



South Asia News

Center for South Asian
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Constructing the Future of Afghanistan

By Debesb Roy

Originally published in the Bengali daily Aajkaal, Calcutta, November 30; translated by Nirmalangshu Mukherji, Department of Philosophy, Delhi University. Debesb Roy is a well-known literary author in Bengal. Subsequent events at Bonn have borne out the perspective sketched in this article.

Deliberations began on 27 November on the future of Afghanistan in the German city of Bonn. Who are the discussants? Some representatives of a king of Afghanistan who left his kingdom in 1973 to reside in Rome. Another group known as the 'Peshawar Assembly' who uttered some words in the past regarding peace in Afghanistan from outside of Afghanistan. A similar formation called the 'Cyprus group'. Plus representatives of the Northern Alliance. And of course representatives of the motley alliance put together by the US to conduct its war against Afghanistan. In all, 30 people

were from the inside of Afghanistan. The intelligensia of Afghanistan, who bore the brunt of five years' of Taliban rule, were not there. Those who continued to perform their duties as lawyers, doctors and engineers were not there either. Women of Afghanistan, who had suffered the most, were not represented; neither were the members of various political organisations.

And, perhaps as a preparation for determining the future of Afghanistan in a handful of meetings, the media in US and Europe have been saying, ever since 9/11, that Afghanistan is not a nation, Afghans do not have a nationality, Afghans are an assortment of tribes and factions, their tribal affinities override their nationalism and their international imagination.

This unilateral publicity has helped spread the view across the world that this war in reality is a war between the civilised and the savage. Bush, the US president, in fact said that. In most of the publications from Calcutta to London and New York, self-made Afghan-experts wrote on a daily basis that the US is bearing the burden of civilization in Afghanistan. Even the liberals, in part the left, have been saying that, notwithstanding the devastation caused by US bombs and missiles, the fact remains that the savagery of the Taliban is the only alternative. Jamila Mujahed, who reads news for radio Kabul, made a faint protest. Jamila is one of Afghanistan's known and respected intellectuals. Her husband, Sayeed Amin Mujahed, teaches history in the Academy of Social Sciences in Kabul. In 1992, Jamila announced the fall of Najibullah over radio Kabul. Jamila reported on the entry of the mujahideen in Kabul. In 1996, Jamila announced the entry of the Taliban after they drove the mujahideen off. Just the other day, she announced the withdrawal of the Taliban from Kabul. Then Jamila said that no discussion on the future of Afghanistan can be meaningful without the representation of the women of Afghanistan. She was supported by Sarika Parlika, one of the leaders of women's movement in Kabul.

Why should we think of the Northern Alliance as the liberators of Afghanistan just because they are

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Director's Note

As a philosopher, one is used to having to *prove* such obvious things as that one's own hand is real or that other people exist and leaving it an open question whether future or past times are real at all. Recently such academic metaphysical questions had to be answered by us here at the Center for South Asian Studies. Does the Center really exist? Does it have a future? Should the Library continue and increase its support for South Asian studies? These questions were hilariously easy to answer. And I hope, like the last four issues of the newsletter, this one too would once again say it loud and clear that the increasing importance of South Asian studies in this campus goes without much saying. Now to turn to more urgent matters:

One of the major events this semester for us was a rather provocative talk by Professor Akeel Bilgrami, the reputed philosopher from Columbia University, on Gandhi's moral psychology (see page 11). Next semester, besides the Spring Symposium, we shall have another colloquium on Gandhi from Professor Roy

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Contributions of articles, book reviews and commentaries are welcome. Please send them to us at csas@hawaii.edu.

We also thank all those who have supported the Center with monetary contributions in recent years. These funds provide a flexible resource to supplement our (rapidly declining) university operating budget and permits us to augment our South Asia activities.

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Perrett of Australia who has written extensively on Hindu ethics, bio-ethics, and Western aesthetics. But is Gandhi relevant in this age of computerized combat? What does 'zest for truth' have to do with bringing terrorists to militaristic justice, when the two nations that Gandhi never thought of as *two* are flexing their nuclear muscles against each other?

Even peace-loving people harbour deep doubts about the practical efficacy of non-violence in the so-called 'real' world. Like surgery and chemotherapy—to which even homeopathy-buffs succumb when push comes to life-threatening shove—revenge looks like the way to go when you need to 'get real'. Well, in spite of some confusion with the Tora Bora caves that are still being bombed with daisy-cutters—what a delicate name for weapons of mass destruction!—as I write this, revenge has been taken. Almost the same number of innocent civilians have been killed in Afghanistan as were killed in the World Trade Center towers. That these are not 'American lives' makes it easier now for the revenge to escalate by its own logic, when violence takes the form of chaos-spreading, intrigue-mongering 'international political (and gasoline-greedy) control' in the region. The fate of South Asia depends now on political stability or the lack of it in hungry, gutted, wintry Afghanistan.

In spite of the anti-fundamentalist pro-democracy voices within South Asia and the work of the United Nations and Doctors Without Borders, hope still sounds like utopia in the region. As Gandhi once remarked to a journalist, non-violence never makes news. Its daily dialogic victories inside a family, society or country—even the most blood-bathed ones—never makes it to the annals of history. We know about the royal killings in Nepal but not about the powerful poetry and fiction coming out of modern Nepal. We know of the bickering in Bonn about which alliance will rule Afghanistan after it has been allegedly 'de-Talibanized', but we don't hear about the silent non-detonating work done by the Afghan women's group RAWA.

This issue of our newsletter highlights some of the creative and life-enhancing work going on in and out of our campus related to South Asia and our neighbour, Afghanistan. In Gandhara—from where the name 'Kandahar' derives—once the Greek Bactrian civilization intermingled with the Indic civilization, producing one of the greatest fusion styles of sculpture as well as such philosophical classics as the *Milindapanho*, a two thousand year old dialogue be-

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Upadhyay Returns to Hawaii for Symposium

By Tammy Pavitch

Manoa Journal

During the three short years since his graduation from the UH PhD program in creative writing, Samrat Upadhyay's literary star has risen quickly. Upadhyay, the first Nepali writer ever to succeed on the American literary scene, will return to Hawaii in April to present a reading at the symposium of the Center for South Asian Studies, featuring keynoter Amitav Ghosh. The reading will be sponsored by the CSAS and *Manoa Journal*.



Now 38, Upadhyay spent four years as a student at the University of Hawaii honing his fiction-writing skills. In 1998, his short story "The Good Shopkeeper" was printed in *Manoa Journal*, edited for the University of Hawaii Press by UH English professor Frank Stewart. Set in Nepal, this story was later selected by writer Amy Tan to be reprinted in the prize anthology *Best American Short Stories of 1999*, bringing Upadhyay to the attention of Boston publisher Houghton-Mifflin.

In July of this year, Upadhyay's collection of nine stories, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, hit bookstores across the country. It immediately received thumbs-up reviews in such major publications as the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Amitav Ghosh calls him "a major new talent." The book has also been selected for Barnes and Noble's Discover Great Writers Program. Upadhyay's most recent triumph, a \$35,000 Whiting Writers Award, was presented to him in New York on October 25th.

Although Upadhyay now lives in Ohio, where he teaches creative writing at Baldwin-Wallace College, he has maintained his ties with *Manoa Journal* and the University of Hawaii. In an effort to introduce Nepal's writing to the West, he was asked by Stewart in 1998 to guest-edit a selection for *Manoa Journal*. *Secret Places*, the resulting volume, was released this month by the University of Hawaii Press.

