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Our Contributors
Delhi’s fourteen million residents live in a brewing crucible of hazards. The possibility of accidental death, murder and fire haunt people regularly. In the city 208 crimes, 33 road accidents and 25 fire calls occur each day. Sixty days in a year, Delhi is on red alert due to terrorist threat. This is not the terminus of hazards faced by the residents of the city. Scientists have made an addition to this spectre by confirming that the city falls in a vulnerable seismic zone and is prone to floods as well. Floundering buildings and dozens of colonies covered under the deluge of water are a testimony to the incidence of earthquakes and floods in the past. Though the city is reeling under a complex variety of hazardous perils, most consider these events as accidents, calamities, or simply misfortunes.

Hazards are a process. They can be variable, worse, and mild or less offensive, their condition may thus deteriorate, improve or acquire whole new features. Urban areas are the seed-beds of new and complex socio-environmental arenas fostering unprecedented permutations and combinations of old and new hazards. The city is not a static or homogeneous entity because its land use, population density, civic amenities and other features show a sharp change and contrast. These processes are also not random in space. Floods and other hazards take place at particular places, as they have specific locations. Fires erupt only where the setting provides an opportunity to blaze. Hazards thus, are not distributed evenly; they converge at certain places where they occur repeatedly. A policy for making the city safe can deftly be pegged only if the dynamics of precariousness and its spatial pattern are discerned. What are the regions of hazard and how could they be identified? This geographical analysis is not available for any city of India, let alone its capital: Delhi. A review of the literature confirmed the need for an inquiry. Lack of data, however, bogged enthusiasm. The absence of a pre-tested methodology and of authentic information balked the initial hope. The research therefore is tentative.
Scales of Urban Hazards

As small as a dot on the latitude and longitude map of India, Delhi’s location between Latitude 28° 24’ North to 28° 53’ North, Longitude 76° 50’ East to 77° 20’ East inherits a geological structure that is trapped between faults and thrusts. Over a dozen land-related faults scar the immediate vicinity of Delhi. As a reminder of its geological remnants, the ancient Aravali range abuts the city from a southwest and north-northeast direction. Moreover, the city lies merely 200 kilometres from the Himalayas and cannot disentangle itself from the foundation of the earth’s crust. As a sprawling circular shaped settlement, Delhi spans on the Yamuna. Flowing from north to south, the river bifurcates the urban area into two unequal halves and lashes a fury of floods on areas clinging to it. Above all, a chaotic mix of old and new constructions, high-rise buildings and pavement dwellings is what an outsider gets as a close up view of the city. In varied combinations and intensities are also evident the residential, commercial cum industrial land uses. A heady pace of unplanned growth, inadequate civic infrastructure reinforced by an inept administration is palpable throughout the city. These result in the occurrence of frequent fires, industrial mishaps, traffic deaths, a rising crime toll along with a host of other menaces. Delhi is riven with hazards.

Hazards dot this city at different places. The delineation of hazard regions should ideally be a combined score of such occurrences of all types in an area but inadequacy of data mar this expectation. Crime graphs suffer from gross under-representation because of unreported and suppressed cases while many cases of vehicular accidents never reach the official registers. This analysis is, therefore, confined to the occurrence of earthquakes, floods and fire. The selection of these three hazards was also influenced by the fact that whereas crime, accidents, epidemics are often accepted as emerging from the human-environment, earthquakes, floods and fire are often blamed on the whims of nature. How far this is true needs to be verified. The choice of these three hazards was governed not only by an availability of data, but also by the need to understand the spatio-temporal dimension of a spectrum of contrasting hazards—earthquakes are related to land, floods to water and fire to urban built structures. And attempt is made here to discern whether the geographical occurrences of hazards cluster in certain regions of the city. Whereas the temporal analysis of the three hazards have
Hazards in Delhi

been dealt with separately, a methodology is spelled out to allow for the spatial analysis to combine these in delineating the hazard regions of the city. Some critics can argue that selecting only three out of a galaxy of hazards that assail a city is an inherent weakness. While this concern is valid, it should be used for improving the database rather than for abandoning the exercise.

Earthquake Hazard

Frequent earthquakes rudely rock Delhi. The first recorded earthquake took place on July 6, 1505 with its epicentre at Kabul. Since then earthquake shocks were successively felt in the city in 1720, 1803, 1819, 1905, 1937, 1945, 1949, 1958, 1960, 1966, 1975, 1980, 1994 and 1999. In the last 200 years, almost 25 earthquakes have had their epicentres in close proximity to Delhi. This shows an occurrence of one earthquake in every eight years. Historical sources confirm that earthquakes are not a recent phenomenon, and they have struck Delhi and its surroundings since ancient times. The great epic – the Mahābhārata—talks about earthquakes during the war at Kurukshetra around 3000 B.C. The susceptibility of the kingdoms of Kuru, Matsya, Salva, Yaudheya and Trigarta, which include and encircle the present Delhi region, to severe earthquakes is mentioned in the Sanskrit works, the Brhat Samhità of Varāha Māhira in A.D. 5th-6th century and the Adbhuta Sāgara of Ballala Sena in the A.D. 10th-11th century (Iyengar, 2000: 572). The seminal Seismotectonic Atlas of India and its Environs (Narulla et al. 2000: 10) categorically states that earthquakes from the historic and pre-instrumental period lie in close proximity to the Yamuna river course between Delhi and Mathura.

The Bureau of Indian Standards also endorses this stamp of vulnerability. They have divided the country into five zones in an increasing order of seismic hazard from I to V. Delhi is placed in the Zone IV, which is referred to as the High Damage Risk Zone. On the Richter scale, most of the earthquakes here are of magnitude 5 and 6, a few of 6 and 7, and yet others, on some occasions, of 7 to 8 magnitude. Delhi’s Zone IV corresponds to VIII on the Mercalli Scale, which is identified as one with the destructive intensity. When an earthquake of this intensity occurs, moving cars become uncontrollable, masonry fractures, poorly constructed buildings get damaged and walls of well built structures develop cracks. Delhi’s geographical location is responsible for its seismically high ranking.
Table 1: Earthquakes in Proximity to Delhi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Longitude</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1720</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1803</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>VI</td>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: I to XII on Mercalli Scale, 1 to 8 on Richter Scale, N.A. data not available.

Note: The city of Delhi lies between Latitude 28° 24' North to 28° 53' North, Longitude 76° 50' East to 77° 20' East.

Twin tectonic features—one, its location along the Yamuna, which separates the Ganga basin from the Indus basin over a tectonic fold, and the other is its location near the Himalayas—place Delhi under a seismic hazard.
The city of Delhi is internally dissected by a number of faults, fractures, and shears which have an alignment from north-northeast and south-southwest to east-northeast and west-southwest. Important faults which cut the Delhi ridge occur at Rajinder Nagar, East Patel Nagar, Anand Parbat and the Inderpuri faults. Notable faults to the east of the ridge are the Kishangarh fault and a west-northwest and east-southeast treading fault between Qutab Minar, Mehrauli and the Lado Sarai faults. Not only those earthquakes that are located as close as Gurgaon and Mathura but ones with their epicentres in Shimla, Kangra, Kumaon and even in far neighbouring countries like Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan have an impact on the city. Both local and Himalayan sources are therefore discernible.

India has experienced 1467 earthquakes of magnitude above 5.0 in a span of 49 years from 1949 to 1998 (Indian Meteorological Department, 1998). This is an average of 30 earthquakes per year. More than half of these earthquakes have their genesis in the Himalayas. The Himalayas are seismically the most active continent-continent collision zone, which account for approximately 15 per cent of the yearly global energy release (Acharya, Unpublished, Pg. 7). The question one can ask here is, how many of these have left their indelible marks on Delhi? Delhi’s receptivity to earthquake pulses is difficult to delimit precisely. The focal depth and magnitude
of the earthquake would also be an important factor, an 8-magnitude earthquake felt anywhere in the Himalayas would cause vibrations all over Indo-Gangetic plain and even beyond, irrespective of proximity. Ignoring the foregoing exceptions of remote probability, I think a 500 kilometres distance can be notched and called the *quakeshed* or impact zone for Delhi.

**MAP 2: EARTHQUAKES FIVE HUNDRED KILOMETRES AROUND DELHI**

Such a reckoning was eventually confirmed with seismic scientists of the Geological Survey of India. Thus, the bond between Delhi and the 500 kilometres *quakeshed* becomes even clearer.

Taking a cue from these, an attempt is made to assess the number of earthquakes that could possibly have been felt in the city during
the last five decades. Concentric circles at 100 kilometre intervals were thus drawn, upto 500 kilometres with Delhi as the centre. All earthquakes of magnitude above 5.0 on the Richter scale, occurring from 1949-1998, were plotted in these five concentric circles using latitude and longitude as the locational address.

Table 2: Occurrences of Earthquakes within 500 Kilometres of Delhi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from Delhi</th>
<th>Number of Earthquakes (Magnitude on Richter Scale)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilometres</td>
<td>5.0 to 5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-200</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-300</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-400</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401-500</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indian Meteorological Department Records of Earthquakes, 1949-1998. (Data recalibrated)

Note: Earthquakes above 5.0 on Richter Scale have been considered.

Ninety-six earthquakes of magnitude above 5.0 have occurred in the 49 years within a 500 kilometre distance of Delhi. This averages to nearly two earthquakes a year or one in every six months. If only the impact of local earthquakes were considered, the frequency would have been one in eight years. Of this total, 10 per cent belonged to the above 5.9 category. While the first 300 kilometres from Delhi have been a relatively quiet zone with only five earthquakes, over 42 per cent of the total earthquakes have occurred within the 300 to 400 kilometres distance. The 400-500 kilometres took the single largest share of 51 per cent of the total earthquakes in a 100 kilometre stretch.

Most earthquakes thus disturbing Delhi originate either in the floor of the Ganga basin or in the roots of the Himalayas. The release of energy in the Himalayas finds an additional outlet in the tectonic surfaces around Delhi. The isoseismal maps of the Himalayan earthquakes seen vis-à-vis Delhi support this connection. The Uttarkashi earthquake of 1991 which took root
295 kilometres north of Delhi in the Uttaranchal, showed a petering earthquake with intensity from above XII near the epicentre to IV where the landform changed from Himalayas to the Ganga basin. This regular pattern of declining isoseismals showed an anomaly “around Delhi-Sonepat sector which recorded an intensity of V surrounded by areas with intensity IV”. Another earthquake, rooted at Chamoli in the Himalayas, in early hours of March 29, 1999 also, according to a report of the Geological Survey of India (1999), “damaged well-constructed buildings in and around Delhi due to accentuation of intensity.”

Tectonic features within and adjoining Delhi do respond to quakes in the Himalayas. The frame of local and Himalayan faults endows a frail safeguard to Delhi’s structure, which frequently falls prey to the damage of earthquakes.

City Damage

Historical descriptions, reports and events glued together from news cuttings speak of more than just rumblings and sleep disturbances for the inhabitants of the city. Delhi has been victim of losses ranging from death to collapsed houses. An account of an earthquake on the July 15, 1720, as recorded by Quaff Khansays states,

“At this time on Friday, when in most of the mosques of Darul Khilafat (capital i.e. Delhi) the recitation of Chute (pre-address) was in progress and people were getting ready for prayer, a horrible earthquake took place. People felt scared of the noise beneath the ground, shaking walls, cracking roofs of buildings.” (Iyengar 2000: 574).

A translation of these descriptions into the Mercalli scale indicates damages comparable to those of the VIII and IX intensity (Narulla et al. 2000: 10). This however is not a solitary event. Qutab Minar, one of Delhi’s prized archaeological monuments, once had seven storeys in all attaining a height of 92.3 metres. On the top of the fifth storey, there was a 3.6 metres high cupola. In 1803, this cupola crowning the Minar was thrown down and destroyed when an earthquake struck in Mathura, 145 kilometres to the southeast of Delhi. The Qutab Minar has thus been dwarfed to 72.5 metres. (Thapliyal 1987). Some people were injured in Delhi in the Khurja earthquake on October 10, 1956. In the epicentral tract of the 1960 earthquake located between Delhi Cantonment and Gurgaon in the south, two people died, 100 sustained injuries and 75 per cent of the buildings developed cracks
Hazards in Delhi

that ranged from hairline to 13 mm wide ones. The seismic waves originating in 1991 from Uttarkashi jolted men, women and children out on to the streets as houses shook like cardboard boxes. A convulsing shock on July 28, 1994 generated isoseismals V on the MM scale encompassing areas around Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Pahar Ganj and Connaught Place. Nearly four years later, windowpanes quivered and cracks appeared in tall buildings of Delhi—again from a convulsing Uttarkashi on March 29, 1999. Crossed and encircled by numerous geological faults, lying in close proximity to an active tectonic plate, Delhi is vulnerable to ruinous scales of the earthquake.

Earthquake Expectancy

Forecasting is at a nascent stage in the case of earthquakes. Movements of the earth are but omens of possible earthquakes. Thrusts in the Himalayas are moving at varying speeds of 1 to 2 centimetres per year along the Nahan Riasi, it is 5.8 centimetres per year along the Himalayan thrust, and 0.9 centimetres per year along the Krol thrust near Kalsi (Valdiya 1976: 358) Even the advance of the Asian plate by 2 centimetres every year announces that the crust is still out-of-adjustment with its interior. It is estimated that quiescence in the Himalayas lasts for a period of 200 to 279 years after which a great earthquake reoccurs.

Experts predict that in the next 50 years the region is bound to be hit by a severe earthquake of magnitude 6.0 on the Richter scale. They also state that there is an 80 per cent probability of the occurrence of an earthquake of the magnitude 7.0 (Srivastava and Roy 1966: 420). A major seismic upheaval in the range of 8.0 or 9.0 magnitude is expected in northern India in the foreseeable future. The forecast is based on detailed analysis of past earthquakes and underground movement of the region backed up by satellite imageries. Delhi is no doubt sitting on a ticking bomb. With such a host of symptoms it would be propitious to ignore the prognosis of an intense earthquake knocking the city. What creates a hazardous situation is the thin armour it has against such an eventuality.

Houses in Delhi are fragile. The Census of Delhi 1991 claims that the city has 1.9 million houses of which 85 per cent are classified as pucca and 15 per cent as kutcha or semi kutcha. To state that only the two hundred thousand kutcha houses are the weak ones would be a gross underestimation. Several new flats built by the Delhi Development Authority in the Vikaspuri colony in west Delhi came
crashing down after a heavy downpour. The Authority since its
inception in 1957, has built an estimated 70,000 pucca houses, one
would be suspicious of the construction of many of these.

The Delhi urban environment is continuously wearing out but the
rate of replacement does not match the rate of urban obsolescence.
The historic part of the walled city dates back to the 1650s, and it
contains a dense concentration of old buildings. Most of these have
lived their age and are thus fragile. Earthquake resistant design was
developed in India as early as the 1930s, but the Bureau of Indian
Standards developed its first code of seismic design only in 1962
(IS 1893-1962). This Bureau set detailed recommendations of
earthquake resistant designs for all kinds of structures including
houses. Within the patchwork of old and new, private and public,
high rise and slums it would be not so far from the truth to say that
not even a minuscule fraction of the constructions in Delhi adhere
to the seismic hazard norms. Till now houses in Delhi have behaved
like a camel that carries on for years, only to suddenly kneel down
and die.

Flood Hazard

While the threat of earthquakes looms menacingly over Delhi,
sweeping floods frequently drown much of its area. Delhi straddles
along the Yamuna, one of the major tributaries feeding the mighty
Ganga. The Yamuna itself is a river of no small magnitude.
Originating from the 6387 metres high glacial field of Yamunotri in
the Himalayas, it merges its identity into the Ganges only after
completing an independent traverse of 1376 kilometres. The Yamuna
flowing through Delhi is barely two per cent of its total length, yet
this brief contact today is a curse in the form of recurrent floods. In
the last 97 years, the river has risen to a danger level nearly 45
times, which means an occurrence of one flood every alternate year.
Incidentally, this is similar to the frequency of earthquakes. Hidden
by the law of averages is the fact that the occurrences of floods have
been increasing distinctly. During the 1940s, the river did not reach
a danger level even once in 10 years, floods became an alternative
year phenomenon in the 1950s, and have been now taking place
almost every year in the 1990s.

When the Yamuna oversteps the specified danger level by one
metre and above, the floods acquire high intensity damage. In the
last 97 years, the Yamuna flowed one metre above the danger level
almost 15 times, and it thrice crossed the danger level by two metres. The all-time high floods occurred in the years 1978, 1988 and 1995. The catalogue of floods confirms that there has been a sharp multiplication in their occurrence as well as a rise in intensity, thus exposing the city to the hazard. This flood situation however seems to be a recent development.

Table 3: Occurrence of Floods in Delhi, 1900 – 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>No. of floods*</th>
<th>Average flood situation per year</th>
<th>River Flow 1 to 2 metres above danger level</th>
<th>More than 2 metres above the danger level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900-1910</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911-1920</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1930</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1940</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>1941-1950</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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<td>1971-1980</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981-1990</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1997*2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1900-1997</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>153</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Records of Central Water Commission & Irrigation and Flood Control Department. Delhi. (Data recalibrated)

Note: *1 The Danger Level for a flood is identified as 204.83 metres.

The Yamuna has been flowing in one channel ever since the British conquest of Delhi. But there are historical references to show that the river had been flowing in two-channels up to 1857. One, the channel that is still flowing through Delhi. The other channel flowed somewhere near Mehrauli, then known as Mihirpuri. The city remained safe from floods not only due to this extra channel but also because of its compact size and drain outlets as high as 6-7 metres. The latter allowed plenty of room for the river waters to rise, thus preventing it from flowing into the city. What actually happened to this second natural channel remains shrouded in mystery till today. Perhaps it was snipped, choked or filled. The neglect of the main channel started when the East India Railway Company built the
Yamuna bridge in 1876. Its conversion into a double lane in 1913 made it a busy thoroughfare, thus overtaking the important role that the river had played for the city. The city and the river have always had a relationship but in recent years the kinship with the Yamuna has been nonchalant. Impeding its movement, reducing its size, encroaching on its bed and degrading its catchment are all acts, which worsen the flood situation in Delhi.

The Yamuna experiences extreme seasonal stances and knows only two seasons, the dry and the wet. Seasonal aridity of the long dry months keeps the river lean for a long time. The Yamuna's shallow depth does not exceed 1.5 metres during the eight month long dry spell, and its width is a mere 0.2 kilometres. The monsoon arrives in early June and awakens this sloppy stream nourished with waters from July to September, so that it bloats 6 to 7 metres in depth and stretches to over a kilometre in width. The contrast of the dry and wet season is so vivid that it fosters the myth: rains flip Yamuna to flood. While it is true that 99 per cent of the total floods in Delhi occur during the monsoon months, the correlation between rainfall and runoff negates this relationship. The high intensity floods of 1976, 1977 and 1978 were chosen to prepare a statistical correlation or 'r' between rainfall and runoff. The results conclude 0.05, -0.24, and -0.42 for these three years respectively (Soun 1980-81: 72). The near stationary trend of rainfall in the last 50 years vis-à-vis the rise in the occurrence of floods also confirms that rain is not solely responsible for the occurrence of floods. Hence the Yamuna is much misunderstood.

**Causes of Floods**

Unlike earthquakes, which originate exclusively from natural processes, a plethora of human interactions with the river conspire to trigger floods. Behaving like a tin-cap, urban structures are impervious because they cannot absorb rain and thus direct it underground. The amount of runoff increases in relation to the paved area. Estimates in Delhi show that an increase in paved area by 10 per cent leads to an addition of 10,000 cusecs of water into the Yamuna (Sokhi 1981: 85). The runoff is unstrained in Delhi owing to an extensive paved area. Delhi's urban area has expanded 43 to 710 sq. kms. from 1901-1991.
In this 16 time increase, 'paved' land use whether it is residential, commercial or transportation collectively forms an overwhelming 75 per cent of the total area. Drains coming from the urban terrain are thus overloaded. Adding to its burden are a number of big and small drains which make their way through the rural adjunct of Delhi. Traversing a length of 440 kilometres, 75 drains flow through various parts of Delhi and collect to form 17 major channels, which ultimately joins the river.
Puncturing the length of the Yamuna, these drains increase the load of river especially during the monsoons. The level of most of the drains and their outfall into the Yamuna is 4.46 metres lower than the average flood level during the monsoons. Thus, most drains are vulnerable to reverse flows (Sokhi 1981: 77). At times, unable to accommodate the excess load, the stormy river back-flows into these drains, causing floods in areas that are away from the direct proximity of the Yamuna. A classic example is that of the Najafgarh drain.

**Map 4: Drains Flowing to Yamuna**
As water rushes from the western side of Delhi’s Aravalis and the Sahibi Nadi in Rajasthan, it plugs a 45 square kilometre saucer shaped depression and forms a near permanent lake, the Najafgarh Jheel. Built way back in the Mughal times the Najafgarh drain was designed to ferry this extra water from the jheel along a corridor to the Yamuna. In recent times the banks of the Najafgarh drain have been raised by 0.6 metres and its water carrying capacity has increased fourfold, yet it remains the Achilles’ heal in Delhi’s flood situation. It is because the reclamation of land in the semi-arid belt of the Sahibi Nadi has resulted in the water that was previously absorbed now flowing into low lying Delhi and increasing the flow of the Yamuna. This drain, which enters the Yamuna at Wazirabad, back flowed in both the 1977 and 1978 floods. A number of these drains also collect a mixture of rain water, sewage and sullage. The pollution thrown into the river raises the floor directly as well as indirectly by stimulating growth of vegetation in the river bed. This pollution is caused by the numerous urban expansions that the populace of Delhi has subjected the banks of Yamuna to. Nothing constricts the river more than constructions on its lying areas.

The Yamuna bed is at 183 metres, therefore the difference between the upland or bangar and the flood plain or khadar is not more than 15 metres, which is at places reduced to 8 metres. The bangar is higher and free from floods. For centuries, Delhi remained to the west of Yamuna. Even during the British period, when the foundation stone of New Delhi was being laid in khadar, north of Model Town colony, it was rescued at the last minute and was relocated on the Raisina Hills, keeping the city buffered from the rising waters of the Yamuna. Since 1947, settlements have come up on the Trans-Yamuna, as the eastern bank is more commonly called. Most of these localities are situated below the 700 feet contour and are thus directly on the flood plain of the Yamuna. It is estimated that 40 per cent of Delhi’s population lives in the khadar of the Yamuna; this amounts to at least five million people being at risk to floods.

Floods in Delhi are not caused by these factors alone. Much like the tectonic thrusts, which shifted in the Himalayas, yet moved land in Delhi, the mountainous catchment of the Yamuna too plays a role in flooding the city. Fifty-eight per cent of Yamuna catchment lies in the Himalayan slopes, which were till the middle of the last century, covered with dense forests. Anchored in deep soil, trees like fir and deodar absorbed 25 to 30 per cent of the rain, which fell on to the slopes. Rapid deforestation at the rate of 2 per cent per annum, have
denuded much of the Yamuna catchment as well as other Himalayan rivers. Bouncing off bare surfaces and assisted by steep gradients, the rain water now hurriedly rushes to join streams eroding the bare slopes on the way. The present rate of erosion in the Yamuna Basin is estimated to be 400 acre feet per year for every 100 square kilometres (Gupta 1979: 35). Such aggressive action cause soil and boulders to become loose, get detached, and at times get carried into the river. Ground and crushed with the passage of time, this eroded mixture gets converted into sediments that raise the bed of river and constrain its capacity of carrying water. Thus, on one hand, the high intensity of rainfall, coupled with reduced absorption increases the amount of water sedimentation while on the other hand, this decreases its capacity. These processes contribute to increase the incidence of floods.

Worsening an already bad situation are the technocratic solutions put forward for containing and training the river. Reinforced with cement, steel and mortar nearly 57 kilometres of the river in Delhi is embanked. The city authorities have also constructed three barrages at Okhla, Wazirabad, and the Income Tax Office bridge. 16 storm water pumping stations, 22 semi-permanent pumping stations, and a host of other means for desilting drains to control the hazard of flood.

It would be foolhardy to depend upon engineering solutions alone. They are not only costly and require constant maintenance but some of these measures are counterproductive. Take for instance, the embankments. Lining both sides of the river from Wazirabad to the Yamuna Barrage sector, these walls severely constrict the width of the channel to 500 metres. They ignore the vacillating character of the river, which in the case of Yamuna involves changing its course frequently. A comparison of Satellite Imagery of 1988 and 1995 by IRS-IA show that, 'The river bed near Burari, Shakarpur and Kundakalan villages has recently shifted its course and it is attacking the protection works' (Central Water Commission, 1999: 12). Indeed such swings in a span of barely 10 years mean that the river would strongly resist being embanked. Likewise, the Najafgarh drain was breached at 12 places during the 1978 flood.
Perhaps it would be wiser to allow the river to have some room to expand and contract according to its natural processes, and the necessary engineering solutions should take better cognisance of nature's laws. In fact these structural defensive measures on the banks are under such adverse impingement of flow that vulnerable sections can be identified at several places like Burari, Jagatpur, Jasola and the Deoli Bund. Bursting at its seams, announcing its rage at being misunderstood, the river is forced to flood and in its wake damage the city.

**Flood Damage:** Floods cause widespread loss to a city. Some inkling of this harm can be gleaned from Table 4. Sixteen important floods displaced 2 million people, ruined 40 thousand hectares and caused
damages worth Rs 600 million in and around Delhi. Floods played havoc in the city for no less than 45 times in the past 97 years, thus causing widespread damage, both in material and human terms.

Table 4: Damages from Significant Floods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Flood Level (Metres)</th>
<th>Area Affected (Hectares)</th>
<th>Population Affected (thousands)</th>
<th>Damage (Rs. Lakhs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>205.88</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>206.44</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>205.88</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>205.06</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>205.20</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>205.88</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>205.40</td>
<td>20000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>206.26</td>
<td>50000</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>205.85</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>206.19</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>205.50</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>206.70</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>205.85</td>
<td>40000</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>207.49</td>
<td>70000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>205.80</td>
<td>20000</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>206.93</td>
<td>58000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Water Commission & Irrigation and Flood Control Department (Data recalibrated)

Where is the mention of the 1988 floods in the table? How can there be only 16 listings when the Yamuna flowed 1 m above danger level 15 times, 3 times over the 2 m danger level and 3 times all time high floods occurred during 1978. Houses remained submerged up to 0.61 to 0.91 centimetres under water and personal property and goods were damaged. Diseases such as malaria were rampant reaching epidemic proportions. Several cases of cholera, dysentery, conjunctivitis and gastro-enteritis were reported. All the four bridges over the Yamuna were closed, and suburban trains were stopped. The railway line between Sampla and Kharawar, a double section on the Rohtak-Delhi route, was adversely affected, and water eroded large chunks of the Najafgarh road. The flood led to severe shortage of milk and drinking water. As a consequence, the law and order situation also worsened. Private tempo and taxi drivers took undue
Hazards in Delhi

advantage by charging exorbitant tariff. Tension among the villagers against the city dwellers assumed alarming proportions as villagers wielded spears and *lathis* to chase Delhi police pickets in a bid to breach the drains to lessen the flood pressure on their villages.

Coming back to the present, nearly 100 villages out of a total of 260, which constitute rural Delhi are distinctively flood prone. They form a semicircular band covering the western, eastern and northern sections of the city with the exception of its southern section. An unplanned expansion of the city towards these flood prone low-lying villages would catapult Delhi further towards future floods. Such a scenario seems all the more possible when we consider that urban growth has expanded at the cost of 167 villages in the last 60 years at the rate of nearly three villages per year. Urbanization in terms of spatial spread will augment, and it is estimated that by 2011 a flood situation similar to that of 1978, when waters rose to an all time high of 2.66 metres above danger level, will be faced each year during a normal rainfall (Sokhi 1981: 93)

The city may seem to be at the mercy of the river owing to its geographical location, but it is both the planning departments and governing authorities that allow the river catchment to degrade and the city to step onto the river bed. Prognosis point to the fact that Delhi will witness more floods of even higher intensities than ever experienced in the past. After all, processes contributing to floods in the form of rapid urbanization, deforestation, sedimentation, and embanking will continue in the near future. Floods however, are not the only woe of the city. While, during the monsoons, most of Delhi drenches and drowns, in summers, it simmers erupting into frequent cases of fire.

*Fire hazard*

Each day the fire stations in Delhi receive on an average, 25 calls requesting for a fire tender to douse a spreading blaze. A compilation of the city’s twenty-three fire records confirm that these calls have increased from 7 per day in the 1970s to 13 in the 1980s and 25 during the 1990s. Once every fortnight such a request carries an urgent tone because then the demand is for 8 to 16 fire tenders, which means the fire is not a small one but of a major to serious intensity. Fires are a growing hazard in Delhi.
Table 5: Fires in Delhi, 1971-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2638</td>
<td>2654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2779</td>
<td>2789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2785</td>
<td>2806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2529</td>
<td>2554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2717</td>
<td>2731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3218</td>
<td>3236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>3514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3791</td>
<td>3802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4162</td>
<td>4179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5236</td>
<td>5261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4891</td>
<td>4905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5011</td>
<td>5025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5883</td>
<td>5909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5884</td>
<td>5910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6573</td>
<td>6596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6908</td>
<td>6936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7057</td>
<td>7085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7201</td>
<td>7225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8467</td>
<td>8496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9431</td>
<td>9455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11004</td>
<td>11027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10644</td>
<td>10666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9912</td>
<td>9933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11310</td>
<td>11338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Number of fire calls to the Fire Department, Delhi.

Fires can be classified into four categories of intensity—major, serious, medium, and small, based on the requirements of the fire extinguishing equipment. A major fire needs thrice the number of water and hose tenders, and thrice the number of water bousers, pumps and ambulances when compared to the medium fires. The serious ones are placed in between. Small fires in comparison are the least demanding to extinguish. The fire fighting equipment is then used as an indicator of the intensity.
Table 6: Intensity of Fire as Gauged from the Assistance Required for its Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Fighting Equipment</th>
<th>Intensity of Fire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Tenders</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Bousers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumps</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hose Tenders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Tenders</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished official circular of the Fire Department, Delhi. (Data recalibrated)

In terms of occurrence, the small intensity fires account for 99 per cent of the total fires experienced in the city. These are doused quickly and are not of severe consequence. The major, serious and medium intensity fires pose the real threat and have been therefore chosen as the basis of analysis in this research. In the last three decades the frequency of all these three high intensity fires has almost doubled in each case.

Table 7: Occurrence of High Intensity Fires, 1970 - 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Average Annual Occurrence in the Decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1998</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Address of individual Fire cases were used to categorise them into land use.

Occurrence of fire shows that safety flaws are rampant in all kinds of urban uses whether it is residential, commercial, industrial or institutional. Considering the caveats in data, the annual average is a better yardstick to judge the type of land use that is more prone to fire. In Delhi, fires in residential areas have tripled in the last two decades. Industrial fires have also seen a rising trend while commercial areas attained a higher incidence rate from three per year in the 1970s to seven per year in
1990s. The category 'others', which includes prime properties like Delhi Telephone Exchanges, Supreme Court, Railway Stations, and Airports cannot be treated casually just because the share of this in the total high intensity fires is less. Such places are of public importance, and the incidences of fires in such premises have doubled thus furnishing evidence of the growing indifference towards safety in the city.

Table 8: Fire Incidences according to Land Use, 1970-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Average Annual in the Decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: 1. Includes only major, serious, medium fires.
2. Address of each fire was used to categorise them into these land uses.
3. Though fires cannot occur in decimals, data is kept like this to indicate the miniscule occurrence.

