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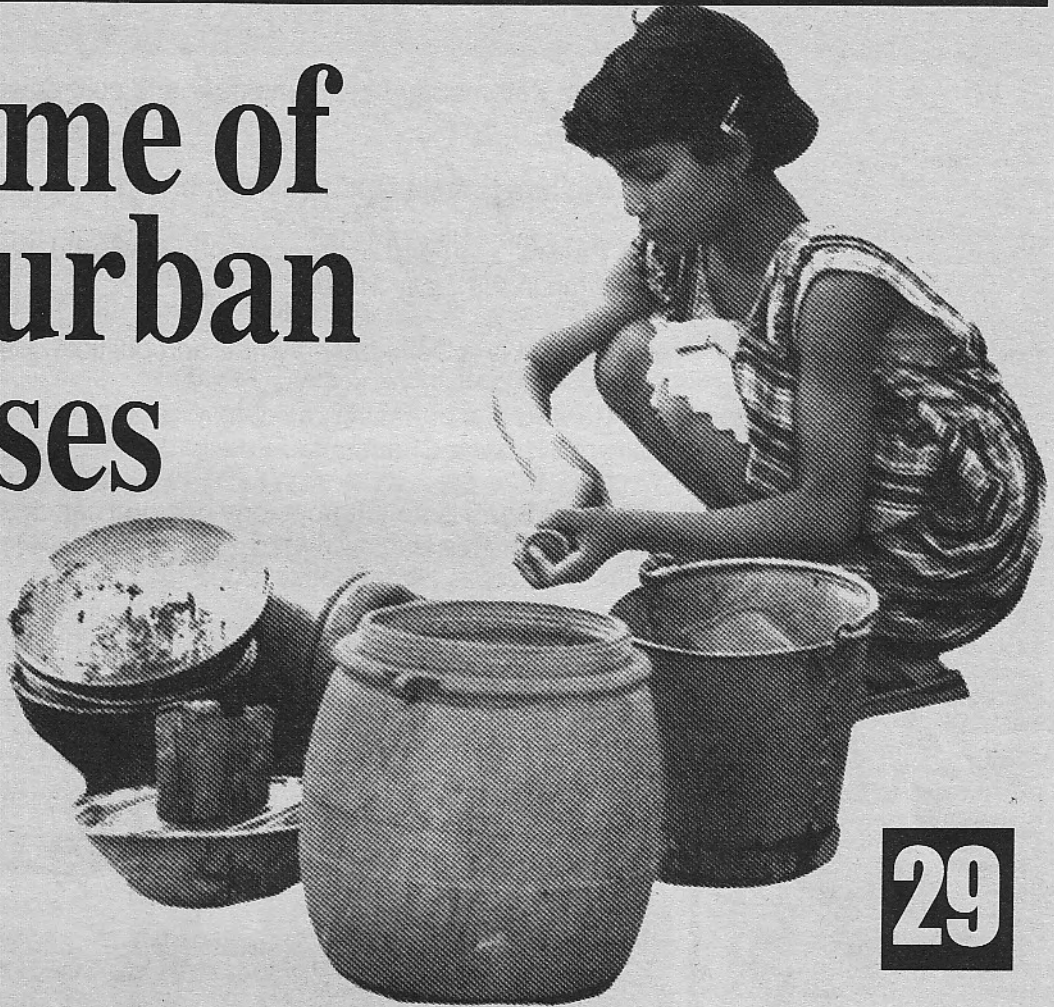
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Shame of the urban classes



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Himal is published and distributed by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-543333, 523845
Fax: 521013
Email: editors@himalmedia.com
http://www.himalmag.com
ISSN 1012 9804
Library of Congress Control Number
88 912882
Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-521393, 543017

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Cover design by Chandra Khatiwada

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

subscription rates

	1 year	2 years
India	INR 580	INR 1125
Nepal	NPR 540	NPR 1000
Rest of S. Asia	USD 18	USD 34
Hong Kong/ Brunei/Gulf	USD 22	USD 42
Elsewhere	USD 40	USD 75

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Maldives	Asrafee Book Shop, 1/44 Chandhane Magu, P.O.Box. 2053, Male. Tel: +960-32-3424
Nepal	Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd. GPO Box: 7251, Kathmandu. Tel: +977-1-543333-36
Pakistan	Ajmal Kamal, City Press, 316 Madina City Mall, Abdullah Haroon Road, Saddar, Karachi 74400 Ph. +92-21-5650623/5213916, email: cp@citypress.cc
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Note: Subscribers can send payment to local subscription agents in equivalent local currency. Please notify any change of address.

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RESEARCH GRANTS FOR YOUNG SOUTH ASIANS

The Colombo-based Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) invites applications for the following 2 research grants:

1. **KODIKARA AWARDS FOR SOUTH ASIAN STRATEGIC STUDIES 2003**

To be awarded to young South Asian scholars for conducting policy-oriented research on strategic and international issues of contemporary South Asian interest. Nationals of all South Asian countries below 35 years are eligible for the grants. Women candidates are particularly encouraged to apply. Grants will be made early next year.

Candidates should have a Master's Degree in international relations, strategic studies or other related subjects. Each grantee receives a total of US\$2,000/ for the study. An additional amount may be paid for field work in 2 South Asian countries including the candidate's own.

CLOSING DATE OF APPLICATION is December 31, 2002.

2. **MAHBUB UL HAQ (MUH) RESEARCH AWARDS FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH 2003**

This is a grant for collaborative research between two participants, one each from a different South Asian country, for joint research on non-traditional security issues that have relevance to contemporary South Asia.

One Award each will be made on the following themes:

- a) *Governance in Plural Societies and Security*
- b) *Environment and Security and*
- c) *Globalization and Security*

Nationals of all South Asian countries are eligible for these research awards. US \$ 2,000/ each will be paid for the award equally to the awardees. An additional amount will be available for fieldwork connected with the project, depending on the requirement and submission of a detailed proposal.

CLOSING DATE OF APPLICATION is February 28, 2003.

Eligible candidates wishing to be considered for the awards should apply to the RCSS along with the following:

- a) Full CV and contact address including telephone, fax and e-mail, if any;
- b) A research proposal within 750-1000 words, describing the theme, importance, objectives; methodology; justification for field work; for Kodikara Awards. A research proposal jointly prepared by the co-applicants not exceeding 1000 words for MUH Awards.
- c) Copies of up to two recently published work by each applicant, if any; and
- d) Two confidential letters of academic reference in favour of each applicant to be sent directly to the RCSS.

Online application will be preferred. Additional references may be sent by post.

Check out our website for more details: <http://www.rcss.org>

Further inquiries may be addressed to :
Executive Director
Regional Centre for Strategic Studies
2, Elibank Road, Colombo 5, SRI LANKA.
Tel: (94-1) 599734-5; Fax: 599993; e-mail: rcss@sri.lanka.net

ASIA FELLOWSHIPS 2003-2004

~ASIAN STUDIES IN ASIA~

Applications are invited from citizens and residents of South Asian countries for the ASIA Fellowships 2003-04 awarded by the **Asian Scholarship Foundation (ASF)** which is funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation. Its office in Bangkok administers the ASIA Fellowships in the region with assistance from partner offices in Beijing, New Delhi, Manila, Hanoi, and Jakarta. The ASIA Fellowships offer opportunities for outstanding young and mid-career Asian scholars and professionals to conduct research in a participating Asian country for six to nine months. Fellows should identify preferred placements in host countries. The **ASF Board of Directors** selects the Fellows, oversees the program and makes policy decisions.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Citizens of and residents in **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Republic of Maldives, Sri Lanka.**

The program is not open to applicants from countries in West and Central Asia, Afghanistan, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, North Korea, South Korea, or Taiwan, and projects cannot be carried out in these countries/territories. Applicants who are not residing in their own country at the time of application are disqualified.

2. Research proposals must be in the humanities, social sciences and policy science only. Projects must be designed to be carried out in 6-9 months in the People's Republic of China (excluding Hong Kong), Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines or Indonesia, or in any of the seven South Asian countries above.

3. Master's or doctoral degree or equivalent professional training and experiences.

4. Minimum of 3 years of university teaching experience for academics or 5 years of work experience for professionals.

5. Applicants must be forty five years of age or younger at the time of application.

6. Proficiency in English or in the language of the host country appropriate to the proposed research project.

7. Projects must focus on an Asian country other than the applicant's own. Under no circumstances will the Fellowship support research in the applicant's own country even for the own-country part of a comparative study project.

8. While an applicant from South or Southeast Asia may propose a project in a country within his/her own region, **preference** is given to applicants who propose to conduct research in a **region of Asia other than their own** (e.g., an award to a South Asian scholar or professional for research/study in China/Southeast Asia).

9. Applicants are cautioned against planning to conduct their research in a country with which their home country has a difficult diplomatic relationship because of the uncertainties of securing an affiliation and obtaining a visa for research for a long-term stay, though such proposals are not ruled out.

10. Preference will be given to projects that focus on one country. Applicants may not propose to carry out their projects in more than two countries.

11. Fellowship awards are not for the purpose of completing doctoral dissertations or for any degree program whatsoever. Those who are currently enrolled in any degree program, or have just completed a degree program less than one year ago will not be eligible to apply.

12. Those who have recently completed their graduate studies or training abroad may apply for the ASIA Fellowships only after a year of completing their studies or training and should be residents in their own country at the time of application.

13. For persons who have been on leave from their employers on any research grant/fellowship, a minimum period of one academic year in service with their employers is necessary before being eligible for applying for the ASIA Fellowships.

14. For persons who have held awards funded by the Ford Foundation there should be a gap of at least two years before they can apply for the ASIA Fellowships.

For Application Forms and further information, please access the Asian Scholarship Foundation Website
<<http://www.asianscholarship.org>>

All application materials must be received by: **January 10, 2003** at:

University of Pennsylvania
Institute for the Advanced Study of India (UPIASI)
India Habitat Centre, Core 5A, 1st Floor
Lodi Road, New Delhi-110 003

Tel: (91-11) 460-4126/27
Fax: (91-11) 469-8201
E-mail: upiasi@del2.vsnl.net.in

Prospective applicants are requested to read this advertisement carefully because the program is not obliged to respond to inquiries which violate the eligibility criteria or to inquiries which ask for information given somewhere in this advertisement.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS



South Asia Network of Economic research Institutes initiated in 1998 is a regional initiative to foster networking amongst economic research institutions in South Asia. Prof. T N Srinivasan is Chairman, SANEI. Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi, is the nodal agency for coordinating the activities of SANEI, and Director & CE, ICRIER, is Secretary (Coordinator), SANEI. ***SANEI in its Fifth year invites research proposals on economic development and reform in South Asia. Proposals could relate to a single country or more than one in a comparative framework.***

□ Guidelines for Funding and Application

- ▶ Maximum funding per project will be US \$ 30,000. Grants are awarded for one year only.
- ▶ Applicants must be a national of any of the following countries in South Asia – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka currently resident in these countries. Applications may be submitted by individuals or teams of researchers. In the latter case, at least a majority of the researchers must be residents of the eligible countries.
- ▶ An applicant cannot submit more than one project or be a member of more than one research team. A SANEI Steering Committee Member cannot be a project holder or a researcher in a SANEI supported project
- ▶ A formal application must be made by the institution (eg. Universities, research institutes or non-profit organisations) with which the applicant is affiliated and if the project proposal is funded, the institution will be responsible for the administration of the grant. *No funds will be paid directly to the individuals.*

□ Proposal Review

Selection will be made on a competitive basis. The Research Advisory Panel (RAP) of SANEI comprising of internationally renowned economists will evaluate the research proposals.

□ Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of the research proposals will be based on:

- ▶ Clarity of the proposed research question
- ▶ Originality (preference will be given to projects that develop new methodologies or use the transition experience to obtain new insights into fundamental economic questions rather than those that call for mechanistic application of conventional techniques to new data).
- ▶ Use of the most modern and appropriate techniques.
- ▶ Cost effectiveness.
- ▶ Preference will be given to collaborative research proposals involving collaboration of two or more research institutes in different member countries in South Asia.

□ Guidelines for Proposal Submission

Proposals must include the following components:

- ▶ A **cover sheet** clearly specifying the project title, names of principal researchers and **e-mail contact address**.
- ▶ An **abstract** of no more than 200 words outlining the significance of the research and the methodology to be used.
- ▶ A **research proposal** of no more than ten (10) doubled-spaced pages
- ▶ A brief **survey of literature** and some indication of the availability of data.
- ▶ A **bibliography** of relevant literature
- ▶ **Short CVs** of all participating researchers (not more than ten pages).
- ▶ Information on how many other project/s the researchers/s will be involved at the same time as the proposed study.
- ▶ The proposed budget on a separate sheet in the format below. **All figures must be in US\$**. If more than one institute is involved, the budget must clearly state the expenses for each institute in respect of all cost-heads, viz.
 - Salaries
 - Field Survey/Data Collection
 - Books, Stationary and Software
 - Communications
 - Travel for workshop/conference
 - Subtotal
 - Overheads (up to 5% of the subtotal)
 - Total

Grants cannot be used for buying computers, hardware and other acquisitions of a capital nature.

The disbursement pattern would be 25% upon award of the grant and signing of the contract, 50% upon receipt of the progress report at the mid-point of the grant and 25% upon receipt of final deliverables from the grant.

The closing date for submission of proposals is December 31, 2002.

All proposals must be submitted before the end of closing date, both by e-mail and by post at the following address:

Secretary (Coordinator), SANEI
Core 6A, Fourth Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodi Road
New Delhi-110003, India
Email: director@icrier.res.in

For further details on the call for proposals please visit www.saneinetwork.org.

Pakistanis still believe

'FALLACY OF the Basic Idea' (*Himal* July 2002) was absurd for the Pakistani and misleading for the non-Pakistani. The writer, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, based the article on the rhetoric that the two-nation theory was a fallacy and is used exclusively "by the elite as a means of social control". Aside from this assumption, he quotes loose-ended facts from history, and fails to make a point of any sort.

Yes, the Pakistani elite is responsible for many of Pakistan's problems, but no – all of the country's ills are probably not of its making. Sometimes theory (albeit supported by fact) can cloud the basic, crude and underlying reality. Such as the idea that "Kashmir continues to irk because of the failure of the two-nation dream". This is incorrect and simplistic. Underneath all the layers of conspiracy and the 'who-has-what-interest-in-Kashmir', Pakistan's people today have gotten over the fact that Kashmir was unjustly seceded to India. In all honesty, most do not even expect it to ever become a part of Pakistan. But what does "irk" a majority of Pakistanis is the fact that today, as for the past 55 years, Kashmiri Muslims undergo systematic brutality at the hands of the Indian Army. Arundhati Roy aptly calls it "India's state terrorism in the name of fighting terrorism".

The images of mutilated Kashmiris are indeed shown on Pakistan Television every night after the news programme *Khabarnama*, but this is the tiniest morsel of reality every Pakistani has a right if not a duty to be a witness of. And if Pakistan does not bring the forgotten plight of the Kashmiris to the fore, who will? I also do not see what is proven by there being "more Muslims in India than in Pakistan". The only reminder here is that the majority of those Indian Muslims also live in India's most impoverished neighbourhoods, and as second-rate citizens under constant oppression and threat – more so now because of resurgent Hindu fanaticism.

If anything, the Kashmir issue and the state-supervised massacres of Muslims in Gujarat demonstrate that when there is growing nationalism fuelled by (among other things) an intensifying religious identity, two inherently distinct, equally self-assured nations of people cannot coexist in eternal harmony. The less powerful is eventually persecuted by the more powerful. And no, the magnitude of the recently worsening carnage of Muslims in India does not equate with the attacks on minorities in Pakistan. Both are acts of evil – but while one is 'terrorism', the other is state-supported ethnic cleansing.

The theory that Pakistan was created out of the drive of a few Muslim interest groups looking for short cuts to get rich quick is often floated in Pakistan. It may in

fact be true – but only to a point. The more balanced truth is that a number of different events led to the creation of Pakistan, just as there are myriad reasons for almost any occurrence on Earth. And to say, "the fact that the majority of Pakistanis still subscribe to the two-nation theory underlines how powerful a means of control it is" is not only an entirely unfounded conclusion, but one that undermines the sensibilities of the average Pakistani.

One reality of contemporary Pakistani discourse is the need to fault, to blame and to accuse. The liberals blame the conservatives, the religious blame the non-religious, the not-rich blame the rich, the educated blame the uneducated, the military blames democracy, democracy blames corruption, and the 'progressives' blame just about everything they can get their minds to focus on. This is unhealthy if only because it makes us go around in circles. And it is dangerous because it breeds resentment, which turns into hostility, and eventually into hatred. And we all know what hatred is capable of doing.

Pakistan's social, political and economic ills are grave, but they are in no way measures for either the fallacy or the validity of the two-nation theory. I, like a majority of Pakistanis, am ashamed of the societal ills that exist within Pakistan. But contrary to what the writer states, they are not "all-consuming". The institution of the family is still strong in Pakistan, the moral coordinates of the majority of Pakistanis are still secure, the average person is brimming with compassion, people still give charity and feel

pangs of guilt at the misery of those less fortunate, and some of the most under-privileged people still have the courage to dream of a better future.

There is also the odd rickshaw-driver who will not take money from the ever-broke student, and the earnest street-hawker who will return the extra 10 rupees mistakenly handed over. Pakistanis celebrate independence day with a fervour – with *jhandis* (flags) atop their homes and with festive family visits to the country's parks. At the end of the day, despite many odds, these are the simple things that make Pakistanis believe in each other. The brutalised Mukhtaran Bibi whose face has been in the world's newspapers, magazines, and on television screens, decided to spend much of the 'compensation' money given to her by the government on building a girl's school and a mosque in her village. This makes one believe that despite all the ills of Pakistani society, something is still intact.

Also, at the sounding of 'Allah-o-Akbar' at *azaan* time, peace does mysteriously spread among the people, even if only momentarily. Yes, Islam does unite us at a very basic level. Against the backdrop of the attacks that religious minorities have undergone in Pakistan, this may seem insensitive but I am by no means overlooking the reprehensible. The recent killings of Christians

The institution of the family is still strong, moral coordinates are still secure

and Shias is something all Pakistanis are appalled and deeply saddened by; the fact is there is distress for the victims, and an inability to fathom what drives the perpetrators.

Under the shadows of the government's liberal exploitation of the common man, corruption, rising violence, hopeless leaders, and many social and economic crises, patriotic emotion will be laughed at. Perhaps emotion and attachment is not what takes countries forward, but it does add to the collective dignity possessed by a people. As one youth put it on being asked about his feelings for Pakistan on the occasion of independence day: "You see, in love and faith there is no logic". And so it is that Pakistanis continue to strive. And this too is part of the picture that is Pakistan today.

A word to Pakistani thinkers and professionals – criticism is useful only if it has direction, and is provided with balance and a clear mind.

Rabia Asif, Lahore

NRI's are OK!

FATEMA GUNJA'S point about the different varieties of NRIs (*Himal* October 2002) is well taken. Constraints of space make some degree of essentialisation unavoidable and I, reluctantly and for want of a better term, adopted the designation NRI to refer to those Indian expatriates who dominate the expatriate Indian public sphere, monopolise the nature of the relationship with

the homeland and create a varnished history of the past to suit their current purposes. This is the set of people who in India are commonly identified as NRIs in a more or less pejorative sense. The term was not intended to embrace all expatriates, many of whom have in their own individual ways negotiated the relationship between the two countries they are intimately connected with. The point I was making was about inventing the history and culture of a constructed 'India' to the eventual detriment of the many cultural traditions of India.

On her second point, that I do not suggest what kind of relationship should exist between Indian expatriates and Indians in India, I would like to clarify that it was not my intention to prescribe what the nature of the relationship should be. That is a private matter and one that must obviously be determined by the circumstances of the individuals and families concerned. I was only indicating what it should not be, because that is a public matter. This is particularly so since the Hindutva movement in India has received enthusiastic support from those expatriates who are engaged in a very public assertion of their cultural roots. As it happens, both the Hindutva version of the 'culture of India' and the Hinduised NRIs version of it have increasingly begun to coincide and this is not an accidental convergence. I was, among other things, commenting on this trend, and its manifestations in the entertainment media. It was not at all my intention to deny expatriate Indians the right to forge their own relationships with their kin in India.

Bela Malik, Kathmandu

Civic Professionalism and Global Regionalism: Justice, Sustainability and the 'Scaling up' of Community Participation

***Rockefeller Humanities Fellowships, 2003-2004
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The Appalachian Center and the Committee on Social Theory of the University of Kentucky announce a three-year program of resident fellowships on globalization, democracy, equity and sustainability. We are particularly interested in scholars from the global South — especially Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Pacific Rim.

Deadline is February 3, 2003 for applications for fellowships in 2003-2004.

Application materials can be found on the UK Appalachian Center website www.appalachiancenter.org or contact: Pam Webb, (859) 257-4851, rock@pop.uky.edu, Appalachian Center, University of Kentucky, 624 Maxwellton Court, Lexington, Kentucky 40506-0347 USA. Tel: 859-257-4852. Fax: 859-257-3903.

SRI LANKA

JOINT TASKS

THE CONCEPT of partnership between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) assumes concrete form in the Joint Task Force charged with overlooking the rehabilitation, reconstruction and development of the north and east. The terminology of 'partnership' emerged for the first time during the first round of peace talks in Thailand in September. Those talks saw a major breakthrough when the LTTE virtually renounced its demand for an independent Tamil state. Given such a step forward on the LTTE's part, it seemed fitting that the government should consider the LTTE to be its partner in the raising of international funds for the north and east.

The government's acceptance of the LTTE as a partner marks a paradigm shift in its approach to Tamil militancy and is welcomed by those who have sought an end to the civil war. From the inception of the militant struggle to obtain Tamil rights and independence, the government and the LTTE have seen each other as mortal foes. Even during previous periods of ceasefire and peace talks, the competition between them did not cease, especially the efforts of the government to edge out the LTTE from the sentiments of the Tamil people. The transformation of mortal foes into partners is a remarkable feat in any society at any time.

The terms of reference for the Joint Task Force that appeared in the *Daily Mirror* at the end of October have not been publicly acknowledged by either party as an official document. It is likely that this is a draft version of the paper that will be finalised at the second round of peace talks in Thailand scheduled to begin on 31 October. Whoever leaked this document probably made a calculated decision - the leak's likely purpose would be to obtain constructive feedback from society. Otherwise, given the nature of the present high-level peace process, civil society, the political opposition and society at large would all be excluded from making constructive inputs into many critical aspects of the peace

discussions.

A group of civil society analysts brought together by the Centre for Policy Alternatives to discuss the draft document pertaining to the Joint Task Force had two important observations to make. One was that while the terms reflected many modern ideas of development, including the mainstreaming of the values of human rights and sustainable development, focus on vulnerable groups and called for consultation with civic and NGO groups, it had missed many ground realities. It neglected to address the potential pitfalls in implementation: currently many ministries handle the task of the rehabilitation and reconstruction, and it is likely that they will be unwilling to hand over their mandates to the Joint Task Force for reasons of turf-protection. There will be bureaucratic confusion, which is harmful in itself, and the risk that the LTTE will lose its patience over what it might see as wilful tardiness is real.

The other was to note that the document stressed the unique partnership between the government and the LTTE. This partnership has been formed to improve the living standards of the population in the northern and eastern provinces through a policy-formulating body that raises financial resources and oversees the implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction activities.

The government's willingness to make the LTTE a partner in the affairs of the north and east, and endow it with command over economic resources is understandable. From Colombo's point of view, this is the best way to ensure that its relationship with the LTTE remains within the ambit of the peace process. However, from a democratic point of view the question arises whether it is appropriate to make the LTTE the only partner in the task ahead.

During the last general elections in December 2001, the vast majority of Tamil voters in the north and east cast their votes in favour of political parties that supported the notion that the LTTE was the sole representative of the Tamil people. This unusual democratic mandate clearly gives the LTTE a very special status in the north and east. However, it is also true that the vast majority of the Muslim and Sinhala voters in those areas did not share an attachment to the LTTE, but voted instead for other political parties. It is in this context that the exclusive partnership between

The government's acceptance of the LTTE as a partner marks a paradigm shift

the government and the LTTE becomes problematic.

Ceasefire model

In fashioning the conceptual underpinnings of the Joint Task Force, the government and the LTTE appear to be using the two-party model of the ceasefire agreement that they signed in February this year. However, they need to draw a fundamental distinction between the two situations. The ceasefire agreement was drawn up to bring the war fought by the government and the LTTE to a halt. For all practical purposes, these two were the only parties fighting out the war. Therefore, the signing of the ceasefire agreement only by them was appropriate.

However, sustaining the ceasefire and ensuring that the living standards of the people of the north and east improve cannot be the purview of only the government and the LTTE. The Joint Task Force has enormous responsibilities that impact the lives of all the people living in those areas, including the Muslims and Sinhalas. While there were only two parties waging the war, there are many more involved in the post-war democratic public life existing today.

According to the terms of reference that made their appearance in the *Daily Mirror*, the Joint Task Force is a mechanism for "improving the living standards of the population in the northern and eastern provinces of the country". It is to formulate policy guidelines for the identification of needs, prioritisation of work and for funding rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. Making the LTTE the sole partner of the government may be to the satisfaction of most Tamil people. But the danger of restricting participation in the Joint Task Force thus is that the body will be seen to be biased, insensitive and illegitimate by a significant proportion of the population in the north and east.

The recent incidents of mob violence in the east are a warning of the possibility of social unrest in the near future in areas that will be under the Joint Task Force's mandate. When the power of guns was present, it was possible to cultivate acquiescence among the people. But when people feel that the guns are muzzled it is difficult to stop them from asserting themselves. This has been marked in the case of the Muslim population of the east, which is resentful about LTTE land expropriations and tax coercion. Tamil civilians recently stoned

heavily armed camps of the security forces since they had been oppressing them. More recently still, there have been reports of Tamil people defying unreasonable demands of local level LTTE cadre concerning taxation and the forcible recruitment of children.

Given the emerging situation, the government and the LTTE need to recognise that in the peace process there are more actors than just the two of them. They also need to be aware that the Joint Task Force is likely to be perceived as the nucleus of a future interim administration for the north and east. Its composition could influence thinking on the nature and composition of the interim administration itself. Clearly, all points of view, especially those of the ethnic minorities in the north and east, will need to be reflected in the interim administration. Consequently, those points of view also need to be accommodated in the Joint Task Force.

The draft terms of reference hold that the Joint Task Force will be composed of three members each of the government and the LTTE and that Norway will play the role of facilitator. As a practical measure, it would be appropriate if the principle of plural representation were respected by the inclusion of two Muslim representatives on each side to the currently proposed number of three each from the government and the LTTE. Subsequently, the Joint Task Force could be further enlarged to include other interests until such time as it is subsumed in or by the interim administration.

The value of the discussions surrounding the Joint Task Force is that a start has been made in good faith and in a spirit of partnership by the government and the LTTE, two former mortal foes. However, there is no substitute for rigorous analytical thinking and research that sets out the problems that are to be dealt with in their full complexity. A proper analysis is required before valid answers are found and presented. In particular, the prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe's, oft-repeated admonition that the peace process will be a long and slow journey needs to be borne in mind.

-Jehan Perera

There were two parties to the war; many more are involved in post-war public life

Development critique

From evil state to civil society

Two decades of NGO-led development in Nepal has been accompanied by a steady privatisation of the state's welfare functions and an erosion of community institutions. A retrospective assessment of the impact of NGO activity.

by Saubhagya Shah

The last two decades have seen the proliferation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across the underdeveloped world. Since the development enterprise involves the exclusion of the third world masses, civil society's inclusion takes the form of partnerships with NGOs as "apolitical" and "responsible" representatives of disenfranchised people. In many small countries, they have, as "genuine representatives" of civil society, acquired a quasi autonomous status, the larger among them being treated practically on par with the state, particularly by multilateral aid organisations. It is only recently that the activities of these development organisations have attracted critical scrutiny, and some of these studies see NGOs as purveyors of donor country agendas and various other formulae that pass by the name of international consensus. The historian, Akira Iriye, for instance, argues that more than any other US enterprise in the 20th century, NGOs have shaped the "American Century" by transporting the core American values of association, civic culture and democracy to the rest of the world. While Iriye's conclusions on the origins and forms of NGOs are debatable, his recognition of the growing significance of NGOs in modulating the North-South relations is incontestable. NGOs have become crucial agents in sustaining the rhetoric on democracy, development, civil society, human rights and good governance around the world. These dominant discourses become powerful lubricants facilitating the day-to-day interaction between the donors and the recipients.

Nepal's own experience and transformation in the past decades is intelligible only against the backdrop of this transnational flow of ideas and agendas.

Government and the non-government

As in many third world countries, the relationship between the Nepali state and NGOs is often uneasy and contentious. The tension emerges primarily from the fact that both the government and the non-government sectors often compete with the same donors for funds. Having been the sole conduit for Western development aid until the relatively recent advent of NGOs, the government sees the latter as a rival in times of shrink-

ing resources. The growing trend among donor countries to channel development funds through NGOs, coupled with the numerous structural adjustment requirements of the Fund-Bank, has led to a scaling down or even complete termination of many government-run services and programmes, even as NGO operations are on the rise.

