



Iwaaz

The voice of South Asia

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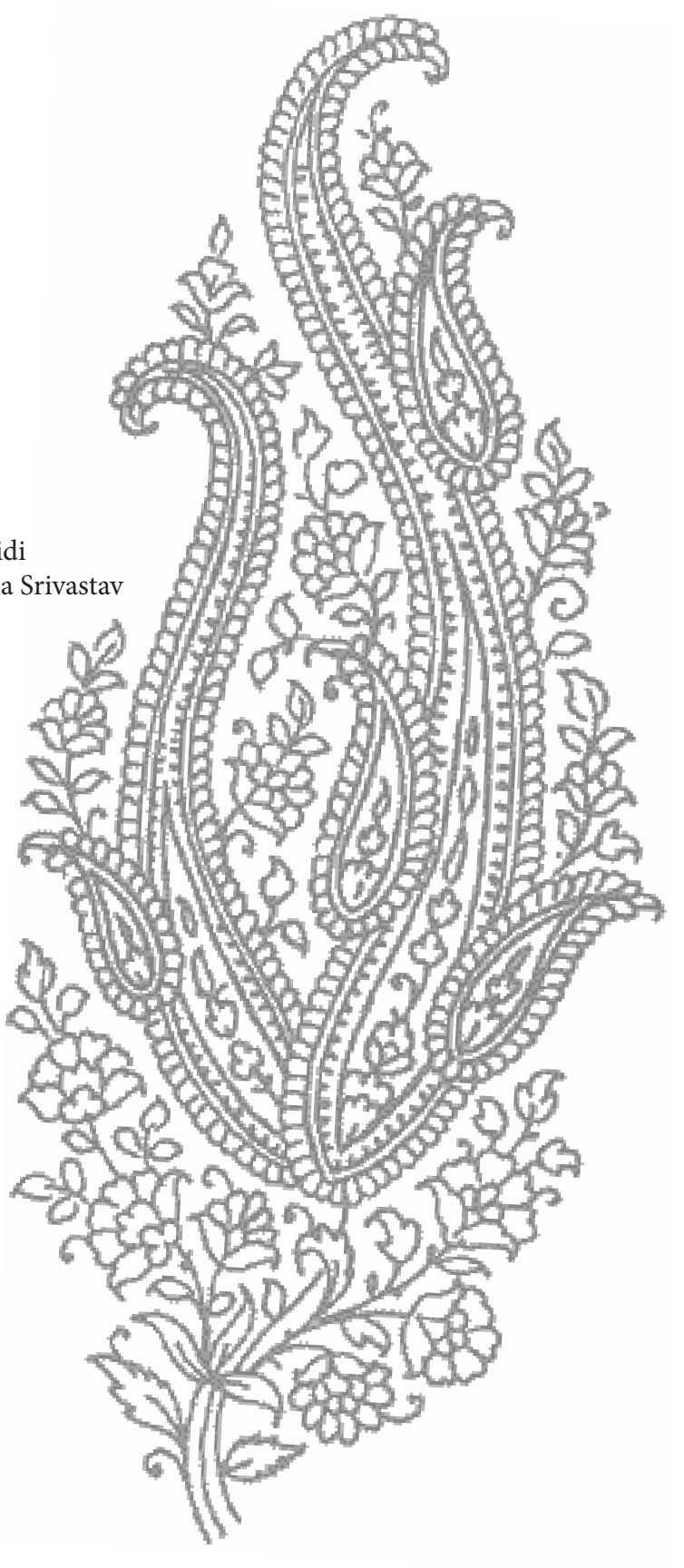


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Letters to our Readers:

Dearest Reader,

It is with pleasure that we are able to present to you yet another issue of Awaaz: The Voice of South Asia. This issue, while only our second, has become a milestone in our publication history and will hopefully - as these pages will testify - set a standard we hope every future issue will meet. A great deal of time has been put into each piece, and we hope that you find each work as entertaining, interesting, edumacational and pleasant to peruse as the next. Without further ado, please turn the page and the ones after that. This is our only wish.

Kanak M. Gupta

Editor in Chief

Dear Readers,

For the first time this year, Awaaz oversaw the production of a South Asian play, a seventh-century Sanskrit farce called Bhagavad-Ajjukiyam. I would like to congratulate the director, actors, and crew for an outstanding job. I also want to thank the audience at our first performance for their enthusiasm and laughter. Awaaz can hopefully continue to support South Asian theater at Columbia for years to come.

Abhijit Nagaraj

President

Alexander in India

Original in Greek: Plutarch

Translated by: Abhijit Nagaraj

Below is a translation of a passage from Plutarch's Life of Alexander (1st century AD, originally Greek) in which the young conqueror questions some Indian ascetics on life and virtue. In his closing words to them, Alexander recognizes a parallel between Greek and Indian philosophy and encourages the Indians to engage in some cross-cultural discourse with the cynic Onesicritus.

Alexander captured the ten gymnosophists, or “naked philosophers,” who had most persuaded Sabbas to revolt and who had made the most trouble for the Macedonians. Now these naked philosophers were reputed to be quite clever and pithy. Alexander therefore decided to test them with difficult questions, and said he would put to death the first one to give a wrong answer, and would then execute the others in an order determined the same way. The eldest among them he made the judge of the answers.

Alexander asked the first philosopher whether the living or dead are more numerous.

“The living, since the dead are no more,” he replied.

The second was asked whether the sea or the earth produces larger beasts.

“The earth, since a the sea is but a part of the earth.”

The third was asked what animal is most cunning.

“The one which man has not yet discovered.”

The fourth was asked why he had roused Sabbas to revolt.

“I wanted him either to live nobly or die nobly.”

The fifth was asked whether he thought day or night had been born first.

“The day. By one day.” When the king was amazed at his answer, he added that an impossible question must have an impossible answer.

Alexander asked the sixth how a man can be most loved.

“If he is most powerful, but does not strike fear.”

Of the three remaining, Alexander asked the first how a man becomes a god.

“By doing what is not possible for a man.”

The next was asked whether life or death was more powerful.

“Life, for it shoulders so many ills.”

And the last was asked how long a man should live.

“Until he does not suppose dying to be better than living.”

Alexander then turned to the judge and ordered him to give his verdict. The judge answered that each man had answered worse than another.

“Then you shall die first,” said Alexander, “for giving me such a verdict.”

The judge replied, “But, O King, that cannot be, if you did not speak falsely when you said you would put to death the man who answered worst.”

In the end, Alexander sent them off with gifts. But to those among them highest in reputation, who lived quietly by themselves, he sent Onesicritus, asking the philosophers to pay him a visit.*

Abhijit Nagaraj is a senior at Columbia University majoring in Classics.



Modes of Women's Empowerment : Literacy & Democracy in Urban India

Sandra Zhao

INTRODUCTION

In mid-December 2007 I contacted Pratham International with a proposal to develop and implement an adult literacy project with the organization. Pratham, one of India's largest NGOs, is dedicated to increasing levels of educational attainment in urban slum areas in the country. The proposed project also included a research component that examined the impact of education on women's political agency through a sociological lens. I was concerned with the effects of low literacy on political participation among women in impoverished urban communities. Using the CIA's World Factbook 2009 statistics, this demographic represents 82.5 million people; a reasonably significant proportion of the electorate in the world's largest democracy. However, with a male literacy rate of 73.4 percent and a female literacy rate of 47.8 percent, the degree to which India's democratic process is truly participatory comes into question.¹

I chose to focus my study on the work of Pratham because of its innovative, decentralized organizational structure and its wide reach across the whole of India. Pratham operates in twenty-one of India's twenty-five states. Its goal is to reduce dropout rates amongst children in slums by providing tuition programs to supplement their regular schooling, which is often inadequate due to the poor state of public schools in India. Another factor is the level of educational attainment by mothers. Studies show that six to eight-year-olds of mothers who have completed at least the fifth standard are three times as likely to be able to read the alphabet as children of mothers who have not been to school.² Adult education is therefore as important as child education to overall literacy levels, as it has far reaching consequences for breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and inequality.

Pratham recruits women from the slum communities to teach their programs, and therefore integrates its goals of furthering child and adult education in a sustainable manner. It also builds community capacity and grants the women a source of both education and employment. This has far reaching consequences for their participation in the democratic process and their social and economic mobility. The women are trained and educated by Training Monitors and are paid a monthly salary by the organization. They are responsible for recruiting their own students, and keep the fees they charge. The program also allows for career development by rewarding performance through promotion to the position of Training Monitors (TMs), who are

“We vote so that a good candidate is **elected** and if that is what you hope for, you should participate. By **not voting** you can't sit aside and say **he's not a good choice**, he's a bad choice. You must participate in it yourself.” – *Nikate Tai*

responsible for training the teachers and managing the program within a community.

Given my project goals and budget, Pune emerged as the best location for me to work. Pune is a city of 4.5 million people located three hours south of Mumbai. Approximately 2.7 million of the population lives below the poverty line. The average monthly income in slum communities is Rs. 3000, although the high degree of economic inequality results in a high variation in income distribution. In Pune alone, Pratham employs thirty-four TMs and over 600 teachers.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

With the help of the Pratham staff, I identified Jai Bawani Nagar as the ideal community to test my

program. This neighborhood is an impoverished area where the mean level of income was close to the overall average income of the slum population of the city. It therefore provided a fairly representative sample of the teachers employed in Pratham's Pune program. The teachers that I interviewed came from varying backgrounds, but all lived in the slum communities where they work. The mothers enrolled in my program were aged between twenty-six and forty-years-old. Almost all had been married off in their teens and all have multiple children.

The program I had come to implement had been developed in tandem with the Pratham staff and was targeted towards the mothers of the students in the organization's classes. The program would engage mothers

"Since I don't know much about how we should decide, I would *rely* on my husband's **opinion** or family member's opinion and then if he says that this candidate or party is good, I'd vote for that candidate."

in their children's education by giving them the materials to read together. The materials would be based on what the children would be learning in their classes, so that they could come home and use them with their mothers. The children would be transferring their knowledge to their mothers, in addition to fortifying it in their own minds. The packet began with the alphabet and numbers, graduated to words, simple sentences, complex sentences, short paragraphs, and then short stories. I arranged them in "flashcard" style complete with pictures. I tried to select terms and sentences that they would commonly use. There were also sections with "fill-in-the-blank" or "draw a picture" to make them fun and interactive. The point was to provide the mothers with materials so that they could study alongside their children. I hypothesized that many of the women would want to learn and would be willing to spare at least ten or fifteen minutes a day to use the materials.

In early 2008 Pratham had just debuted its English language classes in Pune, and I accompanied the staff members on their visits to the slum communities where they tested potential teachers. I found this to be a particularly enlightening experience because not only did I visit to a slum for the first time, but I also got to meet the women and children and see for myself what their lives were like. This initial exposure to Pune's slum communities and Pratham's teaching methods informed

the development of the materials for my program.

I interviewed the twenty six women enrolled in my program in addition to sixteen teachers and Training Monitors. In mid-September I distributed evaluation forms to all of the mothers to assess the progress of the literacy program. From the evaluations, the women seemed to respond very well to the materials. All learned alongside their children as I intended. Not only were they helping to reinforce their children's education, but they were also learning themselves. All said that they found the materials useful and that they felt that they are actually learning. I think that the women also appreciated the opportunity to spend time with their children doing educational activities. A few did not use the materials, instead giving the packet to their children to use alone. Generally these women were either minimally educated and lacked the confidence to try the materials themselves, or they worked throughout the day and could not find any free time. The materials did not go to waste, though, because the children still benefited.

EMPLOYMENT AND VOTING BEHAVIORS

Alongside the evaluation of my project, I continued to collect data on voting habits and behaviors among the women using an interview method based on a standard set of questions for both groups of women. I found significant differences between patterns across stay at home mothers and those across teachers. Among the mothers who did not teach, sixteen out of twenty-one vote. The women who do not vote have not actively sought out a voting registration center, indicating how little they value the right. The women who said that they would like to vote reasoned that voting is a right that should not be wasted.

Paradoxically, none thought that their actions would make a real difference. One woman, Gauri Garg, said

"I would like to vote as a right, but when you look around at the community, people are voting but there are not direct effects, so it doesn't really matter what candidate comes."