In residential areas medium fires have tripled from three per year in the 1980s to ten during the 1990s. Commercial areas like markets and high rise premises have also witnessed a doubling of the medium fires from 1980s to the 1990s. Sweeping through homes, shops, offices, and industries these flames inflict severe harm and the city has to pay a heavy price for it.

Table 9: Intensity of Fire by Land Use in Delhi, 1970-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Average Annual in the Decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hazards in Delhi

Fire toll: Fire imposes an enormous and dreadful waste on the society, measurable only in pain, suffering and death; a toll that is a wasteful destruction of property. Every alternate day one person in Delhi succumbs to his fire injuries.

Personal injury by fire is self inflicted or accidental. In 1985-86 and 1989-90, the number of such deaths soared to 316 and 309, respectively, while injuries were as high as 1760 (1988-89) and 1617 (1989-1990) per year. The ratio of death to injury was 1:5. Though these numbers can vacillate, not a year has passed by when the number is lower than eighty-six.

Table 10: Casualty from Fire in Delhi, 1971-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dead</th>
<th>Injured</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dead</th>
<th>Injured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>1493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>1441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>1422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>1760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1992-93</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>1292</td>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>1125</td>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>2113</td>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>1488</td>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished records of the Fire Department, Delhi. (Data recalibrated)

A sample from Safdarjung Hospital, which houses Delhi's largest burn ward, negates the data of the Fire Department. It shows that not only are fire victims distinctly on the increase, but deaths are six to seven times higher to those recorded by the Fire Department. Doctors in the hospital confirm that even though many patients in the burn ward are victims of suicide, domestic accidents and quarrels, but the majority are triggered by what are called fire accidents.
Table 11: Patients Admitted to the Burn Ward of Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi, 1990-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Admission in burn Ward</th>
<th>Death within 48 hours</th>
<th>Death after 48 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1747</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3125</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3354</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>4124</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>648</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished Medical Record Registers of the Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi. (Data recalibrated)

Note: Includes self-injury cases in the Hospital.

The tragedies are most glaring in some individual fire episodes. Uphaar is one of Delhi’s prime cinema halls. On June 29, 1987, flames that started in its fifth floor led to the death of three individuals. Another glaring episode occurred at Siddhartha, one of Delhi’s leading five star hotels. A major fire engulfed a number of its floors on January 23, 1996, killing 37 people and injuring equal numbers too. This is a high percentage because, on that night, the hotel had only 189 guests. On June 13, 1997, 1075 viewers of the Hindi film ’Border’ had no idea that 59 among them would soon be asphyxiated in smoke spurting from the cinema hall’s 1000 Kilowatt oil filled transformer. Ansal Bhawan is a 48 metres high rise premise in Delhi’s prime commercial-cum-business centre of Connaught Place. In a major flare that broke out in Sanjay Amar slum cluster on the banks of Yamuna on March 15, 1999, 28 people died and 40 were seriously injured. In the Lai Kuan calamity of June 1999, more than 40 persons were killed and over 100 severely hurt when a fire broke out in a godown of chemicals in this congested residential-cum-commercial area within the walled city area of Delhi. More lethal and far reaching in damage was the fire episode of Jwalaheri PVC market. PVC is an acronym, which stands for a toxic compound called Poly-vinyl-chloride. This is Asia’s largest plastic recycling manufacturing area with over 2000 factories, which has already turned into an inferno seven times. Fire scalds and kills irrespective of whether the structure
Hazards in Delhi

engulfed is a cinema hall, a high-rise building, a hotel, a slum, a godown or an industry.

A large amount of material wealth is bound up in the form of buildings and infrastructure in the cities. When hazards strike, losses are thus heavy. Over the years property losses have escalated from Rs 6 million per year in the 1960s to Rs 2.75 billion in the 1990s. This is a forty time increase within a span of 40 years.

Table 12: Property Loss from Fire in Delhi, 1960-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Average Annual in the Decade (Rs. million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>138.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>555.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1998</td>
<td>2744.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished records of the Fire Department, Delhi. (Data recalibrated)

The value of goods have increased over the decades. The loss due to fires therefore has also increased manifold. The fire which gutted the Indian Airlines terminal at the Indira Gandhi International Airport of Delhi on October 29, 1996, ruined property worth Rs 155 million. This subsequently paralysed emergency telephone services, trunk dialling, and computerized reservation lines for many days.

The irredeemable loss of life and property causes destruction that cannot be measured in rupees. These include bereavement, business failure, destruction of vital official documents, personal treasures and the psychological trauma of living with a disfigured face or limbs. The capital of one of the largest democracies in the world, Delhi, is glaringly unable to safeguard its citizens from this most primitive element harnessed by man, fire. Why do fires occur in Delhi?

Cause of Fire

Fifty-four per cent of the fires occur in the dry months of April to June and 25 per cent of them in the cold dry months of November to February.
Table 13: Mean Monthly Maximum Temperatures in Delhi and High Intensity Fires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Indian Meteorological Department, Delhi. (Data recalibrated)

The climate versus fire relationship for Delhi is established as the coefficient of correlation runs a +0.6 between temperature and fire occurrence and it drops drastically to -0.89 between relative humidity and fire and further down to -0.35 between rainy days and fire. There is no doubt that Delhi's semi-arid climate is characterized by extreme dry conditions associated with hot summer. When the mercury in Delhi soars to more than 45° centigrade, three to four intense fires strike the city per month. July and August are almost free of fires due to the high humidity accompanying the prevailing monsoons. None the less, it is not Delhi's scorching summer temperatures, which make the city vulnerable to this hazard. In the last 70 years, the mean monthly temperatures have not changed yet the number of fires have escalated-proving clearly that temperatures alone do not cause the fires in the city. On scrutinizing the records kept by the Fire Department a variety of causes were found and their list included electric short circuit, naked flames, carelessness and lightning. According to their classification, 64 per cent of the fires were caused by electric short circuits and 16 per cent were acts of carelessness.
Table 14: Causes of Fire as Classified by the Fire Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Percent to total fires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electric Short Circuit</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carelessness</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naked Flame</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others*</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Others include causes like incendiary, lightening, children playing with fire.

While the Fire Department sets out its own classification of the causes of fires it tends to gloss over its own inadequate services. The following reasons may be responsible for this. At the time of independence, Delhi had 4 fire stations, and today it has 34. In 1951 Delhi had a population of 1.4 million and one fire station served 0.37 million people, today it has to serve 0.50 million. Another way to grasp the shortfall is to compare the growth of fires vis-à-vis the number of stations.

Table 15: Fire Stations versus Number of Fires, 1970-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>No. of Fire stations</th>
<th>No. of Fires *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only major, serious and medium fires have been considered

While high intensity fires have increased by six times the number of stations lag behind with only a three-fold growth. It is the manpower and fire fighting equipment, which are the strength of the stations. The fire service authorities state that it has a sanctioned strength of 1603 personnel but it needs 2138, indicating a straight shortage of 535 people. In addition to the feeble work force, the infrastructure is also inadequate. The fire department has a fleet of 103 fire tenders, 13 motor pumps, 12 trailer pumps, 8 high pressure pumps, 17 water bousers, and 33 ambulances (1998). If distributed equally among all the 34 fire stations then except for the fire tenders, all other vehicles get reduced to a fraction. This too is not whole reality. Nearly 40 per
cent of the vehicles have outlived their life and are near a breakdown point. This reduces the functional figure to barely one fire tender per station. Let us not forget that in case of serious, medium, and major fires, 12, 8, and 16 tenders were the minimum number required, respectively. This means that while stations are few and far between, the fire fighting equipment is even more inadequate.

The desired response time by international standards is three minutes. But in Delhi, a fire tender often has to face chaos in the form of traffic snarls, narrow lanes, vendors, stalls, animals, and sometimes even angry mobs. A diary was maintained to check the time taken by a fire tender to reach and handle fires in four different land use areas. It took as much as 11 to 45 minutes for the first fire tender to reach the spot.

Arranging large quantity of water further adds to the delays. The number of fire stations, workers, vehicles, water tanks, traffic congestion and water supply, all conspire to hinder the efficiency of the city fire service. The revenue base of the civic department has also been eroding consistently, while its responsibilities for augmenting the existing services has been growing. But concluding that these inadequacies form the sole basis for the argument for a fire hazard to the city would be a myopic understanding of the ecology of fire breeding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time of fire</th>
<th>Arrival of first fire tender</th>
<th>Time taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.06.1984</td>
<td>Jehangirpuri Slum</td>
<td>1610 hours</td>
<td>1655 hours</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.04.1989</td>
<td>Vandana Building</td>
<td>1800 hours</td>
<td>1811 hours</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.01.1996</td>
<td>Siddhartha Hotel</td>
<td>0212 hours</td>
<td>0224 hours</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.06.1997</td>
<td>Upchar Cinema</td>
<td>1710 hours</td>
<td>1716 hours</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from News and Inquiry Reports.

Delhi has grown at a breathtaking speed of 0.20 million (per year) to accommodate 14 million people in 100 years. Accommodating and housing this annual surge of people is an awesome task, especially when one half of these can be traced to an exodus from rural areas. Delhi attracts a large number of migrants. Fleeing deteriorating ecological conditions and crushing poverty, most of
these immigrants to Delhi seek shelter in hastily built huts or jhuggies. A closer look at this form of habitation is a key to understanding residential fires in Delhi.

A recent report states that Delhi has more than 1700 slum clusters and 1000 unauthorised colonies which house nearly five million people. The *Compendium of Environmental Statistics, 1997* states that nearly 1080 such housing clusters containing nearly half a million jhuggies house 2.5 million people in different parts of Delhi. Each jhuggie, an anachronism of a habitat in which life is a cramp of all sorts, gives refuge to an overwhelming population of Delhi. Nearly 75,500 such jhuggies were destroyed by fires during the last 12 years, killing 150 and injuring another 370 people.

Table 17: Occurrence of Fire in Slums of Delhi, 1987-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Jhuggies Gutted</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Loss (Rs. millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>3999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2766</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>5856</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>17286</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>10202</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9634</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>4557</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>5639</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5277</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2891</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5820</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dheri, S.K., 1999. (Data recalibrated)

It is difficult to count every jhuggie in the city, but records tell us that on an average each year nearly 6,000 of these poor men's abodes are gutted exposing at least 50,000 people to severe hardship.

Owing to their vulnerable ecology, slums are gutted in fire a number of times, yet most people show tenacity in rebuilding on that very debris. Jhuggies in the Jehangirpuri colony have been worn down by five fires within a span of ten years, one on the Yamuna embankment locality called *pushta* six times; and in Kirti Nagar the frequency has been seven times. On some days fires have struck at two different places in the city as on March 15, 2000, when Sanjay Amar jhuggies in west Delhi and the Rajiv Gandhi camp in east Delhi burnt simultaneously.
Politically, the slum dwellers are seen as vital vote banks. Economically, they provide cheap labour known as the informal sector. Despite their gains to the city, the inhabitants are locked into a ratchet effect of poverty and have the limited option of choice between rural starvation and low grade inflammable huts. While their homes are unsafe, their work environments are even worse. Many of these people find employment in the industries, which have mushroomed in the city.

The industrial landscape of Delhi is not dominated by large modern factories where production, storage, and marketing is streamlined and equipped with state of the art measures of fire safety precautions. A majority of the industries are small in scale. An index to their condition is the fact that of the 1,26,000 such units nearly 97,411 are located in the non-conforming zones. This means that 77 per cent of the industries violate this legal document and occupy garages, basements, backyard of shops and houses or small sheds in non industrial areas. Hundreds of these units manufacture plastic or rubber using highly inflammable raw materials. In most factories, electric wires hang carelessly while furnaces, smelters, and machines occupy crowded premises with no exhausts for ventilation. Manned by a low skilled and niggardly paid labour there is no concept of safety in these cubbyhole industries, resulting in quick fires.

The tragedy of industrial fires is further compounded by their situation within residential premises. Prime examples include the Wazirpur industrial area located near Shalimar Bagh and the Najafgarh industrial area situated between Patel Nagar and Moti Nagar. The entire Sarai Rohilla area houses hundreds of small scale industries manufacturing plastic, rubber and various other highly inflammable chemicals within residential areas. In Karol Bagh, the Regarpura colony has hundreds of goldsmiths working together by taking several connections from one or two gas cylinders in the residential buildings. Leakage in one pipe would lead to a major blast.

Commercial areas comprising markets, cinemas, and offices in high rise buildings have also become the frequent, niches of high intensity fires. If carefully observed many shops bear a close semblance to jhuggies. This may sound a bit far fetched, but here are the parallels: in Delhi, shops are of small size, most have only one entrance, or show-windows, and no ventilation outlets. All these factors are common to jhuggies. The exterior of jhuggies is made of wood shingles, cardboard, and polythene while the interior décor
of shops is also made of similar inflammable building materials. A jhuggie is stuffed with all things that the owner can afford; most shops are bursting with goods too. Shortage of space in jhuggies forces one to conduct domestic chores on the pavements, while racks and wares of shops stealthily encroach on to the pathway in a similar fashion. Almost five to six of a family cram inside a jhuggie and an average small shop of Delhi usually has the owner, his son, one salesperson, and a person doing odd jobs called a mundu, who crowd the shop with four to five people. The chulla or cooking hearth is of course, not there in the shop, but Delhi’s chronic shortage of electricity makes a generator and its fuel cans essential gadgets in every shop. Shops huddled back to back on both sides of the narrow streets are also a similarity between a jhuggie cluster and a market. Congestion, high population density, and insufficient civic amenities are the other features common to both. The only difference is that markets thrive during the day and empty out at night. The shops house expensive, modern and new goods while ragged, obsolete, and second hands are outfits common to a jhuggie. Shop owners are the rich citizens of Delhi while jhuggies house the poor. But fires consider neither day and night nor rich and poor. If the aetiology is conducive, the hazard strikes both alike. Delhi has retail, wholesale, planned, and unplanned markets, but most typify the above said characteristics. Therefore, it is not surprising that fires attack one and all.

Sadar Bazaar is one of Delhi’s leading wholesale market with an umbilical bond to the walled city dating back to A.D.1700. Its narrow winding lanes with neck-to-neck row of buildings, innumerable illegal encroachments, and the hustle bustle of thousands of traders have given the bazaar the feel of a beehive. On an average, a small fire erupts in the Bazaar on every alternate day. In the last 23 years, five serious fires erupted in its sub markets of Gandhi Market, Darvesh Bazar, Pan Mandi, Shiv Market, and Swadeshi Market. On April 16,1990, fire from a shop filled with hosiery goods smouldered and destroyed 700 shops. Even Connaught Place, a well laid out and open spaced retail market, becomes a victim of a small fire once every two days. A row of shops on Janpath Street was engulfed in a major fire in 1994 destroying five shops. These shops were huddled close to one another and stocked clothes and handicraft.

Markets are sprinkled across many areas of Delhi which have added attractions in the form of cinema halls as the foci of entertainment for the people. It is well known that Indians are enthusiastic cinema watchers. Every day nearly a quarter million
people make a beeline into Delhi’s 70 halls to seek recreation. Cinegoers have grown from 17 million per year in the 1960s to 90 million per year in the 1990s.

Table 18: Cinema Halls and Cinegoers in Delhi, 1960-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cinema halls (No.)</th>
<th>Cinegoers (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Yet the safety of cinema halls is dangerously fragile. Nearly 30 per cent of the cinema halls in Delhi are over 50 years old, and they are badly in need of refurbishing.

Table 19: Age of Cinema Halls in Delhi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of hall (years)</th>
<th>No. of halls</th>
<th>Per cent to total halls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 90</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-80</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-71</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Primary Sample Survey in 60 per cent of the cinema halls of Delhi.

If slums are symbols of poverty and markets that of utter chaos, fire in high-rise premises signify that even planned and nearly stacked structures do not escape from this hazard. These high rise premises project themselves as solutions to the population density, shortage of land, and soaring rent. In sharp contrast to the jhuggies, high-rise premises epitomise the input of professional architects, builders, multiple government inspections and clearance agencies, all of which
Hazards in Delhi

exist to ensure the highest safety standards. What causes these constructions of the higher echelons in the city to suffer from this hazard?

Delhi has over 1200 high-rise premises. In a sample of 221 such areas, 70 were declared as unsafe by the Fire Department in 2001. If rules and laws are violated so blatantly these could turn into towering infernos, instead of fulfilling the promise of saving space and creating efficient work environs.

According to norms prescribed for fire protection, each high rise building has to follow 12 fire safety rules which include having provisions like a separate five metres wide approach road, water riser system, automatic sprinkler, fire detection system, fireman’s switch board, alarm, public address system and hose reels. An estimated cost for the installation of all these would be around Rs 2 million, which apparently many seem to be unwilling to undertake. The apathy of the owners and users of the building towards safety, and at times the connivance of the administration towards enforcing safety rules pose problems in this regard.

Hazards in the city are evidently not accidents or acts of providence. Neither do rain nor high temperatures cause floods or fire. Even earthquakes do not cause damage—it is the faulty designs of structures and low quality building material, which spruces the figures of loss. Branding hazards as natural processes implies that we are abducting responsibility. On the contrary, these hazards are symptoms of larger conspiracies, which put society at grave risk. It reiterates what Beck said, “in the risk society the point of impact is not obviously tied to the point of origin” (Beck, 1992, Pg. 100).

In short Delhi contains all the ingredients for hazard occurrence—heightened risk, concentrated exposure, increased vulnerability, corrupt officials and lax governance. Such is the crucible, which fuels the soaring crime graph, road accidents, health epidemics and a string of other hazards breeding in this mega city. All these factors have propelled the city into the high-hazard category. The disadvantage of taking city level data is that the average conceals the discrepancies between different areas and makes the hazards seem isolated. These averages also make hazards seem random thus occurring anywhere in the city. The need for examining the spatial distribution of hazards in a city thus becomes imperative.

Geographers have traditionally divided cities on the basis of their age, type of land and the ways it has been put to use, population structure, building types and infrastructure. Today the occurrence of
hazards in the city has an important spatial manifestation. After all the
distribution of hazards, be it floods, fire or the imprint of an earthquake,
cannot be overlooked, as it is an index of safety for the people. Hazard
regions are thus an important spatial abstraction that geographers could
create. Regional tags help to amalgamate vast areas and imagination is
needed to define such regions.

Spatial study can reveal connections and patterns of hazards
unseen at the level of the individual household, shop, industry,
high-rise or slum. Hazard regions can also draw the attention of
policy makers to these locales of a city. The maps also hold the
mirror up to the society at large to see as to where the unsafe
regions of the city are, that require urgent action. Such maps are
thus useful in locating disaster assistance centres based on the
number of facilities available, especially shelters like schools,
hospitals, fire and police stations. Regional constructions
demonstrated through maps have power when they become units
for identity formations with an effect on local development
policies. Therefore, the important questions are: what is the
distribution of hazards in the city? Where in a city
do hazards concentrate? Do single or multiple hazard regions
dominate?

**Hazard Regions**

A search for an appropriate unit for spatial analysis was met by
the Planning Divisions identified in the Delhi Master Plan by the
Town and Country Planning Organisation. These Planning
Divisions were conceived as self-contained in employment,
housing, recreation shopping and other essential services (Rana,
2000) They were assumed to be functional units reflecting their
own patterns of development and land uses. For delimiting hazard
regions, Zonal Development Units under the Planning Division
have been selected because their boundary is governed by, ‘the
land use, where change in predominant function of land use
would give a clue to the possible boundary for the next zone
since this would indicate a major shift in the activities of the
area.’ Further the Zonal Development Units are not of fixed size
‘those in populated areas are much smaller than those in less
populated areas’. Each unit has some special features of its own
and is named according to the most popular area included in it.
Map 6: Planning Divisions and Zonal Development Units of Delhi
At present Delhi's urban area consists of 14 Planning Divisions but the delimitation of all the Zonal Development Units in it are unavailable. In 1971, the city was carved into 8 Planning Divisions, further subdivided into 136 Zonal Development Units. A map to this effect was available. Freezing the boundary of the city to the 1971 situation may seem an under representation of the area and population, but contained within the 1971 girdle is the main geographical, historical and commercial space of the city. People, goods and services maintain close ties with this area. The occurrence of hazards has been regionalised with reference to this spatial organisation of the city.

As a first step in regionalisation, three categories of zonal development units were identified, namely,

i. Areas that received any impact from earthquakes,

ii. Spaces which were affected by 1977-1978 floods, and

iii. Places that suffered high intensity fire during the last 23 years.

The reason for using a dissimilar range of data, all years for earthquakes, two years for flood and twenty-three years for fire is that evidence of the occurrence of earthquakes is scanty and only twenty-six addresses could be gathered. The 1977 and 1978 floods were of exceptionally high intensity spreading over a large expanse. Therefore, these two years can be considered as a representative sample for the area of occurrence of this hazard. Fires are erratic. To rule out this randomness it was important to study where they agglomerated. This necessitated collection of data over a long period of time. Fire records are available for twenty-three years and all of these were used. To make the data comparable major, high and medium fires were converted into uniform units by using the number of fire tenders sent to extinguish fires as the index of intensity.

Addresses of all the points of impact of earthquake, flood or fire were pinpointed in the Eicher City Map of Delhi, and these were then allocated into their corresponding 136 Zonal Development Units. A data set was thus created to identify the hazard areas of Delhi. Data has been confined to the occurrence of the hazard, as the purpose was delineation of hazard regions rather than vulnerable areas. The virtue of keeping the data set simple is that it locates all areas where the hazard has occurred, and it is a useful measure for certain policy decisions. Further, comparison across cities would require an index which is simple and for which data is available. The method makes use of the visualisation techniques embedded in Geographical Information System through the production of maps.
The following Geographical Information System queries were initiated. For:

A. Hazard regions of Delhi based on occurrence of hazard,
   (i) Identify multiple hazard regions by selecting all Zonal Development Units where all the three hazards of earthquake, flood and fire have occurred.
   (ii) Identify double hazard regions by selecting all Zonal Development Units where any two hazards have occurred.
   (iii) Identify single hazard regions by selecting Zonal Development Units where any one hazard has occurred.
   (iv) Identify regions where these three hazards in Zonal Development Units have not occurred.

B. Hazard regions of Delhi based on intensity of fire hazard,
   (i) Identify dominant fire hazard regions by selecting all Zonal Development Units where more than 50 fire tenders have reached.
   (ii) Identify high fire hazard regions by selecting all Zonal Development Units where 25-50 fire tenders have reached.
   (iii) Identify low fire hazard regions by selecting all Zonal Development Units where less than 25 fire tenders have reached.

C. Fire hazard regions of Delhi based on land use which caught fire,
   (i) Identify fire hazard regions where more than 25 fire tenders reached the slums.
   (ii) Identify fire hazard regions where more than 25 fire tenders reached the commercial land use.
   (iii) Identify fire hazard regions where more than 25 fire tenders reached the industrial land use.

D. Service Regions-Fire Hazard vs. Fire Stations,
   (i) Identify regions with more than 50 fire tenders but no fire station.
   (ii) Identify regions with 25-50 fire tenders but no fire station.
   (iii) Identify regions with no fire tender but a fire station.

Today, Delhi as a city has become a perilous habitat. A large part of the city has experienced the imprint of flood, fire or earthquake. If the occurrences of hazards are seen individually then 24 Zonal Development Units were witness to earthquake (17 per cent), floods have submerged 32 such units (23 per cent), and fire incidences have broken out in 80 of the total units (58 per cent). Spatially, fire occurrences are spread over a larger part of the city while floods and earthquakes have a comparatively restricted territory. Floods are only a hazard in the units along the banks of Yamuna and also through which the drainage lines such as Shahdara drain, Najafgarh drain and their supplementary offshoots traverse.
A high water level caused these drains to breach at several places, thus drowning a number of residential areas. Delhi is fast expanding into flood territory. Fifteen out of the 32 flood hazard units fall on the peripheries of Delhi and are recent entrants into the urban ambit of Delhi. Mistakes of urban construction in these areas in the past have invited floods into the city. The direction of expansion of the city needs to be drawn on the basis of vulnerability to hazards.

While the experience of floods is vivid in the memories of most Delhi citizens, earthquake impacts are still isolated and lesser known in the city. Delhi does fall in the seismically vulnerable zone, yet evidence of visible impacts of damage to buildings could be gathered for only 26 locations, which cluster in 22 out of 136 Units.

These could be grouped into two types, by location; firstly in the flood plain, and secondly in the high rise areas. Representing the former is the damage to houses in Geeta Colony, Laxmi Nagar and, Daryaganj...
while the Surya Kiran building, Tarang Apartments and Qutab Minar that exemplify the vertical constructions, which dot the city. Records also point to the impact of an earthquake, which occurred way back in A.D. 1720 in the Zonal Development Unit of Chandni Chowk, Lal Darwaza and Farash Khana occupying an old floodplain in the core of Delhi. It is a well-established fact that the young and loose sediment deposits are more susceptible to earthquakes. Also buildings on the deep alluvial deposits are vulnerable to even long distance earthquake due to the resonance effect. Therefore, the depth of bedrock is of vital significance. In contrast to floods, the impress of earthquake occur in both the newer and the older units of Delhi. Overall Delhi's expansion on the flood plain and its eagerness to soar skywards without recourse to seismic sensitive building codes are harbingers to a more widespread distribution of earthquake damage in the future.

MAP 8: EARTHQUAKE IMPACT REGIONS OF DELHI
Fire when compared with earthquake and floods has a wide presence in the city. The geographical location of the fire regions includes a continuous belt in the north and north west, a prominent cluster in the centre, four isolated patches in the east and an inverted L zone in south Delhi.

Most of the fires in the north west and all the fires in the eastern part of Delhi have ignited in the slums. Commercial premises, such as markets and high rise buildings have drawn a large number of fire tenders in the central and southern parts of Delhi. The industrial areas of Naraina and Okhla enlarge the spatial extent of the north west and southern fire areas respectively.

MAP 9: INTENSITY OF FIRE HAZARDS
In Delhi, fires occur both in the core and peripheral Zonal Development Units. Both these are zones of mounting urban pressures, though the manifestation of the stress has differed being jhuggies in the peripheries and high rise premises at the core. The critical units are those where all the land uses: jhuggies, commercial and industrial fires occur.

Land use too has undergone a change in both the peripheral and core units. In the former, the change has been from rural to urban and in the latter from residential to commercial. Despite these apparent differences the unplanned hasty constructions with little semblance to planning guidelines or care for safety are features common to the periphery and inner city. Hence they both fall in dominant and high fire hazard category.

**MAP 10: FIRE AND LANDUSE IN DELHI**
The criticality of fire hazard comes to light when fire occurrence is seen vis-à-vis location of fire station in the unit. There are a number of units distributed all over Delhi where over 25 fire tenders have reached but they lack a fire station. The occurrence of fires needs to be considered as a vital input while making a decision of locating fire stations in a city.

**MAP 11: FIRE HAZARD VS. FIRE STATION**

It is often assumed that the older parts of a city are victim to a greater number of hazards. Urbanization after all has occurred at different times in the Zonal Development Units. Some Zonal Development Units are old with urban settlement dating back to 1650s while others are as recent as the last decade. Superimposing the hazard region
map on the time period, one of the Zonal Development Units disqualifies partially the statement: that the older the urban areas, the more are the hazards. While the older core of city has decayed and attracted hazards, the city of the 1930s is least prone to hazards when compared to the more recently urbanized Zonal Development Units of post 1970s on the northern and eastern peripheries. Comparing the geographical locations it is seen that the recent entrants into the urban ambit have accrued more hazards.

**MAP 12: HAZARD REGIONS OF DELHI**

Multiple hazard areas cover only four units, which are strung along the Yamuna, reminding that the land use along its alluvial bed is incompatible with the environmental vulnerability of the zone. Double hazard regions, either a combination of flood and fire, fire
and earthquake, or flood and earthquake, occur in 36 units, they are scattered throughout the city. Ninety-six Units of the cityscape have been the victim of one or another hazard. A cardinal division shows that north, west and east Delhi are greater victims of the hazards while the southwest and south are relatively free of them. The latter areas happen to include relatively high-class residential and prestigious institutional areas and constitute 30 per cent of the Zonal Development Units. (Fig.12) Barring a few isolated locales, a continuous triangular shaped stretch of hazard free region occupies a prominent part of south and south-west Delhi.

With a narrow apex in Central Delhi, the region acquires a distinctly wide base in the southern units. Embracing the Buddha Jayanti Park and the Cantonment, the broad area conforms to the Aravali ridge, the last vestige of a green spine within the city. The areas neighbouring the ridge like the units of Akbar Road and a legacy of the garden city of colonial Delhi, today are the abodes for ministers and politicians, while bureaucrats dominate the well-planned colonies of Chanakya Puri, Moti Bagh and Ram krishnapuram. Prominent industrialists lodge in the other patches of hazard-free regions such as New Friends Colony, Nizamuddin, Maharani Bagh, Anand Niketan and Safdarjung, to name a few. In essence, therefore, the hazard free region is a small fraction of Delhi. This population is comparatively distanced from the human tragedy and misery, which accompany any of the three hazards. But this spatial island is also being choked and trapped around with markets, industries, slums and pressures to go high rise. Private security and land use zoning or cordoning off a few residential pockets of the powerful and rich is not an index of safety for the city. It needs to be realized that a city, which is not safe for all, will become unsafe for all. Scorching fires, flood refugees, organized crime and the likes do not remain confined to pockets. Eventually the entire city is affected by hazards.

Concluding Remarks

Cities in the developing world are fast becoming vulnerable to multiple hazards including floods, earthquakes, cyclones, fires, besides epidemics, terrorist attacks, accidents and crime. Mega cities in particular are crucibles of hazards (Mitchell 1999: 43). Yet no attempt has been made to identify hazard regions in cities and thereby design policies to mitigate the occurrence or to prevent recurrence of loss and suffering. A first step towards policy formulation for
disaster management in cities is to identify places and spaces where hazards occur. The delineation of disaster regions within a city is of value in framing an integrated spatial policy. Collating data from diverse sources, and using the tool of GIS, this paper has identified the multiple hazard regions of Delhi. The boundaries of the hazard regions were determined by taking into account the extent of the urban sprawl on tectonically weak and flood prone areas, as displayed by satellite imageries. This procedure resembles the one followed by (Rosenfield 1994: 29) who favoured a landscape based geomorphological approach in such cases. Evolving a methodology to identify hazards regions was one major objective of this research.

A temporal-spatial view of the city morphology reveals that the establishment of Old Delhi sought a hazard free-site where while maintaining the proximity to the river Yamuna, settlements were built in locales free from floods. Here an acquired wisdom through experience is manifest. When the foundation stone of New Delhi was laid by the British for the elite, it was made to occupy the safest site atop the Aravali ridge. Single storeyed construction that made lavish use of open space was a pattern of this New Delhi. With the coming up of the New, Old Delhi was neglected and gradually it became structurally fragile, overcrowded, congested and thus prey to hazards. In the post-independence period since 1947, Delhi grew and expanded beyond the limits defined by the old and new capitals and it is the recent expansion of the urban ambit, which has become the victim of multiple hazards. The siting of civic amenities like fire stations have a mismatch with the occurrence of fires; more fires occur in the slums and old parts of the city while more fire stations are located in the hazard free zone. Vulnerability to hazards thus gets magnified among the poor (Parker 1995: 315). But then, like the infectious diseases of the poor, hazards are also not likely to spare the wealthy neighbourhoods in the long run (Beck 1992: 100).

