

Burning effigies

Nepalis are tolerant towards other faiths while Indians have too many problems related to religion



DINESH WAGLE

The other day I came across a Reuters video on an AOL web site that showed some angry men on the street burning effigies of the government of Nepal, shouting slogans against the Nepali Maoists and demanding the restoration of the Indian priest at the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu. The visuals were not from Gaushala or Chahabil or any other places in the Nepali capital. They were from Agra, India. The people in the video were not immigrant Nepalis who are in their millions in India but the members and leaders of a radical Indian Hindu outfit called Bajrang Dal. I don't recall when I first heard about Bajrang Dal but whenever I come across this name, the images of angry men with swords in their hands willing to kill people from other faiths come to my mind. I am always proud of the fact that we don't have such a squad like Bajrang Dal that frequently promotes religious disharmony in society in the name of defending Hindutva in Nepal. It was widely reported by Indian media last October that members of this group were involved in raping a Christian nun in Orissa. That is why the Agra video frightened and shocked me.



Were they really hurt by the Nepal government's decision to replace Indian priests with Nepalis? Rajiv Sikri, former Indian diplomat with hawkish views regarding Nepal, thinks so. "In India," said the former Indian foreign secretary in a program titled "Pashupati Nath - Atheists Assault Faith" that was organized in New Delhi on Thursday, "one thing that touches people is religion, the faith."

People in Nepal are no less religious, I think, but the only difference is that we are very tolerant towards other faiths while Indians have too many problems that are related to religion.

While watching that video and later listening to Sikri, a thought came to me: "Do these people have to tell us Nepalis how to protest? Hey, do you know that protest has become part of our life in the past several years? We are far better and efficient at burning tires and effigies, shouting slogans and dealing with tear gas. Do we need Bajrang Dal activists in Agra to do that for us? Certainly not. I am not a Maoist and I hated Pushpa Kamal Dahal's brazen intervention in Pashupati. But I also didn't enjoy hearing anti-Prachanda slogans from Indians. I remembered what Cordell Hull, former United States Secretary of State, once said about a Caribbean dictator: "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch."

In a democratic and globalised world, people have their right to express themselves on the events around the world. But I feel Indians who were offended by the recent Pashupatinath row should instead concentrate on how they can successfully face their own home grown challenges. I don't think the removal of a priest from Pashupatinath hurts the sentiment of Hindus around the world as much as it does by the news reports that suggest the possible involvement of Hindu sadhus and sadhvis in terror activities. That really hurts the sentiment of Hindus around the world. Look what India with the largest Hindu popu-

lation in the world is doing? Producing Hindu terrorists? The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and its leaders who were so quick to call our President and Prime Minister to express their concern regarding the removal of a corrupt priest from the temple and score brownie points in their political constituencies in India should stop dialing +977. They should instead work to rescue the Hindu prestige that is in the trap called Malegaon blast. Police are investigating the possible involvement of Hindu activists, including a sadhvi, in the 2006 serial blasts in a Mosque in Malegaon, a town in Maharashtra, that killed 37 people.

In the abovementioned Delhi discussion on the Pashupatinath row, speakers heavily criticized the Indian government for not taking up the issue with the Nepal government. We should do this, one said. We should do that, another urged. While listening to them another thought came to me: If only they had organized one such program to criticize their government for encroaching Nepali land in the Shree Antu village of Ilam district. After all, both incidents were reported in the same week. Stating that the temple row was part of a grand game that also made Nepal a secular state, BJP spokesman Ravishankar Prasad said that he was worried about the growing Pakistani influence in Nepal. I wanted to remind him where the Mumbai attackers entered India from.

One participant made fun of the comment made by Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood Wednesday in which the diplomat had said that the dispute at the Temple would not sour Nepal-India ties. "This is how the government thinks!" he said.

A friend of mine who accompanied me to the program had this question in his mind: Why don't these parties and organizations who are so concerned about Nepal being a secular state declare India a Hindu state? Why are they so happy using the Christian AD calendar while talking so much about Hindutva? Isn't this a great Hindutva hypocrisy?

Maoists, the atheists who believe in Marx and Mao but certainly not Bishnu and Shiva, are the last people on earth who are qualified to intervene into religious affairs. Similarly, Indians who have a troubled history of religious intolerance and fighting are the last people on planet to tell us how we should deal with our temples. While Maoists believe religion is opium, right wing Indian religious organizations like Bajrang Dal spread the opium of hatred via their radical activities.

The whole temple row is a tussle between two thugs with equally sinister motives. Both the Maoists and the alliance of Bhattas and Bhandaris have their eyes firmly fixed on the income of the temple. There are many instances when Maoists have captured properties that earn rent. Even after leading the government, subverting the system and trying to take control of everything has remained their intention.