Of the fourteen teachers interviewed, twelve vote. All twelve think that their votes can make a difference. This is a large departure from the stay at home mothers, who did not believe their votes were significant. The attitude of the teachers stems from their willingness to hold their elected official accountable for upholding his or her campaign promises and by extension, to ensure that their votes made a difference. Gayatree Nikate votes because she feels that if she does not, she will have no right to

complain about poor representation.

“We vote so that a good candidate is elected and if that is what you hope for, you should participate. By not voting you can’t sit aside and say he’s not a good choice, he’s a bad choice. You must participate in it yourself.” – Nikate Tai

In order to expect change, she feels that she must take part in creating it. This participatory attitude reflects a confidence in one’s self-worth. Technically every vote counts, but one must also believe that it can make a difference.

The women’s attitudes towards voting and the reasons for participating in the democratic process therefore varied between the two groups. This raises the question - if the stay at home mothers did not believe the candidates delivered, why did they vote? Most of the women vote because they think that they are supposed to, although they do not expect any results. Jaya Phalak votes “because it is my right.” When asked what it means to have a right, she responded laughing, “I can’t say exactly.” This sense of responsibility prevails over her belief that results should not be expected. Phalak initially said she voted because the candidate who gets elected will “work for the well-being of the society.” However, further probing revealed the sentiments she had earlier expressed – that this does not happen in practice. Her initial response therefore seems reflexive, as if it is what she has been taught to think. Social pressure is a major factor in voting for women. Many claimed that they voted simply because everyone else did. Phalak said,

“I don’t think that my vote really matters at all. But I vote because it is a privilege that I have to vote, so I don’t want to waste it. And since everyone else votes, I vote.”

This attitude was consistent with the teachers who did not vote. Aruna Jadhav, a Pratham teacher who does not vote, said

“I don’t see any personal profit in it. Even if I vote the same benefit that is given to the society will happen to me. If I don’t vote it doesn’t make a difference. The same things will happen whether I vote or not. The person who will get elected will first look for his own progress and benefit and then look for the progress of the society. I don’t want to encourage this attitude.”

Her attitude therefore brings into question the degree to

which employment affects the women’s’ attitudes towards voting. Although she is employed as a teacher, her attitudes toward her vote as a proportion of the electorate and toward her capacity as a citizen to bring about change are consistent with those of the stay at home mothers.

The ways in which the women form political opinion differs across the two groups. When asked what issues she considers important, one of the women, Sangita Tai, who has completed only seven years of schooling and works as domestic help, responded,

“Since I don’t know much about how we should decide, I would rely on my husband’s opinion or family member’s opinion and then if he says that this candidate or party is good, I’d vote for that candidate.”

However, the teachers formed their opinions very differently. Sunanda Raut said, “I think, I think and decide. Only me...I read newspapers and watch TV and think who would be right [sic].” Vimal Khandale stated,

“I will look at that person’s qualities and his credentials. If he supports the truth, what work will he do if he is voted, then I will decide. But usually the people who are running for election are people that I know, so I know what he will do if he is elected.”

The groups of women differed in their perceptions of the candidates and the degree to which they were represented. Sangita Mahadik, a stay at home mother, said

“I don’t think that the politicians or leaders really represent us. They only spend a part of the money that they get from the government for the welfare of the state, and they pocket the rest for themselves.”

In contrast, teacher Vandana Kadam said in reference to a particular candidate,

“At least in my area, he is a good representative. He has worked here for the past five years and made a lot of difference in the village. He has always been a person who helps. And since he comes from the same strata of society he knows what are the problems. He is a role model

who first does things and then asks people to follow him.”

Sangita Tai and Vandana Tai have very different views on the quality of candidates – while Sangita Tai expresses frustration at corruption among bureaucrats, Vandana Tai qualifies her appreciation of the representative with specific justifications. It is particularly interesting that Vandana Tai distinguishes herself as an individual citizen choosing a leader for her specific community rather than part of a mass electorate. While many of the stay at home mothers echoed Sangita Tai’s concerns regarding overall corruption in the bureaucracy, the teachers’ focused on only the track record of the candidate they considered qualified. Jaya Phalak, a stay at home mother, complained that the candidates in the area are seen only at election time and not after. However, Gayatree Nikate said that if the candidate did not deliver on their campaign promises she would “go and question them. I’ll keep nagging them until they come and do it.” A large difference that emerges between the two demographics is therefore their willingness to demand accountability. When asked where her initiative comes from, Nikate Tai said,

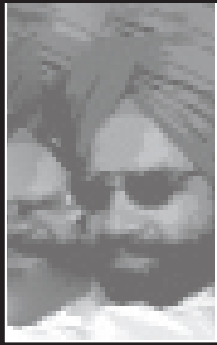
“You have to cultivate it yourself. If your self-confidence is bringing about a good change and if it is helping other people, then why not? You just have to remember to stay in your limits. You can’t promise somebody something that is beyond your limits. Help them as much as you can, however little you have, just do it.”

The greatest difference between the women who were employed and those who are not appears to lie in their faith in the political process, as reflected in their attitudes towards and participation in the institution of voting. The teachers took a more proactive attitude, expressing confidence in their ability to demand accountability and ensure the effectiveness of the political process. The stay at home mothers voted, but were far less convinced of their power as democratic citizens. These results indicate that low literacy levels have far broader effects than merely lower levels of education attainment; they may shape the behavior of entire segments of the electorate. The work of NGOs such as Pratham then becomes all the more important, not only with respect to short-term social benefits within urban communities, but also with regards to its long- term consequences on the growth of the world’s largest democracy.*

Sandra Zhao is a senior at the University of Pennsylvania. This article is an excerpt from a research project funded by a DCC undergraduate fellowship grant.

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THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

Unshrouding the Invisible South Asian

Diva Datwani

The South Asian community in the United States constitutes the wealth of linguistic, religious, regional, and socioeconomic diversity characteristic of the subcontinent. Yet this multiplicity often gets overlooked in favor of a South Asian monolith, which reduces the community to a single species: the North Indian, Hindu, information technology or medical professional. This reductive description often popularly characterizes South Asians in the US as a uniformly affluent, educated, and well-assimilated group. This “model minority” characterization blithely glosses over the thousands of people who toil endlessly in menial jobs and live from paycheck to paycheck, far removed from the four-bedroom houses and station wagons of their ethnic brethren.

In recent years there has been increasing awareness of the fallacy of cultural and religious homogeneity within South Asian America, but the unvarying image of upper-middle class affluence holds tight. In fact, the media and affluent Indian Americans alike celebrate and perpetuate this image, despite the fact that it is a blatant dismissal of an entire segment of the community. The model minority myth, then, not only misrepresents the composition of the population, but creates stratification within the South Asian community between those who can and do meet its criteria and those who can't and do not.

The roots of this issue lay in the particular patterns in 20th century South Asian immigration to the United States. Much scholarly literature has been produced on the South Asian immigrants who arrived in the United States immediately following

the Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1965, a severe break with prior laws prohibiting Asian immigration. Under the new law, Asian professionals, particularly those in the information technology and healthcare fields, were greatly encouraged to migrate to the United States. Indeed, between 1966 and 1977, 83% of Indians coming to the US entered under the occupational category of professional and technical workers. Of these, approximately 20,000 were scientists with PhD's, 40,000 engineers, and 25,000 doctors. Nazli Kibria, a professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, describes this substantial influx as the “second phase” in South Asian migration to the US, after the decidedly less abundant (and hence less influential) inflow of Punjabi farmers to California at the turn of the twentieth century.

Yet there has been a massive demographic shift in immigration since the 1980s. This third phase in South Asian migration to the US stems from the family reunification policies within the 1965 law, which allow people settled in the US to send for their family members back home. Family reunification now accounts for the vast majority of South Asian inflow to the US. In 1996, for example, 9,910 Indians, 1,164 Pakistanis, and 711 Bangladeshis came to the US under employer-based preferences. The comparable figures for those who came under the family reunification scheme are far higher: 34,291 Indians, 9,122 Pakistanis, and 8,221 Bangladeshis. Also, a sizable sub-wave of increased refugees and asylum seekers have further shifted the third wave demographics.

Many recent immigrants are not highly skilled

professionals like their predecessors; they are taxi drivers, domestic workers, busboys, and convenience store employees. As the immigrants of the third phase do not come from the class of highly skilled elites in their home countries, they are often not proficient in English and hence face far more difficulty assimilating into American society and achieving upward mobility than the professionals of the second phase. In their article “Immigration and the Earnings of Youth in the US,” Benjamin Matta and Anthony Popp go as far as to contend that family reunification provisions actually provide incentives against investment in skills by potential interns. They also note a significant and persistent drop in the educational attainment level in South Asian immigrants since the 1960s. Correspondingly, US Census Bureau statistics from 1993 show that among

them to “pull themselves up by the bootstraps” and attain the American Dream. They positioned the second wave in opposition to Black Americans, whose portrayal emphasized negative values and perhaps even inherent inferiority. In truth, it was the fact that the Immigration and Nationality Act had largely attracted elite professionals that allowed first generation Asian Americans to achieve far more economic success than perhaps any prior group of immigrants, not some natural or cultural talents as the myth still holds.

This glaring fact, long overlooked by champions of the model minority theory, not only harms Black Americans, but also all South Asians who deviate from its oppressive constraints. South Asians who face day-to-day struggles with immigration

“It is mainly the **unyielding persistence** of the model minority myth that has relegated the **working class** immigrants of the third phase to the position of the unwanted “other,” and actually **hardened** the line between them and their professional counterparts.”

the immigrants that entered the US in the preceding five-year period, 20 percent live below the poverty line and the average income for the group was only \$22,231.

The stark differences in the socioeconomic characteristics of the second and third phase immigrants to the United States enable natural divisions within the South Asian community. However, it is mainly the unyielding persistence of the model minority myth that has relegated the working class immigrants of the third phase to the position of the unwanted “other,” and actually hardened the line between them and their professional counterparts.

It was the second phase of immigrants - a mishmash of doctors, scientists, and engineers - that engendered the development of the model minority myth in the American mindset. They were educated, upwardly mobile, and spoke perfect English. Beginning in the 1970s, the media deified these Asian immigrants, whose unique cultural values enabled

issues (rent, and keeping their children in school) are pushed to the fringes of what is considered acceptable and normal for the community. They face a constant stigma from their own community as well as the media, who propagate the belief that their experience is not truly representative of what it means to be South Asian in America.

“American Masala,” an article in Newsweek, aptly demonstrates the unabashed celebration of prosperous and erasure of working class South Asian Americans in media. By calling South Asians in the U.S. “children of affluence” and “high achievers” living the American Dream, both the authors and the article’s South Asian subjects treat the model minority theory as a blatant reality. While they acknowledge that South Asians are no longer confined to the fields of science and medicine, noting desi actors, entrepreneurs, and even sommeliers, these attempts to break with South Asian stereotypes are always set against the backdrop of college educations, upper-middle class upbringings, and professional parents.

Only in the very last paragraph of this multiple-page piece do the authors even bother to mention the South Asians who do not live up to the harsh dictates of the model minority theory. They quote Aladdin Ullah, the son of indigent Bangladeshi immigrants, who worries “that those who haven’t made it will be overlooked” as success stories become more common. Yet this concern is quickly brushed aside in the final lines of the article with the assertion that as the overall community continues to gain visibility, the chances for success among the disadvantaged will only improve – essentially trickledown economic theory.

Misrepresentation of minorities in mass media is nothing new; the disappointing reality is the South Asian professional class’ overwhelming acceptance of this portrayal. In many cases they even propagate the very upper-middle class that push their brethren to the fringes. However, unlike the white-dominated media, they cannot reasonably profess ignorance of

to buy into the false notion that Asians are the model minority. They inherently have some traits, such as adaptability, work ethic, and emphasis on education, that have allowed them upward mobility and high levels of assimilation into American institutions. This view is corroborated in a study by Professor Dhingra, in which he conducted interviews with Indian American professionals in Dallas, and found that “they accepted the model minority stereotype of being successful through hard work and adoption of key American norms.” By espousing belief in the idea that South Asians’ inherent positive qualities have caused their immigrant success, professional desis implicitly condemn their working class counterparts for not having achieved as much. Because they seem not to possess the mythical traits that allow for rapid upward mobility, they do not fit comfortably into popular notions about what constitutes South Asian identity.