A myth this paper explodes is that it is natural forces that cause hazards. The number of city fires in a year has multiplied 10 times in the last three decades with no change in the march of temperature. A haphazard growth of the city, the proliferation of slums and the gross inadequacy of fire control infrastructure emerge as the main explanatory variables. Briefly put, more of the hazards occur where the city population interfered with the natural processes, faulted in making locational decisions and failed to manage local habitats. Fragile infrastructure, in general, aggravates the situation (Horlick 1995: 332).
Hazard occurrence however cannot be exclusively explained away with reference to the age of city, its population density, or its land use. Embedded in the hazard map of a city is an invisible hand of political economy which influences the location of richer people in hazard free sites, leaving the hazard prone ones for the relatively poor. This is exemplified by the case study of Delhi. Only 39 Zonal Development Units out of 136 in all, covering one-fourth of the city area accommodating hardly 10 per cent of the population, are free from the hazard of earthquake, flood and fire. All such localities are elite in character and include the residences of politicians, bureaucrats, and industrialists, mainly the policy makers.

Forceful and direct measures, such as zoning, land use regulation, and condemnation of dwellings in particular hazardous environments are among the strategies recommended for meeting the situation (Palm 1981: 392). No less critical is the resolution of issues linked with relegation of the poor to hazard prone sites. Equally important is to grasp the peoples' perception pertaining to the vulnerability of different parts of the city to specific hazards and to assess their attitude and response to them. Are the residents of Delhi aware of hazards? What are their perceptions? How can they be motivated to mitigate the damage from hazards? These are relevant questions that need to be addressed through research.

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Narrative Strategies: Past and Present

SONJOY DUTTA ROY

Narratives can be implicit, symbolic and concealed, or explicit, realistic and open. But always, behind them are strategies. These strategies take poetic, dramatic or fictional forms according to their inner requirements or exigencies of the situations, whether of an oral communal nature, or written individual nature. Strategies have significantly changed over the years, from the past to the present, and through the opening up of the native mind to the global challenge, and the coming of the written word. Indian narrative strategies, in addition, have faced the challenge of the colonial experience, that many Indian writers and critics feel has resulted in a kind of amnesia that has obliterated a rich past. Others feel that the past persists, but within the oral traditions of the illiterate majority. This concern about a lost heritage is the sensitive reaction of a literate elite finding itself increasingly distanced from the collective memory (and its languages) of the illiterate, rural, tribal and peasant population. On the other hand, there is the sensitive contemporary Indian writer who uses the English language either because he or she is living in some English-speaking nation, or because he or she feels more comfortable with this language taught as the most important language in schools in India. Whatever the situation, we are poised delicately at the point of a vibrant and creative debate.

I see the discourse taking shape in three distinct sections. The first section is the theoretical premise that emerges out of this debate. This section will take up the views and experiences of a cross section of contemporary Indian writers (poets, dramatists and fiction writers) as they try in their own ways to negotiate between a native or personal past going increasingly out of focus, and a globalizing present that seems to be creating this distance or orientalizing this exotic past into a market force. This cross section ranges from writers with deeply traditional views about culture and language; writers holding the middle path; and writers caught in diasporic situations
(feeling linguistically and culturally cut off from their native roots) and finding English as the most comfortable language. The second section will examine some of the strategies used in traditional narrative structures (poetic, dramatic, epics and tales) that have survived due to the oral nature of communication and are now available not only in written texts but also in excellent translations. This section will act as a background against which the final section will be seen in terms of losses and gains as one moves from the oral to the written word en route the colonial experience. The religious, social, political, erotic and romantic nature of these communal narratives—as they grew through the centuries—educating and entertaining as the enchanting chants got embedded in public memory, have become transformed. The third section will examine certain contemporary texts to study the manner in which narrative strategies have altered under the pressures of the private written word and the effects of globalization. The texts examined are all written originally in English. This is only for the purpose of studying the modernizing effect in its extreme case. The autobiographical imperative is perhaps the strongest force that has emerged out of this situation. The private written word, as different from the communicated oral word gestured across, opens vistas of introspective individuating writing that seek its own unknown sahredaya somewhere out there, all over the world. Yet the communal concerns are there—tradition and roots exist—though fragmented, and like a broken mirror, seeking and trying to recover an imagined connecting totality that the narrative could achieve. Books of poems, plays, a book of short stories, and two novels, feature in this section only to reveal that whatever be the contemporary form, it is prompted by the inner demands of the fragmented individuated self as it seeks to merge itself into a vaster symbolic life. In the ancient oral narratives, the individual narrator did so secretly in the act of narrating and gesturing, making his own contribution to an existing structure (very much like in classical music and dance even today).

Section 1: Writers Creating Theory

The past, for a contemporary writer, can be an individual personal past or a vast mythical, historical past. Both these pasts shape the present of the writer and the milieu in which the writer is writing. In the Indian situation, the historical past of the colonial experience being more recent, quite overpowering, and, one must admit, also
in many ways creatively enriching, it has come at many crucial junctures into sharp conflict with the vast mythical frameworks that evolved through a community of beliefs and rituals through the centuries. English education, with its emphasis on the written word, on the one hand has opened up vast global vistas which can tempt any writer; on the other hand, in the urban and semi urban centres, it has obliterated the collective memory that was passed on from generation to generation through oral narrative traditions. The language being used by the contemporary writer determines the closeness of that writer to the grand narratives of the past. Many contemporary writers have felt that their education—even in the vernacular language—has distanced them from the language and culture of the illiterate peasants and tribals, who, interestingly, in India, are still the preservers of pristine native sources of language and culture. Dialects would be closer, and at the other extreme of the spectrum would be English. Caught between the region, the state, the nation and the globe, language and culture fracture the identity of the contemporary writer in disturbing ways. But a vibrant theoretical discourse emerges when we try to see how the Indian writers within this spectrum have coped with this situation in unique and original ways. Unfortunately, I have no tribal or peasant writers (the word writer itself sounds absurd in this context) expressing their identity crisis and ways of coping with it. This is because they do not face this identity crisis. It does not exist for them, still steeped as they are in community culture and the oral tradition. This crisis itself is the fallout of the colonial experience, as we shall increasingly notice. Individualism and the concept of historical time are alien concepts that have their own insidious attraction, however much we idealize the lost community sense, values, beliefs, rituals and mythical frameworks of time.

Thus, a writer like Girish Karnad (1994) in *In Search of a Theatre* intensely feels the tension between 'the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, the attractions (simultaneous) between Western modes of thought and our own traditions'. He recounts how he would sit up at nights with his servants, watching Yakshagana performances and the later impact of watching Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* directed by Ebrahim Alkazi; of how he 'stepped straight out of mythological plays lit by torches and petromax lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers'. It was a mind-blowing experience with a kind of mixed reaction, fascination as well as recoil: 'by the norms I had been brought up on, the very notion of laying bare the inner recesses of
the human psyche like this for public consumption seemed obscene'. The fascination for the west made him train himself to 'write in English, in preparation for the conquest of the west'. Yet, when he found himself writing his first play, it was in Kannada and on the mythological story of king Yayati, from the *Mahabharata*. Karnad admits with admirable honesty that though the content of this play came from the innumerable mythological plays he had been brought up on, the form came from his exposure to western theatre. Later, in retrospect, he also discovered that within the mythological content of the play, he had secretly poured his own personal emotions: 'my anxieties at that moment, my resentment with all those (his father specially) who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future (just like the youngest son of King Yayati)' (brackets, mine). It is fascinating to see how for a writer like Girish Karnad, his past (personal and mythical) provided him with 'a readymade narrative within which' he could 'contain and explore' his 'insecurities', yet there was nothing in his past that could provide him with a 'dramatic structure'.

'Even to arrive at the heart of one's own mythology the writer has to follow signposts planted by the West, a paradoxical situation for a culture in which the earliest extant play was written in AD 200!' As one moves slowly through the journey of his exploration of the right Indian theatre for himself, one finds him rejecting Parsi theatre for its superficial bourgeoius secularism, and Sanskrit drama as 'an elitist phenomenon ... remote from the general populace'. Karnad rejects the Indian version of the realistic middle class theatre for its confined living room reality and its inability to see beyond it 'at the socio-political forces raging in the world outside, as well as the battleground where values essential to one's individuality are fought out and defended'. He felt that 'nothing of consequence ever happens or is supposed to happen in an Indian living room ... Space in a traditional home is ordered according to caste hierarchies as well as the hierarchies within the family'. Later on, I will contest this point through some of Mahesh Dattani's plays. But Karnad obviously was searching for something else. I think his rejection of these middle class living room plays has more to it than meets the eye. Perhaps he wanted to come close to the folk and folk theatre and this discovery is initially through the historical play *Tughlaq* modelled on the Parsi theatre division between shallow and deep scenes. In *Tughlaq*, the so-called shallow scenes involving the 'mass populace' started 'bulging with energy hard to control'. The problem still remained. It was to find ways and means of relating this 'rich, vital and meaningful'
Narrative Strategies: Past and Present

theatre with its 'theatrical devices, half curtains, masks, improvisations, music and mime' with the 'city dwellers' like him. He felt he could do it in Hayavadana. Taking the story from Kathasaritasagara, and Thomas Mann's further psychological development of the story in The Transposed Heads, Karnad experimented with masks and music in the tradition of the folk theatre, and moved closer to the oral tradition in his Nagamandala. What attracted Karnad to the folk theatre was its 'energy' that seemed to 'uphold tradition' on the one hand, but at the same time had 'the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head'. He did exactly this kind of experimentation in Hayavadana, and its success in urban centres is because of this very reason. The complex urban mind would not be happy with the mere upholding of traditional values. Karnad learnt the 'potentiality of non-naturalistic techniques' from Bertolt Brecht though he realised that in India the 'alienation effect' was never required. I have dwelt at length with Karnad because he gives a detailed personal account of his experiments and experiences in a succinct and clear manner, running through the entire gamut of tradition, contemporaneity, India and the West in his search for the right Indian theatre. Besides, as Balachandra Nemade has so rightly observed, 'of all the forms of literature, it is Drama that seems to have preserved the vestige of oral culture within its structure'.

Unlike Karnad, a writer like Balachandra Nemade, through the course of his explorations, has arrived at extreme traditionalist views. Nemade (1994) is pulled to the Nativist extreme of oral forms of literature and is unwilling to admit or even in the least succumb to the influence of the western modes of thinking and writing. His fascination for the act of oral communication with its 'visual and auditory participation, high degree of interaction between living persons present in the communication link' makes him reflect sadly on the increasing loss and redundancy of this mode of literary communication. He prizes the 'paralinguistic features of orality', its 'gestures', 'facial expressions', 'bodily movements', 'choreography', forming a subsystem of 'entire body language'. Nemade observes that the 'written culture' can only boast of '24 of the 1652 distinct languages spoken in our country'. His is a case heavily loaded against the cultural elitism of the educated, speaking for the unlettered masses of India, steeped in a rich and varied oral literature. Being a Marathi writer himself, he gives the example of the Warkaris who have recently extended their regional centres where the Dindis meet twice
a year, singing *kirtans*, *bhajans* and *garuds* at night, educating and entertaining the villagers and moving on. Though Nemade does not talk openly about his own works as Karnad does, it is understood that such an orientation would be reflected in his literary outpourings in unique ways, blending his contemporary mind with the rich traditional tapestry with which he is so familiar and intimate.

Unlike Nemade, but close to his thinking, U.R. Ananthmurthy is haunted by a sense of identity crisis. It is not dissimilar from Karnad’s, but Ananthmurthy (1982) does not trace the full course of the crisis and his attempts at resolution. Nemade’s identification with the oral tradition and Warkaris and his complete disregard for the western modes of thinking and writing, perhaps save him from this crisis. But the cases of Karnad (as we have seen) and Ananthmurthy (as we will see) are different. Ananthmurthy contends that: ‘many of our regional languages, despite their rich literary traditions, were actually preserved by illiteracy; for the literate in our country have always acquired the language of the ruling elites, whether it was Sanskrit, Persian, or English’. Ananthmurthy’s primary concern, as we can see here is with the writer’s choice of language, which he feels is a ‘moral choice’. Though a writer can be influenced by western literatures, he need not choose English as his language. Ananthmurthy chooses Kannada, but here too he has a problem. Kannada may have a literary tradition of a thousand years, but the contemporary writer can only use the ‘current language that has become a part of his experience in his own lifetime’. Not being able to wish away (also, not wanting to) English and the impact of western literatures, the writer would endeavour to embody in his language of choice ideas that belong to another language and culture. This, the writer might be able to do. But the problem lies elsewhere. Modern Kannada itself in this process of modernization, distanced itself from the language of the illiterate peasant of this same region. Ananthmurthy is haunted by the image of this peasant who has actually preserved the vigour of the root language, because he is illiterate. Unfortunately, the writer is unable to establish communication with this vital figure, distanced as he is both by language and culture. And to bridge the gap would be to educate this peasant away from the vigour and vitality of his language and make him ‘a man of the sideways looking middle class, like me’. It is indeed a situation of crisis, very pessimistically put, and without any resolution in sight. And yet, I feel, that working under such a creative tension would perhaps do something to the language of
The text discusses the concept of "moral choice" and how it mediates between the peasant attraction and the western attraction. It also examines the work of writers like Nemade, Ananthmurthy, Karnad, and Nirmal Verma, focusing on the struggle of Indian writers to find their authentic selves in the context of colonial uprootedness. The text analyzes how the Indian writer must pass through various stages of metamorphosis to arrive at their authentic self. It highlights the contrast between the peasant and the western influences, and how these writers' works reflect the challenge of European education in undermining India's sense of 'time', 'space', and 'selfhood'. The text also comments on the de-Indianization of the Indian in the context of European influence, and the impact on the Indian's own understanding of 'self'. The author concludes by expressing the importance of reaching into the heart of the matter.
To experience this process of de-Indianisation and then be able to return to one’s own sense of time, space and selfhood is the fate of the sensitive Indian writer. Verma gives the example of Ajneya. Verma himself would be an example.

Verma seems to have arrived at the philosophical crux of the matter when he talks of time structures and notions of selfhood. The mythical framework of thinking that is part of the oral tradition that Kamad, Nemade and Ananthmurthy feel is the essence of the Indian past was seriously challenged by the spirit of history that European education introduced. The historical notions of time and its emphasis on the emerging individuation of a particular race, nation or individual clashed with the ātmā paramātmā notions of time, eternity and selfhood that was the basis of oral narrative structures. The oral narrative structures were mythical superstructures built through centuries on which the individual narrator innovated quietly in the act of passing it on to the future. The individuality of the narrator was unimportant and so was his historical position. The written historical structures opened fields of individual self-exploration that was attractive on the one hand, but also lonely and private. But even here, the propelling force was to merge the individual self into a symbolic life, into the historical forces, into the spirit of history. This autobiographical imperative is perhaps the strongest attraction in contemporary times. But this does not in any way exclude innovative narrative experimentation that would come to terms with both the individual and the vast mythical or historical past essential for symbolizing the self. Indian writers who write in English, based in India or abroad, have made remarkable experiments in narrative strategies, perhaps because the challenge is greater. The past and one’s roots make their own demands on a language that might not be ideally suited for the purpose. A Kannada writer or a Bengali writer based in his/her region is closer through his/her language to regional and ancestral roots as well as the immediate reality around, rather than a displaced Indian writer based in England, America or regionally displaced within India.

Salman Rushdie (1991) makes two important statements in ‘Imaginary Homelands’ that sharply delineates his difference from the traditionalists and even the middle path holders. One is in his attitude towards the past and the other in his attitude towards the use of the English language. He talks of the past as a ‘loss’, a ‘country from which we have all emigrated’. He feels that the writer who is ‘out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss
in an intensified form'. Thus, he talks of the broken mirror of the past with many of the pieces lost and builds a positive force out of this loss and fragmentation when he says; 'writers are no longer sages, dispensing the wisdom of centuries'. This he calls the 'guru-illusion' (of the oral narrative tradition may be). Writers have been forced by 'cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps modernism forced upon them'. But this displacement, this fragmentation, this distance can actually give the writer a clearer, more open and comprehensive perspective: 'insiders and outsiders... this stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of a “whole vision” (of the sages of the oral tradition)’ (brackets, mine). It is with this globalized perspective that the writer can get a multidimensional perspective on his homeland, its past and his own past with an imagination that 'opens the universe' 'a little more', in its reconstruction. About the use of English, Rushdie has an interesting thing to say both for the Indian writer writing in English and for the British Indian writer. One, ‘it needs remaking for our own purposes’ and secondly, this ‘linguistic struggle is a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between cultures, within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free’. Both these categories can be clubbed together in his phrase: ‘we are translated men’. People say ‘something always gets lost in translation’. But Rushdie obstinately clings to the view: ‘something can also be gained’. All this applies to both categories of writers writing in English, with the exception that ‘the British Indian writer simply does not have the option of rejecting English anyway’.

Much of what Rushdie says would be applicable to the Indian writer within India writing in English, barring the ‘out of country’ loss. Shashi Deshpande, whose father was a Kannada writer, mother a Marathi, tries to locate her preference for English. In The Power Within, Shashi Deshpande (2000) makes certain basic observations about a contemporary writer’s struggle, on the one hand to find one’s own voice and individuality, and at the same time feeling a sense of isolation in the absence of a community that is physically present. Writing in English and being a woman add a greater challenge in this struggle. In an introspective tone, she recapitulates: ‘In a sense it was due to my father as well that I was educated in English. Knowing his deep love for his own language Kannada, and for Sanskrit literature, this seems surprising. Perhaps it was
because my mother and he had two different languages that he opted for a third, a neutral one. Perhaps it was a feeling that it gave us the freedom to move throughout the country. Most of the writers who write in English in India have either mixed parentage, or are displaced regionally, or belong to a community that uses English as its first language, or have been moved by the beauty of the language itself. Some major problems confront the writer. Prominent among these is the fact that many of the characters featuring within a work do not speak English, and also that many of the readers to whom the writer would like to communicate are not comfortable with English. Nevertheless, as Deshpande observes: ‘English is an amazingly flexible and versatile language’. She must have felt within herself what Rushdie had called ‘the linguistic struggle, the struggle between cultures within ourselves and influences at work upon our societies’. And to conquer English must have given her a feeling of freedom that would come from the Empire writing back, in its own terms, using the medium of its subjugation. Rushdie had earlier emphasized that English ‘needs remaking for our own purposes’. The other problem that Deshpande talks of needs serious consideration: ‘there was a sense of isolation; I was part of no writer’s group, neither physically, nor literally’. One can understand about the physical part because in the regional languages with their geographical bases, it would not be too difficult to have such groups of writers. But in English, there is a national and international diffusal that is very difficult to cope with. But it is possible to have a literal group both at the virtual and the real level. This seeking of a community is—at a more fundamental level—a symptom of the urge to merge one’s individual created self into the flow of a symbolic life that earlier, in the oral tradition, was part of a pre-existing communal structure of beliefs, values and rituals on which the individual narrator innovated anonymously.

Section 2 : The Past

With so much of reference to the tradition of oral narratives of the past coming up, it might be fruitful to examine the structures and components of these ancient literary expressions, that comprise our collective past. First, I will try to probe deeper into the structural complexities of these narratives through what I feel are two essays with exceptional insights. Then I will try to explore some of the contents of these narratives, ranging from the religious, the moral,
the socio-political, the romantic and the erotic. I hope to arrive at some kind of complex collective superstructure of values, beliefs and rituals that still might hold the interest for the contemporary mind. At the same time, I will try to weigh the advantage of the autobiographical imperative of the individuated self in a historical context as against the anonymity formula of the orally transmitted community text immersed in mythical time structures.

Vidya Niwas Mishra (1994) identifies the roles of these narratives. The primary role was integrating ‘all life... universalizing the basic emotions’. This role, he felt, was what caused ‘the aesthetic vibration... by the use of metaphor and imagery, rhythmic patterns and assonances of both word and meaning’. The secondary role was educative: ‘to kindle the imaginative faculty of the child’ and to ‘inculcate a perfected art of communication’. The secondary role saw to it that the accumulated and collective recollections of the past did not remain a thing of the past but became a living force, constantly getting embedded in our life. The primary role saw to the incantatory and aesthetic quality essential for empathizing, enjoying and memorizing. Though there is a scope for the individual narrator to innovate both in the gestured telling and in the aesthetic poetic quality of the words and the tale, and quietly adding a new angle, or detail, it would ultimately become a part of a continuing structure into which the innovations of the individual narrator blended quietly. The name of the innovator was unimportant. These were the ākhyānās, meaning ‘the act of making something well known through oral transmission’. Yet there was scope for individuality. Kathās and gāthās in prose and verse forms were based on plots imagined by the author. Mishra gives examples of a few narratives. The voice of Thunder (Prajapati) in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad is his first example. Besides the features identified by Mishra in this narrative, there are some more having contemporary significance that came to my mind. In a unique way, this episode represents the symbolic and sound origins of language where the symbol and the sound contain multiplicity of narratives that could flow out of it depending on the perspective of the listener and also the interpretation and further narration. The same sound ‘da’ is interpreted differently by the gods, the demons and the humans. Secondly, it reveals the fundamental poetic nature of communication and transmission, which is in the silence that exists as space between the speaker and the listener (later, the writer and the reader). Later, when I take up the implicit narratives in a book of poems or a book of short stories, this
will be of great importance. In this silence and space are future narratives born. Thirdly, it is a metaphor for the movement of narrative from its poetic mythical origins into the flow of history, from the divine to the human, from eternity into time.

The second narrative, which is a folklore related to the autumn festival, similarly highlights further qualities of narrative structures. The girl (daughter of the folk singer) triumphs over her cursed fate through the power of sequential and ritualistic action and its narration. If the Upanisadic story had highlighted the magical symbolic quality of the chanted word as containing multiplicity of narrative meaning, here we move into narrative proper. The fate of the girl cursed to widowhood, is tested on a calf, a tree, a stone (she is married to these in sequence) with disastrous results as she circumambulates around them. On being left to her lonely fate, she does a kind of ritualistic backward movement of circumambulation and restores the rock and then gains a handsome prince as husband. On being questioned by her father on his return, she reconstructs the story forward till its crucial point. Such seems to be the power of being able to ritualistically connect, organize the fragments of life sequentially into a whole, the power of narrative. I was fascinated by the way Mishra recounts and analyses these stories. But most of the inference is my own. Such is the power of Mishra’s narrative in this essay. Mishra has another extremely fascinating narrative (it is in the telling) that forms the fulcrum of Brhatkatha.

It is not a mere coincidence that Gulam Mohammad Sheikh (1994), in “Story of the Tongue and the Text: The Narrative Tradition”, begins his talk with a detailed structure of Somadeva’s Kathasaritasagara, which is believed to be an abridged version of Guṇḍāhyya’s Brhatkatha. One is able to draw interesting inferences from both these versions, Sheikh’s and Mishra’s. First is the divine origin, Śiva telling Parvati stories of love and adventure about the Vidyadhara who were capable of traversing several worlds. The divine world of the Devas was rejected by Śiva because they were too self-contained and complacent. The human world was rejected because mortals were perennially in distress and total chaos prevailed. Already the stories have begun the process of negotiating between the eternal celestial heights and the temporal depths of the human world, via the Vidyādhāras. But the complex pattern of this two-way journey is through the two Ganas. The first one, Puṣpadanta, is cursed by Pārvāti for eavesdropping while the stories were being told by Śiva in the secret inner chamber. He is to be born into a
cycle of lives as a mortal and as Vararuci, the great grammarian. The second Gana, pleading for mercy, meets a similar fate but succeeds in managing a boon of deliverance. Interestingly, the deliverance has connection with forgetting and remembering, of thinking backward and narrating forward. The first Gana, having forgotten the tales due to the curse, would be able to remember only after he met an earth spirit Yaksha, reborn as a demon, a Pisaca, in the deep Vindhyā forest. The stories would have to be told to this Yaksha, who in turn would tell them to the second Gana, now reborn as Guṇādhya, the archetypal disseminator of the Brhatkatha. Guṇādhya in turn would be delivered from the curse by narrating the stories to mortals in the human world. To remember the stories, he inscribes them in blood on barks of trees in the forest and when spumed by the king for this grotesque and gory act, he decides to consecrate them to fire. Seven series are thus destroyed. Only the eighth survives as he tells it to the birds and animals and the repentant king comes to hear them. Several intriguing features, both at the level of structure and content, exist in the superstructure itself. The curse of the failure of memory is the greatest curse as it closes the path of deliverance. Deliverance is linked to recovery of memory, reintegrating parts into a whole, and the ability to narrate forward in a complex organized sequence. Just narrating would not do. They would have to be shared and passed on into the future, into the complex human world. The stories of love and adventure, the most potent excitants of human energy, would involve and trap into the mesh of human desires and aspirations out of sheer curiosity. Curiosity, thus, is a central motif. It is curiosity that lies behind the curse on the Ganas. But release from this cycle of human desires and aspirations, symbolized in the stories, is by remembering and narrating in an organized fashion so that the mind of the new generation is caught in this mesh of human relationships. They, in turn, would similarly seek their release in a chain of stories that connect generation to generation through a complex network of universalized human desires, emotions, aspirations that belong to the entire community, a collective memory into which the individual narrator can introduce his own little innovation quietly. Deliverance means to be released back to the divine fold from where one had fallen. Recovery of memory and sequence of the originating stories entails a kind of vision that goes back to Śiva and Pārvatī. The vision behind the stories lies in the traversing mediation between the eternal, divine, perfectly patterned world and the temporal, human, imperfect
and chaotic world, that symbolically only the Vidyadharas could emblemize.

Looking at the complex superstructure revealed through these stories, it is possible to read the existence and persistence of certain central motifs, though vastly transformed in the contemporary context. Leaving aside the complex ritualistic network of Gods, Vidyādharas, Yakṣas, Devas, Piśācas, demons, mortals that formed the structures of belief of that time, one is intrigued by the fabulous time structures that hold the stories within stories framework, where eternity and time, myth and history are woven in a rich tapestry. The individual narrator is lost in the collected and collective maze, but lost happily because there is no individual or personal emotion that goes unrepresented in this maze of stories. It is possible to merge and universalize oneself just through the act of narrating, simultaneously imparting just that unique individual gesture or tone that adds a special flavour to the performance. From here, when we move to contemporary times, the crux of the matter lies in the inner imperative to universalize something that is personal. In doing so one can feel that one’s life, emotions, experiences, thinking, values are part of a symbolic life. It gives a sense of meaning and a kind of release from the sense of isolated individuality that can become extremely disturbing and depressing. Today, one would read this as an autobiographical imperative that is central to the act of writing. The problem is that this autobiographical act is full of uncertainty and peril in the absence (or breakdown) of the collective superstructure of narrative that gave the ancient individual narrator a sense of belonging within which he could innovate. The peril and uncertainty at that time was in the loss of memory and the isolation and cursed situation it created.

Section 3 : Contemporary Texts

There is a metaphor in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* that poignantly poses a problem peculiar to our times, and to our post-colonial situation, specially highlighting the case of the Indian writer writing in English. When Rahel returns to the history site where the two major dramas in the story had taken place (Velutha’s death and Sophie Mol’s death), the history site has been transformed. From the haunted and haunting ruins of a colonial past, it has become a starred hotel catering to foreign (American and European mainly) tourists. To this hotel, the Kathakali dancers come, bringing their
traditional dance form born in the backwaters of their ancient land, carrying stories and legends as old as time, into which they secretly pour their own stories, emotions, passions. The emotions and passions in the \textit{Mahabharata} easily and intensely correlate with individual emotions and passions in the life and imagination of the dancers. But to cater to the short attention span of the tourists (there is the problem of communicating the language and grammar), they have to edit and mould their performance to twenty-minute slots, displaying only the most eye-catching, dazzling and showy movements. But while returning, they stop the night at the Ayemenem temple, and through the night, intoxicated and delirious, the pent up stories pour out as they dance for themselves, their gods, and pay their respect to their ancient art (its language and grammar) and its mysterious ways. Caught between the dollar dazzle (money, money, money, it is a rich man’s world), the inner demands of their creative urges, and the discipline of their art form (its strict language and grammar), a strange kind of complexity is born.

I do not know how much of a personal statement is hidden in this metaphor, but Roy’s own art seems to be caught within the complexes of this precarious and subtle negotiation. There are some stories embedded deep in memory, childhood, that need to be told, ghosts exorcised. These stories have rooted connections to one’s land, one’s mother tongue, native culture and traditions (Kerala, Syrian Christians) and at the same time come to terms with contemporary changes and the coming of the modern world. On the one hand, the language and the style of telling the stories have to deal with the vocabulary of childhood, the naming of the land, its customs and history, and on the other hand, if the language is English (which it is in this case), it has to keep an international readership, with its standards and values, steadily in focus.

At a more general level, this becomes a negotiation between the personal and the universal, home and the world, the regional, the national and the international. Centrally, I see it as a constant negotiation between the autobiographical imperative and the demands of fiction. The first is always there, either openly or in a hidden way, in all creative expression. The scope of the second is mostly determined by language and culture specific factors (\textit{Bhasha} literatures or English, in this case). Here, as I have earlier pointed out, we are dealing with Indian writers (poets, novelists, short story writers and playwrights) writing in English. And interestingly, because of the friction between the mother tongue and English, the
colonial hangover and postcolonial carry over, the bifurcated tongue and its cultural clash, creative writers can feel the challenge at its utmost. Thus, I have chosen writers (writing in English) who: (a) Have displayed strong regional connections in their texts and have felt its tension with the modern mind and the so-called contemporary worldwide standards and interests. (b) Have created texts concerned with contemporary Indian middle class urban society that are delicately balanced between the traditional ethics and modern global values. Finally, I have chosen (c) first and second-generation diasporic Indian writers representing exile, nostalgia, global identities and an intense quest for roots. All the texts display richly different narrative strategies, trying to bridge the gap between home and the world, or trying to create channels of communication between native roots and globetrotting minds. In doing so all the texts examined create fascinating experimental narrative crossovers from the autobiographical to the fictional and back.

In *The God of Small Things*, the autobiographical imperative is very strong and there is a subtle, technically achieved border crossing between autobiography and fiction. The third person narrative of Rahel is thinly disguised fiction using the technique of autobiographical narrative strategies of an absent narrator. The return to the past, one’s home, childhood, and, the history site littered with traces from the past, memories, fragments, ruins, to an altered reality that is still good enough to reconstruct a story—are these not the building blocks of autobiography? Add to this the present riddled with haunting ghost images from chaotic, half-understood past (due to childhood and adolescent innocence) crying out for a narrative order. The achieving of this order would perhaps help in the process of exorcising guilt, remorse, seething anger (at being used, manipulated, when one was too young to understand), regaining composure and gaining a maturity of perspective that only time can bring through the narrative. The centrality of Rahel’s perspective is another narrative strategy that has strong autobiographical connections. Rahel’s own description of herself down to the details of her ‘absurdly beautiful collar bones’, ‘wild hair tied back to look straight though it wasn’t’, and ‘tiny diamond gleaming in one nostril’ is a sharply etched self portrait as anyone looking at the author’s picture can immediately recognize. But the creation of the twins is the coup de etat. It is a finely thought out psychological ploy capturing the fracturing of a child’s innocent holistic world by adult manipulation. The thinking narrating mind of Rahel and the
perpetrating acting self of Estha, innocently, incoherently doing things leading to disastrous events, are twin parts of the same fragmented self, separated and seeking the healing, comforting union (sexual?) for peace, composure and release from the tense, tortured, knotted, termite-like self-reproach and remorse. The narrative leads to this union, thus seeking of a lost sense of wholeness and balance. In the beginning 'Esthapen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us'. Then later: 'now she thinks of Estha, Rahel as Them. Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks, Limits have appeared like a team of trolls in their separate horizons'. Towards the end of the narrative, the intense scene of incest has to be read in the symbolic light of the regaining of the lost oneness after the fragmented parts have been able to simultaneously come to terms with their essential innocence and sharing it in a world that has otherwise slipped by and altered irrevocably.