It is misleading to think of the structure of NGOs and their mode of functioning as being very different from the large centralised and routinised structure of state. Given the growing ability of the NGOs to plan, generate data, create subjectivities and produce other state-like effects in the "Age of Globalisation", anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, argues that NGOs and multi-lateral organisations are "state-like institutions". The NGO world is an alternative bureaucracy with its own hierarchies structured along the lines of nationality, class, gender, caste and race. Janus-faced, the non-government mimics rather than denies the government.

Even as NGOs in Nepal have imbibed the quintessential '*jagiray*' (a typical government employee mindset) attitude and adopted the hierarchy, bureaucracy and power structure of the government, civil servants have begun aspiring to the higher pay and perks of the NGO sector. The significant differences in remunerations and resources available to development NGO employees has been a cause of envy and resentment among government employees. Ironically, as NGOs come to resemble and behave like government bureaucracies, the strident calls for a rollback of the state and the end of state sovereignty have become familiar, both as observations of facts and moral imperative in the interconnected discourses of free market, NGOs and globalisation.

However, the hasty announcement of the economic and political obsolescence of the nation-state obscures the fact that "globalisation" is a highly discriminating historical process that rewards some regions at the cost of others. The false equivalence implied in the celebration of globalisation masks the cold reality. Whereas many third world states have seen a rapid decline in autonomy, other states have accumulated the sovereign surplus to the extent that destinies of other nations can



still be unilaterally effected. Despite the various promises of globalisation, international civil society, peace dividends and the new world order, the basic imbalances of interstate relations and possibilities have hardly altered since the end of the cold war.

During the Panchayat period some degree of regulation and supervision was maintained by the Nepali state over NGOs through the office known as the Social Services National Coordination Council (SSNCC). With the advent of the multiparty system in 1990, however, NGOs have been deregulated and the purview of SSNCC (now known as the Social Service Council) much reduced. While NGOs managed to free their operations from local authority following the 1990 political changes, their dependence on donors states for programmes and funding remains intact. Even radical advocates of NGO autonomy have tended to ignore this vital contradiction.

While civil servants resent the impunity with which NGOs can today operate largely outside of state purview, the NGO world has its own list of complaints against the Nepali government, ranging from inefficiency to corruption. A degree of malevolence may also be attributed to the political and therefore biased state when it opposes the supposedly apolitical and neutral NGOs and "civil society". In the words of anthropologist William Fisher, NGOs are idealised as "disinterested apolitical participants in a field of otherwise implicated players". Indeed, claims of efficiency and political neutrality constitute the moral high ground of NGO intervention. The underlying tension between the government and the development establishment was brought to the fore at the official celebration, held in January 2001, of the 50th anniversary of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) involvement in Nepal. At the function attended by late King Birendra and the prime minister, the US ambassador thought fit to admonish the government and political parties to deliver on democracy, facilitate development, and to end corruption and misgovernance. Despite the public furore kicked up by what was seen as undue interference in Nepal's internal affairs, the government chose to maintain a diplomatic silence on the episode.

Through a choice of forum and form, the US envoy, in one speech, unified the ideologically powerful discourses of governance, development and democracy, leaving no sovereign space for a regime that depends on the West's democratic certification to sustain its own claims to rule. Earlier, in 2000, during a serious power tussle within the ruling Nepali Congress Party, the World Bank had expressed extreme "concern" when the elected prime minister changed his finance minister. Even though the government and the new finance

minister reaffirmed their commitment to the ongoing economic reforms mandated by international financial institutions, the World Bank warned about the threat to the market economy from such a change in personnel. The Bank's intervention was locally interpreted as an attempt to strengthen one faction of the party against the other.

The two examples from Kathmandu illustrate the new fusion of diplomacy, democracy, development and civil society as a potent foreign policy instrument in managing the global South. The asymmetry of the global order creates an ironic third world condition where one takes one's ethics from the money-lender and democratic exhortations from the most undemocratic of institutions. These opportunities for intervention sustain historian Geir Laundestad's observation that the "American century" is basically an "empire by invitation". Many of these nation-states find themselves facing a novel assault from two inter-related global processes. The "globalisation" of capital, culture and politics chips away at the political, economic and cultural

manoeuvrability of these governments, while NGOs and other non-state actors usurp the welfare and other service delivery functions of governments. Thus, traditional internal and external challenges facing vulnerable states such as Nepal are compounded now by new assaults.

Even though development NGOs are invariably presented as non-political, in reality they achieve a series of political effects in different spheres of society and government. The process of NGO development has the potential to undermine local regimes by creating alternative centres of resources and authority beyond the purview of the state. Nepali officials often complain of the lack of coordination between the

The asymmetry of the global order creates an ironic third world condition where one takes one's ethics from the money-lender and democratic exhortations from the most undemocratic of institutions.

government and various NGO programmes and within NGOs themselves as well. Charges of religious proselytisation under the pretext of development have also ruffled the sensibilities of a "Hindu state". NGO claims of efficiency and flexibility are beginning to be questioned on several counts. It is apparent that uncoordinated programmes from a multiplicity of actors often leads to duplication in some areas and a total absence elsewhere. A large part of the cost effectiveness and flexibility of NGO delivery rests on labour practices identified by geographer David Harvey with the dispersal of late capitalist production practices in the third world so as to maximise regional labour cost differentials. By hiring temporary, short-term and casual staff bereft of job security, pension or other benefits, employers can maintain a "lean and flexible" work force. Claims of NGO efficiency aside, serious cases of misappropriations – a practice usually associated with the govern-

ment – have also been reported about the development establishment in Nepal's Auditor General's report.

The relationship of the NGOs with various political formations in Nepal is similarly complex. The Maoist guerrillas who have been waging a bloody campaign in the rural hinterland have on occasion accused the NGOs of working as imperialist stooges to divert the rural masses from real contradictions and struggles. In some areas, Maoists are said to have asked NGOs to hand over their budget to the party. On the other hand, parliamentary political parties engaged in electoral politics negotiate with NGODom for resources, programmes and employment for their constituencies. As such, NGO pretensions of transcending politics and profit appear quite untenable.

NGO development, development NGO

One cannot talk about NGOs in Nepal outside of the development discourse: if one is the delivery, the other is the package. Hence the use of the term "development NGO". Under the tutelage of erstwhile colonial powers, development became the rallying cry of the modernising state in the 1950s and this project has ridden many horses to reach its yet elusive destination. After the experiment with and failures of various approaches, development NGOs were ushered into Nepal in the 1980s to deliver "development", thereby effectively ending state monopoly on development and external relations. The government and its opposition – the "non-government" – for the first time came to stand as structural equivalents in relation to global donors. It is this equivalence that provokes so much collusion and competition between the Nepali state and non-governmental organisations.

What started as an NGO trickle in the 1980s turned into a tide in the 1990s and later. The growth in the number of NGOs in Nepal has been phenomenal – over 11,000 NGOs had been registered by the year 2000 compared to only a few hundred that existed in 1990. NGOs have become so ubiquitous of late that their pervasiveness has become the other distinguishing feature of a third world condition where per capita NGO distribution is inversely related to per capita income. In the absence of an effective monitoring agency, it is impossible to estimate how much foreign money is injected into these NGOs and how that budget is spent. A rough estimate, however, is that NGO funding compares favourably with the government's annual budget of approximately USD one billion (roughly 50 percent of that budget is provided by foreign loans and assistance).

The exponential growth in the number of NGOs has been matched by the range of issues they are currently engaged in. They work not only in traditional sectors such as education, agriculture, irrigation, forestry, drinking water, health and nutrition but also in newer arenas like environment, income generation, gender mainstreaming, trafficking of women and girls, micro-credit, democracy strengthening, human rights and

AIDS. As the NGO system continuously reinvents itself to fit the ever fickle funding priorities of the donors, "civil society", "transparency" and "good governance" have become the cutting edge of NGO discourse since the late 1990s. The built-in obsolescence of the NGO mode of development has given rise to a unique form of development entrepreneurship that has to keep up with the shifting fads of funding.

Analytically and historically, the NGOs created or used by the development industry in Nepal must also be distinguished from the traditional community institutions such as *guthi*, *parma*, *dhikur* and non-profit organisations such as Paropakar Sanstha and other initiatives that mobilise resources and work for community improvement, service delivery and charity. Such efforts are motivated by a sense of community, self-help or the transcendental values of *dharma*. In the NGO-sponsored din of civil society, these sustainable roots of social engagements have largely been eclipsed in the public consciousness.

For every development NGO that is up and running, there are many others that are waiting in the wings with funding proposals meant for donor eyes. Some NGOs are situated at the local level, while others work at the district and regional levels, and still others straddle the national and the global as INGOs (international non-governmental organisations) based in the donor countries with branches and programmes in the developing world. It is the hierarchical chain that connects the recipient "youth club" in a remote Nepali village to Northern donor states through several layers of national and international interlocutors to reproduce one important facet of the "global civil society".

While recognising the difficulty of formulating a formal definition of an NGO, it is still possible to sketch the basic vector of NGO enterprise as a unique creation of the development industry's mediation with the third world. This (pre)condition of NGO engagement is a double-edged sword – while the linkage provides the knowledge claims and resources to act in this world, the action itself generates further dependencies that create a paradoxical subject position of agents without an agency.

Promise and performance

Popular assessment of the performance and contribution of NGODom tends to be quite cynical in Nepal. Nevertheless, no public function is complete without the expression of faith and hope by politicians, civil society leaders, bureaucrats, donors and development practitioners on the role of the NGO sector in uplifting society and democratising the nation. How is one to make sense of this apparent contradiction? Even rural villagers who are often sceptical of NGO development often request researchers to "bring some NGOs" to help them out. One way to understand this apparent contradiction is to examine the two decades of NGO intervention in Nepal in terms of its proclaimed goals and unstated



consequences.

Nepali society has imbibed and reworked the discourse of *bikas* – the Nepali-language equivalent of “development” – in more ways than is often recognised. In its evolving usage, this Nepali neologism also carries the sense of evolution, superiority, advancement, power and betterment. The polyvalent nature of *bikas* enables it to provoke a gamut of emotions, ranging from profound material aspirations to a warm and fuzzy sentimentality of neighbourhood upliftment to a sense of betrayed disillusionment with the powerful.

A case in point is the contemporary practice of naming children *Bikas*. Prior to the 1950s, there was hardly anybody with that proper name. Its addition to the Nepali cultural repertoire is indicative of Nepal’s ambivalent encounter with development. First, *Bikas* as a name is given only to boys, even though grammatically *bikas* is a gender-neutral term. Naming a child involves the ultimate investment of desire and hope. Which begs the question, what sort of masculine inflections are present in development to cause *bikas* to be born only as a male child? Second, *Bikas* has tended to obliterate the particularity of Nepali middle names, which serve to qualify the first name. But those who christen their male progeny *Bikas* do not generally find it necessary to give them a middle name, as if subconsciously emphasising the point that “development” needs no further qualification.

In more material terms, it is conservatively estimated that between thirty and forty thousand people are employed in the NGO/development sector. In a country with massive unemployment as well as underemployment, this is by no means a minor contribution. In fact, if NGO and civil society funding was to suddenly dry up, it would cause serious economic and political crises. NGOs have become an alternative sector of employment for thousands of educated youths crowded out of the bloated civil service and anaemic economy.

The expansion of NGOs has directly and indirectly contributed to the emergence of new services and markets. One of the most notable of these spinoffs is the rise of “action research” firms and consultancies that cater to the NGO/development sector. Sociologist Gopal Singh Nepali observed a shift in the focus of social inquiry within Nepali social science from fundamental research to project application. Due to the prestige attached and – more importantly – higher remuneration, a significant number of academics and other profession-

als have been lured to work for NGOs and the development industry. Questions of merit and relevance aside, one cannot deny the phenomenal growth in the production of “Rapid Rural Appraisal” (RRA), “Participatory Rural Appraisal” (PRA) and various project-related feasibility, evaluation and follow-up studies from all corners of the country.

Since sociologists and anthropologists have for long been identified as development’s cultural interlocutors, the prospects of development recruitment has fed an explosive growth in sociology and anthropology programmes in Nepal’s colleges. At Tribhuvan University’s Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology – established during the early 1980s, a period which roughly coincides with the early years of NGO proliferation in Nepal – the admissions pressure swelled to such an extent after 1994 that it led to campus riots. The demand was so high and the political pressure so strong that the university ended up opening several new MA programmes in Kathmandu in what by then had become the hottest discipline for university students, leaving earlier stars like economics and political science by the wayside. The new market and the intellectual climate have affected not only enrolment choices among students but also the course content. The department originally started out with a strong focus on general theory

and research, with only a minor emphasis on development issues. The market demand has now tilted the curriculum’s emphasis towards applied courses in rural development, project design, appraisal and management.

There are other consequences of the growth of the NGO-development economy such as in the hotel-seminar industry. Organising conferences, workshops and other talk-shops – especially in hotels and their in-house conference rooms and restaurants – is a phenomenon largely popularised by the development industry in Nepal. In the past few years, hospitality services targeted to NGO clientele and their budget have begun cropping up even in district headquarters and towns.

In the public imagination, there is perhaps no more powerful an emblem of “development” than the shiny late-model four-wheel-drives in which development professionals ply themselves back and forth. These fuel-guzzling Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) are the defining signatures of the development establishment in Nepal and there is no sight

Large all-terrain vehicles were introduced and popularised by the development sector in the 1990s – ostensibly for use in the inhospitable hinterland but curiously seen mostly in Kathmandu.



more seducing than development's hot wheels cruising through Kathmandu's pedestrian alleyways. The large all-terrain vehicles were introduced and popularised by the development sector in the 1990s – ostensibly for use in the inhospitable hinterland but curiously seen mostly in the capital city. The development NGOs and donor agencies have been the ones to have introduced new tastes and high consumer aspirations among the upwardly mobile classes of the country. The shifting contour of taste and desire is in line with anthropologist Stacy Leigh Pigg's analysis of the development discourse in Nepal. Pigg wrote in 1992 in *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*:

In daily life, bikas becomes the idiom through which the relationship between local communities and other places is expressed... bikas is quantifiable in this way because in common usage it connotes new things: new breeds of goats and chickens, water pipes, electricity, videos, schools, commercial fertilisers, roads, airplanes, health posts, and medicines. Bikas comes to local areas from elsewhere; it is not produced locally.

Such reorientation of time and place has been a significant part of the development enterprise in Nepal. This notion of dissolution and rearrangement of time and space is evident in the Nepali government's 1999 decision to change its office hours to nine-to-five from the earlier ten-to-five schedule, and the introduction of the five-day working week. The new timing was implemented in Kathmandu valley alone.

The fragmentation of the old rhythms and its reorganisation into market-centred work, leisure and consumption patterns go on simultaneously. The businesses and media have been quick to promote the weekend as ideal for recreation and leisure. Retailers report that the sale of liquor, beer, cigarettes and snacks, and renting of video cassettes shoots up during the weekend. The rapid growth of a new leisure economy in the valley over the past decade has also witnessed the rise of the "dance restaurant" phenomenon, where men can drink, eat and gaze at lightly clad girls performing raunchy numbers on brightly lit stages. There has been a rapid growth in the number of these soft-porn establishments that introduce the sexuality of young, out-of-town women to Kathmandu's emerging cosmopolitan commodity market.

The government has resisted calls to revert back to the old office schedule, reasoning that since all NGOs and development agencies stationed in the capital – usually referred to as "counterparts" – start work at nine the government must synchronise its own timing with their schedule.

The Bank, the casino and Mao

There is almost a poetic quality to the ethical disconnects between the social and material coordinates of

the Western development establishment and its proclaimed constituency, the impoverished masses. The World Bank, the major driver in the global poverty alleviation mission and a major champion of the NGO mode of development, is ensconced in the regal wing of a premier luxury hotel-cum-casino complex in Kathmandu's most expensive neighbourhood. The absolute distance from local poverty could not be starker than in the seamless blending of the Bretton Woods institution with the ritzy hotel and casino. Physically and metaphorically, it is difficult to distinguish where the Bank begins and the opulence and decadence of the casino ends. The inability of the "development set" to find something amiss in this breathtakingly tragic juxtaposition says it all.

Compared to the impressive results in the creation of new employment, services, economies and tastes, the manifest goals of development NGOs, with a few exceptions in community forestry and public health, have been mostly paltry. There has been no significant improvement in the fortunes of the majority of poor rural dwellers who officially continue to constitute development's "target group". If anything, the target base is getting larger with the gap between the small affluent class and the masses widening further as more and more people sink below the poverty line. It is as if the concerted global assault on poverty has taken the poor as collateral damage: a staggering 71 percent of the 23 million Nepalis live under the poverty line, which is defined as an annual income less than USD 150.

The degree of disillusionment comes partly from the way development advertises itself as the cure-all for the third world. Given the inherent contradictions and limitations of the development project, it is too much to expect the development NGO band-aid to cure the economic, political and cultural ravages of the world systems and comprador collusions. In some ways, development efforts are an eerie throwback to the poor-houses, orphanages and soup kitchens of the Dickensian era: services intended to address the worst abuses of bare-knuckle capitalism and defuse urban disorder without having to rectify the processes that produce the injuries in the first place. The late capitalist order also finds itself in the same position of having to pursue similar fire-fighting gestures in the global village to normalise itself.

Urgencies of this sort prompted the World Bank to chart a strategic shift from the infrastructure and growth-oriented development to poverty alleviation under the leadership of Robert McNamara, the US secretary of defence under presidents Kennedy and Johnson, who obviously understood the dangers of rural radicalisation from his leadership during the Vietnam war. In this sense, development, like other allied narratives of civilisation, enlightenment and democracy, can be seen, to borrow Ranajit Guha's inimitable phrase, as a "prose of counter-insurgency". While the possibility of rural radicalisation has generally



receded for the world as a whole following the end of the cold war (a historic understatement, it was anything but a "cold war" for millions of people in the third world who felt its heat in more ways than one), the red spectre has raised its head with a vengeance in Nepal. This is development's double jeopardy in Nepal: neither an alleviation of poverty nor a forestalling of rebellion. As a consequence, the Nepali state now totters between being a "soft state" and a "failed state".

The revolutionary ideology of Maoism comes to Nepal through a rather circuitous route. Essentially the historically contingent blending of Marxism to specific Chinese conditions, Maoism as praxis is currently being promoted in different parts of the world, including Nepal, by the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) centred in the West with support nodes mainly in South Asia and Latin America. It is apparent that there are major historic and objective differences between the Nepali Maoists and Maoism, just as some discontinuity existed between Mao and Maoism. As another derivative discourse profoundly affecting Nepal, how will Maoism perform in Nepal in comparison to the earlier promises of democracy, development and market economy? History will probably be the judge, but until that time what is certain is that hundreds of thousands who had absolutely nothing to do with the present mess will pay dearly for the greed and hubris of a few unless the virtues of reason and compassion prevail.

As political entrepreneurs, the communist rebels have fully seized the opportunities created by a progressively enfeebled nation-state, a distorted development mission and an utterly corrupt democratic regime. Just a few short years ago it would have been impossible to imagine Nepal turning into a fiery cauldron of violence. Who could have foreseen the thousands of internal refugees piling up at district headquarters and tarai towns? It is as if in a nightmarish instant the enchanting hills and valleys of one's childhood have turned into killing fields where the peace, however imperfect, has been drowned by the tears and terror of widows and orphans.

The strains and stresses of the current war in Nepal have lifted the veil on many of the dominant claims and rhetoric. If the hapless casualties of the "people's war" expose the contradictions of the Maoist promise, the state's urban bias has also come to the fore as it takes charge of the towns and deserts the rural hinterland to the rebels. The Maoist war has been even more severe on those who have made careers out of nurturing the transplanted discourses of "human rights" and "civil society". These careerists, truly, are threatened with bankruptcy.

The general indifference displayed towards the summary intimidation, brutalisations and lynchings of the weak and the vulnerable in hinterlands is in stark

contrast to the righteous indignation expressed when the urban intelligentsia – a constituent element of the new civil society – are caught in the fray. The selective engagement with partisan constituencies has eroded some of the credibility of the universal claims of human rights and civil society and left it exposed as another privileged discourse of a self-referential community. If the higher ideals of human rights are to have meaning and significance, then its moral compass must be broadened to empathise with all sections and classes and it must be willing to censure all life-negating deeds, whether it be of the market, political formations, transnational forces or the state. As has become amply clear, the state does not enjoy a monopoly on terror and violence any longer, if it ever did.

It is ironic that the current "people's war" should burn those at the bottom the most – the very constituency on whose behalf the war is supposedly being waged. Invariably the victims on both sides so far have been

In the NGO-sponsored din of civil society, the sustainable roots of social engagements have largely been eclipsed.

ordinary peasants, low-level policemen, rural teachers and average villagers whose deaths do not provoke national and international sympathy or condemnation. It is difficult to imagine how their alleged crimes will ever justify the revolutionary justice they were meted out. These lowly deaths augment the kill ratios without inviting urban and international public opinion backlash against the perpetrators. It is rather miraculous that over the past seven years

of a guerrilla war that has claimed over 7000 lives, no one of national-level political or military significance has been killed on either side. The apparent avoidance behaviour by top leadership on both sides raises the possibility of a gentleman's agreement between the protagonists to keep the carnage confined to the rural backwaters and not to raise the stakes. On rare occasions when the rebels have targeted the high and mighty in Kathmandu for symbolic intent, the punches have always been pulled: an empty shed, the metal gate, or a boundary wall has been the extent of the class warfare. Such feints pale in comparison to the deadly force employed against the general population. The increasing spectacle of gratuitous violence, maiming and wanton destruction of life brings to mind the playwright Bal Krishna Sama's prophetic lines on misfortune's jealous penchant for favouring the dwellings of the poor. It is indeed a strange justice where the downtrodden and the inconsequential in the status quo become the preferred revolutionary offerings.

For the global development regime these local debacles are nothing more than minor irritants as development itself keeps ahead of its failings by retroactively shifting the goals to justify the results at hand. When the plug was pulled on the growth-oriented modernisation mission in the 1970s, the new discourse of "poverty alleviation" and "basic needs" managed to

turn what was looking like a rout into victory. Twenty-five years later, there are more poor than ever before, and "development" needed a deft manoeuvre that would rescue it from the march of poverty. The second crisis in development was salvaged by the brilliant proposition that development is primarily about democracy and civil society – the material prospects apparently being mere secondary consequences. With most of the world now under some form of parliament and multi-party elections, development can be certified to have delivered again.

This is Development's development. From the early focus on the building of infrastructural dams, electricity, irrigation, industry and roads, development shifted to basic needs and hunger during the early seventies. The recent paradigm shift to democracy now fully liberates development from the sheer burdens of the body. Like the Cartesian dictum, "I think, therefore I am", the development discourse has now become a state of mind. When economists like Amartya Sen espouse "development as freedom", development becomes primarily a self-referential discourse that can never be judged outside of its own measures of success. It is ironic that development should turn fully ideological after the end of the "ideological war". The only material concession the new development makes to the relief of the poor, is that in a democracy famines are less likely. Development achieves a moral victory by displacing its own economic and social failures into the opaque discourses of democracy, civil society, good governance and bad governments.

Hopes for social movements and civil society

Most social movements in Nepal have been parochial rather than social in nature. Bereft of any economic vision or commitment to broad social issues, these mobilisations have been driven by a single quest for the capture of political power by overthrowing the existing regime, without reforming the nature of the state or economy. The quest for office has metamorphosed head-hunting radicals into bourgeois apparatchiks, while pedigreed socialists have come around to embracing privatisation and free market as life itself. This is one reason why even with several regime changes in the last 50 years the nature of the Nepali state has not changed substantially, contrary rhetoric and rituals notwithstanding.

It remains Nepal's singular misfortune that the political forces are always engrossed with changing the regime, but never with altering the substance of governance. As a consequence, the country is made to live from one 'revolution' to the next with the intervening periods muddled through in ad hocism and make-do solutions. For the political elites and counter-elites, establishing rule-based governance and institutional procedures has so far proved less attractive than simply overthrowing the political opposition and ruling through patronage and fiat. The regularity of the

ten-year cycle of 'movements' and upheavals would suggest that Nepal has fatefully institutionalised a condition of perpetual revolution. Cyclical upheavals every decade or so preclude a process of accumulative depth in governance and creativity. Instead, each cycle further accentuates the polarisation of Nepali society and the incapacity of the state.

The hyper-fragmentation of society by forces jockeying for brute power has disabled any articulation above or beyond the clique level. This is not a progressive politicisation of the social but the fragmentation of the very spirit of community. It is not surprising that commentators still have to belabour the point about "national consensus" even on minimal issues of providing food, shelter, health, education and ensuring the right to life and limb. Outside of power, there is little space left where broader non-partisan engagements can take place on vital issues. Efforts and initiatives that seek to engage the public and transform the nature of power are hemmed in from two sides: on the one hand the colonisation of all public space by the Party (for a citizen it matters very little whether public space is colonised by one, two or many parties), and on the other the depoliticisation of the remaining by NGOs and the market. If the political parties and their networks have disabled the community impulse by their petty politicisation of life, the NGOisation of society and intellect has circumscribed and further curtailed the state rather than reform it.

Some Nepali intellectuals have begun to express despair that a decade of NGO effervescence in the country has not made any significant dent in the country's socio-economic condition or led to any sustainable social movement that would address public issues. These expectations and disillusionments generally tend to erroneously conflate NGOs with civil society, democracy and social movements. By its very constitution, NGOdom in Nepal appears unlikely to play a vanguard role in social movements. Participation in civil society and engagement in social movements presupposes a certain degree of autonomy and commitment that is not feasible from agents lacking agency. But first, what is this foisted civil society – Hegelian ideal, de Tocqueville's civic association or late capitalism's post-class imagining? Or, is civil society the political arm of the transnational economic regime? The fetishised object itself neither explains nor brooks interrogation.

In the context of a surplus of authorised engagements with "civil society", "democracy" and "good governance", authentic movements that surface independently suffer the violence of cognitive deficit. This is a condition in which society fails to perceive and acknowledge impulses that are not sponsored by the logic of development. What is both surprising and promising is that despite the generally bleak climate, Nepal has witnessed a remarkable resurgence in small-scale grassroots mobilisations on issues of community and livelihood. Some of these examples include the



creative initiatives of 'untouchable' castes for dignity and equality; struggles by agricultural labourers for justice; and the voices of the rural against domestic violence, gambling, alcoholism, and for women's rights. The fate of the alcohol control movement is a case in point. Despite the enormous social havoc caused by the free alcohol regime in the country, none of the NGOs, INGOs, or other development agencies has deemed it necessary to recognise the enormous potential of these marginal gender awakenings. One activist from Dhangadi in western Nepal who made futile efforts to build a coalition with NGOs and development agencies arrived at this self-clarification: "How stupid of us, when all they want to do is drown the Nepali people with their multinational liquor and beer, why would they ever want to help us control alcohol?"

Nepal perhaps faces the worst alcohol problem in South Asia where the economic, medical and social costs of alcohol use is probably far more serious than the combined ravages of AIDS and drugs. Yet due to externally mandated development priorities, AIDS and drugs have managed to overshadow other public health issues in funding as well as recognition. Because of the lucrative nexus between officialdom, the liquor lobby and the media, women's voices against the alcohol epidemic have been denied a fair hearing. But when a movement to free the *kamaiyas* (a form of agricultural bonded labour) surfaced in Kailali in 2000, everyone – NGOs, civil society, the government and donors – was ready to join in. Morally and politically, the enfeebled remnant of a bygone era offered an irresistible target for loud activism. The fight against the vestigial remains of landlordism – appropriately objectified in the media image of one toothless Shiva Raj Pant – was more of a romantic expeditionary foray into the far west, both in the sense of time and space than a sustained engagement, as was amply demonstrated by the neglect of the *kamaiyas* after they were liberated. In contrast, the initiatives against the abuse of tobacco, liquor and such other injuries of capital and market that complicate class, gender, caste and ideological positionings tend to be either deferred or altogether discredited.

The most insidious form of this cognitive deficit operates by denying any legitimacy and recognition to issues that might be raised outside of party or development patronage. Authorisation through funding becomes the normative worth of any issue and engagement; anything outside of the hegemonic discourses of development and democracy appears weird or even outright sinister. The obstacles to broad social coalitions come in many forms: the hyper-fragmentation of life by the parties on the one hand and the NGOs on the other. The community sense that propels movements appears out of place at a time when the ideology of individualism, free market and privatisation of everything from education, health care and public transportation is intensifying. It is a sign of the times that instead of pooling resources and energies to improve

dilapidated drinking water services, tottering public transportation and eviscerated health services, people now seek solutions in private tube wells, exclusive schools and nursing homes. In such a climate, those small signs of community spirit that still manage to surface slowly wither away as society continues to avert its gaze. However, the persistence of such eruptions opens the possibility that the remedy for the fractured polity might come not from the authorised agencies but from these grassroots impulses.

The logic of privatisation and deregulation has been taken to its perverse conclusion in Nepal where fundamental community issues such as drinking water and public security are being turned into market commodities. The drying up and contamination of drinking water supply has given birth to a booming bottled drinking water industry, as well as private tanker-trucks which transport hundreds of gallons at one go from outskirts rivulets to Kathmandu valley's privileged homes. Amidst the background of a rising tide of political and criminal violence, the state has backed out of the "social contract" to assure a minimum level of security. The state's retreat from this vital arena has led to a budding market for private security companies in the past few years. Rather than shoring up the deteriorating law and order situation, the government has instead reduced the fees and duties on firearms to facilitate the privatisation of security.