The working class’ potential to shatter the false,



their disadvantaged brethren. Professional South Asians are largely guilty of failing to acknowledge the key role their (or their parents’) high educational attainment and job security have played in facilitating their success, claims Professor Pawan Dhingra of Oberlin College. For example, Alpina Singh, the young Californian sommelier profiled in the Newsweek article, cited South Asians’ “amazing ability to adapt to the surroundings” as a central reason for their success. This indicates the tendency

but overwhelmingly positive, views of South Asian community often engenders resentment from the professional class. Prashad quotes an affluent New York City desi who reviles South Asian taxi drivers for “lowering the tone” and “ruining our image” in the United States. “In just five years they’ve undone all the good work. These uncouth chaps, straight out of Punjab, can’t even speak proper English—can’t even drive. I don’t know how they got here. Must be through Mexico or something. I don’t know

why they let them in.” This active effort by many professional South Asians to differentiate themselves from members of their own ethnic community speaks volumes about the enormous gulf between the socioeconomic classes. It also seems to be a thinly veiled attempt at aligning South Asians with the white majority, from whom one traditionally hears such anti-immigrant vitriol.

An explanation for this seemingly incongruous identification with white American values lies in the fact that many South Asians “tend to follow an old tradition that groups [them] with whites in a racial family called ‘Aryan.’” Their line of reasoning is that if the white majority believes this “racial fantasy,” then they will be accepted. Prashad intimates that while desis realize they aren’t white, they resist being grouped with blacks, “the most despised category” in American society. They choose to align themselves with the white half of the racial binary because they desire class mobility that has been historically denied to blacks, and sense that unity with blacks will effectively end their hopes of attaining the American Dream. In a sense, professional South Asians’ unwillingness to let go of their model minority status could be considered a manifestation of their desire for acceptance from mainstream white American society. They subconsciously fear facing up to the falsehood of the model minority theory, because admitting that disadvantaged South Asians do exist would cause the community to lose its status as an ideal, exalted by white America. Yet their assimilation into the white mainstream comes at the expense of their own ethnic brethren and community solidarity.

This South Asian community rift may best be understood through the experience of the disadvantaged - the daily struggles of New York City taxi drivers. The fact that the desi technocrat quoted above chose taxi drivers as the target of his attack on the South Asian working class comes as no great surprise. Taxi drivers are perhaps the most emblematic representatives of changing South Asian demographics in the US. Their incredible visibility actively eats away at the prevalence of the model minority theory and incenses those who espouse it. Yet while they are visible on just about any street corner in New York, there is remarkably little literature available about taxi drivers or any other working class South Asians. Biju Mathew’s Taxi! Cabs

and Capitalism in New York City is a landmark effort to voice the lives and dreams of these working-class Asians, drawing a harsh contrast with the farcically optimistic and downright misleading portrayals of the community typically encountered.

The South Asian men who make up the majority of New York City taxi drivers come from middle class families in the Subcontinent. They experience downward mobility in the US, taking jobs as low-income taxi drivers to help their families maintain their class status at home. They live many men to a room, work ungodly hours, and after paying exorbitant medallion fees and car payments, often make only enough to eke out a meager existence. This itself contrasts strikingly with the undeniably comfortable lifestyles of so-called “typical” South Asians. Yet it is hardly the harshest disparity between the experiences of the two classes. Mathew notes that the majority of anti-Asian violence occurs in the form anti-worker violence, rendering taxi drivers prime targets. They offend white, middle-class sensibilities in the same way that the Irish and the Blacks did in decades past. While affluent South Asians in suburbs will usually only experience mild forms of individual racism, taxi drivers encounter its most brutal and crippling manifestations every day.

Professional South Asian immigrants often possess the socioeconomic status to shield themselves from racism. They gain acceptance from the white mainstream by replicating their patterns of existence. For example, while the South Asian professional might drive her children to Hindi classes and kathak lessons instead of Little League and piano lessons, she will still do so in the same minivan as her white counterpart. South Asian taxi drivers, on the other hand, have no reference point in the mainstream, cannot claim the same so-called “white privilege” as professional South Asians. They do not have college degrees, business suits, and flawless English to protect them by giving whites a sense of safety and familiarity. Hence, the South Asian working class, particularly taxi drivers, is on the front lines facing xenophobia. Following 9/11 they have been victims of an inordinate amount of customer violence, with three drivers hospitalized for assault in the first half of 2004 alone.

Yet the racism they experience is not limited to

random acts of brutality. South Asian taxi drivers face systemic prejudice from the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) and the City of New York, whose ex-mayor Rudy Giuliani labeled them “terrorists” and developed a “Quality of Life Program” that enabled police to be overtly racist to immigrants for the convenience of the white middle class.

Unlike upper-middle class South Asians, the taxi drivers would hardly position themselves in the white half of the racial binary. This is evident when Rizwan, one of the many New York City taxi drivers profiled by Mathew, says, “I am not worried about the blacks...I am most scared of that white guy...” The South Asian working class cannot align itself with or adopt the values of white America because it has been blatantly rejected, spit at, and stomped on by them. They seem to espouse views much closer to those of African Americans, who tend to view society through a lens of racial stratification where economic and social opportunities are impeded due to structural obstacles that block minority success. They do not identify with their successful South Asian cohorts, who denigrate their lack of upward mobility and fail to acknowledge the discriminatory policies and overt racism these workers experience on a daily basis.

The heart, then, of this rift in South Asian America is the black-white binary, and the positioning of professional and working class South Asians on opposite sides of this schism. Hence, an important step in mending the fracture within the community is getting beyond the binary. The South Asian identity does not have to share a particular affinity with either the black or white half of the binary, nor does it have to be defined in terms of another group. The South Asian community has a unique story in American history and should carve an equally unique niche for itself in the national discourse. In order to do this, there must be greater acknowledgment and legitimization of South Asians who do not meet the standards of the model minority theory. More scholarly analysis will help to create a better understanding of this group and give them their proper place within South Asian discourse in the United States. Currently, the working class is unaccounted for in the popular understanding of South Asian identity. Only through increased mass and media attention to their stories and struggles

may a more inclusive South Asian identity be created.

Above all else, South Asians must come together. Today, unification occurs primarily along vocational, religious, regional, and linguistic lines, with specific organizations that cater to each strain. One of the few places where South Asians of all backgrounds can come together is the educational setting. Colleges and universities, in particular, are some of the few settings where a pan-South Asian identity is a dominant mode of group formation. We must use these South Asian student organizations to foster greater unity across socioeconomic classes, and encourage youth to reach out to less advantaged members of the community. They must not be shunned because they don’t meet model minority standards, but aided, socially, economically, educationally, and legally so that they can achieve the same success as their professional peers. This is particularly important as a new generation of South Asians develops its value systems and prepares to make its mark on the world. It is only with action and activism that the gap in the community can be bridged.*

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Snow Lion in the Bengal Tiger's Lair, Crouching Dragon at the Door

The Place of Tibet in Sino-Indian Relations

Mark Hay

A HIMALAYAN THREE-WAY

The age of Asia is upon us – this much is gospel truth. As many pundits have half-joked, it seems now that greatest concern for the Western world is this: who will be our overlords, the Indians or the Chinese? With a substantially larger military, a faster economic growth rate, and an aggressive stranglehold approach to politics and finance, all signs suggest that the U.S.A. will eventually take marching orders from Beijing rather than New Delhi. And with China as India's greatest trading partner and fear of defeat in mind, notes Singaporean Minister of Foreign Affairs George Yeo, the two countries increasingly cooperate not just bilaterally but internationally in both economic and political issues. Indeed, India time and again since 1962 has shown itself compliant to Chinese encroachments in South and Central Asia, ostensibly because they fear the alienation and wrath of China, and in making clear this fear they give China the upper hand in negotiations more often than they or China's future subjects would like. But India holds an ace up her sleeve, though she does not know it – Dharamsala.

Home of the Tibetan government-in-exile and his holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, this

remote mountain post nestled in the Himalayan hills of northern India has exerted a seemingly inordinate amount of force on Sino-Indian relations since it was granted to his holiness and 80,000 Tibetan refugees by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1959. At present, some 120,000 Tibetan refugees make their permanent residence in India spread across thirty-five settlements with the bulk of new arrivals settling into Dharamsala. The largest refugee group in India and one of the highest profile diasporas in the world, these every move and every breath made by these Tibetans finds its way back to Beijing and into the machinations driving the relations between the two Asian giants – and as such they may soon help to determine the fate of Asian development in the next century. India's relationship with Dharamsala has wavered substantially over the past sixty years, more often than not being seen as a thorn in the side of Sino-Indian relations and a liability in negotiations. But Indians are now warming to a new vantage on their Tibetan community – to view it not so much as a liability, but as a tool: potentially the greatest trick in India's repertoire in managing Chinese ambitions and encroachments, but only if properly and delicately, but boldly and firmly, managed.

To understand the power and potential of Dharamsala for Indian politics today, one must necessarily understand the evolution of Sino-Indo-Tibetan relations over the past sixty years. Providing such an overview shall be no mean feat, but the author promises that the tale, so often told only in subtext and oblique narrative, is absolutely engaging and profoundly logical (odd for international relations), so the author begs forgiveness for delving into points of history probably well known to his audience.

HINDI-CHINI BHAI-BHAI: CAIN, ABEL, AND THEIR COUSIN, TENZIN GYATSO

When Mao Zedong took control of China in 1949, India responded with such joy and fraternity as only the champion of the nonalignment Third Way. In this spirit, and in search for an ally in the resurgence of Asian power, Nehru promoted the diplomatic concept of Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai – India and China are brothers. In this spirit, India recognized the People's Republic long before most global actors, pushed for their assignment of a seat

in the UN, and backed their interests in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Indochina, to note just a few points. All seemed well, until cartography came into play.

In 1954, India published a series of new maps defining their borders conclusively, using the McMahon Line to determine its northern border – a 1914 treaty between India, Britain and Tibet on the border between the former and the latter. During a visitation that year between Nehru and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, Nehru noted discrepancies between Indian and Chinese maps. Enlai brushed off these concerns, noting that these maps were remnants of the old government and that revisions would be made. That same year, India signed an agreement with China officially recognizing (as it had vaguely in 1950 and again with greater gusto in 1952) Tibet as



Miss Tibet

an integral part of China. It was only in 1958, when Nehru noticed persistent discrepancies in the two nations' maps, that things started to heat up.

Under the provisions of the McMahon line, India laid claim to the region of Aksai Chin in Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Arunachal Pradesh – sparsely populated, but historically, demographically and geographically Tibetan areas. China, never having recognized the McMahon line, claimed that by acknowledging Tibet as a part of China, India had forfeited any claim to Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin (as well as, but not so contentiously, Sikkim and other regions). Soon thereafter, Nehru discovered that the Chinese had been building road and rail lines through Indian territory in Aksai Chin to connect Xinjiang and Tibet – reaping substantial economic and security benefits in the process.

Naturally, India was fuming, so when several months later, on March 30, 1959, the leader of

Tibet fled to Arunachal Pradesh seeking asylum, Nehru dropped the last vestiges of a Bhai-Bhai relationship, welcomed the Dalai Lama, made him a grant of land, and allowed the establishment of the Tibetan government-in-exile. As the Dalai Lama was a supporter of the 1914 border agreement, his presence and claim to governance gave credence to Indian claims on contested areas, becalmed possible tensions in Himalayan regions in an era when India was faced with dissension and threats of secession from multiple angles. The Dalai Lama, then, allowed India to legitimize its territorial claims, gain a positive reputation for taking in refugees, counter claims by Chinese-backed Tibetan governing bodies to rebuke the McMahon line, and additionally was a nice flip of the bird to a China perceived as ungrateful for the policies of India.

As noted by Professor Abanti Bhattacharya, “Beijing saw the granting of asylum to the Dalai Lama and enabling him to mobilize international support as an anti-China policy” and by May 6, 1959, Mao responded with the publication of his “The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy,” which accused Nehru of imperialist and rapacious intentions in India, using the Dalai Lama as a legitimizing agent and a tool for insurgency and terrorist movements in Tibet. Negotiations on border issues deteriorated rapidly with this change in the winds. Both sides increased their infrastructure, defense and military investments along disputed borders. Cross-border expeditions became increasingly common. And then came 1962 and the Sino-Indian war.

