



two poems by Rebecca Haque

Akika

Sitting on the bed, late at night
Five years ago.
I wondered aloud, addressing my husband,
আজ্ঞা! বলে তো, অকিকা কেনো দেবে?
He shook his head, said the didn't know.

I know now.
They sacrifice goats so that they do not have
To sacrifice sons.

God was once merciful to Abraham.
Why was he not merciful to me?

I shall never sacrifice goats or cows or lambs
On Eid-ul-Azha.
God will understand.
আমায় কখনো কবনে তিনি,
আমি দুটো ছেলে কুরবানী দিয়েছি তাহার কাছে!



Epitaph

One shallow grave, two tiny bodies
Flesh of my flesh, now dust to dust.
How shall I measure grief, legitimise death?

There are no words, no tears,
Only the hollow aching of my heart.
Oh my two sons, lost forever.
Shall I forever mourn?

Pupils dilate, and on my retina are seared
Images of your births, short flowering, and cruel deaths.
Mysterious, horrendous, invisible, insidious, incurable disease.
Myasthenia Gravis!

How shall I apportion blame?
Whom shall I crucify?
How shall I avenge myself?

Clytemnestra knifed Agamemnon for Iphigenia,
And stood in resounding glory of motherhood

I have no such mortal enemy.
Only God and his indecipherable mystery.
How shall I accept? How shall I ever come?

I know not.
Grief, silent and subversive, is a heavy burden
Oh my sons.

books

A Long-awaited South Asian Atlas

by Parvathi Menon

Ecological and Agrarian Regions of South Asia, circa 1930 edited by Daniel Thorner; Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1996; pages 148; Pakistan Rs.1,700.

THIS atlas, which depicts the agrarian and ecological landscape of the Indian subcontinent in 1930 from a regional-historical perspective, has been published by the Oxford University Press, Karachi. A remarkable product of collaborative scholarship, it was planned, edited and fully prepared for the press by 1965 under the supervision of Daniel Thorner, eminent economic historian, well-known to generations of Indian students, researchers and government officers. Publication, however, was held up until 1996, more than 20 years after Thorner's death. The core of the project is a definitive monograph on regional development in the Indian subcontinent, researched and written in the late 1940s and early 1950s by the Chinese historian Chen Han-seng.

The monograph, "the most thorough and penetrating analysis known to me of the data pertaining to regional differentiation in South Asia," as Daniel Thorner wrote in his preface, is presented in full in the Regions. The other important aspect of the book - cartographic illustration of Chen's 21 regions and the accompanying tables - was an idea that matured and bore fruit after Thorner joined the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Institute of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences) in Paris as a Visiting Professor in 1960 (he was subsequently elected to a permanent Chair). A research team set up within the Institute gathered, sifted and consolidated the crop and land use information reproduced in the tables as well as the additional data on irrigation systems; population of towns and so on, shown on the maps. There are two maps - one displaying topography, water resources, roads, railways and cities and the other providing district-wise crop patterns - for each of Chen's 21 geographical regions. The only work to which this may be compared is the path-breaking Atlas of the Mughal Empire by Irfan Habib, depicting the economic and political contours of 17th century India. The striking difference between the two is, of course, the more consistent data sources upon

Given the subcontinent's shared past, it should not come as a surprise that an atlas on South Asia has been published in Pakistan. Ideally, such a work should have been brought out simultaneously in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the three contemporary nations whose common economic history it documents. In fact the road to Karachi was paved with Daniel Thorner's successive attempts to place the manuscript with publishing houses in Mumbai, the Netherlands and England, and, after his death in 1974, the herculean efforts made by Alice Thorner, Daniel Thorner's widow, a social and economic historian herself, to bring out the Atlas in India.

which the present work could draw material which became available only with the statistical proclivities of the British raj.