In collecting writings for the volume,

Upadhyay said, "The interesting thing is that even though we selected more for artistic merit than for political content, the issue reflects very well the major concerns in contemporary Nepali society. I think it's an exciting issue, and I'm proud to continue my association with *Manoa*. Hundreds of literary journals appear in the US, yet there is none like it. It's clearly one of the best literary journals internationally."

According to Stewart, who also won a Whiting Writers Award, in 1986, "*Secret Places* is filled with surprising stories, poems, essays, and photographs from a country most people know very little about. And it is the first collection of contemporary Nepali work by any American journal. Samrat is a fine translator as well as an excellent writer and deserves of all the recognition he's getting. We're very proud that he was a student in the creative writing program and that he has guest-edited this wonderful issue of *Manoa*."

Naturally, over the summer and autumn, Upadhyay has been asked to comment on the massacre of the Nepali royal family. "It came as a tremendous shock," he said, "to Nepalis around the world, but we have also bounced back with a composure that is very heartening and bodes well for our future." Upadhyay believes that in the wake of the massacre, the violent Maoist insurgency is a greater threat to Nepal's young democracy than concerns about the character of the new crown prince. "Also, it will take time," he says, "to overcome the ills that plague many Third World countries, such as illiteracy, political nepotism, and corruption."

Many reviewers have questioned him about his position as the first Nepali writer to attract the attention of a large American audience. "I want to

See UPADHYAY on p. 9

Arresting God in Kathmandu: Stories of Nepal, By Samrat Upadhyay, Houghton-Mifflin, 2001.

Secret Places: New Writing from Nepal, co-guest-edited by Samrat Upadhyay and Manjushree Thapa. General editor Frank Stewart. *Manoa Journal* and UH Press, 2001.

Islam, Jihad, and Terrorism

By Saleem Ahmed

MILUN

The word *jihad* conjures images of bearded, hawk-nosed, fanatic Muslims on the warpath, killing infidels indiscriminately in total submission to *Allah* (the Arabic word for God), not fearing death as this would only assure them a berth in Paradise. The tragic

killing and destruction at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Somerset County, Pennsylvania are cited as proofs of

this religious bigotry. But is this perception correct? No passage in the *Koran*, the Muslim holy book, gives a wanton license to kill. "Holy War" is permitted only in self-defense, and only to counter oppression. The *Koran* states:

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God does not love transgressors.... And if they cease (fighting), let there be no hostility except against those who practice oppression (2:190-193).

Do not take for friends hypocrites except those who join a group between whom and you there is a treaty (of peace) or those who approach you with hearts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people.... God has opened no way for you (to war against them) (4:89-90).

Thus, Muslims are forbidden to initiate aggression; only to retaliate, in self-defense. They are not to conquer, subjugate, and kill others, drive them from their homes, or usurp their land. The "war" is to end immediately when oppression ceases. Muslims are not to transgress limits: the innocent, especially women and children, are to be protected; no plundering or rape is to occur. Unfortunately, the word *jihad* has been used inaccurately - not only by non-Muslims, but also by Muslims. The latter have used it often for their own self-serving purposes. It has been used as a rallying point to

inspire people for all sorts of purposes. It was also used by both Iran and Iraq in their war against each other.

Can the September 11, 2001 tragedy be justified as *jihad* by any passage in the *Koran*? No. Unfortunately, some Americans on the mainland have started

a hate campaign against Muslims by twisting the meanings of the above-mentioned *Koranic* verses and

painting all Muslims and their religion as evil.

Universality of God's message

Notwithstanding the action of some Muslims, Islam is actually a very open religion. In the *Koran*, God reminds Muslims that He has sent prophets to all nations of the world, and that we are to respect and honor all of them - and make no distinction between them. Here are some *Koranic* passages:

To every people was sent a messenger... (10:47; 16:36)

God sent messengers among all people with the command: "Serve God and shun evil (16:36)

To those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them he messengers, God shall soon give their (due) reward (4:152; 2:285).

Nothing is said to you (O Muhammad) that was not said to the messengers before you (41:43).

The *Koran* names 23 prophets, 19 of whom are also mentioned in the Bible (Table 1) — possibly because Arabs were already aware of them through the Bible.

Table 1. Prophets named in the Bible and Koran

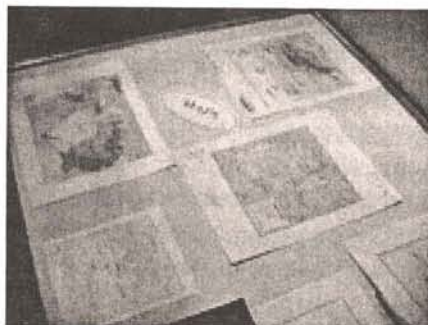
Biblical name	Koranic name	Biblical name	Koranic name
Adam(#)	Aadam(#)	Aaron	Haroon
Noah	Nuh	Elias	Ilyas
Abraham	Ibrahim	Elisha	Al-Yasa
Enoch	Idrees	Lot	Loot
Ishmael	Ismail	—	Hud
Isaac	Ishaq	—	Shuaib
Jacob	Yaqoob	—	Salih
David	Dawood	Ezekiel	Dhul-Kifl
Solomon	Sulaiman	Zechariah	Zakariyah
Job	Ayoob	John	Yahya
Joseph	Yusuf	Jesus	Eesa
Moses	Moosa	—	Muhammad

Afghanistan on Display

Monica Ghosh

UH South Asia Librarian

A display titled "Knowing Afghanistan," was set up for November in the Asia Collection of Hamilton Library. The display was prepared mainly to highlight the Library's materials on Afghanistan, and to introduce visitors and library users to the complex history of a country and its people that since October



has been under attack by the U.S. military. The inspiration for this display comes from a personal desire to promote understanding and education as an alternative to violence.

The central display case, "Focus on Afghanistan," includes CIA maps from the Maps Room collection; and British accounts of Afghanistan from the nineteenth century that have some outlandish, and racist impressions of Afghans. Another case has materials on the history and politics of Afghanistan, including: a time-line from the independence of Afghanistan in 1919-2001; histories of the British-Afghan Wars; and the period of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan that



has been compared with the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

The third display case includes uncataloged ephemera — propaganda materials distributed in the 1980's by the U.S. Department of State, and intended to promote the efforts of the anti-Soviet

Mujahudin, and to show the victimization of the Afghan people as reported by the U.N. Also in this case are a few books on women in Afghanistan and several videos in the Wong Audiovisual Center.

The U.N. and other humanitarian agencies have identified serious concerns about famine and the forced dispersal of Afghan refugees into nearby Iran and Pakistan. These conditions and circumstances

will raise additional issues that surely will be studied in the forthcoming literature on Afghanistan. Continued interest in Afghanistan should focus on supporting and promoting education and nonviolence from the outside as well as the inside.



*If anyone is interested in a bibliography of the items used in this display, please go to this website:
<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~monicag/afghanlist.htm>
 or contact Monica Ghosh, Asia Collection, Hamilton Library, Honolulu, HI 96822.*

Patriotism, Humanity, and the War on Terrorism

By Stephen Phillips

Philosophy, University of Texas

If the title of this talk had been left entirely to me, the word 'war' would have been printed in scare quotes, "war" on terrorism, a metaphoric, not a literal usage, like Johnson's "War on Poverty." Taken literally, the word as employed with respect to the military action against Osama Bin Laden and his protectors in Afghanistan sounds like "newspeak," the propaganda language used by Big Brother to shape consciousness. In George Orwell's novel *1984*, war is continual and conducted along every dimension of society. All of Big Brother's policies including torture and secret police are justified by the logic of war, the "total war" logic of war. In war, anything goes. Generals can deny rights and kill civilians, no matter that they are unimplicated in any wrong. People who get in the way cease to be persons and become "collateral damage"—a phrase that seems to me a paradigm of obscenity. In *1984*, patriotism is harnessed as a force of oppression. The patriotic public is willing to sacrifice for the greater good of national security. No international law, no multilateralism, censorship and denial of due process, and of course no open debate.

