 'understanding' of the experiences, wants and needs of other women living in Nepal, and yet propounding certain policies and proposals on behalf of their "uneducated, less-fortunate Nepali sisters", the assumption is that their 'womanhood' and 'Nepali-ness' guarantee absolute understanding of the lives of other women of Nepal.

Gatekeepers of hierarchy

That the problem and danger of speaking for others remains to be acknowledged in Nepal at a time when it has become almost mainstreamed into feminist dis-

courses and practices everywhere else, was further illustrated recently in the opposition by some members of this elite circle to the hiring of foreign gender experts. Apart from other reasons, the dissent was based most strongly on the sense of a 'womanhood' and 'Nepali-ness' which automatically lends itself to more 'authentic' accounts and awareness of gender issues in Nepal. Certainly the vantage points these women have *vis-a-vis* foreigners cannot be discounted but such unreflective arguments serve to authenticate and validate their own unproblematised, packaged versions of the 'Nepali woman's' life and their own role in raising the consciousness of their un-educated, un-emancipated and un-liberated 'Nepali sisters'.

While questions of representation seem quite theoretical, they have very real implications. For, hidden and unreflected in reports and speeches are the repressive hierarchies which underlie relations between women in Nepal. Far from the realm of "sisterhood is global" slogans of the Kathmandu-based women/gender and development offices, the dynamics in the field have not been the "sisterhood bonding" experiences they may have been.

For instance, a Pun (hill ethnic) friend accompanying a foreign, female researcher to a Gurung (another hill ethnic) community encountered the following situation. After talking with the women of a village for a while, she was beckoned aside by one of the Gurung women. For over half an hour, the Gurung woman then poured out her heart, starting with how glad she was to see another *janajati* (ethnic) woman instead of those Bahun women who came from Kathmandu and told them what they needed, or what they had to do as decisions had already been made by the "office", or just because she said so, because they (the Gurung women) were too uneducated, slow and dumb to understand "these things" anyway.

Such stories are numerous. Other *janajati* women have related how in 'participatory' gatherings, the women are all made to sit around in a circle but once they voice anything that is not approved of by the invariably Bahun or Chhetri development worker, a stern glance or cutting remark follows. Issues of internalised stereotypes aside, remarks like "we are slow to understand and those Bahun women, who are so quick and clever, boss us around" reveal that these *janajati* women — purportedly in need of having their consciousness raised — are all too conscious and aware of the power dynamics imbuing relations between women in Nepal — unlike most consumers of Nepali WID/WAD/GAD reports and speeches.

It must further be noted that such forces are not restricted to the 'field'. As more *janajati* women enter the development workforce, encounters with Bahun and Chhetri women — invariably in higher positions of power within the offices — reveal the same hierarchical and repressive structures. *Janajati* women's perceptions of critical issues to be raised as it pertains to women in

Nepal, defined by their own particular historical, social and political experiences, are seen to be irrelevant or "too political" to be presented to the higher echelons of power. This sieving process means that again, donor agencies are deprived of a more heterogeneous and indeed, more problematic picture of 'Nepali women' by the female gatekeepers of such information.

Perils of erasures

It is thus no wonder that advocacy of certain issues have hitherto had dismal results in Nepal. Be it property rights, domestic violence, etc, the impact and implications of proposed laws and legislations on ethnic and other groups of women have not been fully researched. There has been no acknowledgment of the different contexts in which women are embedded and therefore the differential impacts that the proposed legal and other changes could have on their lives. Nor

has the potentially different manner in which women perceive certain issues been considered. For example, some janajati women have stated that as janajati women, they are more vulnerable to rape. For, while men may hesitate in raping 'high caste' women, the fact that janajati women are 'known' to be more 'sexually free' within their societies, make them more 'touchable' and 'available'. (Indeed questions have been raised as to why the focus on differences between janajati groups and others have always been on issues of sexuality, with consequent concerns of the ensuing sexual stereotypes and the dangerous repercussions thereof.)

Furthermore, while as concerned as anyone else about the trafficking of women and girls to brothels in the Nepali towns and to India, voices have also been raised against the manner in which janajatis have increasingly been derisively labeled as "those in whose culture one can sell off their own daughters and sisters" — yet another image added to the list of negative stereotypes of janajatis. As women, the trafficking of girls and women is obviously of concern to janajati women. Yet there is also the sense of a need to stick together with janajati men against the Bahun and Chettri hegemony that has historically oppressed them and seeks to continue to oppress them.

It comes as no surprise, then, to find that there exists

among janajati women a suspicion of the motives of the current players in the women and development sphere. Apart from feeling that they are being used in order to shore up funds, these women are additionally wary of those women leaders as being those who would seek to silence them. The fact that two janajati women's organisations have recently been formed and registered in Nepal can not only be seen as advocating the need to recognise the specificity of their being women and janajati, but an attempt to challenge certain powers of representation. In the particular historical, social, economic and cultural context of structured power relations, the prioritisation of different issues or different aspects of the same issues thus cannot be facetiously ascribed to patriarchy or the lack of a certain level of 'consciousness'.

The failure of advocacy groups to garner support must be situated in issues of rural/urban, class, ethnic, caste, age and religious divides, and the manner in which the creation of certain images smothers the lived realities of others. While it is understandable that women branches of political parties would be hesitant and are indeed vocally against the embracing of 'difference', the opinion of so-called women intellectuals that recognising differences is part of an insidious plan to break apart the 'women's movement', reflects an enormous poverty of thought; furthermore, the rebuttals to the need to recognise the problem of speaking for others have mainly consisted of "well *they* (janajati women) themselves don't come forward" (an alarming off-the-cuff remark from a very 'big' and visible feminist proponent at a recent seminar).

Thus, some 20 years after the publication of the *Status of Women* volumes, the level of analysis has not reached for more depth. More than ever, there is a need to rethink the manner in which women in Nepal are conceptualised, researched and analysed. At the heart of this re-conceptualisation is a need to recognise that to embrace difference is not to automatically peril the struggle against structured inequalities. Indeed, the minimalisation of other peoples' experiences, if not the erasure of their lived reality, is a fundamentally self-debilitating foundation from which to attempt any development or build any movement. ▲



RISHAN BAI

No coups in India

The Indian military is known to stay away from governance. Maybe not for much longer.

While hundreds of military establishments around the world have seized power or at least encroached upon civilian authority for many years now, the quiescent attitude of India's large army has puzzled sociologists and scholars. Apurba Kundu, a scholar at the University of Bradford in the UK, decided to analyse this extraordinary non-event, eventually publishing the book under review.

Kundu's work, however, is incomplete, partly because he ran into India's obtuse bureaucracy that suspected his motives, and partly because his interviewees are only described in general terms, i.e., "high ranking retired major general". (The writer got 95 retired officers to fill out a questionnaire, and interviewed 44 civilians and soldiers.) But quibble as we might about his methodology, some information is better than none: even gossip sometimes offers clues, if closely examined.

Relying by and large on published sources, Kundu traces the evolution of India's military establishment from the struggle for independence onwards. Very early on, India's military understood that the overwhelming consent of the Indian people was essential for any institution to govern India. This resulted in the military's decision to keep away from politics.

After Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru's seemingly naive assumption that with political control would come civil supremacy of rule proved true. Until, of course, Nehru's trusted but rather disliked defence minister Krishna Menon, along with cronies like General B.M. Kaul, left the military establishment appalled, especially during the Himalayan blunder vis-a-vis China in 1962. In fact, throughout the first decade af-



Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus

by Apurba Kundu
Taurus Academic Studies,
London, 1998
230 pp, GBP 45
ISBN 1 86064 318 3

reviewed by Maroof Raza

ter Independence, Nehru's choice of defence ministers—Sardar Baldev Singh, Mahavir Tyagi, Kailash Nath Katju—was repeatedly unwise.

Even so, India's military officers never offered themselves as popular alternatives to the Nehru government. In the post-Nehru period, too, the military establishment clearly stayed away from the body politic, perhaps because the Congress party had a strong electoral base, and was seen as spearheading a nationalist movement. It was also because India's post-Independence generation of senior army officers were mostly Sandhurst-trained, and were steeped in the British tradition of democracy, with clear separation between military and political concern. The tradition still exists in India, but unfortunately, unlike in the West where "government" means the parliament and its elected members, in India, the civil servant has become the pivot of India's defence establishment.

The Indian army's respect for civil supremacy stands in sharp contrast to the situation in Pakistan, where the army too had inherited a similar tradition. But because the politicians—initially at least—were happy to leave matters of defence and security to the army, it was inevitable that the military stepped into the political arena. Moreover, political mismanagement was so

glaring that when Ayub Khan took over the country in 1958, the Pakistani public welcomed the military-bureaucratic symbiosis. But military rule in turn gave free play to vested interests in defence purchases and ultimately in foreign policy. Thus, having established a precedent of intervention in politics—under the guise of national interests—Pakistan's military has now become a completely political entity.

Nehru legacy

India's unusual civil-military equation is thus the legacy of the Nehru era, but over the years, a rift has developed between the bureaucrat and the soldier. It was this uneasy relation which led to the unprecedented sacking of naval chief Vishnu Bhagwat earlier in the year and the removal of defence secretary Ajit Kumar. India's armed forces have for long opposed the total financial control that civilian bureaucrats enjoy over military budgets; even service chiefs have to seek the approval of junior bureaucrats for routine expenditure from the defence budget.

Admiral Bhagwat had sought to change this structure, and also the control that the bureaucrats enjoy over the selection and purchase of military equipment and in the approval of key military appointments. He may have had a valid point there, as most of the bureaucrats are pure 'generalists', not spending more than a few years with the ministry of defence before moving on to another ministry.

Interestingly, the admiral's sacking took place at a time when India was trying to embark on a programme of nuclearisation. This incident brings home the point Kundu's book attempts to make—that the military in India has no say over the policy-making process. For instance, India's highest body for professional military advice, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, does not have direct access to the Cabinet Committee on Security. It has to go through the defence secretary, who is the true pivot of India's defence establishment. Kundu writes that if India were to deploy its nuclear ar-

senal, then its generals, admirals and air marshals, and also some junior officers, must be accommodated in the nuclear chain of command.

The book is useful for understanding the essence of civil-military relations in India. The likelihood of a military coup—an oft-discussed topic—depends as much on the military officers' perception of the civilian leadership as on their own sense of professional responsibility. If a regime is perceived as incompe-

tent or illegitimate, civilian supremacy could then be under threat.

After 50 years of Independence, while Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is keen to show the military its place (the ouster of army chief Jehangir Karamat being an example), in India, it is the civilian elite that is keen to adopt military-like values. What this holds for India and even Pakistan, Kundu does not examine, but he does make it clear that it was the waning interest of Indian politicians in defence mat-

ters that allowed its military officers to practise soldiering free from any external interference.

This 'non-interference' set the tone for the subsequent relations between India's elected representatives and its soldiers. But while India's military has earned the highest marks in repeated opinion polls for its integrity and conduct, India's politicians are seen to be largely corrupt and inept. No wonder India's armed forces have begun to demand a greater say in strategic planning. ▲

Everything you always wanted to know about globalisation

Some time ago, in a currency dealer's room in one of the big banks in Singapore, this Nepali writer was amazed to see sums equalling Nepal's GDP changing hands every hour. The sheer volume of money that was multiplying itself was astonishing. This big world of money was difficult to comprehend. It was a time to wonder what an ordinary citizen from South Asia might think about the astronomical amounts of money that today float around in the world of finance, and whether s/he had any idea of how his/her life was being impacted by that movement.

A *Citizen's Guide to the Globalisation of Finance* is a near-perfect guide for people who have heard and know a little, but have never quite figured out the entire gamut of finance, especially its global reach. Kavaljit Singh provides a base from which one can begin to understand the world of international finance, how it is beyond the power of national governments to control, and also where and how it goes wrong.

The book guides the reader through the process of economic globalisation and looks at its trends, key players and instruments. It then focuses on the economic flu that has

struck countries from Mexico to Thailand, and how the contagion spread amongst the East Asian tigers in 1997. It also evaluates the prescriptions of big daddies such as the International Monetary Fund, analyses their efficacy, and provides advice on how to monitor globalisation and provide resources for action. The conclusion is simple enough: when capital flows are uncontrolled and when currency transactions exceed a country's total reserves, it is a recipe for collapse and could easily happen again.

So how was it that the Indian

was thus cushioned. Thailand used to be the ultimate IMF dream model—it had left itself wide open to short-term capital flows and speculators. During its globalised phase Thailand benefited from inflows, but the money flowed right back when, as they say, someone sneezed. This fleeting nature of global capital flows was not properly regulated, and was the reason for the crisis. The Thais had to go back to the same IMF, but the bail-out turned out to be more like a sell-out.

The book cites numerous examples of bullying by supranational entities like the IMF that dictate every facet of the economy of the countries they bail out. These institutions, themselves very undemocratic and unaccountable, impose on nations that have to rely on them, values that are as alien to their own inner workings.

Like-minded readers may enjoy a chuckle or two over snide remarks against the IMF and the World Bank that pepper the book. A sample: "Rather than policing global finance capital on behalf of the people, the IMF is policing the people on behalf of global finance capital". ▲



A Citizen's Guide to the Globalisation of Finance
by Kavaljit Singh
Zed Books, London, 1999
pp xi+187, INR 120
ISBN 81 86816 08 9

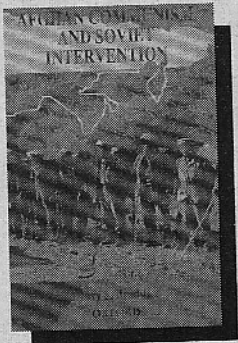
reviewed by **Sujeev Shakya**

economy came out of the East Asian crisis more or less unscathed? The author believes that some degree of control remained in South Asia and that did not allow sudden outflows of cash. Relatively insulated from international capital markets, India