DRAGON GOT YOUR TONGUE: RUBBING 1962 IN THEIR FACES

India was summarily trounced in the war. Among many, Professor Sumit Ganguly holds that “the memory of [the 1962] rout still haunts Indian military planners and policymakers.” This memory is perpetuated in no small part by constant reminders of the defeat in public addresses from China, who after the war established stronger ties with Pakistan and the Naga, Mizo, Liberation front of Assam, and other violent separatist groups in India. Increasing their lines of communication and transportation along the contested borders, India began to (rightly) fear the slightest provocation of China. In turn, China used this fear to flip the Tibet, which could have been used to destabilize a young China, against

its wielder.

The presence of the Dalai Lama, in contact with Tibetans across the border, enabled the Chinese to plausibly implicate Dharamsala and, by association, New Delhi in the rise of the Tibetan Khampa rebels. In return, China increased their support for the Pakistani cause in Kashmir. Feeling themselves in a vice grip, incentives were given to India to throw down the option of Tibet. As Ganguly notes, this led India to constantly, “publically and abjectly reassure China that the Tibetan exiles will not be allowed to engage in any meaningful political activity Whenever Tibetan exiles have engaged in minor protests, Beijing has sternly rebuked India for allowing them to engage in political activities,” resulting in India’s acquiescence to aggressive and often unilaterally beneficial policies.

For several decades, this pattern persisted. To paraphrase Professor C. Raja Mohan, tranquility in Tibet meant tranquility between India and China. But the second a spark was lit in Tibet, regardless of response, the existence of Dharamsala enabled the Chinese government to implicate India in the hullabaloo. And they would crank up the heat – mobilize along the border, send their love to Pakistan, or pull out the failures of India in 1962 and drag them about in a shameful display of muscle. This continual negative reinforcement conditioned Indian policymakers to perceive their Tibetan community as a handicap to negotiations and to vigorously and constantly reassure China of their support for Chinese domination of the plateau and their vigilance in maintaining the standard of religious, but not political, freedoms for the Tibetan exiles – prayers, not protests.

PET RABBIT STOCKHOLM SYNDROME: TRADING IN STICKS FOR CARROTS

And then money came into the equation. In 1989, after the post-Tiananmen commencement of a new and more serious wave of liberalizing economic policies and growth in China, the People’s Republic formally agreed not to escalate border clashes. Increasingly they took support away from separatist groups and instead, by 1992, began the resumption of border trade in contested areas. Heavier and harder, China began to push for trade agreements and economic cooperation between the two nations, though always stressing that such positive relations

were contingent on India maintaining silence from Dharamsala on political matters. The 1988 joint communiqué by Rajiv Gandhi and Deng Xiaoping contained express statements to the effect of “anti-China political activities by expatriate Tibetans [will not] be tolerated.”

This has led many, including scholars Lee Curtis and John J. Tkacik, to “believe that China is pursuing a two-pronged strategy of lulling India into complacency with greater economic interaction while taking steps to encircle India and undermine its security.” A statement rather hard to defy. Certainly even in this time of peace and development, the Chinese built up considerable capabilities outside Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin and even stationed a nuclear arsenal in Tibet. On the Indian side, over the past ten years China has become India’s main trading partner and the offers of the dragon in co-bidding for energy development contracts, such as perspective joint bids by the ONGC Videshi LTD and China National Petroleum Corporations, and the coupling of manufacture and technology ventures, as Premier Wen stressed in his 2005 visit to Bangalore, all appeal to the resurgent urges to non-alignment and an Asia axis of growth and international power. For two decades, then – starting slowly around 1988 and picking up speed at the turn of the millennium with the Chinese explosion – India has taken the bait, tasted the fruits, and, in turn, kept the Tibetan population quiet.

JUST BECAUSE YOU’RE PARANOID, DON’T MEAN THEY’RE NOT AFTER YOU: GOSPEL TRUTH OR CRAZY TALK?

At this point, it is only appropriate that this article address the question: is any of this really merited? Does China have a true case for fear of the Tibetan exile community and should India take seriously their concerns? Or is Dharamsala merely the unfortunate victim of Realpolitik machinations?

The short answer is this: clearly there is no threat. And just like that I’ve made several million enemies within the Chinese Communist Party. Admittedly, the Tibetan Youth Congress, branded by the People’s Republic as a terrorist organization, is one of the largest and most active civil societies in India, and they claim Indian culture as the basis for their propensity for protest. And yes, some within the ranks of the TYC have voiced their support for

opposition in Tibet. But, to paraphrase Professor Tsering Shakya, the ability of such groups in India to communicate with and influence groups within Tibet is essentially null. And their political, cultural and ideological identity is now so distorted by Indian influences that they cannot relate to or dialogue with the increasingly Han-influenced Chinese Tibetans. Indeed, the only organization in Dharamsala with any ability to communicate and connect with Tibetans over the border may be the Guchusum, refugees from the 1980s uprising in Tibet. However, their activities are limited to small welfare and support programs for new arrivals. And most importantly for their case, the Indian government gives no support to any political activities by these groups. So it would seem that China has nothing to fear from the Tibetan political communities in India, a fact that should be clear to India. Perhaps someone should have called that bluff a little earlier on.

However, the Chinese may have something to fear in the religious communities in Dharamsala and other Tibetan-Indian communities. As Shakya notes, “the flow of people between historic monasteries in Tibet and newly established ones in India (created and popularized by the flight or reincarnation of respected and historic monks into India) has been constant since the 1980s.” The Chinese have expressed their fears that India’s allowance of such pilgrimages – and India does smile upon the religious functions of Tibetan exiles – only creates an easier environment for Tibetan radicals to train agents to return to China and perform destabilization operations. A fear without a scrap of evidence, and it was not until 2008 that the Chinese began to recognize what their true fears should be.

THE 2008 OLYMPICS: NOT FLASHY AND DIVERSIONARY ENOUGH, APPARENTLY

World attention to the planning of the 2008 Beijing Olympics happened to capture a rather momentous event in Tibet—the remembrance of the forty-ninth anniversary of the failed uprising of 1959. These demonstrations spread all over China and drew a great deal of attention to the question as to whether or not China really had a grip on its minorities. Naturally, such images inspired a reaction in Dharamsala, but in keeping with their *détente* with China, according to Ganguly, “Indian security forces swooped down on nonviolent Tibetan

protestors at Dharamsala [] and incarcerated them for 14 days using India’s preventive detention laws, a colonial relic.” And, as Shakya points out, “almost all the areas where protests occurred were in places where the senior lamas had left Tibet and gone to live in India.”

Under official doctrine, the Chinese, starting with the Panchen Lama but made law in 2007, have officially for some time now attempted to select the reincarnations and appointments of high lamas in an attempt to influence Tibetan culture. This upstart resoundingly proved the point that Tibetans continued to give their loyalty to their lamas-in-exile in India, and to completely rebuke their Sino-Tibetan installed leaders. What chance, then, that the Dalai Lama in 2008 began to vocally assert that he intended to reincarnate not in Chinese-controlled territory, but quite possibly in Arunachal Pradesh. This destroys any legitimacy of the pretender selection of the Chinese government and crushes the long-held Chinese hope that the Dalai Lama’s death would allow them to cherry-pick an acceptable successor, set him up as a pro-Han promoter, and watch as the Tibetan exiles fizzled out under Indian pressure and died off, utterly destroying the Tibetan issue. With this religious myth destroyed, though, it became apparent that the allowance of religious activism and control of Tibetan land by India still posed a substantial threat to Chinese security despite honest Indian attempts to limit the rights and actions of expressly anti-Chinese groups in Dharamsala and beyond.

Add to this the speculations that, with India’s economy growing slowly but steadily, projections predict that India will outstrip China in population by approximately 2050, and the fact that, while China and America maintain a strong economic alliance, India and America maintain a stronger strategic connection, including nuclear support. Then mix in the fact that, after the July 2009 Uighur revolts, Uighurs have gone on to idealize India, speculating, as did one Uighur man, that they can “do more [for ourselves and our people] from India [...] India has welcomed Tibetans and we are similar.” India, then, has become a stronger and more globally beloved opponent. And it is an attractive destination for anti-Chinese refugees, especially members of recently active and revolutionary minorities who express a clear interest in destabilizing China from an external base camp. For all their success in getting India to



drop the political card of Tibet it drew forth in 1959, China still witnesses now the rise of a powerful and destabilizing opponent merely because of the continued presence of a neglected but relatively unaligned Tibetan population in India.

Within the past few months, China has responded logically and in accordance with its precedent for dealing with the Tibetan situation in India. In August, 2009, China convinced the Asian Development Bank to cease and desist in its funding for Indian projects in Arunachal Pradesh. Simultaneously, China has resumed its calls for the unilateral surrender of the state to China – an unthinkable move now. Meanwhile, China has reopened the case of Kashmir, largely closed since 1988, by issuing a separate passport to Kashmiris than to Indians – effectively silently recognizing Kashmiri independence. Even the simple visit of the Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh this November on explicitly religious errands (Prime Minister Singh stressed repeatedly his adherence to the doctrine against allowing “Tibetan refugees to indulge in political activities,” even as recently as October 25, 2009) has elicited claims by the Chinese that this is an imperial grab by India to claim Chinese territory and agitate dissent within Chinese Tibet.

For all the conciliatory motions of the last decades, for all the economic cooperation, it appears as if the war is back on. Aksai Chin and Arunachal

Pradesh have become hotspots once more and as such could jeopardize trade. But China has not accounted for new factors in adapting their 1962 to 1988 aggressive intimidation tactics. A crumbling Pakistan feels less of a compulsion to war with India, emboldened minorities within and without China feel free to voice more dissent and may do so with greater ease, evasion, and anonymity using modern communications tools, India is much stronger than it was in 1962 and possesses nuclear deterrents and a host of powerful allies, and in the middle of a global financial crisis, there have been fewer recent economic bonds built between India and China than in the past – restrictions on the purchase of some Chinese goods due to contamination certainly has not helped this trend - eliminating some of the institutional memories that would move towards appeasement. As such, the pressures being leveled by China are substantially more laughable than those after the 1962 war and the Indians know it: they have refused to suppress coverage of the visit and have allowed the Dalai Lama free movement and the status of an “honored guest.” It may not be political support and full rights, but very slowly it appears as if the Indians are realizing their own strength, the fragility underlying Chinese growth and power, and as such feeling much more comfortable in using Dharamsala to flip the bird to Hu Jintao once more.

LEWD, FORCEFUL HAND GESTURES: PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE OF SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS VISA VIE DHARAMSALA

Recent events should be rather heartening to the Indian government. The reaction of the Chinese to the events of 2008 and 2009 reveal a gaping lack of understanding of the changes in development between 1962 and now. The lack of recognition of a threat in the death of the Dalai Lama until now also points towards a great deal of misunderstanding of their foes in the Chinese leadership. India may be the smaller, poorer and weaker of the two nations, but not by much and it has a great deal more savvy in international relations than the Chinese administration, excepting perhaps climate change issues, although the power of that leverage, given current speculation on the floundering chances of the Copenhagen summit, is waning. The existence of nuclear arsenals – under nuclear proliferation peace propositions (i.e. it's crazy to start a war that could escalate to a nuclear exchange), applicable here as both India and China are clearly rational and calculating actors – highly negates the possibility of a war and makes this instead a game of strategy and chicken. And in games of strategy, a million expendable bodies do little for China.

The way in which India stood by the Dalai Lama this November gives hope to those who believe in Tibet as a powerful tool for India. So long as India begins to see the weaknesses of China – minorities ready to erupt, an out-of-touch and miscalculating government willing to alienate itself from the rest of the world – it becomes more and more probable that Tibetans within India will be given their full rights to freedom of speech and protest. And in one simple stroke, coupled with the need for both nations, if they intend to maintain growth, so vital to their image and power, to maintain open borders and trade, the newly mobilized and revitalized Tibetan movement could work to destabilize China from within – just as they always feared it would, but with no backing from the CIA or India.