Deep down, the compulsion to narrate is entrenched in the recognition of an ancient tale being retold innovatively and originally due to the pressures of immediate and current circumstances and situations. This tale is the age-old tale of love laws being broken (Ammu and Velutha's story is its latest reincarnation) and the nemesis this calls upon itself. The tone is of defiance of the love laws to the point of the celebration of incest (breaking the first primal love law) in the most beautiful and symbolic manner. But 'however for practical purposes, in a hopelessly practical world' a plot is constructed and a story told about things that began with a Plymouth journey to Cochin. This merging of a contemporary personal story into an archetypal ancient tale, and the need to make it coherent to the practical needs of a hopelessly practical world—does this not bring the metaphor of the Kathakali dancers back into focus?

Though the Booker jury is by no means being equated to the foreign tourists sitting and watching the Kathakali performance in the History House site (the new starred Hotel), it is not too difficult to notice some of the features of the story that might have been an instant hit with the jury (well aimed by the author or otherwise). But we must not forget here that the book we are reading is also not a twenty-minute slot performance to please and entertain these foreigners. This book contains the entire dance, even the one danced in the Ayemenem temple through the night. A dance that has no element of show or attention catching stunts, but is a genuine expression of deep inner feelings being poured into an archetypal tale, in a classical fundamental form. Thus, the book becomes a
curious blend of certain perennial, evergreen storyline interests (the love tragedy angle), a classically perfect circular narrative structure innovating on autobiographical fiction, an almost revolutionary use of the English language (born, as we shall see, out of an intense inner necessity, rather than being just an eye-catching stunt), and a bitter critical awareness of our times and its many fads and fallacies (which Roy uses to her full advantage). In this last, there is a possibility of reading the twenty-minute slot stunts. Roy has caught the pulse of the present, post-colonial, post-modern, post-Marxist, feminist mood and capitalized on it, though it is so much a part of the genuine personal anger in the novel that I, for one, cannot fully agree with this criticism. If Roy’s mind and moods in her text (communicated through Rahel) coincide with a major section of existing minds and moods all over the world, she should not be blamed for it. Thus, it is very difficult to say where the inner compulsions of the storyteller are working and where, it is only for ‘practical purposes’. Interestingly, the storyteller has herself metaphorically and through statements (as we have seen), given the tools for this criticism.

The playful use of the English language, appropriate to the child’s eye perspective that is being reconstructed, is very much a part of the Indian child’s process of learning the language with landmark texts and English movies featured prominently (Lochinvar, Julius Caesar, Sound of Music). It is a colonial and post-colonial experience that many will immediately recognize as a part of their own childhood and education. Playing with grammar and pronunciation is part of the learning process in children and at the same time, this becomes a classic case of the empire writing back. This kind of use of language also helps in maintaining a tone that never gets philosophical and sentimental but playfully dissolves all pretensions of serious intent, hiding a bitter adult anger, resentment, and feeling of having been used while innocent. It strikes out by making the adult world ridiculous, pompous, selfish and ridden with hypocrisy. All this goes very well with contemporary intellectual views in the west. Add to this the breakdown of the grand narratives of the past, symbolized through the title itself. This is a book embodying the little narratives about the god of small things, neglected things, oppressed and suppressed things. The grand narratives of the grand gods (Christianity, religious, spiritual ideals and philosophies, politics, social moral laws, Marxism, even Nature itself, like the river Meenachal, has been tamed and civilized) have outlived their
prominence and degenerated into hypocrisy and deceit, or been commercialized beyond recovery. All this, rather than playing to the galleries of the western readership, is presented with a lot of seething anger and bitterness against certain clogs in the system and community depicted. The slow seething poison injected during the innocence of childhood has to be brought out into the open, the agents exposed, made public and universal, so that the hurt is cured through a subtle revenge. The revenge is the transfer of the private anger into the public mind as it recognizes the malaise that has been targeted. The semi autobiographical fiction achieves this through its narrative strategies.

But other autobiographical fiction might not be this neat, circular and complete. Other narrative strategies have also been used. Example can be made of the use of the drifting, linear narrative of a drifting life as used by Pankaj Mishra (2000). Roy's novel has innovated on a set autobiographical structure of moving backward in memory from a defined narrative present (Rahel's return to Ayemenem), picking up fragments from the chaotic, half understood past and reconstructing them in a forward moving narration till it reaches that same present, altered now by the coherence and holistic vision (Rahel's and Estha's silent and perfect understanding, expressed in their union) that the narrative has achieved. Mishra's story selects a marked point of beginning (that winter when Samar came to Benaras) from the past, with no hint of the present state of the narrator, and meanders through a series of experiences and locations to no definite conclusion, no significant resolution. Otherwise, Mishra uses the straightforward first person autobiographical narrative structure and the fiction often seems to be only in the name. The main motivation of the story seems to be the depiction of Samar's voyage of self discovery as he moves through a succession of significant relationships and events, revealing a host of characters in various stages of their impossible romantic quests, dreamers in the face of the death of dreams. Ultimately it becomes an open-ended spiritual and metaphysical journey.

The language of the novel being English, it has to keep an international readership in mind. We had seen how Roy's work had successfully negotiated this precarious cultural bridge between Ayemenem and the world. Mishra's trump card is Benaras. The romantics' club (sorry for putting it like this) is an international club. This is a story of people who live through their imagination and dreams in hopelessly realistic times. Also, this is an international phenomenon, not country or culture
specific. It is a story of unconventional lives with a strange meeting of east and west. For me, living and teaching in Allahabad University, there are many Samars, Anaads and Rajeshes around me who drift away into the unknown. Mishra's own days in Allahabad, Benaras, Dharamshala, form the backdrop, and the centrality of Samar's mind has the author's signature spread out finely throughout the text. But it is Benaras that gets Samar (you could read Mishra here) in touch with the world. Benaras still attracts a lot of foreigners, with its mysterious blend of the traditional and the modern, the spiritual and the secular. Samar's mind is the centre of the various different paths. He is caught between diverse worlds. There is the global world that is opened to him by Miss West, Catherine, Mark. On the other hand there are his own native roots that are fundamentally no different from Anand's or Rajesh's. Only circumstantially, he is in a peculiar urban position where he does not belong to either, yet can relate to both in the course of a meandering, almost destinationless drift which becomes the ultimate spiritual reality underlying the various and varying lives (east and west) narrated.

Samar's mind is able to maintain an ideal narrative balance between subjective involvement in the story and the detached distance to see other lives objectively. He is an avid reader seeking an intellectual academic high, drifting away from his traditional Brahmanical moorings, sucked into the vortex of a shattering cross-cultural drama through his obsessive love for Catherine and his companionship with Miss West, essentially preserved through his deep-rooted philosophical strength of detachment that can only be a part of his inheritance. Rajesh, interestingly, is the flipside of Samar's quest, a grim possibility growing out of similar roots. He has grass root level credentials; rural poverty is the green card here. Samar, from this point of view, is the dispossessed urban self, seeking non-annihilating grass root contact. Rajesh's own story is sad, as he moves from his love for Faiz and Iqbal to organized east UP crime. But it is a sad story of many students from rural backgrounds in UP, in a tragic representative manner. The best part of Rajesh's story is his tragic zeal to keep Samars's idealism alive by trying to provide undisturbed time and space to him, as a kind of subtle Godfather (though the caste factor is important). Maybe he wants to see his own dreams realized in Samar, with a kind of foreknowledge of his ultimate fate. Mishra is here in home grounds with his student days in Allahabad and Benaras fresh and raw. The autobiographical strain is very strong.
Anand is another imaginary take off from the same grass root level reality, absurdly balanced between his poverty-stricken Bihar roots (not too far from east UP), and the dreamed glamour of Parisian life. If Samar is a fumbling intellectual, bred in the Oxford of the East, Anand represents intense traditional creative talent (bred in the Gharanas of Benaras), faltering in a competitive world in an attempt to secure a footing. All are dreamers (Romantics) in a hopelessly real world. The contents of the dreams, though various in forms, are essentially the same. It is to escape from the confines of their immediate realities—whose octopus-like tentacles hold them fast—into a vaster richer life that the world holds like a mirage before their eyes. Be it through the competitive exams leading to bureaucratic bliss (of the IAS), or academic intellectual recognition, artistic achievement, or political ambitions, the nation and the world beckons. Mishra, as a student in Benaras and Allahabad, must have been one among many such dreamers around him.

Interestingly, the west (Miss West is not just a casual name), the land of dreams, comes to the east in Benaras, bringing its own load of dreamers, their sorrows and their unfulfilled quests. Perhaps dreamers and romantics all over the world and in different times have a spiritual similarity as Rajesh so poignantly realizes reading Edmund Wilson's essay on Flaubert's novel Sentimental Education: 'it is the story of my life. I know these people well. Your hero, Edmund Wilson, he also knows them.' Miss West, apparently an independent, individual white woman, seems quite self-possessed, self-sufficient in her eastern solitude. She is patroness, friend to Samar, the connecting thread in his relationship with a new, vaster world. Yet she is lost in her own silent tragedy, her own romantic, indefinite, secret waiting for her clandestine meetings, Catherine, a white beautiful vision capable of transporting Anand with his Sitar dreams and Samar with his aimless intellectual drift from their grim sordid realities into another world (a passport to bliss)—yet caught in her own confused quest for an impossible love, an impossible ideal to which she could give herself completely. Then there is Mark, an American, a wandering adventurer seeking relationships and a culture to which he can devote himself. They are all drifting romantics, seeking the impossible in a world that is either spoilt by over opulence and systematization of middle class materialism, or by a glaring savage poverty and its accompanying vices of superficial glamour, lopsided wealth and power. The narrative meanders through these relationships over a selected time span, with strong autobiographical overtones and undertones.
Autobiographically, both the novels by Roy and Mishra are located in places with which the authors had intense relationships, spanning their childhood and youth. In the process of fictionalizing, the novels strategically equate this home and region to the world using the English language, with its peculiar global position and colonial history in our land, as a proper medium for this connection. Mishra's fiction makes a metaphysical equation between the self (autobiographical) with its east UP moorings and origins, and the world in an expansive outward movement, revealing how the essential human situations, despite differences, can relate. Is the English language, with its global baggage of accessories the fit medium for such an undertaking? Samar's use of the language is convincing because in India, with the kind of emphasis on English in the convent schools, or even some of the other non-convent schools (post-colonial, if you may say), Samars do exist (Mishra himself is the apt example). But Rajesh, or for that matter maybe even Anand, does not have this colonial privilege. In fact, many youngsters from rural UP and Bihar are like these young men, and their lack of fluency in English does become a kind of obstacle in opening out to the international experience that the novel explores. But Samar is interestingly poised, as we had noticed, between this vernacular (Desi or Bhasha) culture and the wider world that English opens. Mishra's debut novel takes its flight from this fundamental post-colonial truth. Roy's strategies in negotiating between home and the world, as we had seen earlier, were remarkably different from Mishra's. But both move outward into the world from regional roots.

In a book of short stories, or even poems, each poem or short story is self-contained and self-sufficient. Thus, they can create breaks and fragments in the total continuous structure of the book; dislocate the centrality of the narrating or narrated protagonist. This discontinuity, in the flow of the evolution of the centralized self or persona, can distract the reader from the secret autobiographical motives that might be self-evident in a novel. Nevertheless, such motives exist and find devious means, as we shall see, creating subtler nuances in narrative strategies. Implicit (as opposed to the explicit in the novel) narrative connections might bind poems and short stories within a book. It is for the reader to read these connections that create a greater story that moves from poem to poem or story to story in silent jumps. The only hints and clues that the poet or storyteller might leave could be either in the order in which the stories or poems exist or in the selection of certain stories and poems that
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relate to each other in mysterious ways. Such a secret and implicit narrative can be noticed in Jhumpa Lahiri’s (1999) debut book of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, for which she received the Pulitzer award. I will select a few of her stories and try to show how a larger story gets revealed if the reader is able to see the hidden connections. Let us begin with the end, that is the last story, ‘The Third and Final Continent’, which in fact, is the beginning, bringing Eliot’s autobiographical lines in *Four Quartets* to mind: ‘In my end is my beginning’ and also ‘in my beginning is my end’. The story is a first person autobiographical narrative of a first-generation Bengali immigrant settler in the US. The culture conflicts and tensions, the problems of adjustment, the difficult days, the arranged marriage, the bride from a conservative background, her culture shock and ways of coping, have a strong ring of the particular and the individual in the telling of the story. But at the same time, the story blends into the stories of thousands of first-generation Bengali settlers in a representative and universal statement. In fact, it could be a story told by a father to a child as the child grows up, of how he migrated to a different country, left his roots behind, brought his wife (the child’s mother) to the new land and gradually settled. It has been recognized as the story of Lahiri’s parents, her own diasporic origins, thus a kind of beginning for her own fictionalized autobiographical stories. What needs to be further noticed is the manner in which this story connects in a flowing narrative to other stories in the collection. For example, ‘When Mr Pirzada came to Dine’ and ‘Mrs Sen’s’ could be seen as a continuation of the parent’s story as they settle into American lifestyle, yet retain their Bengali roots. The first of these stories introduces the child’s eye perspective (the author as a child) into the narrative. I see it as a subtle fictional introduction of the author into the text. One can notice the formative second-generation immigrant child’s experience as she sees the story told by her father in ‘The Third and Final Continent’ continue. The wide-eyed culture shock settles and the Bengali couple (the child’s parents) get used to American life. At the same time, they maintain their own culture rhythm, seeking compatriots (Mr Pirzada), follow socio-political upheavals and partition pangs in the subcontinent from neutral territory. All along, the child grows into American culture, studies American history, American geography, participates in Halloween rituals, but is acutely conscious of a difference in her own roots through her awareness of her parents’ other parallel life. Lahiri’s own childhood is reflected in Lilia’s narration. To take the metaphor
further, one could look at ‘Mrs Sen’s’. This could easily be a continuation of Mala’s story of her adjustment spilling over from ‘The Third and Final Continent’. Mrs Sen is still living another rhythm of life, following another calendar of rituals belonging to the land from which she hails. She follows another food cycle with her Bengali obsession with fresh fish. It is very difficult for her to adjust to American lifestyle. Finally, she even rejects the freedom that driving can afford, and the change in pace that it could introduce into her life. Yet she symbolizes the mother figure so central in Bengali culture, and with her innate motherly affection, reaches out far deeper into the innocent heart of the American Elliot than his own mother, who has other priorities into which she fits Elliot.

‘Sexy’ and ‘A Temporary Affair’ move deeper into the stories of second-generation Bengali men and women as they grow into a different culture. This age group is closer to the author’s own age group and thus, can be read as a continuation from the child narrator persona to a distant third person narration of major cross-cultural (culture clash) and adjustment issues that young Indians face. These young Indians, like the author, are far more American than Bengali (than their parents), yet India exists somewhere in their maps as a point of reference that keeps on coming. Identity has to be defined, values reorganized, and it is a precarious balancing act. Though these stories are openly fictional in style, the autobiographical imperative is very strong in the issues being objectively (only in style) explored. In ‘A Temporary Affair’, Shukumar’s laid back easy going lifestyle (very Indian?) is in stark contrast to Shobha’s very American mechanized routine that leaves little time for leisure and introspection. The baby metaphorically would have been (is) a symbol of domestic involvement and family ties. Shobha’s involvement with her work at one level is a kind of escape from the mental depression that the loss of the baby would have wreaked on her. At another level, it is the takeover of the American way of life as a counterfoil to the excessive domestic involvement of Indian womanhood. Is Shukumar’s refusal to get into the flow of American professional life a deep Indian resistance? The drifting apart is circumstantial and implicit in such a situation. The forced togetherness in the power cut situation throws these various tensions into sharp focus. For Lahiri, these conflicts and tensions are not mere fiction. They are part of her own situational exploration—metaphors and fictions of the self.

Similarly, in ‘Sexy’, questions of marriage, loyalty, fidelity, extramarital relationships, are explored both from gender-specific
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and culture-specific points of view. The American lifestyle, with its emphasis on individuality and privacy, allows for casual flings in a way which the fundamental Indian culture with its family-oriented values does not. This could create serious disturbances in relationships, as the backdrop story of Lakshmi's cousin emphasizes. This cousin's trauma and the child's confused situation is to highlight this crisis. But the foreground story of Dev and Miranda, without passing any moral value judgement, explores the beauty of an extramarital relationship in the face of sneaking infidelity. Looming disturbingly in the back of her mind is Miranda's full scale realization of Lakshmi's cousin's trauma. The two stories taken up, in a way, continue the cross-cultural conflict that is very much a part of Lahiri's own experience of second generation Bengali youth in the US.

In theatre, where the singular narrative voice disappears into the various voices of the numerous characters, discovering the autobiographical imperative becomes a tougher proposition. In a collection of short stories, one can connect the various and separate narrative strands to visualize the implicit authorial connecting narrative that I have tried to show through Lahiri's work. But theatre, with its emphasis on character conflict, dialogues and action, fractures the singularity of any authorial voice (hidden or otherwise) into a kind of creative multiplicity (unless it is the Shavian kind of theatre or the propagandist or pamphlet plays. But interestingly, contemporary theatre has been experimenting with subtle narrative strategies that learn from the relationship between autobiography, fiction and subjective narrative poetry. Never has the use of the singular narrative voice (through the sutradhara or through subtler means) been used in more exciting ways than in today's theatre. Mahesh Dattani's (2000) 'Dance like a Man' and 'Twinkle Tara' are two plays that can be used as examples. 'Twinkle Tara' begins with the single narrative voice of the narrator/writer Chandan before bodying forth into the drama of characters, obviously born from the fictionalized author's personal concerns. He says it in so many words that it is based on memory and remembering the past. But the past in a play, as Chandan realizes, is different from the past in a poem. In a poem, emotions of the past are recollected in a singular mental tranquility or agitation. In a play, that past has to be touched 'like a live wire' electric and alive in its multi-voiced reality. Of the several indicators, the dedication to his parents in his Collected Plays subtly voices the author's personal concerns shared between parents and son and sharply focussed maybe in 'Dance like a Man': 'For my
parents Guju and Wagh: “Look I am dancing like a man”.

Technically, the narrative coalesces, collapses the past and present by separating and simultaneously bringing together the three generations, traditional rituals and contemporaneity, framing changes and conflicts, tensions and breaking points, and yet an underlining continuity. Lata fits into the mould of young Ratna (her mother in the past) and old Ratna (the present of the plot). Young Jairaj and Viswas are interchangeable, as is an old Jairaj with Amritlal (his own father). This kind of telescoping, for reasons of economy in theatre, here assumes a philosophical dimension of continuity amidst discord. Conflicts/tensions within a joint family structure; the younger generation trying to break out into unconventional areas and ways of life; patriarchal hegemony and the tensions it creates; gender issues seen both from the male and female perspectives; all these sub-plots form the basic fabric of the plays mentioned. It could easily be a dramatized exploration through a more personal, autobiographical (not in the factual sense) hidden subtext. (a) The conflict inherent in a life dedicated to the performing arts (the dance metaphor could very well have been theatre) clashing with the responsibility of continuing the family business; or (b) the tension about who assumes domestic responsibilities in a situation where both wife and husband are involved in performing arts (and if it is an art like dance that is traditionally more a female domain), are of immense, widespread and general importance in today's middle class Indian society. But we cannot forget Dattani’s own situation as a performing artist, playwright, director, and the possibility of a break with family norms. However mild or serious the personal tension might have been, this dedication does have that tone of thrown challenge of the ‘look ma, no hands’ variety. If ‘Twinkle Tara’ exposes the bad deal women get in a male-dominated society (the shared leg goes to the male of the twins), ‘Dance like a Man’ would be about the bad deal a sensitive male can get when he breaks the male chauvinistic ring and enters unconventional areas of self expression, or professions. Somewhere in Chandan’s situation in ‘Tara’ lies the clue to Dattani’s own gender perspective, where like Rahel and Estha in The God of Small Things, Chandan and Tara are twins in whom the male female separateness does not exist: ‘Like we have always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives in one body, in one comfortable womb’.

In The God of Small Things: ‘Esthapen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us’. That is: ‘till we were forced out’ (‘Twinkle Tara’). Social forces
cruelly separate them, bringing tragedy. In Twinkle Tara', they are separated and Chandan gets the better deal, while Tara slowly dies. In The God of Small Things, similarly, adult manipulations destroy childhood innocence: 'now she thinks of Estha and Rahel as Them... Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks, Limits, have appeared like a team of trolls in their separate horizons'. Unlike fiction where the single narrative voice (or experimentally a few more) would dominate, theatre has to give voice to everyone. But it is interesting to note how underlying the multiplicity of voices is the new experimental playwright's (like Dattani's) effort to jog memory, personal experience and thinking and then 'relive that charge (of the live wire) over and over again', in its full dialogic vibrancy.

When we come to a book of poems, we are confronted by an apparent absence of a narrative. The poems appear as self-contained pieces that could stand on their own in any anthology where other poets feature as well. But it might be a good idea to ask some pertinent questions. What are the criteria for the selection of poems within a book of poems? Why are they arranged in a certain order, and not in any other? Does the title of the book hold them together? What is the implicit connection that justifies this title? Is there a hidden and silent narrative that connects poem to poem? Is it left to the readers' strategies to empathize and get into the hints and suggestions that lie secretly embedded in the text that holds the book together? It is with these questions in mind that I will be examining Agha Shahid Ali's The Half Inch Himalayas to reconstruct the poet's story (biography of a different kind) as I read.

Agha Shahid Ali's (1987) The Half Inch Himalayas is divided into four prominent sections, each dealing with a certain segment of the life of the poet, and the poems that feature within these sections carry the essence of that section's major concerns within them. The first section deals with ancestral past in the typical autobiographical beginning. Parents, grandparents, great grandparents feature as sharply etched portraits delineating cultural symbols that the poet inherits—some accepted proudly, some critically, some rejected: a white turban, the Koran... inscriptions in Arabic' are associated with the poet's great great grandfather in cryptic epithets admiringly. But the great grandfather, 'a sahib in breeches', is 'simply disappointing'. Grandfather, 'a handsome boy... smoking hashish... reciting verses of Sufi mystics' has a tragic heroic touch. Father with the Colonial debonair look, knowledge of Lenin and Beethoven, is seen critically, 'loses me as he turns to Gandhi'. But the women
ancestors are all seen with great admiration and sympathy, more than the men, revealing the poet’s sympathy to gender issues. While grandfather ‘thumbed through Plato... his inheritance lost/his house/taken away’, grandmother ‘worked hard/harder than a man’. She inherited the beauty of the ‘Dacca gauzes’, later torn into handkerchiefs, ‘distributed among nieces and daughters-in-law/Those too lost now’. Ensnconed in the rich ancestral past of ‘brocade, silver dust,... quilt studded with pieces of mirror,... prayer rugs,... Mecca scarlet woven/with minarets of gold’, it is only natural that there will be a sense of exile as the poet moves to Delhi and then on to US and the cities of the modern world: ‘for wherever I seat myself, I die in exile’. But before moving into that, I would like to comment on a unique technique that the poet uses as a kind of double narrative, holding simultaneously two or more time frames together. For example, in ‘Lost Memory of Delhi’, the poet reconstructs the time of his parents’ initial days after their marriage as they move like lovers through certain landmark Delhi sites. But the poet is present in their present. He is elder than his father was at that time: ‘he is younger than I’. At the same time ‘I am not born’. Yet he quietly witnesses the fateful ‘night of my being’ that even his own parents, lost in their embrace, do not even know.

The second section is centred around Delhi and the poet’s simultaneous awareness of the crass materialism; the vulgar side of contemporary life; and the remnants of cultural and literary landmarks in the strangest of places and circumstances. The Jama Masjid butcher even as ‘he hacks/ the festival goats, throws their skin to the dogs’ quotes Ghalib and Mir in the game of completing couplets. This is tradition alive in the midst of commerce and butchery. On a slightly different note, the pavement astrologer’s strident warning ‘pay, pay attention to the sky’ rings out as wisdom amidst pollution and poverty. After watching Kuzintzev’s King Lear with the Delhi intelligentsia, the poet is reminded of Zafar, the poet king who saw his sons hanged, died in exile in Burma ‘begging for two yards of Delhi for burial’. Lear’s cry ‘you are men of stones’ hauntingly echoes in the poet’s mind, underlying the deep tragic essence that connects cultures and times even as surface superficiality, ugliness and vulgarity take over the life in a modern city. This section ends with a homage to Begum Akhtar and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, establishing the poet’s deep-rooted affiliations that a city like Delhi cannot wipe out. It is this affiliation that makes the poet’s own exile meaningful in such company: ‘in the free verse/of another language I imprisoned/
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each line—but I touched my own exile’ (to Faiz) ‘exiling you to cold mud/your coffin, stupid and white” (to Begum Akhtar). But this is only the beginning of the poet’s sense of exile. Exile becomes the central metaphor of the book, as we shall see, with Virginia Woolf’s lines (quoted earlier as well) assuming a sense of eerie truth in the poet’s life; ‘For wherever I seat myself/I die in exile’. This distance travelled by the poet in his journey away from his roots in Kashmir will only increase the sense of exile. Delhi is only one move away from those roots. But interestingly, the roots persist in insidious ways.

The third section is about the poet’s move to America, furthering the metaphor of exile and simultaneously connecting it to the title of the book that holds all the sections together. Is it a wrong move, bringing a sense of emptiness and vacancy? ‘A wrong turn brings me here’; the ‘town’s ghost station’ (after the crowded stations of India); ‘the dry well piled up with bones’; seems to suggest this. In this section, we find another interesting use of telescoping two narratives of two time and space zones in ‘Vacating an Apartment’ and ‘Previous Occupant’. In the first one, the act of vacating the apartment is like vacating a previous identity as ‘the storm troopers... efficient as fate... wipe my smile... burn my posters (India and heaven in flames)... whitewash my voice stains... make everything new... clean as death’. The death of an earlier identity is followed by the birth of a new identity. The next poem, ‘Previous Occupant’ underscores a similarity of fate undergone by the previous occupant of the new apartment that the poet is about to take over. This occupant ‘who came from as far as Chile’ has left behind (like the poet must have in the earlier poem) ‘the stains of his thought’ on the ‘windows’, ‘the colour of his eyes... his shadow everywhere, his love for “Neruda, Cavafy”’. Very smoothly the poet moves into the new apartment and the new identity as Neruda and Cavafy take over from Faiz and Ghalib. It is the subtlety of such experimental narrative techniques in poetry that make Ali such a fascinating poet. The American days are almost blurred in whiskey fuzziness of the ‘midnight bars’ and the ‘melting rocks in my glass’, as if to induce through intoxication a kind of forgetfulness that goes with tragic exile. Even the poet’s identification is more with Latin America, as revealed in his love for the previous occupant who came from ‘as far as Chile’ as also in ‘Flight from Houston’. Between Mexico and Pittsburgh, Houston balances the ‘warm side of the sky, the sun / touched with Mexico’ and the ‘white (cold?) hills of Pittsburgh’. We must not forget the poet’s own ambivalent relationship with his home, Kashmir,
ensconced in the cold white Himalayan ranges and yet beautiful and lush. In this state of exile, home 'shrinks into the mailbox' in the form of postcards 'a neat 4 by 6 inches'. The Himalayas shrink into 'half inch' postage stamps. 'Home', 'out of focus now', in 'memory' just an 'undeveloped giant negative'. Even as nostalgia, a very strong emotion in the poet of exile, make the waters of the Jhelum 'so brilliant', so 'ultramarine', the poet knows that in reality, it is far from that ideal and it is only an 'over exposed love' that is revealed in the picture. We can easily understand here the significance of the title of the book and also the organizing principle, as also the significance of the frame poem 'Postcards from Kashmir'.

The final section is the story of the survivor, the alien, the outsider. The poet becomes the alien who 'lives in my house... in my room... sits at my table... practicing my signature... wearing the cardigan/my mother knit for my return... the mirror gives up/my face to him... he calls to my mother in my voice'. Is this the new identity? But we know that the other self exists. Vulnerable, sensitive, it still dreams of return to the word that exists only in the past. The present is an emptiness, 'a ten-year-old movie ticket'... 'all empty, empty'. This is a tragic poetic narrative of exile, nostalgia and modern life. But the narrative strategies of the poet, as we see in Ali's case, are subtler, more implicit and hidden than either drama or fiction where the demands of the form make it more explicit and evident.

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The Debate between Pancasila versus Islam in Indonesian Politics

MUNMUN MAJUMDAR

For most Indonesians the *garuda* is a familiar bird. It is featured on the official seal of the Republic, where the bird's claws grasp the ends of a banner proclaiming the national apophthegm, *bhinneka tunggal eka* (Unity in Diversity), indicating the predicament of a state which comprises a diverse combination of people and territory. At the centre of the seal, on a shield drawn on the garuda's chest, are five objectives that symbolize the five principles of Pancasila. As officially translated the five principles are a statement of belief in:

1. The one and only God,
2. A just and civilized humanity,
3. The unity of Indonesia,
4. Democracy guided by the inner wisdom evident in the unanimity arising out of deliberation amongst representatives,
5. And social justice.

Sukarno launched these principles in his famous speech on the ‘Birth of Pancasila’ (*Lahirinja Pancasila*) on June 1, 1945 during a debate between such Indonesians who wanted their new state to be Islamic, and those who wanted it to be secular, or at any rate trans-religious. In this debate between the Islamist and the *kebangsaan* (national secularists) movements about the adoption of *shahriar*, the latter won, and the state adopted an ideology dedicated to the unity in diversity and religious pluralism. The Indonesian state embraced the Pancasila as the sole means of holding together a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. The first principle—belief in God—did not give pre-eminence to Islam, or enjoin Muslims to adhere to the *shahriar* law, but as Islam was the religion of a vast majority of the Indonesian people it became a critical element in determining what was defined as Indonesian.
The history of the national movement in Indonesia reveals that the various nationalist groups struggling for freedom had never been united except for transitory and tactical reasons, when the Japanese occupation was coming to an end and independence seemed imminent. President Sukarno was aware of the ideological conflict existing within the nationalist movement. He comprehended the danger of such a conflict, which, if permitted to take its course, would inevitably result in the disintegration of the country. This could not be allowed to take place. Therefore, an attempt was made to harmonize these conflicting trends.

Accordingly to bridge the irreconcilable ideological positions Sukarno set out to establish a philosophical basis that would ensure the survival of Indonesia as a unified national state. This objective was in accordance with the explicit goals of the nationalist struggle that had promised since 1928 an independent Republic that would bring about ‘one land, one people, one language, and one nation’: satu nusa, satu bangsa, satu Bahasa, dan satu tanah air. Pancasila was therefore designed as a statement of universal values, which sought to find a political compromise to allow vastly differing conceptions of state ideology to coexist.

As the principle of ‘belief in God’ recognizes that the state will be based on religious belief and that every Indonesian should believe in God, it raised much controversy. But it was also an affirmation of the proclamation that the Indonesian state is not based on any particular faith and that the religious diversity of its citizens would be respected.

Some Islamic leaders had pressed Sukarno for an explicit recognition of Islam in both the Preamble and the body of the Constitution. Sukarno’s most fundamental argument made against this was that if the Indonesian state were based on ‘belief in God’, it would be a religious state—without specifically being Islamic or secular. While this implied a monotheistic religion—a concession to Muslim concerns—it did not grant a preferential treatment to Islam. This was despite the fact that a majority of the Indonesians are adherents of Islam. But Sukarno offered the Pancasila as a compromise assuming that ‘belief in God’ would commit the new country to faith in God, which Muslim spokesmen had wanted. The Pancasila however, did not mention Islam, and that implied toleration of Christian and other non-Muslim beliefs.