The efforts of the neo-liberal ideology to frame progress in an antagonistic relationship with the state is both ahistoric and disingenuous. The discourse meant for third world consumption constitutes an historical amnesia of an experience in which no society – whether Western or any of the new Asian Tiger specie – achieved prosperity with the help of NGO development in the absence of an effective state system. Without a competent regulator and mediator there can be no development, civil society or even market economy, at least nothing more than a rhetoric that gets shriller by the day as if to discursively compensate for its actual absence. There is an urgent need for political parties, the intelligentsia and the market to contemplate creative ways of "bringing the state back in".

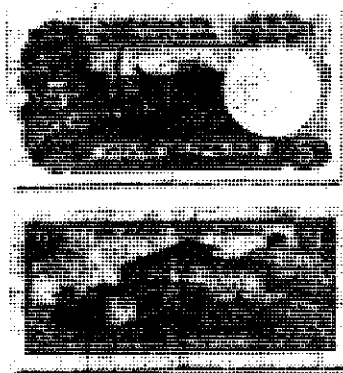
A part of this will entail reassessing the dominant discourses relating to free market and development. The inherent cultural and ideological inflections of the dominant ideas preclude off-the-shelf application. Obviously, the one-size-fits-all approach to development and deregulation is not working for Nepal. Two decades of NGO-led development and a decade of market economy have amply demonstrated that there can be no substitute for a reformed and enabling state and its constructive role in society. A socially conscious engagement must transcend both the limitations of traditional party politics and a cynical rejection of the state in addressing the basic questions of the Nepali polity. ▽

In currency

NECESSITY BEING the mother... and all that, ingenuity is an important component of a survival kit in the developing world. And in the northeast of India, being even more 'developing' than most, this trait has developed rather keenly.

Thus, a slipping gear in a motorcar of an earlier vintage was regularly made to behave by deftly placing a length of split bamboo to jam the gearshift. Three or four strands of a thin coir rope, dampened with a mug of water, made a perfectly serviceable emergency fan belt. And if the petrol tank or a fuel line sprung a leak, sealing it with a bit of soap kneaded into putty would easily see one through to the next motor workshop.

And so, what did one do when, in the recent past, the Indian monetary authority was unable to keep up with the growing demand for currency notes? The paper in the market became increasingly dirty and dilapidated, and in the beginning shopkeepers and patrons alike would refuse to accept the soiled currency. There was no new sup-



ply and the notes just became increasingly foul. One would often have to pass up on the urge for a quick roadside cigarette purchase because the wallet did not hold a single rupee note that would be acceptable to the *panwalla*.

As the situation got worse though, ingenuity kicked in, and tattered but still (though barely) recognisable notes began to be encased in cellophane or plastic covers. Thus, was the wheel of commerce kept turning in the Northeast, and no thanks to the Reserve Bank of India.

But in a belt of territory contiguous with Bhutan's southern border, people had the advantage of using

Bhutanese currency as a substitute. Although the Indian rupee (INR) and the Bhutanese ngultrum (BTN) were almost at par, that was only incidental and of no consequence for this practice. Because of an open border and free, though minimal, trade across it, the people of this region of Assam and north Bengal were familiar with Bhutanese currency, and the ngultrum was treated at par with the rupee as a matter of convenience in the face of a scarcity of the domestic currency. It was only the smaller denomination notes – 1, 2 and 5 ngultrum – that were ever freely used.

And now that an enhanced supply of at least the 1 and 2 rupee coins has finally reached the Northeast from the mint, it is only the 5-ngultrum note that remains in circulation. Curiously, and for no apparent objective reason, the river Brahmaputra seems to define the southern boundary of the region where the Bhutanese currency is acceptable.

Incidentally, Indian currency is freely accepted in Bhutan, just as in Nepal.

PN Deb, Assam

Suicide and the press

THE NEPALI press may be very critical about everything it lays its eyes on, but virtually never carries out the exercise of self-inspection. A perfect example that preaching is easier than practising, it expects decency from everyone but does not demonstrate any itself. The 12 October suicide of Nepali actress Shreesha Karki, however, has suddenly stirred a debate of ethics in the media. The actress committed suicide after a weekly ran a photo of her, naked in a hunched-over position on a bed with a terrified look on her face that made it clear she was being ambushed.

Jana Aastha, a Nepali language weekly tabloid from Kathmandu whose name translates as 'faith of the people', is known for its *masaladar* (spicy) material. It has a history

of foregoing decency and not respecting privacy. But it took the suicide of an upcoming actress for the rest of the newspapers and media institutions to react. The editor of the tabloid, Kishor Shrestha, has apparently had access to pictures of other than just film personalities in compromising positions and it seems that these were used to extort, blackmail and occasionally create a 'splash' for his newspaper.

This time, the splash was larger than usual but then it also splattered the delinquent editor. The Nepali cine world rose up as one – some of the members perhaps also concerned over what else Shrestha may have in his photo file – to demand trial of the editor in a court of law for murder, public offence and defamation. From hiding, the editor called a radio station in Pokhara to denounce the charge and to say



unconvincingly that he was only trying to cleanse the dirty world of Nepali films. Shrestha, and the story's writer, Bishwomani Subedi, justify the story with the claim that Karki's suicide only proved the story's allegations of a sex racket in the Nepali film industry.

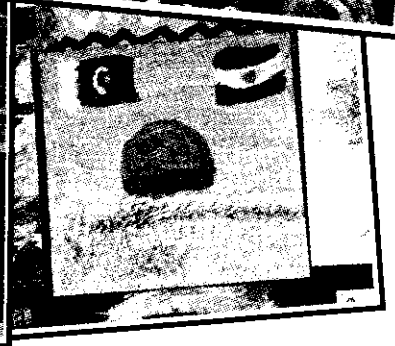
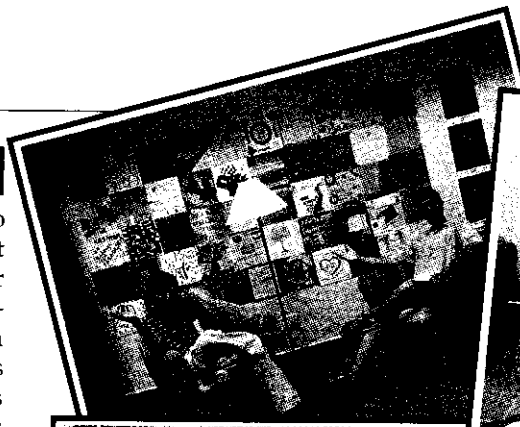
The *Jana Aastha* atrocity is not unprecedented, although it does

YIP, don't just yap

THERE ARE, theoretically, no two strangers in this world who cannot get along. Different cultures, or languages, or talents, or nationalities – nothing can keep people from being friends save the boundaries that exist in our minds. As much was proven at a meeting of 20 Pakistanis and 20 Indians in Singapore recently, which promoted in the short span of a week more understanding, mutual respect and, above all, friendships between the young men and women of two normally hostile states than I, for one, would have believed possible.

'Focus on Kashmir' was organised by the United World College South East Asia, Singapore, and its result was a student movement in the two countries called the Youth Initiative for Peace (YIP). Almost immediately after the conference was over, YIP started charting the way ahead. A conference is to be held in Lahore in December 2002 or January 2003 and this one will be 'Focus on South Asia'.

The aim of the conference is roughly the same as that of Focus



on Kashmir: to facilitate and promote understanding, trust, mutual respect and friendship, and to encourage participants to set up peace initiatives of their own. This time around, instead of just from two countries, participants will come from all the seven countries of SAARC.

Though the seven countries are

all part of the entity called South Asia, their people tend to have little knowledge of one another's situation, culture, circumstances and problems. There is a history of misunderstanding and even enmity among them obscuring the fact that there is much in common, not least the fact that the youth has a burning passion for peace.

take matters to a new level of prurience and seems to reflect the complete anarchy in a society being hit by multiple shocks. About two years ago, the same newspaper published a photograph of a journalist in a private act in the bedroom, and prior to that it had printed the picture of a male actor in the buff, who protested that the picture had been taken to describe a skin condition to a doctor overseas. And now, the Karki suicide. This has generated much public cynicism and disenchantment with media institutions, which rush to lobby for bills in parliament to check indecency in other sectors but have no energy for their own code of ethics.

Despite the many column-inches of coverage provided to the titillating story, the institutions of the press were still dealing with the episode with unseemly hesitation

weeks after the suicide. The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), while critical of the practice of *Jana Aastha*, in a lengthy note pleaded that the media as a whole should not be maligned. True, the mistake of one should not tar the rest of the community, but the press is culpable for letting the practice go unchecked over the years.

The president of Nepal Press Council admitted that the newspaper had crossed acceptable limits, but did not volunteer what the council proposed to do about it. It almost seemed as if the media institutions wanted to let the editor off with a little slap on the wrist. An idea of their attitude can be had from the FNJ general secretary's opinion that if the actress had been coerced into posing for the photograph, this would have been a case of yellow journalism, "... but the simple act of

printing her picture [was] not yellow journalism". To think that events percolate through hands such as these before being offered to society as 'news'.

Much Nepali journalism today lacks a sense of responsibility. The capital's dailies extended huge coverage to events stirred by the suicide – but they seemed more interested in the pretty faces at protest rallies than in hard issues of institutional accountability. When Shrestha and Subedi justify the publication of the picture, they do so little realising that they themselves are now exposed for their ignorance of privacy laws and journalistic ethics.

And, the expression on Shreeshha Karki's face in the photograph is definitely not that of a damsel in "a 'colourful' evening in a film city", as the story was titled.

Hemlata Rai, Kathmandu

Before they arrived in Singapore, the delegates from Pakistan were mostly cynical students who were there for the boost it would give their CVs. I know I was. And now, in quite short a time, a youth movement is on its way to achieving some ideals. Thus, from personal experience, I can testify that this love for peace, this commitment and dedication towards freedom and friend-

ship is truly 'burning'.

Battles, now and always, will be fought in the hearts and minds of the youth. The youth is not the future of these countries but the present. While it is all very well to be told that we will make a difference tomorrow, we should know that there is nothing stopping us from making a difference today. ▽

Zaair Hussain, Lahore

For what it's worth

WHAT CAN 10 Nepali rupees buy you? Well, about five pieces of candy, or two mid-distance trips on the *Safa tempos* in Kathmandu, called so because they run on 'clean' battery-powered energy, or four-five *sel rotis* (doughnut-shaped fried bread) at the tiny hole-in-the-wall eating establishments that one and all hold out the promise of "the best momos in town". But, what can one 10-rupee note get you? For the curious and the observant, definitely a perspective of changing times.

Australian technology and recent history mingle on the new version of the humble 10-rupee in all its polymeric slickness. In October 2002, Nepal became one of 21 countries in the world, and one of two in South Asia, to have polymer notes (Sri Lanka, being the other). Polymer has greater durability, the ability to withstand high temperatures, and can incorporate many more security features than paper money. One such safeguard in the Nepali note is the transparent oval window featuring the plumed crown.

What makes the 10-rupee note of extra interest, how-

ever, is that it finally includes the image of King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, looking dour and despondent just as he did during his second enthronement. Since those tragic times of a year and a bit ago, the king has slimmed considerably though, and his visage in general has picked up spirit; in fact he took 'spirited action' less than a month ago when he assumed de facto powers, just days after the new note came into circulation.

The old paper notes with the slain King Birendra's picture on them are still in circulation, and apparently will be for some time to come because, while paper tears more easily than polymer, it also withstands rents much better than polymer. A torn paper note will retain its form for many years after the first tear appears but once damaged, a polymer note will not survive much careless handling. In a part of the world where for generations, the practice has been to make currency bundles with the aid of staples, the new polymer notes demand a complete change of attitude.

Meanwhile, King Gyanendra is firmly ensconced on the 10-rupee. And now the 5-rupee and 50-rupee notes as well, incidentally. ▽



King Gyanendra (top) supersedes his brother Birendra.

Philately diplomacy

THE WORLD'S first postage stamp appeared in London on 6 May 1843 and featured a youthful bust of Queen Victoria, then just six years into her 64-year reign. A few decades thereafter, letters were floating around the entire northern rim of the Indian Ocean relying on Raj stamps to get around, as cancellation marks on British Indian stamps from Baghdad, Aden and Rangoon testify. Sindh, brought under colonial India's control in 1843, got its own *dak* (postal mark) in 1852. Nepal has issued stamps at least since 1881, and Subhas Chandra Bose, leader of the anti-British Indian National Army during the second world war, had stamps for 'Azad Hind' printed in Berlin in 1943. Since gaining independence in 1947-48, the leaders of South Asia have regularly made use of philatelic diplomacy to demonstrate their affections for allies and inspirations near and far.

Pakistan, for example, issued a stamp commemorating the centennial anniversary of the founding of Saudi Arabia's monarchy, an important ideological and financial patron, and has issued stamps commemorating Sino-Pakistan ties on at least three occasions, most recently in 1999 on the occasion of communist Beijing's golden jubilee. That same year, in a fitting tribute to globalisation, Islamabad issued a stamp commemorating a century of Shell Oil in Pakistan. Jute from Bangladesh, the erstwhile East Pakistan, made its way onto a 1956 Pakistani stamp juxtaposed with wheat from West Pakistan. Two years after that configuration lost its basis in reality in 1971, India issued a stamp featuring a Bangladeshi flag rising from a map of its eastern neighbour.

Nepal has made ample use of philately to demonstrate its international priorities as well. It has issued anniversary stamps for relations with two important donors, the US and Japan (both in 1997), and



it issued a stamp in 1976 venerating the Non-aligned Movement. Stamps were also issued to mark occasions such as its membership of the UN Security Council (1969) and the inaugural SAARC meeting in Kathmandu in 1985. In keeping with its monarchical tradition, the Himalayan kingdom released a stamp in 1971 noting the "2500th anniversary of the founding



Someday, in Sri Lanka.

of monarchy in Iran" – eight years before it was snuffed out.

India has put at least three Americans on its postage – Eleanor Roosevelt (1963), Abraham Lincoln (1965), and Martin Luther King, Jr (1969) – while MK Gandhi landed on US stamps twice in 1961. 27 years before Pakistan marked the golden jubilee of the founding of the People's Republic of China, India noted the

Soviet golden jubilee by putting the hammer, sickle and star of the USSR flag on a stamp of its own. A bit escapist, a bit sentimental, capturing the martyred mourning of the times, New Delhi issued a mark praising its frontier guards in 1963, one year after it lost the 1962 war with China.

South Asian nations have regularly issued stamps commemorating the work of UN agencies, and regionalism has made its mark occasionally as well. Following Nepal's lead, in 1998 Sri Lanka issued postage to commemorate the SAARC Colombo meet, and Burma marked its ascension to ASEAN in 1997 with a stamp. With philately diplomacy now a regular feature of South Asian life, one wonders how political shifts in years to come will affect postal service. If Sri Lanka succeeds in keeping its peace, will Velupillai Prabhakaran adorn postcards mailed from Colombo?

The most original philatelic nation of all of course is Druk Yul. But more on that next time...

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'Holy' cow and 'unholy' dalit

The bovine becomes divine, the cow becomes 'mother',
the untouchables get dehumanised.

by *Siriyavan Anand*

There are some protagonists of Hinduism who say that Hinduism is a very adaptable religion, that it can adjust itself to everything and absorb anything. I do not think many people would regard such a capacity in a religion as a virtue to be proud of, just as no one would think highly of a child because it has developed the capacity to eat dung, and digest it. But that is another matter. It is quite true that Hinduism can adjust itself... can absorb many things. The beef-eating Hinduism (or strictly speaking Brahminism which is the proper name of Hinduism in its earlier stage) absorbed the non-violence theory of Buddhism and became a religion of vegetarianism. But there is one thing which Hinduism has never been able to do – namely to adjust itself to absorb the Untouchables or to remove the bar of Untouchability.
– BR Ambedkar

The dalits account for 165 million of India's one billion-plus human population. The population of cows is pegged at 206 million. There are more cows than dalits in India. The cows, therefore, have more rights than dalits. For instance, you can kill dalits before thousands of witnesses and get away with it. But the imagined murder of a cow will not be suffered. The state promotes the drinking of cow urine and dung, while dalits are forced to eat the shit and piss of caste Hindus.

Ambedkar was, perhaps, ironically, aware of the literalness of his metaphor. Hindus have proved that they can not only eat dung and piss but digest it too. However, while he was right about what brahminic Hinduism could not ever absorb, what he perhaps did not reckon with was that latter-day dalits would be forced to eat the shit and piss of caste Hindus. In *Untouchables* or *The Children of India's Ghetto*, published posthumously like many of his other works, Ambedkar devotes two sections to highlight the practice of untouchability in his time through newspaper sources from the 1920s and 1930s. Close to 50 reports, culled from a variety of sources, from *The Times of India* to Hindi publications such as *Jivan*, *Milap* and *Pratap*, are cited in an effort to convince the reader that various forms of untouchability were indeed in practice. However, not one of these mentions that the dalit-untouchables were forced to consume human excreta. Not one talks about dalits being lynched by a Hindu mob for

skinning a cow.

Brahminic Hinduism has always yoked together practices that are at such odds with each other that the meaning of one is to be found in the meaninglessness of the other. While it is the brahmin who ritualistically excludes himself from the rest of the caste heap and indulgently renders himself untouchable, it is the dalit – whose touch of labour informs perhaps everything that is consumed and used by society – who is condemned to be untouchable. The brahmin, to protect his untouchableness, has to render others untouchable. Such a play of contradictions that binds the brahminical social order is as historical as it is contemporary. In such a binary, the ridiculous and the unimaginable jostle with each other; the claim to superiority and merit of the one depends on the making inferior of the other. The ridiculous easily invites sarcasm, even critique by rational-scientific voices that unwittingly participate in the ridiculous, but the unimaginable defies words, language – it demands outrage but forces aphasia.

Demonstrative of this dichotomy, we see in New Delhi, India's human resource development minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, proudly asserting the legitimacy invested upon the use of cow's urine for therapeutic purposes by the United States patent authorities, while in Thinniam, an obscure village in Lalgudi taluq, Tiruchirapalli district, Tamil Nadu, two dalits are forced to eat dried human shit. The state and the brahminical social order play equally proactive roles in both cases – promoting cow urine drinking among caste Hindus, and in forcing human shit and piss down dalit throats. The bizarre patenting of cow-urine therapy elicited three kinds of reactions: sniggers from the 'secularists' who were amused, at best; a sense of pride from a mostly-Hindutvaised brahmin-dominated media fraternity, among whom there could be several members who practice cow-urine therapy; and sheer indifference. However, Thinniam went unnoticed, uncommented upon.

On 21 May this year, a caste-Hindu thevar family in Thinniam branded two dalits, Murugesan and Ramasamy, with hot iron rods and forced them to feed dried human excreta to each other. After local activists of the Dalit Panthers Movement heard about the incident on 30 May, they informed a human rights activist-lawyer and sometime in mid-June a press conference



was organised where the dalits presented their testimonies. The mainstream media in India, which has almost no dalit members, ignored it.

About a month and a half later, the media splashed the news that the United States Patent and Trade Office had granted Patent No 6410059 to an "Indian innovation which has proved that cow's urine can make antibiotics, anti-fungal agents and also anti-cancer drugs more effective" (*The Hindu* 4 July 2002). The product, cow-urine distillate (CUD), was the result of a joint enterprise by the centrally funded Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Go-Vigyan Anusandhan Kendra (cow science research centre) in Nagpur. Seems Murlu Manohar Joshi, union minister for science and technology as well, notorious for introducing 'vedic astrology' and reviving Sanskrit courses in universities, had asked the Centre for Science and Industrial Research in 1999 to investigate the chemical properties of cow's urine. According to *The Indian Express* (4 July 2002), 10 lakh rupees were spent over three years by the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants at Lucknow to establish that "certain compounds in cow urine, when used in combination with certain antibiotics like the commonly used anti-tuberculosis drug rifampicin, can help kill more bacteria than a single application of the antibiotic".

In Tamil Nadu, the Thinniam incident did not make any impression on the government, media, civil society or the mainstream intelligentsia. Most newspapers and television channels did not report it and those that did, like *The Hindu*, ran shy of seeming scatological and referred to it as simply "a heinous incident". This neglect led to another Thinniam. On 7 September, Sankan, a dalit, was drinking tea with a friend at a shop in Goundampatti, Nilakottai taluq, Dindigul district when he was attacked by six caste Hindus. He was verbally abused and beaten up, after which an off-duty constable urinated in his mouth. Sankan had earned the wrath of the caste Hindu gounder community because he had aggressively pursued his right to a piece of land of which he had been cheated. Today in the village, even the dalits appear angry with Sankan because the caste Hindus are threatening the entire community with social boycott. Peace in a village can be maintained as long as the dalits accept oppression and learn to digest urine.

The profanity of the sacred

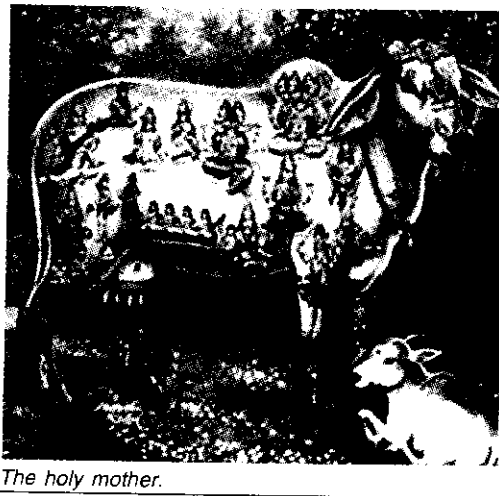
Before 'discovering' the medicinal values of cow-urine and dung, the brahmins, during the vedic and immedi-

ate post-vedic period, ate the meat of all kinds of animals (see *Indian Food* by KT Achaya, 1998). As evident from brahminic texts such as the *Satpathatha Brahmana* and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, beef was in fact a favourite food in vedic times.

Following the powerful discourse of spiritual democracy that Buddhism unleashed, brahmins were forced to give up beef and their cults of animal sacrifice. As the dalit-bahujan writer, Kancha Ilaiah, points out in *God as Political Philosopher*, "Though the use of animal power had been discovered, the killing of animals in the yajnas prevented their practical implementation". With the coming to power of the Buddhist king Asoka in the third century BCE, whose edicts proscribed the killing of animals for sacrifice (however, not necessarily for food), the brahmins not only gave up beef but slowly turned vegetarian and remained so in a post-Buddhist society; in a reversal, those who continued to, and were forced to, consume beef, specifically the meat of the dead cow – not in a grand sacrificial manner, but as ordinary food – were labelled untouchables. They became the 'broken people', literally "dalit", falling outside the pale of the four-fold *varna* system to which all caste Hindus belong.

According to this theory of the origin of untouchability that Ambedkar formulates, the broken people were the pre-untouchables of the 'primitive society'. To

paraphrase him: During the frequent wars between the 'settled tribesmen' and the 'nomadic tribes', those who were separated from their communities came to constitute the 'broken men'; these were then captured and used by the agriculture-bound settled community to protect the villages from the invading nomads. Though there was no ritual untouchability imposed on the broken people, they were to live segregated from the main village. It was a time where there was no taboo on cow's meat and it was consumed by all. After the brahmins made the cow a sacred animal and made beef-eating a sacrilege, the broken people continued to consume beef. The broken people were not to own any wealth, land or cattle. They could not kill a cow for its meat because they did not own any. But why were they allowed to eat beef when the brahmins and non-brahmins had given it up? Because eating the dead cow's meat was not a crime; killing a cow was. They could also not imitate the *savarnas* in giving up beef-eating, because they "could not afford it. The flesh of the dead cow was their principal sustenance. Without it they would starve. In the second place, carrying the dead cow had become an obligation though originally it was a privilege. As they could not escape carrying the dead cow they did



The holy mother.

not mind using the flesh as food in the manner in which they were doing previously". (Ambedkar, *Untouchables: Who They Were and Why They Became Untouchables*, Volume 7 of Writings and Speeches, 1990)

Having given up the most edible and nutritious part of the cow, and forcing the outcastes to consume the same, the brahminic caste Hindus began sacralising the cow, specifically the humped zebu breed found in the Subcontinent, which finds mention in the *Rig veda* and is common on Indus Valley Civilisation seals. The black buffalo was not endowed with any such sanctity in spite of its more nutritive milk. They also sacralised and consumed every product and by-product of the cow – milk, *ghee*, curd, dung and urine – substitutions for the real thing, beef. They mixed these five ingredients to make *panchgavya*, assigned it therapeutic value, and ascribed a place for it in the purity-pollution binary. Hence the *Manusmriti*, a post-Buddhist text dated around the second century CE, ordains that "a twice-born man so deluded that he has drunk liquor should drink boiling-hot cow's urine, water, milk, clarified butter, or liquid cow dung until he dies" (chapter 11, verses 91-92). Another verse decrees: to make up for the crime of "stealing raw or uncooked food, a carriage, a bed, the cleansing is swallowing the five cow-products" (Chapter 11, verse 166, from the translation by Wendy Doniger, Penguin, 1991). Several Hindu temples, such as the one at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, serve *panchgavya* and cow's urine as *prasadam* (divine offering) for a price. Cow's urine has since remained 'sacred' and Murlī Manohar Joshi, while announcing the patent achievement, recalled with pride the contemporaneity of it: "When I was young and went to Chennai on an educational tour, I saw people drinking cow's urine straight from the source. Everybody thought it was dirty. Today, I realise that all traditional practices from ancient Indian medicine have a strong scientific base" (*The Indian Express*, 4 July 2002). And today, that a patent on cow-urine therapy is being bestowed by the largest consumer of beef in the world does not bother the rightwing Hindu fundamentalist Sangh Parivar or Joshi.

The brahmins and brahminic Hindus (*dwijas* – twice born) have been consuming cow's urine and other waste for centuries and continue to do so. The bovine becomes divine – Kamadhenu, *gau-maata* (the cow as the mother) – but the dalit-untouchables are rendered subhuman. Ambedkar says, "In Manu, there is also a provision for getting rid of defilement by transmission – namely by touching the cow or looking at the sun after sipping water". Meaning, a *dwija*, defiled by the sight or touch of a dalit-untouchable, has simply to touch a cow to be cleansed. The pollution caused by touching the

wrong human being can be nullified by touching the right animal. Hindus believe that some 330 million gods and goddesses reside in the bowels of the cow. Yet, when a cow dies, caste Hindus would stay away. Touching the dead cow and burying it are jobs assigned to the dalit-untouchables.

And yet, today we witness in India an episode that against this backdrop defies explanation. In Dulina, Jhajjar district, Haryana, two hours from the capital, New Delhi, five dalits were lynched by a mob on 15 October. The dalits were reportedly sighted skinning a cow, but the local Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) rumour mill, in collusion with the police, spread the word that the dalits had slaughtered the cow (*The Indian Express* 17-18 October). Within three hours, a mob – of four to five thousand according to the police – gathered near the police station where the dalits were sheltered, pulled them out, burnt two of the them alive and lynched the other three with stones and sharp implements. At least 50 police personnel, three sub-divisional magistrates, the deputy superintendent of police of Jhajjar and Bahadurgarh and the block development officer watched the carnage. It was the last day of the Dussehra festivities, and the Sangh Parivar of which the VHP is a member – which has been working overtime to raise the consciousness of Hindus on issues bovine – found it easy to mobilise villagers from the surrounding areas to "avenge the killing of the cow-



Jhajjar: A father's photos of a dead son.

killers". A post-mortem report of the cow was ordered by the superintendent of police, Mohammad Akil, and a case filed against the dead dalits under the Cow Slaughter Act 1960. It was reasoned by the SP that if the post-mortem proved that the cow was alive before the dalits skinned it, "it will show how the mob got emotional when they saw an act like this". The priest of the local temple, Mahendra Parmanand, was quoted as saying: "If they can kill our mother then what if we kill our brothers who kill her". The cow, Kamadhenu, is the mother being referred to. And we need to console ourselves: at least in death a brahmin priest was referring to the dalits as brothers. The VHP justified the killings saying, "According to Hindu *shastras* a cow's life is very important".

Here is a country where the imagined murder of a cow can cause more outrage than the death of a human being. Again, the root of such attitudes lies in ancient brahminic injunctions. After the brahmins gave up beef-eating, cow-slaughter was made a punishable crime and equated with the killing of the brahmin, the ultimate crime. According to the scholar of Hinduism, DR Bhandarkar:

We have got the incontrovertible evidence of inscriptions to show that early in the 5th century AD killing



a cow was looked upon as an offence of the deepest turpitude, turpitude as deep as that involved in murdering a Brahman. We have thus a copperplate inscription dated 465 AD and referring itself to the reign of Skandagupta of the Imperial Gupta dynasty. It registers a grant and ends with a verse saying: 'Whosoever will transgress this grant that has been assigned (shall become as guilty as) the slayer of a cow, the slayer of a spiritual preceptor (or) the slayer of a Brahman'... A still earlier record [412 AD] placing go-hatya [cow-slaughter] on the same footing as brahma-hatya [brahmin-killing] is that of Chandragupta II, grandfather of Skandagupta... (Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture 1940, quoted in Ambedkar 1948).