The Bhatta-Bhandari alliance is no different. They have been looting the temple for centuries.

Binod Chaudhari, the member-secretary of the Pashupati Area Development Trust from 2000 to mid-2006, told a journalist this week that Bhattas and Bhandaris were the ones who blocked the Trust's effort to make the income of the temple transparent. "When I took on the responsibility of member secretary, the temple was in a mess," Chaudhari said. "The records of revenue from the temple's lands were not properly managed. The revenue were shared between the Bhattas and the Bhandaris...When we started to manage the donations, there was stiff opposition and non-cooperation from the Bhattas and Bhandaris."

That cannot continue. The Nepali Congress folks who happily marched to Pashupatinath temple last week to express their solidarity with Bhattas and Bhandaris should realize that they can't shoulder one thug while kicking other. Both thugs must be kept away from the holy shrine. The income of the temple must be managed transparently. That is the only way forward after the mess we saw last week.

(The writer is the New Delhi bureau chief of The Kathmandu Post.)

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Journey back home

I managed to escape after 11 days at a concentration camp in the heart of Germany

ROCHELLE WILSON

The following story is a translation from Polish of an account I asked my aunt to write in 1979. I wanted to record the story of my father's family, most of whom perished in the holocaust. Although my aunt spoke English, it was not easy for her and I thought that getting her to write in her native tongue was the best solution. When I finally got her story and then had it translated, I was shocked by the matter-of-fact tone and by how much was left out. I never felt able to ask her more at that time, and she died before we could talk about it again. My own father, Moryc, who appears at the end of the story died when I was only 9.

The town of Czestochowa in Poland, our birthplace, is not a very large town but an attractive one. We attended the local Jewish Grammar School. The school had high standards of education.

Our brother David escaped with his life during a general clear out of the

prisoners. There were 1000 women and since everybody was very hungry, a riot took place. The Germans tried to restore some order, even the guard on duty at the gate, left his post and joined the others trying to restore some order. He left the gate unattended. We saw it and acted upon it. We were lucky that the guard did not return to his post and he did not look out towards the road. We ran away and were not noticed by our captors. Eventually, we reached a village and there, pretending to be Germans, we went from house to house asking to be allowed to spend the night. Nobody suspected anything as that was the time when many Germans were fleeing West into the depth of their country to escape the incoming Russians. There were many vacant places but nobody wanted to take us in as we had no official papers.

Looking for a place to stay and not finding one, we had returned to the place at which we had entered the village, the main road which we had left and along which our prisoners were being marched. We were in great

Her advice was very good. When we arrived in Lubeck we found the factory, we introduced ourselves as Polish women and were given a job. We stayed there until half way through April, until the day the Russian army arrived.

After a few days of bombing, the Russians gained the town. We left it and started on our journey back to Poland. After two weeks, with the help of Russian lorries and transport trains, we reached our town, Sosnowiec, the town we had lived in prior to our deportation into Germany. It was a very tragic moment this return to Sosnowiec. There were hardly any Jews. The place which used belong to my family before the war was now occupied by a Polish family. I did not even try to see what was happening there. I was lucky though to come across somebody who informed me that a family I knew well was still in Sosnowiec, living in their own house. These people accepted me warmly and I stayed with them for the next few months. Soon after, I found a cousin in Katowice. This was a great relief to me; at last I



ghetto at Sosnowce. Unfortunately, after a short while he was captured again, this time with his wife Jadzia (Jadwiga). They were both sent to Auschwitz. Jadwiga died there of typhus. David died later during a compulsory march into the depth of Germany at the time when the Germans started emptying Auschwitz and made the prisoners march barefoot. Anyone of the prisoners who could not walk fast was shot dead by the Germans. I am sorry but I do not know the exact date of his death. My own concentration camp, Grunberg, was also 'transported' into the depths of Germany. That was the so-called 'Fussmarsch' where everybody was made to march barefoot through forests, minor side roads, through snow and mud. It was winter, the latter part of January. After 11 days, together with two of my friends, I managed to escape.

Well, on that day, 11th of February 1945, a Sunday, our 'transport' set out on its destined journey. We had rested for 2-3 days at a German village, having slept in a stable on hay. We continued the march barefoot. On this day, before the departure, the Germans decided to share some soup amongst

despair. But, at that moment, we saw an old man approaching us on his bicycle. He appeared before us as if sent from heaven. He greeted us saying something like this: 'Hallo young ladies, what's new? Are you looking for something?' We told him we were from Grunberg and we were looking for a place to stay and since it was a Sunday, we could not find anything. Without a moment's hesitation, he said: 'come with me, I have a room which has just been vacated by some people. You can stay with me.'