Admittedly, such rights for Tibetans would endanger the integrity of the federal system in India, allowing grater dissent and autonomy by precedent to separatist groups. This may also force China's hands somewhat in its decisions over the Brahmaputra River, a project that could severely damage Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Bangladesh

to disastrous effects. However the benefits of using the Tibetan card – leverage in dealings with China, destabilization of a competitor, a moral rallying point for global opposition to Chinese aggressive behaviors, and increased legitimatizing of claims over Tibetan area border disputes – far outweigh the faint chances of backlash.

For far too long has India viewed Dharamsala as a handicap and allowed itself to be pushed around. A bizarre set of events, though, has conspired to destroy that myth and help to assuage the pains of the Sino-Indian war of 1962. China's reactions have severely reduced Indian fears of retributions for support of the Tibetans. Never before, then, has there been so much hope for the resurgence of the Indian upper hand in Sino-Indian affairs. Never, also, has there been so great a possibility for Indian Tibetans to gain their full rights and as such to expand the Tibetan movement further along than it has ever been. Frankly, there is little to lose that should not probably be voluntarily lost by embracing Tibet as a strong tool in conducting Sino-Indian relations. Perhaps, then, there is a chance that our overlords in 2100 will not be dragons, but rather Bengal tigers. And we will have the snow lion to thank for that.*

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SHAIKH NASRUDDEEN

Original in Pashto: Abdul Bari Jahani

Translated by: Mujib Mashal


Abdul Bari Jahani is a renowned poet of Afghanistan who writes in Pashto. Invasion, resistance, pain, music, and intoxication are some of the themes that constantly run through his poetry. Numerous poems of Jahani have been turned into songs by prominent Afghan singers. The words for current national anthem of Afghanistan were also composed by wJahani.

Jahani is particularly celebrated for his satirical poems that have a clear narrative and deal with themes of superstitions and corruption. "Shaikh Nasruddeen" is an example of such satirical poetry.

Long ago, in a distant village, was a young man
without people, without belongings, without a home.
A champion of reason, sturdy and strong
but dismal fate had left his heart swollen.
His father had named him Nasruddeen in pride,
but, poor, wretched, a mere Nasrugay he was called.
Neither his summers, nor his winters were comfortable;
from heat or cold, he never ceased to grumble.
As his heart grew weary of his village and tribe,
jaded with the elders and the youth alike,
Nasrugay declared: I'm leaving on a journey,
whatever happens will be kismet and destiny.
He rolled up his sleeves to end his poverty
and passed village after village, around the country.
One day, as dusk fell on Nasrugay, the air darkened.
In a shrine, on a Shaikh's almhouse he knocked.
This shrine, this house, belonged to Shaikh Qader
Among the saints, well esteemed and high regarded.
In the Shrine, Nasrugay secured a place to rest
and, amongst the hangers-on, became a guest
In the corners of the house, in various rooms
crowds of guests convened; conversations bloomed.
From the kitchen, full steaming plates arrived
and the guests eagerly devoured bite after bite.
As he listened to the stories of the men,
he measured them with the scale of his wisdom.
In the hundred tales that he patiently heard
The secrets of the Shaikh Qader were unveiled!
Nasrugay, too, in his chamber, began to bow and sway

From dawn to dusk, he prayed and prayed.
 Spending all his time bent in prostration,
 he no longer cared for food or conversation.
 Word of him traveled to the dervishes and faqirs.
 With praises they rushed to him and began to query:
 Shaikh, from what city, when did you arrive? Tell us
 So on your path we sacrifice the rest of our lives.
 Nasrugay refrained from answering, paid no attention,
 leaving the dervishes to lament in dejection.
 One of the dervishes, wiser than the rest
 aware of the house's long buried secrets
 approached Shaikh Qader in great haste, and
 after score of praises, informed the Saint:
 A godly traveler has recently joined our way
 Days and nights, all he does is pray and pray.
 So focused that he has no time for food or stories
 On his knees all day, I'm sure he's after some glory!
 At midnight, Shaikh Qader entered the chamber
 and quietly hissed in Nasrugay's sleeping ear:
 Tell me your actual purpose right away.
 This same night, you must end your stay!
 Nasrugay, regaining his senses from confusion,
 paid his respects and recounted his misfortunes:
 Fed up with endless poverty, O almighty saint
 I left on this hopeful journey to other lands.
 But upon your command, in this darkness
 I'll ride my wretched fate out of your place.
 But to do so, I ask your help, and the Lord's grace.
 The Shaikh, slipping hand to pocket in a flash
 withdrew few coins and threw them into Nasrugay's lap:
 Here is some money, and there's an ass in the barn.
 Look after it; the animal is a very special kind.
 Nasrugay, with amazement, took the money
 mounted the ass, and resumed his journey.
 For a few nights, he traveled through deserts and hills.
 The ass was old, quickly wearied and fell ill.
 By the road side, as tears streamed down his face,
 Nasrugay mourned the struggling ass's fate.
 When dusk took over, Nasrugay was left alone.
 His ass dead, his heart broken, he wailed in vain.
 He buried the ass, building for it a large tomb.
 At its feet he wept until his heart calmed.

In the morning, on the fresh tomb he raised
 a grand waving flag of scarlet shade,
 Announcing: this is Ghaybana Father's Shrine!
 I found it after many years of constant trying.
 Without food or sleep I've served it hard and long;
 with constant prayers, I've lighted his nights to dawn.

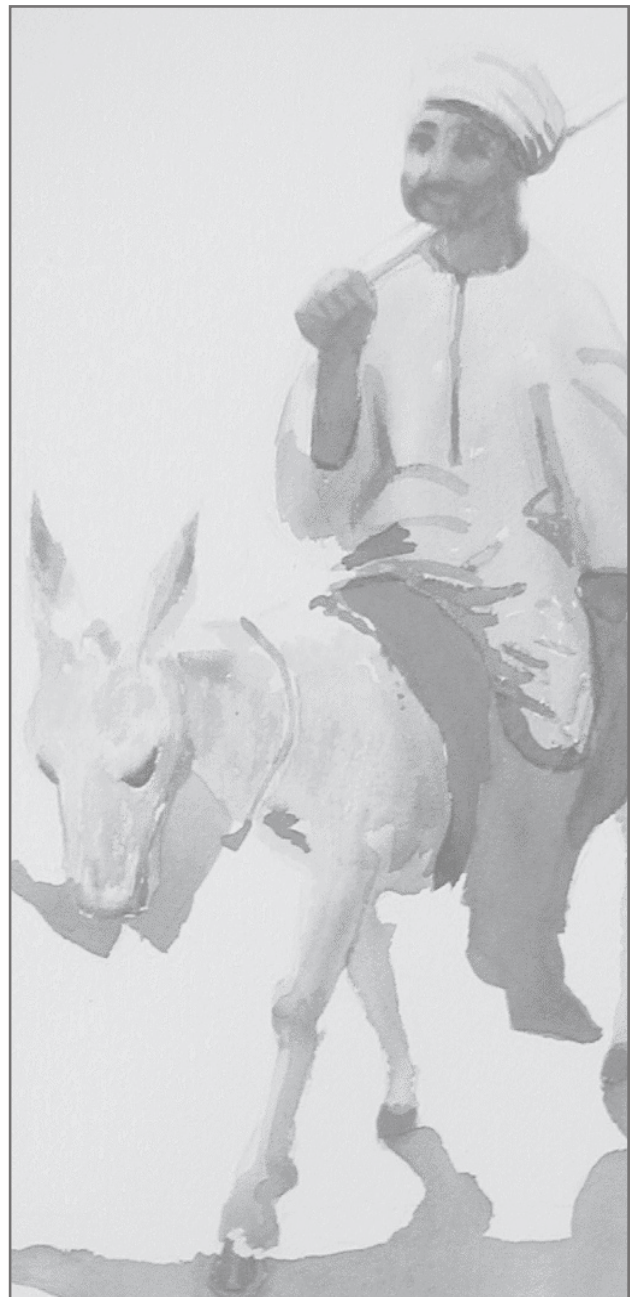


His frenzy has so quickly
 spread through the lands
 Every soul, in every house,
 is familiar with his legend.

A dozen times, even more, he's visited my dreams
 With his finger, he's pointed me to his tomb.
 This shrine is for the barren and blind
 for the widows, despairing and maligned.
 The legend of the Shrine traveled through hands
 Ghaybana Father grew famous in far towns.
 Some brought cows for him, some herds of sheep
 some offered money, some grains in heaps.
 Soldiers, constables, sheriffs--those of high esteem
 To Ghaybana Father, all sorts of people came.
 In little time, Nasrugay became Shaikh Nasruddin:
 a saint so rich that his crown in jewels gleamed.
 Within a year he wedded three or four young ladies
 plump as partridges, pretty as daisies.
 Shaikh Qader was informed by one of the guests:
 a great Shaikh has emerged from the Shaikhs
 claiming he is the saint of the poor, the distressed;
 he's returned sight to numerous blind eyes and
 cured fatal disease-- most palsied hands and feet!
 His frenzy has so quickly spread through the lands
 Every soul, in every house, is familiar with his legend.
 That a new Shaikh had brought a disaster on his tribe,
 this news bruised Shaikh Qader's fragile heart.
 It was midnight, he mounted his horse and rode away.
 At the Shrine, he asked a moment of Shaikh's company.
 Shaikh Nasruddeen had retreated to his chamber,
 but as the name of Shaikh Qader caressed his ear
 he blushed in excitement and proudly declared:
 Leave us alone and don't bother us for few moments
 for this is a secret meeting of two old acquaintance.
 Once left alone, the two Shaikhs began to converse.
 The legend of the new shrine was recounted bit by bit
 and Shaikh Qader was informed of the whole truth.
 Shaikh Qadir, stunned by the story, slowly began to speak:
 My highest praises for you. For your enemies, defeat.
 The secrets-- yours and mine-- are thus hidden
 for we have both acquired the friendship of one Satan.
 That you have so quietly raised a flag upon an ass
 You have tied Satan's hands behind his back.
 Take good care of it, it is lineal and legitimate;
 It's father's made me into this commanding saint.
 His grandfather's buried in another town;
 hundred dervishes are prostrate on its grounds.
 An almighty patron, confers to every need
 and fulfills every heart's desire, every plead.
 The simple-minded come to it for pilgrimage
 and bring along with them droves of sheep.

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The Pashtoon tribe is a tribe of ignorance
 Their land is a heaven for the rogue and the cheat
 To anyone who grows long-shaggy hair, in respect
 they give him their daughters and all their wealth.
 Yesterday a barber came to them, today he's their boss
 he's their elder, their lord, and their priest.
 Whoever grows a long beard here is fit to lead.
 in this city of the blind, a one-eyed is Lord.
 If you desire paradise now, in this world,
 countless servants, pretty women and good wine
 for a brief period, seek detachment.
 Then, by the highway, build a shrine.
 For your household, a darbar leave behind
 and reign over generation after generation.*



Engendered Freedom

Assessing the Impact of Partition on East Bengali Migrant Women



On August 15th 1947, India found herself formally divided into two nations and free from the shackles of British rule. The aftermath was a deluge of refugees who fled their homelands to settle in unknown lands. Migration in the post-independence era had its foundation in religion and communalism. In Bengal, the sociopolitical volatility led to communal riots long before Partition. In 1946 Naokhali, Calcutta and Dhaka witnessed massacres. Countless Hindus left East Bengal, which was transformed into a Muslim entity. They were faced with the onerous task of rebuilding their lives. The birth of Bangladesh in 1971 was another milestone in the region's history, and resulted in an escalated influx of refugees; a phenomenon that remains unchecked even today.

This paper aims at exploring the impact of the process we term Partition and its aftermath on a marginalized section of society: the migrant women of East Bengal. The study focusses on Hindu women that migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal and endured unrecorded struggles to adjust to the changes in their lives. The women of Western Pakistan and Northern India and the Muslim migrant women from Bengal are not within the scope of this study. The political, social and economic impact of Partition on the migrant women was assessed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The paper tests the hypothesis that the migrant women's newfound economic freedom was a key to their social and political freedom. Using examinations of first person experiences and documented historical accounts, this hypothesis has proven to be true to a large extent.