Commenting on Bhandarkar, Ambedkar notes: "The law made by the Gupta emperors was intended to prevent those who killed cows. It did not apply to the Broken Men. For they did not kill the cow. They ate only the dead cow". Ambedkar, probably, did not reckon with how the law against cow killing could become an excuse to lynch dalits. He also perhaps did not know that one day cow-urine therapy would make its way to the US patent office, that India would have a law that prohibits cow-slaughter (Cow Slaughter Act 1960), and dalits would be lynched for dealing with the hide of a dead cow, or that dalits would be forced to eat shit and piss. What is unfolding against the dalits in India is something that even the Gupta period, 'the golden age of Hinduism', would not have witnessed or justified.

The Thinniam 'rebellion'

In Thinniam, what was Murugesan and Ramasamy's crime? They beat the *thappu* – a traditional leather drum used by dalits – and went about the village announcing that Rajalakshmi Subramani and her husband Subramani had cheated their friend Karuppiyah of 2000 rupees. About two and a half years ago, Karuppiyah had paid 5000 rupees to Rajalakshmi who was then the president of the village *panchayat* (citizens council) – though her husband Subramani, a former schoolteacher, was the de facto president – for a house under a government scheme for his sister. Karuppiyah's sister was never allowed to occupy the house, and despite repeated requests, neither was the house allotted nor the money refunded. Eventually, Subramani returned 3000 rupees but Karuppiyah insisted on the whole sum. When Subramani refused to pay up, Karuppiyah decided to tell everyone in the village how he had been cheated.

Murugesan and Ramasamy accompanied Karuppiyah as he went around the village with his *thappu*.

Inebriated, and thus made bold, they declared that they would no longer render their traditional caste-based service as *vettiyans* (a dalit sub-community involved in burial ground work) to the caste Hindus if they did not get the money back from Subramani. In the villagers' words, "They got drunk and made some noises they would otherwise not make".

Learning of this, Subramani summoned Karuppiyah the next morning on 20 May. The entire family beat up Karuppiyah, who then quietly returned home and left the village the same night. He rarely spends time in Thinniam these days.

The following day, a sober and terrified Murugesan and Ramasamy went to Subramani's house to apologise. There, obscenities were hurled at them using their caste name – *parayar* (dalit) bastards – and Murugesan was kicked. If the temporary lapse of a drink or two could make them go around the village speaking disrespectfully of the *thevars*, Subramani and Rajalakshmi

'Cow's urine can cure diabetes, blood pressure, acidity, asthma, psoriasis, eczema, AIDS, piles, prostate problems, arthritis, migraine'

had methods that would make them acknowledge the realities that are permanent. Rajalakshmi handed a hot iron rod to her husband Subramani, who branded Murugesan on his left hand, above his elbow, on his neck in three places and below the left ear in two places. Ramasamy was branded above his left knee and on his left wrist. Then Subramani gave them a *thappu* and ordered them to go around the village, this time to announce that what they had tom-tommed was not true. After making a round of the village, they

returned to Subramani's house where they found dried human excreta in a winnow. Subramani reasoned that the *parayans* would come to their senses only if they ate shit. When they protested, Subramani threatened to brand them again. Murugesan put the dried shit into Ramasamy's mouth and Ramasamy fed it to Murugesan. The hands that beat the drum of rebellion were made to feed shit to the mouths that articulated protest. Subramani then accused them of damaging the *thappu* and made them pay 50 rupees each as compensation.

Many weeks later, the district collector offered the victims 6650 rupees and some rice and kerosene as a 'rehabilitative measure'. The Lalgudi police went through the routine of filing weak cases under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Scheduled Castes Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989, known commonly as the Dalit Act. On Karuppiyah's complaint, the police registered cases against six caste Hindus under sections 341 ('causing hurt voluntarily'), 323 ('wrongful restraint'), 355 of IPC ('intent to dishonour a person') and 3(1)(x) of the Dalit Act. The IPC sections can lead to a simple imprisonment of up to two years and a fine. Section 3(1)(x) of the Dalit Act is a favourite with the police according to dalit activists and lawyers. Irrespective of the crime – rape, burning down a dalit house,

stripping and parading a dalit naked or abusing a dalit in public – the police tends to book everything under 3(1)(x) that deals with “intentional insult or intimidation with intent to humiliate him in any place in full view of the public”. Under this section, punishment is minimal and a compensation of 25,000 rupees is to be provided on conviction, which rarely happens.

The police did add charges under Section 3(1)(i) of the Dalit Act and sections 324 and 325 of the IPC when Murugesan and Ramasamy, who were forced to eat human shit, filed a separate complaint. As per Section 3(1)(i), “it is punishable if anyone forces a member of the SC [scheduled castes] or the ST [scheduled tribes] to drink or eat any inedible or obnoxious substance”. If it can be proved in a court of law that a dalit was indeed forced to eat an obnoxious substance, the state pays him or her 25,000 rupees or more “depending on the nature of the gravity of the offence”. Clearly, the Dalit Act, formulated in 1989, has this clause because such practices were prevalent in India. The law in itself was an acknowledgement of, and a response to, an existing, established reality.

The incidents of Thinniam and Nilakottai are of course not unprecedented. In 2001, at Prichatur, 75 km from Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, caste-Hindu men paraded a dalit youth, Murugesu, in a procession and forced him to drink his own urine for “the crime of relieving himself in the presence of the upper castes” (*Deccan Chronicle* 30 August 2001). Also in 2001, caste Hindu landlords from Chanaiyan-bandh village in West Champaran, Bihar, tied Dasai Manjhi, a dalit, to a pole, shaved his head and urinated in his mouth. But it was the dalit who landed in jail “for felling the timber of his landlord” (*The Times of India* 11 July 2001). Lalit Yadav, a minister in the Bihar state government, held a truck driver Deenanath Baitha and cleaner Karoo Ram, dalits both, captive for over a month in June-July 2000. The minister and his cousin removed the fingernails of the driver and made him drink urine. Lalit Yadav was dropped from the ministry but remains a free man today. Again in Bihar, in September 2000, Saraswati Devi, a dalit woman was paraded naked on charges of witchcraft in Pakri-Pakohi, Karja block, Muzaffarpur district. A dozen persons tortured her and forced her to swallow human excreta. After Devi lodged a complaint, police visited the village but failed to ‘nab’ the accused.

The spirit of rebellion

The forced consumption of dried shit in Thinniam was preceded by a moment of ‘rebellion’ on the part of three dalits. Some commentators in Tamil Nadu have sought to locate the expression of such protest in the consumption of alcohol. According to them, it was alcohol that enabled the dalits to transgress the social boundaries that they knew would be impossible to break otherwise. It appears that to speak out against oppression and injustice, Karuppiah, Murugesan and Ramaswamy could not be sober. Such a line of argument seeks

social-therapeutic values in alcohol.

Murugesan and Ramasamy went to apologise to the thevars, but the message that the thevars sent is that even the excuse of a drink cannot justify resistance. If dalit transgression is seen as arising from ‘drunken behaviour’ in the night, and is to be forgiven by the oppressor the next day when the dalits go to seek pardon, the assumption informing the episode is that a meaningful rebellion cannot be sustained. A reading that presumes that dalit protest cannot be articulated when the dalits are sober undermines both the potential of dalit agency and the possibilities of any long-term liberation agenda since ventilation of a grievance when drunk need not be seen as resistance. This is not to make a moral argument against drinking, or in this case dalits drinking; if the gandhian position against alcohol is loaded with brahminic morality, so is an argument that seeks to essentialise a drinking culture with dalit lifestyle.

There are other problems with reading too much into the aspect of alcohol-stimulation. In India, when drains filled with human excreta and other wastes get clogged, sanitation workers are required to enter them bodily. Invariably, these workers belong to a particular local community of dalits; in Tamil Nadu, it is the arundhatiyars or sakkiliyars. Exposed to noxious waste clad in nothing but a *komanam*, a loincloth, for long stretches of time, it is not surprising that the influence of alcohol becomes necessary for the municipality worker. The drinking in the arundhatiyar’s case only enables him to continue to do his work; alcohol does not give him rebellious ideas. The same is true for dalits employed in the mortuaries of government hospitals.

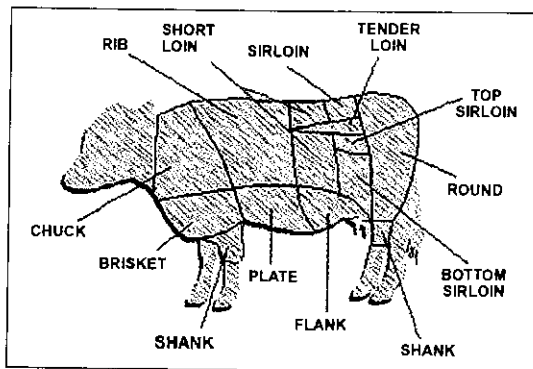
Brahminising the shudra

The brahmins might have been the progenitors of the caste ideology and the group that invested sacrality on cow dung, urine etc but today this ideology has percolated to the dalit. It is a fact that the ‘most-backward’ shudras (members of the lowest tier of the four-tier Hindu varna system) such as vanniars or thevars, and even the dalits, in a Tamil Nadu village have imbibed the practice of cleansing one’s home using *gomayam* (cow urine) after a death or ahead of a religious ceremony. It is on this ‘common sense’ that the Hindutva lobby cashes in while seeking a patent.

Such brahminisation of the shudras has a telling effect on the dalits. Much of the physical violence on dalits in rural India is perpetrated by the shudra castes. Though this does not absolve the brahmin of a role in such violence – the brahmin historically has never had to get physical to defend his rights or others’ rights, but has had the privilege of letting others slug it out and watching the fun from a safe distance – we need to be alive to how it is on the basis of assumed caste superiority that the thevar in Thinniam or the gounder in Nilakottai makes a dalit eat shit or drink piss. The shudra-thevar does not act in the name of Hinduism or



as a Hindu; he acts as a thevar, or more specifically invoking his subcaste identity as a piramalai kallar. It is the 'social nausea' – to use Ambedkar's phrase – of the dalit that makes the shudra react with such intolerance to any dalit assertion. This nausea is expressed in the form of caste.



Research and Analysis Wing

If the harassment of dalits has a pattern, so does the effort to formalise the practice of caste Hindus drinking cow-urine and dung. There was much groundwork done before Joshi could make his announcement about the patent. Already 200 cow urine therapy centres have been established in 18 Indian states, most of them in Gujarat

and Madhya Pradesh. The target is 10,000 such centres. The Cow Urine Therapy and Research Institute set up in Indore claims that cow's urine can cure diabetes, blood pressure, acidity, asthma, psoriasis, eczema, AIDS, piles, prostate problems, arthritis and migraine. This *gau-mutra* (cow urine) distillate is already being sold across the counter as 'Kamadhenu Ark'. There is even a 'Gaumutra Hospital' in Lucknow.

The Gujarat government has in place a 'Gau Seva Ayog' that hopes to improve cow reverence and promote the benefits of its various excretions. Last year, it talked about a "cow dung and urine revolution". Gujarat truly is a laboratory for Hindutva. According to a news report, cow urine is already being sold in 200 outlets in Indore. In Jaipur, Rajasthan, the rightwing Hindu fundamentalist RSS runs the Gau Seva Sangh, which claims to have at hand the one element that will guarantee protection against the horrors of nuclear radiation: cow dung. Cover the roof of your house or better still, lather yourself with cow dung as a protective shield. At the Krishi Expo 2002, an agricultural fair held in June in New Delhi, there was a stall where every product – tea, toothpaste, hair oil, porridge, tonics, fertilisers, insecticides, 'beauty' soap, shampoo, incense sticks – was manufactured from panchgavya. The producer was the Kanpur Gaushala Society.

In December 2000, a 'National Workshop on Scientific Dimensions of Gauseva' was held in Indore. According to the official report on the seminar, "Cow was given the status of mother and worshipped and honoured by celebrating festivals and religious functions. The present society is based on science. Now people need information and data based on research. Most of the tested practices of cow therapy, Panchgavya, Agnihotra and milk miracles are rejected as myth or mythological adventures". It concludes, "It is therefore necessary to blend science, spiritually [sic] and wisdom". Such a blending has resulted in the patent for CUD.

Ezhavas in Kerala, gounders in Tamil Nadu or jats in Haryana do not victimise dalits to defend 'Hinduism' as much as they do to secure their caste supremacy. And when the dalits of Meenakshipuram (in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu) famously embraced Islam in 1981, they did it not to escape Hinduism, to which they anyway did not belong, but to liberate themselves from the oppression of the thevars. The Hindutva groups descended on the area, and on Tamil Nadu in general, only *after* the Meenakshipuram conversion. The assertion of caste supremacy by the shudra groups is today being increasingly expressed through Hindutva outlets like the VHP and Bajrang Dal – as seen from the experience that the targets of Hindutva are invariably the dalits and Muslims. In fact, Hindutva, as we have seen it since the 1990s, is basically an organised, pan-Indian expression of casteism to which even 'Dravidian' parties like the DMK and shudra outfits like the Telugu Desam Party lend legitimacy. A casteism backed by brahmins and other upper castes but acted out by the shudras.

More recently, the National Commission for Cattle, constituted in September 2001 when Jayendra Saraswati of the Kanchi Sankara Math threatened a fast unto death over the "neglect of the country's cow population", in its report running into 1500 pages and four volumes, suggested the constitution of a Central Rapid Protection Force to control cow slaughter; the amend-

Perspective

ment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) to detain gangs who smuggle cows; the prohibition of cross-breeding with imported cattle; demanded the scrapping of the subsidy on tractors and mechanical appliances for agriculture and encouraging instead the use of bullocks, the constitution of a permanent National Development Commission on Cows, and the introduction of the "panchgavya therapy" (*Milli Gazette* 15 August 2002).

Almost in anticipation of the NCC's recommendations, the patent for CUD and other related developments, the RSS launched a 'Rashtriya Jagran Abhiyan' in 2001 to awaken 'national consciousness'. One of the pamphlets that was issued for the exercise was *The Protection of Cow Clan*, which contained these ideas: ghee made from cow's milk saves the environment from atomic radiation; the sound of a cow's lowing automatically cures many mental disabilities and diseases; cow's urine contains copper which turns to gold on entering the human body; cow dung and urine are the best cures for stomach diseases, heart diseases, kidney ailments and tuberculosis; the urine of a virgin cow is the best; foreign cows lack the properties which Indian cows have; the Hindu *gotra* system applies to the cow-clan too.

It is not as if only the Sangh Parivar is a proponent of the sacred and therapeutic values of cow urine and dung. In Upleta, Rajkot district, Gujarat, 700 woman workers of the Congress protested the Bharatiya Janata Party's 'Gaurav Yatra' (tour of pride) by 'cleansing' the

1.5-km stretch traversed by the BJP chief minister Narendra Modi's chariot with cow urine.

Jhajjar was merely the culmination of all these events in the 'cow-belt', as the plains of north India are somewhat derisively called.

For every Saraswati Devi who is branded a witch and forced to consume shit, there is an Ulpeta-like celebration of the 'properties' of the cow's excreta. India is equally the land where a prime minister (Morarji Desai) boasted of drinking eight ounces of his own urine every morning and where Sankan of Nilakottai is forced to drink the urine of caste Hindus for asking for a piece of a land that he has a right to. A land where state-sponsored consumption of cow urine and dung complements the state's indifference to force-feeding of dalits with shit and piss.

Responding to the Thinniam incident, Monica Vincent, a Chennai-based lawyer, recalls Nelson Mandela's words in *Long Walk to Freedom*, "At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire." But how does one react to shit like this? In the context of legalised and state-sponsored racism – apartheid in South Africa – Mandela talked of fighting fire with fire; but can the dalits of India fight shit with shit?

(Author's note: I thank Sivapriya for comments and suggestions on an earlier draft, and Ravikummar for discussing various points in the essay. Editorial note: Capitalisation style reflects author's preferences.)

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LIBERATION OF THE CHILD DOMESTIC

The closets of millions in middle class South Asia contain a dirty little secret, — the treatment of children who are harnessed to work as domestics. Can we go beyond bemoaning the situation, and do something about a human rights abuse that is not really talked about because practically every urban middle class family keeps a child domestic? What does it take for a family to see its own child in the eyes of the boy or girl who shoulders the burden of its household chores?

by *T Mathew*

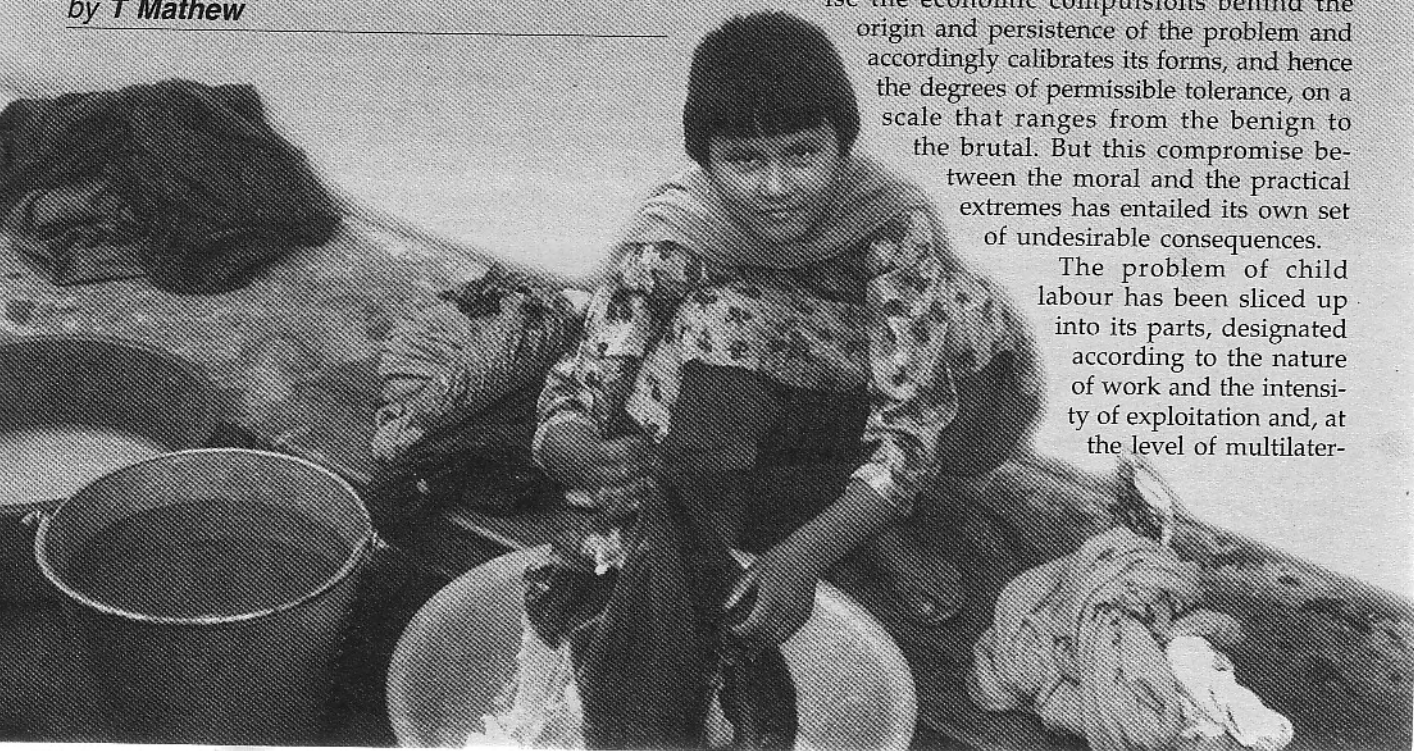
In the last two decades, enormous sums of money, more perhaps than has been earned by all the child workers of South Asia put together in the corresponding period, have been channelled into the enterprise of mitigating and eventually eliminating the practice. After all these years and despite all that money, there is little indication of any progress.

Missionary enthusiasm, moral vehemence and financial commitment have clearly not sufficed, and so, far from eliminating the practice, the number of working children has actually increased. It remains a moot and ultimately unverifiable point whether the rate of growth of child employment has come down or not. The abysmal inadequacy of the statistical record renders that an idle speculation. What matters simply is that the total numbers have increased and continue to increase. Clearly, the sweeping objective of completely eliminating all forms of child labour was based on too many virtuous presumptions, untouched by real circumstances, to ever rise above empty rhetoric.

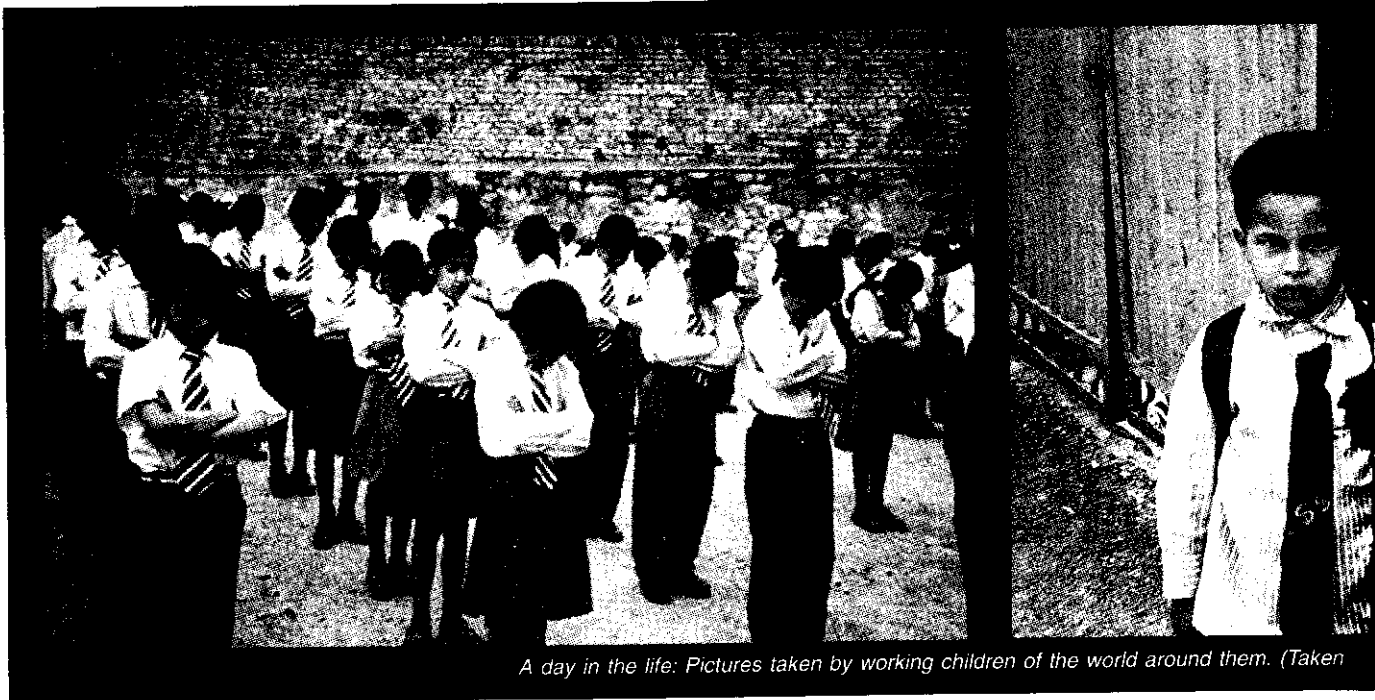
But this rhetoric at least had the merit of possessing a moral veneer, unlike the general attitude of cynical acceptance of the economic factors animating the demand for and supply of child labour. Too many million childhoods have disappeared through this crack between the gratuitous sermonising of clueless bleeding hearts and the vulgar pragmatism of hard faced utilitarians.

In recent years, a more realistic perspective that lies somewhere between the normative and pragmatic extremes has emerged. This new realism does recognise the economic compulsions behind the origin and persistence of the problem and accordingly calibrates its forms, and hence the degrees of permissible tolerance, on a scale that ranges from the benign to the brutal. But this compromise between the moral and the practical extremes has entailed its own set of undesirable consequences.

The problem of child labour has been sliced up into its parts, designated according to the nature of work and the intensity of exploitation and, at the level of multilater-



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A day in the life: Pictures taken by working children of the world around them. (Taken

an intervention, the search for solutions has been distributed among the different agencies in tune with their respective mandates. Thus there are now different categories of child labour stretching from the worst forms of child labour, which demand immediate attention, to the more benign forms which do not, and perhaps may never, receive the same attention.

Consequently, the focus, especially among influential multilateral agencies such as the International Labour Organisation, has been concentrated almost exclusively on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, notably those involving hazardous industries. The legal spotlight has therefore been wholly restricted to the prohibition of child work in the manufacturing sector, though without much success. In some quarters at least, the energy for this particular campaign has been fuelled by the Western corporate demand for parity in international labour standards.

But whatever the reasons, and notwithstanding the extremely limited relief that the law has provided, this campaign has certainly drawn attention to the plight of children working in hazardous industries, who tend to age prematurely and die in their youth. Its impact is evident from the incipient tendency among middle class consumers to boycott the products made by the labour of children. A notable example of this is the receptivity to the Delhi government's campaign against Diwali firecrackers, which is pitched on the platforms of pollution and child labour.

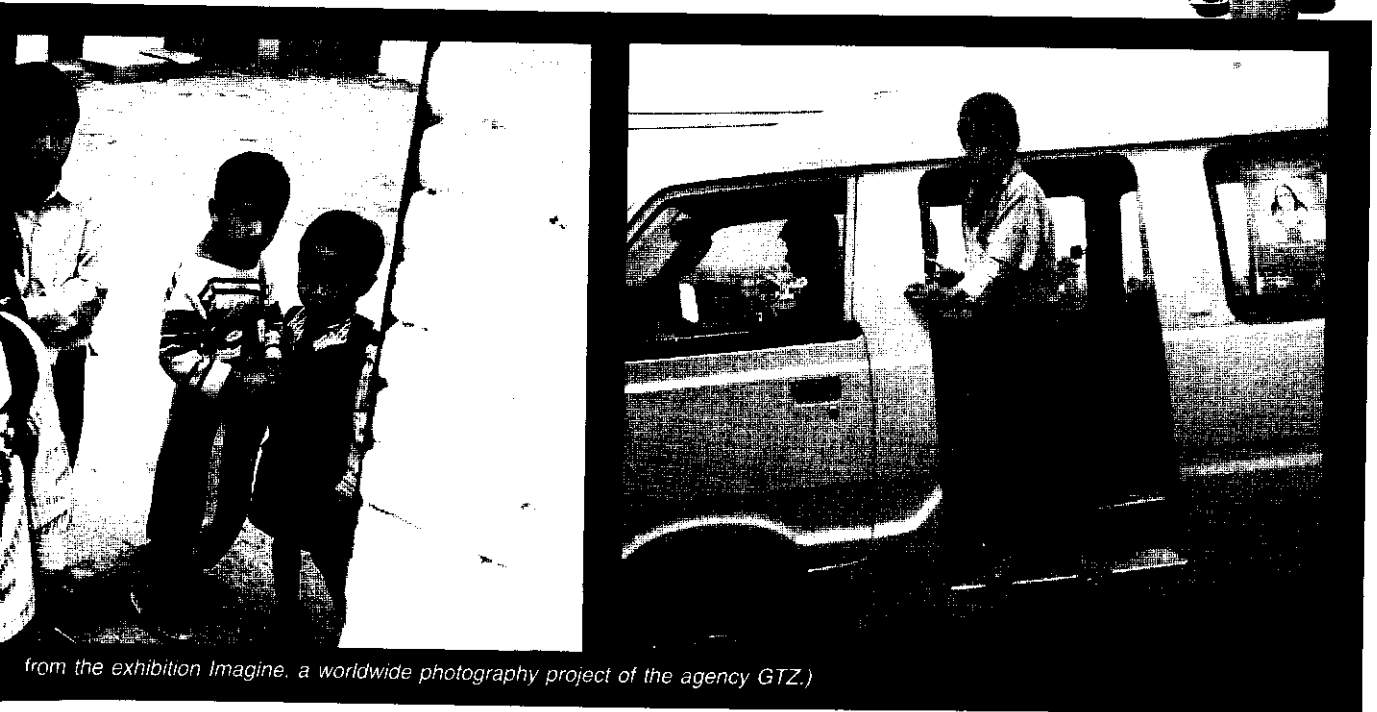
The problem however is that the amplified campaign against the worst forms of child labour has distracted attention from an invisible class of children which figures neither in the law nor in the consciousness of the public at large, which has no globally influ-

ential patrons, witting or unwitting, and about which nothing will be done in a hurry. These are the child domestic workers of the Subcontinent, the sacrifice of whose collective future is sanctified by the higher necessity of keeping in order the domestic arrangements of, among others, the very people who lead the campaign against the worst forms of child labour.

Compared to the visibly appalling conditions of work in hazardous industries, domestic work has the appearance of being a benign form of labour. But the very act of making a distinction between the worst form and other forms is also simultaneously an act of calibrating the moral disposition of the different categories of employers. As a description of the actual extent of exploitation and abuse of children under the different regimes of labour it is meaningless, based as it is on assumptions that have little basis in sociological fact.