The current military action in Afghanistan is, fortunately, one where the cause of the U.S. is the cause of humanity. Or, it could be the cause of humanity—to use that internationalist word in a political sense that matches a second, moral sense that I'll talk about in a moment, namely, humanity as a moral virtue, a genuine virtue in contrast with the often false virtue of patriotism. (According to Confucius's moral teaching, humanity (*jen*) is the premier virtue in fact, making possible the virtuousness of all the rest.) Politically, the campaign against terrorism should be an international campaign since terrorism attacks the welfare of people everywhere, in Pakistan and India, in Ireland and Britain, in Russia and Chechnya, in Israel and Palestine, as well as in Afghanistan and the U.S. Patriotism as the emotion appropriate to nationalism is out of place, irrelevant, in what should be an international police operation. Police action protects the innocent; war doesn't. The U.N. is the appropriate agent, the appropriate coordinator, since, to repeat, terrorists threaten us all, every human being everywhere.

Now of course things are complicated because the United States and its allies fought a proxy war against the Soviet Union for a decade in Afghanistan. And in a singular failure of policy, the war zone and its

population of twenty million was abandoned by the victorious capitalists although billions of dollars of U.S. weapons had been instrumental in devastating the entire region, not to mention the millions more spent by the U.S. and its allies to fund foreign mercenaries from, in particular, Saudi Arabia, who stayed. International thugs have clustered around warlord paymasters such as Osama Bin Laden. There has not been a legitimate government in Afghanistan since 1980. By not acting out of humanity a lot earlier, the U.S. is having to act a lot less humanitarian now, and we are approaching the ironic language of newspeak. Not only the former Soviets but the U.S. and its allies are responsible, in part, for the terrible conditions in Afghanistan, the landmines that blow off the limbs of farmers and children and rubble in place of schools and now the bombs destroying villages and hospitals—who can really tell a hospital from a terrorist hideout amid all the destruction?—and the solution is to bomb and kill more?

Is the U.S. taking the bait of the terrorists whose simple-minded strategy is to incite a cycle of atrocity-reprisal-counter-reprisal escalating to total war along the so-called fault lines of civilizations, Islamic versus Western? Let's hope not. (In the current state of secrecy, it's hard to know.) When it comes to terrorism, cultural differences do not matter. We live in a super-civilization and should aspire to a global super-culture where terrorism is not tolerated, no matter where. Multilateralism, an insistence on internationalism, and action out of humanity are the ways to bring that super-coalition about.

According to Confucius's ethical teaching, a human being is malleable by nature, and particularly as young people we make our own personalities and character by consciously appropriating the practices of our society; that is, we undergo self-training by mastering trades and conventions including traditionally established norms. And people make themselves differently, particularly people from different cultures, where there are different practices to internalize. Now some interpreters have overblown this malleability theme to attribute to Confucius a moral relativism. But this is a misinterpretation because of the centrality of *jen* in Confucius's message and in his understanding of human potential. We are born with *jen*, but it too—more

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Theology across traditions



Book Review:

Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How reason helps break down the boundaries between religion*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

By Rohit Dalvi

Department of Philosophy

In a climate of religious strife and fanaticism on all sides, Francis Clooney's book offers a creative and open-minded approach to theological questions. Somewhat in the tradition of Roberto de Nobili, the 17th century missionary to India, Clooney advocates the "broadening of theological inquiry into an inter-religious conversation." Clooney, as a Christian and a theologian working in an increasingly pluralistic world wants to emphasize the possibility of agreeing with others across theological traditions on the basis of rational arguments and commonly held beliefs. The themes around which Clooney organises his discussion of an intelligently comparative theology are the existence and identity of God, embodiment and the role of revelation. The goal is to correct the notion that a chasm separates theological reason in India and the West. Clooney's discussion adopts particular examples from the Christian and Hindu traditions as a point of departure. From the Christian theological tradition Clooney discusses, Urs van Balthasar, Swinburne, Barth and Rahner. The Hindu theologians discussed are not restricted to the San-

skrit tradition of Nyaya, Mimamsa, and Vedanta but also include theological discussions in Tamil by Vaishnavite and Shaivite writers like Arul Nandi.

Clooney is aware that he may be suspected of imposing an order and coherence under the label "Hindu theology" as well as preferring god rather than goddess centred discussions. Nevertheless, this is an attempt at providing a "manageable" milieu for conversation and hence is only a beginning, an opening into a domain of theological thinking. Although writing as a Christian, there is no presupposition on Clooney's part that Christian versions of theological doctrines are superior to alternatives from the Hindu tradition. Christian theologians, Clooney believes can only benefit from this interreligious conversation with Hinduism or other theological traditions. In considering possible directions for his project Clooney expresses his enthusiasm for seeing the possibility of not only similar books being written from the Hindu perspective in Tamil or even in Sanskrit but also similar books being written from an African or Native American perspective. Clooney's eminently readable volume is much more so because of a dialogical response by an up and coming Hindu theologian Parimal Patil appended to it. Patil's short essay is critical and informed. Patil points out the asymmetrical relation between Christian theologians and Hindu theologians insofar as there is no room for a Hindu theologian in academic theology. In India, unlike the US, universities provide no intellectual space for Hindu theologians. The risk then, Patil believes is that in the absence of a

"professional" space for Hindu theology, the comparativist project will remain a uniquely Christian enterprise. In the absence of recent work in Hindu theology, Patil recommends a renewed return to the classical pre-modern traditions in Hindu theology. However, I believe, it would be lamentable and would further the asymmetry between Christian theology (which surely is not restricted to St. Jerome or Aquinas) and Hinduism if new texts and streams of Hindu theological thought were not encouraged and actively pursued. The dialogical role of the Hindu theologian as expositor for his Christian or other non-Hindu interlocutors is rightly emphasised by Patil. Hindu theological traditions are receding into oblivion and efforts such as Clooney's and Patil's can surely serve to correct this undeserved state of neglect, of a rich and valuable human heritage.



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tween a Greek general and a Buddhist monk. Let us hope that, shaken by all this terrorism and state-sponsored counter-terrorism, we shall begin to know women and men of that tragic melting pot of civilizations once again, and not because anthropological knowledge brings power, control, gasoline and good business, but because one must know one's neighbours just as one must know oneself.

Arindam Chakrabarti
CSAS Director



Just Wars and the 'Woman' Question: Orientalism in Current Discourses on Gender, Islam and the Taliban

By S. Charusheela

Women's Studies

The following is based on a talk presented at panel on "Women, Islam and U.S. Policies," October 28, 2001. Part of the series on Islam and Women: Documentaries and Dialogue organized by the University Peace Initiative/Professors Opposed to War at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The panel was preceded by the screening of "A Tajik Woman" by Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa.