CHRONICLING PARTITION AND THE FREEDOM IT ENGENDERED

1947 was the year entrenched in history as one that gave the formerly colonised Indian subcontinent two new and independent entities, India and Pakistan¹. In historical memory, the glorious achievement of liberation seems to overshadow the greater, more bitter truth: that of the "Partition".² Partition was a mammoth exercise in displacing countless individuals who left their homes in search of their religious identity. These individuals traversed a course that marked the less idealistic reality of hardship and alienation; whether Hindu or Muslim, each person bore the burden of adjustment Partition brought with it.³ Unfortunately for Bengal, its tryst with fragmented lands and lives did not officially end until 1971 when Bangladesh was born.⁴ Throughout this period the weaker sections of society wrote their own stories of "trauma and triumph".⁵ Prime among these sections were the migrant women of Bengal whose lives were studied to understand the impact Partition had on them economically, socially and politically. Their lives have been examined through first person accounts and formal historical research, studies which have attempted to uncover the migrant women's grit and resilience.

To say that women sought economic emancipation only after the formal decree of Partition would be rather incorrect. There is evidence to show that women went out to work as early as 1946. During the Calcutta Communal Riots, policemen often had to escort women to their workplaces as a measure of safety during the violent and tense periods⁶. The impact of Partition, and particularly of pre-Partition riots, on the migrant women of East Bengal who had slowly started trickling into Calcutta was adverse. However, the ability of these women to continue to work under the given circumstances shows that the otherwise adverse impact did not hamper their economic activity. There is also an indication of the economic desperation of the migrant women at the time, and it seems that they had no other option but to go out to work. Often the sole breadwinners, they had large families to support and could not afford to lose their income⁷. Therefore the migrant women's economic emancipation, in the grandest terms, could be viewed as one aspect of their lives that was not eradicated by Partition but was, arguably,

transformed under its threatening conditions.

The migrant women of Bengal came out of the private domain of domesticity and child-rearing to take up significant public duties. The position of the woman in traditional Bengali society allowed her to only tend to the home, while the man was the economic backbone of the family. The sociological and cultural conditioning of Bengali society impeded and undermined women's economic enterprise ⁸.

The impact of Partition on the Bengali migrant woman was positive yet complex; however, the negative undertones in the context of new-found employment cannot be ignored. The "Bhadramahila" ⁹ was now a symbol for female emancipation. The migrant woman sought employment to provide for her family to the best of her ability. The inclination towards employment held the family at the crux and the outlook was not towards self-liberation but towards supplementing financial provisions for their family. Self-liberation is arguably consequential in the process, although it does not take effect instantly. Liberation required the woman to shed her previously held beliefs and embrace economic freedom, which in turn held the promise of social and political freedom. Traditional social norms and mores were deeply rooted and often not immediately erasable, and the women had to bear the brunt of discrimination on the basis of their gender because they were made to believe that the economic domination of the male was a pre-ordained state. Namita Roy Chowdhury who was a victim of economic necessity after her father's death says on the issue "Jakhan amra bari tikhe baire gai chilam takhan ama der poribar amar sansar chilo kintu baire javar pore aamra nijer sansar chilam."¹⁰ (When we went out to work initially, our family was our world but after we started working we realized we were our own world).

The tryst with the taste of freedom was similar for most women, and the nascent stages of public duty vis-à-vis domestic duty were fraught with conflicts of gender in particular that were overcome only after gradual exposure to the outside world. The conflict between the "outside" and "inside" worlds, however, in no way undermines the achievements of the women in the public sphere. Therefore, we see the migrant women emerging as torchbearers of economic freedom, an ostensibly positive distinction

that had various socio-cultural ramifications which were not necessarily positive themselves.

The socio-cultural disparity between the East Bengalis and West Bengalis was reflected in the economic analysis of the state. According to the Census of India 1951, "...It is true that there has been a rise in employment of women in mills and factories and in administrative and miscellaneous services. But the majority of women in mills and factories do not belong to West Bengal and their employment therefore does not substantially help in the struggle of the population. The exalted position of women is a misconception clouded by economic subservience."¹¹ The figures below illustrate the statistical changes in the employment of women in 1931 compared to the figures released in 1961¹²:

Sector of Employment in	Employment of Women in	Employment of Women in
West Bengal	1931	1961
Coal Mining	17,321	33,717
Stone Quarrying	-no figures available-	979
Religious Charitable Services	726	1,894
Retail trade in fuel	2,746	4,534
Metal	871	7,384
Retail trade in textile	1,548	2,467
Vegetable oil and dairy	1,088	1,232

The impact of Partition on East Bengali migrant women was yet again positive when statistically represented. Particularly if the increase in non-traditional fields such as metal and fuel production is taken into account, we see an increase in number of women reaching up to nearly 400% of the original number in the sector (Metal). Therefore, women were moving into areas of heavy industry that were previously largely male-dominated.

However, it was marred by the skewed analysis that was presented afterward. The socio-cultural differences between the East Bengalis and West Bengalis should have been handled with special care while presenting economic data on the emancipation of the Bengali woman in a document as publicly viewed as the Census of India. The unfortunate alienation of the East Bengali migratory community was yet again brought to the fore, not in social or cultural terms but in official terms that

had economic and political bearings. The migration therefore is treated as redundant and the plight of those that were forced to migrate grossly neglected, ironically by a committee set up by the Government—the apparent caretakers of the East Bengali refugee diaspora.

By 1958, the Central Government strongly urged the West Bengal Government to terminate the operations of the Rehabilitation Ministry in an effort to curb the influx of migrants into West Bengal. After much deliberation on the matter and several joint meetings between members of the Central and West Bengal Governments, a plan was agreed upon by both which divided migrants into the following categories¹³:

- 1) Migration between October 1946 and March 1958 was termed “Old Migration” and the migrants under this category were eligible for Government doles and Rehabilitation assistance, which in itself was minimal and the state exchequer of eight crore Rupees (\$1,726,374) for 2.6 million migrants allowed only 20 rupees per capita. After an increased number of migrants amounting to nearly 720,000 more in the period the Central Government added Rs. 1200000 (\$26,000) to the state treasury and the ceiling on house loans was a measly 1,175 rupees (\$25), the average looming around 500 Rupees (\$10).¹⁴
- 2) Migrants who came in between April 1958 and December 1963 were euphemistically termed “in-between migrants” and possessed none of the rehabilitation or financial rights of a state defined refugee because the Government opined that the migrants were motivated by the pittance doled out to shift their home and hearths to West Bengal.
- 3) The “New Migrants” category was a bid by the Government to assist in their unique way the increasing number of migrants that infiltrated the state after 1963 until the late 70s. The new migrants were eligible for rehabilitation if only they sought occupation outside the state. The 600,000 that opted to stay in the state were thus ineligible for the benefits of assistance.

The impact of Partition on the migrant women of East Bengal in the aspect of rehabilitation was negative. The policy in itself was the Government of India’s answer to the escalating number of immigrants who the Government felt were motivated more by financial incentives than need for political sanctuary, even though they had entered under “refugee” status. This assumption was fundamentally flawed, and therefore no policy was successful at reaching a solution.

Those who continued to migrate bore the brunt of poor financial and rehabilitative aid. Ashoka Gupta and her group of female social workers visited refugee camps in North-Western India and offered recommendations to the Central Government based on their needs assessments two months before this policy was introduced in 1955¹⁵. This highlights the gross disregard of constructive criticism that would have helped the Government to ensure the safety of the refugees that already lived within the confines of the state. The daily dole for a migrant woman in West Bengal was Rs.12 (\$0.26) compared to a much higher Rs.20 (\$0.40) for the migrant women in West Punjab.¹⁶ The very same report states that there were no separate women’s homes for the women of Bengal, let alone latrines and training centers. The lack of recognition that the problem of influx was a recurrent one hindered the Government from adopting concrete policies towards the rehabilitation of refugees.

In the context of rehabilitation and governmental aid, Pramila Basu (nee Guha-Choudhury) is a case in point. She migrated to Calcutta from Barisal (erstwhile East Bengal) much before her two elder brothers did, and was surprised that no scholarship had been done on issues of compensation of property and other fixed assets in the migration process. She talks of a time when she, as a lone woman in an alien city, had to fight for a respectable living space: “Barisaler bastu ta bishal chilo...Kolkater bari ta ekdome choto chilo aar otar jono o du bochor laaglo....Governmenter samay aamader samay noy.”¹⁷ (Our ancestral house in East Bengal was monumental, with eighteen rooms and huge outhouses but our house in Kolkata was more like a pigeon hole which took two years to complete because of the bureaucracy. I guess the Government works on its own clock whereas the entire world is

far ahead of them.)

The impact of Partition in the context of compensation was negative as well. Even while working out rehabilitative schemes the bureaucracy hindered their proper implementation. The women often had to bear the brunt of this, not only from a sociological perspective, as the home was a woman's bastion of hope in times of distress, but also from the economic and political perspective. Pramila Basu and several other lone women, some who were widows, had to fight against the bureaucracy that impeded their realization of a home. A very important factor to be noted is the differences in scale between the houses of East Bengal and the ones the refugees received as compensation in West Bengal. While the houses of erstwhile East Bengal were extravagant and plush in their architecture, often with special sections (andarmahal) for women, the houses in West Bengal were small, one-bedroom bungalows¹⁸. The sociological contention and historical seat of women in their homes proved that women were adversely affected by their new homes. However, the effect was far more complex than a mere value judgment of negative or positive would suggest, because adversity also led to the discovery of unexplored territories, especially in the public sphere.

Rachel Weber, a feminist geographer, wrote that due to the crumbling of the many walls that separated their existence from the outside world in East Bengal, the houses in Calcutta became susceptible to the mobilisation of women into the political, economic, social and communal spheres. The house thus essentially became extended to include these spheres. This was a gradual process and by no means an instant transformation. The women did not simply "step" out of their domestic lives; rather, their domesticity gradually began to include new public duties that were felt within the political, social and economic spheres.¹⁹ Subhoranjan Dasgupta, a renowned human scientist who has studied the refugee women differs by saying that the public roles migrant women had post-Partition were a dramatic and path breaking entry into a relatively unknown world.²⁰

The impact of Partition on the migrant woman was positive, especially in light of the increasing roles women took up in the political,

social and economic spheres. The lack of consensus on the actual transformation of the bhadramahila is because it followed an undefined and uncharted path. The reality is that the transformation was more complex than the two extreme cases of being

"The economic impact on the women during the period was significant and they proved that they could enter the public sphere in times of necessity and **stand shoulder to shoulder with men** despite having to balance their domestic roles."

gradually incorporated into domestic life or being a dramatic foray into the outside world. The ability to find economic means to support one's family and oneself is essentially circumstantial, but requires a measure of self confidence to be actualized. The confidence stems not only from necessity but from the inherent nature of enterprise and grit present in the women. Sabitri Chatterjee's example rings true in this case. Her remembrances capture the sheer gumption of a girl of twelve, driven to work due to gnashing poverty who became the star of a play titled "Natun Yehudi" (The New Jews):

I took part in crowd scenes just to earn five rupees. I had to stand outside the studio in a long queue and on the rare occasions I was preferred I was taken in. I got only five rupees for it as the remaining five rupees went to the agent but even those five rupees were very important to my family. From a very prosperous and secure life in Dhaka we were thrown onto the streets in Calcutta. Let me confess I left no stone unturned in procuring a role. I went to producers, directors and actors asking for one chance. I have knocked on a countless doors and faced rejection more than acceptance but I always knew I had to keep going.²¹

Namita Roy Chowdhury reflects, "Aamra badho hoie chakri bakri korte aarambh korlam anek takar aye korar kono sopno chilo na."²²(We worked because we had to, not because we had grand plans of economic success). The determination to continue the struggle lies in those cases where a single cause, whether circumstantial or inherent, cannot be

identified. Therefore the definition of the new avatar of the migrant woman is multi-layered and the lines between the domestic and public domains seem to fade when the triumph of the migrant woman's economic struggle emerges.