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Alice Thorner, who spoke to Frontline in Bangalore during her recent visit to India, recounted the final segment of this story - her experiences with bureaucratic rigidity and incompetence which effectively drove out of India the printing and publication of a splendid book of both topical and reference interest. Since the volume may not legally be imported into this country, most Indian readers are effectively denied access to this work.

Chen Han-seng, the author of the original monograph, came to India in the early 1940s as a pro-Communist refugee from Kuomintang oppression in China. He had studied history in Germany and the United States and had been associated with Mme Sun-Yat-Sen's Shanghai group. Chen was a major contributor to a volume on the agrarian regions of China, brought out by the Institute of Pacific Relations in the 1930s. It was in Delhi in 1944 that

he met Daniel Thorner, who had come to India as a member of the U.S. Lend-Lease Mission. The variety and complexity of agrarian regimes in the subcontinent proved to be an area of shared interest, and they quickly became good friends. The ever-curious Chen travelled extensively in India, asking questions wherever he went and learning about crops, wages, prices, crafts and so on. He came into contact with a number of Indian intellectuals, notably the Kisan Sabha leader N.G. Ranga who frequently took him along on his rural tours. "Chen had a fantastic memory. He noticed everything and remembered everything," recalled Alice Thorner.

In 1948, when Daniel Thorner joined the faculty of the South Asia Regional Studies Programme at the University of Pennsylvania as Assistant Professor, he recommended Chen's name for a senior research fellowship to work on a regional approach to the Indian agrarian question. The distinguished Sanskritist W. Norman Brown, who had created the programme, the first of its kind in the U.S., agreed. By 1952, Chen had succeeded in completing a manuscript, two copies of which he left with Thorner before he returned to China. He was given an honoured place in the Chinese academic world and became one of the editors of the glossy journal *China Reconstructs*. Chen and Daniel Thorner did not meet again, although they remained in touch through mutual friends. In 1952, Thorner was given a sabbatical year which he planned to spend in India. Shortly before leaving he was summoned to testify before the Committee headed by Senator Pat McCarran, which was investigating the allegedly pro-Communist activities of the Sinologist Owen Lattimore, and was accordingly interrogating persons who had been associated

with him. Thorner refused to cooperate with the Committee. When he finally arrived in India in October 1952, Thorner carried a copy of the Chen manuscript with him. The second manuscript, which he had left in a file cabinet in his office in the University, never reached him, although the rest of his books and papers were eventually shipped to him in Mumbai.

The Thorners remained in India until 1960, when Daniel Thorner was invited as a Visiting Professor to the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. It was here that he met Jacques Bertin, Director of the Cartographic Laboratory of the Ecole. Between the two of them the idea of illustrating Chen's text in map form took shape. Although the work on the maps, the statistical tables and the graphic representations as well as Chen's text was completed by 1965, all of Thorner's negotiations with prospective publishers came to naught. When he died in 1974, three publishing concerns had successively taken up and dropped the work, largely for reasons of cost. The second part of the story begins after Daniel Thorner's death, when Alice Thorner visited India in 1975, bringing with her a sample of the text and maps. The perspicacious Member-Secretary of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), F. P. Naik, called together a number of economists and geographers from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), who enthusiastically recommended prompt publication of the manuscript. Alice Thorner gave the copyright to the ICSSR and assigned to the Council any proceeds. The ICSSR, in turn, signed a contract with a Delhi publisher.

"From that moment on anything that could possibly go wrong, went wrong," said Alice Thorner. After a series of avoidable delays, one of the own-

ers of the publication house finally sent the maps to the Survey of India for permission to print. He neglected to mention that the maps were historical. The Survey refused permission on the grounds that the district boundaries were wrongly drawn, the rivers, deltas and coastlines inaccurate and above all, the international boundaries with Bangladesh and Pakistan did not appear.