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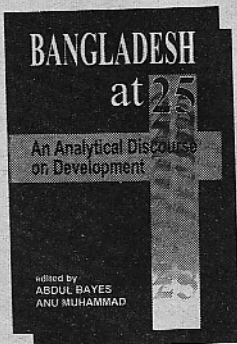
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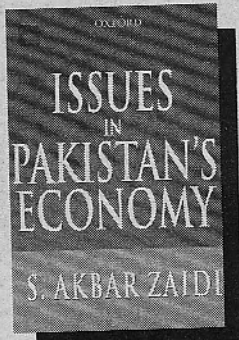
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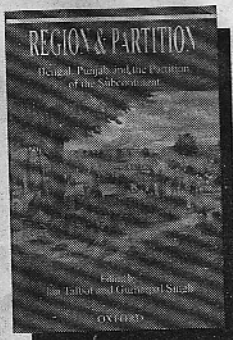
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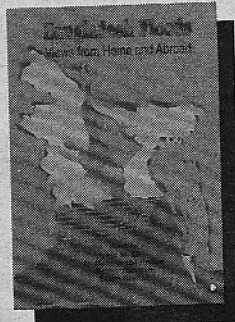
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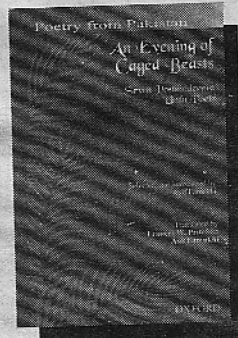
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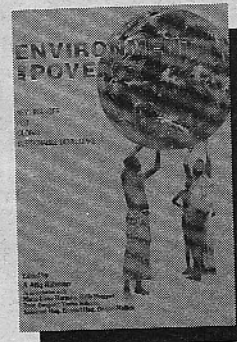
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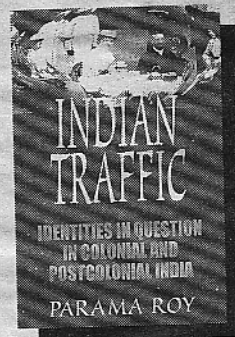
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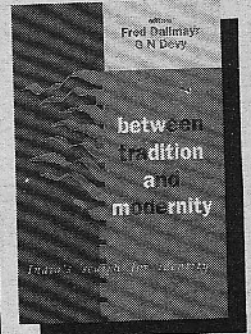
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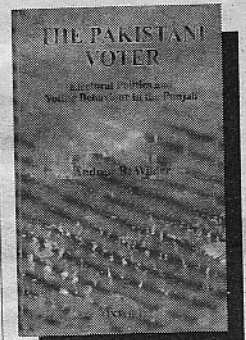
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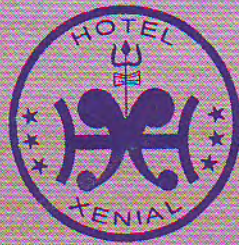
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litSA

literary south asia

HIMAL

Announcing the arrival of Himal's Literary Pages

Something is lost when stories from different parts of south asia are not shared. **litSA** is short for literary south asia—a new department started by Himal with the August 1999 issue in an effort to bring together the literary talent of the Subcontinent. The creative voice of women and men from all over the region, we feel, are as necessary to share as the journalist's presentation or the social scientist's analysis.

Himal hopes that **litSA** will develop as an important forum for writers — contemporary and traditional, and from everywhere, inside and outside, the centre and the margins, and from all sides of the barbed wire fences that attempt to divide the south asian people. Besides featuring a wide range of literary styles, **litSA** will encourage experiment and adventure. Above all, it will champion the writer's right to be irreverent. Over the years, Himal believes **litSA** will help develop an indigenous appreciation of the region's creative talent, free from the shackles of power publishing and marketing hype. We also aspire eventually to bring to readers anthologies and collections culled from the best writings that feature in **litSA**.

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Himal invites writers and poets, whether established or new talent, to make submissions to **litSA** at:

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GUIDELINES

1. **litSA** prefers unpublished material in the form of short fiction, poetry, memoir, travelogue, literary essays or criticism. We also welcome book reviews and literature-relevant interviews, as also book extracts which can stand alone.
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The sealed coffin containing my father's mutilated body lay in the middle of our drawing room. By the side of the coffin, where his head should have ordinarily lain in full view, two large oil lamps threw an eerie glow on my mother's swollen tear-streaked face resting at the other end where my father's feet should have been duly encased in new white socks; she gave a watcher the wrong impression that she was quite at peace with herself. No one would quite know the fire of sorrow that must've been burning within her; my parents had been extremely close to one another, in spite of, or perhaps because of, being married to each other for 26 years. The whine of the table fan, running constantly to keep the flies away from the sealed coffin, took up the grieving from where my mother left off, exhausted.

My sister, having no more tears, sits two feet away from the coffin that is supposed to contain her father's mortal remains, staring into thin air, as if trying to comprehend what really happened, while her husband, his arm around her, fights hard to fend off the sleep, heavy on his eyelids. In all, my father's funeral did not lack anything from the point of view of a traditional funeral rightly due to his generation, except in the manner in which he died and the unusual way his coffin was sealed.

Unable to bear the gloom within any longer, I walked outside to see whether I could keep myself occupied. The depths of despair into which my happy family had plunged, suddenly became too much for me and I felt a couple of tears streaking down my cheeks on the way out. Outside, the scene was entirely different. People were playing cards and caroms to while away the time, while others were busy preparing the obligatory decorations for the road to the cemetery. I noted immediately a couple of persons, quite drunk, pretending valiantly to be sober when they saw me. Someone pressed a cup of coffee into my hands and I suddenly realised that it was 5.00 am: my father will go out of our lives forever. I decided to walk to the nearby junction to see the morning newspapers to check the death notice.

In 1974 my father, an Assistant Stationmaster until then, got his first posting as a full-fledged Stationmaster to the Medawachchiya Railway Station in the heart of dry zone, about 30 miles north from Anuradhapura. Being the eldest in a family of two brothers and a sister, I had to do a lot of the work, packing up our stuff, though I was only 10 years old at the time. When we got off the train at Medawachchiya, there was a group, mainly Railway

employees and their families, gathered on the platform and my father was welcomed with a traditional garland by his deputy-to-be Mr. Nadarajah—later my favourite Uncle Nada. In the gathering, I noticed a little girl clad in a traditional Tamil dress: a long skirt and blouse made of shiny material, her hair woven with lovely white flowers, staring at us with wide black eyes, hiding behind the folds of her mother's sari.

That was my first glimpse of Rewathie.

Rewathie was the eldest daughter to Uncle Nadarajah and Aunt Kamala; she had an older brother called Balendran and a little sister called Shashikala. Amongst all of them I always found Rewathie to be outstanding,

though we always fought with one another over the pettiest of things. I found the massive black birthmark right on the tip of her nose rather ugly and tormented her endlessly about it; she fought back hard being the spirited soul that she was. However, she became Ranil's best friend: my younger brother worshipped the very ground she walked on. The moment both of us returned home from Medawachchiya Central School, the first thing he'd do was to see whether Rewathie had returned

from the Tamil Girls School to get her to come and feed him his lunch. My mother too simply adored Rewathie and all of them were furious with me for being the only one who fought with her.

Who is that ugly skinny boy with the new Stationmaster? Is he his son and is he going to be my neighbour? His nose is too long and his body too scraggy. How could any one ever like him?

That is how I felt about Sunil when I saw him for the first time, from behind my mother at the Medawachchiya station, unconsciously trying to cover the ugly birth mark on my nose with her sari. Uncle Dinga, as I began to fondly call Sunil's father—derived from his name Dingiri Banda—looked every inch the sweet man he was from day one and so was Aunt Seela. But the best in the family was little Ranil, who looked like a little Lord Krishna with his curly hair falling over his shiny little curious eyes with their drooping lids. I immediately latched on to him and we became friends right away.

Time flew by with Uncle Dinga teaching us English, when he had the time, and my father, being the devoted Hindu that he was, telling us a whole heap of mythological stories. However, little Ranil was a poor listener and for the first time Sunil and I found something in common listening to my father's narratives. He always made fun of the mole on the tip of my nose and called me a mongoose when our parents were out of earshot. But Ranil, he was a real darling and couldn't spend a moment without his Rewathie Akki.