The documentary we just saw is the starting point for my discussion. Here, we follow the documentarian, an American of (Iranian) Tajik descent, in search of identity. Her quest leads her to interview four Muslim women from a variety of backgrounds who discuss their oppression under Islam - Zinat and Homeira, both Americans of Bangladeshi and Afghani descent respectively, and Maryam and Fahimeh, Muslim women from Afghanistan currently exiled from their home.¹ Homeira and Zinat faced difficult issues of familial control over their behavior, especially around questions of marriage and dating. While parental efforts to limit and control their daughters are reprehensible, what is troubling about these narratives is the way they approach their situation. Despite the strong differences in the personalities of the two women, the underlying imagination informing their narrative, as well as the narrative of the American-born documentarian, is the same - they locate their experiences in the context of two incommensurate cultures, with themselves between. They simply attribute everything regressive about their familial experiences to their 'Muslim' side, and all that is positive to their 'American' one.

This is done despite the presence of evidence that while the conduct of their parents was controlling, this did not indicate that this was a *general* aspect of either Islamic doctrine or even of the Bangladeshi and Afghani cultures they come from. For Bangladesh, there seemed to be little consideration on Zinat's part that perhaps the desire to control a daughter's sexuality is a classic aspect of middle-class immigrant experience, and not a necessary reflection of any innate cultural practice 'back home.' This becomes even sharper in the Afghani example, where Homeira notes that her cousins from Afghanistan who came to visit were much more 'modern' than she was - this observation does not in any way make her question the attribution of her par-

ents' conservatism to 'Afghani culture,' or rethink her understanding of what is Afghani and what is American in her upbringing. These narratives contrast sharply with the politics of fundamentalism in their countries without invoking any larger imagination of cultural clash or immutable differences.

Zinat and Homeira's narrative proceeds by 'arranging' the evidence to fit a pre-given image of the backward, regressive, primitive and controlling as Islamic, and the modern, free, progressive, and good as Western. This, of course, is what Said famously identified as orientalism. As the work of scholars like Lata Mani and Gayatri Spivak have shown for the South Asian context, the obsessive deployment of such orientalism, especially around the 'woman question,' is a key justificatory trope for colonial control. The deployment of this trope makes women the symbolic ground on which the justification for rule and control is sought, but does little to improve the actual conditions facing the women. Thus, the underlying issue is not whether the efforts to control daughters is reprehensible, but whether one can so easily assume that this type of control is a unique or innate aspect of Muslim cultures, rather than a common aspect of immigrant experience in America, reflecting something about how immigrant experience works in this country.

My colleague Tamara Albertini has already highlighted both the diversity of Muslim cultures and the complexity of Islamic religious views on the issue of women's roles and rights. Here, I would like to focus on the importance of taking up alternate discussions of women's position in Afghanistan as a mode of rethinking the usefulness of justness of this war in terms of liberating Afghani women. There is little doubt that currently, anti-Islamic sentiments and the demonization of Islam, especially around images of fundamentalists and terrorists who oppress women contrasted with modernity that upholds and rescues women, are circulating at a high rate. The sudden concern for women is suspicious, given that there was little such concern evinced till it became convenient, and that the actual proposals for post-war governance have

Questioning US Foreign Policy and Terror Rhetoric

By Sankaran Krishna

Political Science

Let us remind ourselves of a few facts that are not being mentioned in the hoopla surrounding the attacks on Afghanistan.

1. A decade ago, during the Gulf War, American television and media reports spoke exclusively of "smart bombs", precise targeting, minimal collateral damage, and the like. The "truth" of US actions in the Gulf war came out only months after the war itself was over, buried in the inside pages - not in splashy headlines and sound-bites. 93% of the bombs used during the Gulf War were NOT so-called smart bombs, but conventional 'dumb' bombs. The Pentagon estimates that the bombs (both dumb and smart) missed their target approximately 70% of the time. 88,500 tons of bombs were used in the Gulf war - with a 70% miss-rate, you can imagine the civilian casualties that ensued. About 200,000 to 300,000 Iraqis were killed during the two-week long Gulf War - but the one person that the United States wanted to kill not only remains alive, but remains at the head of Iraq, namely Saddam Hussein. What this indicates is the need for us to be vigilant about the Government's claims regarding the precision of its operations, to question the military strategy that relies on air-strikes, and to question the claims made about limited civilian casualties. We have to be vigilant about all these claims because the track record of governments, especially the US, has not been a good one in terms of accuracy.

2. Before rushing off to proclaim either the Northern alliance or some decrepit old Afghani emperor living in exile in Europe as the next great hope, the US needs to re-evaluate its options. The Northern alliance are no improvement on the Taliban - they are not liberal democrats, they do not believe in the separation of religion and politics, their views on the rights of women are no different from that of the Taliban, and so on. The logic of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" has been suicidal in the past and it will prove to be so now.

3. Instead of following the media and administration's lead which will focus only on the short-term and immediate aspects of policy, any long-term and sensible analysis has to look at the following: the United States policy towards the main problem in the middle east, namely the Palestinian right to self-determination; sec-

ondly, the energy consumption patterns of the US which has an insatiable thirst for cheap gasoline; thirdly, a military-industrial-media complex that makes no distinctions on what it sells and to whom as long as there is a profit; fourthly, a sustained long-term foreign policy that actually lives up to its rhetoric - namely the promotion of democratic and secular regimes all over the world and the refusal to do business with those who are intolerant of the rights of minorities, women, and the like.

4. Finally, as everyone rushes to drape themselves with the flag, it might be more important than ever to hear the words of Rep. Barbara Lee (California -D), the sole member of the US Congress who voted against giving President Bush unlimited power for military attacks. Speaking on 14th September, 2001, Rep. Lee noted

I have agonized over this vote. But I came to grips with it in the very painful yet beautiful memorial service today at the National Cathedral. As a member of the clergy so eloquently said, "As we act, let us not become the evil that we deplore."



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deconstruct certain myths about Nepal," he explains, "that all Nepalis are spiritually enlightened, that all Nepalis are happy even though mired in poverty. I want to show the Nepali middle-class folks in their everyday lives, their everyday petty concerns—about money, sex, food—all the things that make them human and like their counterparts in the West. I think there's a tendency in the West to see Third World people as the Other, strange creatures who are violent or inscrutable or who shun materialism. I hope my work counters these myths."



Debunking Bullshit: Discourse-Envy in Academics

By Rohit Dalvi

Philosophy

This is a lengthy abstract of some parts of a paper, which was occasioned by Prof. Bilgrami's visit. It is a kind of elliptical response to what Prof. Bilgrami might consider an insignificant aspect of his work and it has no pretensions of actively engaging his arguments on Gandhi.

There is a trend in certain sections of academia, which leads intelligent people to the rather questionable exercise of exposing and debunking their fellow academics. This exercise however is not a rigorous conceptual analysis but more of an untutored dismissal. It is practised in the interest of "rigor" and "getting it right" and often on the receiving end are French and sometimes German authors and those who read them in the Anglophone world. This dismissal is not restricted however to people who are self-confessed deconstructionists or Deleuzians but also to those who are guilty of "name-dropping" or "mouthing-off" in academic contexts and thus insincere. Controversies abound concerning deconstruction where many reputable philosophers in the US and in Britain, with little or no knowledge of the writings of Derrida, chose to legislate that it was quite clearly not philosophy. There has always been a mistrust of Parisian fads and of Teutonic obscurities, of which we should have been cured by good old fashioned common sense. Moreover, any kind of thinking which is inventive not only in its vocabulary but also in the questions it asks is especially suspect. Post-colonialism, perhaps because of its reliance on French philosophy and literary theory, is coming increasingly under the scrutiny of self-professed bullshit detectors. The risk, which I will explain in a moment, is multiplied with a term of art like "bullshit" and "bullshitters". Bullshit as a term for denigrating persons, thoughts, styles, arguments is not entirely novel. Its explicit treatment has a history going back to Max Black's refined term "humbug" which he treated at length in his essay "The Prevalence of Humbug". Subsequently it has received consideration from the Princeton philosopher, Harry Frankfurt, who unabashedly used the word "bullshit," as has Akeel Bilgrami. Consider the following quote from Nietzsche "there is only one world and that world is false, cruel, contradictory, misleading and senseless, we need lies to vanquish this reality, this truth, we need lies in order to live." This would serve as classic example of

scholarly humbug or perhaps even bullshit. Although, in contemporary discussions bullshit is more akin to "mouthing off" in an academic context which is presumably accompanied by a pretense of sincerity.