Manikuntala Sen²³ has an interesting insight to offer into the transformation of women. She says, "Had they stayed within the district, they might not have acquired the self-confidence. It was not just their lives; these women were able to take the responsibility for maintaining entire families. They were no longer people who were drifting, lost and overwhelmed. These women from East Bengal were teachers, nurses or clerks; was there any work they could not do? Had it not been for the pressures of necessity and numbers, it might not have been possible to push open the doors that remained closed earlier." ²⁴

The impact of Partition on the migrant women was largely positive as far as economic success was concerned but through Manikuntala Sen's views we see how a single qualitatively and quantitatively measurable phenomenon like economic success can be viewed through either a negative or positive lens. However, it is important to take into account that Sen herself was an East Bengali and therefore it could be natural for her to sympathise with her kin. Through her own description of East Bengalis as "simple, unaffected and intelligent"²⁵ and the West Bengali community as "pretentious"²⁶ we see a clear delineation between the two sides. Joya Chatterjee, an academic historian, makes a very important contention that culturally divides East and West Bengal. "It was not only dialectal distinction that separated the two but geographical conditions that defined a guiding attitude towards life. East Bengal was a riverine state, never wholly industrialised or urbanised and the peoples of the state lived in rural grandeur, often owning large masses of land or tilling them, juxtaposed with the peoples of Calcutta, West Bengal who lived in the city and grew accustomed to a faster pace of life and a more sophisticated, white-collar lifestyle."²⁷ Even Pramila Basu confirms the difference "Kolkata ashur por dekhla choto andhokar ghar. Bishal shohor aar aamhi or modhe ekta pran..bhoy peichi aamhi..upor thekhe niche ashay gelam."²⁸ (Only after reaching Calcutta did I realise houses could be small and dingy, the city

was large and I was one mere human, I certainly got scared. We'd been displaced, from being at the top of our town we came down to being nothing).

Therefore the impact of Partition on the migrant women can be distorted due to the essential differences between the East and West of Bengal. The apparent alienation, however, could have had an adverse socio-cultural impact on the women as they were not treated at par with West Bengalis in society, despite their newfound economic freedom and equality with both men and West Bengalis. They were still the majority of women in the blue-collar workforce, as was represented in the census report presented earlier and if anything they would have inspired the West Bengali women to join the workforce like them.

The predominance of proletarian jobs among these women also had significant political implications in a state where Communism aimed to allay the displaced people. The MARS²⁹ was an outfit of the Communist Party of India that emerged in 1943, and it played a pivotal role in organising and empowering them through the years following Partition where women tried to play an active part in fighting for their rights. Manikuntala Sen mentions "the message of equality and fraternity in times of communal tension" as one of the greatest struggles of the Communist Party.³⁰ The illiterate and lower social strata came forward as volunteers and activists for the Communist Party. The women came in large numbers and organized rallies and protests demanding the rights to rehabilitation, compensation, employment and franchise³¹. It is important to note that the term "immigrant" was a euphemism for the destitute and displaced who afforded the rights of mere "refugees" whom the State did not want to take responsibility for, as is evident from the Leftist struggle for these rights.

The Marxist philosophy struck a chord with the East Bengali refugees, especially the women because it fought for their rights at a time when the State had forsaken them. Some of the biggest achievements of The MARS along with other independent and affiliated Samitis³² was the collection of 14,102 signatures by 1955 demanding employment in the government sector, ³³ grants for marriages of girls and remarriage of widows, ³⁴ and passing of a bill

granting equal rights to Hindu women with regards to property inheritance in 1950. The Communist Party of India and its women activists in this way not only played the role of the responsible opposition to the Congress Party which was in power at the time but also became a part of the daily lives of migrants, and left an indelible impression on the culture that it created Post-Partition.

The impact of Partition was thus positive as it saw women involving themselves in the political movement. Sukumari Chaudhary, a woman activist of Nari Seva Sangha³⁵ describes her experience of working in the Bengal Lamp company: "Our salary was very low. In 1955, the agitation for our payment of bonus sharpened. Marching shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, refugee women participated in the agitation. The CPI³⁶ spearheaded us."³⁷ Thus, one sees that women were as much a part of the Communist movement in Bengal as the men and had a significant political role to play as the rights denied to them became an important agenda for the CPI.

CONCLUSION

The period between 1946 and 1971 was historic in India. The Indian subcontinent had gone through a series of divisions and as a result there was a sizeable population that, when displaced from erstwhile East Bengal, shifted to West Bengal, particularly Calcutta. While exploring the broad question of the Impact of Partition on the migrant women of East Bengal between 1946 and 1970, one discovers that despite many trials and tribulations, the East Bengali migrant women emerged victorious and arguably became one of the greatest testimonies to the Indian subcontinent's newfound freedom.

The economic impact on the women during the period was significant and they proved that they could enter the public sphere in times of necessity and stand shoulder to shoulder with men despite having to balance their domestic roles. The hypothesis that with economic freedom, women were able to take social and political decisions has been largely confirmed. The women were able to play a pivotal role in the Communist movement of Bengal and effected a great number of changes such as doles for widow remarriage and inheritance rights for women. These women could battle the socio-cultural

distinction between the East and West Bengalis in the public sphere and were also able to ignore the stigma of working outside of home in patriarchal Bengal by earning and fighting for their own wages. As Jasodhara Bagchi said, "...the women proved that they could be more than just mere conquests of men in a "man-made" Partition, they charted their own story of emancipation."³⁸

Jyotimoyee Devi who told the story of a sexually assaulted woman and her struggle with Partition said that women were rewriting their own Stree Parva³⁹ through Partition.⁴⁰

The unfortunate truth is that the border between India and Bangladesh is still porous, these women still exist today as they did then, and remain a marginalised section of society today as they were then.⁴¹ This study raises a number of questions for further social research, primarily questions about the effects of Partition on men, and of how women across the world in similar political situations grapple with the effects of migration and displacement.*

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D h a r m a

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D i a g n o s i s

Sandeep Kishore

Ten years ago, I lost my personal mentor, Tata, to cerebral malaria. We were on a pilgrimage in south India in late December and I dropped my mentor off at his home in Delhi.

During our pilgrimage, my mentor taught me a principle from the Hindu Bhagavad Gita that has forever changed me. He taught me about dharma - the notion that one must perform his or her duty without considering the fruit of the labor. For a precocious high school student intent on making it to the Ivy League, on being the best (and bragging about it), this principle of detachment was a gut-check. My priorities were completely misplaced.

Only days after his lessons to me, my mentor fell into coma. Presumptive diagnosis? Cerebral malaria. One week later, he passed away. Just like that.

Soon after, devastated and in tears, our family left for my home in Virginia. Here was someone who spent his last days not with his own family, but with our family. Then, in Virginia, I, myself came down with a 105.3 degree fever and later was semi-comatose. My parents, both Indian-trained physicians, were frightful given my clinical presentation as textbook cerebral malaria. But my case was different from my mentor's: I received access to first-line medicines and the world's best care. I bounced back within days, having cleared my fever almost instantly.

This was a pivotal experience for me. It motivated my interest in access to essential drugs and health

care for vulnerable populations. My dharma, it became clear, was to fight for access to health.

The problem was that I was overly passionate. I was adharmic. I wanted to succeed so badly, to make a difference, to somehow discover a way to deliver cartons of malaria drugs to India. Yet I had no direction. I easily got lost in rhetoric and let my emotions take reign. I didn't know how to marshal evidence, to construct a sound argument.

One thing I have found helpful is to get concrete about a problem, to define it—the parameters, the steps needed to make it soluble and then, to throw yourself into it. I'd like to think Tata would appreciate that. So when I read that heart disease was the leading global killer and that up to 80% of deaths to heart attacks were in countries like India and China, I resolved to determine whether essential drugs for heart disease were available. To my surprise, I found that drugs that Americans took for granted – including blockbuster statin drugs that lower cholesterol (and risk of heart attack) by 25-30% – were simply not available in developing countries. Seeing an opportunity here, I assembled a team at the World Health Organization (WHO), Italy and collaborated with fellow medical students to delve headlong into why this was the case. What we found is that there was this perception that 1) heart disease is a problem restricted to Western populations and 2) medicines for heart disease were not cost-effective. Our research proved this to be false.

We then resolved to mobilize ourselves to find a pathway to ensure access to the drugs, settling on the WHO Essential Medicines List which enables mass drug donations to over 156 countries and national governments. I'm happy to report that the result of our efforts, an evidence-based petition, was the addition of statins to the WHO Essential Medicines list and, already, 7 of the 11 Southeast Asian countries have adapted their national drug importation schemes to allow for statins. The drugs are now moving into the developing world, albeit slowly.

The drivers for heart disease, though, are still tobacco use, poor diet and inadequate physical activity and by not addressing these (especially in South Asia), we are setting up ourselves for a pandemic of chronic diseases including type II diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Already, India claims the greatest number of diabetics in the world.

All this is a perspective that activism in public health is possible for students and professionals alike. From my experience, the activism should be concrete and evidence-based and has the potential to make an enormous difference. The key, for me at least, is to just not get carried away by focusing on the difference an idea might make, but on the process itself. If you master your subject, the natural consequence is being successful.*

Essential Medicines		16th edition (March 2009)
WHO Model List		
<input type="checkbox"/> furosemide	Injection: 10 mg/ml in 2-ml ampoule. Oral liquid: 20 mg/5 ml Tablets 40 mg.	
<input type="checkbox"/> hydrochlorothiazide	Oral liquid: 50 mg/5 ml. Solid oral dosage forms 25 mg.	
Complementary List		
doxamine	Injections 40 mg/ml (hydrochloride) in 5-ml vial.	
12.5 Antithrombotic medicines		
acetylsalicylic acid	Tablets 100 mg.	
Complementary List		
streptokinase	Powder for injection: 1.5 million IU in vial.	
12.6 Lipid-lowering agents		
<input type="checkbox"/> simvastatin*	Tablets 5 mg; 10 mg; 20 mg; 40 mg. * For use in high-risk patients.	
13. DERMATOLOGICAL MEDICINES (topical)		
13.1 Antifungal medicines		
benzoic acid + salicylic acid	Cream or ointments 6% + 3%.	
<input type="checkbox"/> miconazole	Cream or ointments 2% (nitrate).	
sodium thiosulfate	Solution: 15%.	
Complementary List		
selenium sulfide	Detergent-based suspensions 2%.	

Image courtesy: WHO Medicines



The Golden Temple, Amritsar. A Sikh devotee washing his feet in the Pool of Nectar, or Sarovar, in the Golden Temple compound. The Golden Temple, or Harmandir Sahib as known by the locals, is the holiest temple in Sikhism.

India

Life Itself is a Religion

Weilun Soon

It was a very religious response to a very rational calculation: I had only two-weeks to travel, and I chose to do so by visiting some of the holiest sites in India.

After completing my two-month-long internship in Delhi, I was spoilt with choices of backpacking destinations. I knew that this is a very ancient land that I was standing upon, and two weeks wouldn't offer me any insight into what India had to offer, so I chose to cast my net as wide as possible. For someone who is not religious, my subconscious choices of Delhi, Agra, Amritsar, Dharamsala and Varanasi were almost karmic.

Syncretic India celebrates religious diversity despite a 80.5 percent Hindu majority. Northern India, where I toured, is almost a microcosm of India's religious diversity, where the holiest sites of Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Jainism can be found.

The belief in a higher power has inspired mankind to produce larger-than-life monuments, and I went in search of this in northern India. From the Baha'i House of Worship and Jama Masjid in New and Old Delhi, I went back farther in time to the ancient Mughal capital of Agra, where the belief in Love, perhaps one of mankind's oldest inspirations, underscored Shah Jahan's ode to his beloved Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal.

I then went into Amritsar, where I uncovered a proud, dignified and friendly caste of warrior-like Sikhs. The gold-plated walls of their holiest shrine, the Harmandir Sahib still shine majestically, never betraying its turbulent past in the bloodshed that occurred when Indira Gandhi sought to quell the Sikh independence movement that had the temple as its base.

Following Amritsar, I headed deep into the

mountains where the lingering hope of a nation is pinned on a foreign land – Dharamsala. The Tibetans fled their homeland when Chinese authorities asserted control over Tibet, and sought refuge in Dharamsala, a testament to India's graciousness. Thousands flee the greater historic Tibet regions that encompass today's Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan provinces in China, to seek cultural and spiritual reconciliation in Dharamsala, a land that never was part of their history.