1976, the Sinhala New Year: my father asked Uncle

JULIET of OUR Times

a short story by Janath Tillekeratne



Nada if he could take Rewathie and little Shashikala along with us to our village in Matara; Uncle Nada consented without a moment's hesitation. Both the families having a very good rapport with one another, and being the best of friends, it never occurred to us then that we belonged to different communities. But I was in my adolescence and at a stage where girls were an anathema; I did not relish the prospect of a member of this hated species spending a whole month with us—and in *our* village at that. Fortunately both the girls spoke very good Sinhala, with a slight accent though, and they could converse easily with everybody back at home. Gradually I learnt to accept them and even volunteered to take them on beach expeditions, where we gleefully went to collect seashells. On Sundays when my father came home on weekends, he took us for sea baths and I still recall him carrying Rewathie on his shoulder into deep water, while she cried in mortal fear. I also recall my mother desperately shouting how she would not be able to face Uncle Nada if the unspeakable happened to his daughter just because of my father's antics.

One day Rewathie, who was 10 years—at that time I was 12—was playing marbles with some of the village boys when she had a streak of luck and started winning continuously. I considered myself above marbles and was watching the game with amusement when one of the boys who'd lost all his precious marbles to Rewathie, hit her on the hand, causing all marbles to spill. In anger, Rewathie caught the little boy by his hair and hit him with her other hand. Suddenly all the others around her ganged up on her, calling out, "Demalichchi, demalichchi!" All of a sudden, she lost the spirit to fight back, covered her face with her hands and started crying. At this, something snapped inside me; I started whipping all the boys ignoring the fact they'd been my friends since childhood. They disappeared, leaving us alone. How can I ever explain what passed between us at that time? There was a glow in her face and a strange light in her eyes; neither of us spoke a word, but kept on staring at one another for a long time. Finally I could not bear it any longer and turned homewards.

Lord Shiva, why do I feel this way? I can't sleep, I can't eat and I can't concentrate on my studies. There does not seem to be any room in my heart for anything but Sunil. I tried to convince myself he is ugly, too tall and thin to be handsome, but he still manages to emerge above it all. Is this what they call love? Is this how my mother felt towards my father? But Lord Shiva, he belongs to a different community and a different religion, so how can we ever get married? I must try to forget him. No I can't do that. Life without him will be so empty and I cannot even think about it. Forgive me, for right now I love him even more than my parents.

Things have changed at home: it is not my younger brother who looks for Rewathie now but me, the great Rama. I will never let any harm come to my beautiful queen. There were times I felt uneasy casting the ancient Sri Lankan King Ravana as a villainous figure and it also must have then been crossing my yet-undeveloped mind that Rewathie was a Tamil, but all these misgivings disappeared whenever I saw her smiling face. There were days I found half-eaten toffees on my windowsill—at times covered with ants.

One day after coming from school, she was not to be seen. Even Ranil was dismayed that his Rewathie Akki did not come to see him that day. In the afternoon, when I could not bear it any longer, I asked my mother offhandedly where Rewathie was and she only said that Rewathie would henceforth be considered to be a grown up; I knew what she meant.

Lord Shiva, this confinement is killing me. I am dying to see Sunil but my mother says I have to stay like this for three days more. How can I ever explain to her the anguish I am going through? All I have is this stupid book of his with his name written on the first page and now I have read it more than a hundred times.

I will never forget the day her attainment ceremony was held. Dressed in the finery of a Hindu bride, on a dais which resembled the stage used for Sinhala weddings called a poruwa, Rewathie really looked the image of Princess Sita. Even the mole at the tip of her nose, which I had found so repulsive, looked like a diamond placed there by the gods, increasing her beauty a thousandfold. My father, usually sensitive to my moods, noted the change in me but being the wise old man he was, never spoke about it.

When I asked Uncle Nada why they had to dress her like a bride, he told me that it was an old custom among his people, which permits the parents to see their daughter as a bride and store it in their memory in case she happens to pass away before she actually gets betrothed. When it was time for her to pay her respects, immediately after greeting her parents in the traditional Hindu style by touching their feet, Rewathie came directly to my father and my mother and much to their pleasure and to the surprise of everyone else, took a bunch of betel leaves lying on the table and offered to them with joined palms in the Sinhala way. Without knowing it, Rewathie walked in to our hearts as an adult, just as easily and effortlessly as she did as a child.

My Sunil looks smart in his new long pants, but I just can't look into his eyes for a long time any longer, because they seem to burn into mine. Goddess Parwathie, did you feel the same way when you looked at Lord Shiva in your youth?

1976 April: my father accepted an invitation from Uncle Nada to join them for a three-day visit to Jaffna. We all boarded Yal Devi Express from Medawachchiya and since my father was the Stationmaster and Uncle Nada his Deputy, we managed to get a large 2nd class compartment all to ourselves. Within half-an-hour every adult in the family was fast asleep, whilst the younger children were gathered at the two windows. Her left hand was resting on the windowsill below the open shutter and was not visible to those within the compartment; suddenly my hand, generating a motion of its own, touched her fingers and bound them in one solid lock. How can I ever explain, or relive, those few moments we had together?

I will never ever let go of this hand, even if the whole world rises against me. My love for Sunil will never wither away and by Lord Shiva I will look after him in his sickness, in his sorrow and in everything else. I don't know about him, but all the persistent and nagging doubts in my mind about our different communities, are no more. I may be just 12, but I know how much I love him and will never ever leave him. My only problem



will be to make him learn to like thosai and uppuma; but if he does not like them, I will get used to his food; I will learn how to prepare poloss from jackfruit and ambul thial from tune, just the way his folks made them back in Matara, so that he will never eat anywhere else. Lord Shiva will understand if I go to a Buddhist shrine with him. After all isn't Lord Buddha supposed to be a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu? My brother and sister will laugh when I chant "Buddham Saranam Gachchami", but if it brings a lot of happiness to my Sunil, that is enough for me. Sunil will also not find our temples a strange place, because there is a temple for Hindu gods in every Buddhist shrine in Sri Lanka.

July 1977: the nightmare. On an early morning of this accursed month, we hear the newspaper vendor shouting at the top of his voice that Five Sinhalese Policemen Killed by Tamils in Jaffna during Festival. My father was on duty at that time expecting a train to pass through while I was getting ready for school. When I read the incendiary lead story, I felt my young blood boil and wanted to rush to Jaffna and kill every Tamil there. That moment, my Rewathie and the unspoken dreams we'd shared together were quite forgotten. My father came home looking quite alarmed and told us that communal riots had broken out in Colombo and adjacent areas where innocent Tamils living among the Sinhala were being killed by angry mobs. In my rage I praised the Sinhala patriots and then, for the only time in my adult life, my father slapped me with all the strength he could bring to bear. Though it brought tears to my eyes, the slap taught me the only lesson I ever needed to know. Suddenly I realised that venting one's anger on people like Uncle Nada and Rewathie for something done by a handful of unknown people of their community was an unpardonable crime. Unfortunately, not many of my contemporaries had a father like mine.

Medawachchiya was on fire. Tamil shops in the city were looted and owners beaten up mercilessly by gangsters pretending to be patriots and the citizens had no option but to stand by and watch the outrage. But my father was different: he immediately went next door, brought Uncle Nada's family home and locked them up in his own bedroom. Also the family of another Tamil subordinate who worked under him, a man considered to be of low caste. Then my brave father sat on the doorstep in his undershirt, standing guard.