When we got to his house, we were shown a small room full of hay on which the previous occupants had slept. In the house, we met his wife, an old lady, who raised no objections to our staying with them. It was dinner time by then and were invited to share their meal with them. They were having 'ordinary food' not 'war time' food. The dinner was just as good. The next day, Monday, we asked them if we could spend another day at their house and they agreed. The old lady advised us to go to Lubeck, a town situated nearby, where would find a textile factory, and since we had some experience in working at a textile factory, we would find some work there.

found a member of my own family.

After a few months, my sister Ala (Alicija) returned from Germany. I had not seen her for three years and had had no news from her. I had no idea about her existence. Ala had also been a prisoner in two German camps. After a short time, she met her future husband, Karol.

Later on in June, I found an office job with a petrochemical products company. I worked there until November 1945. I married my husband in December 1945. We went to live at Jelenia Gora, a town in Lower Silesia. On 25th March 1947, our son Yair, was born there. We left Poland in January 1949. We first went to Paris where we stayed only three months. We then left for Israel. We arrived there on 21st March 1949 and we have lived here ever since. While in Paris, my brother, Moryc, from London, came to visit us. It was a very moving reunion; we had not seen each other for such a long time.

(This story is submitted by Anna's niece, Rochelle Wilson, a volunteer story gatherer for the BBC in Nottingham)

BBC

Give credit



I totally agree with Subas Sharma's letter to the editor ("Be fair", Jan. 8, Page 5) regarding the Maoist-led government's appointment of Nepali priests, even though I don't support the YCL's disruption of the press conference in

the temple precincts.

Madhu Raman Acharya (*Nepal Culture Shift*, 2002, p. 5) asserts that the South Indian sage Sankaracharya visited Nepal sometime after 788 AD. His visit resulted in the destruction of many Buddhist monuments and installation of South Indian Brahmins as priests at the Pashupati temple. Anthropologists regret Sankaracharya's initiatives. Had Nepal remained a predominantly Buddhist state, as Sankaracharya found it, it could have developed like Thailand and Japan.

I am glad that the PM has heeded the Supreme Court's order and plans to appoint Nepali priests in a thoroughly transparent manner. Nepali priests can perform rituals as well as South Indian priests. Why are NC

leaders fishing in troubled waters? And why is BJP's Advani poking his nose into it? For heaven's sake, give credit to the government when it does something right.

Dr Ramesh Khatri
Kathmandu

I am very happy to hear that the recent appointment of two non-Kirati priests at Pashupatinath has been revoked ("PM revokes Pashupati appointments", Jan. 8, Page 1). The new appointments should be made with the objective of recapturing the past of Kirateswor Pashupatinath. All the senior priests of the temple should be appointed from the Kirat community and the junior priests should be represented by dalits. Such appointments would bring back the glory of the casteless Nepal before the import of caste system from India by Jaya Sthiti Malla in the thirteenth century.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Save energy



mother was boiling water in the rice cooker. It took me little effort to make her understand the need for conserving energy in times of crisis. Likewise, I think the govern-

ment and all other institutions, including schools and colleges, must try to create awareness and educate people about the energy crisis. It is high time we learn how to conserve energy and bring a slight relief to the toiling turbines.

Suraj Niroula
Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk

Orphanages

Thanks to Claire V Goodwin for highlighting the sad reality of orphanages in Kathmandu ("Orphanages" in Kathmandu, Jan. 5, Page 4). It is sad to know that orphanages are filled with children whose parents are living. Kids are thus deprived of parental love and their links to their culture. However, we disagree that children from orphanage get quality education. With the mushrooming of private schools and their competition for making profits, how can children get

quality education? Goodwin has rightly identified the need for qualified teachers in the countryside. The education ministry must send good teachers to villages by paying them high salary along with added benefits to encourage them to work outside the Kathmandu Valley.

Malika and Mallicka Shrestha
Vanasthali, Kathmandu

Pain in Gaza

I could not control my tears when I visualized Jawad Harab's situation in Gaza ("Dad, when are we going to die?" Jan. 8, Page 5). Can't we make the world a better place and be happy? Harab is in pain and yearning for our empathy. If everyone in this world could empathize with another's sorrow, then there would be no war, no bloodshed, no disparity, no deprivation, and no one would commit violence. But war is never the solution. Why are Israel and Palestine mired in a never-ending war? Why haven't they been able to arrive at a peaceful solution? Hope they won't involve in acts that will leave their future generations regretting.

Sonam Lama
Kathmandu