Why would Nietzsche be throwing out this humbug? After all, he did go insane. Perhaps it is a case of *bomphoiologia*, as the Greeks would have called it: speaking (or for that matter writing) because one loves to hear the sound of one's voice and the rhythm of one's punctuation. Yet, could not Nietzsche be giving us something meaningful that reflects the presence in our lives of our little untruths and self-deceptions without which we would be bearers of an unbearable, almost brutal candor? Bullshit or humbug results in complacency, we are told. It is a progressive adulteration of thought, an insidious numbing of our sense of being able to tell true from false and good from bad. Be that as it may, there is in the use of this label a risk of casting aside that which does not resonate with our taste or our preferences, making intellectual disagreements a species of aesthetic disagreements. Bullshit as a pejorative label, then, is applied from somewhere, a starting point which is not that of disinterested inquiry. It is a standpoint of convictions, previous beliefs, tastes and preferences in style of argument, of preferred tones, diction, syntax, accents, punctuation and other elements of rhetorical lore. It is surely not a view from nowhere which is then removing themes, ideas and questions from the intellectual arena; it is a profoundly *interested and invested* reduction of these to non-themes, non-concepts and irrelevancy. This is a blindness which will be disastrous in an age of new hybridities of race and culture where as a first step we will have to innovate radically, not only in terms of concepts but also with regard to the creation of new vocabularies and questions. This is not the advocacy of just another pragmatism but of a difficult inclusivism, which hears out discourses—I almost said *wisdom*—wherever it comes from, whether it be Seinfeld or semiotics, the Dalits or Derrida. The need for new "lines of flight" from a deficient reality should not be compromised.

Moreover how would one even detect what is bullshit and what is not? It seems really far fetched to accept that we have some miraculous access to people's intentions. The person we accuse of "mouthing off" on

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fighting America's sky war in the ground? Each aspect of the misrule of the Taliban - the abuse of human rights, atrocities on women, imposition of an imaginary Islamic rule, use of terror - started and grew during the mujahideen rule from 1992 to 1996. The Northern Alliance represents that rule. When the Taliban entered Afghanistan, the Afghans supported them in the hope that they would be freed from the autocracy of the mujahideen. Rabani's militia publicly whipped girls because their shoes made noise, people were publicly executed in the sports stadium. Who does not know that the Taliban and Osama bin Laden are American creations and the Pakistan-Taliban axis was formed because the US needed it. It has not been proved if Osama bin Laden is behind the brutality of 9/11 or whether the Taliban supports this act. The US is progressively moving away from the responsibility of furnishing the proof. Isn't its prominent support to the Northern Alliance on the future of Afghanistan is just another name for re-imposing Taliban rule?

Just as every government of the world has unconditionally supported America's war against Afghanistan, they have also supported the (US-sponsored) plan of constructing the future of Afghanistan. Never before did we see such unity of opinion in support of the terrorism of the state. Some states in some ways raised some protest between 9/11 and October 7. But as the war progressed, the official support to America and its alliance has mounted as well. As the direction of the war became clear with the fall of Kabul, a queue has virtually formed to support America's plan. This support is based on sheer opportunism as each government vies for its share of the loot.

There is some economic competition between the US and the states of the European Union; but the overarching interests of global politics is sufficient to sustain the level of support (to America's war in Afghanistan). Just when the US got busy with its, to quote Bush, 'first war of the new millennium', the American Congress raised the status of China to PNTR, China was made a member of WTO, and plans are afoot to increase the existing trade relations with that country. Of course Taiwan was also admitted to the WTO. China did not complain. Heads of states of China and America wore Chinese coats and were photographed as twins. The Russian president spent his holidays in the ranch of America's president like a family friend; they have resolved the problem of missile-defense. Just then the war in Afghanistan intensified. It was declared as a war against terrorism. The declaration found its use in Rus-

sia and China. China will find it useful to extend America's war against the secessionist arms struggle in Western China. Russia will extend it against the Chechens. Pakistan will use it in Kashmir under Indian control; India in Kashmir under Pakistani control. There is a stampede in the White House to extend support to America. In the second week of November alone, President Bush shook hands with scores of Premiers and ministers standing in line - from Britain, France, Pakistan, India, Algeria. In this week, Bush gave more speeches than in the entire October.

It may be thought that this range of support to America is a passing affair. Later we might see some of these supporters parting ways. This is how global diplomacy works.

But which action of the US generated this wide support? Everyone agreed that the US has the right to bypass the UN, including the Security Council. Alternatively, everyone finally officially agreed with the right of the US to run the UN according to its will. It is agreed that a nation can be attacked without any proof whatsoever. These things have happened before, these have been happening since the second world war. However, never before such American actions were backed by this massive support of states. Never before did every country in the world support the US solely from amoral self-interest. There was never any doubt that the future government of Afghanistan will be constructed according to the desires of the US. It happened with the Rabbani government, it happened with the Taliban. But now the rest of the world wants to join the party. The party began in the German city of Bonn without Afghanistan.



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The unnamed prophets

I believe that holy men and women of all religions, who preached about a Supreme Being, implored upon people to lead righteous lives, and who received a Book from God, were also messengers of the same God. Among these, I include:

Zoroaster (founder of Zoroastrianism, c. 628-551 B.C., born in Persia), who described the Supreme Spiritual Light — *Ahura Mazda* — the God of Good, who will eventually prevail. Zoroastrians pay homage to *Ahura Mazda* through fire, which represents the Supreme Spiritual Light. This, to me, reinforces Koran's description of God as "*light upon light*" (or purified light) (24:35). Zoroaster preached three tenets — good words, good thoughts, and good deeds — as the path-

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Center news

Fall 2001 events

The Terrorist

On Friday Sept 7, the Center for South Asian Studies held a film showing of "The Terrorist" directed by Santosh Sivan and award winning cinematographer, and starring Ayesha Dharkar. Sivan filmed The Terrorist on a small budget in 17 days, mainly in Madras and some of it in Kerala.

Though inspired by the events surrounding the assassination of Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, the film focuses not on the death of a national leader but on the last days in the life of the assassin. In an interview Santosh said this film tries to answer his questions of "how would someone do something like this? And what possibly could make her not do it?" He uses this hauntingly beautiful film to narrate the story of a young woman named Malli who resides in a world of mine fields, explosive vests and suicide missions.

After spending most of her life in revolutionary training, Malli wins the coveted right to assassinate a VIP. Yet, as she approaches the fateful moment, she finds herself contemplating her own emotions for the first time. Love and new encounters. As the narrative nears its climax, she finds herself caught in a divide, and forced to choose between her own life and the ideologies of her people and the cause for which they have been fighting. The image of Malli is often contained within a frame in the shots, such as a corridor, a window pane, fences, a photographer's gaze, an abandoned building, and a mirror.