What is happening? Why is every one trying to kill us? We have done nothing wrong to them. Andawane, please help us. Don't let them kill us.

Nothing happened that day, because the looters had enough places to exploit; but next morning, when they had finished with the Tamil shops, they turned their attention to Tamil residences and swarmed to the Railway Dept compound like a bunch of hungry jackals. I knew most of them, but on this particular day, their faces were unrecognisable. Some of them had blood smeared on their clothes, and for the first time my little mind tasted fear. But one look at the defiant face of my father, who at that time looked to me like the great warrior Bheema from one of Uncle Nada's stories, washed all my fear away and I stood right next to him trying to look as tall as possible.

Andawane, will they kill my Sunil and Uncle Dinga to get to us? Please Lord Shiva, save them for they are trying to protect us. Aunt Seela will be a widow and I will also be

without my life if anything happens to my Sunil.

The leader of the gang, a vagabond called Ukkuwa, approached my father and asked defiantly whether we were harbouring any Tamils in our house. My father informed him very quietly that if he wanted to find out he would have to go inside, but over his dead body. A man of few words, my father did not say anything else, but Uncle Nada shouted from the locked room that he was there and that the gangsters could come and have him without killing anyone.

What happened next was the most unforgettable incident of my life. My mother, carrying a bawling Ranil on her hip, walked out with the massive chopper she used to split firewood. Handing it over to my father, she said deeply and without emotion: "Kill them if you have to, but don't let them get at Nada and his family." The tide shifted in our favour. Unable to face the stupendous amount of energy generated by my parents, the mob melted away. Two days later, a police jeep drove up to our house and took away my Rewathie and her family to a refugee centre.

Today my mother shouted at me for talking only about Sunil, Ranil and uncle Dinga, simply because other women staying with us at the refugee centre had their dear ones killed or wounded by the Sinhala and all their life's savings stolen and did not want to hear anything about them. But how can I think of anything else? My father is terribly distraught and he is always brooding as if he still can't believe what is going on; but being the practical person she is, my mother is trying hard to pep up our spirits. She has already persuaded my father to get a transfer to Jaffna. And if he can not, she wants him to leave the job and she swears that she will never again go anywhere else. I can not blame her because she only cares for our well-being; but I know I will not last very long without seeing Sunil, or hearing his voice. Already I have written so many letters to him, but so far he has not replied to any of them.

I got Rewathie's first letter at a very bad time. My father was at home and the postman handed it over to him directly which he opened and read while I watched helplessly. In the end he signalled for me to come for a walk with him outside and I joined him, shaking like a leaf.

My father was not angry. But he explained to me the practical difficulties of getting married to Rewathie under the present circumstances, when the void between us had suddenly become unbridgeable. He advised me to lay off Rewathie not for myself, but for her own good. "If you bring Rewathie here as your wife and come home one day to find she has been cut to pieces by your own people, will you ever be able to forgive yourself?"

I had no answer.

More than fifty people sharing one toilet in this stinking refugee centre. And even the food is always under-prepared. When do I get to go home? My mother thinks of Jaffna as her home, but my home is next to my Rama at Medawachchiya. Will I ever be able to go there?

September 1997: I saw Rewathie for the last time when they came to collect their belongings and say goodbye to us. My mother and Aunt Kamala could not speak a word during the hour they were together. Our fathers shook hands warmly, but ended up hugging one another, both of



them battling their tears. But their agony was nothing in comparison to what Rewathie and I went through.

Andawane, why don't you just burst my heart and let the blood flow out instead of forcing me to bear this agony? How can I ever leave Sunil and go to Jaffna? Andawane I might never ever see him again and how can I bear that thought? If I wait for him, will he ever come for me one day?

With the passage of time, Rewathie went backstage in my mind as I pursued my studies remorselessly. When communal violence broke out again in 1983 July with a greater intensity, I was in the Peradeniya University pursuing my B.Sc engineering, and its ravages are still embedded in my mind.

Unlike the school in Medawachchiya, I am beginning to enjoy my studies in Jaffna because there are better facilities and more dedicated teachers. But what I do not like about most of them is, they are talking of some Tamil Liberation all the time, which I am unable to comprehend. May be it is because they have never met or seen people like Sunil and Uncle Dinga. Every living moment I think of him and his family. My little Ranil baby also must have grown up by now and I am sure he is better looking than Sunil. My hair is very long now and when Sunil sees it I am sure he will be very happy. Will he see me again? I don't know, but no one can take away my right to dream about him.

In 1986 I passed out as a Civil Engineer and got a posting immediately in London, where I could study while working. The same year, I met Susan, an Anglo-Indian girl living in London and we got married in 1988.

I still did not get a job, though I have a degree in Economics. It is a shame my mother did not allow me to study science; else I could have been a doctor very easily. Now I am 22 and my mother is constantly pestering me to get married, but the only other person I have really liked apart from Sunil, Kutti, has gone and joined the LTTE. The last time we met, he asked me to join them too, but how can I ever fight against Sunil's people? No way. I still love them as dearly as I did then.

My father had never been the same since that fateful day in 1977 and he died last year. Yesterday my brother also left us and went to Canada and now it is only Shashikala, who has turned into a real beauty, my mother and I, left in this dreary place. I wish my Rama would come now and take me away. O, these childish dreams still haunt me.

There are many LTTE activists in London and the British have lent a sympathetic ear towards their struggle. If the atrocities that are said to be committed by our Armed forces are true, the Tigers will not find it difficult to find enough cadres to fight for them. Where can Rewathie be now? Did she join them? She must be married and having a couple of children, because she would be a little too advanced in age to go running to join the Tigers.

The broken pieces of my sister's abused body is in my arms. She was arrested by these animals in Army uniforms, who say

that their war is only against the LTTE and not the Tamil nation, gang-raped by them and beaten to death. How can they do this to an innocent girl, who wanted nothing from life but some education and fun?

Every little drop of blood my sister shed, will be avenged. Thousands of families of these Sinhala barbarians will lament for their loved ones just as I lament for my sister now. The only regret I will have is that I will not be able to make their deaths as painful as hers.

I came back to Sri Lanka with my wife and my son in 1994 and started my own consultancy firm. By now my mother was in slightly poor health, though my father was very healthy and strong and helped me in setting up an impressive business. Thanks to him, I am a very rich man today. One day, going through the family photo album with my family, I came across a photograph of Rewathie with her pigtails and the big mole at the tip of her nose. It was not difficult for me to visualise her as a grown up, because even I was surprised at the very clear and precise picture I still had in my mind of her: every tiny detail of her sweet face, including a small strand of hair that always turned upwards on her neck stubbornly escaping the pig tails...

This is the train. There he is. The slow stroke of his open palm across his moustache is the signal. I must enter his compartment now and the bomb must go off at Dehiwala. There are hundreds of Sinhala pigs surrounding me, who will be reduced in a few minutes to mincemeat when I am through with them. Yes. I can feel the detonator inside my long frock and I only hope our explosives expert did not make a hash of it. I am happy to die for my people, avenging the death of my poor sister. Let the sons of bitches rot in hell. I will get my vengeance. Push Sunil and Uncle Dinga out of my mind now. They are from another world. A world of dreams. Now that old man sitting in that corner. Do I know him? Lord Shiva, he looks very familiar and it seems he has recognised me too. This damned mole on my nose makes me stand out anywhere. Sorry dear, time's up. Here I come my little Shashikala, bringing with me a heap of the bastards who destroyed you....