The lenience towards child domestic work, for instance, is based on a widely held myth, encouraged by shoddy liberal thinking, about the civic and filial virtues of the urban middle class, a large and diffuse section of which employs children to fulfil the labour requirements of the household. This is a socially and economically defining class in more than one sense. The professionals who dominate public discussion, define social problems, formulate policy and implement decisions are drawn from this class.

A class that commands the public sphere and advertises its own urbane civility can scarcely be expected to equate itself with the mofussil business class which exploits the labour of children in such a public fashion. Nor for that matter is it likely to undermine the basis of the cheap labour it uses by acknowledging facts publicly. This is where the problems of child domestic



from the exhibition *Imagine*, a worldwide photography project of the agency GTZ.)

labour begin.

The worst forms of child labour typically involve a relatively small segment of the provincial entrepreneurial community. The conscience of the urban educated classes is easily stirred and just as easily assuaged by more or less token legislative measures that are considered an adequate index of how aghast everyone is at the idea of children being put to such debilitating work. Here the entire process from the employment, the exploitation, the physical injury and the enlightened litanies of outrage are very public.

By contrast, domestic labour and what it is subject to is a characteristically clandestine and concealed phenomenon, precisely because it is in the hands of the class that not only invented and refined the modern idea of privacy, but also commands the public sphere for its own self-serving ends. This is among the principal reasons why child domestic labour will never acquire the status of an urgent problem to be abolished completely. Instead, it will retain the status of a temperate form of labour, a regrettable necessity, ie a necessity for the impoverished families who eagerly send their children for labour to the lasting regret of the affluent middle class families which reluctantly hire them.

This is the clinching argument that reconciles the private exploitation of children with the public affirmation of the rights of the child, the legal equality of all human beings and the sundry other abstract clichés that the liberal middle class repeats *ad nauseam*. The moral paradox is sublimated into a civic virtue. The middle class home, which has the reputation of being the fundamental social unit for the reproduction of family values and the nurturing of children to adulthood and independence, is therefore seen to be the refuge of

the destitute child. Child labour by this token is not the consumption of labour by the affluent but an act of magnanimity to the poor for which they ought be grateful.

Condescension being the pervasive attitude, and privacy being the hallmark of the nuclear family, very little of the actual conditions of labouring minors ever becomes public. It is as well kept a secret as domestic violence, which as it turns out is a far more common private pastime of the urban middle class than its public posturing would lead us to believe. Admittedly, the conditions and consequences of work in hazardous industries are invariant and uniform for all employees whereas in domestic labour the degree of exploitation will vary from employer to employer. It will not be unreasonable to suggest that child domestic work partakes of many of the features of work in hazardous industries and in the child sex trade – the only difference is that in domestic work there is a greater dispersal and variability in incidence. But this dilution of incidence is not necessarily a guarantee against permanent debility, as so many stories that have come to light of maltreatment of child domestics within the confines of the middle class home testify.

When the middle class carries its feudal attitude to labour beyond all limits, the veil of privacy parts to reveal the scandal of the abused child. Instances of suicide, homicide, disfiguring, sexual abuse and other gross infringements have periodically trickled out, inviting attention to what actually goes on in the private universe of the nuclear family. Domestic work could potentially be among the worst forms of child labour and random interactions with children working in some of the major metropolitan cities of the Sub-

continent suggest that it is a problem that is no less serious than the recognised worst forms, and the treatment meted out is often both psychologically and physically damaging.

Pushpa and Sunil

One of the primary problems is that children working as domestics, separated from home at a formative age, find themselves trapped without social or psychological definition in a legally and morally undefined relationship of work that belongs neither to the family nor the formal contractual workplace. This results in an extraordinary level of exploitation, and evokes in the child a range of sentiments and emotions as a routine technique of human resource management.

For Pushpa, an 11-year-old living and working in a house in suburban Calcutta, the rudimentary moral, emotional and mental resources that she accumulated in her life of eight years in her parents' home in the 24 Pargana district of West Bengal, cannot help her cope with any part of the job she has been doing for the last three years, including the very uncertain and capricious relationship her employers chose to have with her. And she has not acquired any new psychological resources in the three years she has been living with her employers, precisely because of the unpredictability of their behaviour towards her. The only constant she knows is the lack of pattern in her life.

Sometimes when there are guests at home, they call Pushpa their daughter and lie through their teeth of the things they have done for her, just as they lied to the police once about the theft of things they never had in the robbery that never took place. They had asked her to lie to the police about noises in the night that she had not heard. On that occasion, they had been pleased with her and called her a dutiful daughter. But when Pushpa lied about the missing pastry from the fridge that hunger drove her to eat, she was beaten black and blue for thieving and lying, before being told how lucky she was to be living in a comfortable house, away from the misery of her good-for-nothing parents. Pushpa does not understand that the urban middle class must bear the burden of its pretences as lightly as possible and lying in public is part of the just life.

Pushpa has difficulty explaining her confusion. At her parents' house there was no need to steal anything. Unlike her employers, her parents never demanded any gratitude for the little they were able to give her. She does not have the mental resources to comprehend why her new 'parents' can eat at all hours of the day while



Billboard in Kathmandu exhorts the people not to exploit child domestics.

she has to make do with the morsels she is handed out twice a day. And what she gets to eat here in Calcutta is far less than what her parents were able to provide. Pushpa only knows that to be a 'daughter' now means to be perpetually hungry.

Pushpa's life, barring some minor details, is not very different from Sunil's. But Sunil's memories are different from hers. 12-year-old Sunil lives on the fifth floor of an east Delhi apartment block. He does not know it is east Delhi. In the four years he has lived there he has never been out of the house, except once when his uncle had come to take him home to Dhanbad for two weeks. He works for a middle-aged couple. There is an old woman in the house, the

mother of the man. The man's wife is out for a large part of the day. About the man, he knows very little, except that he comes home very drunk late in the night. For Sunil, that is as it should be. He has seen his own father do that everyday.

His employers do not talk to him very much except to issue curt orders. But the husband and wife fight all the time, and when guests come everyone joins in the shouting. Sunil's employers are prominent journalists, but he does not know that. They believe in market forces and the freedom of speech, about which also he knows nothing. Not that asking would help, because Sunil really does not know much about speech. For four years, he has lived practically in silence. Back in Dhanbad, he at least had a language and he could speak and roam freely. Now, trapped among the freedom-loving bourgeoisie he has spent the last four years of his life in the two-by-six balcony of a fifth floor apartment. On the balcony there is an old cupboard. He sleeps on the third shelf of this cupboard. In winter he sleeps with the cupboard door shut.

Sunil's main job is to keep company for the old woman of the house. He has been trained to answer the phone in the absence of his employers. He sits on the balcony in his spare time, smiles a lot and talks to himself in the telephonic mode. It is very civil but tedious as he repeats the same lines endlessly. Below, children shout at each other as they play. Inside, the old woman broods and prays. Sometimes a young woman comes to the house and sits with the old lady. The two of them talk at length and he sits on the floor and listens. There is the odd word he can understand. When the old woman is through with speaking, the visitor leaves after collecting some money.

He does not know that the old woman is trying to



buy her way out of loneliness. Some months ago, the visitor stopped coming. One day a few weeks ago, when he was on the balcony in the middle of a polite telephonic conversation with himself, the old woman came with a stool, placed it on the floor, stood on it and flung herself over the railing. There was a hue and cry in the house for many days. He could not understand what the fuss was all about. Some years ago his elder brother who worked at the factory was brought home in a mangled heap. His parents had put the body inside a pile of wood and burnt him without a word. There was no commotion then.

Some things have changed since the old lady died. He does not really need to answer the phone. His employers have phones they carry about with them. Now he has only himself to talk to. Even the solace of strangers has been taken away.

Ranjit, Meena and Anil

While child domestics all over are pushed to the extremes of their physical abilities, Pushpa and Sunil have also been mentally tortured. They are being gradually desocialised and rendered unfit for anything other than taking orders. The poverty of their homes may have impeded the development of their physiological and psychological resources, but in the new environment where they only witness affluence without experiencing it, their natural cerebral capacities have actually atrophied. The problem is that there are no laws to cognise the mental disintegration of a human being as a crime.

Even if it is granted that gruesome practices of this kind constitute a grey zone in which legal provisions are not easily applicable, surely there cannot be any explanation for why families from the professional stratum are allowed to get away with violations of a physical nature that lie within the ambit of ordinary criminal laws. Ranjit is a street kid in Calcutta. He has been hanging out for the last few years with a gang of kids near a garbage heap outside a hotel. He denies taking drugs, but external evidence suggests otherwise. Ranjit is 14 years old and hails from a village near Ranchi. Five years ago he was brought to Calcutta by his former employer, an unmarried man in his 30s.

For Ranjit, the new life was comfortable for a couple of weeks. He had enough to eat, the work was not too demanding, he could watch television through the day, and he could chat from the balcony with the boy who worked next door. Apart from cleaning the small flat, he only had to serve a light breakfast and dinner to his employer. But he ran away after six months because the nights had begun to get excruciatingly painful. His employer often had a guest who stayed the night at the house. About two weeks after he had been installed in the new house, the employer and his friend began to make nightly visits to his room and make all manner of sexual demands. Ranjit did not know what was going on. Unable to bear the pain and humiliation he ran

away early one morning. Not knowing how to get back to Ranchi, he hung about and gradually learnt the ways of the street.

If Ranjit had an exit option, bad as it may have been, Meena, a 12-year-old in an affluent locality in Kathmandu, suffers her lot without even the capacity to be angry. She lives with her employers on the ground floor of a two-storey building which they own. She shows no outward sign of physical abuse but in many ways she is not real. During the day, her employers leave for work and she is locked out of the house and left to her own devices in the compound that she is not allowed to leave. She has in the last many years not spoken to anybody her age. She does not know the name or location of her village, nor even where she currently lives. Meena has not seen her family since she came to Kathmandu four years ago. Her parents are too poor to come to Kathmandu to fetch her, and her employers are too parsimonious to take her to them. They are also fearful of losing someone who they have practically converted into a slave.

To battle her loneliness, Meena lurks about near the gate and befriends strangers on the road. She and the dog of the house are given the same food, which she cooks for three days at a time. And at night, the son of the house repeatedly molests her whenever he comes to stay. Sometimes he lends her to the middle-aged British tenant on the upper floor. She does not know how to be angry, so she cries to the dog. Her mannerisms have become strange and do not belong to any of the normal categories of growing children. She calls the dog her younger brother and of late has begun to mimic its ways.

Having already been beaten by her employers and called a whore for telling them about their son and the tenant, Meena does not want to discuss the nature of the sexual assaults on her at any length. Among other things, she fears that her *dai* (elder brother) who molests her will get into trouble with the police. She does not know about the Children's Act of 1992. Even if she did, it would not matter much, because this act does not offer her any protection since it takes no cognisance of child domestics. And now, after all these months she is not even certain whether what is being done to her is wrong, or whether it is simply part of her duties as a domestic worker. She is inclined to believe the latter. On the other hand, she does not know what to do about the persistent pain in her abdomen.

Meena has spoken about it now and then to Anil, the boy who works in the even bigger house next door. But Anil could not care less. He has problems of his own. His main problem is that he cannot even see Meena very well. He does not really know what she

The December issue of *Himal* will carry a full-length review of *Home and Hegemony: Domestic service in South and Southeast Asia*, edited by Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey (Michigan University Press, 2000).

looks like. In fact, he no longer knows what most things look like. He is 14 years old but looks like he is eight. He works for a middle-age woman who lives alone, except when her husband visits from India, where he works for most of the year. The husband is a brute, while the woman is very mild in her manners. But there is little difference in the way they both treat Anil. If anything, the mild mannered woman is the cause of his plight.

Anil is allowed less than six hours of sleep and he works for close to 18. All he is fed is a handful of *chiura* (pounded rice) and tea in the morning, followed by another handful about 16 hours later. He must wake up by half past four to prepare the house for the woman's morning worship ritual and carry on through the day till about 11 pm, when he retires after washing dishes at the tap in the back garden, even on freezing winter nights. He must last the entire day on the meagre rations of *chiura* and tea. Anil, naturally, suffers from various ailments related to vitamin deficiency. Mostly importantly, the lack of Vitamin A has affected his eyesight. He bumps into things when he moves and has begun to peer like an old man. When he is despondent, he sits on the terrace and flings stones at where he knows the water pipe is. It makes a 'metallic' sound on the rare occasion that he hits the target.

The young man knows he is going blind and he also knows that nothing can be done about it unless the woman who worships the idols of her pantheon without fail at the crack of dawn mends her ways. She claims that she took him to a doctor who told her he would get better in another three years. Some well-meaning students who live nearby sneaked him off to an eye doctor who assured them that the boy would shortly go blind if his diet did not improve. The students have informed Anil's employer but she is adamant that the boy's illness has nothing to do with his diet or her attitude. And she claims that she feeds the boy what she herself eats. Whatever her claims, the fact of the matter is that Anil will be blind by the time he is 15. Perhaps he would have had a fighting chance if he had stayed on in his village. Instead his parents had pinned their hopes on the woman from Kathmandu.

Anil's story is tragic but there may still be a glimmer of hope for him. His life at least is not yet over, unlike Rehana's. For some years, Rehana was one of the 300,000 child domestic workers in Dhaka. One day more than two years ago she was beaten to death by her employer, who was briefly arrested and soon let out on bail. Rehana died without telling her truth, so nobody will ever know what happened to her. Her tale of misery cannot be recounted, and it is not possible to provide any detail. Some life stories can at least be partly chronicled but there are many million others that will forever remain untold, a mass tragedy that emanates from the middle class households all over South Asia,

which keep and exploit child domestics. For, every individual child worker bears the burden of some tragedy which makes him or her a labourer before reaching adulthood. And behind all child domestics are the multiple tragedies that their families suffer, the inescapable compulsions that make them send their sons and daughters to join well-to-do families in the city, in the hope that they will be fed, clothed and treated with a little bit kindness for the labour that they provide. Much of the time, these expectations are not met.

Chinks in the armour

Child domestic labour is not an independent variable to be tackled in isolation. The fact of child labour arises from the larger macroeconomic conditions that affect different families in different ways. But the realities of child domestic work are almost entirely a result of the attitudes that prevail in the private world of the urban middle class family. This is why, despite the peculiarly perverse practices that go on inside this private world, child domestic labour still retains the potential of being a beneficial arrangement for children who live in poverty.

No amount of strenuous effort can transform a hazardous industry into the site of a superior form of production, and no degree of reform can ease the life of a child sex worker. The problem in those instances lies in the unalterable nature of the work itself. On the other hand, in domestic work, the hazard does not lie in the nature of the work but in the attitude of the employer. Therefore, by simply tapping into the existing moral

When the state writes off their fiscal guilt, the affluent classes can write off their social guilt

resources of the middle class family, child domestic work can actually be transformed into an honest barter, in which poverty trades its labour for the possibility of a slightly better future. This does not call for any deep structural change. If the urban middle class can be made to practise the cant of welfare that it spouts to justify child domestic work, the problem is automatically solved.

The middle class rears its own children to succeed in life. But it does not extend the conditions in which it raises its own children to the children of others who labour in their households. It only takes a small attitudinal change for child domestic workers to be brought within the benevolence of the affluent home. This means integrating the child worker into the employing family's paradigm of moral obligations. It is, of course, true that even small degrees of attitudinal change are hard to effect, particularly when it comes to the prevailing attitude to labour in the region.

There is obviously no guaranteed system of changing a social attitude, but it is still possible to identify certain approaches to the problem that may well pay off over time. But for that, it is necessary to first identify the chinks in the middle class armour. Apart from



being a glutinously self-righteous class, it has a propensity for certain well-defined activities that can be exploited for the purposes of reorienting the relationship between the employer and the employee into as equal an arrangement as the circumstances will permit. At least two plausible arenas of intervention suggest themselves.

It is a sociologically certified tragedy that this class and its offspring are notorious consumers of entertainment, particularly television. The more they are bombarded with a television truth the more they tend to be influenced by it. In the present mix of entertainment programming, practically everything that is screened on television deals with the cares, concerns and the trivia of affluent existence, presenting among other things, caricatured depictions of the 'servant class' that pass for humour. Such programmes are also careful not to show children working in the houses of the affluent.

If there has to be a change in attitude, imaginative programming pitched in different ways at different age groups and showing the realities of domestic work by

children in well-to-do houses is a necessary first step. This does not necessarily mean making gloomy programmes about domestic child labour. It is about devising creative ways of seamlessly weaving the dismal realities of the child domestic into programmes that otherwise concentrate on themes that appeal to middle class audiences. In particular, it is worthwhile to win over middle class children who are constant witnesses to the discriminatory practices that go on under the roofs of their homes, and who can

be made to question such practices rather easily. The success of the Delhi government's campaign against firecrackers is because of precisely this constituency. Without neutralising the existing trends in television programming there can be absolutely no way of penetrating the middle class consciousness in a way that the world of hundreds of thousands of child domestics can be improved beyond token gestures.

Such subtle media campaigns must also be accompanied by other measures that can free ride on existing institutional practices. For instance, there is the entire arena of fiscal policy. In robust social democracies, fiscal policies have a strong family orientation that is designed to ensure the welfare of future generations without compromising the current labour requirements of these societies. States in South Asia have historically been unable, and in more recent times been forbidden by international mandate, to introduce or sustain systematic social welfare. The only feasible approach in the circumstances is to campaign for appropriate fiscal incentives.

This is where the other notorious failing of the South Asian middle class, viz tax default, can be

suitably exploited. There is little point providing conditional tax relief to people who in any case will default. Instead, the conditionalities should be added to the routine mechanisms that finance ministries have devised to garner some revenue from evaded tax. Every so many years, general amnesty is offered to tax violators who declare their illegal incomes and pay a flat percentage as tax.

Since this kind of conversion of illegal incomes to legal incomes happens anyway, it can be put to good use in the campaign to regulate the conditions of child domestic work. Proof of the fair treatment of employed children, ie evidence of their schooling, their medical insurance, their bank balance, their medically certified nutritional status, and so on could be made a condition for such routine measures that are designed to dilute the effects of fiscal violation. When the state writes off their fiscal guilt the affluent classes can also simultaneously write off their social guilt.

But if this is to succeed, there must be a clear recognition of some very basic facts. The middle class will not bear the burden of the child's welfare unless the

Child domestic work can be transformed into an honest barter: poverty trades its labour for the hope of a better future

facilitating circumstances are made available. This will necessarily entail, among others, the setting up of non-formal schools for working children and subsidised medical facilities. This is where the commitment of the multilateral agencies will be tested. The Washington Consensus, that unilateral agenda of the Fund-Bank, does not favour non-productive expenditures which place additional pressure on the fiscal deficit. Many of the multilateral agencies, like the United Nations Develop-

ment Programme, have themselves become converts to this cause. Their real commitment to the welfare of working children depends on their capacity to reinstate the agenda of social expenditure and not on the frequency and shrillness with which they mouth clichés about strengthening civil society and forging social partnerships with the private sector.

If the normative prescriptions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) are to be treated seriously, it is necessary to get away from the flippant attitude that has come to dominate 'development'. Development professionals now speak the language of privatisation with the mindless zeal of fanatics. If they are earnest, then it is time to get real. IMF orthodoxies are not very child-friendly. And merely carrying out media programmes about the cruelty of child labour will not suffice. Everyone knows that already. ▽

This focus on child domestic labour was written with inputs from Afsan Choudhury (Dhaka), Mitu Varma (New Delhi), Rajashri Dasgupta (Calcutta) and Samden Sherpa (Kathmandu), as well as from the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia.

A MAJOR advance was achieved in South Asian journalism with the starting of a weekly Hindi magazine, *Outlook Saptahik*, brought out by Vinod Mehta of *Outlook* (pic). At long last the Hindi-reading people of northern India will finally (hopefully) have a source of news analysis that will go a long way in providing the liberal point of view to them. The fact is that magazines such as *Dinman*, *Dharmayug* and *Ravivar* were killed off by their publishers more than a decade ago, leaving the field empty except for niche market publications such as *Hansa* (which has remained restricted in circulation) and *Maya* (which has gone rapidly downmarket). What emerged instead was daily broadsheets, which other than the low-circulation *Jansatta*, provided news but poor analysis, and were particularly prone to reactionary coverage of all the critical issues of present-day India, including war and peace, communalism, Hindutva, nuclearisation. Equally, the Hindi-reading public has not been provided with the perspective it needs to countenance economic globalisation, industrial policy, consumerism, the rise of the middle class, and the distress being felt all over the Hindi-speaking world due to rapid cultural decline. The Hindi edition of *India Today*, which the Hindi *Outlook* obviously has plans to take on, is not adequate to meet the needs of the times because it is essentially a translation of the English *India Today*, which means that, firstly, it is increasingly right-wing which is hardly where the death in Hindi media is at present, and secondly, the demography for which the English edition is prepared is light-years from the where the Hindi reader stands. So, all in all, it is good that the Hindi heartland now finally has a magazine of its own. In the days ahead, if this magazine fulfils its mission of providing the alternative and liberal viewpoint and coverage of events – without being accused of exaggeration – one can expect a change in the politics of India and of the Subcontinent as the Hindi-speaking mass receives information from a different, inclusive angle. The only thing required then would be an Urdu newsmagazine of similar calibre in Pakistan. Peace, then, may just be at hand.



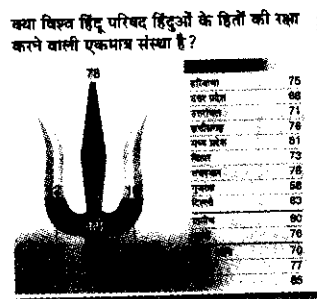
Vinod Mehta promises in the first editorial of the first issue (14 October) that *Outlook Saptahik* will contain mostly original material rather than irrelevant stuff culled from the English *Outlook*. And, indeed, he has chosen the esteemed Alok Mehta as editor of the Hindi weekly. In his first editorial, which is on corruption throughout the land, Mehta more than once recalls Jai Prakash Narayan, which is a good indication of the 'politics' to be practiced by the new publication, which puts it squarely in the 'liberal-progressive-Bihar-socialist' bracket and in stark opposition to the Hindi *India Today* that is gunning for a Hinduised capitalist

state. The columns are by prominent left-of-centre names including Kamaleshwar, who writes a column claiming in the title that "Hindutva was born of inferiority", adding that India is being pushed not towards a battle of ideas, but towards civil war. The litterateur Bhisham Sahani in his article decries the impact of the Gujarat killings on the concept of India as a common inheritance of all communities. Even more interestingly, the cover story of this inaugural issue of *Outlook Saptahik* is based on a poll taken on Hindutva-related themes, and the results are as revealing (and satisfying) for the South Asian liberal anywhere as they will be instructive for the Hindu readers of the new magazine.

Thus, Atal Behari Vajpayee is considered more a representative of Hindutva's ideology (28 percent) than LK Advani (15 percent), with 25 percent opting for 'no one'. When asked whether the Vishwa Hindu Parishad should be considered the only organisation that can protect the rights of Hindus (actually, a loaded question), the answer is 12 percent 'yes', 78 percent in the negative, and 10 percent 'undecided'. To the question whether secularism is anti-Hindu, 80 percent answer in the negative, 13 percent in the positive and seven percent are undecided. Reflecting the opinion of the Hindi-fold, which is the target of the magazine, the poll was carried out in the states which make up 'Hindi India': Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi.

THE LAND of the Bangla harbours an incongruous fear of foreign journalists. In fact, it is quite paranoid on the matter. Anyone can pass through immigration at Dhaka Airport easily enough, but if you are a media-person, then you are picked out of the crowd, taken to a cubby-hole and grilled by senior officers. The extra-sensitivity of the Dhaka authorities to the press is quite out of proportion with what the press may do to the Bangla nation. Certainly, Bangladeshi society is not so paranoid within itself, so why this high anxiety about letting in journalists? The only suggestion Chhetria Patrakar (oops, that last term means 'journalist', there goes my Bangladesh visa!) can come up with is that some politician or bureaucrat sometime in the past decided to create the hurdles at immigration for journalists and it just set the trend. Listen to the experience of two South Asian colleagues; their identities are concealed for obvious reasons.

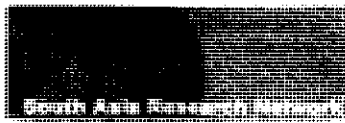
A journalist arriving from Kathmandu was accosted at the immigration counter at Dhaka Airport because he had filled in "journalist" on his disembarkation card against the query, 'profession'. It caused quite a flurry among the immigration babus, until the confusion was suddenly



cleared – he was an ‘editor’, it was discovered much to official relief. The matter was sorted out with our friend complying with their wish that he cut out “journalist” and replace the word with “editor”. He passed through into the exhilarating evening air of Dhaka, and attended a seminar peopled mostly by former foreign ministry turned track two-wallas.

Writes a journalist from Bombay:

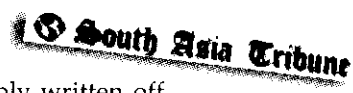
I applied for a visa to Bangladesh as I was invited for a conference, jointly sponsored by one of their ministries. The visa application was submitted more than a week before the day of departure. But despite daily queries, the visa was not issued because it was apparently awaiting clearance from the ‘journalist section’ of the External Affairs Ministry in Dhaka. The High Commission had received a fax directly from the ministry that was hosting the conference with my passport details. The visa was finally issued late on Friday night in Delhi when I was supposed to travel late Saturday night from Bombay. On arrival in Dhaka, a policeman intervened while the immigration official was processing my passport. He insisted that he wanted to see my letter of invitation and return ticket. He took all this, plus my passport, to make photocopies. The day after I arrived, a Special Branch official visited the hotel where I was staying to inquire about my whereabouts, whether I had checked in and when I was scheduled to leave. On the day I left, I had two customs officials waiting for me. They accompanied me to the check-in and ‘walked’ me through immigration! My only question is, why?



IT MAY be worth your while to visit the *South Asia Tribune*, which is a weekly web newspaper (ISSN: 1684-2075) published from Washington DC by Shaheen Sehbai, former editor of the English-language daily, *The News*. If anything, SAT seems to be a crusading web paper as far Pakistan is concerned, exposing stories about the military regime. Sehbai told the *Los Angeles Times* that he is living in self-imposed exile in the United States with his immediate family because he was harassed by the Pakistani military for having uncovered fraud in the government’s pension fund, and also for having published a story that said Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, convicted in the murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, had admitted links to the ISI (Inter-services Intelligence). The site is certainly crusading as it takes on the military administration, but there seems to be overwhelming emphasis on Benazir Bhutto to the exclusion of Mian Nawaz Sharif, at least in the latest web edition. A link is provided to “Worldwide coverage of the Sehbai family harassment case”, which lists media stories about the trouble Musharraf’s regime was giving to Sehbai’s extended family which is still

in Pakistan.

The highlights of upcoming issues include an impressive listing of exposés on Pakistani politics and economy. If the *Tribune* is able to deliver expect to see, among others, the following stories: how Pakistan rushed to buy a “junk space satellite” just because otherwise the Indians would get it; how the consumer is being bilked with sky-rock-eting electricity costs; how the Pakistan Ordnance Factory imports defective artillery shells worth millions, and how the losses are simply written off while importers and exporters “enjoy their loot”; a count of how many Pakistani officials and diplomats, civilian and in uniform, refuse to return to Pakistan after completing their posting in the US, and how the numbers are “embarrassing numbers”; and how car manufacturing in Pakistan is a “certified fraud” in which influential groups obtain car making licenses allowing manufacturers to import these otherwise banned imports, and how “these greedy car makers have been joined by the military government to rip the people off their money. A huge scandal in the making”.



To see if the website delivers on the promise of crusading journalism, something that all of South Asia sorely lacks, check www.satribune.com

THE SOUTH Asia Research Network (SARN) is an electronic initiative of the Social Science Research Council, the New York-based organisation that has main-

tained a special interest in promoting social science expertise in the Subcontinent. SARN is a network to facilitate “the production, exchange and dissemination of basic research knowl-

edge in the social sciences and humanities, and to link researchers, scholars, teachers, students and practitioners whose primary area of interest is South Asia and South Asian Studies”. The electronic network is to facilitate access to scarce academic resources and to enable dialogue and exchange between scholars who work in and on all countries of South Asia.

The website, www.scholarsnet.info, could become a hub for social science researchers in the region. It has listings of libraries, research centres, fellowships, and workshops. (The section for journals is as yet under construction, however.) So, even the maverick scholar who will not spend time culling such information from the social circuit, a dying breed if ever there was one, can pick up on what is happening where and who is looking to fill vacancies without having to keep an ear to the ground. One thing to bear in mind though, if you are visiting the site for libraries or research centres – for the SARN, Uttar Pradesh is “Eastern India”. And for some reason, so is Dharamsala where the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives is located.