Another reason why Sukarno embraced the principle ‘belief in
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God’ rather than ‘belief in Islam’ in the Pancasila, was because he felt that if the Indonesian state was to be founded on Islam, regions where the people were not Muslims, such as in Moluccas, Bali, Flores, Timor, the Kai Islands and Sulawesi might yearn to secede. Further, the West Irian which was not yet part of Indonesia might also not join the Republic. Sukarno made it clear that although Indonesia was a nation consisting of various sub-races, these latter could not be identified as forming separate nations but that the geographic, political and administrative unity among the sub-races in Indonesia could create a nation, above this isolation. Therefore Pancasila was an effort to offer Indonesia’s heterogeneous political tendencies a common foundation. The discourse over what kind of nation Indonesia should be, or more precisely, what kind of political systems Indonesia should have, often revolves around the different meanings and political functions Indonesians give to Pancasila.

Characterizing Indonesian Islam

Counted as one of the third world countries, Indonesia is a socially and culturally complex nation. It has a sizeable Muslim population and hence national governments have to deal with the question of the relation of the State to Islamic values. The source of Islamic power, though great, remains largely inarticulate. A significant element of the Indonesian Muslim population seems to relate strongly to alternative values in the area of political life, particularly to nationalism, geographical identification and traditional cultural identities. Consequently, many Muslims place Islam and its values in that context and they are sensitively receptive to political relations that combine Islam with those other values.

Traders brought Islam across the Bay of Bengal to West Sumatra in the thirteenth century. Owing to the heterogeneous intensity of the spread of Islam in Indonesia there is a social cleavage between the Islamic communities—the Santri and the Abangan. While in conformity with their political orientations, the Santri of 1950s and 1960s usually voted for Islamic parties and explicitly endorsed the Islamic agenda; the Abangan supported nationalist, socialist, and communist parties and opposed the concepts of an Islamic state. Thus, the hard core of the Masjumi, Nahdatul Ulema (NU), and other Muslim organizations came to represent the Santri, the more strict Islamic population, and cherished the Islamic ideas seeking to ultimately realize an Islamic state in Indonesia. They were opposed
to Pancasila—a fleeting concept—because of its syncretistic nature and its inability to secure a special place for Islam. One historical indicator of the size of the Santri community was Indonesia’s first general election in 1955, in which the total vote for Islamic parties was 16.6 million or 43.9 per cent of votes cast.

On the other hand, the Abangans did not have much regard for Santri Puritanism, which was outside the purview of their syncretistic religion: Agama Djawa. The Pancasila principle, however, appealed to the Partai National Indonesia (PNI) that comprised the Javanese population. They were opposed to the idea of an Islamic state in Indonesia, which would mean giving up their way of life. For the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) the principle of ‘Belief in God’ was in contradiction to their ideology. Their aim was to realize a communist Indonesia. They were aware at the same time that a majority of the Indonesians were opposed to their views on religion. Therefore, as a tactical move, supporting Pancasila was the way of least resistance for them. The major improvement suggested by this group was the replacement of the clause ‘Belief in God’, by ‘freedom of religion’.

Islam and State

Indonesia is often described as a secular state but formally it is a state based on religion. The first principle of the five-part national ideology, Pancasila, enshrines ‘belief in Almighty God’ (Ke Tuhanan yang maha Esa). As discussed earlier, this was, in effect, a compromise between those wanting a secular state and those favouring an Islamic state. While there is no official state religion or formal acknowledgement of the authority of religious law in the constitution, the use of the term ‘Almighty God’ implies monotheism, a concession to Muslim sentiment.

The question of the formal role of Islam in the State has been one of the most divisive issues in Indonesia’s political and constitutional history. In particular, bitter debate occurred over whether to recognize the Shahriar in the Constitution. This consideration created complex fissures within the political elite. Most non-Muslims and Abangan secular nationalists were staunchly opposed to it and Santri politicians were also divided on it. While the majority backed a constitutional recognition of Shahriar, some prominent Santri even favoured a religiously neutral state. Much of this debate focused on the so-called Jakarta Charter, an agreement of a compromise struck between
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Muslims and nationalist leaders on June 22, 1945 as a part of the preparations for Indonesia’s independence. In a draft Preamble to the Constitution, the Pancasila was retained but the ordering of the principle was altered. Belief in God was placed first and the following words were added: ‘With the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out Shahriar’. Islamic leaders also sought to stipulate in the Constitution that the President must be a Muslim. The draft Preamble came to be known as the Jakarta Charter. The most controversial part of the Charter was a seven-word clause, which translates as: ‘with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law.’

The legal implications of the clause were ambiguous. The minimalist interpretation was that an obligation to follow Islamic law lay with individual Muslims, not the State; the maximalist position held that the state must ensure adherence to the Shahriar and that the charter would provide the constitutional basis for extensive legislation giving effect to Islamic Law. Although often portrayed as an attempt to make Indonesia an Islamic state, the inclusion of these seven words in the constitution would not, of itself, have had this effect. After all, there was no proposal in it for Islam to become the official state religion; and the seven words were intended as an adjunct to Pancasila, not as a replacement. It remained to be seen whether Islamic parties would have the will and numbers in parliament to push through the Shahriar-based legislation needed for the state to enforce Islamic law.

The committee charged with finalizing the Constitution initially agreed to the Jakarta Charter’s inclusion as the Preamble, but at a meeting on August 18, 1945, the day after independence was proclaimed, the pro-charter Muslim leaders came under strong pressure from secular Muslims and religious minorities to drop the seven words. The main argument was that if an Islam-inclined state was declared, the predominant non-Muslim region in Indonesia’s east might break away from the Republic. Reluctantly, Muslim leaders agreed to exclude the charter in the interest of national unity. They also dropped the clause requiring the president to be a Muslim. The omission of the charter drew a bitter reaction from many sections of the Islamic community. They felt that the charter’s opponents had been alarmist and that the Muslims had been forced into making a greater sacrifice in establishing the new state than had the non-Muslims. Islamic political leaders consoled themselves with the expectation that they would later win large majorities in parliament.
and the constituent Assembly and could implement the shahriar
through legislation and constitutional amendments.9 But, after the
proclamation of independence in August 1945, the Constitution did
not contain the concessions to the Islamic position as were laid down
in the Jakarta Charter. Consequently, much of the Muslim bitterness
against the governments of Sukarno and Suharto arose from an
Islamic perception of betrayal by the advocates of Pancasila.10

Much of the Islam-Pancasila debate that dominated the preparation
to independence in 1945 continued to rage on through the 1955
elections which gave all Islamic-oriented political parties a combined
total of 43.5% of the vote. The debate emerged subsequently in the
Constituent Assembly between 1956 and 1959, where the question
of the dasar negara became the most divisive part of the debates.
Pancasila was presented from the late 1950s onwards, very much as
a philosophy that denied any legitimacy to the notion of a theocratic
state, particularly an Islamic one. In fact, it did not separate state and
religion, in that it required every Indonesian citizen to assert a belief
in God—atheism and agnosticism were both declared illegal. Yet,
the State was not theocratic in the sense that it emphasized a particular
doctrinally-based phenomenon, merging the notion of religious belief
and national loyalty together. The idea remained a contentiously
debated issue throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. During the
1950s and 1960s Pancasila became an ideological weapon, wielded
against militant Muslims for their religious intolerance and against
Communists for refusing to believe in God at all.

The Jakarta Charter re-emerged as a polarizing issue in the late
1950s. The popularly elected Constituent Assembly, which began
drafting a new constitution in 1955, came to a deadlock in early
1959 over the issue of whether or not the Charter should form the
preamble. The ideological battle found its constitutional focus in the
Constituent Assembly. It became the forum through which parties
could get their ideal of an Islamic or Pancasila State realized in a
constitutional manner.11 Nationalist and non-Muslim parties, with
the backing of President Sukarno and the increasingly influential
Army leadership, opposed the Charter's inclusion. Muslim parties
forced the matter to a series of votes in May and June 1959 but fell
way short of the necessary two-thirds majority. On July 5, 1959
Sukarno dissolved the Konstituante and decreed the return of
Indonesia's founding Constitution of August 18, 1945—without the
Charter—making it the sole legal Constitution of Indonesia. The
Konstituante, for its part, was able to resolve the ideological
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question. The Pancasila remained intact and as a nod to the Muslim concerns it acknowledged that the Jakarta Charter influenced the spirit of the Constitution. The only concession to Muslim sentiment was the insertion of an imprecise clause stating that the charter 'gave soul' (menjiwai) and 'connecting totality' (rangkaian-kesatuan) to the Constitution. This was a little more than a gesture. The word shahriar was not mentioned in the body of the Constitution and the vague acknowledgement of the Charter carried no legal force. The Charter was effectively buried as a serious political issue for the next forty years. Sukarno discouraged further debate on the matter and the New Order stigmatized efforts to implement shahriar as contrary to Pancasila and inimical to national stability.

However, despite the exclusion of the Jakarta Charter, the State nonetheless played an active role in the religious life of the nation, and Islam in particular. This has been evident in the existence and functions of the Department of Religious Affairs, in the statutory recognition of shahriar in specific areas of law affecting Muslims, and in the state funding allotted to a variety of overtly Islamic purposes.

Further since January 1946, Indonesia has had a Department of Religious Affairs to administer matters of religious law, ritual and education. The decision to establish the department was in part an attempt to appease Muslim groups aggrieved at the omission of the Jakarta Charter. Though formally serving Indonesia's five officially recognized religions, the department is largely devoted to Islamic affairs. Its Islamic orientation is evident in its logo, which depicts a Quran resting on a rehal (a folding book stand), and its Arabic motto: ikhlas beramal, 'sincere commitment to service'. The department is currently responsible of over 40,000 Islamic educational institutions, administers the marriage law for Muslims, oversees the organization of pilgrimages to Mecca, and manages ritual issues such as the timing of Id-ul-fitr and other major celebrations in the Muslim calendar. The department presently has a staff of over 2,00,000, making it the third largest government department. Historically, it has been the bastion of Islamic patronage and a major employer of ulama within the bureaucracy. For the most of the 1950s and 1960s, the NU and much of its funding and recruitment during that period, favoured the traditionalists who controlled the department. From 1971 onwards, however, the Suharto regime appointed a succession of modernist intellectuals and retired military officers with modernist inclinations to head the ministry, effectively breaking the NU's hold. Not until 1999 did NU regain the portfolio.
Several areas of the department's activities warrant special mention. A major element of its educational programme consists in administering the network of State Islamic Institutes (IAIN). First established in 1960, there are now fourteen IAIN spread across Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan and Sulawesi offering undergraduate and postgraduate studies in a range of Islamic-related sciences to over 30,000 students. There is no equivalent state-run institution for any of the other four official religions. Although the academic standards at the IAINs are generally lower than those prevalent in the state universities, the institutes have produced a good deal of innovative scholarship in recent years, particularly on liberal interpretations of Islam. The department's authority in matters of marriage and family law also had an impact on the personal lives of Muslims. Department officials register marriages and disputes over marriages, divorces, inheritance and religious bequests (Waqf) involving Muslims who can be brought before religious courts. Until the late 1980s, however, the power of these courts was limited: their decisions were neither binding upon the petitioners nor recognized by civil and military courts.14

The Council of Indonesian Ulema (MUI) provides a similar example of state sponsorship of Islamic Institutions, though MUI's role has often proved controversial. It was established in 1975 under the aegis of the Department of Religious Affairs, ostensibly to issue fatwa and advise government on Islamic issues as well as to promote good relations among Islamic groups. It has representatives from all the major Islamic organizations on its board and it claims that its decisions reflect the broad diversity of opinion within the umma.15 In reality, MUI decisions have a limited impact on the broader Islamic community, and most Muslims would pay greater heed to fatwa issued by their own ulema or by the organizations to which they are affiliated, such as the Muhammadiya, NU or al-Irsyad. Many traditionalist ulema, for example, complain that doctrinaire modernists dominate MUI. Furthermore, during the Suharto era, in many Muslim circles, MUI had gained the reputation of being a tool of the government. Successions of decisions were seen as reflecting the regimes' wishes rather than the considered jurisprudential interpretation. Also, senior MUI officials were closely associated with the regime's electoral vehicle, Golkar, and frequently campaigned for the party during elections.
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ISLAM UNDER THE NEW ORDER

The new order under President Suharto (1967-1998) ensured that ideological conflicts would not betray the development of Indonesia, again as formerly. Built on the ruins of Sukarno’s ‘Guided Democracy’, Suharto established an authoritarian ‘Pancasila Democracy’. Although the Indonesian military mobilized Islam to help it secure power in 1965, President Suharto soon acted to restrict it as a political force. Military men were still generally suspicious of militant Islam, which they identified with regional rebellion. Moreover, Islam was now the only visible independent source of mass mobilization. And thus, it was an implicit threat to security. By and large, the Indonesian military has distrusted political Islam, partly because of its experience in suppressing Muslim rebellions in the 1950s and 1960s—which accustomed the armed forces to viewing radical Islam as a threat to the stability of the State—and partly because the military leadership has been largely dominated by secular nationalists.

The new order went to great lengths to give effect to the concept of Pancasila as the practical policy of state. It implemented its conception of ‘Pancasila Democracy’ by restructuring the political party system. The Islam-based political parties were forced to merge to form the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan) or PPP, which was not allowed to use Islam in its title nor use a religious symbol as its logo. Under Suharto’s new regime, political Islam was tamed and Pancasila was made the sole ideological basis for all social and political organizations. The only vehicle allowed for the representation of Muslim interests was the PPP, an officially recognized and controlled party with Pancasila—not Islam—as its sole ideology. For most of the new order, the government-labelled political Islam formed the extreme right, ranking just below the communists, the extreme left, in its hierarchy of political threats. The Protestant, Catholic and nationalist parties formed the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or PDI.

From the outset, the new order undermined the Muslim party’s effectiveness by manipulating rivalries between its NU and Parmusi components. It also restricted PPP’s ability to appeal to Muslim voters by imposing a succession of electoral restrictions, including bans on the use of the Arabic language and Islamic symbols.

The decorative coalition of Muslim interests set up under the banner of United Development Party (PPP) was perceived as a wholly
unsatisfactory vehicle for Islamic interests. While the left was physically eliminated, antagonism between the regime and the Islamists endured. It was in this context that a political culture arose during the 1970s that offered an Islam-oriented alternative. It was moulded by a new generation of intellectuals calling themselves Neo-Modernists, in reference to the thinking of Fazul Rahman, a Pakistani liberal who tried and failed to shape the legislative policy of the ruler, Ayub Khan, and was forced into exile in the US. (The foremost thinker of this group, Nurcholiist Madjid, wrote his dissertation at the University of Chicago under Rahman)

Strict restrictions and the increasing meaninglessness of party politics under the new order's highly-controlled politics, culminated in 1985 with a return to the 1926 Charter by the NU, hitherto the PPP's most important element. With this, the NU abjured political engagement in favour of socio-economic activity, a measure as necessary under the restrictive conditions of the new order which were similar to colonialism. Consequently, in the interest of national unity, the students' groups gravitating around these young intellectuals accepted without reservation the Pancasila ideology and its political implications, especially with regard to the non-sectarian and harmonious relations between the various faiths. What began as an elite phenomenon soon gained a wide following among the educated youth after the fall of Suharto, culminating in the electoral success in 1999.

The electoral victory of 1999 was due, in part, to the personality of its intellectuals namely, N. Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, Harun Nasution, Munwir Syazali and Ahmad Wahib. The movements' ideas also fitted the nation-state ideals unique to Indonesia among Muslim countries, its tradition of pluralism, tolerance and social harmony. Its commitment to democracy and human rights during the Suharto years served it well after his fall in 1998. This was a reverse of the situation in the 1950-65 when what mattered were party and organizational affiliations, ranking and factional manoeuvres. Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the religious mass organization NU, became the first democratically elected president. This event was also, in a sense, a jubilation of Muslim politicians and their supporters, as a mark of a telling victory over secular nationalism and minority-dominated politics. Abdurrahman's election appeared to show Islam's power as a legitimating force in Indonesian politics and also as marking not just a resurgence in Islamic politics, but a new high point of Islamic influence in national affairs. He was the first genuine
Islamic leader to hold the presidency. Although all preceding presidents had been Muslims, none had serious credentials as an Islamic leader like Wahid. He was a religious scholar, the chairman of Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization, the NU, and was the grandson of one of the country’s most revered ulama (Islamic scholar), Hasyim Asy’ari. His rival, Megawati Suakrnoputri, herself a Muslim, was the leader of the main secular nationalist party and was portrayed by her Muslim detractors as antipathetic to Islam. The euphoria surrounding the 1999 presidential elections tells us much about the national history of Islamic politics. Despite presence of the world’s largest Muslim community, defeats for political Islam have outnumbered victories in Indonesia. Islam, though the avowed religion of a large majority of Indonesians, has rarely been the dominant element in the nation’s politics and has remained largely inarticulate. In fact, from the late 1950s to the mid-1990s, Islam was politically marginalized and subject to state repression under Sukarno’s Guided Democracy and later under Suharto’s New Order regime.

In the eyes of the Muslim leaders, the final blow to Muslim autonomy and aspiration had come in 1984. In that year the government drafted a law requiring all socio-political organizations to accept the national ideology of Pancasila as their sole foundation and outlook. It ordered all social and political organizations to have Pancasila as their sole ideological foundation (Asas Tunggal). In practice, this meant that regardless of an organization’s original purpose only Pancasila could be adopted as its sole basis. This caused dissent and a nationwide debate. The ideological concerns of the early 1980s were also buttressed by accusations that Suharto’s conception of Pancasila was deeply informed by his adherence to Javanese culture and religious belief. Therefore, he represented only the Abangan point of view. At the same time, restrictions on political party activities meant that the old boundaries between reformist and traditionalist Islam were no longer reinforced by party affiliation as they had been in the democratic period of the 1950s. The leaders of Christian associations objected to the legislation as official interference in matters of religion. By introducing a legal code with penalties for those who refused to follow the principles of Pancasila many Muslim leaders felt that their organizations and their identity were the real targets of the proposal. It was anticipated that many of them would refuse to go along. But by 1985-86 all major social, political, and religious organizations had formally adopted Pancasila.
as their sole philosophical foundation. Those that did not were subsequently banned. While heated controversy surrounded the government initiative, the debate about the appropriateness of Pancasila as the basis of the State ended following the adoption of the asas tunggal legislation. By making Pancasila the official ideology of all Indonesians, Islam became one of the tolerated religious streams with no legitimate claims to exclusivity. To oppose the regime was to oppose the Pancasila, which in turn would mean opposition to the constitutional foundation of the state. State leaders confined the ulama to a narrow religious role.

Simultaneously, however, the new order also needed religious endorsement. Especially from the mid-1980s onwards, one can see a change in government policy which was moving to co-opt Islam rather than simply to restrict its political expression. The authorities involved themselves in a great expansion and upgrading of the system of religious tertiary education. They took a positive role in the growing dakwah internal missionary movement, setting up training centres for propagating the faith, thus competing with militant fundamentalists for patronage of religious fervour. In contrast to its repression of Islam as an independent political force, the regime became a generous patron of religious Islamic activities and infrastructure. Thus, by the mid-1980s Suharto began to take steps to accommodate the desires and sensitivities of Indonesian Muslims while deepening his own identification with Islam. This he did by negating any shift towards a politicized Islam through symbolic overtures and by co-opting leading Muslim figures. A series of legislative and institutional concessions to Islamic sentiment provided tangible evidence of this. Suharto himself established the Pancasila Muslim Service Foundation (YAMP) in 1982,20 for the stated purpose of developing socio-religious resources for the umat. By 1991, the YAMP had raised over US $ 80 million and built more than 400 mosques. Undoubtedly, these activities had a political objective; through such beneficence the regime could parry accusations that it was anti-Islamic. Another political vehicle in this endeavour was the ICMI (Association Of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals). The establishment of the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia (ICMI, chaired by the Minister for Research and Technology and later by President B.J. Habibie, with strong support from Suharto, was a milestone in the Islamization process. ICMI was the key in establishing new Islamic institutions, such as, the Indonesian Islamic Bank, the Republika daily newspaper and the Centre for Information
and Development Studies (CIDES). It also mobilized Muslim intellectuals and laid the ideological and political foundation of the post-Suharto upsurge of political Islam.  

Suharto’s endorsement of the ICMI reflected the President’s ability to get a grip on the increasing Muslim intellectual ferment among the middle class. Many of the members of the ICMI were long standing critics of the new order’s policies towards Islam and even the new order regime itself. One difference, however, was that unlike in the 1950s when Masjumi leaders found themselves debating whether the State should be explicitly Islamic in character, many of them now thought that it should be. They also debated whether the State should cling to the principles of Pancasila, as Sukarno and his secular-nationalist and Christian supporters had wished? In the 1990s, the Islamic groups centered in ICMI were willing to set aside the talk of an Islamic state and work instead for an Islamic society within the framework of Pancasila. Suharto now, in contrast to the preceding two decades, appeared set on pursuing a proportionality policy whereby the number of Muslims in cabinet and senior military and bureaucratic positions would roughly reflect the percentage of Muslims in society. In his own personal behaviour, Suharto appeared also to embrace a more santri form of Islam. He took the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1991 and began appearing regularly thereafter at events to mark major Islamic celebrations. Through one of his charitable foundations, Suharto also supported the construction and maintenance of thousands of mosques and madrassa. The government passed legislation establishing the equality of Islamic courts with other types, and returning to them jurisdiction over inheritance disputes.  

Suharto courted the neo-modernist Muslims represented by the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII-Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council), an organization with a strict salafi orientation that had previously been a strong critic of the regime. The close relations between the younger DDII leaders facilitated this reconciliation and some of Suharto’s green (Islamic) generals rose to leading positions in the military in the mid-1990s. Suharto’s son-in-law, Major General (later Lieutenant General) Prabowo Subianto was instrumental in building a support base among Muslim clerics, called the Committee of Solidarity with the Muslim world (KISDI). KISDI and the DDII were later to play an important role in supporting Laskar Jihad and other militant groups.

Suharto’s change of heart remained a matter of dispute. While some believed that it was a genuine awakening of interest in Islam
for the ageing president, political analysts believed that Suharto’s relations with the armed forces were under growing strain and that he was cultivating Islamic support in order to counterbalance the declining loyalty of the military. In a sense, the seeds of today’s Islamic upsurge in Indonesia were sown in the later years of the new order when Suharto, having lost support within the military, sought to cultivate Muslims as a countervailing force.

Under the final years of Suharto, the regime witnessed the outbreaks of public unrest which all involved religion in some sense, in quite different ways. Islam has sometimes appeared as ethnic identification, sometimes as a symbol of economic protest and at other times as an attack on bureaucratic rule. One reason for this is the historical fact of Islam’s gradual and still incomplete conversion of the Nusantara. The other is the political fact that Islam is essential to the legitimacy of Indonesia’s new order regime and at the same time is the source of popular opposition to it. Although the Indonesian military mobilized Islam to secure power in 1965, President Suharto soon acted to restrict it as a political force. The New Order leadership was nominally Muslim and it had a significant Christian component. Military men were still generally suspicious of militant Islam, which they saw as being identified with regional rebellion. Moreover, Islam was now the only visible independent source of mass mobilization, and thus it was an implicit threat to security. Therefore, the government gradually tightened the screws on Islamic political expression.

Islam and post New Order politics: Is Pancasila still relevant?

Suharto’s downfall led to the dismantling of most of the repressive structures imposed by the new order. Restrictions on political parties, the media and associations were lifted; freedom of speech conceded and democratic elections were scheduled for June 1999. For the first time in almost four decades, Muslims had substantial freedom in expressing their political aspirations. Their subsequent behaviour has provided a revealing indicator of changing attitudes and priorities. Two developments in particular deserve close attention: the fragmentation of Islamic politics and the rise of pluralist Islam. Never before had political Islam been so divided. Pluralist Islamic parties were those that took Pancasila as their ideological basis but which nonetheless relied heavily on an Islamic identity or leadership to attract votes. On the basis of this, it would seem that Muslim support
for a multi-religious rather than an Islam-based state has never been stronger. Arguably, cultural Islam has contributed to this commitment to pluralism but it may also be true that the new order’s unrelenting stigmatizing of the Islamic State issue has played a role as well.

Despite their electoral setbacks, the parties, more Islamic in character, remain committed to the Jakarta Charter. At the 2000, 2001 and 2002 annual sessions, the MPR, the PPP and Crescent Star party (PBB) proposed the re-inclusion of the seven words in the constitution but the motions attracted support from only a small minority and were emphatically rejected by mainstream Muslim organizations such as NU and Muhammadiya. At the regional level, however, the campaign for the implementation of shahriar has had some success. The north Sumatran province of Aceh has provided the most concrete example of this. Shahriar was promulgated under special autonomy laws in early 2002, though there is an intense debate within the local Islamic community over the scope of the laws and details of implementation. The shahriar issue has also attracted strong support from Muslim groups in South Sulawesi, West Sumatra and Banten, but is still well short of the majority support.

Suharto’s downfall in 1998 unleashed political forces that the new order had suppressed or controlled. The new political environment enabled Muslim extremists to launch what Michael Davis calls the jihad project, an attempt to undermine the country’s pluralist political institutions and establish an Islamic State. At the same time, however, the mainstream Indonesian Islam remained firmly anchored in the framework of Pancasila. Both the traditionalist NU and the modernist Muhammadiya resisted (and continue to resist) efforts to redefine the State in Islamic terms.

Following the fall of the Suharto regime, the Habibie government that succeeded it, found it untenable to maintain Pancasila in its previously totalitarian form. As the Suharto regime had become increasingly corrupt, the Pancasila legitimacy suffered. And both democratic and political groups, particularly an expanding new Muslim middle class that had begun to emerge in the 1980s, began to see the Pancasila laws as representative of the corrupt regime itself. Therefore, the Habibie government dismantled the legal sanctions that it had from the ‘asas tunggal’ legislation of 1985, as well as the huge apparatus that had been built up for Pancasila propagation, Pancasila education, etc. Pancasila applied in Indonesia was seen in its initial years, as an ideal example of the positive use of political power in the cause of religious toleration. Rather than
separate religion and state, it gave the state a role in preserving
tolerance through its own form of religious ideology. During the
Suharto era, another side of the coin was exposed with the use of
Pancasila as an instrument of state coercion. Rekindling the
accumulated grievances of significant sections of the community,
the Muslim population now clamoured for the establishment of an
Islamic State once again thus raising the spectre of Islamic
fundamentalism. Student protesters, who agitating for reforms in
the riots of May 1998 had brought on the fall of Suharto, were seen
to regularly wave posters of Ayatollah Khomeini and laud the
Afghani Taliban generals. However, they were viewed in the broader
Indonesian community simply as students craving reform rather than
as marshals for radical Islam.

President Habibie oversaw the general elections of June 1999
and the presidential elections in October where more than ten Islamic
parties competed—a phenomenon that would have been impossible
under Suharto's version of Pancasila. The pre-existing Partai
Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) was 'Islamised', its flag altered to
include the Ka'bah which Muslims face during prayer, while its
party principle was changed from Pancasila to Islam.

Islam has become increasingly important in Indonesia, and since
the fall of Suharto, the Muslim parties have moved into mainstream
politics. These parties have deep roots in the Indonesian Muslim
culture and each brings to national politics its own distinctive Muslim
conceptualization of Indonesian society30 which has not always been
particularly democratic or pluralist. The tension between Indonesian
Islam's democratic and authoritarian tendencies became evident
when President Wahid was threatened with impeachment in 2001.
Despite having espoused the virtues of pluralism and democracy,
he toyed with the use of mob rule and tried to use the army to thwart
constitutional processes when his own power was threatened. But
more worrying and pertinent to this study is Wahid's use of the
more extremist language of Islam to justify his actions. The ulemas
and Wahid himself have used the term jihad in their calls for mass
action, and have accused his opponents of engaging in bughat. This
was not the first time that Wahid had allowed the teaching of Islam
to be interpreted for his personal benefit. One of the arguments used
to edge Megawati Suakrnoputri out of the running for the presidency
in 1999 was an assertion that Islam prohibits women from taking a
leadership position over men. Many Islamic groups also opposed
her presidential nomination on the grounds that Islamic law forbade
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a female from becoming the head of state. The cynicism of this argument was laid bare in 2001 when the supposedly Islamic objection to a female president evaporated, as the Muslim parties wanted Megawati to replace Wahid. It is doubly ironic that the person making the original objection, Hamzah Haz, became Megawati’s vice-president. The cumulative lessons in these cases are the ease with which Islam is used as a cover for short-term political agendas in contemporary Indonesia.

It is important to note that the war in Afghanistan had hardened the fundamentalist wing of Muslim opinion in Indonesia. Although the appeal of extremism to the broader communities of Southeast Asia remains very limited, it has still been sufficiently strong to make Megawati acutely sensitive and defensive about their alignments with the US against Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The relevant question here is regarding the degree to which Islamic criteria have molded the Indonesian political system? The discourse of Indonesian Muslims on politics and the state, as we have seen above, is not monolithic. There have been a wide range of views about what role Islam should play in national life. At one end of this spectrum, Muslims have used Islamic principles to justify armed rebellion and the establishment of a breakaway Islamic State as in Aceh. At the other end, they have drawn on the precepts of their faith to sanction pluralist or even secular positions regarding the role of Islam in the state. This diversity of aspiration and expression is important for an understanding of not only the cultural richness of Indonesian Islam but also its frequent lack of unity and coherence as a political force. Second, Islam, while seldom a determining factor in national affairs, has nevertheless been a consistently significant legitimating force. Therefore, all Indonesian governments, including those that have tightly controlled Islamic parties, have been wary of alienating the Islamic community and have carefully cultivated Muslim support. Consequently, both Sukarno and Suharto devoted considerable effort and expense to co-opt Muslim leaders to their cause or, at the very least gain Muslim approval for government policies.

The developments within Islamic politics since 1999 suggest that its long history of internal rivalry and disunity continues, despite ephemeral periods of solidarity such as that which resulted in
Abdurrahman Wahid’s election as President. Abdurrahman proved an inept and erratic leader and was eventually dismissed by the MPR on July 23, 2001 and was replaced by Megawati, his Vice President. Many of his erstwhile Muslim allies led the charge against him and shifted support to Megawati, conveniently putting aside their earlier objections to her secular nationalism and gender. Megawati, for her part, was careful to curry Muslim favour prior to her election by appearing regularly at Islamic celebrations, by taking the pilgrimage to Mecca and by casting herself as a product and patron of the Islamic education system. Despite her deeply held Abangan views, Megawati, like Sukarno and Suharto before her, understood the legitimating power of Islam.

As such Islam has been a contributory factor in moulding the state but hardly a decisive one. It is important to note that most Islamic groups in Indonesia never sought to establish a full Islamic State, as was the case in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. The great majority of Muslims leaders accepted that Indonesia would be a religiously neutral state based on Pancasila, though historically, Islamic opinion has also favoured a constitutional recognition of the obligation for Muslim citizens to uphold the shahriar. The failure of Islamic parties in the 1940s and 1950s to achieve an acknowledgement of shahriar was a major blow to those seeking the formalization of Islam’s role in the State. Similarly, the inability of Islamic parties to win more than 44% of the vote at any general election has deprived them of the parliamentary majorities needed to drive through a legislation reflecting Islamic values and interests; only a handful of statutes mention shahriar.