In an interview, Sivan says that he "realized that when one makes such a film you often end up glorifying

violence. Most of the films that deal with violence end up showing a great deal of it and then say, at the end, "No, it's not right." So I was making a film on a very violent subject, but I wanted to have the audience go through a process so that they might say at the end, "No, I don't want to see this blast," even though that's perhaps what they came for." Given the Sivan's approach to the subject this film critiques making "thinking bombs" out of people and is highly successful in stemming rather than perpetuating the cycle of violence of the terrorist and the terrorized.

—Monica Ghosh

Cheap Thrills

Professor Lee Siegel (Religion) presented "Magic, Television, Scholarship and Other Cheap Thrills: On Making a Film in India with Penn and Teller" on October 18th. Prof. Siegel served as the scholarly advisor on a film about magic in India, featuring American magicians, Penn and Teller. The film aired on the Learning Channel this year.

After showing clips from the film, Prof. Siegel gave an insightful and entertaining talk on both street magic in India and the cultural politics of the film itself. While on the surface the film centers on the two comedian-magicians' search for a famous Indian magic trick—"the rope trick"—the film, perhaps unwittingly, raises complex issues of cultural representation, ethnocentrism, the role of deception in both magic and media, poverty and affluence, and our willingness to participate in our own deception. Moreover, Prof. Siegel was able to give us a inside-view of the sometimes unattractive realities of documentary filmmaking.

—Matt MacKenzie

Gandhi's Integrity

Professor Akeel Bilgrami, Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, gave a talk entitled "Gandhi's Integrity: The Moral Psychology of Gandhian Politics" on November 15th. The talk was well-attended and the discussion lively.

Prof. Bilgrami argued that Gandhi's moral philosophy was both more integrated and more radical than is usually recognized. According to Prof. Bilgrami, Gandhi was able to retain a tolerant, universalistic ethics, while rejecting the moral tradition of the Western Enlightenment. This rejection was based on two philosophical strategies. First, he rejected ethics based on universal abstract principles (as is found in Kantian moral philosophy). In doing so Gandhi, Bilgrami argued, was able to avoid what he took to be the implicit violence involved in the criticism of others on the basis of universal moral principles. However, Gandhi's ethics remained universalistic, according to Bilgrami, because of the centrality of morally exemplary action. Rather than a universalism based on moral principles, then, Gandhi's ethics was based on the idea of a universal moral exemplar.

Gandhi's second strategy for rejecting the Western Enlightenment tradition was through an assimilation of truth to the realm of the ethical. For Gandhi, the fundamental locus of truth was to be found in ethical experience, rather than in the strictly cognitive domain. On Bilgrami's view, this was Gandhi's most radical move, and that which tied together his entire moral philosophy.

—Matt MacKenzie



Center news

Faculty and student notes

Arindam Chakrabarti (Philosophy) was invited to be one of the four panelists in a plenary session on Indian Aesthetics in the International Congress of Aesthetics held in Tokyo, between 28th and 31st August. The session was the liveliest of all the Asian panels and the other panelists came from Italy, Spain, England and Canada. It was attended by more than 300 specialists in Aesthetics from all over the world. Invited to give the Annual Edwards Lecture in Philosophy at Saginaw Valley State University, he delivered one lecture titled: "A Critique of Pure Revenge" for faculty and students and one evening public lecture on: "The Aesthetics of the Hideous," on October 8. On December 20, Arindam will be presenting a paper in the International Quine Conference at Rabindra-bharati University, Calcutta. His paper: "On What There Will Be: The Future in Quine."

S. Charusheela (Women's Studies) presented a paper on "Modernism in 'Alternative' Feminist Economic Discourses of Development" at the 3rd Annual Conference of the *Association for Heterodox Economics* in London this July (2001). She will be following up with a presentation on "Postcolonial Perceptions" for the *International Association for Feminist Economics* panel on "Feminist Economics: Ten Years Later" at the *Allied Social Sciences Association* meetings in Atlanta this January (2002). She has also joined the editorial board of the journal *Feminist Economics* this Fall. On campus, Charu gave a talk on the limits of current discourses surrounding women's rights in Afghanistan at the panel on "Women, Islam, and U.S. Policies" (with

Tamara Albertini and Laura Lyons) at the University. Part of series on *Islam and Women: Documentaries and Dialogues*, sponsored by *University Peace Initiative/Professors Opposing War*, her talk appears in this issue of the newsletter.

Peter Hoffenberg (History), continues working on "The Sahib in the Wonder House: The Life and Times of John Lockwood Kipling, 1837-1911," which will include discussion of Indian art, art-schools and exhibitions; submitted "The Moving Aura of Authenticity: Photography and Architecture at the Calcutta International Exhibition, 1883-84" to Maria Antonella Pelizzari, ed. *Monuments of India: Photographs and the Making of History* (Canadian Centre for Architecture); and published *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* with University of California Press.

Jagdish Sharma (History) edited the book *Individuals and Ideas in Traditional India: Ten Interpretive Essays* (forthcoming 2002, Delhi). He has recently signed a contract for publishing the second revised addition of his *Republics in Ancient India from c. 3000 to 500BC*, which he hopes to finish in 2002. He also took a tour of the silk road for five weeks in June and July of 2001, and was on sabbatical for the 2001 academic year.

Mimi Sharma (Asian Studies) continues as a key member of the "Moving Cultures" project on rethinking Asia-Pacific area studies. This major Ford Foundation grant was awarded to SHAPS (School of Ha-

waiian, Asian and Pacific Studies). After an initial component with the University of the South Pacific in Fiji was derailed, due to the coup, she is now collaborating with the University of Victoria at Wellington (New Zealand) to teach an interactive module next semester. Continuing her interests in creating academic bridges between Asia and the Pacific she also attended the Pacific Studies symposium-"Pacific Islands, Atlantic Worlds"-that was held at New York University, October 25-27.

Students

Himaneer Gupta (Political Science) presented the paper "Hidden in Plain Sight: The Semiotics of Caste among Post-1965 Immigrants" at "Religion and Public Life," the Asian and Pacific American Religion Research Initiative's annual conference at University of California-Berkeley in August 2001. Her article, "Staking a Claim on Americanness: Hindu Temples in the United States," will be published in the "Revealing the Sacred in Asian America," Jane Iwamura and Paul Spickard eds., by Routledge in 2002.

Matt MacKenzie (Philosophy) is enjoying his post as the new CSAS Coordinator. This semester, he successfully defended the proposal for his dissertation, entitled "Self-Awareness: Issues in Contemporary Western and Classical Indian Philosophy." His review of Bina Gupta's *The Disinterested Witness*, Northwestern, 1998, will be published early in 2002, in a newsletter of the American Philosophical Association.



Center news

Spring Courses

ART 400 : Buddhist Art and Architecture, N. Dowling	HIST 611: History of Modern European Imperialism, Peter Hoffenberg
ASAN 320I: Asian Nation State: India, M. Sharma	HIST 663: Seminar in Indian History, J. Sharma
ASAN 480: Culture and Econ of S and SE Asia, B. Andaya	LING 750F: Phonetics and Phonology, Patricia Donegan
ASAN 694: The Perfection of Wisdom Literature. J. Nattier	PHIL 449: Philosophical Topics, A. Chakrabarti
ECON/WS 361: Women and Int'l Econ Development, S. Charusheela	REL 150: Introduction to World's Major Religions
HINDI 102: Hindi, R. Sharma	REL 662b: Indian Religions, R. Lamb
HINDI 302: Hindi, R. Sharma	SNSK 182: Sanskrit, R. Sharma
HIST 151: World Civilization, E. Daniel	SNSK 282: Sanskrit, R. Sharma
HIST 242: Civilizations of Asia, J. Sharma	THEA 464: Drama/Theatre of Southeast Asia and India, Kirstin Pauka
HIST 302: History of India and Pakistan, J. Sharma	WS 463: Gender Issues in Asia, M. Sharma

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way to heaven.