—Chhetria Patrakar

Dying day by day

Taking stock of mental and social health in Kashmir.

by *Fayaz Bukhari*

Body counts and missing person reports reveal one side of the human toll from Kashmir's insurgency, but they are unable to tell us much about the mental state of the living. How does one assess the mental and social health of Kashmiris, and by what measure do we calculate the accumulated damage on the mind of 13 years of conflict? Data collected from Srinagar hospitals and social surveys conducted by scholars and students in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are beginning to provide a partial answer to this pressing question. What they reveal is a highly traumatised population beleaguered by the effects of daily violence and social dislocation. Even if all violence in the state were to stop tomorrow, the psychological and social damage would continue to be felt for years to come. But the fact is that this political conflict is not likely to be tidily resolved in the foreseeable future, and the battle between the up to 700,000 troops stationed in the state and the 3500-odd insurgents (the figure presented by New Delhi) is expected to continue. Meanwhile, a continuously rising tide of depression, troubled families, delayed marriages and suicides is swamping the state.

Missing persons, disturbed survivors

Official statistics say 13,184 people have gone missing in Kashmir since 1990, most of whom state officials say have joined militant outfits, a claim disputed by many families. Out of this total, 135 (about one percent) have been declared dead by the government. Most families that are missing members have, despite repeated efforts, failed to find satis-

factory explanations for the disappearances. In 1994, a group of these relatives formed the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). They have since visited security officials, police stations, politicians, courts and prisons throughout India with photographs of sons, brothers, fathers and husbands, trying to settle the uncertainty surrounding the disappearances. As of June this year, the State Human Rights Commission had



received 1726 complaints concerning disappearances, out of which 811 have been 'processed', leaving 915 pending.

"There is a method in these disappearances", says Parvez Imroz, an APDP member. "The law enforcement agencies arrest people during raids, routine patrolling, search operations. When the relatives approach the security officials, they usually receive assurances that their relatives will be released shortly. That never happens. After a few visits the relatives are told that the people they are looking for were not even arrested. The local police almost never file a first-information-report against the security forces". The disappearance of thousands of young men has had a measurable economic impact since it is usually the earning member of the family who goes missing, leaving behind 'half-widows', women who for all

practical purposes have lost their husbands, and children, who are sooner rather than later deserted by in-laws. But more corrosive still is the psychological impact on broken families – constant agony and trans-generational trauma. Over time, these develop into mental disorders, says Amit Basu, a psychiatrist who is helping APDP set up trauma centres throughout J&K.

Records from the out-patient department of Srinagar's Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases show that in the 1980s about 100 people were reporting for treatment in a week; today, between 200 and 300 people arrive every day. Most self-admitting patients are women aged 16 to 25. Because of the social stigma associated with psychological disorders, doctors believe that no more than 10 percent of those in need of psychiatric care are actually approaching the hospital.

One outcome of this under-treated trauma is an increase in teenage girl suicides. One 19-year-old girl, Jameela, witnessed her aunt being hit by a stray bullet while working in the kitchen garden, and later also witnessed a shootout in her locality. With no history of psychiatric problems, she began suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders: recurrent, intrusive and distressing recollection of the events, marked irritability, outbursts of anger, difficulty in concentrating, sleeplessness, sadness, and disinterest in all social, domestic and college activities. Following a minor altercation with her sister, she consumed pesticide and ended her life.

Depression and suicidal tendencies also affect male and female grown-ups. On an average day, two to three cases of attempted suicide are admitted into Srinagar's two main hospitals, known simply as SMHS and SKIMS. A large number of people, mostly from the villages, do not even make it to the city hospitals – they die on the way or in local health centres. For a hospital that rarely had to address psychiatric problems till before the troubles, in 1998 SMHS registered 167 suicide

deaths – 92 women and 75 men. In 1999, the total was 208 – 144 women and 64 men. Between April 2000 and March 2001, altogether 567 suicides – 377 women and 190 men – were registered by the hospital.

Researchers attribute this dramatic rise to the fear, tension and uncertainty prevailing in J&K. Suicides among newly married men are also on the rise because of impotency, which doctors attribute to mental trauma from shock. Poverty and unemployment, other outcomes of the violence, are also causes of depression and suicide. These desperate measures, however, are not taken by only the local civilians; Indian troops stationed in Kashmir over a period of several years have also been similarly affected. According to published data, over 400 armed forces personnel have committed suicide in Kashmir since the insurgency began in 1989. Significantly, their reasons for committing suicide are not very different from those of civilians – fear of death, mental stress, but also homesickness. Srinagar's psychiatric hospital also receives a large number of patients from the paramilitary services.

Families without fathers

In the last 13 years, the political unrest in Jammu and Kashmir is thought to have produced about 18,000 widows and 40,000 orphans in the state. This growing population of indigents has become one of the biggest challenges facing Kashmiri society, and yet it is an escalating tragedy that has not received due attention. Widows are not typically acceptable brides, as Kashmiri society places a taboo on remarriage unlike Muslim societies in many other parts of the world. About 80 percent of widows are aged 25 to 32 with children below the age of 10. Even when remarriage is possible, many women prefer to remain single out of apprehensions for their children's welfare. A University of Kashmir study showed that 91 percent of widows surveyed had not considered remarriage.

Aisha, from Budgam, became a

widow at 22 when her militant husband was killed in 1990. She has resisted pressure from her in-laws and parents to remarry, and has declined an offer from a brother-in-law. "If I remarry, my children would be ill-treated", she says. "I would then have another responsibility and my children's lives would be ruined. The objective of my life is to give them better education so that they do not get a feeling that they are orphans. Being a widow is my fate and I do not want to seal the fate of my children".

The University of Kashmir study revealed that widows face three sets of problems. The first difficulties surface soon after the death of their partners, in the forms of emotional stress, denial of inheritance rights, sexual harassment and general social undesirability. The second wave

For the sake of the living, there need to be fewer deaths

of difficulties arises gradually, as loss of control over the children, and a growing sense of inferiority. Finally, the widows are burdened by the long-term and growing demands of house care and the assignment of menial responsibilities. Altogether, the women find their position thoroughly compromised.

The Kashmir clergy claim to play no role in the taboo on widow remarriage, as Islam clearly encourages Muslims to remarry, and men are specifically encouraged to marry widows. In fact, polygamy in Islam is intended to provide sustenance and social security to widows through remarriage. In Kashmir, however, Islam has been greatly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, which may go to explain why widow remarriage is uncommon here. Widows of insurgents or the 'half-widows' of surrendered insurgents are the least desirable of all, as they are directly associated with violence through their husbands.

There are a few young men, however, who are willing to challenge the mores of Kashmiri society and marry widows. Riyaz Ahmad Khan, barely 20 years old, married the widow of his maternal uncle, a released insurgent who was killed by unknown assailants. She is more than 10 years his senior, but he feels proud of having married a widow and he hopes to create an example for others to follow so that more widows are given a respectable place in society. He challenges separatist political leaders, who pay much lip service to the sufferings of the people of the Kashmir valley, to come forward and marry their children to the widows of the conflict.

Brides without grooms

The society has so transformed over the last decade that even finding a life partner in Kashmir has become a struggle. The 'marriage market' has undergone fundamental changes that damage the prospects of both sexes, but women in particular. "The market, especially for girls, is down", explains marriage broker Ghulam Muhammad Bhat. "Now even school teachers are getting matches whereas they used to have a difficult time. Parents are willing to marry off their daughters to anybody who is an earning hand". In spite of this, Bhat has a long list of girls who have been waiting for matches for many years. Young men have become extremely selective about prospective partners in these economically trying times. They want working women to help support the family, and not just any working woman will do. This explains why Bhat's list does not shrink even though the girls on it are mostly highly educated; they work in private schools for meagre salaries while most men want to marry government schoolteachers who have a good and assured salary and also the time after school hours to take care of the children.

In Kashmir, women traditionally married in their early 20s but now many remain unmarried simply because there are not enough men

available. Professor Bashir Ahmad Dabla, head of the sociology department at the University of Kashmir, says the number of eligible boys has dropped considerably as a direct result of the disquiet in the state. Hundreds have been killed, debilitated, arrested or permanently displaced. A colleague of Dabla's, Shabir Ahmad, says the increasing emphasis on higher education has lessened the number of young marriages. In the case of professionals, choice is often restricted to those in a related field, which prolongs a search. "It is ironic that instead of being a relieving factor, education becomes a positive hindrance to marriage", he says. "There is an inverse relationship between education and timely marriages". The prolonged turmoil has also intensified class divisions in the Kashmir

valley. Most parents do not have the money to marry off their daughters, and even earning men often balk at the prospect of marriage.

As marriages get increasingly delayed, and young people try to cope with the increased stress in their lives, the impact is being felt by the next generation. There has been a rise recently in congenital disorders, particularly Down's Syndrome, which has a known association with the age of the mother at childbirth. Further, there has also been an increase in recurrent abortions and gynaecological complications. 'Multi Dimensional Problems of Women in Kashmir', a study sponsored by the Indian Planning Commission, suggests that late marriages, which is an increasing reality in Kashmir, affect the general health of couples and their children.

Joblessness and underemployment continue to destabilise Kashmir, as each additional year of violence further undermines economic and social stability. Nearly 100,000 graduates in the state are unemployed. It does not portend well for the future that owing to the conflict many times that number have never seen the inside of a school room. Tourism, a former staple of the Kashmiri economy, has predictably collapsed with the rise of militancy in the state as a result of the ongoing conflict. Social indicators suggest that with continuing violence the human toll, imperfectly measured in delayed marriages, unfulfilled marriages, mental disorders and suicides, will only grow with the coming generation. For the sake of the living, there need to be fewer deaths. ▽

South Asian Classifieds

Fellowship

Asia Research Centre, London School of Economics, UK

The Sir Ratan Tata Foundation at the London School of Economics & Political Science invites applications for the 'Sir Ratan Tata Fellowship'. Applicants should be established scholars (normally under 40 years of age) in the social sciences with experience of research on South Asia and should hold a Ph.D. or comparable qualifications and experience. Research themes include Poverty, Inequality, Human Development and Social Exclusion; Quality of Public Life; Regional Disparities; Identities - Gender, Ethnicity, Language; Economy and Environment. Application deadline 20 December 2002. For more information, see posting at www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/asia/tata.html

Conference

Cultures of Masculinity in South Asia: Exploring the Contexts
December 2003
Delhi, INDIA

Call for Papers

Papers are invited for a conference on the cultures of masculinity in South Asia. The conference aims to bring together a wide variety of participants: historians anthropologists, sociologists, film and media studies scholars, NGO workers, literature specialists (especially those working in languages other than English), and others with an interest in exploring the cultures of masculinity across a number of registers.

Final dates for the conference will be confirmed in due course. Please send expressions of interest to Dr. Radhika Chopra (Delhi School of Economics, Delhi): choson@bol.net.in

Conference

Third International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS3)
19-22 August 2003
SINGAPORE

Call for papers

The ICAS3 Organising Committee invites proposals for organised panels, individual papers, poster presentations and special meetings on all aspects of Asia research. For more information, see: www.fas.nus.edu.sg/icas3/call4pp.htm

Story Proposals

Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency is inviting mid-career, print journalists to submit creative proposals for in-depth, investigative articles on Asian migration and its links to reproductive, sexual and emotional health, under its media project 'On the Asian Migration Trail'. IPS Asia-Pacific is looking for story proposals of 500 words, explaining the thrust of the proposed article/s along the theme of migration and reproductive health/gender, indicating the places to be visited for interviews, and how the proposal would produce a human, well-rounded story that has different sources, and delves into an under-reported theme. Proposals should include a brief biodata, two sample published stories and a letter of commitment from editor/publisher, sent to: IPS Asia-Pacific, P O Box 180, Dusit Post Office, Dusit, Bangkok 10300, Thailand. Deadline for first

batch of stories 10 Nov 2002. Write to ipsasia@ipsnews.net for more information.

Job Vacancy

Position: Curator of Asian Art, University of Florida, USA
The Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville, seeks a curator for its growing collection of Asian art, including pieces from from India, Pakistan and Nepal. Master's degree in an appropriate area of specialisation is required; a Ph.D. is strongly preferred. Submit letter of application, resume, references and academic and general audience writing samples to Mary B. Yawn, Harn Museum of Art, POB 112700, Gainesville, Florida 32611-2700, USA. Application deadline is 1 Dec 2002.

Job Vacancy

Position: Managing Editor, Himal South Asian, Kathmandu, NEPAL
To market, represent and administer Himal magazine with a view to expanding readership; to plan and oversee subscription campaigns; and to manage the magazine's affairs generally.

Requirements: All-rounder with work in related field(s); outgoing personality and good communicator; South Asian nationality; willingness to relocate to Kathmandu and live on survival salary. Age no bar.

Interested? Send your curriculum vitae plus a one-page presentation on 'The challenge of marketing a South Asian magazine' to HRD@himalmag.com.

To place a classified ad announcing a conference, write to advertising@himalmag.com



German Technical Cooperation

DFID

Department for
International
Development

GTZ / DFID Risk Management Office Vacancies

GTZ and DFID intend to establish a joint Risk Management Office in Kathmandu. The purpose of the office is to provide expertise and support in order to manage and reduce conflict-related risk to GTZ and DFID staff and programmes/projects.

The office will be managed by an expatriate risk management adviser. We wish to recruit two local positions:

Post 1: Deputy Risk Management Adviser, with the following responsibilities:

- Assessment of field risk
- Advise on risk management
- Conduct regular training for programmes and projects
- Provide communications support
- Act as an alternate to the Adviser in his/her absence.
- Liaise with other agencies as required.

The post holder will require the following experience, skills and competence:

- Thorough knowledge of Nepal, particularly of hill areas.
- Excellent spoken and written English
- Proven ability to assess risk in complex situations.
- Proven ability to brief senior management level coherently and accurately
- Proven training experience and track record
- Proven knowledge and experience of radio communications are desirable
- Competent computer skills - Word and Excel are desirable
- The post holder will be required to liaise with other agencies including government to accumulate security information.

Ideally, the post holder should have previous military experience so that s/he can assess conflict situations accurately. Prior knowledge or experience in the development sector would be a distinct advantage.

Post 2: Risk Management Information Manager, with the following responsibilities:

- Create and run the risk information management system
- Assist with training preparation
- Provide administrative and book-keeping support for the office.

The post holder will require the following experience, skills and competence:

- Office management and book-keeping experience and skills
- Strong computer skills and able to create and manage a complex data-base for the risk management information system
- Excellent spoken and written English
- Sensitive to issues that affect risk to development staff; able to pick out from a wide variety of sources facts that are relevant to humanitarian/development work.

Prior field development experience would be an advantage.

Application forms, details of job descriptions, and further information can be collected from the DFID Nepal office in Ekantakuna, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur, Nepal.

Those with appropriate skills and experience who are interested in the posts should send an application before **Friday 6 December 2002** marked 'Deputy Risk Management Adviser' or 'Risk Management Information Manager' accompanied by application form and relevant documents to:

**The Personnel Manager, DFID Nepal, C/O British Embassy,
P.O. Box 106, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal**

Development critique

Blight in donor'ed Bangladesh

Donor agencies regularly charge their host governments and bureaucracies of corruption, but what about the lack of accountability of the agencies themselves? In Dhaka, the donor elite is beginning to be taken on.

by *Salim Rashid*

With the debate on development attaining a certain maturity and international funding practices having come under the microscope like never before, three conclusions are emerging. Firstly, the impact of aid on recipient countries is largely undocumented and even when it is done, the results remain unpublished; secondly, the way international aid is currently managed, with little or no accountability or coordination, it is little wonder that it often fails to achieve its ends; and thirdly, if things are to improve, greater accountability has to be worked into the system.

Critics of foreign aid, both from the left and the right, challenge the efficacy of aid with multiple arguments. From the left perspective, one of these is that foreign aid gives rise to a 'dependent bourgeoisie' that sustains itself on Western grants, support and scholarships, as well as on the lucrative jobs that donor agencies offer to trained people of the South. Meanwhile, the right holds that aid gives governments in developing countries excessive control over the economy, allowing resources to be distributed as political favours, one effect of which is the diminishing of private capital flow into the national economy. The point at which these two arguments overlap is in bringing into focus the bureaucracy as it affects and is affected by aid. Three recent court cases in Bangladesh concerning the alleged abuses of a United Nations development agency and a Bretton Woods lending organisation illustrate an empirical convergence of these critiques.

Altruism and egoism

In 2001, three separate cases were filed against donors in Bangladesh. Two were against the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), one on policy issues and the other having to do with personnel procedures; and one against the World Bank involving a mix of personnel and general issues. A forthcoming collection of essays, *Rotting from the Head: Donors and LDC Corruption* (University Press, Dhaka), takes its cue from these cases where, for a change, donor corruption in a Least Developed Country (LDC) has been exposed. While the focus of detail is Bangladesh, the essays also show the international relevance of the aid problem by shedding light on the workings of the three foremost internation-

al aid agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UNDP.

What is revealed in the chapter on the IMF by Ayse Evrensel, is that stabilisation programmes provide balance of payments relief that is restricted to the short term of the programme period. IMF support mostly does not lead to lasting improvement in the economic policies of the programme countries. As they receive IMF support, it seems, recipient countries implement even more unsustainable macroeconomic policies than before. Where governments may not have been able to afford wrongheaded pet projects and foolhardy populist programmes, the flow of aid allows them to proceed with them. Not surprisingly, the periods between programme cycles when the support is not there see a drastically worsened macroeconomic performance. As for the question of preparing countries for the era of economic globalisation, all that IMF and World Bank lending seems to do is to replace private capital markets. These private sector markets, consisting of competitive firms, lose business against this low cost loan duopoly.

Based on empirical research, Evrensel concludes that there are no internal incentives for drastic reform for either the IMF or its clients: the IMF is too keen on the survival of its own programmes, and borrowers get addicted to low cost funds available to them in the face of their credit unworthiness. Lenders are just too driven by an unhealthy blend of altruism and egoism, writes Evrensel.

Robert McNab and Steve Everhart, who author a chapter in *Rotting from the Head* on the role of corruption in development, study whether international assistance has actually hindered economic development in developing and transitional countries – whether statistically there is an explicit, causal linkage between aid, the quality of governance, and economic growth. Using a newly developed formula, they explore empirically the existence and magnitude of such linkages for a sample of developing and transitional countries. If donor activity actually encourages rent-seeking behaviour, forestalls economic and political reform, and diverts resources to debt service, then it is possible that such aid presents, at a minimum, an additional obstacle to economic development.

McNab and Everhart suggest a re-evaluation of the

entire structure of donor assistance if evidence demonstrates a significant and negative correlation between international aid, governance and economic growth. "Only if we find that international aid significantly and positively influences governance and, in turn, economic growth should we promote the provision of international aid". The two contributors' findings in this regard will not be comforting to the international development set. They reveal that "international aid directly increases corrupt activities and retards the rate of economic growth", and, further, that it "increases levels of corruption, lowers the quality of governance". They also draw attention to "an indirect channel from international aid and corruption through governance to economic growth [, providing] some of the first evidence on the detrimental impact of international aid on corruption, governance and growth".

Judging the evidence

The three petitions alleging serious improprieties on the part of the UNDP and World Bank, which inspired the book under consideration, were filed in the Dhaka courts in 2001-02. The first, filed in the Supreme Court as Writ Petition No 2529 of 2001, sued the government for having prematurely retired its second most senior civil servant because he obstructed certain donor dealings and exposed the corruption involved in the activities of some aid recipients. This case was an obvious attention grabber, involving as it did a major environmental project valued at USD 26 million, and exposed an unsavoury nexus between aid and domestic politics. The court decided against the government on 31 October 2001.

The second case was filed in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh vide Writ Petition No 519 of 2002. In it, the UNDP was sued for the non-renewal of the service contract of an employee "on arbitrary and malicious grounds through abuse of discretion, power and authority". In the third case, Writ Petition No 225 of 2001 and No 22 of 2002, filed in the First Assistant Judge's Court, the World Bank was accused of dismissing an employee on arbitrary and malicious grounds. The second filing (2002) cites a violation of a court injunction on the part of the organisation.

In the second case, the UNDP resident representative for Bangladesh was accused by a senior project staff member of irregularities involving a project costing USD 20 million. The documents now in court raise suspicions that the decision not to renew the service contract may have been made with the view of making the aggrieved staff member a scapegoat for UNDP lapses. It is also revealed that in an attempt to harass the said staff member, the resident representative improperly invoked UN staff rules against the individual, knowing full well that these rules, as is clearly stated in service contracts, are not applicable to project staff. Notwithstanding the immunity guaranteed to UN



Something to laugh about at last.

personnel under the archaic Convention on the Privileges of the United Nations, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 February 1946, and that not much may actually come of the proceedings in the Bangladeshi court, this episode is significant as only rarely has a project staff member taken the bold step of trying to expose the corruption and mismanagement that exists within donor bureaucracies.

Case three is remarkable in that the World Bank responded by claiming immunity from all prosecution. This defence had everyone sitting up and paying attention. The government stated its legal opinion in no uncertain terms, citing that while bank officials enjoyed some immunity in the discharge of duties in their official capacity, the bank itself was not above legal scrutiny. This interpretation was actually in consonance with the articles of agreement signed between the World Bank and Bangladesh, in which it is clearly stipulated: "Action may be brought against the Bank in a court of competent jurisdiction in the territories of a member in which the Bank has an office".

Faced with this clause, the World Bank's country director 'suggested' that the government sign an Establishment Agreement under which personnel would enjoy full immunity from litigation. The law ministry responded that signing such an agreement would require a policy decision that could only be taken subsequent to an appropriate scrutiny of all relevant facts and the examination of such agreements as they applied in other countries. After ignoring 14 summonses, the World Bank finally appeared in the court in April 2002 to file its objection and claim immunity. A hearing on the matter was held in June 2002. A court order is still pending.

These judicial proceedings and the book they have prompted have perhaps been long in coming in a country that has been a playground for the donor agencies for decades. The question that begs to be answered here is why so late? It cannot be that Bangladesh is the only LDC in which donor malfeasance occurs, nor can it be

that this is only a recent phenomenon. Why then have more instances not reached the courts in LDCs – in South Asia or elsewhere – or prompted the kind of analysis and empirical study as in the case of Bangladesh? The reason, of course, lies simply in the very nature of aid operations in LDCs, where local bureaucracies and monitoring agencies as well as the press and audit offices are either co-opted or bought off by the aid-givers.

National and international players

In evaluating the nature and extent of donor malfeasance, consider an anecdote from Cassen, Robert and Associates' well-respected report, *Does Aid Work* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994):

Bangladesh has, on paper, a more impressive coordinating structure than most of the poorest countries, but was unable to prevent its railways, for example, from being saddled with a considerable array of equipment types: diesel locomotives from Japan, Canada and the US; shunting locomotives from Hungary, West Germany and the United Kingdom; and freight wagons from India, South Korea and the United Kingdom. This lack of standardised equipment compounded the training and maintenance problem of the railway.

This kind of occurrence begs the question: is such wastefulness deliberate or is it attributable to confusion and incompetence on the part of LDC bureaucrats for which there is an innocent systemic reason? A further matter to be investigated is whether aid is driven by the confused and uncoordinated requests of LDC bureaucrats or by the 'needs' of the officials in donor agencies? To answer these questions, it is necessary to delve into the source of the aid and investigate the links that are formed between donor and recipient bureaucracies.

The fact of LDC corruption has been widely publicised – more often than not by the donor agencies themselves – and the lack of competence of many LDC bureaucrats is certainly plain to those who have dealt with them. Indeed, there is no need to underplay the lack of accountability, graft and malfeasance within developing country bureaucracies. As the frontline party involved in trying to usher social and economic advancement into their societies, it is the virtues of bureaucrats that should be decisive. But accepting and understanding the weaknesses within the national bureaucracies should not have us turning a blind eye to the actions of donors. How much are the difficulties of LDCs, poor and undeveloped as they are, compounded by the actions of agencies that have the wealth and information-processing resources to know better?

Assume for a moment that the hypothesis of donor-induced and -abetted corruption has merit. Does the charge tar all donors equally? Donors may be broadly categorised under 'bilateral' agencies, such as USAID

(the US), NORAD (Norway), SIDA (Sweden) and CIDA (Canada), and 'multilateral', such as the UNDP and the World Bank. Is it possible to identify, based on this distinction, whether one kind of donor is more harmful than the other, and whether one is more liable than the other to manipulate LDC bureaucracies?

USAID actually has a brochure, tailored for domestic consumption, which states, "The principal beneficiary of American foreign assistance programs has always been the United States. Close to 80 percent of USAID's contracts and grants flow back to American firms" (as quoted by Ruben Berrios, *Contracting for Development: The Role for For-Profit Contractors in US Foreign Development Assistance*, Praeger). This serving of foreign policy by ostensibly benign means is part of the avowed aim of the agency and is open to inspection. Indeed, of all major donor agencies, USAID is said to have procedures that render the greatest transparency.

One can usually apply the example of the USAID to most aid agencies that report to governments, as this means that the agencies are eventually answerable to the citizenry of their individual countries. The most likely violators of trust, therefore, tend to be those who have no direct constituency to which they must answer: the IMF, the World Bank and the UNDP. These are the three most powerful voices in the donor cartel, and their dealings are the least open to scrutiny. There is no parliament back in the donor capital to scrutinise activities (reports from which then would also be available to recipient countries should they choose to inquire), and the watchdogs in the recipient country either do not exist or are compromised from the start. Additionally, the multilateral donors come to the LDCs with agreements whereby potential misdeeds are exempted from national laws, secrecy agreements are secured, and often, as added insurance, funds are routed into the press and the audit offices so that the usual channels of discovery become redundant.

Blow the whistle

In so involving themselves with national political economies, international donors effectively have the power to direct (or misdirect) the economic and social development of LDCs. Whether this is good or bad is partly a question of ideology – should a people have the power to settle matters of economics and politics for themselves? – and partly of fact – what are the visible effects of such foreign direction? These questions sound familiar because the issue has been addressed in an enormous amount of literature on colonialism and imperialism. Evidently, donors really are 'dictating' the nature of development in the LDCs, and since this is not what their avowed purpose is, it is not surprising that convincing documentation of donor misbehaviour is hard to come by.

In order to prove any malfeasance, documents must first be found to show how donors manipulate LDC functioning. Such evidence is usually classified, and a

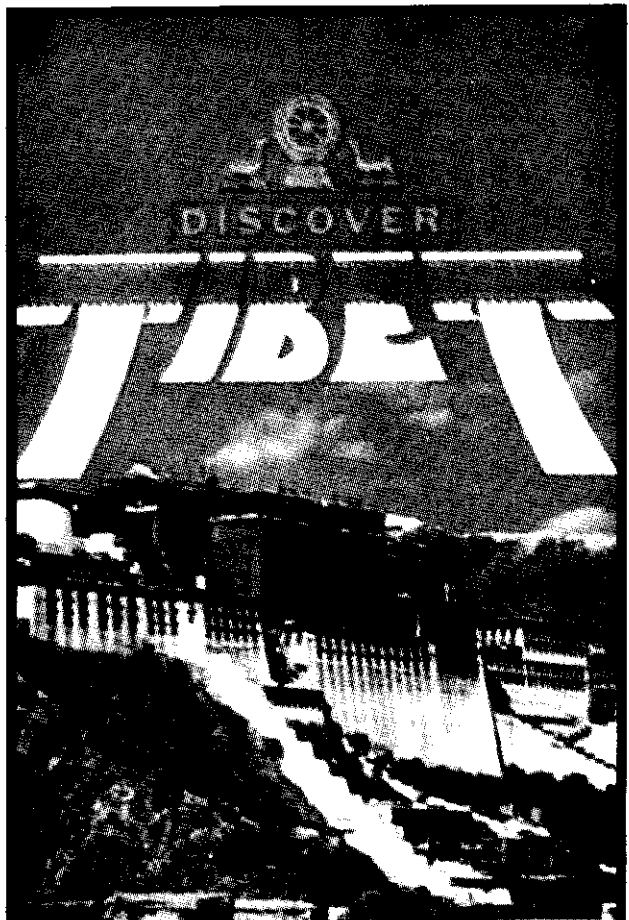
state that does buckle under such pressure would only be undermining its position further if information of the same were to be made public. So states cannot be expected, at the official level, to provide the evidence. What about the top bureaucrats who are involved in the 'negotiations'? If the thesis of donor manipulation is correct, only those who have already been seriously and effectively compromised are allowed to stay on in positions of power where access to such evidence is available. If the donors have done their background work right, and they cannot afford not to, they will have recruited sections of civil society, such as the media and political forums, to their 'cause'.

Any person who slips through this screening system and manages to reveal condemning evidence had better be in a position of economic independence, since the avenues of research and consultancies will effectively be closed once s/he blows the whistle. In summation, it follows that an attempt to document donor culpability requires finding individuals who are in a position to know, are not economically or politically dependent on the aid system, and are willing to face up to the powers-that-be in one's own society, including political bosses and power brokers, compromised bureaucrats, and misguided civil society *wallas*. All international organisations have internal auditors but their unreliability is proven, if proof was needed, in the case of the UNDP and the World Bank in Bangladesh; indeed, this was why the cases had to enter the public domain via the national courts.

For all that is wrong with them, forgiveness could perhaps still have been found for the international agencies had it not been for their hypocritical habit of preaching syrupy sermons on "good government", "governance and accountability" and "transparency" to the nonplussed "recipient community". Those who preach morality so insistently also have the responsibility of setting an example, a responsibility they have not been fulfilling.