Political Islam has, nonetheless, won important concessions regarding Islam’s role in the State. There is a large religious bureaucracy running the Department of Religious Affairs, which is predominantly given to serving the Islamic community. Successive governments have also channelled extensive resources to Islamic groups. There is also de facto recognition across the political elite of the need to respect Islamic sentiment. For example, although there is no constitutional requirement for a president to be a Muslim, in practice, it would be almost impossible for a non-Muslim to become the head of state.

Indonesia’s founding president, Sukarno recognized that his new nation scattered over thousands of islands needed some kind of cultural cement. Religion was powerful yet potentially volatile. In order to harness its potential and yet restrain its excesses, a new ideology, Pancasila was developed.
The Debate between Pancasila versus Islam

The official ideology—based upon unity, belief in one God, and decision-making through consensus—established during the independence, always took precedence. This ideology has been credited with holding Indonesia’s hundreds of ethnic groups together in one pluralistic nation. Yet, the ideological crisis has remained persistent. It emerged in 1945 during the drafting of Indonesia’s new constitution, even before independence was announced, when Muslim leaders strongly sought to create a special place for Islam in the new document. Muslim leaders were committed to firmly establishing Islam within the new Republic’s constitutional framework, which would oblige Muslims to practice the shahriar, Muslim law. Eventually, a charter was produced that reflected a more secular and pluralist view of the role of religion in the State. A national ideology of Pancasila emerged wherein belief in God was not described within a Muslim context, much to the displeasure of pious Muslims.

An outright proclamation of Indonesia as an Islamic State was too controversial to be realistic—while the Christian minorities would have objected to it, those in eastern Indonesia also might have been tempted to secede. Muslim leaders therefore, fell back on what they considered a more feasible proposition; i.e., let the Constitution merely affirm that Indonesia’s Muslims were obliged to comply with Islamic law. After an emotional debate in the committee that was charged with drafting the new charter, this seemingly reasonable request was rejected. For, even the cryptic phrase, merely in seven words, implied that the full power of the State could be used to enforce orthodoxy for all Muslims, including numerous people in Java, whose beliefs and practices could be perceived as incompatible to, if not in violation of the Quranic law. Demographically, Muslims were in a huge majority in Indonesia. But politically, Islamists were in a minority both within that majority and among the State’s founders. Nor did the idea of officially implementing Islam reassure non-Muslims who saw it as an invitation to use the State to transform the archipelago’s statistically Muslim majority into a formidable and, from their standpoint, a dangerous political force. The defeat of the Islamist project and the consequently non-Islamic character of the country, in turn, profoundly disappointed the more self-conscious Muslim segment of Indonesian society. In the eyes of the Muslim leaders, the final blow to their aspiration came when the Suharto government drafted a law requiring all socio-political organizations to accept the national ideology of Pancasila as their sole foundation and outlook.
Promoted assiduously for over 40 years, Pancasila was arguably the most important stabilizing element in the nation’s development. In the present day Indonesia however, Pancasila has not been able to contain the fissiparous tendencies. Indonesia’s domestic instability—it’s potential inability to control a mass outbreak of unrest—is fraught with the possibility of inter-communal violence in the provinces of Aceh, Ambon, Kalimantan, Irian Java. The outbreaks of public unrest that Indonesia has experienced in the recent past have all involved religion in some sense or another, but in quite different ways. Islam has sometimes appeared as a source of ethnic identification, sometimes as a symbol of economic protest and at other times as an attack on bureaucratic rule. One reason for this is the historical fact of Islam’s gradual and still incomplete conversion of the Indonesian archipelago. The nature of Indonesian Islam has been questioned—in that not all Muslim groups seem convinced of the importance of a Pancasila society. A number of moderate Muslims are increasingly taking recourse to Islam as a means to prevent the collapse of moral values. Those who are pushing for a bigger role for Islamic law, include the political parties which seek to reinforce their religious credentials, and also marginal militants who aspire to create an Islamic State. The economic crisis too has unleashed a host of latent challenges confronting the weak political leadership. It remains to be seen how Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population, will deal with the issue of democracy and how political and religious diversity would resonate in Asia and the broader Islamic world. A more extreme Islamic stance in Indonesia would be deeply disturbing if it generates aggressive foreign policies.

At the moment, however, the rising popularity of Muslim movements seems unlikely to translate into a hard-line Islamic insurrection against the central government. At least until the Bali bombing, Indonesia was the weak link in the war on terrorism in southeast Asia. A diminished capacity of the State, its political and economic vulnerability and the unresolved issue of the role of Islam in politics have made Indonesia an attractive target for Islamic extremists: tactically, as a base for recruitment or as a launching pad for attacks, and strategically, as a potential component of their vision of an Islamic state in southeast Asia. In the first years of Indonesia’s new Democracy, militant Islamic factions were able to exert a greater influence than their numbers would seem to warrant. One reason for this was the lack of a countervailing mobilization by Muslim moderates, which allowed radicals to exploit Islam for their own
political purposes. Another was the complacency within the government. The Bali bombing changed the political environment, prompting a crackdown on extremism and a greater willingness by secular politicians and moderate Muslims to challenge the radicals. The qualified support of the major Muslim organizations for a stronger anti-terrorist stance, and the Vice-President's distancing of himself from Bashir, suggest that the Megawati government enjoys more latitude in responding to religious extremists. However, whether this new-found resolve will be sustained, and whether the shift in the wider public mood will fundamentally alter the pattern of political competition in Indonesia, remains an open question.

The future direction in Indonesia will be decided by the ability of President Megawati Sukarnoputri to govern a new democracy, which is characterized as being highly unstable and volatile. The problem is exacerbated by resentment at centralization. What Indonesia essentially needs is political stability and economic recovery to overcome its present predicament. Many of the outer, less populated, islands have large Christian communities whose willingness to remain a part of an Indonesia ruled by an overtly Islamic government is not assured. There has been a serious loss of legitimacy from the way in which the Pancasila had been implemented in later regimes which in turn, has weakened the Pancasila's capacity to overcome religious tensions and conflicts that we have witnessed in the recent years. This same issue had bedevilled Indonesia's founding fathers in the mid-1940s. It had been resolved by a decision not to make Islam the basis of the State. Whether a democratic process a half-century later will produce the same result remains unclear.

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2. Ibid.
6. For criticism on Geertz, Santri-Abangan-Priyayi division, see Koent Jaraningrat’s (1963), review of Geertz’s *Religion of Java in Madjalar ilmu - ilmusastva Indonesia*, No. 1, pp. 118-91.
10. See H. Endang Saifuddin Anshari, (1986)
11. For details see *Tentang Dasar Nagara Republic Indonesia Dalam Konstituante*, (Speeches regarding the basis of the Indonesian State, delivered in the Constituent Assembly), (No Publisher mentioned).
12. The Government initially considered calling the department the Ministry for Islamic Affairs, but eventually opted for a multi-religious function. For a historical account of the department see Noer, (1978); and Boland, (1982), pp. 105-12.
15. 10 Tahun Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Jakarta: department Penerangan RI, 1985) and majelis Ulama Indonesia web page <http://www.mui.or.id/index-i.htm>, 15 August 2002.
16. Following the downfall of Suharto and the lifting of controls on political activity, the PPP has returned to an Islam-based ideology.
17. See Lee, Oye Hong, pp. 59-74.
18. For a good account of this period, see Schwarcz (1999), Chapter 6.
24. KISDI sponsored activities in support of the Bosnian Muslims. Funds were raised through the National Committee for Solidarity with the Bosnian Muslims, chaired by Suharto’s stepbrother, see “Indonesia Alert!” January 2001.< www.indonesiaalert.org/index.html.>
26. For a discussion on the election results see, Fealy, Greg (2001), pp.119-36. Interestingly, the process of fragmentation has continued since the elections, with each of the five largest Islamic parties experiencing internal fraction and splitting away of dissent factions.  
27. No vote was taken on the issue at the annual MPR session but in the deliberations on the Jakarta Charter, seemingly less than 20% of members were in favor of its reinsertion. 
29. In a press interview in which he proclaimed the “death of ideology”, Muhammadiya Chairma Ahmad Syafii Maarif scorned the idea of an Islamic state; “Ideology is Dead”, in Politics.
31. For an account of the controversy regarding Islamic law and a female president, see Platzdasch, Bernhard (1999), pp.226-49.
Abanindranath Tagore’s autobiography, *Jorasankor Dhare* published in Banga Samvat 1354 (A.D. 1947), was first dictated in Bengali language to Rani Chanda on the initiative of Rabindranath Tagore. In nature and content, this work is conspicuously distinct from other autobiographies. The autobiography is notable in that the author, at the beginning of the work, testifies to its authenticity, saying that whatever was written in it, had been narrated by him and that he alone was responsible for any omissions. He had dictated the narrative at an advanced age when the events of the recent and distant past might get mixed up in the psychic memory of a person. But, in the foreword of the book, Abanindranath gives credit to Rani Chanda for earnestly recording—what was spoken to her—with clarity and detail and with an emotional involvement in the sad and happy events of his life. Nevertheless, he acknowledges (Thakur 1947:1) that his own narration was imbalanced as the joyful memories were liable to be forgotten or become hazy while the sad moments of life did leave an indelible imprint on the memory. At the beginning of the narration, Abanindranath accepts that when he starts reflecting on his life there is a flux of memories; and the images that come to him are so mixed up that it becomes difficult for him to keep a chronological track of events. As a result, he says, the incidents of the later part of his life tended to surface even as the earlier ones remained in the background.

Despite these limitations, the descriptions in the autobiography are clear, images are lifelike, colourful and passionate, and it will be easily conceded, that these images are vividly reflected in his creations in paint. He has, in his paintings, identified many characters, including the servants of the household and other acquaintances. Many events and moods, occurrences and emotions from the
storehouse of his psychic images have consciously or unconsciously crept into his paintings. His descriptions of childhood are full of the memories of school, of the Jorasanko household and the garden house of Champadani; and they also relate, in details, to the favours bestowed upon him by the servants in showing him the treasures of the forbidden portions of the house or in facilitating many other experiences specially of the festive occasions. Abanindranath seems to have inebibed these images vividly in his mind. When occasion arose, he used them faithfully in his compositions, just as he has narrated them in colourful visual imageries, in his autobiography.

As the narration by the artist in *Jorasankor Dhare* has not followed a chronological sequence, it may be necessary to re-trace the events of his life in order to analyse and establish a relationship between his imageries and the development in his creative expressions. We therefore, may make an attempt to briefly reconstruct a chronologically apt biographical sketch of the artist from the reminiscences and tributes of his contemporaries, friends, relatives and students. Their impressions form an alternative source of information about the artist, for they in their time, perhaps could not have had access to his autobiography or perhaps, they did not deem it necessary to refer to it as they were witnesses to some of the events of his life, and had their own perceptions about those events. These notices of Abanindranath Tagore, offering new insights on him and his work, are independent of his own autobiographical narration and seem to add significantly to the accounts contained in the *Jorasankor Dhare*. Among such reminiscences and tributes to him, those coming from his students are full of reverence and unveil him as an ideal teacher and patron. Similar in vein are the opinions of his friends.

Of these friends and contemporaries, Mukul Chandra Dey and Jaimini Prakash Ganguly have authored the most authentic biographies of Abanindranath. Dey (1942: 28-35) makes a detailed biographical sketch of his life offering a chronological account of his creative work. Jaimini Prakash Ganguly, a nephew of Abanindranath and five years younger to him, had lived with the latter for thirteen years during his childhood, and his account of Abanindranath seems important for different reasons. Ganguly's writings throw light on the efforts of Abanindranath in learning to paint on his own. The uncle and nephew seem to have gone on their different ways as the former pursued Indian art and the latter, becoming an adversary and critic of Abanindranath, eventually
devoted himself to learning European Academic art. Ganguly repented this 'deviation' at the fag end of his life when he realized the success that Abanindranath had achieved in pursuing Indian art, following a path opposite to him (Ganguly 1942: 16-21).

In making a critical evaluation of Abanindranath and his work, a few scholars have referred to Jorasankor Dhare, his autobiography, but they have not tried to analyse the work given the proclivities of artist's psychic imageries and their relation to his creativity; or to know what the artist has to say about his creative work. These scholars have confined their account to the events that underline his achievements, his learning of the skill of painting and a chronological account of his contribution to the field of painting. No attempt has been made by any scholar to discover his life through his own narrative—the Jorasankor Dhare—though his autobiography remains a useful source for the purpose of appreciating the inner motivations of the artist. The study of Jorasankor Dhare is also significant because it helps in resolving some crucial issues which have been the points of debate among scholars in their attempt to trace his creative journey as he aspired to revive Indian tradition of art with, among other things, his painterly representation of many classical Sanskrit works.

Biographical Account

Abanindranath was born in Calcutta on August 7, 1871 at Jorasanko, the residence of the Tagore family. He was the youngest son of Gunendranath Tagore, and a grandson of Girindranath Tagore who was the second son of Dwarakanath Tagore. Gaganendranath and Samarendranath were his elder brothers. Abanindranath had inherited an inclination for literature and fine arts from his family. In 1864, Gunendranath and Jyotirindranath, Abanindranath’s father and uncle, had joined the Art School at Calcutta and studied there for two years. Abanindranath’s father had varied interests, such as, photography, botany, gardening and dramatic performances besides drawing. Abanindranath was sent, along with other children, to a normal school when he was five years of age. He never liked the routine of the school, and therefore, studied there with difficulty for three years. He passed class three and then dropped out because of his exasperation with the overly harsh behaviour of the English teacher (Thakur 1947: 16-17). After leaving the school, he became an avid lover of nature, devoted to observing it with interest and fascination. He studied at home and came to use the paint-box of his father to
draw pastoral scenes, objects and palm trees (Ganguly 1942: 17; Dey 1942: 31). When he was nine years old, the family of Gunendranath moved to another house at Champadani in Konaagar on the western bank of the Ganga. The house had a large garden spread over a hundred bighas. Here, he developed a great intimacy with nature and with animals of all sorts. His father died when he was 10 years old. Afterwards, the family returned to Jorasanko, and Abanindranath joined Sanskrit College at Calcutta where he studied Sanskrit between 1881 and 1890. While in the College, he started composing verses in Sanskrit and Bengali, illustrating them with line-drawings of decaying temples and landscapes. Along with his studies in Sanskrit, he also continued receiving drawing lessons from one of his classmates: Anukula Chatterjee (Thakur 1947: 123). He also learnt the English language as a special student at the St. Xavier College, Calcutta. In 1889, he was married to Suhasini Devi. About this time, he took private lessons from two artists, Signor O. Ghilardi, an Italian and Charles Palmer, an Englishman, who were associated with the Government School of Art, Calcutta. The turning point in his creative career came with his painting of the Kr~Talila series, and his meeting with E. B. Havell in 1897 (Thakur 1947: 124).

All these happenings are mentioned in the Jorasankor Dhare, but Abanindranath has not cared to narrate them in a chronological order. It can be explained by the fact that he was an artist, not a chronologist, and the making of his perceptions, imagination and visions have played a more important role in his autobiography. Apparently, a representation of an artist’s imaginative life in his creative journey was more significant to him than a chronologically apt historical narrative with statements of the events of the life that he had lived.

Emergence of Abanindranath as an Artist

Jorasankor Dhare presents a vignette of mental images, which can be divided into three major phases to facilitate the study of the creative process of the artist. The first phase consists of descriptions of early childhood days, covering the period of his living in Jorasanko and going to school. The second phase includes the formation of images in his mind through his solitary communion with nature and sojourn at the garden house with the village folks. The third phase deals with his mature life as an artist at Jorasanko, revealing his profession as an artist, his techniques, ideology and the activities for the promotion of awareness and appreciation of Indian Art.
The initial chapters of the *Jorasankor Dhare* contain reflections on the childhood perceptions of Abanindranath. These perceptions are graphic and vibrant and include descriptions with a childlike innocence. Such simplicity, as a gift of his intimate communion with nature, remained with him throughout his life and his autobiographical account is replete with glimpses of his intimate imageries. For instance, there is a lively word-picture of the rainy season (vars-mangala) and its impact on the life of people specially, how the rains continue and do not stop for days, how the baked mud-bricks of the roof crack down and start leaking, enforcing the shifting of children to the dancing hall along with their servants. There is a maid, who looks after him and other children, who is described as offering roasted gram as the only food available at that time. After the interruption of rain the atmosphere becomes very quiet, there is neither the chirping of birds, nor movement on the road, as it is flooded with rainwater. The vegetable hawker, the milkman, barber, etc., are not moving in the street. Life becomes still. There is also a picture, which he paints in later part of life, depicting a lonely bird sitting on the bare rock in the atmosphere of stillness and gloom, created by the havoc of rain. Also drawn graphically are the memories of school which are full of unhappy incidents, frustrations and disappointments, because of the rigid routine of learning methods followed there. The child Abanindranath was averse to classroom discipline but he was benefited by his exposure to the outside world on the way to school. It was his only chance to avail of the pleasantries of the outside world, as the children of Tagore family were not allowed to go out and play with their peers. He recalls having seen Kabuliwalas selling goods on his way to school.

Abanindranath also recollects the names of his teachers: Madhav Pandit who taught Sanskrit and Haranath Pandit who taught English and was harsh towards students. One Laksminath Pandit was dark and intimidating in appearance and was named as the mahiṣa of Durga by children. The experiences of drawing and alchemy lessons in school left a lasting impact on Abanindranath as they were associated with form and colour, the elements which were destined to be his companions for the whole of his life. The lessons in alchemy seemed interesting to him because the teacher demonstrated experiments to make the red water blue or blue water red. But the
drawing sessions were a disappointment for him as the teacher asked him to draw the same surahi and glass every day. That was his first step towards the lessons in drawing. He remembers his classmate Bhulu helping him in copying the tasks that were assigned to him (Thakur 1947: 9-10) as he entertained the hope of seeing the objects kept in the cupboard than sketching them from its display before him. Among these objects, there was a ship also, and he imagined that he may one day become the captain of a ship and might go to far off lands, also fancying that perhaps the teacher would give that ship to him as a prize for his performance in the class. All this remained a wishful thinking and, since no such thing happened, he felt disappointed. Thereafter, for three years he learned nothing and passed his time with great difficulty. At last, he stopped going to school in class three because of the harsh punishment meted out by a teacher. In the circumstances, arrangements were made for his study at home.

After leaving the school, he gained freedom to contemplate and to live in the natural surroundings at his own will without any constraint of a regular schedule. This provided him opportunity to observe nature, living in its midst, and see rural life (Thakur 1947: 16). He could observe the changes brought in by the turn of the seasons and the time of the day, such as the changes in shade of the jackfruit tree (katahali), which turns darker in the moonlight than in the day.

In the Tagore household, he had seen many curios and drawings, which left a lasting imprint on his psyche. He refers to the paintings made by Jyotirindranath and Gunendranath his uncle and father, respectively (Thakur 1947: 18-19). He had also seen a painting representing the volcano of Visuvius in oil on a canvas on the table of Dwarakanath (Thakur 1947: 30) and the instruments brought from South Kensington, London in his father’s room. His father had decorated the room with oil paintings, marble-topped ebony furniture, a bronze fountain with female figures, and a metal figure of a child with upraised arms, imported from Britain. These objects had served as objects of study in pencil in the early days of the artist, Abanindranath. Besides, he was captivated by the objects he had seen in the storeroom of the house, where Nanda Farrash used to keep lamps, brooms, etc., and which was only opened by him in the evening and morning. The storeroom appeared to the child artist as a fairy land (pariloka). There were, in it, old chandeliers, furniture and antiques inside glass cupboards with layers of dust. The room
was solitary and quiet but he imagined hearing the sound of tinkling bells, as if from a fairy’s anklets. The rays of sunlight coming through cracks of windows were transformed into rainbows. But when his reverie was disrupted by the harsh voice of Nanda Farrash, he found himself like a boy lost in a jungle. Such were his imaginations when he was a child of the tender age of five or six years.

His curiosity had no limit; as a result the toys were ruined and shattered. He refers to the sculptures and paintings he had seen namely, pictures of Krñatilä, Śakuntalä, destruction of Kamadeva and terracotta figures from Krisnanagar. The inquisitiveness was not only applied to see the inside of toys, ink stands and sculptures by breaking them but he used to observe the carpenters, masons and potters at work.

These images of his childhood appeared after a long interval in his paintings when he had achieved control over the techniques of painting. For instance, there was a kathak in the Jorasanko house whom he remembers and paints as if to revive the memories of childhood. The kathak was known as Mahim Kathak. He performed rituals and recited Bhāgavat and Rāmāyana. He always wore a red shawl and a silver ring (Thakur 1947: 43). Abanindranath later, made a painting representing the image of kathak though he had seen him at the age of seven. Then, there was an old woman, who used to come to their house with the maid Padmadasi and sang devotional songs. She was dark in complexion having a round face bedecked with a big round red bindi on her forehead. She too has found place in one of Abanindranath’s paintings entitled, “Old Toys”.

SECOND PHASE
The major part of Abanindranath’s mental images crystallized during his solitary stay in the bagan bazi, the garden house at Champadani. He narrates that there were many pets in the house, such as, a dog, a kakatoa, and several deers and monkeys. He used to pass the long afternoons loitering in the garden, observing the pets and other animals with leisure. The acquaintance with the garden became so intimate and intense that he knew the birds and their nests, the locations of the shadows of trees, the passing objects on the wall and the places of lizards lying in wait to catch a fly, etc. There was no distraction here of any kind to disturb his attention. He was so lonely that sometimes he used to fight with his own shadow. These experiences were so engrossing that he forgot the pain of loneliness
caused by his leaving the school and Jorasanko. This routine made
his perceptions sharp, brilliant, discriminating, lively and interesting.
He could hear the vultures, or study their ways of hovering in circles,
or sitting on the wall, shrieking and taking off. Among his paintings
of later days, the studies of a monkey relaxing on the back of goat,
deer, dogs and vultures are noteworthy (Thakur 1947: 16). They
are known as “Playmate Series”, which was painted in 1916 (Pl.
No.1). These paintings were an outcome of the visual impressions
which he had assimilated at a very early age during his solitary stay
with nature at the garden house in Champadani.

His intense perception of colours and sounds was a result of this
solitary life at Champadani. The varying shades of colours in the
late hours of evening from bright reddish to vermilion, violet and
blue had been printed on his mental images long before he learnt
the use of brush and water colours (Thakur 1947: 20). The garden
with its tall shady trees, birds and insects was his pal in these lonely
hours. Similarly, his perceptions of sound were intense and acute;
he knew that the voices of flower-sellers and ice-vendors were heard
in the evening and the pulling of water from wells in the afternoon.
He could hear a sound travelling through the street from one corner
to other, increasing and receding in intensity and also differentiate
between the notes of the violin and piano played by his uncles. All
these perceptions were transformed later in his paintings, songs,
stories, and sculptures. These varied perceptions enriched his mental
images, as if, in imbibing them unconsciously he was preparing
himself to become a great artist.

THIRD PHASE

The sojourn of Abanindranath at Champadani garden house provided
him with varied types of experiences, forms and images, which
compelled him, as it were, to express himself. But his solitude was
terminated by the sudden demise of his father and his return to
Jorasanko, and also with the end of his cheerful childhood days.
The seventh chapter of the Jorasankor Dhare very passionately
presents the nostalgia he feels for the bygone days. He had grown,
and married and, above all, the death of his father had transformed
him into a mature person. He compares the memories of childhood
with the dewdrops on a lotus leaf, which evaporate with the midday
sun, and says that grief converts the dewdrops on a lotus leaf into
tears, which will last longer. This simile forms the subject matter of
one of the painting of Abanindranath representing a lady visualizing the drops of tears on a lotus leaf. Similarly, he expressed his grief and sadness at the death of his father in the famous painting entitled, ‘Death of Shah Jahan’, which was awarded a silver medal in 1903 in an exhibition at Delhi. (Pl. No.2). In this picture, he identifies his own grief at the death of his father and projects it through the daughter of Shah Jahan. During the last days of imprisonment, Shah Jahan was allowed the company of his daughter. Abanindranath perceives in Shah Jahan, the dying image of his father.

He accepts that the psyche of an artist keeps on collecting and conserving images in memory and projects them at the opportune moment (Thakur 1947: 54). For instance, the painting of a 'Santhal woman' depicts the hair-do with flowers in the manner he had seen his mother arrange that for the young ladies of the house. His paintings of the Kṛṣṇalīlā series were inspired by the songs of a Vaiṣṇavī in his house. There are many characters such as, the incense-seller, or Gabriel, who comes to life in his paintings, wearing a unique dress: a loose long coat (achakan) with half cut sleeves and having bright buttons on it. Gabriel was a Jew, and his dress reminded Abanindranath of Shylock of Shakespear’s Merchant of Venice. Abanindranath depicts Aurangzeb in the same dress in his painting entitled, ‘Aurangzeb with Dara’s head’. This painting was done in 1905, perhaps translating into the appearance of Aurangzeb the cruelty in the character of Shylock, a Jew himself. Similarly, the series of paintings of the ‘Arabian Nights’ depict dresses and other outfits of figures which Abanindranath had seen in the Kabuliwalas sitting outside his school or coming to his house for selling antique goods and other things.

II

Beliefs and Ideology

Abanindranath achieved mastery over Sanskrit literature and on silpa texts, and developed his own style of painting. And, in his autobiography, he liberally shares experiences of his creative life and spirituality. He considers the art of painting similar to that of writing, saying that the brush is first dipped in water then in colour, then in the subconscious of the artist and, then alone, he is able to draw and paint, as the fusion of subconscious (imagination), colour and brush goes to make a good painting (Thakur 1947: 72).
According to Abanindranath, if the subconscious is not involved while painting, the picture will remain incomplete; and the same applies to music, as the saying goes: *anta rā bajatā hai to janta rā bajatā hai*. Abanindranath believed that the transferring of the images of subconscious becomes essential in painting at a particular point of time and achieving that makes him feel lighter and happier. To him, if the object is not touched by the beats of the heart, the art becomes meaningless. He accepted that the younger artists start their work from a direct representation of nature or from drawing anything, but it is the emotional involvement and sensitivity that provides maturity, solemnity, softness and depth to the creations of an artist. To create an effect with minimum use of colour and effort depends on this kind of maturity of an artist. He substantiated it by referring to the Japanese technique of handling of brush and colour (Thakur 1947: 72).

In his autobiography, Abanindranath compares the profession of artist to that of a yogi with only one difference that while the former sees with open eyes and concentrates, the latter sees with closed eyes and reflects (Thakur 1947: 101). Abanindranath had practised this process of *sāmādhi* unconsciously, looking continuously and quietly at the sky and was able to see images that he wished to draw. He recalls the joy he experienced from the practice of *yoga* and achieved the state of complete communion with nature in the later period of his life. He relates two incidents of his life. Once when he was painting the *Krīṣṇalīlā* series and again when, after the death of his mother, he recalled her image to make her portrait. He relates the experience of his togetherness with the object of his painting. When he was working on the *Krīṣṇalīlā* series his consciousness identified them with Lord *Krīṣṇa* and he used to see *Krīṣṇa* moving around him, performing the *līlās*. He says,

> It was when I was doing the Krishnalila series that I experienced it for the first time. A perfect identity was established between myself and my theme. I would see Krishna passing before my mind’s eye in all his *līlās* from boyhood up and my brush would move to itself and the pictures in all the details of line and colour produced themselves on the paper (Ghosh 1942:14).

All the incidents of *Krīṣṇa*’s childhood came before his mind’s eyes as if he were watching a colourful film, and he remained engrossed in it till the series was completed. (Pl. Nos. 3, 4). Similarly, when he wished to paint the portrait of his mother, her image even along with the wrinkles on her face, appeared before his eyes. Impatiently, he
started drawing the image on the paper but the apparition disappeared. He concentrated on her image again, and became successful. The image of the mother became visible, and it stabilized in his inner vision till he could complete the portrait. He states,

> The vision was at first hazy and I saw the face like one sees the setting sun through a mass of cloud and then the face gradually took shape until it shone clear and perfect in every detail. Then the picture gradually vanished leaving the likeness stamped in my mind. I transferred it to paper and it was the best study of a face I have ever done (Ghosh 1942: 14).

Afterwards, he practised this experience with other objects and persons and could successfully draw without the physical presence of the person. He tried it in drawing the portraits of Rabindranath, Moti Budho, Akshaya Babu and Jamuna and could complete each of these portraits in two hours. He accepts that a communion with the object and clarity of perception is possible with continuous practice and singularity of purpose (Thakur 1947: 134-5). He remembers that when he was at Champadani, whatever he saw in the day he could recall the images in the night (Thakur 1947: 27). He also cautions the artists not to be disappointed if they fail to attain such a skill in the beginning, as it could be achieved only by the training of consciousness. Further, he explains that it is like a wind; when it starts blowing, it will go on and remain for a longer spell and bring good results for the artist. The period of such spells of trance in Abanindranath’s life were known to his friends especially to Havell who never disturbed him on such occasions. The beauty and spiritual glow that we see in his paintings was the outcome of his sensitive soul and his singularity of purpose in life.

Abanindranath was sincere in pursuing his technique and impressions in his work. He mentions his association with two Japanese, but some scholars allege that he has copied their style. This allegation is unfounded and unjustified. From his narration it appears to be a case of mutual interaction. He accepts that the technique of wash is very effective in creating an emotional, romantic and gloomy atmosphere, and also relates his innovative experiments with this technique. The Japanese artist, Yokoyama Taikan always drew imaginary sketches on his palm just to remember them and to make a permanent impression, while his associate Shunso Hishida was fond of collecting pebbles to extract colours. They shared the studio of Abanindranath and made pictures on order to earn their living. Taikan used very little colour and applied minimum brush
strokes to create the desired effect, which attracted the attention of Abanindranath. Taikan demonstrated the use of brush with a swift and soft hand, and washes of water to create the effect. In turn, he learnt from Abanindranath the technique of Mughal painting (Thakur 1947:108). But Abanindranath always believed that technique is only a means to achieve an end i.e., a medium to transfer completely and sincerely the mental image into an external form. He subscribes to the view that an artist is free to adopt any technique just as he is free to make experiments with other techniques. He is the only judge to decide a technique for his work. Abanindranath always encouraged this freedom in his pupils. He never imposed his technique on them, and gave them freedom to experiment, infusing them with self-confidence. It is for this reason that the Bengal School could develop and transform itself to a meaningful modernity.

The autobiography by Abanindranath reflects his temperament. He was passive in attitude, contented in temperament, and truthful to himself. He acknowledges that if he had achieved something it was because of the continuous stimulation of E.B. Havell, John Woodroffe and Rabindranath Tagore. He was reluctant in accepting the offer of the post of Vice-Principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta. It was on the persuasion of Havell that he accepted the assignment. He expresses his gratitude to Havell who was also his teacher, who kindled his interest in Indian tradition of art.

In his autobiography, Abanindranath has referred to the activities of Indian Society of Oriental Art in detail with a view to express his gratitude to the members for upholding the cause of Indian art. He remembers all the members—British and Bengalis, merchants, civilians, common people, artists, Rajas, Judges, etc.—who contributed in their own ways in the development of a new school of Indian art. These were like-minded people, belonging to different groups, religious sects and countries, contributing towards one common cause. Abanindranath passionately comments on the efforts of John Woodroffe, who prepared the catalogues of exhibitions which formed a critical literature, containing his meaningful comments and notes. He refers to the First National Exhibition organized by the Society at Calcutta, which proved a great success because of the untiring zeal of John Woodroffe. The Society extended equal patronage to arts and crafts by organizing exhibitions, publishing an art Journal and running a School of Art.