Deserting Dharamsala, I went down to the Ganges along Varanasi, in what would be the highlight of my trip. The beating pulse of the Hindu universe, life and death meld along the banks of the Ganges, where the belief of dying in its water will break a Hindu free of the cycle of reincarnation. Death lives exuberantly on the ghats, the nexus of social life in Varanasi.

Then, the total solar eclipse on July 22 which topped off my trip. As my friends and I battled sleepiness, we made our way to the ghats where thousands of others like us gathered. As the sun peered through the clouds, the moon made its grand entrance, and within minutes, the struggling rays of the dawning sun perished in a vacuum-like darkness at 6.24am.

Disoriented and awestruck, many of us started weeping, never expecting to see such stark, natural beauty ever in our lifetimes. The light hum of Hindu chants from anxious monks who want to rid evil, with smells of incense wafting among us made the experience even more stellar and wholesome.

This is India, where death is a part of life, and life is a tapestry and explosion of colors and senses; where life is a religion, and religion is life.*

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Taj Mahal, Agra

Viewing of the Solar Eclipse on the ghats in Varanasi





Nepal's Children

From hardships to new horizons

Kelsey Campbell

I arrived in Kathmandu by way of Alaska, Atlanta, Chicago, and Delhi. I had been living in Alaska for almost five years and was a member of the World Affairs Council in Anchorage. At a luncheon, a well-respected think tank researcher mentioned the book *Three Cups of Tea*, in which climber Greg Mortensen tells his story of building schools as an alternative to the violent religious madrasas that speckle the mountains of western Pakistan and Afghanistan. The title alludes to the Balti proverb: “The first time you take tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you take tea, you become family.” While on a trip to Atlanta, I happened upon a copy of the book. With just a few months left in the military, I started looking towards a post-service trip and decided to check out Mortensen’s website at the Central Asia Institute. His page details not only ways to provide more academically-based schools for the region’s children, many of whom would otherwise be coerced to study under warlords, but also tells of initiatives to fund young girls’ educations through university. I wanted to find a way of getting involved in these programs, but because of the escalation of violence in

“What we think inconceivable is a sobering **reality** just a few thousand miles away.”

the region, the site recommended I seek alternative destinations and directed me towards organizations with similar goals. From here, I discovered a Kathmandu-based organization that has rescued 150 orphan from the city and the countryside.

A majority of the girls were rescued from the “kamlari” system. The kamlari system, virtually unknown to most of the Western world, is the institutionalized sale of young girls, often of poor families, into servitude. Destitute families, seeing no other option, receive less than \$100 for selling their daughters to the families of a higher caste. These adolescents are essentially indentured domestic servants. Alternately, third parties swoop in on recently orphaned girls, placing them into near-slavery. The girls work long hours of hard labor, earn nothing, and are denied any form of education. They do not question the matter of freedoms nor know what life could be like. They are not valued

as human beings. What we view as inconceivable is a sobering reality just a few thousand miles away.

How could this legally persist in the twenty-first century? The answer: it should not be. Nepal, a third world country, is among the least developed nations today. Nepal seems to have been dealt a full hand of disaster: high-altitude and land-locked, unreliable public utilities, the royal family murdered, and a decade-long conflict between Maoists rebels and the government. As the civil war has slackened in 2006, the Nepalese government still contends with illegitimacy and gross disorder. Bandh (protests) have grown increasingly common. They can be as light as a group of dissatisfied workers barking on a corner, or as debilitating as a town or district shutting down the roads and stores blocked off and occasionally barricades in government buildings. As such, the only

“To be truthful, I think I **gained more** by spending time with them, **than** they did with my meager hours of scrubbing and sweeping.”

hope for young Nepalese children is a good education and an English language foundation. (English reading, writing, and speaking skills are imperative for employment at a multinational business or in order to leave Nepal to attend higher educational opportunities.) But the only options for children are, typically, costly private neighborhood schools.

The organization with which I hooked up works to facilitate sending children from an orphanage to such a school just down the street. There they study English, mathematics, science, art, and literature, among other subjects. Despite their troubled pasts, these children are pleasant sponges, soaking up each morsel of information.

I have never experienced such open kindness upon first meeting as in Nepal. Nor have I seen such bright, smiley faces - they melt your heart. My gripes about school loans or missed summer concerts seemed entirely insignificant. Any moment outside school, the children loved to play basketball (many of them had a much better shot than I), show me their artwork, or play with their dog Snowball. Even though I was only able to volunteer at the Elderly Home at Pashupatinath Temple (a sacred Hindu site on the

Bagmati River) for a few days, the Catholic nuns and the elderly residents were genuinely grateful. To be truthful, I think I gained more by spending time with them than they did by my meager hours of scrubbing and sweeping. Any native Nepali will tell you that two weeks is just not enough time to spend in the land at the foot of the Himalayas. After just twelve days there, I must concur. The strength, hope, and kind spirit of everyone was inspiring. The skies shown a bright shade of blue I had never encountered before. The vibrant prayer flags that flapped in the wind created a rainbow of color in the busy streets of Kathmandu. The scent of burning incense and freshly picked Jackfruit along the sides of the road was especially fragrant.

Many people I volunteered with were, while there, already planning their next trip to Nepal. Many were students thirsty for a glimpse at the beauty the land of the highest mountains had to offer. I am not yet sure when I will get back to Nepal, though my maps and Lonely Planet book are easily-accessible in my apartment right now. *Dhanyavad.**

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KAL PENN

South Asian

Stepping Stone

or

the Last of his
Kind?

Jordan Alam

Kal Penn (born Kalpen Modi): whether you've seen him as the goofy Kumar in *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* or on the popular television show *House*, he adds a little color to your screen as one of the few talented actors of Indian origin to become a household name. Many eyebrows have been raised, however, in the past few months following his recent move to the White House as the Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement to serve as a liaison to the South Asian and Pacific Islander communities. While many acknowledge him as a good actor, their fondness stops there. Questions ranging from polite (how qualified is he to hold that position?) to insulting (why are we putting Hollywood actors in the White House?) have been posed by the public and put under the magnifying glass.

Surprising as Kal Penn's promotion to the White House appeared, the move was not out of the blue, contrary to public perception. Since 2007 Penn has been working with the Obama campaign as a volunteer and has remained connected to the campaign's spirit of change and inclusiveness towards minorities. Penn has worked towards redefining the image of non-white Americans in an academic setting as well. In 2008, he taught two courses relating to South Asians in the media at the University of Pennsylvania. Indeed, when interviewed by Gather.com about his experience as Gogol, a second-generation child of immigrant parents, in *The Namesake*, he describes his comfort as an American of Indian descent but says that the similarity between him and his character ends there. On this and several occasions, Penn has publicly described the experience he shares with many children of immigrant parents, in particular the struggle to strike a balance between two cultures. However, he is careful to not over generalize and clarifies the differences between his own personality and past and those of his character Gogol. Hollywood often flattens these nuances and creates a stereotypical image of the "South Asian" experience, a practice that Penn's body of work seeks to change.

Yet his move to the White House from a strong acting career still shocks some; exploring the stereotypes surrounding South Asian-Americans in raunchy comedies does not put people at ease when it comes to their political well-being. So far in his first few months as the public liaison for what he

calls the “front door of the White House,” Penn has worked extensively to welcome not only the South Asian and Pacific Islander community, but to make government actions more accessible to Americans of color at large. Most recently on his White House blog post, he describes the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, a meeting of Hawaiian community organizations to better opportunities for the people in our youngest state.

Though representation is building in the political arena, South Asians in televised media are still a rare breed. Though competent journalists and TV anchors bolster a more balanced image of the subcontinent, many viewer expectations are still framed with reference to Hollywood stereotypes and therefore characterize any deviation as an anomaly. While South Asians began as a model minority, a racial group that achieves a higher degree of success than the average, this reputation has garnered fear and anxiety from some Americans who believe the rhetoric about stolen jobs due to outsourcing. The media has responded with an unjust vision of people from the subcontinent by placing them in roles either showcasing their intolerance of Western ways (the father who denies his daughter’s cry for a love marriage) or as incompetent foreigners in their

“...will, as VH1 proposes, the profession of ‘acting and being Indian’ go extinct with departure of its masthead?”

environment (the taxi driver or the convenience store owner). Only rarely are the second- and third-generation South Asians portrayed. Kal Penn himself speaks out against the stereotype of a goofy Indian male with a strong accent and no social skills that replays itself time and again in shows like *The Big Bang Theory*. Penn was reluctant to take the role presented to him in *Van Wilder: Rise of Taj*, as he explains in an interview with DesiClub, precisely for this reason – only after the director allowed him to cut some more stereotypical bits did he enjoy the role. Penn’s other movies, such *American Desi* (which was created by a majority Indian production team and all-Indian cast) and *The Namesake*, portray three-dimensional Indian characters that break the mold of their stereotype. Yet these movies represent the exception in Hollywood, not the norm.

Thus, with Penn’s move to the White House, he sets a precedent yet unseen by the South Asian community. By drawing on the message of Obama’s campaign for change, his position in the White House facilitates communication between the South Asian and Pacific Islander communities with the rest of the nation. Drawing on his personal volition to uphold a realistic vision of the South Asian community, he continues to raise them up in another public forum: the U.S. government. Yet the question still remains: will this move increase acceptance and understanding of South Asians as more than just engineers and doctors? Will Kal Penn’s movies inspire young South Asian actors to get their foot in the door for leading roles? Or will, as VH1 proposes, the profession of “acting and being Indian” go extinct with the departure of its masthead?

Overall, it may be too early to say whether Kalpen Modi will replace Kumar in the estimations of the viewing public. However, the notable work that Penn has produced remains his influence towards opening the door for South Asians in careers that previously stereotyped them or ruled them out as foreigners. Though race on TV and in movies is still portrayed with the same classic xenophobia (putting a token Indian as the bumbling buffoon in many social comedies, for example) Penn has opened up the conversation for serious lead roles. Now that he has stepped through the door of the White House, joining prominent politicians of color such as Gary Locke, Bill Richardson, and Barack Obama, he opens up another topic for discussion: representation of South Asians in American politics.*

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Renaissance

Sonam Hajela

Azure sky in shadows spills over and cries out.
My grandmother's ailment serious
my aunt opens her arms to me
I give in to her sharp scent.
The dandelions perhaps awaiting my evening of wet, wet diamonds?

In faith I travel to occupy my swelling memories.
I jump through hours to when it was winter.
My grandfather dances with a swagger and flicks out cards. The swampy
corridor is cold and the shadows suddenly still. I think to myself, "Drink the
bountiful banana milk, lick your lips and wipe your cheek ...it's only gypped
minutes my dear."

The chair scrapes.
Only memory holds my hand
Simply content, I clap along to the sloppy songs of my childhood.
But the birdsong is moody and is here merely until I chew my boned fish.
I'm in a renaissance – all wishes mine.

The shark bursts through with the howl of the airplane's engine.
The erosion of pure sound appropriate for the day. I want neither trail nor
mascot that hails adolescence.

I want the wistful assurance of whole milk and eggs. My My, but the years sprint
away; my mischief is hiding within the Indian summers.
Full circle, I admit this is no sport - there are neither cowards nor winners.
But, hell, even the rain is a peony to someone.

Slippers

Sonam Hajela

Stubby fingers with yellowing nails and scars
Trembling, the fingers draw a cigarette to his blackened mouth and then flick it
carelessly, the ash settling on the bench, his bland tattered clothes and his traditional slippers
—the movements somehow deliberate, tantalizing and *graceful*; almost as if put there to

take away from

his boorishness.

Mumbai, a true rose goddess tonight
—loud drunk laborers, beautiful prostitutes
with fig mouths and innocent deceptions
—glittering sin floods the city—
the train screeches past him, the city

stops

and ignores him all at once, as if it were a disinterested coquette.
I wonder if he knows he's staining his slippers?

—he says—

“These clothes don't mean anything - they're borrowed anyway.
Now these slippers of mine, my glorious father bought me these - the only thing the old bastard ever
bought me.

I will never dirty these.”

He stubs out his cigarette and walks out the filthy path to the city.

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