Fortunately, the practices of donors are quietly, though incompletely, coming under review from multiple angles. Court cases expose specific improprieties committed in the course of an agency's work, and theoretical models and empirical studies of donor influence on LDCs heighten awareness of the often-duplicious role played by the aid agencies. In time, one hopes that whistle-blowers in positions of access to vital information will step forward to provide the critical link between systemic critiques and individual empirical episodes.

The three Bangladeshi court cases, and the deliberations and examinations they have prompted, are hopefully the beginning of what will develop into a healthy public discussion of donor practices and foreign aid. However, this is contingent on there being a sustained and sincere willingness on the part of those with access to high-level decision-making to honestly enter such a debate. △



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Making it happen in Kashmir

Sri Lanka is moving ahead with path-breaking peace talks. At the northern end of South Asia, the relative success of the legislative assembly elections provides New Delhi with an opportunity to revise its long-hardened policy on Jammu and Kashmir.

by **Praful Bidwai**

The recent elections for the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly were a landmark. The 40 percent-plus voter turnout, while low by Indian standards, was considerable under the circumstances. Also, the polls were remarkably fair, although, being held in the shadow of the gun, not entirely free. Nevertheless, it takes enormous optimism to imagine India now easily converting the opportunity thus presented into a resolution of the Kashmir problem – one of the thorniest territorial and state-formation disputes in the world.

Consider the developments that immediately followed the elections. The Indian National Congress, which with 20 won the largest number of the assembly's total 87 seats, was loathe to share power with the group with second largest showing of 16 seats, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). All 16 of the PDP's elected representatives came from the largely 'Muslim' Kashmir Valley, which accounts for 46 of the 87 seats, the remainder 41 being divided between the predominantly 'Hindu' Jammu region, which accounts for 37, and the mainly 'Buddhist' Ladakh, which has four. Since the electoral makeup is such, state-level parties rarely have a pan-state presence. As much was reflected in the election results, with no party being able to claim a majority of the seats in the assembly.

Following this result, the PDP staked a claim to the chief minister's post on the basis that it represented the 'problem' region, the Kashmir valley. Small parties from Jammu made their claims too but with an opposite argument centred on the 'neglect' of their region. With the Congress putting in its own claim, via a Kashmiri-speaking chief ministerial candidate from Jammu, the situation got truly enmeshed in *realpolitik*; nobody was willing to budge, and the deadlock hardened.

Ironically, after the people of J&K turned in a mandate to change an incumbent government for the first time ever, on 17 October New Delhi imposed central rule on the state because the exercise seemed to be headed nowhere. The Congress and the PDP continued to bicker and everyone seemed poised to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

The situation changed quite dramatically in the last week of October. The Congress, with uncharacteristic generosity and foresight, suddenly decided to give up

its claim to lead the coalition, hammered out a Common Minimum Programme with the PDP, and settled on a formula whereby the chief ministerial position would switch to its candidate after three of the assembly's six-year tenure. The new coalition nominated the PDP's Mufti Mohammad Sayeed as its first chief minister.

This opens up an unprecedented opportunity for J&K, undoubtedly the greatest one since the *azaadi* (freedom or self-determination) movement broke out in 1989. The election has generated some euphoria in New Delhi, but a realistic assessment would require us to be considerably more cautious. J&K is not out of the woods, which are indeed deep, and what happens there will be determined not only in Srinagar post-election, but in New Delhi, Islamabad and other capitals.

Forsaking its claim to lead the coalition from the chief ministerial position was a major policy shift for the Congress, which has ruled India for all but eight of its 55 years of independence and is notorious for its aversion to serious coalition-building. This move on its part, in the "larger interests" of Kashmir and the nation, as the party put it, has sent out the message that Indian politics can sometimes rise to unexpected heights in response to issues and situations of an exceptional nature.

Disparate orientations

The Congress was not entirely altruistic though; it drove a hard bargain with the PDP over the common programme. Many PDP manifesto formulations were diluted, such as those demanding an unconditional dialogue with *all* currents of opinion, including the separatists and militant *jehadis*, the disbanding of the dreaded Special Task Force-Special Operations Group of the police, which consists of former militants, and a virtual amnesty for prisoners languishing in jail under J&K's super-repressive laws.

The PDP's anxiety to offer a 'healing touch' is clearly rooted in its social base, mainly in the militancy-prone southern part of the Kashmir valley. Its election campaign had stressed the 'wounds' inflicted by state repression and the need for a dialogue with Pakistan. The Congress' caution is explained partly by its 'national' (contra, regional) character, and partly by its

vulnerability to criticism from its principal rival, the Hindu-communal and hawkishly nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads the coalition government at the centre.

The two parties' disparate orientation need not necessarily make the coalition unviable, but it enhances the potential for friction and tension in all-too-probable moments of crisis. Such as, a terrorist attack which would likely precipitate a ferocious retaliatory response by the New Delhi government, whose rightwing leadership feels emboldened by the success of the J&K elections and by a recent shift to the right in India's public discourse thanks to a remarkably vile campaign of abuse by the extremist Hindutva associates of the BJP. These include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal who direct their abuse at the Atal Behari Vajpayee leadership, no less.

Even if the J&K coalition runs relatively smoothly, at least one major determinant of its success will lie in India's capital. Such is the relationship between J&K and the centre, with some 400,000 armed men of the security forces present in the state, and financial grants accounting for the bulk of the state's development budget, that a hostile government in New Delhi can at will sabotage anything a popular state government sets out to do. This means that in the long run, there can be no breakthrough on Kashmir unless there is a paradigm shift in the way New Delhi looks at the Kashmir situation and its own policies, beginning with the nature of the J&K electoral mandate.

Neither the election results, nor the perceptions and motivations of the voters, warrant euphoria on the part of the Indian state. They do not represent the voter's approval of the official Kashmir policy, 'anti-terrorist' measures, nor disillusionment with or rejection of *azaadi*. All ground-level evidence, including that collected by NGOs and Western observers, suggests that the Kashmiri people voted largely out of local considerations, and their urge was to replace the incumbent National Conference with a less unresponsive and corrupt administration. They did so without prejudice to their preferred long-term solutions to the Kashmir dispute. This was definitely not a vote for "full-scale integration" with India, as Vajpayee interpreted it in his first reaction to the media.

Policy rethink

There is obviously a need to curb the euphoria, curtail the complacency, and rethink the Kashmir policy in its entirety. The Congress, which fathered it for long years, itself implicitly admits the policy has inflicted wounds on the Kashmiri people. However, it is unclear if the BJP-led central government, now shaky, feuding and in an advanced stage of crisis, will be willing to rethink

policy in the absence of international pressure.

Yet, in the short run, several changes are possible within J&K's boundaries, which could impel the BJP-led national alliance to shift its stance. If, over the next three to six months, the Congress-PDP-led coalition is able to stop and roll back troop deployment and the repressive laws, especially the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act, restore human rights, and launch economic development schemes that address burning problems such as unemployment, it could seriously begin the process of winning the hearts and minds of Kashmir's alienated people.

There are firm indications that indigenous support for militant *jehad* is now at an all-time low. The All Party Hurriyat Conference, an umbrella platform that hosts a range of views from autonomy to independence, has pushed itself into a corner by declaring the elections a "farce" and an "affront" to the people, but not being able to rally much support for this position. It now feels somewhat chastened. But there remains overwhelming sentiment in the valley in favour of a dialogue with Pakistan. The range of support for this sentiment goes well beyond only those who for historical reasons have harboured 'pro-Pakistan' sympathies.

It thus makes eminent sense for the Indian government to start a dialogue with all currents of opinion within J&K and also open unconditional talks with Pakistan – under the much-vaunted bilateral Simla Agreement of 1972. There is growing international pressure to resume full diplomatic relations with

Pakistan following the de-escalation of the 10-month long enhanced troop deployment at the India-Pakistan border. But there are other sound reasons for expanding the scope of discussion on Kashmir.

New Delhi has agreed in any number of legal forums and documents that Kashmir is a 'dispute'. There is a strong moral case for beginning the process of resolving it between the states of India and Pakistan, besides with the people of Kashmir, so that the bleeding of the entire Subcontinent – and even the undermining of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – is stopped. The involvement of the Kashmiri people in the process is imperative. There can be no democratic resolution of the issue without consultation with them. What is outdated is not so much the United Nations resolutions of the 1940 and 1950s, but the notion that states can determine the fate of people while bypassing them.

The time has arrived for a bold new Indian initiative. This is also the most propitious moment to get the international community to exert pressure on Pakistan to stop encouraging and supporting militant *jehadi* activity in Kashmir. If New Delhi takes the initiative, Islamabad will find it hard to play ducks and drakes there. But can Vajpayee muster the courage? ▽

**The vote is not
an approval of
India's Kashmir
policy, nor a
rejection of *azaadi***

America, Pakistan, Democracy

Calling on Pakistanis to take a stand, now.

by Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

It is interesting how human beings are willing to ignore the obvious because of the way the obvious is portrayed. International media networks now have such an immense impact on the way citizens the world over perceive world affairs that it is easy to miss the meaning of what is really happening in front of our eyes.

In the space of the last 12 months, the United States has invaded Afghanistan, and is now effectively colonising it. Its soldiers are slowly securing every last inch of Afghan soil. It will take a long time to undo what the United States had itself created in Afghanistan. The now renegade *mujahideen* – once backed by the US – are practised in the art of guerrilla warfare. But, rest assured, the United States will not rest till it has conquered all. The charade is preserved through the savvy puppet president that the US has installed to run the country (the only thing he runs right now is a part of Kabul). The promise of a democratic Afghanistan is held out to the world, and the colonisation is seen as liberation.

The Bush team is now wooing Americans with the delicious prospect of war on Iraq. The foreign policy think-tanks in Washington DC that clearly influence the direction of the American establishment are hatching grand plans for a post-war scenario in which Iraq and Jordan become one big, happy, Sunni and therefore, anti-Iran, kingdom. The colonisation continues, with King Abdullah tipped to be Hamid Karzai's counterpart a little further west. Here, too, the promise is of a democratic and friendly Iraq, made more tempting with the slightly more exaggerated hope of a democratic West Asia.

This carefully constructed screenplay becomes downright perverse when it is acknowledged that Mr Bush's warmongering is largely aimed at securing a positive result for his Republican Party in the upcoming congressional elections. Talking war seems to be the only way to divert attention from the deepest economic slump Americans have faced in almost two decades. In the mid-1990s, while the rest of the world

suffered a long recession, the US economy had boomed. But just as dramatically as it had been created, the bubble burst and the virtual economy disappeared overnight. The American state is trying to make its way out of the rubble by raising the Iraq bogey. Bush's martial attitude obviously has also to do with the outrageous influence that oil and gas companies have on the foreign policy of the United States; they realise the need to maintain control over West Asia and, increasingly, Central Asia, for their reserves of oil and natural gas.

So, there seems to be a revival on the cards of the old American practice of removing unfavourable regimes and installing favourable ones. An in-depth study of the conduct of American foreign policy in Asia and Latin America would, however, produce startling projections – of how the puppet rulers of today will probably constitute the 'evil empire' of tomorrow. This is how it has been in the past, with those propped up by the United States, the *mujahideen* who formed the Taliban included, turning against the benefactor.

Part of the problem for those trying to maintain American dominance is that there is just that much more information floating around in the globe. Even people who have long lived on the margins are able to access news much faster now than ever before. It therefore becomes more

difficult for the realities of international politics to be glossed over or airbrushed. Nevertheless, for the time being, international media networks have been able to present a picture of the world that suits the US and the Western world, in which the insistent claim of American diplomats that the US is the bastion of democracy (a delusion that has persisted since Woodrow Wilson) is perpetuated. This situation will continue as long as it is the Western world that determines what international media networks should and should not say.

Friend, then foe

The way that the world has been depicted in the past year may actually have harmed the US cause in the



Jordanian king, Abdullah; allies Karzai and Bush.

long run. George W Bush's division of states in terms of "good and evil" and "them and us" has caused many to question their earlier commitment to the US agenda. The recent electoral results in Germany and Pakistan – two countries that in their own right, and for completely different reasons, are important to the US – illustrate the severity of the reaction to US unilateralism.

In Germany, Gerhard Schroeder was voted back into power in spite of the fact that only days before the elections he was trailing significantly in opinion polls. Schroeder just had to assert that Germany would not support any military action against Iraq to win back the voters. In Pakistan, Islamic parties secured by far their best result in the country's short history, even getting a clear majority in two out of the four provinces, Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Their alliance, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), also won almost 20 percent of the seats at the centre, where no one party has a clear majority, thus ensuring that they will have considerable influence on any proposed coalition set-up. The vote was largely reactionary, based on people's deeply-felt opposition to the pro-US policy of the military government.

Some say, and with good reason, that the outcome of the elections in Pakistan is not necessarily as surprising as it may seem, and that the Pakistani intelligence agencies that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had such a huge role in creating have shown their worth once again. It is a fact that Pakistan is a country that has had its entire political landscape altered by the United States' designs in the region. The religious right as it exists in Pakistan today – that the US and others seem to be so wary of – is too a creation of the Pakistani establishment, based on the US need to be able to secure its interests in the region, in much the same way that the Taliban were friends before they became foes. As such, while creating Frankenstein, the US did not think about whether or not the monster would always be on its side, in much the same way that it did not think too hard about Saddam Hussein when he was being supported against Iran.

The US got around Pakistan's mullahs and their protests when the bombing of Afghanistan started over a year ago, but between then and now the mullahs have strategically regrouped and have had their very successful run at the polls. It is difficult to say how good the poll results have been for the US. There are signs that the mullahs are ready to back down on certain demands they have made in the past about US presence in Pakistan, and let us not forget that the MMA comprises many of the same parties that were darlings of the American establishment not so long ago. There are therefore some who suggest that the outcome of the elections was actually good for the US (and therefore for General Musharraf and the Pakistani military).

These hypotheses may or may not be accurate. Regardless, Pakistan faces a crisis because the political process in the country can now hardly be considered sovereign. Being in as strategic a location as it is, Pakistan's political course has been seriously influenced by the needs and desires of Washington DC. The fact that a party that is clearly toeing General Musharraf's line – the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid) – has secured the largest number of seats at the centre and in the Punjab Assembly amidst credible reports of pre- and post-poll rigging, indicates how severely flawed the electoral process really was. But one should expect the military to continue to manipulate Pakistani politics as US support continues to hold it up. Those who look forward to a stable South Asia must, therefore, worry deeply about the US-induced manipulations of the Pakistani polity by the country's military under Musharraf. What 'accident' lies ahead?

Democracy and dissent

The political parties that have not done the military's bidding this time around, such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), even if they have gone with the military in the past, need to take stock of the prevailing situation and make clear decisions on the path to take. The absurd nature of Pakistani politics means that it is the PPP and the PML-N who potentially have the most important role to play at this juncture even though it is they who over the decades brought the country to its present sorry condition. These two parties ought to establish themselves as

Civil society must cease its assault on the political community

a credible opposition to the puppet government that the PML-Q and MMA are likely to form. Their credibility will depend on taking a principled stand against militarisation, resource concentration, and institutionalised corruption, while also being clear in their support of the rights to freedom of the people of Pakistan.

There is not much evidence to suggest that this will actually happen, that the PPP and PML-N will suddenly turn over a new leaf. It is therefore important that the respected and credible members of Pakistani civil society recognise that they have to take on the establishment, at least insofar as maintaining a principled stand on issues of democracy and livelihood, dissent and culture. Unfortunately, prominent sections of civil society have been co-opted by the military regime over the past three years. It is time for civil society to re-evaluate its strategies, and its orientation, based on brutally honest analyses of how well it has served the cause of democracy in Pakistan in the past. All too often, the intelligentsia and watchdog organisations have joined in the military's continuing assault on the political community. It is time, even if this late, to bring this practice to a halt. ▽

"Let the people go to hell"

*So let the smoking rains fall
on the mind's rain forest.
So many funeral masks
are preserved in the earth
that nothing is yet lost.
— Victor Serge*

THE OUTCOME of elections in Pakistan is exactly what the general-in-*sherwani* wanted it to be. With 45 seats in the National Assembly, a six-party alliance of the religious right – the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) – has emerged as a formidable force. The two major political parties, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), have been cut down to size, but they have been allowed to remain on the scene so as not to raise suspicions about the "free and fair" nature of the election exercise just past. The king's party – the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) – is the largest party in the new parliament with 76 seats to its name, with enough clout to steer the course of the legislature any which way it wants.

For the moment, General Pervez Musharraf appears unassailable. The composition of the resulting assembly is such that his tinkering with the constitution prior to the polls will probably remain unchallenged. Meanwhile, the well-orchestrated campaign to portray the MMA as the Pakistani version of the Taliban means that he can show himself to be indispensable for Bush Junior's 'War against Terror' in the region. The next time Christina Rocca comes calling, he can claim in the manner of the last Bourbon: it's me, or chaos.

Through shrewd strategic arrangements prior to the polls and astute tactical moves during the elections, the brilliant general has emerged victorious in an important political battle. But whether he can win the war of de-politicising Pakistan remains to be seen. The scheme of disqualifying all probable political challengers in the name of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), or the sheer opportunism of hobnobbing with the extremists of the right to undermine the prospects of mainstream parties during the election campaigns are sure to have 'unintended consequences' unimaginable in any case-study of the best military schools.

Methods of warfare do work in short-term politics, but they are of limited use in the longer term. Any political battle that does not end in a compromise produces only losers, and General Musharraf must understand that even generals with the best of intentions cannot replace politicians. And how much ever the upper-crust Pakistani intelligentsia may hate populist leaders, they are all that the people have.

Old disease

To be fair to Musharraf, the politics of being 'above politics' is not his invention; it dates back to the days of the partition when the Muslim bureaucratic-military elite of British India inherited a country without a history which was fertile ground for military fascism. And sure enough, before the 1950s were over, General Ayub Khan had sowed the seeds of 'the political economy of defence'. General Yahya Khan nurtured the noxious weed long enough for it to cause the break-up of the country in 1971. From a military utilitarian point of view, General Zia-ul Haq had learned his lessons from the failures of his two predecessors. Instead of remaining content with his control over the state apparatus, Zia went about dismantling the whole political structure of the country in the name of 'Islamisation'. After the Soviet Union's entry into Afghanistan in December 1979, there was no stopping the nexus between Pakistan's military and religious zealots. Fuelled by the lethal mix of slush funds from the United States and the Wahhabi fanaticism of Saudi Arabia, *jehadis* schooled by the CIA and the ISI destroyed democratic politics in Pakistan even as they waged their war against the Russians in Afghanistan.

Under the circumstances, the democratic regimes that inherited the demoralised state proved to be no less reckless. The feudalistic leanings of Benazir Bhutto and the rapaciousness of Mian Nawaz Sharif added to the disillusionment of the middle-classes in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi even as the free press went hammer and tongs at the freewheeling ways of the merchant political class in Islamabad. Enter Musharraf, the saviour in shining armour from the hallowed institution of the army, with his vainglorious claim that he would modernise Pakistani society a la Ataturk. The economic elite dreamt of an end of the dark ages. The middle-classes saw new opportunities opening up in the government once the political set-up was dispensed with. Small-town aspirants living off the remittances from relatives working abroad hoped of acquiring the lifestyle shown on satellite television channels.

In the euphoria over the ouster of the discredited Nawaz Sharif government, no one paused to mull over the fundamental flaw of General Musharraf's much-vaunted National Reconstruction Scheme: an autocratic regime was unlikely to steer society towards modernisation. Musharraf's methods were sophisticated – he used institutional mechanisms such as the NAB and the National Construction Bureau to tame politicians – but his intentions were no better than those of the earlier despot generals. Despite the 'free and fair' elections, democracy in Pakistan is now back to where it was in the early 1950s, with the added challenges of religious fanaticism.

No remedy

Meanwhile, Indian-held Kashmir has seen another general election, phased over six stages. According to international observers, the polls were largely free and fair, but the fact is that the outcome is unlikely to change anything in Srinagar. Even though the party that besmirched Sheikh Abdullah's name by associating itself with the saffron brigade in New Delhi has received a well-deserved drubbing at the hustings, the fact is that no other party has the mandate to hold meaningful negotiations with the rebels.

Elections are useful only if there is consensus over the acceptability of its outcome. With the Hurriyat boycotting the polls, the usefulness of the exercise was in doubt right from the beginning. The hung legislative assembly led to jockeying for power between Sonia Gandhi's Congress and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed's People's Democratic Party, which once again proves the point that some of the worst enemies of democracy are those politicians who swear by it day and night.

Like all previous arrangements in Srinagar, the new assembly is also unlikely to address the core question of the Kashmir dispute – autonomy, independence or a formal division of the *riyasat* between India and Pakistan? As long as the issue of its composition itself is not resolved, no election is going to restore lasting peace in the Kashmir valley. All political parties in Pakistan-occupied as well as India-controlled Kashmir swear by the people, but their fundamental attitude is the same as that of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah. In the days when Kashmir was still an independent *riyasat*, Ali Mohammed Tariq, a National Conference activist, asked Jinnah whether its people would decide the future of Kashmir. The Quaid reportedly flared up at the suggestion and retorted, "Let the people go to hell". That is exactly what seems to have happened both in India and Pakistan, as the common people in both countries continue to endure the hell of communal hatred.

Kashmir is at the root of many malaises that afflict India-Pakistan (and therefore the region), but at this late date there is no resolution in sight. More elections at the point of the gun are unlikely to provide any solution. But nobody seems to know exactly how to extricate this region from the quicksand of Kashmir. Jawaharlal Nehru is said to have warned a young Zulfikar Ali Bhutto 40 years ago that the two countries had been caught in a situation that they could not get out of without causing damage to the system and structure of their respective societies. So, the curse of Jinnah will continue to haunt Kashmir and Kashmiris.

Freedom interrupted

In the Kingdom of Nepal, a mid-term election that could not be conducted due to Maoist threats became an excuse for the usurpation of sovereignty from the hands of people. The political clock in Nepal has been turned back, to the time of the People's Movement of 1990, for the democratic constitution of the country now lies in coma. No one knows when the executive authority will

emerge from the political equivalent of an Intensive Care Unit that is currently located within the precincts of the Narayanhiti palace.

Beset with one of the most violent political insurgencies not just in South Asia but in the world, Nepal got itself into double trouble when King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev assumed all executive powers by dismissing the "incompetent" Sher Bahadur Deuba government for being unable to conduct elections that he (Deuba) had announced after dissolving parliament earlier in the year. The king has formed a cabinet of his own nominees under the chairmanship of Lokendra Bahadur Chand, an old court loyalist, but it lacks the mandate of the people and does not seem to have any standing in the public eye. What it can, or more appropriately cannot, do remains to be seen, both in terms of restoration of democracy through elections and the looming threat of a wildfire Maoism. But one reality is clear – the extreme right and left now face each other without the buffer of a political centre. Will this augur meaningful negotiations between the monarch and the Maoist insurgents, or a harsh rejectionism on each side which would before long lay the very viability of the Nepali state in question?

Democracy has suffered in Nepal no less than in Pakistan. General Ayub Khan's Basic Democracy was the model for King Mahendra's Panchayat system. Now that power is once again back with the palace, at least a few of the royalists may be contemplating a Nepali version of General Musharraf's Sustainable Democracy. But they should be forewarned, that the people of Nepal have tasted freedom uninterrupted for more than a decade now, whereas Pakistanis have been allowed only teaser doses. In addition to that, despite the goodwill it enjoys, the Royal Nepalese Army does not have the acceptability in society that the defence forces do in Pakistan.

As of the moment of going to press, the discredited political parties that had brought the country to such a pass were meekly protesting the royal move even while their individual leaders were jockeying for power behind the scenes for roles in the new government. All seems to rest in new king's ability to rope in the above-ground political forces, convince the populace of his bona fides, and bring the Maobaadis to the table.

Over to the east, in Bhutan, the king has expressed to the constitution drafting committee a desire to be made a constitutional monarch, and a supreme law is being drafted to suit 'Bhutanese traditions and values'. In the changed circumstances, the palace officials in Nepal should be eagerly waiting to discover the 'traditions and values' model of constitutional monarchy.

Even as the economy in South Asia globalises, its politics all over seem to be mired in the outdated models of the 1960s, fashioned by American think-tanks to counter the rise of communism in newly independent countries. People in South Asia will have to break out of this hell all by themselves. ▽

– CK Lal

River ways

Being taken captive with considerable hospitality by would-be émigrés, taking a boat ride up the swollen Ganga delta, and touring Dhaka's richest neighbourhood prove that travel in Bangladesh will be many things, but never a bore.

by Andrew Nash

While maps make it seem like the most obvious way to get around, boat travel down the length of the Bangladeshi rivers Jamuna (Brahmaputra in India, Tsangpo upstream) and Padma (Ganga) from their entry points into Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal is not possible. There is no regular service to take the traveller the full length.

The Jamuna and Padma, Bangladesh's two principal arteries, collide in the country's torso before shattering into thousands of distributaries that descend south toward the sea, in the process forming the world's largest delta. Bangladesh's north is given over to road and rail, but its south, with its fingers of land and thousands of mangrove islands amidst the silt-laden mesh of watercourses, is boat travel territory. If you come to Bangladesh to cruise its waterways, it is easiest to start at their exit and work your way up. One approach is to start south-east of the delta, at the southern city of Chittagong along the Bay of Bengal.

Built on the northern bank of the Karnaphuli river and home to three million people, Chittagong is the country's second largest city. It is also Bangladesh's largest port, with more than 4.5 million tonnes passing through it annually. The city's history dates back to at least the 16th century, when European traders, mostly Portuguese, established a commercial foothold on the Karnaphuli and began building Chittagong's clustered old town. Today, the metropolitan area is a curious blend of domestic tourist destination, regional commerce engine and transportation hub. Patenga beach, 24 kilometres to the southwest of the city, is a scaled-down version of Bangladesh's 130 kilometres of 'uninterrupted' southern beach around Cox's Bazar, touted by the local tourist industry as the longest in the world.

Bangladeshi holidaymakers flock to the sands after the monsoon, and women in *dhotis* or *purdah* stroll along the sea's edge with families amidst the whiskey-sale cries of entrepreneurial pubescents; the sale of alcohol in Muslim Bangladesh is legal only in Chittagong, although it is sold illegally in many places. With its air



connections to Calcutta in India and its bustling port, Chittagong is unique among the country's cities outside the capital metro for its extensive ties to the outside world. Media reports also highlight the port's role as a major trafficking point for narcotics and weapons. In October, *Time* magazine charged that Al-Qaeda was making use of the under-regulated harbour to transfer wanted militants. But whatever crimes occur in Chittagong transpire under the façade of a sprawling port town considerably less

frantic and seemingly less impoverished than Dhaka.

The unpredictable ferry service from Chittagong to Barisal, a delta town 150 kilometres to the northwest, traverses a patch of the Bay of Bengal before entering the delta. Scheduled trips are often called off due to inclement weather, and the under-maintained and overcrowded boats sometimes sink in placid waters, resulting in several hundred deaths every year. This past May witnessed a particularly tragic accident, when the MV *Salahuddin-2* sank on a foggy night, taking down 320 souls; the worst ferry disaster, in 1986, claimed 600 lives.

Ferry travel is cheap, and is a lifeline for Bangladesh's population. A deck seat to Barisal from Chittagong, for example, sells for 108 taka (about USD 1.5). For that sum, the trip offers the temptations of the open water: ploughing alongside hundreds of coastal fishing vessels in pursuit of their afternoon catch, a view of the shifting deltaic channel labyrinth, and the colourful companionship of Bangladeshis on the deck. With several stops along the way, including one at the otherwise isolated island of Sandwip, the trip to Barisal usually takes 24 hours, although monsoon water levels and mistimed tides pushed our trip above 30. On arrival in Barisal, the difference of deltaic life from Chittagong's metropolitan vibrancy is obvious; the mosques are smaller but more numerous, *ricksas* far outnumber automated transport, and strolls along the beach are replaced with subdued *cha*-sipping at roadside joints.

Boat service, whether scheduled or spontaneous, connects most settlements dotting the delta. Travelling

to Dhaka from Barisal, however, is more expeditious by bus despite three ferry-assisted river crossings. On 17 October, during my visit, the central government initiated an anti-crime drive, dispersing 40,000 troops throughout the country to bring in lawless elements. The opposition Awami League tentatively backed the move, but by 20 October the Home Minister had to respond to allegations of torture and murder (two of the deaths in custody, he said, were caused by heart attacks). Ruling party activists around the northern city of Bogra resisted the military action, provoking brief fighting in which a ricksha puller was killed. The Barisal-Dhaka road corridor, however, proved to be free of violence, although the frequent boarding, searching and questioning by soldiers disrupted the sleep of passengers during the night ride to the capital. The bus pulled into Dhaka just as a new day and rain clouds were breaking.

Dhaka's divides

Dhaka University (DU), about a kilometre north of the Buriganga river, offers a good orientation point for the neo-initiate in the capital. Its lush, tidy campus abounds with buildings in colonial, Mughal and Bengali styles, and wide, relatively orderly avenues dissect the grounds. Student politics have disrupted many Bangladeshi institutions in the past few months, but a group of DU business majors sipping Nescafe blew off my queries about campus revolt; "that's all over", one dismissively assured me.