The Sinhala newspaper I bought at the Junction had some details of the Dehiwala bomb blast that happened a week ago, but it was too dark to read it there. On that fateful day, my father had gone to see a friend and feeling a little tired, decided to take the train to Dehiwala. I walked under a streetlight to search for the personal columns to check the death notice, but I was stopped by the front page. They had blown up a grisly picture of the severed head of the Dehiwala train Suicide Bomber on the front page: it was still intact, having been blown to the roof of the Railway platform. Even in death, the big mole at the tip of her nose was just as attractive as ever and the naughty strands of hair just above her neck, were still turned impishly upwards, despite the blood.



ANWOLE PRASAD

Rejection notes

One of the many joys of working in a newspaper office is the opportunity one has to reject articles written by others. Since it is next to impossible to convince a writer that he has written rubbish, the regret slip comes in handy. All you have to do is to pick up his manuscript, attach it to the regrets slip and dispatch it by post. You do not have to argue with him on the telephone or across your table; instead, the regret slip does the job quietly and without a hassle.

Being a small cog in the huge machinery of a newspaper, I keep a large stock of regret slips with me and drop them regularly. However, what it contains is highly unsatisfactory, because it gives only six reasons for rejecting an article.

The beginning is, of course, very serious and polite: "Dear sir/madam:

"I regret to say that your letter/article on the subject of...cannot be published because:" and then it goes on to give six reasons, one of which I have to tick. The six reasons are: "of lack of space; it is blasphemous; it is libellous and defamatory; it falls within the mischief of Section 124-A and 153-A of PPC; it is not exclusive; it is *sub judice*."

Usually, I resort to the first reason—so as not to hurt the writer's ego. It is rare that people write libellous or defamatory stuff. An occasional tick is marked for number five and six—"it is not exclusive" and "it is *sub judice*".

However, experience tells me that the six reasons are highly inadequate, for there must be many more, considering the kind of rubbish that is inflicted on a newspaper.

The first reason must be—not the lack of space but—the quality of writing: to be truthful, in a majority of cases, the reason must state the obvious—that the writer had never been inside a college: "Dear sir/madam, we regret to say your article cannot be published because," and here goes the first reason, "you have written utter garbage."

There should be a "remarks" column, in which some specific examples should be given, like, "Dear sir: in your article you have called Nelson Mandela the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken idea, which is most unfortu-

nate. A great freedom-fighter, Mandela might have gone on an eating binge after his release from prison and eaten a lot of fried chicken, but to the best of our knowledge he is not the brains behind KFC. You have also said that you were the first Muslim to step on the Great Wall of China during your visit to Holland. This, I am afraid, our readers will find difficult to accept for reasons of both geography and common sense. You also said that Marilyn Monroe was the woman with the lamp during the Battle of Crimea; and, finally, that it was your grandpa who had advised Italian dictator Rudolf Hittlar on how to build the *wehrmacht*. We suggest that you read a little more and do not try to prove again that your grandpa was number two in the Nazi Party. Finally, I am putting your name on the blacklist.

JAMIL SOOMRO IN "JOYS OF REGRETS SLIP" FROM DAWN.

Values

Having been through nearly four decades of the modernisation process, which often seems contradictory to tradition, many of us developed the view that preserving culture is, indeed, a struggle. Therefore, when some members of the Assembly proudly announced that our culture was stronger today than ever before, our first reaction was skepticism.

But, when those of us who have been around since the early 1970s, look back, it suddenly dawns on us that it is true. Referring mainly to urban residents, many more are wearing the *gho* and *kira* today than they did three decades back. A far greater proportion of the population can now speak, read and write Dzongkha.

Members of the National Assembly also pointed out that one of the urgent needs today is clearly defined rules and regulations on language and dress. In the long run, we must develop the right perspective of culture and tradition in its new, or "modern" context.

We are back to seeking the fine balance of tradition and modernity which Bhutan represents. Yet this Middle Path is not going to be easy, either to define or to establish. But try we must, from the National Assembly to offices, classrooms, and on the streets.

But, back to the archery ground. Whether he wears his *khoetoe* up or down, the average Bhutanese today has an inner sense of etiquette. Men and women will immediately stand up and step back in respect if a senior member of society approaches. If we are wearing a cap we will take it off in respect. These are the deeper values which are far more important than the facade.

EDITORIAL IN THE KUENSEL, THIMPHU.



KUENSEL, THIMPHU

Cyberbabu Naidu

Chandrababu Naidu, the much lionised chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, was very much around before the World Bank took over the Indian economy. He was known to be an unprincipled political manipulator, otherwise described as an able party manager. His shifty eyes—described with accurately defamatory imagina-

tion, and subsequently retracted for that reason, as the looks of a thief at a cattle fair by his erstwhile colleague in the Telugu Desam Party, Member of Parliament, Renuka Choudhary—put off most people, but his talent at the kind of politics he chose was recognised and respected by those who respect such things. That corporate capitalism would at most recognise a country cousin in his cut throat ruthlessness and ability to cohabit easily with falsehood would perhaps have been conceded by an observer of those days, if at all such an observer thought of corporate capitalism in connection with such an unlikely creature as Babu, as Chandrababu Naidu is fondly known to such people as are fond of him, or wish to be thought so. But a country cousin is only a country cousin, and nobody in those days would have dreamt that he would become a blue-eyed boy of corporate capitalism one day.

His capacity to amass property at remarkable speed, otherwise described as entrepreneurial ability or business acumen, was also known, and again respected by those who respect such things. He was after all born to a father who had but four acres of rainfed land in a part of Rayalaseema where much of the land is rainfed, that is when there is rain at all to feed it, but according to his own recent 'declaration of assets' he owns property worth Rs four crore [40 million] now. One is at liberty to multiply that figure by such factor as appeals to one's imagination, for he is no stickler for facts, and indeed it has been a favourite parttime of Congressmen over here ever since he made the declaration to guess at the right factor, and they have been coming up with a new number each day, more for their amusement than anybody's edification. But even four crore from four acres of dry land in a not particularly fertile region—and that too shared among brothers—is an achievement that tells quite a lot about the man and his scruples. And yet nobody dreamt in those days that he would be talked about in the business capitals of the world, as we are told is happening now. Though, that perhaps merely shows that, influenced by the smooth and suave face of corporate capitalism, we do not often realise the strong affinity it has to the recognisably repulsive rural buccaneer.

He habitually speaks, whether in the assembly or outside, in the terse and peremptory tones of a village bully, accompanied by the shaking of a threatening forefinger. That is perhaps put down to unease in speaking English when he is seen on TV by outsiders, but no, it is his manner of speech, which reflects a personality trait

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THE HINDU, 13 JULY

formed perhaps quite early in his youth from his upper caste lower middle class background, which meant he was one among the boys in the village, the school or the college, not alienated and set apart as a rich one would have been, but one of the boys and a natural leader by virtue of his caste, entitled to bully the boys around. It is not that the background automatically makes one a bully, but it gives the opportunity, and some of those given the opportunity choose. The same background gives other opportunities too, and some may elect those. Moreover, the opportunity is not presented from outside but is refracted through the particular personality. We are here close to the point where our explanation can no longer be merely social; it must necessarily also be moral psychic. And after a while all explanation ceases and we can only record, though we can always dig a little more and try to explain a little more.