Abanindranath also remembers his friends with appreciation for their help and encouragement in developing the school of Indian
painting in Bengal. Among them, the foremost were E.B. Havell, Thronton and Sister Nivedita (Thakur 1947:92). He had great regard for sister Nivedita for her patronage to his students, Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and Surendranath Gupta as she deputed them to the team of Lady Herringham for copying the paintings at Ajanta (1909 - 11). Besides, he expresses his heartfelt gratitude to his second elder aunt on the paternal side, for her important role in inspiring him to start painting, painting and writing. She got installed a litho printing press for him and paid tuition fees of Rs. 20 per lesson enabling him to join a painting class at the studio of Signor O. Ghilardi, an Italian artist (Thakur 1947: 124). Abanindranath learnt the oil pastel technique of making portraits and nature studies from this European artist for six months. Under this European influence, he set up his studio with a direction light flow from the north according to the western pattern, but at the same time, in pursuance of the Indian tradition he started illustrating Citrāngadā, a dance drama, written by Rabindranath. Citrāngadā and Bālak magazine were printed with his illustration from their press at Jorasanko. He considered these illustrations as his first successful attempt at painting.

Similarly, he expresses gratitude to his uncle Rabindranath who could recognize his talents of story telling and sensitivity for poetry. On the suggestion of Rabindranath he had started writing literature for children and illustrating Vaiṣṇava Paḍāvalī of Vidyapati. He used to visualize the poems with his own sensitive intuition and creating a mental image before painting it on paper. The word-picture created by the poet served as a source of inspiration in the formation of that image. But his painting was not merely a translation of the word-picture. He continued to read literature and engaged a pandit for translation of the Sanskrit texts of Kalidasa, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, etc., for his students. His paintings are based on several literary works such as Vetāla Paṃcavimsatī, Meghadūtam and Rūtasamhāra. But his paintings do not appear as mere illustrations, as he tries to catch the same spirit of the poet, and represents it in the same manner to evoke the rasa (sentiment).

As an artist he enriched his mental collection of images as he travelled to distant places like Mussourie, Darjeeling, Puri and Konark (Bhubaneshwar). These travels had a great impact on his work and creativity. He was overjoyed to see the ocean and the sikhara of the temples of Puri and Konark; some of the images assimilated during this period could be identified from his paintings. The painting of kājari dance was drawn after he saw some girls
dancing near a tree at the Commissioner's garden party, to which he was invited during his stay in Puri. The paintings entitled, ‘Devadasi’ reminds of the devadasis he had encountered in the temple of Puri. The memories of the kajari dance and also of the devadasis seen at the temple stayed with him and were relived when he came back to Calcutta. In Mussourie, he used to wake up early in the morning and covering himself with a blanket he would sit outside his house hearing the birds sing as he waited for the sunrise. He observes that ‘the birds in the cities do not sing but cry, while in the jungle, undisturbed, they sing beautifully’. When in Mussourie he also saw a Pahadi girl with a pitcher coming down a hill to collect water from a stream. He drew a painting of this Pahadi maiden depicted as a Bhotia girl when he returned after his walk. The creative journey of Abanindranath as a painter came to an end with his drawings of the ‘Omar Khayyam’ and ‘Arabian Nights’ series of paintings. In his old age, he continued to devote his creative urge in writing the scripts of jātrā and making small toys.

Nature or life occurs not in the ordinary sense of their representations in his paintings. The analysis of his subconscious images and their visual representation indicates that to him, representation meant the transfer of his mental vision and images on to the paper. There always was an interlude of several years between the images conceived in his mind and their depiction in a painting in an evolved visual form whether in whole or in part. These images encompassed a wide variety including landscapes, historical and literary themes and compositions, and portraits too. Abanindranath never copied any form directly from the external world. He is criticised by scholars because in his paintings he did not adhere to the principles of silpa texts which he advocated in his lectures (Mukherjee 1942: 105-118). The allegation does seem justified if his paintings and his discourses are closely examined together. His studies of nature, animals and human figures truthfully represent anatomical form, proportion and character of the subjects. And, his capacity of retention coupled with his keen observation for hours and days together endowed him with the felicity to draw those objects in a manner one would do from a direct observation of the object.

In his discourse on the Indian anatomy or on the canons of painting, he claims his adherence to them. He had very minutely read the śilpa texts on tālamāna, the science of measurement in human anatomy, and he believed that aesthetic principle is the fulfillment of art, and that it should not be taken as rigid, absolute
and inviolable. He believed that the treatises and aesthetic canons were made for the continuation of the tradition and not to stifle the freedom of expression. According to him, the Šāstras are guiding principles for a student of art serving like a guide who takes a devotee to a temple through its portals, arches and mandapas. When the god or divinity of the temple reveals itself, the arches, portals and guide cease to exist. The Šāstric principles are not made to extinguish the expressions and creativity just as artistic creativity is not a stagnant pool of water but a flowing stream which carves her own banks (Tagore 1961: 29-30).

Abanindranath believed that the šilpa texts were composed with a spirit of freedom from the rigid bonds in order to attain the realm of joy which is the final goal of all arts. He has quoted a number of verses from the Šukranīti, where it is clearly said that all images are not meant for worship. It explains that the tālamāna, dhyaṇa, the descriptions of attributes and vāhanas are to be strictly adhered to only in case of those images, which are meant for worship. As regards the other images, the artist is free to follow his own artistic instinct.15

Abanindranath had quoted the text of Šukranīti of Šukracarīya16 where he specifically says that in the text, the section on tālamāna was composed only for the purpose of carving of those images which are meant for worship. It says, sevyā sevakabhāveṣa pratimālakṣaṇam smṛtam. The text also explains that, there are eight types of images, made of sand, rice flour, liquid paste, clay, wood, stone and metal besides those painted with colours. Among these images, those painted (citra), or made of liquid paste, sand, clay and rice-flour are exempted from Šāstric injunctions and they may not be considered as defective if they avail freedom of expression or do not abide by the rules.

Pratimā saikati paiṣṭi lepyā ca mṛṇmayī
dhārayā vṛttaṁ
Vārkyā pāṣāṇadhārātthā sthirā jñeyā yathottaraṁ
Lekhyā lepyā saikati ca mṛṇmayī paiṣṭikī iathā
Etāśām lakṣanābhave na kaiścīd doṣa śritaḥ.

(Šukracarīya c. 800: IV. 4.72, 152)

The text also dwells upon the idea of a beautiful image and on the freedom of artist. It says that perfect beauty is rare indeed; but the images, which are rendered according to the standard laid down by Šastra alone, are beautiful. It further says that according to learned men, nothing can be called perfect unless it has the sanction of the Šastra, or, as others would insist on that being beautiful and perfect to which one's heart may cling.
The *Sukraniti* allows such freedom of expression to artists repeatedly which shows the flexibility of the Śātric injunctions with regard to the norms about images and paintings. For instance, it says that a violation of the prescribed code of measurements for an image would not bring about ill consequences if the worshipper likes it. The artist is thus allowed latitude to make an image according to his own artistic instinct: *pratimii ruzya kalpayet simpi yathā ucya paraśaḥ smṛtyah.* (Śukrācārya IV.4.154), and *pratimiiṣyaśca ye dosaḥ hyarçaksya tapobaliś sarvatresvaracıtyaḥ nāsaṃ yanti ksanāt kila.* (Śukrācārya IV.4.159-60).

The historical and literary themes of the paintings of Abanindranath were a result of his wide reading of literature and Indian history during the third phase of his life, when he was a student of Sanskrit College and St. Xavier College at Calcutta. He has approached these themes through his literary sensibility and nationalistic fervour fanned by the swadeshi movement and by the wave of the cultural renaissance.

In the treatment of paintings based on literary and historical texts, Abanindranath’s approach was to concentrate on the representation of bhava, the sentiment or emotions expressed in the theme. He selects landscapes, backgrounds of paintings, human figures and other forms from his imagination according to his vision of the theme. Such a vision may not necessarily and always have coincided with the vision of the poet but he thought that giving vent to his own vision of it would facilitate evoking the spectator’s empathy. He believed that the guiding principle for an artist should always be the creation of artistic grace and sentiment, which is also described in the Indian canons of painting as bhava and lāvanya. The remaining elements namely, the different form, proportion, verisimilitude, colours and technique (*rupabheda, pramāna, sādṛṣya* and *vargikābhanga*) are secondary and serve as tools which the artist uses to express his inner vision regarding that bhava. In this context, verisimilitude would mean conformity with inner form, proportion would be according to the pictorial space and mode of applying the colour would be decided by the emotion or the content. These terms
are also used to represent real life but in painting and other visual arts it is the imaginative content that has to be presented through these tools. Thus, Abanindranath’s analysis of the traditional canons and their use in practice opened a new vista for the artist where there would be no confrontation between tradition and modernity. It is this freedom of experimentation given by the *silpa* texts that led to modern experiments in Indian art.

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NOTES

*The author is extremely grateful to Mrs. Sumita Bhattacharya for her help in translation and reading the complete text of Jorasankor Dhare and for her valuable suggestions in identifying certain persons, places, flowers, etc., mentioned in the text.

1. Thakur, Abanindranath and Rani Chanda (1947).
3. Jaimini Prakash Ganguly also attended the classes of Charles Palmer to learn academic oil painting and later on, joined as the Vice-Principal of the Government School of Art at Calcutta, after the resignation of Abanindranath from this post because of his differences with the Principal, Percy Brown. Cf. Partha Mitter (1994), pp. 275, 314.
6. Abanindranath has referred to a painting of Rabindranath which was exhibited in the school of Mukul Dey. The painting represented a boy lost in the jungle. Thakur and Chanda (1947) p. 21.
7. A girl came from the house of Shyam Mallick. She brought with her a pet dog. Abanindranath was attracted by it and observed its activities minutely. Later on, it was painted in the Playmate series. Abanindranath also painted a vulture many times. Two studies of the bird are preserved in the collection of Rabindra Bharati Society, Calcutta and the bird also figures in a composition entitled, "Vulture on a Temple Pinnacle" which was exhibited in the Exhibition of Indian paintings in Paris. The painting was unique and attracted attention for its intimate and symbolic idealism and representation of rare and penetrating strength of the bird. Cf. Parth Mitter (1994), Pl.No.166. Similarly, a pair of deer was represented in the 'Playmate' series and one deer was represented in the mural of Kacha and Devayani.
8. Moti Budho was a servant of the Tagore family. For details, see, Thakur and Chanda (1947) p. 120.
9. Akshaya Babu is Akshaya Kumar Maitra. He was the Director, Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi, East Bengal. He was a regular visitor to Tagores' house. Jamuna was the daughter of Nandalal Bose.

10. John Woodroffe was a judge. He had a personal collection of Japanese prints, which were exhibited in the exhibition of Indian Society of Oriental Art.

11. The Indian Society of Oriental Art was established in 1907. The idea of establishing a Society originated from Bangiya Kala Samsad which was founded by Abanindranath in 1905. It started as an art club at the Art School where artists and critics, both Europeans and Indians, met regularly in the evening to discuss various aspects of Indian art. The Indian Society of Oriental Art regularly organized exhibitions in Kolkata till 1919. One national exhibition was organized at Allahabad in 1911 and, one abroad at Paris through the efforts of Andree Karpeles. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London also had this exhibition. Exhibitions were also arranged in Tokyo and Chicago in 1915. The exhibition of 1916 was moved to Maiares (now Chennai) on the invitation of Annie Besant and James Cousins, who was a regular contributor to the Rupam, an art journal of the Society.

12. Edward Thronton was an Engineer in the Martin Company and a member of the Indian Society of Oriental Arts and he purchased paintings from the exhibitions of the Society. He was also a landscape painter. Abanindranath used to visit him daily to see and discuss the proposed architectural plans of Calcutta. Thronton painted landscapes of Udaipur, Jaipur, etc., in Indian style.

13. The Balak magazine with illustrations and line drawings of Abanindranath was printed from Jorasanko Litho Press. His aunt had seen him working on his own, copying the drawings and objects, and making line drawings for the magazine, Svapna Prayana. It is to be noted that after the death of Gunendranath the family became dependent on the elder brother. Abanindranath was the youngest male child who was not settled yet.

14. Tagore A.N. (1942) pp. 46-62. Similarly, the lectures on "Canons of Indian Painting and Indian Artistic Anatomy" were delivered by him as a Bagesvari Professor and originally published in Bengali in Probashi and Bagesvari Prabandhmala. Later, these were translated in English and published in the Golden Jubilee Volume of Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta in 1961.

15. N.R. Ray also subscribes to the same view. According to him murti means visual form of the mental image while the word pratima indicates a form made after the actual or given measurement. Hence, the images for the purpose of worship were made according to a definite dhyāna of the deity while other images were made according to the artistic instinct of the artist. Cf. Ray, Niharjanjan (1972: 132-148).

16. The date of the Sutraniti is a matter of debate among the scholars. Some
scholars believe that it is not the same text, which has been referred to in the Mahābhārata or in the Arthasastra of Kautilya, which was written by Śukrācārya, the son of Bhrigu. Cf., Gopal, (1965), pp. xviii–xix. R.N. Dandekar and A.L. Basham (1963:240) who ascribed it to A.D. 800 have remarked that the work is notable for its detailed treatment of the administrative machinery, foreign relations, military policy and iconographic rules. On the basis of internal evidences Misra dates the Sukraniti between the post-Gupta and the pre-Harṣa periods. Cf., Misra, (1998), pp. 8–10. The Nitikalpataru of Ksemendra quotes 10 verses from the work of Śukrācārya, which have been traced to the printed edition of the Sukraniti. According to Mazumdar (1960: x-xi), this mention of the work by an author writing in the middle 11th century may be taken as a positive evidence of the existence of the work in the A.D. 11th century.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate no. 1  Kacha and Devayani
Plate no. 2  Death of Shah Jahan (1902)
Plate no. 3–4  Kṛṣṇa Līlā Series
Kacha and Devayani
Death of Shah Jahan (1902)
Jorasankor Dhare on Abanindranath Tagore’s

Krishna Lilā
Krishna Lilä
Reform and Reinterpretation of Hinduism in Nineteenth Century Bengal
A Rooftop View
AMIYA P. SEN

So far as I can see there are four key words or expressions in the title to this essay that need some preliminary clarification. While some may justly begin with ‘reform’, ‘reinterpretation’ or even ‘Hinduism’, I personally would prefer beginning with the expression ‘Nineteenth Century Bengal’ for two related reasons. First, while reform and reinterpretation of Hinduism occurred in other provinces as well, there is something distinctive about what occurred in nineteenth century Bengal. There is a historical conjunction here of two important elements, the nineteenth century and Bengal, each of which is important in its own way but went on to produce certain unique experiences when historically combined. I am, in other words, trying to suggest that, within the history of modern Hindu hermeneutics, there is a certain significance to nineteenth century Bengal that is not comparable with say, eighteenth century Maharashtra or for that matter, even twentieth century Bengal itself. In the eighteenth century for instance, Bengal had not been effectively colonized and in Maharashtra, the rule of the Peshwas continued until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, with the result that the interpenetration of two cultures and political economies had not begun to take significant effect. By the twentieth century, on the other hand, the keenness for reform and cultural reinterpretation lost much of its power and public appeal; a fact that has been put down to the intensification of Indian nationalism.

In hindsight, we can justly claim that there was an inverse relationship between the success of social and religious reform movements and the deepening of nationalist thought. Nationalism suspected all attempts at reform, whether initiated by the state or individuals and more often than not argued that political freedom
should precede social emancipation. Here it is also important to remember that during the nineteenth century, Hindu Bengalis were a fairly mobile community and as virtually the second colonizers, spread Bengali cultural ideas, motifs and symbols to many parts of upper India. At some places within India, the Hindu renaissance and reform movements reveal palpable tensions between the local ways of life and Bengali cultural hegemony. Public anger against anglicization and the adoption of alien ways of life were often directed equally against the local Bengali teacher or Head Clerk and his English superior.

The term ‘reform’ is actually problematic. Contrary to common perceptions, it does not have a very long history. On the basis of my knowledge of at least two major Indian languages, Hindi and Bengali, I should like to hazard the guess that there was probably no equivalent for this term in the pre-modern history of these languages. The currently fashionable ‘samskar’ in Bengali and ‘sudhar’ in Hindi, probably came into vogue and were certainly widely accepted, only in colonial India. Also, it is current historiography that projects religious figures like the Buddha, Kabir, Nanak or Caitanya as ‘reformers’, not their contemporaries and certainly not these historical actors themselves.

In the context of modern Hinduism, the term ‘reinterpretation’ too is far from clear and unambiguous. Ordinarily, textual reinterpretations as commonly occurred in nineteenth century India, vitally touch on the question of authority. What are the definitional boundaries of tradition and on what interpretative axis must reformers and re-interpreters base themselves? Also, are texts and traditions interminably stretchable or were there practical limits to this? Could a scholar or reformer relate to a text across a historical chasm of several hundred years? These were some of the problems that came up before activists and the modern Hindu and in some cases, one has to admit, they could not come up with satisfactory answers. Their problems were compounded by several factors. Operatively, there was no one text that could be taken to be the authority for Hindus for social, religious and cultural matters. Here, it would be somewhat misleading to cite the traditional Hindu reverence for śruti for, one of the distinctive features of the religious history of modern India was the weakening of the unity of scripture (ekāvyatā) that characterized traditional society. Particularly in Bengal, this had hardly been an operative reality, partly because of the relative weakness of the Vedic tradition and partly because the early arrival
of modern education had further eroded faith in scripture and revelation. Throughout the nineteenth century, Bengal was to be the seat of the Vedantic not Vedic revival, whereas the opposite had been the case in the Punjab, under the Arya Samaj. The weakening of the authority of the śruti can also be gauged from the fact that in Bengal and in some other parts of India, a smṛti text like the Bhagavadgītā attained near canonical status.

Finally, we negotiate the term 'Hinduism' as distinct from the term Hindu dharma or Sanātana dharma. Here, the first question to ask us is whether or not like 'reform', this too was a word of recent coinage. Hindu thinkers outside Bengal such as the Brahman reformer from early nineteenth century Maharashtra, Vishnu Baba Brahmachari, preferred using the term Sanātana dharma, which incidentally, is not directly connected with the part ethnic, part cultural term, Hindu. The prefix 'Sanātana' was rather meant to convey the universal and eternal nature of religious truths. Some scholars are now of the opinion that the term Hinduism originated with Raja Rammohun Roy. This is not fortuitous because in the intellectual and cultural history of modern Bengal and India, the Raja was one of the earliest to obtain a copious knowledge of the English language and of the contemporary west. The connection between his exposure to the modern west and his attempt to identify the Hindus with one, homogenized religion (Hinduism) is historically very significant because through this, Rammohun wanted to project the Hindus as a monolithic religious community like the Muslims and Christians at a time, when such unity was considered to be symptomatic of the moral and social progress that a people had made. Identifying the Hindus with a common religion was also vital to the entire reformation. In the nineteenth century, reform was meant to not only bring about progressive changes in religion but also forge together the nascent nation of the Hindus. Hence, any reformist activity had to be seen as touching the lives of all Hindus. This essay therefore argues that reform and a redefined Hinduism critically determined each other.

II

There is, of course, an obvious answer to why recounting the history of modern Hinduism ought to begin with Bengal. The province was the first to be colonized, leading to an early and intense exchange of ideas and values between two cultures that were removed from each
other not only in terms of material development but also ways of looking at man and the world. Bengal was not only the first seat of Orientalism which awakened pride and nostalgia for a 'golden' past but was also the province to first feel the impact of the modern episteme; of modern education which threw a moral challenge before indigenous knowledge systems. The historical factor which also contributed to the uniqueness of Bengal is the rapidity with which the political transition was effected in this province. When compared to their counterpart in Maharashtra, the Hindu ruling classes in Bengal perceived greater powerlessness for they had been displaced for a longer time. Under colonialism, they had been only further marginalized by the radical changes to the economy and society. In the hundred years or so following the battle of Plassey, upper class Hindus of Bengal were systematically deprived of their economic power and commercial entrepreneurship. Further, with the spread of modern university education, the new Bengali middle classes, having lost their roots in modern agriculture, finance or industry, were reduced to the life of petty clerks in government and European mercantile offices. From the perspective of reform and reinterpretation of culture, this was an important development. In provinces such as the Punjab or Maharashtra, where British power arrived later and under slightly different circumstances, the political and economic transformation was not as rapid. Both these provinces had enjoyed a degree of autonomy from Indo-Muslim rule, especially after the seventeenth century and the ruling classes therein had a greater sense of involvement with the changes being produced in society. The Peshwas in Maharashtra, for example, had already authorized widow marriages among upper class Hindus which may be contrasted to the great public controversy that broke out in Bengal when the British passed a law in 1856 enabling widows to marry. By comparison the greater controversy generated in Bengal was due to a variety of reasons. For one, it reminded the Hindu elite and intelligentsia of their utter powerlessness in law making and not surprisingly, the widow marriage campaign was seen by its opponents not only as a move to offend traditional custom and sensibilities but also as an undue intervention by an alien ruling class in the internal social arrangement of Hindu society. In the coming years, this class was to oppose all social change attempted through statute. The question of reforming one's own society came to be interpreted as a matter affecting the self-determination of the Hindus. Ironically enough, in this respect, the Hindus of Bengal acquired a particularly bad name.
because some of the major instances of social legislation in the
nineteenth century such as the abolition of Sati, civil marriages, or
widow marriages among upper caste Hindus were introduced by
them. Reformers in Bengal, on the one hand, were indeed aggrieved
at the fact that social initiatives to set their own house in order were
now being seized by the British; on the other hand, they were also
of the view that such measures represented a practical blue print for
the progressive reordering of their society. This also leads us to the
paradox that was distinctive to modern Bengalis. In hindsight they
would appear to be among the greatest supporters of British rule but
also their strongest critics.

The Ideological Basis of Reform

In nineteenth century Bengal as elsewhere, there was no fixed or
commonly accepted definition of social reform. Sometimes very large
and inclusivist definitions were given of it, especially by those
influenced by current western thought and practice. Raghunath
Purushotam Paranjype, India's first Senior Wrangler at Cambridge\textsuperscript{1}
once drew attention to the fact that in the contemporary west, the
term 'social reform' was broad enough to include matters like hours
of work, workers' insurance cover and the abuse of child labour in
organized or unorganized industry. On the other hand, some
expressed unhappiness over the fact that the entire issue of social
reform had been somewhat trivialized by including in its purview,
matters like the objects of fashion. However, generally speaking,
reformers were extremely choosy about the subject on which to
agitate and here what mattered more was not the intrinsic merit of
the issue but what value it had for the emerging Hindu discourse.
Humanitarian concerns were not always the inspiration behind acts
of reform. Why else was the evil of female infanticide, noticed as
early as 1800, never seriously taken up by Hindu reformers and its
abolition in the 1870s, attributable to the intervention made by British
officials themselves? On the contrary, there was a disproportionate
emphasis on the marriage of upper caste widows, even when they
formed an insignificant number in respect of the total Hindu
population in British India. The difference in attitude in both cases
is explained by a common cause namely, the values entertained by
a patriarchal society and the reform movement itself being so
dominated by upper caste male concerns. For most Hindu reformers
advocating widow marriage, the preferred subject was the child
widow, not women widowed in adulthood. What was at stake here was the social value put on virginity though people also highlighted the lifelong hardships that a child widow would have to put up with if left unmarried. The marriage of child widows also had the advantage of bypassing in most cases, the question of the women’s choice. In any case, widow marriages did not prove particularly popular in a province like Bengal, not because society here was traditionally more conservative but because Hindu nationalism made the widow’s chastity, a cultural symbol of Hindu resistance. More widow marriages were celebrated in coastal Andhra than in Bengal, notwithstanding the fact that leading Andhra reformers like Kandukuri Viresalingam were deeply inspired by developments in Bengal. Ironically enough, in princely states, where Indian nationalism was relatively weaker and developed over a longer period of time, the history of social reform was generally more successful.

Broadly speaking, modern reform and reformers were driven by positivistic notions of time and history, imbibed from the west. In Enlightenment Europe, it generally came to be believed that man was capable of interminable progress and that this had been manifest in both the working of nature and the will of god. Until about the 1860s, the most powerful religious ideology in western Europe was that of deism that likened the world to a mechanical clock with god as the clockmaker. The universe was perfect in its conception and all that was required to realize its perfection was an active and willing intervention by man, as God’s chosen representative. It was, however, accepted that not all men would be equally able to gauge god’s intentions for man and hence it was assumed that in society, these would be rightly interpreted and executed by the chosen. In the nineteenth century, it was precisely this task that a reformer hoped to carry out. ‘Reform’ and ‘help’ were both very self-conscious activities that such people willingly ascribed to themselves. The reformer was instrumental to the successful implementation of god’s will for man on earth and he assumed the moral responsibility for the development chronology that was now beset in the very paradigm of reform.

The significance of such ideas emerges more clearly when pitted against traditional Hindu notions—for lack of a better word—of reform and change. The first point of some importance is that the Hindu understanding of time is significantly different. It is at best spirally linear that is to say that while time did move forward, it did
not do so directly but through a spiral movement. Now, this is very different from the understanding of time in contemporary notions of history where time moves directly and irreversibly in one direction with the result that we witness a succession of events, each unique to itself. In the Hindu view, by comparison, this uniqueness is lost in the possibility of circular repetitiveness. For a reformer, with the presuppositions he had, the latter could be problematic for one of the presumptions here was that the act of reform was a progressive step forward towards the ultimately realizable perfection in man. A modern reformer, in other words, would be extremely confused and exasperated by the possibility of the ills—which he hoped he had eradicated—returning with surprising regularity. Finally, a tendency common to modern reform was judging matters by their practical usefulness. Rammohun Roy, a pioneer in respect of social and religious reform, believed that religion had to have functional validity in society, which is to say that religion could be seen to be an adjunct of society and not as an autonomous category in itself. This is indeed different from the traditional Hindu understanding which saw religion as standing outside society. Even in modern India, a Vedantin like Swami Vivekananda consistently maintained that higher things like religion or spirituality could not be judged in terms of everyday social life. Religion was timeless and transcendental, society and man's material life were temporal and transitory. Pre-modern figures like Kabir or Nanak perceived equality between man and man essentially in spiritual terms, as children born of the same God rather than on the basis of any doctrines of social egalitarianism. A modern reformer like Rammohun was also unique in suggesting that besides securing social comfort, religions could also be reformed with an eye on the 'political advantage' they could bring about. For the times, this was indeed a novel thing to say.

The Distinctiveness of Bengal

The history of Bengali reform appears to have undergone a radical change within the space of a few decades after Rammohun. Whereas the Raja had tended to evaluate the worth of religion from the point of view of its social advantages, his successors rejected this idea altogether. The important reformer and public figure from Maharashtra, Mahadev Govind Ranade, once accused the Bengalis of dwelling far too much on the subject of religious reform at the expense of the social. This is indeed borne out by the attitude of
Bengali reformers in the 1860s and the '70s. At a public lecture that he delivered in Bombay in 1867-68, the Brahmo leader Keshabchandra Sen admitted:

I do not belong to that school of secular reformers according to whom Indian reform means making stronger garrisons on the frontier, irrigation, female education, intermarriage and widow marriage. If you wish to regenerate this country, make religion the basis of all your reform movements.²

Such thoughts were echoed by a host of Bengali reformers including Swami Vivekananda. This apparent backsliding in respect of social reform is in a way surprising since the strength of the conservative opposition in Bengal was not any stronger than in Maharashtra or other places in south India. Bengal did not have to put up with fiats issued from Sankaracaryas excommunicating reformers for daring to attend widow marriages and caste-friction in this province, at least in the nineteenth century was never as intense as it was at some other places. It is also reasonable to assume that relatively speaking, contemporary Bengal would have a larger proportion of graduates or men generally on the side of change and reform. The tendency to project the religious as the more important category is, in a way a reversion to the older argument about the inner spiritual unity of man taking precedence over any social theories on egalitarianism. But more importantly perhaps, this also reflects the argument, first originating in Bengal, that the Hindus were quintessentially spiritual and it was this spirituality that would support them in a modern world, characterized by rapid material change. That India could teach spirituality to the west in lieu of knowledge concerning arts, crafts or industry is an idea strongly put forth by Vivekananda in the 1890s; what is not so well known however, is that this argument has been endemic to modern Bengali thinkers since the time of Rammohun. Here it is important not to lose sight of the fact that his argument about the social determination of religion notwithstanding, Rammohun was a leading figure in the revival of Vedanta in modern India, which, in its outlook is quite non-utilitarian.

That religion, albeit of the 'reformed' variety, could be the basis of Indian unity is an idea clearly implied even by Rammohun for it is he who was the first to claim in modern India that the esoteric knowledge of the śrutis ought to be opened up to śudras and women as well. Thereby, the Raja aimed at some kind of spiritual and not social democracy for he was otherwise, a scrupulous follower of caste rules.
In Vivekananda’s writings and speeches, the monism of Vedanta is made to acquire both an ethical and social dimension. Vedanta is now made more ‘practical’, which is to say that rather than be pure speculative metaphysics, it was also to include some sense of social responsibility. Rather than encourage world-renunciation, it was to preach an activist involvement in the world. This was indeed a courageous innovation considering that the relatively more powerful sub-tradition within Vedanta, the advaitic non-dualism of Śankara, had contributed significantly to break up an older synthesis of jñāna and karma (jñānakarmasamuccaya). The important thing about the Vedantic revival in Bengal was that while mostly situating itself within the spiritual lineage of Śankara, it also revealed certain significant departures from the same. Especially, a man like Vivekananda departed from Śankara in arguing that practical, personal experience (anubhava) was the authority to be put even before the authority of śruti. In a general sense, this represents the philosophical turn against metaphysics, beginning again in contemporary Europe and reaching new heights with the social theories of Comte and Spencer.

The ethical redefinition of the Vedanta too has to be understood in this light. One of the recurring criticisms directed against Hinduism in modern times was that it had no clear notion of morality as distinct from religion. The neo-Vedantic tradition wanted to actively contest this view by alluding to the moral possibilities within Vedanta. Vivekananda argued that the most effective moral system could be built on the basis of an inner unity of souls. People would be morally motivated when they realized that helping others was actually helping oneself because the self was ultimately not different from the other.

Concluding Remarks

it would have to be said that within the history of social and religious reform movement in modern India, Bengal occupies an important place not merely because chronologically, these movements arrived here first but on account of the fact that some of the most critical conflicts and tensions within these movements were also manifest here. Bengal was not only the province to first support state-sponsored reform, beginning with the abolition of sati in 1829 but also to launch the most reactionary agitation against it, as apparent from the Age of Consent Bill controversy in 1891. Thinkers and writers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, most perceptibly on the side of a rational and liberal religion, sharply criticized the state
and non-Hindu reformers like Behramji Malabari for trying to persuade the state to pass laws against premature marriages and the consummation of marriages among Hindus. The Bengali reformer, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, who himself solicited the intervention of the colonial government over the remarriage of Hindu widows or the abolition of polygamy, was sharply critical of government’s intentions of passing the Consent Act. And Vivekananda, who would be deeply moved by the tears of a widow, was one of the consistent opponents of widow marriages. Such paradoxes, evidently, have to be explained not so much in the light of personal weaknesses or inconsistency as by the contradictions inherent in the times. Though deeply influenced by the moral and social thinking of the west, Bengali reformers and interpreters of religion and society were equally firm in their rejection of such elements of thought or practice, which, in their opinion, were unsuitable to Indian conditions. Thus in his reinterpretation of Hindu society and culture, Bankimchandra constructively used the social theories of August Comte but rejected the ‘godless’ qualities in Positivism. Activism and a moral responsibility towards the other did indeed become an important part of neo-Hinduism in Bengal but they were often subordinated to categories of god and religion. Bankimchandra, possibly the first to produce a commentary on the Gîtâ in modern times, felt that patriotic duty to the country could be best rendered through the adoration of God. This is significantly different from the position of Tilak whose Gîtârâhasya takes the path of selfless, ethical action (karma yoga) to be the supreme message in the text.