Between the university and the river falls Dhaka's old city, a tangled jumble of city streets home to such historic treasures as an Armenian church, the famous Ahsan Manzil "Pink Palace", countless mosques from different periods intermingled with Hindu shrines – all of them existing in the middle of teeming humanity. To the university's east are the more modern business district of Motijheel and the Kamapur train station, while the areas to the north and west of the university's ordered existence melt into the expanding urban zone of ever-shrinking parks, Dickensian textile factories and decomposing infrastructure. The university, an oasis of relative quiet in what one lifelong resident terms a "criminally insane city", falls on several of Dhaka's fault lines, its green fields literally and figuratively lying at the intersection of history, business and turbulent poverty.

In Delhi, the rich are too numerous to squeeze into a single square-kilometre enclave, and in Kathmandu, wealth is too tied to feudal land holdings to draw the privileged onto one plot, but

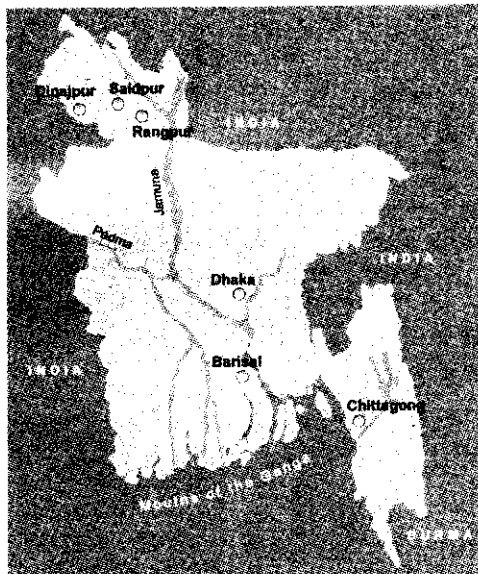
Dhaka suffers under neither of these constraints. Thus, the city's upper-crust primarily resides far to the north of the city centre in the walled-in compounds of the overlapping neighbourhoods of Gulshan and Baridhara, exclusive enclaves whose architecture blends hacienda rooftops, Parisian balconies and wedding cake frill. Guarded by their own private security force, the buildings are visually and economically so divorced from the rest of Dhaka as to provoke wonder that they arise from the same urban fabric.

A senior Dhaka journalist offered me a ricksha tour of Gulshan and Baridhara, lamenting their irreversible rise over the past 10 years while pointing out by name the residences of successful businessmen, expatriates, less-than-honest politicians and smugglers of all sorts. The oddest detail of the neighbourhood is the miserable condition of its roads, a backbreaking experience by ricksha, though an inconsequential one by Pajero. Poor road maintenance around such notable addresses trumpets the triumph of the SUV, plastic and steel cradles that lift passengers above the pitfalls of degraded avenues.

About half a kilometre north of DU is the relatively upscale retail zone of New Elephant Road. Bangladesh earns three quarters of its foreign exchange from the export of readymade garments (RMG), and export managers maintain strict quality control to keep foreign purchasers satisfied. The result is that rejected RMGs, fine but for a misplaced stitch or slight miscolouration, are among the best clothes to be had in Dhaka. With industry-rejected RMGs in great demand, in fact, a cottage industry of fake rejects has emerged to flood the market. New Elephant Road is one centre of this commerce, though it also houses the shops of traditional tailors. If the RMG market is relatively new, catering to demand certainly is not, and Dhaka clothiers find ways of blending old and new approaches to business.

The national museum, in the same neighbourhood,

is well worth a visit; skip the first floor's uninspiring flora and fauna display to reach the impressive independence struggle gallery upstairs. Bangladesh's first national flag, unfurled by renegade Bengalis in Calcutta in 1971, was obviously of hasty construction, with its jagged sanguine spot slightly off-centre in the forest green background. In the same room as the flag are several commemorations to the dead of that year, although tributes take shape in understated ways, including through mementos and news clippings. A collection of a dozen human skulls bears a label saying that an estimated one million Benga-



lis died in the independence war. The effect is something both mournful and motivating, a collection that does not pause too long on pain but instead attempts to highlight the inspirational themes of Bengali self-determination.

Captivity

While the dark red of Bangladesh's flag represents the price paid in blood for independence, the green symbolises the country's lush vegetation and agriculture, and the fecund northern district of Rajshahi is where a fair share of this flora is located. The deltaic region is a blend of marsh, fields and swamp-like rivers, but Rajshahi, famous for its grain and mangoes, is solidly green from top to bottom. Its fertility makes Rajshahi home to one quarter of Bangladesh's 130 million people and renders it one of the most densely populated spots on earth. Hamlets extend throughout even much of its uncultivated forest area, and the occasional large plot of cultivated land looks incongruously empty of people.

In north-central Rajshahi, the town of Saidpur, straddling a stretch of rail line, has been dubbed by one guidebook a "sleepy little backwater". It is in fact a desperately poor settlement of 100,000, located halfway between the more prosperous and populous regional hubs of Rangpur and Dinajpur. Most of Saidpur's ambitious youth are attracted away from home by the pull of the big city. On a bus to Rangpur, I chatted with one such Saidpur émigré, a high school student on leave from Darjeeling for the Dashain holiday. When we got to Rangpur, he first took me to have a look at the abandoned *rajbari* (palace) and then offered to show me around nearby Saidpur while I waited for the night bus out.

It was a seemingly altruistic offer that I was to regret accepting. For a quick tour of only Saidpur was not on the cards; two hours later we were on a bus to Dinajpur, 50 kilometres to the west, to visit extended family, my bags having been left behind in his address-less house in Saidpur. My failure to force a return to his home to collect my possessions made me self-conscious of being an 'occidental' alone in the middle of north Bangladesh, at the mercy of a young man who had effectively rendered me captive to his hospitality and willingness to return me safely at some point to my belongings. That was to take a full day and a half.

At Dinajpur, the foreigner alighting from the ricksha proved a spectacle for the 'host' family, which sacrificed no expense and extended every conceivable courtesy – Bangladeshi hospitality at its finest, if compelled by disconcerting circumstances. One of the uncles, against my protests, abandoned the master bedroom for my resting, and I dined on all manner of super-saccharine Bangla sweets. The Dinajpur branch of the family has made its money from glasswork retail and rental properties; their prosperity – a three-storey house and multiple televisions – contrasted starkly with the grinding poverty of the relatives in Saidpur.

Dinajpur, at least superficially, is a poster-city of communal harmony. During the climax of Durga *puja*, this Muslim family put *tika* on their daughters' foreheads and one uncle took the children on a three-hour ricksha tour of the city's competing *puja* ceremonies, where, he confided to me, "about half" of the attendees were Muslims out past midnight partaking in the carnival cheer. In this annual contest of *puja* displays (*pan-dals*), this year's offerings included *sadhus* moving in beat to blaring Hindi pop, swinging their smoky vessels in front of fearsome idols of the deities; a light show of neon beams timed to Kenny G targeted at life-sized drawings of menacing dinosaurs; and yet another at the city's *rajbari* where the rites were solemnly performed, despite the intrusion of Britney Spears from an adjacent lane. Although international boundaries do not demarcate religious settlement patterns with any precision, Dinajpur is only a dozen kilometres from India's West Bengal, and this Muslim-majority town of 700,000 seems to enjoy its holidays in a convivial and sharing spirit, which was heartening to note in these communalism-threatened times.

Eventually, I was taken back to my possessions, although not before a ceremonial exchange of gifts and thanks at the uncles' abode in Dinajpur had taken place. But once back in Saidpur my friendly abducting Bengali family had one request of me: would I sponsor the eldest son, my Darjeeling-educated tour guide-host, for an immigration visa to the US? His father, a tailor, made counsel with me with the boy acting as interpreter. My evasions proved futile, as the son translated his determined father's directions on how to fill out of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service forms and where to mail the necessary multiple copies. In many Bangladeshi towns, US 'diversity visa' applications are sold alongside eggs and tobacco, but this familiarity with overseas bureaucratic procedures startled me. Is this the extent of despair in small town Bangladesh? I remained noncommittal on the matter of sponsoring the young man, but every evasion only strengthened the family's determination; finally, the father by-passed his intermediary and spoke to me directly in broken English. "Look how poor we are", he said, lifting his hands in frustration at the tin-roof, "please help us".

No traveller likes to be put on the spot in such a manner, and it occurred to me that rather than militants adhering to perversions of Islam, travellers in lands of crippling poverty are more likely to face abduction and harassment from the more banal demon of economic desperation. I had been foolish to step onto the bus to Dinajpur, and was now experiencing a liberal mix of persuasion and guilt. After a few hours of cajoling, they good-naturedly released me, putting me on a bus to Dhaka with a family friend on the same night ride assigned as my escort. The bus eventually pulled out, heading south in the dark, leaving both the family and myself with a considerable measure of uncertainty about the meaning of my visit to their town. ▽

The Sweet Perfume of Numafung

A feature film from Nepal remains ethnographically sensitive and provides a window to the specificities of the patriarchy that controls rural life in one corner of the country.

For a Nepali feature film, *Numafung* is remarkable in many ways. There is of course the fact that it is set within Limbu culture and community (one of the non-Indo Aryan groups of Nepal), and while the predominant language used in the film is Nepali, Limbu *bhasa* is interspersed throughout via various characters. There is also the immense relief that there are no song-and-dance sequences; or a valiant hero rescuing damsels in distress; or melodramatic emotional scenes exemplary of the bad versions of Bollywood which run rampant in 'Kollywood'. But most importantly, the fundamental extraordinariness of this film lies in its amazingly sensitive treatment of women and the lives they live structured by patriarchal norms of society. The film addresses the entire range of issues, from the treatment of daughters, marriage, marital obligations, widowhood and in-law relations, to the struggles, the moral dilemmas, and frustrations of being female. Yet the women in the film are far from mere victims, and are portrayed as strong, determined, full of agency and will, even as patriarchal forces and social structures seek to reign in their independence, ambitions and freedom. Acts of verbal and physical resistance to the societal norms values that attempt to structure their lives are manifest in many of their everyday actions and form an intrinsic part of their day-to-day negotiations.

Written and produced by Nabin Subba, a Kathmandu filmmaker, the film *Numafung* is situated within a Limbu community in easternmost Nepal and centers around the life of the older of two daughters (Numafung, "beautiful flower") of a poor Limbu farming couple in a non-descript rural village. The main



Numafung
Feature film
108 minutes, Nepali, 2001
Directed by Nabin Subba

reviewed by
Seira Tamang

story line consists of Numafung being married against her wishes to a young man of her own age – a happy marriage that ends abruptly and early with the young man's untimely death. Following a miscarriage that according to societal norms terminates her relationship to her in-laws, Numafung returns to her parent's home, only to be married off again. Her second husband, Girihaang, is older, richer and a truly odious man – a violent, arrogant

drunkard. Suffering gravely at the hands of this man, Numafung runs away with another man who has shown her consideration, a *lahuray* (a migrant worker, often a recruit) and her parents and younger sister lose their home as a result of having to pay *jari* to the husband (a form of compensation usually paid by the man who takes the wife from the husband).

Much could be said about the film from stylistic points, such as Subba's use of the younger sister Lojina as an excellent narrative foil for her sister's story. Two of the important revelations of film are not explicitly stated (the death of Numa's first husband and her leaving of her second husband) but are segued through Lojina's dream sequence. On occasion, the acting of some members of the cast is stilted and mechanical, especially that of Numafung's father, and this is perhaps to be expected given that most in the cast are not professional actors. However, rather than delving into the technical aspects of the film, this review will limit itself to a study of the social issues raised with respect to gender, more specifically the matter of patriarchy, resistance and – within the framework of the Limbu community – how notions of "multiple patriarchies" may enlarge the territory for feminist theorisation and activities in Nepal.

Dissecting patriarchy

Patriarchy is broadly understood as a system in which men control women's bodies and labour. In this sense, *Numafung* can be seen as a very perceptive portrayal, and thus implicitly a critique, of patriarchy. That women's bodies are owned, controlled, and bargained over by men with other men in a transference of ownership, is made explicitly clear throughout the film. The depiction of the selling of Numafung in both marriage proposals is replete with very realistically presented negotiations over a *nang-lo* (wickerwork tray) of money and gold placed between the two

parties of men. That the active purchase of Numafung is being undertaken, is reinforced in Lojina's innocent questions to her sister in their room upon seeing the first marriage negotiations: "What do the men downstairs want? What are they here to buy?" That once the terms of the "purchase" have been settled, there cannot be a re-negotiation, is made clear when a more than reluctant Numafung is forced to marry for the second time because the *reet*, customary payment, has already been accepted by her father.

After the wedding, the transference of ownership by marriage is explicit – the shift is from paternal patriarchy to conjugal, masculine patriarchal right. This is evident in the everyday ordinariness of Numa having to ask her husband's permission to visit her *maiti*, the maternal home. Conjugal patriarchy presumes inherent sexual rights and this aspect informs the bedroom scene between Numafung and Girihang, and permeates a particularly unpleasant sequence in which Girihang tells a group of his friends tauntingly that they are welcome to take her if they can afford to pay the *jari*. Making references to her sexuality, he expands that she used to be "*rusali khasali*" but now "*ras pani sukheko chha*" – that since she had been married before, her "juice" had dried up.

Such comments, of course, are part and parcel of the policing mechanisms of patriarchy that ensure the maintenance, reproduction and continuation of male-dominated hierarchies. Societal norms and 'culture' play upon internalised values to ensure that women do not resist or challenge either norms or the status allotted to them. This policing process takes physical and verbal forms. For instance, in the film, there is a sequence where the women are being chaperoned to a fair. That this reflects a need in men to protect women's sexuality is highlighted in the 'humorous' comment by one of the escorts that a marriage proposal for Numafung, who is one the

girls in the group, would be more than welcome as they are tired of 'herding.' Then there are the more blatant rebukes such as when Girihang says, "I don't like to hear this and that from women and children" on being asked by Numafung to try and have more harmonious relations with the rest of the village. 'Putting' or 'keeping' women in 'their place' has been a key strategy in maintaining existing power relations. There are the staple demands for Numafung to think about her family's *ijjat*, or honour, another foundational platform of patriarchy. Women are also carriers for the cultural perpetuation of patriarchal norms. For instance, it is the first mother-in-law who tells Numafung



Nabin Subba

that while they love her more than they would a daughter, since the *reet* has been taken, for the sake of the *ijjat* of the *maiti* she must marry a second time as directed without thinking of herself.

Women's role in perpetuating patriarchal norms is especially evident in the internalised policing mechanisms that prevent disclosures of injustices. Numafung makes Lojina promise not to tell the parents about Girihang's behaviour. The sense of moral duty ingrained in Numafung and the self-sacrificial behaviour expected of women is starkly portrayed when she physically intervenes in an attempt on Girihang's life – placing herself between the intended victim and the *khukuri*-wielding assailant. The husband is spared, but as the circle of his attackers walk away,

Girihang kicks Numafung to the ground.

Not just victims

It is clear that Numafung and the other female characters in the film are firmly embedded in the patriarchal norms and have had their lives structured accordingly. Yet, to label them as merely oppressed and dominated victims is clearly to ignore the multifaceted ways in which women resist or defy, and challenge, the forces of patriarchy, and the director has been sensitive enough to address this matter in *Numafung*. The subtle and not so subtle levels of individual and private sites of protest make clear the agency of these women.

Numafung's resistance to the social trajectories mapped out for her is evident both physically and verbally throughout the film. Her dialogues before both marriages are sharply critical and intensely clear. Before the first marriage, she openly declares, "I will not marry now" to her parents and her grandmother, only to be rebuked and admonished. During the second marriage negotiation, the camera moves to the second floor of the house where Numafung is furiously packing her clothes. Her mother comes upstairs looking for her as she is to serve the guests. Even as she continues with her packing, Numafung says, "You gave me away forcibly once, and you are still not satisfied? What do you think I am something you sell? I am not your cattle. I will not marry". She declares that she is going to her (first) husband's house even though, as reminded by her mother, the absence of offspring has rendered all formal ties to her former husband's household void. Numafung manages to escape and does go to her dead husband's household. Only at the intervention and counselling of her mother-in-law to get married a second time does Numafung travel back to her *maiti*.

Her continued opposition and resistance is made delightfully clear in the shots of her refusal to touch knees with Girihang as they sit

cross-legged during the wedding ceremony. Indeed, so open is her objection to the marriage that through the ceremony Numafung's hand has to be forcibly steered by another. From returning to her *maiti* following Girihang's bad behaviour – and declaring her unwillingness to return – to her eventual running away with the *lahuray*, Numafung's active resistance is clear.

The everyday resistance of those whom we usually label as being 'powerless' and 'helpless' is also made visible in young Lojina and how she reacts to her *bhena* (brother-in-law). She calls him "*motay*" (fat) and "*bhunday*" (pot bellied) when alone with her sister; she rudely thumps the container of *thongba* (alcoholic beverage made of fermented millet seeds) in front of him when he comes to take Numafung back; and most hilariously, she surreptitiously spits into the bowls of *dal* before serving the food to him and his companion. These would all be acts of what the theoretician of resistance James C Scott would term "disguised aggression". Indeed, in the same manner that Scott describes how slaves actively manipulated rituals of subordination to their own advantage – an art form of successful manipulation – Lojina's "respectful service" to her *bhena* serves as a tool for her agency. While not dramatic or confrontational, these are acts of resistance.

The *Teej* festival in September brought to centre stage the manner in which women voice their criticisms of unjust and oppressive social norms. Songs sung on this holiday for women are sharply critical of social injustices such as household burdens and the behaviour of men and mothers-in-law. What *Numafung* makes clear is that these political struggles, insofar as they challenge power relations, occur on an everyday basis at local and personal levels. Such an understanding problematises the simplistic depictions of women in Nepal, in developmental literature and elsewhere, as 'helpless, patriarchal-y oppressed women in need of con-

sciousness raising'. However, it must also be made clear that notwithstanding resistance and agency, the positions of the dominated, the subaltern and the peripheralised remain unchanged. Material reality does not alter just because one recognises the agency, forms of resistance and self-definition of the women.

Contextualising patriarchy

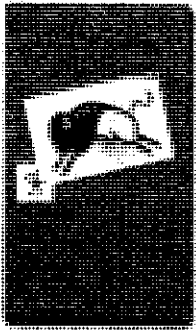
Any discussion of *Numafung* that did not refer to culture would be incomplete. Clearly, the fact that this movie is located in Limbu culture has an important bearing in Nepal where, historically, ethnic groups and their cultural values and norms have been sidelined if not denigrated. Culture forms both the context and medium of the story in the film, and the norms and values are intrinsic to the storyline and the characters. Thus, for example, you have the ever-present image of *thongba* served as *khaja* (light meal) to tired workers on the one hand, and to the young Lojina and her friend upon arrival at Numafung's first married home on the other. That the crowd at a recent screening of the film in Kathmandu giggled and laughed at the scene of a young girl being offered alcohol, revealed the 'strangeness' and 'foreignness' of this very 'Nepali' cultural practice for many other Nepalis.

In the same vein, while the moral dilemmas, the forced choices and the oppressiveness of social norms and values would touch the heart of many if not all women in Nepal, it is clear that the patriarchy of *Numafung* is qualitatively different to that usually envisioned as existing in 'Nepali society'. To name a few examples: the easy remarriage of Numafung even as a widow; the social acceptability of her running away with another man while already married; her addressing of both husbands in the more egalitarian "*timi*" and not the more respectful '*tapai*' or even '*hajur*'; the open dancing at the fair between strangers of different sexes and the splashing of water between two men and

women at Numafung's second wedding. There are clearly very particular notions of purity, sexuality and gendered norms in the Limbu world. Feminist battles for *Limbusis* (Limbu women) would not need to fight notions of sexuality that underlie prohibitions against widow-remarriage; in that sense, rethinking the struggle against patriarchy as struggles against the 'multiple patriarchies' in existence within Nepal may be a more profitable strategy for feminists in Nepal.

Numafung heralds a new form of filmmaking as far as the Nepali audience is concerned. From the widening of the frame to accommodate nuances of Limbu culture, to the underlying perceptiveness with regard to gender relationships – whether it be in critiquing the altered forms of the originally positive arrangement of marriage payments, which were meant for the security of the bride, to the overall presence of strong female characters (Numafung, Lojina, the second mother-in-law and the regal grandmother) or in amplifying the agency of women in constructed positions of inequality – the multiple sensibilities which inform this film are extraordinary.

Issues could be raised with the film of course. There is, for example, the portrayal of that which is defined as being 'beautiful'. With her oval face and her overall non-Aryan features, Numafung clearly portrays an alternative to the widely accepted notion of beauty that privileges sharp aquiline noses, large eyes and accentuated cheekbones. Numafung is a Limbu beauty. However, unlike the stocky, well-built lasses one is more likely to encounter in Limbu villages, she is slim and svelte and thus still conforms to certain 'hegemonic' standards. Thus the potential for the cinematic portrayal of alternative forms of beauty in Nepali cultures seems somewhat muted. This is but a small point to raise in the context of the achievements of Nabin Subba, the director, whose next endeavour this reviewer awaits with great eagerness. *Numafung* must be seen. ▽



Living with the AIDS virus: The epidemic and the response in India

Edited by Samiran Panda, Anindya Chatterjee and Abu S Abdul-Quader
Sage, Delhi, 2002
pp 208, INR 395/USD 12, 2002
ISBN 0 76 1996222

The exploding HIV epidemic in India, which infects an estimated 23 people every minute, has prompted a growing

public health debate over the proper role of government and civil society in combating the disease and caring for its victims. In this collection of essays, leading social scientists and epidemiological researchers analyse factors contributing to the virus' spread in India, evaluate responses by governmental bodies, NGOs and community action groups, and prescribe alternative approaches. With HIV now well into its second decade in India, this collection offers an overdue critical retrospective on HIV policy to date.



Alfarabi and the foundation of Islamic political philosophy

by Muhsin S Mahdi
OUP, Karachi, 2002
pp 282
ISBN 0 22 650 1868
PKR 425/USD 18

Muhsin Mandi, a Harvard University Arabic language and Islamic political philosophy scholar, analyses the

origins of Islamic political thought as seen through the life of Alfarabi (870-950), an Arab courtier based primarily in Baghdad and Aleppo. Alfarabi, who authored several texts on Greek political thought, advanced the concept of "the virtuous city", which distinguishes philosophy from religion and science. This volume draws on four decades of research into medieval Arab texts and presents Alfarabi as a philosopher-teacher who laid the groundwork for new understandings of a revealed religion.



Time warps: The insistent politics of silent and evasive pasts

by Ashish Nandy
Orient Longman, Delhi, 2002
pp 240, INR 495
ISBN 81 7824 020 3

Ashish Nandy, one of the Subcontinent's leading public intellectuals, examines the role played by the Indian state in imposing a 'secular

ethos' on the everyday lives of Indian citizens. By taking account of psychological identities – personal, spiritual,

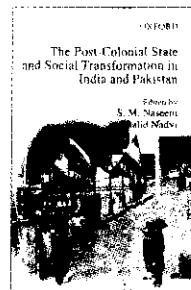
sexual and political – Nandy critically revisits the process of state formation and identity creation, rethinking many of the underlying doctrines of South Asia's ruling elite and articulating a vision of the region based on alternative futures.



Patan Museum: The transformation of a royal palace in Nepal

by Götz Hagmüller
Serindia Publications, London, 2002
pp 144, price not mentioned
ISBN 0 906026 59 8

The Patan Museum is without a doubt one of the Kathmandu Valley's finest showpieces. Located in a medieval palace that was painstakingly restored with assistance from the Austrian government, Götz Hagmüller supervised its transformation from a crumbling building to a world-class museum space. His passion comes through in this well-produced book that provides the reader with the story of the renovation process, accompanied by 'before' and 'after' photographs and drawings. Guest contributions touch upon other aspects of the museum's importance, and provide brief historical backgrounds of the palace and the Kathmandu Valley, which offer the reader a suitable context in which to appreciate the palace's renaissance. (The book is available in the market after 1 December.)



The post-colonial state and social transformation in India and Pakistan

Edited by SM Naseem and Khalid Nadvi
OUP, Karachi, 2002
pp 500, PKR 595/USD 23
ISBN 0 19 579636 5

This collection brings together 16 essays on different social and economic themes facing post-colonial South Asia, with a particular emphasis on Pakistan. Divided into sections on state and governance, economic development and social change, religion and democracy in South Asia, and gender relations in Muslim society, the volume combines theoretical work with ground realities, with an aim to addressing pressing contemporary problems in the region. In bringing together the writings of noted activists, academics and researchers, the volume's publishers hope the book will "set the tone for the development of a healthy tradition among social scientists of questioning orthodox perceptions based on reasoned and well-researched debate".

Compiled by **Deepak Thapa**, Social Science Baha, Patan

The Subcontinent of South Aisa

When faced with a challenge, a problem, the South Asians of the northern (problematic) part of the Subcontinent scratch themselves behind the ears and say, "aisa hi hai", adding, "kya karein?" The languages may differ, but the idea is the same. Translated, it refers to a fatalistic acceptance of things, and there is enough of that to warrant that at least this portion of South Asia should be called South Aisa. Nowhere is fatalism and willingness to suffer mayhem (as long as it is in the next state, city or *mohalla*) more obvious than in the easy acceptance of death due to political violence.

Look at the facing page, and study the *incomplete* list of political killings in our region over the course of October 2002. Do not bother yet about a full count, just check the column inches. Where do most South Asians die for a 'cause', get killed for fighting for that 'cause'? Jammu and Kashmir, that incredible haven of peace and tranquility of the 1960s where Shammi Kapoor and Sadhana used to cavort in the meadows of Gulmarg. J&K takes the skull and crossbones trophy for October as the place where the most South Asians died, and where Kashmiris suffer under the twin onslaughts of *jehadis* exported from Pakistan and the lakhs of Indian troops meant to lock the region into the union.

Next, the column-inches take us to Nepal – the kingdom that deluded itself into thinking it was the abode of peace only because tourism brochures said so and because the Buddha happened to be born here in a nondescript patch of the tarai two and a half millenia ago. For being a far smaller country than Pakistan or Bangladesh, notice how poorly Nepal stacks up against eternally violence-prone Pakistan with all its sectarian violence, especially in Karachi. As a columnist wrote in the *Nepali Times*, "Mahakal, the deity of death and destruction, is performing his Tandava in Nepal without bothering to take a break". The state and security in Nepal do not even seem to notice the dead and dying all around, and Kathmandu valley's cocoon is as yet intact from the brutality in the hinterland.

Sri Lanka would have been right up there, and even above J&K, for much of the last two decades. But it is at relative peace today, with discussions going on between the LTTE and GOSL across the waters in Thailand. Even the Indian Northeast seems to have tired a bit of mayhem, if you consider the consolidated inches for Tripura, Nagaland, Assam and Meghalaya. And could it be that we have missed out on Maoist activities in Bihar-Jharkhand and in the Deccan? Gujarat has gone mostly quiet, the terrible Mr Modi apparently unable to cause more harm.

Perhaps there is a cycle to these things. Everywhere, in the absence of a 'naturally' evolved state – and South Asia's states are such – there is a premium on the

quality of political leadership. When that leadership is found wanting, for being rampantly corrupt and self-centred, for not providing the minimum of governance which leads to economic uplift, or for not listening to the urgent voice of minorities and those who have been crowded out of state power, you can rest assured that the flare-up will come. In places where the government cannot even see an explosion staring it in the face, as in the case of the Kathmandu-centric *sarkar* of Nepal, then the flames rise as if out of nowhere. Elsewhere, when the government is far (physically or psychologically) from the place of inequity and is able to send in the paramilitaries to suppress the initial sparks, the problems fester. But when they do come to the surface, they last much, much longer.

Perhaps, therefore, there is an element of predeterminism in all of this, the killing and murder for political purpose. Since democracy is imperfect in most parts of South Asia, we can take it that the politicians will not as a rule look to the long term. Which means that they are programmed to turn away those who seek justice and release from discrimination on the bases of ethnicity, language, religion, region, caste, class. And so, the dispossessed will rise when under manipulative and opportunistic leadership, and when they do the state and establishment will without exception respond with the stick.

Depending upon the local specifics, the depth of discontent, the fractures within protest movement, the importance of the 'prize' for the central government, and the involvement of outside powers, the war will go on for decades or it will be tackled in a few years. But the battle will happen. If we are right, then the only thing to hope for is the emergence of leaderships all over that can understand the trend and decide, once the flare-up begins, to address root causes so as to shorten the duration of the pain.

Sri Lanka has had a long tragic innings, and hopefully it is on the mend, although we would be correct to collectively hold our breath. J&K and the Indian Northeast are clearly travelling on a longish road of violence, while Nepal will likely self-destruct if the violence of the kind indicated in the facing page goes on much longer. But if there is indeed predeterminism in South Asian violence, look at the regions that are today at relative peace, particularly in the problematic Northern half of the Subcontinent, starting from Balochistan, all the way to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Have they had their cathartic experience yet?

Meanwhile, have you noticed something else? The complete absence of South India in our column inches out there? How do we account for *that*?

Kanish Dixit

ONE MONTH OF BLOOD



NOTE: IN SOME CASES, DATES REFLECT THE DAY ON WHICH AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCED A DEATH AND MAY NOT BE THE ACTUAL DAY ON WHICH THE KILLING OCCURRED. COMPILED BY ANDREW NASH.

A partial count of political killings in South Asia in October



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