K. BALAGOPAL IN "THE MAN AND THE TIMES" FROM *ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY*.

Sorry, Mohandas

A South African law society has apologised posthumously to Mahatma Gandhi—105 years after a racist decision barred the young lawyer from practising. In 1894 Gandhi became the first lawyer who was not white to apply to practise in the then British colony of Natal. The

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 200 STICKS, CIGAR 50 STICKS, TOBACCO 250 gm. NECESSARY
 MEDICINES, AND ORDINARY PACKED FOOD & FRESH FRUIT
 MAY USE GREEN CHANNEL.

CUSTOMS DECLARATION FORM AT TRIBHUVAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, KATHMANDU.

Natal Law Society opposed his application because he was Indian.

Current president of the Natal Law Society David Randles made an apology in the Johannesburg newspaper *The Star*. "The society apologises unconditionally, albeit posthumously, to the late Mahatma Gandhi for having attempted to restrict his rights to practise as an advocate in Natal," Mr Randles said.

He said the apology was extended to "all other aspirant lawyers whose access to the profession was restricted in any way on the basis of racial grounds".

FROM "SORRY GANDHI" - 105 YEARS LATER
FROM BBC ONLINE.

Just adjust

Consider an individual economic agent. There are two ways in which this agent can improve his/her stock of assets. The first way is by refraining from consuming a part of the revenue earned and using this part either to acquire some physical asset, or to make a loan, directly or indirectly, to someone else to acquire such an asset. In common parlance this is expressed as follows: the individual must 'save' and 'invest' (either directly or indirectly) in order to add to his/her stock of wealth. This appears well understood but, in fact, is not. The impression which most people have about this process is that wealth can increase only if some 'sacrifice' is made in the form of foregone consumption out of a given income. As a matter of fact, it is investment that governs savings, so that wealth increases merely by the aggregate decision to add to wealth, which increases aggregate income until an equal amount of savings is generated (or squeezes an equal amount of forced savings out of the workers through inflation). The question of the acquirers of additional wealth making, in the aggregate, any sacrifices does not arise. This is the way of capital accumulation.

The second way is by the economic agent acquiring

Firmly established



Sign in Lahore.

an asset of higher value in exchange for an asset of lower value. There are obvious circumstances, even apart from direct physical coercion, where this is possible – the example of the village moneylender being a typical example. While writing *Capital*, Marx deliberately left out of the reckoning such possibilities of enrichment: since one asset-owner in such cases enriches himself/herself at the expense of another, the aggregate of asset-owners cannot be enriched by this process. But obviously, a particular aggregate, e.g., a the asset-owners of a particular set of countries which constitute the advanced capitalist world, can enrich themselves by this process. In retrospect, one cannot but regret Marx's decision to have left this phenomenon out of the reckoning, since it is an extremely important real-life phenomenon: capitalism does not exclusive sway over the world, as Rosa Luxembour (1951) emphasised later, and is also characterised by uneven strengths of capitalists belonging to different countries. Enrichment through this second way at the expense of petty-producers or smaller capitalists is therefore not only possible, but actually occurs. And if these dispossessed producers belong to distant lands, e.g., the backward countries, this fact does not even have the adverse repercussions on the social and political stability of capitalism in its home base that a dispossession of similar producers domestically would have had.

PRABHAT PATNAIK IN "THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT: A NOTE" FROM *DISINVESTING IN HEALTH: THE WORLD BANK'S PRESCRIPTIONS FOR HEALTH* (ED MOHAN RAO, SAGE, 1999).

This is London

Last year, at 3000 metres in the Nepal Himalaya, three to four days' walk from the roadhead, I was sitting with a local family around their open fire. My host was putting the finishing touches to a bamboo mat he was weaving whilst his wife, my hostess, was cooking millet paste. I had just finished writing up the day's notes and was tuning in to the BBC, to get the afternoon news. The reception is remarkably clear high in the mountains – little to get in the way I suppose. At any rate, as I heard the familiar-sounding chimes of Big Ben, I felt a tiny patriotic shiver run down my spine.

"This is London," said the voice, and as I looked up I saw that my hostess had taken a brief break from stirring the millet mush. She was smiling at me and nodding slightly. "London," she said in Nepali. "The voice of London."

"Yes," I replied, happy that the BBC could even mean something to someone who spoke no English. I pressed the radio to my ear and tried to catch the headlines. My hostess was still looking at me, more quizzically now.

"What's he like," she asked. "London, I mean?" She registered the confused expression on my face and tried again, this time slower: "London, the man speaking now, what's he like?" Not really being prepared for the question, and knowing that there was no good answer, I tried

to answer diplomatically: "Ah well. He's OK, I guess, although I don't really know him well." She seemed content with my answer, and returned to the millet paste as I concentrated on the news.

Soon it was dinner time and the news was over. We ate in silence, occasionally stoking the fire to keep it strong. When she had finished eating, I could see that she was eager to ask another question. Obeying the Nepali custom of not entering into long discussions with someone who is eating, she patiently waited until I had finished. When I had, and once we were all smoking a cigarette, she felt the time was right. "This London chap," she said, and then tailed off.

London was clearly still troubling her. "This man who calls himself London," she tried again. "Did you know that sometimes he's a woman?"

MARK TURIN IN "LETTER FROM NEPAL"
IN SHANGHAI PICTORIAL.

Philip flap

Queen Elizabeth's husband has put his foot in his mouth again — with a cheap swipe yesterday at Asian Indians. Prince Philip — who in the past has insulted the Chinese, the Scots, Hungarians and even the deaf — sent jaws dropping as he visited a high-tech factory near Edinburgh yesterday.

Noticing a fuse box that appeared less sophisticated than other devices in the factory, Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, quipped: "It looks as though it was put in

by an Indian."

The remark — referring to Britain's substantial population of immigrants from India — was immediately blasted by the National Assembly Against Racism. "What he said is absolutely abysmal. It's typical of someone his age, his time and his class to say something like this," said a group spokesman.

Last night, Buckingham Palace issued an apology and insisted the 78-year-old Philip was joking. "The duke regrets any offence which may have been caused by remarks he is reported as making," a spokesman said. "With hindsight, he accepts that what were intended as lighthearted comments were inappropriate."

Philip's "inappropriate" comments over the years have scandalised the royal family. He once asked a Scottish driving instructor: "How do you keep the natives off the booze long enough to get them past the test?"

On a trip to China in the 1980s, he warned British students: "You'll get slitty eyes if you stay too long." And earlier this year, as he visited a group of deaf kids in Wales, he joked that it was "no wonder" they couldn't hear, because they were standing near a brass band.