Vardhamana Mahavira (founder of Jainism, 599-527 B.C., born in India), who expounded right conduct, right knowledge, and right belief as the essentials needed for the perfection and purification of the soul and its emancipation, the Ultimate attribute of the Omniscience;

Confucius (founder of Confucianism, c. 551-479 B.C., born in China), who looked upon a Supreme Being ("Heaven") as the one who appointed the emperor of China as the father of his people, to rule with piety and virtue and help alleviate human suffering;

Lao Zi (founder of Daoism/Taoism, 6th. Century B.C., born in China), who believed in the interaction between human society and the universe. He said, "*There was something mysteriously formed, born before Heaven and Earth, quiet and still! Pure and Deep! It stands on its own and does not change. It can be regarded as the mother of Heaven and Earth. I do not know its name. I call it Tao;* and

Gautama Sidharta (founder of Buddhism, c. 563-483 B.C., born in Nepal), who expounded the Noble Eightfold Path — right views, intentions, speech, action, livelihood, efforts, mindfulness, and concentration — as the means of reaching the Ultimate state of Peace.

I also include the unnamed **Hindu sage** who described, around 1,500 B.C., **Brahman** as follows:

He is the Omniscient Lord. He is not born; He does not die. Smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest, He dwells within the hearts of all. Though seated, He travels far; though seated, He moves all things. Formless is He, though inhabiting form. In the midst of the fleeting, he abides forever. He is all-pervading and supreme (Upanishads, Chapter "Katha").

The same sage also implored people to lead righteous lives, with duty and devotion.

How could all these philosophers, sages, and masters conjure up an abstract concept as a Supreme Being unseen by us? Only through inspiration from that Supreme Being!

Since traditionally, Muslims believe that God has sent 124,000 prophets the world over, I also include sages of other people, such as American Indians, African tribes, Australian aborigines, ancient Europeans, Pacific islanders, etc., who may have similarly spoken of One Supreme Being and enjoined people to lead righteous lives. Indeed, we can look at many ancient cultures and find that, even in the earliest times, thinking people philosophized about a Supreme Being and asked people to lead righteous lives. We should similarly honor and respect religious reformers of more recent times, such as Martin Luther, Guru Nanak and

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Center news

Mark your calendars!

Spring 2002 will be filled with South Asia-related activities. CSAS has scheduled the following events so far:

- * Prof. Nancy Martin, Associate Professor Religion/ South Asian Studies at Chapman University, will present "Lyrics of Love/ Love of Lyrics: The Social Impact of Mirabai Across Caste and Gender." January 18th at 12:00 in the Tokioka Room, Moore 319.
- * Prof. Kirstin Pauka will present "Thovil: Ritual, Healing, and Theatre in Sri Lanka" Thursday, January 24th at 2:30 in the Tokioka Room, Moore 319.
- * Prof. Roy Perrett will present a talk entitled "Gandhi, Nonviolence and Moral Casuistry" on February 7th at 2:30 in the Tokioka Room, Moore 319.
- * Acclaimed novelist Amitav Ghosh will be the keynote speaker for the 2002 CSAS Spring Symposium, in April. The theme of this year's symposium is "Tongues of Fire: Languages and Literatures of South Asia."

JIHAD continued

Baha'ullah. However, it appears their followers possibly may have forgotten the original message, started worshipping these sages and/or other physical objects, and also moved away from the path of righteousness.

In Islam, so central is the concept of the universality of God's message through all His prophets that people, while embracing Islam, make the following declaration:

"I believe in God, His angels, His messengers, His books, and in the Day of Judgment" (based upon 2:177)

Jihad in the broader context

Actually, *jihad* has a much broader meaning: "to strive in a noble way." And while it includes "holy war" as outlined above, it also includes "holy peace." These include adopting peaceful means to counter injustice, helping the poor, tending to the sick, protecting the weak, giving in charity, showing humility, rising above selfishness, and controlling one's ego. God has promised paradise to both who engage in righteous activities daily, and to those who lay down their lives fighting oppression and injustice. Peaceful *jihad* carries a higher status than violence. This was also emphasized by Prophet Muhammad when he stated, "The best *jihad* in the path of God is to speak a word of justice to an oppressive ruler."

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. carried out *jihad* to end racial discrimination in the U.S.; Nelson Mandela conducted *jihad* to end apartheid in South Africa; and

Mother Theresa carried out *jihad* to help the downtrodden in Calcutta.

Let us collectively embark on a *jihad* of love, understanding, and tolerance. We owe this to all the innocent people who were mercilessly snatched away from us on September 11, 2001.



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than anything — has to be self-fostered. All appropriation of cultural practices is to be tempered and refined, says Confucius, by the influence of *jen*, humanity, the virtue that generates a moral sphere. This is the "single thread," he says, of his system. And he connects it to *shu* ("likening to oneself") and the golden rule that one should act towards others as one wants to be treated. In Confucius's political teachings, too, humanity is the foundational virtue. It secures the very possibility of civilization.

In India, in Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, a similar teaching emerged that, when exported to China by Buddhism, found a ready audience. This readiness was not so much, as scholars sometime say, because of doctrinal affinity between Buddhism and Daoism, but because of the affinity of Buddhist ethics and its emphasis on compassion (*dayā, karuṇā*) and non-injury (*ahiṃsā*) with the Confucian teaching of *jen*, hu

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New Poetry from Nepal

This poem is taken from the special issue of *Manoa* (13:2), guest-edited by Frank Stewart, Samrat Upadhyay, and Manjushree Thapa.

SIDDHICHARAN DURING THE RAINS

By Manju

During the rains people use umbrellas
 whether the showers are heavy or soft
 In the summertime
 people use umbrellas
 whether the sunlight is scorching or mild

Does the poet Siddhicharan do the same?
 No, absolutely not
 exactly the opposite
 Siddhicharan's umbrella walks
clickety-clack carrying Siddhicharan

A man says, "Dear Poet, your getting drenched."
 Carrying an umbrella in his hand the dear poet
 says,

 "I just don't have an umbrella."

The man is taken aback
 What the poor thing doesn't know is
 he gets drenched by rainfall
 Siddhicharan takes shelter beneath poetry
 he wants to save himself from showers
 Siddhicharan doesn't want to
 separate himself from poetry
 Siddhicharan isn't concerned with the umbrella
 the way the man is concerned with the umbrella
 nor does he feel a need for it

Perspiring in extreme heat Siddhicharan
 composes poems on his face with sweat
 the way feelings write poems in the heart
 A man says, "It's hot, Dear Poet!"
 Carrying an umbrella in his hand Siddhicharan
 neither hears his words
 nor sees him

“Acting as though you can’t see me.” The man berates Siddhicharan

He doesn’t understand the gift of seeing what can’t be seen

“Acting as though you can’t hear me.” He goes on berating
Siddhicharan

He doesn’t understand the gift of hearing what can’t be heard
Siddhicharan is capable of leaving himself behind in every step
he can raise himself, gather himself from every step

Can the man walk like that?

Siddhicharan can walk staying dry in a downpour
getting drenched in the blazing heat

Can the man walk like that?

Siddhicharan can walk carrying an umbrella
and letting the umbrella carry him

Is the man naturally able
to walk like that?