The dominant school of thinking on reform within Bengal was most seriously challenged by the emergence of leaders like B.R. Ambedkar and E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, Periyar, who essentially agitated on social issues like caste and found religion to be the greatest impediment in the path of social reorganization and improvement. It is a fact of some significance that Bengali reform movements were primarily centred on issues concerning women and not caste and that Bengal produced no leader of an all-India standing in this respect. This was a distinctiveness determined both by the traditional ordering of Bengali society where caste differences were relatively less sharper and the fact that educated Bengalis reacted more strongly to western allegations regarding the state of Hindu women. Without stretching the argument too far, I should like to suggest that this possibly has some roots in Bengal’s traditional religious ideology, strongly under the influence of sâkta and tantric cults. These cults were known to
be respectful towards women though not necessarily in the social sense. However, in an age particularly known for its creative hermeneutics, a metaphysical value placed on female power (Śakti) could well be transformed into a social empathy for women in society. I find it significant that Raja Rammohun Roy, a pioneer in respect of woman-related reform and in championing the right of property in respect of woman, was a śāntric in personal life.

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NOTES

1. The first Wrangler was Ananda Mohan Bose, a man with Brahmo leanings.
Archeology of the Middle Ganga Plain
The Chalcolithic Phase

PURUSHOTTAM SINGH

Though not a clear-cut physical unit, the Middle Ganga Plain (24° 30' N - 27° 50' N and 81° 47' E - 87° 50' E) stretches for about 300 km from the Himalayan foothills in the north to Vindhyan ranges in the south and covers a large physical area (144, 409 sq. km). It attained its present form during the post-Tertiary period when this deep trough was filled up by fine alluvium brought down from the Himalayas in the north with an average thickness of 1300-1400 metres. In historic times, the main river Ganga, watered by several tributaries, flowed sluggishly in meandering fashion forming ox-bow lakes, some of which are perennial. These lakes were rich in aquatic fauna and the lands around them were covered with wild grasses, many of which had edible grains. With the onset of the milder climate of the Holocene, the marshy land gradually turned into good grassland, which attracted small animals.

The Middle Ganga Plain is bounded by the Ganga-Yamuna confluence in the west and the West Bengal and Bihar border in the east, Himalayas in the north and the Vindhyas in the south. The area includes modern eastern Uttar Pradesh and parts of Bihar. The western and eastern limits of the Middle Ganga Plain have been demarcated as follows:

The delimiting line marks the western boundaries of the tahsils of Utraula and Balrampur (Gonda district), Faizabad and Akbarpur (Faizabad district), Sultanpur (Sultanpur district), Patti (Pratapgarh district) and Phulpur and Meja (Allahabad district). As regards the eastern limit of this plain the problem is rather easier. Here the natural boundary i.e. the old Kosi-Mahananda divide very easily solves our problem" (Singh, S.C. '1973).

The eastern boundary thus follows the western margin of the Rajmahal hills and the West Bengal-Bihar state boundary excluding the Kishanganj division.
The Drainage System

The drainage system of the Middle Ganga Plain is governed by the general lie of the land, which slopes from the northwest to the southeast. The entire region is drained by the Ganga system. The Ganga is the trunk river of this Plain covering a distance of about 2000 km within the alluvial plain. It is a Himalayan source river having a large catchment in the mountains. Emerging out of the Himalayas near Hardwar, the Ganga flows majestically for 1200 km eastwards, turns south, and then flanks the eastern face of the Rajmahal hills. All along this course it receives waters from various tributaries as follows:

The Yamuna

For the greater part of its course, the Yamuna flows between high banks, considerably dissected at places by gulley erosions. It runs for 800 km parallel to the Ganga and joins it at Allahabad after having received on its right bank a number of tributaries—the Chambal, Sind, Betwa and Ken—from the Central Highlands.

The Ghaghara

The Ghaghara is the recipient of all the drainage of the Saryupar—west of the Gandak—through its tributaries like the Kuwana, the Rapti, the Chhoti Gandak and the other smaller ones. It is highly notorious for its flood, changing courses and its capacity to render vast agricultural tracts into sand flats (Singh, R.L. 1971: 195). This behaviour of the river must have adversely affected human settlements during the Chalcolithic period. Other streams like the Rapti, although equally notorious, deposit fertile silt and provide highly fertile agricultural tracts.

The Kosi

The Kosi, formed by seven important streams (Sapt-Kosi) in eastern Nepal, receives no tributary in the plains because of its raised bed; it meets the Ganga, at present, a little below Kargola. It is the sorrow of Bihar and the wildest and the most devastative of Indian rivers, and it flows through several capricious channels. It deposits infertile sediments consisting of micaceous sands and renders vast fertile lands into sandy and marshy flats. This again deterred prehistoric man from settling in its catchment area.
The Son

The Ganga receives numerous tributaries from the Southern Uplands among which the Son is the largest. The channel of this river is very wide (about 5 km at Dehri), but its flood plain is narrow: only 3 to 5 km wide. The river—as is traceable from several old beds on its east—must have been notorious for its changing courses in the past, but it has now been tamed squarely with the anicut at Dehri and, more so, with the Indrapuri Barrage that has been built a few kilometers upstream (Singh, R.L. 1971: 196).

Floods

Floods are a recurring feature of the region, particularly in the Northern Ganga Plain. Not infrequently, when the Ganga itself remains in spate, and thwarts the incoming water from its numerous tributaries in the region, large areas get flooded leading to breaks of transport system and devastation of life and property.

The Ox-Bow Lakes

A striking feature of the Middle Ganga Plain, particularly its western section, is the existence of a large number of horseshoe or ox-bow lakes. A large number of them have been filled up partly by nature and partly by man but many of them still survive. Obviously, these lakes were formed by the meander of the Ganga and represent the various stages in the withdrawal of the river to its present channel. In fact, it has been claimed that the Ganga shifted its course some 55 km southward during terminal Pleistocene time (Kennedy 2000 : 202). These horseshoe lake formations have been studied at some places. The available evidence suggests that very arid climatic condition, which existed in the beginning, were followed by arid, semi-arid, and semi-humid conditions (Misra and Gupta 1995: 22). In any case, these lakes are important, because it was on their banks that the first settlers of the Mesolithic times came and settled, and prehistoric man’s life came to be governed by the ecology of the new sandy alluvial formation and by the lakes that were situated in it.

CULTURES OF THE MIDDLE GANJA PLAIN

The Mesolithic Cultures

The first effective forays of prehistoric man in the Middle Ganga
plain were made at the fag end of the terminal Pleistocene and at the beginning of early Holocene period. This stage is known as the Epipalaeolithic (a transitional phase from the Late Upper Palaeolithic to the early Mesolithic). During this stage the Stone Age man from the Vindhyas used to cross the Ganga and Yamuna rivers in the north and colonize the Ganga plain. The second phase, known as the Mesolithic, constitutes a transitional stage from the Palaeolithic to Neolithic. The Mesolithic sites, characterized by microliths, have been reported from different ecological zones across the length and width of the country, excepting from the major portion of the Indo-Gangetic plain and the northeastern part of India.

More than 200 Mesolithic sites have been discovered in the Middle Ganga Plain. They have a fairly dense but discontinuous distribution in the Pratapgarh district as against sporadic occurrences in Allahabad, Sultanpur, Jaunpur and Varanasi districts. Such a disparity in their distribution may probably be either as a result of uneven explorations of the region or due to micro-level environmental differences among the districts concerned.

The chronology of the Mesolithic phase in the Ganga valley is still not firmly established. Two radiocarbon dates obtained from Sarai Nahar Rai on bone samples gave a reading of 10050±110 BP and 26601±120 BP. It is believed that the former date represents the early phase of the culture. However, a time span of 8000 B.C. to 2000 B.C. has been proposed for the Mesolithic phase of the Ganga valley (Pal 2002: 77).

The Neolithic Interlude

In the mid-Ganga valley, traces of Neolithic culture were found at Sohagaura in the early seventies of the last century. This site is situated on the confluence of the Ami and the Rapti river in district Gorakhpur. In recent years, Neolithic artifacts comprising a limited number of microliths and the characteristic cord-impressed, hand-made pottery have been found from more than a dozen sites, and of these sites, Imlidih Khurd and Lahuradeva, have been excavated. The excavation at the last-named site has shown, among other things, that paddy was cultivated as early as 5300 B.C.

The Chalcolithic Cultures

The discovery of Chalcolithic cultures in the Middle Ganga Plain is barely three decades old, and this discovery is largely the result of
field investigations carried out by the Universities of Allahabad, Banaras, Gorakhpur and Patna and the Departments of Archaeology of UP and Bihar states. The Chalcolithic levels were identified first at Chirand in 1968-69 and subsequently at Sohgaura in 1974 - 75, although the latter site had been investigated earlier also.

THE EXCAVATED SITES

Among the principal excavated sites of the Chalcolithic period, the following may be mentioned:

Sohagaura

This site is situated at the confluence of the Rapti and Ami rivers in the Bansgaon sub-division of Gorakhpur district. It was the findspot of a bronze plaque with a Mauryan Prakrit inscription. The University of Gorakhpur excavated the site in 1961 - 62 and again in 1974-75.

Lahuradeva

This site is situated on the bank of a lake in district Sant Kabir Nagar. This site, measuring 220 m east-west and 140 m north-south, was explored by the University of Gorakhpur in 1974 - 75 and has been under excavation since 2001 - 02 by the UP State Department of Archaeology.

Narhan

This site is situated on the left bank of the Ghaghara in the Gola subdivision of district Gorakhpur. The present author excavated it during 1984-89.

Imlidih Khurd

The inconspicuous mound of Imlidih Khurd is located on the left bank of the Kuwana, a tributary of the Ghaghara, in district Gorakhpur. The present author excavated it for three field seasons respectively, in 1992, 1993 and 1995.

Khairadih

This small village is situated on the right bank of river Ghaghara, about 40 km downstream of Narhan. The Banaras Hindu University
excavated it for five seasons from 1980-81 to 1983-84 and after that in 1985-86.

Senuwar
This site is situated on the bank of a small river, Kudra, 7 km south of Sasaram in district Rohtas (Bihar). It was under excavation by the Banaras Hindu University during 1986-87 and 1989-90.

Chirand
It is an important settlement of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures. It is situated on the bank of the Ghaghara river in district Saran, Bihar, 11 km east of Chhapra. The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Bihar excavated this site for seven seasons between 1962 – 63 and 1972 – 73.

Champa
The ancient settlement of Champa lies in the general area of Nathnagar on the outskirts of modern Bhagalpur. This site was excavated by the Patna University between 1969-70 and 1976-77 and again in 1982-83 on a limited scale.

Raja Nal Ka Tila
This site is located on the banks of river Karamnasa in the Sonbhadra district. It was excavated for two seasons during 1996 and 1997 by the UP State Department of Archaeology.

Malhar
This site is also situated on the Karamnasa river in district Varanasi. It was excavated in 1999 by the UP State Department of Archaeology.

As its name implies, the Chalcolithic stage is represented by cultures where Chalkos (copper) was used, (though in limited quantities), along with Lithos (stones) in the form of microliths which were used as parts of composite tools. However, in the Middle Ganga Plains, the artifacts of copper are very limited and the lithic component is completely missing on sites like Inlidih, Narhan, Khairadih, etc. and wherever it is present (as at the sites of Sant Ravidas Nagar district; Waina in Ballia district and Agiabir in Mirzapur), its number is exceedingly small and it is not clear if their presence made any significant contribution in the economy of these people.
The Neolithic phase in the Middle Ganga Plain and the Vindhyas was succeeded by the Chalcolithic cultures. There is no time gap between the two cultures and a gradual evolution from the former to the latter has been witnessed at a number of sites. The excavations at sites like Sohagaura, Imlidih Khurd, Chirand, Chechar and Senuwar have furnished evidence pertaining to the transitional stage from the preceding Neolithic cultures of the region to the Chalcolithic. The only perceptible change during the Chalcolithic is the introduction of copper in this region sometime in the latter half of third millennium B.C. This resulted in tremendous farming activity bringing about agricultural surplus in a big way and the consequent increase in human population. Whereas the Neolithic settlements were few and far between, the number as well as the size of the settlements increased several fold in the Chalcolithic phase. Exploration carried out in 14,600 sq. km. area of the Middle Ganga Plain has brought to light more than 200 sites. Surely, many more sites lie buried and are yet to be documented. Of the explored sites, about two dozen have been excavated so far (Misra, B.B. 2000:66). Important among them are Kakoria, Magha, Koldihwa, Khajuri, Banimilia-Bahera, Takiaper, Malhar, Raja Nal Ka Tila in the Vindhyas and Jhusi, Kausambi, Sringaverapura, Raighat, Prahlapdpur, Masondih, Sohagaura, Narhan, Imlidih, Khairadih, Chirand, Chechar, Maner, Oriup, Champa, Sonepur, Taradih, Manjhi and Senuwar in the Ganga Valley. The general features of the chalcolithic culture in the Middle Ganga Plain can be listed as follows:

Houses and Settlement Pattern

The Chalcolithic inhabitants lived in wattle-and-daub structures, circular or oval in plan and in houses having mud walls. The Chalcolithic cultures in Bihar have been documented in the excavations at Chirand, Sonpur, Oriup and other sites. Evidence coming from the first two of these sites shows that the Chalcolithic people lived in houses made of mud plaster, reeds or bamboos. The 5.50 m thick Chalcolithic deposit at Chirand revealed, at its earliest level, a circular hearth and post-holes and floors of burnt earth. The exposed lime floors at Sonpur had circular pits representing circular huts, with varying diameters of 1.84 to 2.44 m. and with bones of animals and birds inside.
Ceramic Industries

As it has been rightly said, pottery is the alphabet of archaeology and until recently ceramics was considered as a diagnostic trait of Neolithic culture. However, the discovery of an a-ceramic stage of Neolithic cultures of Western Asia has exploded this myth. In India, pottery has been reported from the Mesolithic levels of Chopani Mando, Baghai Khor, Lekhahia Rock Shelter I, Langhnaj and other sites, but it is absent on the Mesolithic sites of Pratapgarh. Pottery appears again in the Neolithic levels at Laburadeva, Sohagaura and Imlidih Khurd where it is marked by a handmade cord-impressed red ware.

In the Chalcolithic cultures the ceramic assemblage mainly comprises the black-and-red ware, the black slipped ware and the red ware. The pots are usually wheel-thrown, though hand-made specimens are also met with. The red ware, the most prolific ceramic industry, is characterized by the bowl, including the lipped and pedestalled varieties, with convex sides and everted rim; convex or straight-sided dishes with sagger or flat base; shallow basin including the lipped variety and storage jar. The types in black-and-red ware include the deep carinated, lipped or pedestalled bowl; dish with convex or straight sides and sagger base; small vase, basin, and straight-sided troughs. Though, in general, the pottery is plain but decoration in the form of paintings, (essentially linear), incisions, and applied patterns are also met with.

In the Sarayupar plain, the chalcolithic cultures have been identified at Sohagaura, Narhan, Khairadih and other sites. At all these sites, this phase is characterized by the occurrence of black-and-red ware (plain and painted), black-slipped ware (plain and painted), red ware (both slipped and un-slipped), burnished black ware, cord-impressed pottery and rusticated ware. The last three wares are found in limited number. At Narhan, the painted black slipped ware is meager: the prominent ware being the painted black-and-red ware. About twenty per cent sherds in this ware have been reported. On the contrary, the painted black slipped ware is the prominent industry at Khairadih (Singh P. 1992: 78).

The ceramic industry at the Chalcolithic sites of Bihar is represented by kiln-burnt plain and painted black-and-red, black, steel-grey and red wares. The pottery, of sandy clay and porous section, is both wheel turned and handmade and has a thick slip over it. The early specimens of Sonpur are brittle and too small to indicate any shape,
Archaeology of Middle Ganga Plain

but the types at Chirand include dish-on-stand; long-necked jar, lipped bowl; basin; bowl with ring base; spouted vessel; four-legged and ring-based perforated pot in black-and-red ware; and high-necked jar, lipped bowl; basin; bowl with ring base; spouted vessel; lota with corrugated shoulders in black-slipped ware. Generally bowls and dishes bear painted designs comprising groups of wavy and straight lines or dashes executed in white on black surface.

The Small Finds

The negligible occurrence of copper objects, which include a few small, corroded pieces from Sonpur and Chirand, a bead from Chirand and a bangle piece from Oriup reflect the scarcity of the metal. Cores, waste flakes, blades and numerous small nodules on carnelian, chalcedony, quartz and chert represent Microliths from the sites. The appearance of iron in the uppermost Chalcolithic levels of Sonpur and Chirand is significant. A similar stratigraphic position obtains at Narhan also.

The other associated finds from Sonpur and Chirand include tanged and socketed arrowheads having circular or square section and pins of bone, arrowheads of ivory and styli of both materials. Besides, there are terracotta beads, some pear-shaped and some others with incised decorations; beads of steatite, chalcedony, etc.; balls, pestles and querns of stone, bones of birds and fish and a few Neolithic celts from Chirand.

The post-cremation circular pit-burials at Sonpur and suspected such other burials at Chirand are noteworthy (Roy (in Ghosh, ed.) 1989, I: 99). The Sonpur burials having diameter of 1.82 to 2.12 m and a depth of 91 cm and containing ash, charred bone pieces and sherds of black, red and black-and-red wares and a handmade jar with 5 kg of charred rice, suggest that the people burnt their dead and buried their charred bones. The handmade jar with 5 kg of charred rice found in the burial at Sonpur indicates the evidence of rice cultivation there.

The noteworthy small antiquities found at Khairadih, Narhan and Sohagaura consist of beads of agate, chalcedony, carnelian, jasper, steatite besides, socketed and tanged arrowheads of bone, points, pottery discs, etc. Terracotta beads, decorated with incised designs, are common to both Khairadih and Sohagaura. At Khairadih, the use of glass is attested by the presence of a micro bead of blue glass (Singh, P. 1992: 79), while at Narhan a polished celt is reported
The presence of a socketed copper arrowhead, an indeterminate object, a rod and a copper piece, respectively found at Khairadih, Narhan and Sohagaura suggest the scarce use of the metal. A noteworthy point, which needs our attention, is the complete absence of lithic tools—an essential element in the ‘Chalcolithic’ appellation—at these sites (Singh, P. 1992: 79).

AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE CHALCOLITHIC PEOPLE

Agriculture is no mean art. It calls for a scientific understanding of the natural phenomena, development of tools and skill, sense of right season for sowing various crops, correct method of storage and preservation of grains from insects, right type of grains for seed, domestication, control, training and use of draft animals, water management, fertilization, weeding out, reaping, thrashing, grinding, pounding, invention of methods of cooking and processing including pottery. The achievements of Chalcolithic people have to be evaluated keeping in view the above factors.

A good quantity of archaeo-botanical remains obtained by floatation from a number of sites give a fair idea of the agricultural practices of the Chalcolithic people. Such evidence comes mainly from Laburadeva, Imlidih Khurd, Narhan, Senuwar, and Chirand.

The archaeobotanical remains from Imlidih Khurd comprised rice, barley, wheat, jowar, millet, bajra (pearl millet). The pulses included lentil, field pea, grass pea (khesari) and green gram or mung. The oilseeds comprised field brassica and sesame or til. Jujube, awla and grapes were the fruits eaten by the inhabitants.

Recovery of grains by floatation from the Chalcolithic levels at Senuwar indicates that agriculture was practiced on a large scale. Its study revealed that the subsistence economy of the Chalcolithic Senuwarians depended mainly on agriculture, cattle-breeding, hunting and partly on some cottage industries, which included pottery making, lapidary, bone tool making and faience industry. As the detailed report on the excavations at Senuwar has just been published, we get a detailed account of their agricultural practices, which are as follows:

Stage IA: Early Neolithic (c.2200 B.C. to c. 2000 B.C.)

The economy of this stage was marked by domestication of animals and incipient farming which included the cultivation of only the
Oryza sativa variety of paddy. The latter fact is rather surprising as only rice was cultivated at Senuwar in the Neolithic period while in the Middle Ganga Plain raising multiple crops is evident from the entire early Neolithic horizon. The domesticated animals comprise cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat and pig (Sathe and Badam in Singh 2004). Though deer, antelope, barking deer and nilgai were hunted, their contribution in the Neolithic food economy was marginal.

Stage IB: Late Neolithic (c. 2000 B.C. to c. 1950 B.C.)

This stage is marked by a major shift in the agricultural practices and consequently in the economy. The new cereals now included barley, wheat, jowar millet, lentil, field-pea and finger millet (ragi and khesari). This shows that agriculture now played a major role in the economy.

Stage II: Neolithic-Chalcolithic (c.1950 B.C. to c. 1300 B.C.)

This stage has been designated Neolithic-Chalcolithic as metal (copper) appears for the first time during this stage. This period witnessed an overall advancement in the living pattern. In the field of agriculture, new cereals and pulse crops were introduced. These comprised bread wheat, kodon millet, green gram/ mung, horsegram, kulthi and chickpea/gram. The faunal complex now included some wilder species of animals like wolf, four-horned antelope and chital along with the species found in Period IA. Besides, various craft such as clay moulding, lapidary, chiselling of bone, shell and stone show gradual refinement, and the high proficiency in bead making at Senuwar remind one of Harappan craftsmanship. But the most important contribution of this period was the introduction of metal (copper). As many as nineteen objects made of pure copper (99%) were recovered from the limited excavations. The introduction of this metal helped in the development of various crafts, and the increased prosperity led to interaction and trade with other regions. Beads and pendants of marine shells, Turbinella Pyrum (Linn.) found at Senuwar were probably imported from the Gulf of Kutch; copper was obtained from the Rakha mines; and lead from Bhagalpur district of Bihar (Singh, B.P. 2004: 609).

Stage III: Chalcolithic (c. 1300 B.C. – 7th century B.C.)

This stage of techno-cultural development is characterized by the production of bronze objects, improvement in agriculture and
introduction of plain and painted pottery comprising black-and-red ware and other associated ceramic industries. Several new shapes in pottery forms were introduced; noteworthy among them are: dish-on-stand, bowls of varying shapes and capacity, vessels with long vertical sides and dish. The appearance of the last-named pottery form suggests a change in the food habits of the people.

This stage also witnessed the evidence of alloying (tin, around 5%) which may be considered a technological advancement over the preceding stage. Now the economy of the Chalcolithic Senuwarrians depended mainly on agriculture, cattle breeding, hunting and partly on some cottage industry which included pottery making, lapidary, bone tool making, etc. In the realm of agriculture, a new pulse crop, the moth bean, was added and the cultivation of til, field brassica/brown mustard, safflower, linseed/alsi and castor were started. Besides, orchard husbandry began to be practiced. Watermelon seeds, mango and jackfruit have been reported from this period. Thus, the pre-iron age farmers laid down the agricultural base of the Ganga valley and no new crops were added after the introduction of iron (Chakrabarti 1988: 73).

At Narhan, grains of hulled and six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), club wheat (*T. compactum*), bread wheat (*T. aestivum*), dwarf wheat (*T. spheoreococcus*) and cultivated rice (*Oryza sativa*) have been identified from the Chalcolithic levels. The pulses include pea (*Pisum sativum*), green gram (*mung: Vigna radiata*), gram/chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*), khesari (*Lathyrus sativus*), besides mustard oilseeds and flax/linseed. Seeds of jackfruit (*Artocarpus integriolius*) found from these levels is an important discovery. Jackfruit grows wild in the Western Ghats and it was taken to cultivation in north India. The present evidence suggests that the Narhan inhabitants cultivated it for its fruit.

Other Sites:

Preliminary observation to identify the grains obtained from Tokwa by floatation indicated the presence of rice, barley, til and mung. Some fruits and beans were also found. The analysis and identification of animal species is under process.

Archaeobotanical remains were collected from Raja Nala Ka Tila in district Sonbhadra. A preliminary examination of these samples showed that the earliest settlers of Period I (Chalcolithic) had sufficient experience of agriculture and they cultivated rice, barley, lentil, field
pea, ragi millet and fox-tail millet, besides khesari and mung.

The presence of ragi and fox-tail millet in the collection, indicate that the inhabitants of Raja Nal Ka Tila gave due consideration to their ecological surroundings. These millets require little water and can thrive on the soil too poor for other cereals. Double cropping, i.e., rice in rainy seasons and lentil, pea, etc. in the winter, was practiced in the inundated area of river Karamnasag.

Concluding Remarks

(1) The introduction of metal (copper) witnessed a spurt of activities in every walk of life and a significant increase in the settlement. These sites are found below the 90 m contour line and are located on higher bhangar land, which is above the flood level. These sites are almost always found along the riverbanks. Of the nearly 200 sites, 13 have been excavated. The radiocarbon dates from Sohgaura, Khairadih, Narhan, Chirand, Sonpur and Senuwar indicate that Chalcolithic cultures were firmly established around 2000 B.C. on sites in Bihar and by about 1500 B.C. in the Sarayupar plain.

(2) As compared to the preceding Neolithic culture, there was a dramatic increase in the number and size of the Chalcolithic sites. Obviously, this was due to a sharp increase in population. The social structure of the Chalcolithic folk has not been worked out in detail because the excavations at most of these sites were conducted on a very modest scale. Some sort of stratification in society during the Mesolithic period has been suspected on the basis of grave-goods from Mahadaha. A similar situation must have obtained in the Chalcolithic society as well. The presence of various types of ceramic wares and small objects of stone, bone, ivory, etc. indicates the specialization of crafts by certain individuals/families in the Chalcolithic society.

(3) We do not have any indication about the religious beliefs of the Chalcolithic inhabitants of the Middle Ganga Plain. It may be recalled that 'a place of worship' has been identified in the excavation of Baghor in district Sidhi in Madhya Pradesh. This place of worship has been dated to the Upper Palaeolithic period. Further, the discovery of a figurine of a Mother Goddess made on bone and found from the eroded Gravel III in Lohanda nala, a tributary of the Belan River has been dated to the Upper Palaeolithic period. It provides the earliest evidence of a belief in the supernatural. The burials of the Mesolithic sites of Pratapgarh provide ample evidence of belief in the after-life, but no such evidence is forthcoming from the Chalcolithic sites.
The only evidence is that of post cremation pit-burials from Soapur and Chirand, which indicate that this custom was prevalent on some sites in Bihar. But this evidence is missing on other sites. The absence of burials in the Chalcolithic levels indicates that the method of cremation for the disposal of the dead body, which became the principal mode in the latter-day Hindu society, had its roots in the Chalcolithic Culture.

(4) The faunal remains obtained from these excavations have not received adequate attention except in the case of Senuwar and Narhan. Bones of domestic cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat, pig and dog have been reported from Senuwar. Among the wild fauna from this site, mention may be made of antelope, spotted deer, nilgai, four horned antelope, barking deer and wolf (Sathe and Badam 2004). The bones of humped Indian cattle, sheep, goat and horse have been reported from Narhan. A tentative taxonomic classification of animal bones from Imlidih shows that cattle, sheep, goat and presumably pig had been domesticated in Period I.

(5) An insight into the economic activity of the Chalcolithic inhabitants has been provided by the ‘site catchment analysis’ in the case of Senuwar. (A catchment area—located within reasonable walking distance from a site—is that area from which resources are taken to support human populations.) Vita-Finzi and Eric Higgs first used this technique in 1970 for reconstructing the prehistoric economy of Mount Carmel in Palestine. From this analysis in the case of Senuwar, it has been shown that several resources were available within as well as in the close vicinity of this ancient site, and these included clay for pottery and terracotta objects, house building materials, fish and animals—the latter, both domestic and domesticated. The arable land around this site was quite sufficient for agriculture. However, the raw material for preparing the lithic blades (agate, chalcedony, jasper, milky-quartz, etc.) was obtained from a distance of eight to nine kms, from the foothills of the Kaimur Hill ranges (Pappu 2004: 410). A similar situation must have obtained on other Chalcolithic sites also.

(6) The archaeo-botanical remains from Imlidih, Narhan and Senuwar have been studied in quite a great detail. This study indicates that by about 2000 B.C. almost all cereals, pulses and oilseeds, which form the staple food of the present-day inhabitants of the Middle Ganges plain, were grown in this region. The only serious omission is the pigeon-pea (Arhar), which is presently missing from the archaeological record.
While the economic base of the Chalcolithic culture of the lower Ganga plain was mainly based on rice cultivation, the staple food of the Chalcolithic cultures of the middle Ganga plain (including the Sarayupar region) comprised rice as well as wheat and barley. Here, we find that the cultivation of two crops a year was already firmly established during the Chalcolithic period and almost all the cereals which were the staple food of the urban settlements of the Harappa culture in the northwest, were being cultivated by the Chalcolithic people.

The radiocarbon dates from Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites of the Middle Ganga Plain have conclusively proved that these cultures are a younger contemporary of the Harappa culture. The natural question arises as to whether the Chalcolithic people here were in contact with the mighty Harappan city-civilization. The discovery of more than one hundred tiny beads of steatite from the pre-Narhar deposits at Imlidih Khurd and several steatite beads from Chirand do provide an indication of such a contact, but this remains to be firmly established by further research.

On the basis of archaeo-botanical evidence Saraswat (2004) believes that since Harappan trade with Mesopotamia had declined around 2000 B.C., the Late Harappan people migrated from their homeland to different regions and some of them came to the Kaimur region. From the Kaimur region the tradition spread in inland regions of the Middle Ganga Plain and a number of sites like Chirand, Taradih, Maner and Chechar-Kutubpur are a testimony to this (Singh, R.N. 2004: 607). Harappan influence has also been noticed by some scholars in the pottery types of this period. The bottomless goblet, dish-on-stand and knobbed ware from Chirand are taken as further proofs of the eastward migration of the late Harappans.

Analysis of copper objects from Senuwar (R.N. Singh in B.P. Singh 2004: 597) shows that the coppersmiths of this site had definitely started smelting copper ores since 1950 BC–1300 B.C. (Neolithic-Chalcolithic) for procuring metallic copper. The trace element analysis of Senuwar specimens suggests that the source of copper was Singhbhum copper belt of Bihar, particularly the Rakha mines. The metallurgical analysis of a copper axes from Imlidih Khurd is under progress.

Excavations at Raja Nal Ka Tila, Malhar and Dadupur have provided quite early dates on the introduction of iron in the Middle Ganga Valley (Tewari 2003: 536). A number of radiocarbon dated from these sites put the introduction of this metal to about 1600
B.C., if not earlier. This is a new development that has wider ramifications and the stratigraphic position of this metal in future excavations needs to be watched carefully.

(12) The discovery of well-established village cultures based on the cultivation of two crops a year, by rotation, in eastern UP and Bihar demonstrates an uninterrupted cultural continuity from about c. 2000 B.C. in Bihar and from c. 1600 B.C. in the Sarayupar plain, un-influenced by any external stimuli. This discovery has exploded the popular theory that this part of the country was ‘aryanised’ by clearing dense forests only around the eighth to seventh centuries B.C. This theory was proposed by some scholars while giving a historical explanation of the Videgha Māthava legend of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. There is only casual reference to this region in the early Vedic literature. However, by the late Vedic period, it had become an important administrative unit due to the formation of the Kosala and Videha kingdoms. The region is first mentioned in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, a text that relates to the spread of the Aryan culture. In this text, we read about Videgha Māthava, the king of Videhas. Accompanied by the priest Gotama Rāhugāṇa, he carried the sacrificial fire from the banks of the Saraswati river eastwards across Kosala and the Sadānāra and established a settlement known as Videha after the tribal name of Māthava.

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