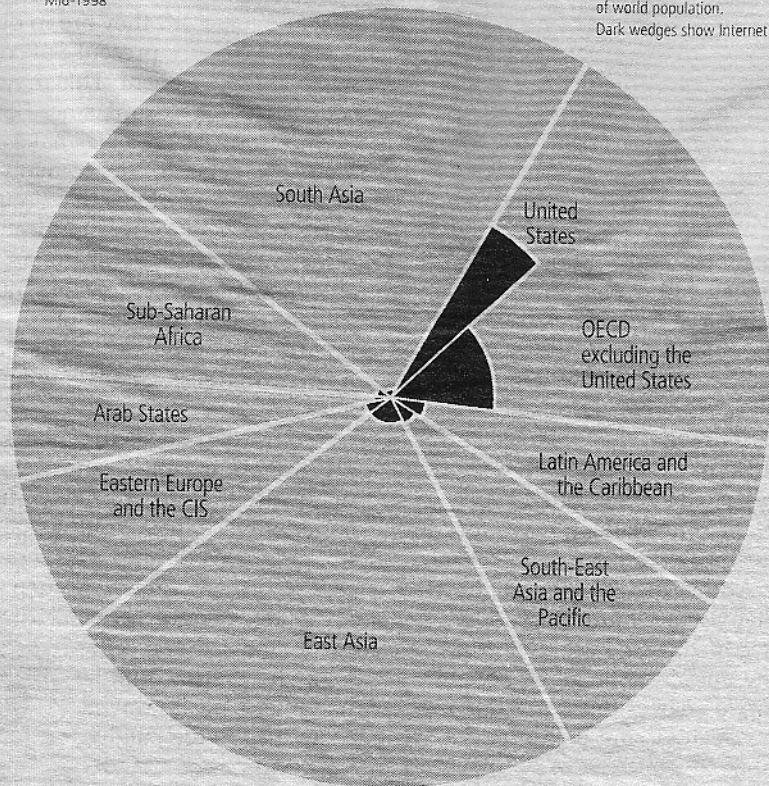
Even his daughter, Princess Anne, is not immune to his off-the-cuff blunders. He once said of Anne's lifelong love of horses: "If it does not eat hay, she is not interested."

BILL HOFFMANN IN "NEW PHILIP FLAP OVER FLIP REMARK" IN NEW YORK POST.

Internet users—a global enclave

Mid-1998

Large circle represents world population.
Pie slices show regional shares
of world population.
Dark wedges show Internet users.

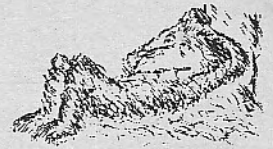


Region	Regional population (as a percentage of world population)	Internet users (as a percentage of regional population)
United States	4.7	26.3
OECD (excl. United States)	14.1	6.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	6.8	0.8
South-East Asia and the Pacific	8.6	0.5
East Asia	22.2	0.4
Eastern Europe and the CIS	5.8	0.4
Arab States	4.5	0.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	9.7	0.1
South Asia	23.5	0.04
World	100	2.4

Note: The Czech Republic, Hungary, Mexico, Poland, the Republic of Korea and Turkey are included in the OECD and not in the regional aggregates.

Source: Based on data supplied by Nua 1999, Network Wizards 1998 and IDC 1999.

Abominably yours



Before I am hooted out of here, let me spring to the defence of that fearless defender of our morals: Asha Parekh, India's Censor-in-Chief. For those of you who missed the last episode, here is a brief recap—Asha is an ex-star who in her entire career did nothing more risqué than flutter her eyelashes while circumnavigating a fully-clothed pine tree and lip-synching a duet with a screen sweetheart in tight pants and sideburns whose sole role was to croon to her through half a dozen song sequences amidst scenery that looked suspiciously like the Batalik Subsector in more peaceful times.

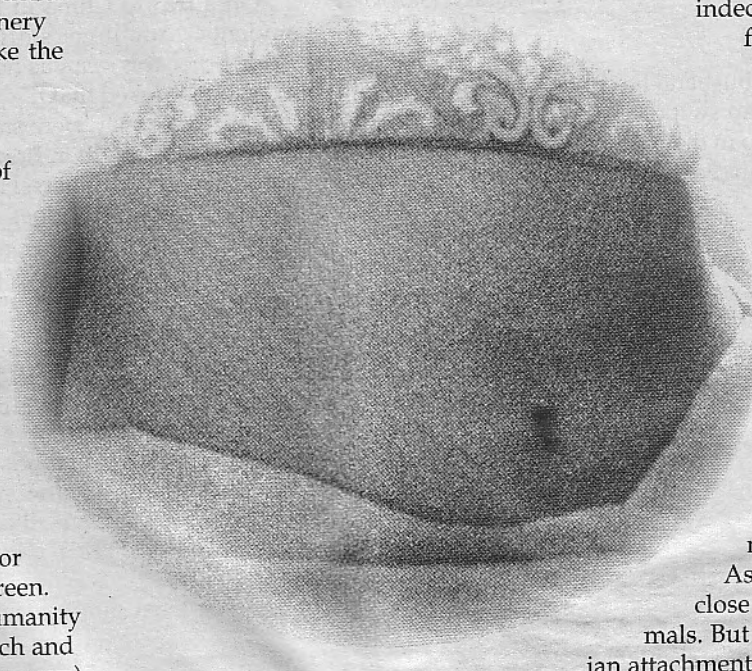
Today, just as valiant jawans defend every inch of our territory against foreign intruders, so does the Censor Brigade guard our morals from foreign cultural infiltrators that are worming their way into the vitals of our society. And here, I don't just mean the morals of Indian film-goers. Asha Parekh actually determines what one fifth of humanity gets or doesn't get to see on its screen. (The other four-fifths of humanity knows it's not missing much and therefore doesn't care either way.)

For some years now, the Censor-in-Chief has selflessly shielded us from gratuitous and unnatural oral resuscitation scenes. She has excised needless exposure of female armpit follicles to millions of males who may be corrupted by the sight. She has expunged words and sentences in film scripts that threaten India's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Battle scenes which don't show enough blood and gore on our side of the Line of Control and thereby fail to incite sufficient hatred against enemy intruders are cut.

Asha takes the Indian Penal Code seriously, especially Section

293 and Section 294 which, with the 1952 Cinematograph Act, she follows by dotting the i's and crossing the t's. But does this mean that she is a prig? Not at all.

Just look at how extraordinarily liberal she has been in fostering the growth of artistic creativity in Indian cinema by allowing pelvic and pectoral thrusting that accurately simulate the steamy movement of piston shafts on the Siliguri-Darjeeling locomotive while on the final uphill below



Kurseong. Look at how she has allowed full frontal close-ups of Aishwarya Rai's twirling belly button, giving one-fifth of humanity a new meaning to the phrase "Navel Gazing". (Not since Madhuri Dixit have we seen an orifice of such superlative suppleness, such symmetry and such potential for being a repository for fine lint.)

At this very moment, I know what you are muttering under your breath. You are muttering: why doesn't Asha allow kissing? Simple answer there is. Allowing on-screen kissing would be a public health hazard, as couples across the land emulate this

unhygienic mode of mouth-to-mouth existence. (According to one semi-pornographic toothpaste commercial I recently had the privilege of watching in a cinema, an average South Asian oral cavity is crawling with terroristically minded bacteria that are just waiting for the opportunity to carry out their evil designs. Kissing is not just silly, it is a threat to national security. The Censor Board rightly gave this commercial a +18 rating: we don't want our boys to be perverted by indecent Closeups of female tonsils.)

Breast-feeding, on the other hand, is much more hygienic. And numerous studies have shown that in no other Subcontinent are young males as obsessed with mammaries as they are in our present Subcontinent. This may be natural, since South Asian males have a

close affinity to mammals. But why is this Freudian attachment to the significant udder so rampant here? Indian cinema is partly responsible by titillating viewers with only occasional glimpses of cholis that have given these glands a vulgar aura.

Bollywood needs to go back to our Konark traditions and demystify the breast—make busts commonplace, make nipple as ubiquitous as dimple. The Indecent Representation of Women Act (1986) does not restrict unleashing the mammaries on celluloid, and there would be no better place to unveil them than in the Batalik Subsector.



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