The man who condemns Siddhicharan
should grasp the difference between himself and Siddhicharan
should understand his own position and Siddhicharan’s
but no one who condemns him thinks like this
Those who think don’t condemn at all

Siddhicharan can walk
transforming condemnation into praise
and praise into condemnation
in a natural way, in a natural way

Can anyone lacking poetry
do something like that?

Can anyone lacking poetry
think like this?

Understand such things?

In summertime or during the rains
others walk beneath umbrellas
but Siddhicharan, the authentic Siddhicharan
walks beneath poetry
and makes the umbrella walk carrying him
in the rainfall of sorrow, in the sunlight of adversity
in summertime or during the rains

Translation by Manjushree Thapa



HUMANITY continued from p. 15

manity. The fact that others are like are ourselves in being a self and not wanting to be injured provides moral pull (*ahimsā*), the constraint from the value of others on our own behavior. Compassion provides corresponding moral push, compelling motivation for an ethical life. My sense of the current problem is that we do not have enough *jen* or compassion to take risks to move policy towards true human concerns: universal primary education—and I mean *universal* primary education, a global effort for every child to get the opportunity to learn to read and write — infant health care, food for famine, land-mine clearance. Consonantly, we need to move away from the politics of, well, not Big Brother — that would be unfair — should I say Madison Avenue and the idea that maximizing profit is the only value?

“War” is an obsolete concept or it should be. The “enemy” should be militarism, the mind-set that thinks in terms of us-them and petty nationalisms. The U.S. should be the champion of the open society, the internationalism of universal opportunity and progress. Surely it can do more than promote soccer-fan mentality. That’s just a step away from terrorism. Imagine the fan not fed on beer and victory but watching his team get clubbed and starved. So much for the enemy without. In the metaphorical language of the Bush

Administration, the enemy within is not lack of resolve but emotions untempered by humanity. The WorldTrade Center attack was an attack on everyone, not just on the U.S. It occurred in the freest, most international city, the target, the twin towers, a symbol of the hope of worldwide prosperity, prosperity that can be brought about by free trade and international capitalism bridled by humanitarian and non-exclusivist concerns. Anti-militarism along with world engagement is the crucial next step. Just about every dollar spent on the military is a dollar misspent not only because weapons cause harm but because it would be better spent building schools or training teachers or farmers.

In the tradition of Thoreau, Tolstoi, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, there are two principal concepts, *ahimsā*, non-injury, which we have discussed, and *satyagraha*, holding fast to the truth. The truth now is that the rich of the world’s northern regions have to respond with humanity to desperate situations in the south. There needs to be a lot of money spent on human beings, particularly children. The gap between the rich and poor is unbelievable, and if the U.S. is to assume the role of world policeman, it needs to pay a lot more attention to world justice.



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almost no serious provisions to safeguards the rights of these women.

By no means do I wish to imply, by critiquing these narratives, that fundamentalism is not a problem, or that women’s rights are not an issue under religious fundamentalist regimes. Coming from India, where fundamentalism - Hindu fundamentalism as well as Muslim fundamentalism - has created sharp political problems on a variety of fronts, including women’s rights, I would not lightly dismiss such concerns or romanticize and ignore the potential dangers of fundamentalism. But I think we need to ask ourselves if a return to orientalism, especially the current rise of anti-Islamic orientalism, provides us with an adequate response. Orientalism not only damages the cause of justice by providing false legitimizations for what is, in effect, a return to imperial control, it also makes appropriate solutions impossible as it turns our attention away from the type of nuanced and careful political analysis necessary for adequate responses to fundamentalism. We cannot simply talk of fundamentalists as if they are

a uniquely Islamic phenomenon - currently, little attention is being paid to Hindu fundamentalists in India, even though the Babri Masjid was just re-entered by Kar Sevaks from the VHP. The damage to the sense of security for South Asian Muslims that generates cannot be underestimated - and the prospects for peace and stability in South Asia are low if these concerns are not taken seriously and addressed.

What we need then, is not a reinscription of orientalism in the name of Afghani women - that approach, while reflecting the needs of American born Muslims seeking a cultural identity, cannot meet the needs of the Afghani women themselves. We need, instead of a sterile debate about East and West, modern and non-modern, Islam and civilization, a more nuanced political discussion of fundamentalism and of the relationship between state policy and women’s rights. This is the type of discussion that was found in the interviews with Maryam and Fahimeh - discussions that spoke not in terms of immutable cultures but con-

JUST WARS next page

JUST WARS continued

crete issues, discussions that focused on historically-situated social, economic and political analyses.

This alternate discussion has to include a more careful discussion of the geopolitics of South Asia. Regional stability cannot be found simply by putting 'friendly' regimes in place of slightly less friendly ones. Further, especially with respect to women's rights, we need to replace culturalist and orientalist approaches with careful social and political analysis of how and why women face deprivation. To discuss women's status in terms of veiling as if they live in societies with abundantly available cheap clothing, or talk of limits to women's mobility as if the infrastructure for transport and travel is well developed, or decry women's inability to see doctors as though they live in countries with well developed health infrastructures, is at best misguided, at worst cynical. Any solution to the problems of political Islam - and political Hinduism - cannot be provided without a serious discussion of the concrete measures needed to solve such problems - a dis-

cussion that is absent in culturalist approaches such as provided by Zinat and Homeira. Afghani women - and feminists in general - are much better served if we fight against the use of women as symbols in a struggle for control. Instead of myths of rescues that legitimize actions that in practice hurt these women, we need a more careful exploration of the realities of power and control within a socioeconomic and political structure. Only then can we work toward concrete alternative actions that prove our *genuine* - rather than cynical - concern for Afghani women.



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a given topic in the context of an intellectual exchange may for all we know be utterly serious about it. The attribution of an intention, as it were, of deceiving interlocutors is at best quite baseless. There are no good inferential grounds in most cases to attribute insincerity solely based on certain utterances. We are free of course to consider these utterances implausible, that is our prerogative, but this still is better than the dismissive "bullshit" label. Even if people are pretentious, speak of their "Paris or Oxford days," and freely interject anecdotes of their meetings with famous people, still an outright dismissal on these grounds is quite hasty or even callous. On the other hand, we find ideas presented in a jargon and we denounce them as bullshit. Yet, the onus is on us to learn a technical vocabulary before denouncing it. It is strange that analytic philosophers never complain about terms like "charmed quarks" but have an apoplexy when anyone mentions *differance*. This kind of duplicity arises of deep-seated presuppositions (which are rarely reconsidered) about what is and what is not acceptable in academic humanities. Then it devolves into a political phenomenon with power rather than intellectual conversation being the arbiter of acceptability.

Professor Bilgrami in a private conversation said that he would not speak to a person who believes the earth is flat. I insist that we must speak to flat-

the earth is flat. I insist that we must speak to flat-earthers and allow ourselves to be persuaded or persuade them in the long run. This is especially true of intellectual flat-earthers—that is to say those whose approach is not entirely consonant with the mainstream. In philosophy this becomes relevant because a philosophical thesis is not the same kind of thing as the thesis about the number of fingers a human being has. Openness in the humanities is a kind of innocence without which the whole project of humanities is far less attractive. There is of course one valid use of bullshit, if any, which Ezra Pound captured in the following lines,

Hey snag wots in the Bible
Wot are the books in the Bible
Name'em don't bullshit me

Still what would life be without promising what we can't deliver? Only let's not make it a habit!





Prof. Lee Siegel with magicians Penn and Teller

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