(The maps in fact pertained to the year 1930, when neither Pakistan nor Bangladesh existed.) It was at this point that an important person involved in the project - "an eminent geographer from the JNU," in Alice Thorner's words - sent a "draftsman" to the Survey of India office to "correct" the maps. Sitting in the Survey headquarters in Dehra Dun, this young man "who had no notion of map making," said Alice Thorner, effectively mutilated the elegantly designed pages. He inserted the Pakistan and Bangladesh frontiers and redrew stretches of rivers as well as the entire coastlines in thick black strokes. Originally these had been delineated in a light grey to highlight other features such as contour, forest cover and command of irrigation works. Apparently the Survey staff did not realise that they were dealing with maps drawn on an earlier projection used by the Survey itself in the years before 1930. "As a result the newly added borders ran through pie graphs and legends, coastal cities like Porbander and Veraval in Gujarat left out in the sea, symbols for trees in the Sunderbans were removed and so forth," recounted Alice Thorner. Neither she nor any member of the French cartographic team was informed of these alterations.

In December 1981 the publishers presented her with a printed-up version of the text, tables and disgracefully disfig-

ured maps. "I wrote a seven or eight page memo in cold fury, indicating that there was no question of publication," she said. The ICSSR then appointed a committee, which, after a year of deliberations, recommended that four of the maps might be reprinted. Nothing happened at all for another five years until Alice Thorner succeeded in redeeming the manuscript and handing it over to the

Oxford University Press in New Delhi. New negotiations with the Survey of India resulted in new stalemates. At long last, OUP Pakistan agreed to take over the job; it did an excellent job of printing and binding.

Chen's written text - precise, concise and well-documented - bears the unmistakable impress of a qualitative input as well, one that reflects his familiarity with the Indian reality as well as the printed material available. Chen's single-most important source was the huge body of Evidence (14 volumes) presented to the Royal Commission on Agriculture (the Linlithgow Commission, 1928).

Chen's 21 economic regions were based essentially upon five criteria: the topographical situation, water supply (rainfall and all forms of irrigation), crop patterns, landholding systems, and general economic development (transport and communication, urbanisation and population growth). The maps illustrate four out of the five criteria. Land relationships, an important aspect of each of Chen's chapters, could not, of course be represented in the maps. As Thorner wrote: "For the agrarian problem these relationships are of course central, but statistically they are well nigh intractable." The crop pattern maps and tables on land utilisation are based upon statistics taken from the Agricultural Statistics of India, 1930-31. Chen's text, on the other hand, reflects the agrarian situation up to 1950-51, and to that extent there is in certain areas a mismatch between the text and maps. For example, the Mettur dam, discussed by Chen in his text, does not appear in the topographical map of the Tamil Region (page 52). That does not, however, in any way diminish the value of the maps and tables, which provide a valuable benchmark study on the regional agrarian economy of India.

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'Mod and Forces Tussle Affecting Military's Morale'

by Nirendra Dev

THE 'combative mentality' between defence ministry and the forces has had 'damaging consequences' on morale of the military and country's strategic planning, says external affairs minister Jaswant Singh in a new book 'defending India.'

"As there is no horizontal integration between the service headquarters and defence ministry, and as early prejudices have now got layered over by bureaucratic one upmanship, a combative mentality has grown between the service headquarters and the ministry," says Singh.

"Such an attitude has its own damaging consequences. The defence ministry, in effect, becomes the principal destroyer of the cutting edge of military morale," Singh says in the book tracing the evolution of Indian armed forces from the pre-Islamic period.

Maintaining that 'institutionalising' of policymaking on security concern "has simply not taken place" in last 50 years, he says "the country has deluded itself into thinking that a vast and ever-growing ministry is the proper alternative for such and institutional mechanism."

"The sword arm of the state gets blunted by the state itself," Singh laments, noting "so marked is the resistance then to change and so deep the mutual suspicions, inertia and antipa-

"On account of Pandit Nehru's early enunciation of the country's foreign policy, India deluded itself into thinking that simply because it bore no enmity against another, none harboured any designs against it either. Naive credulity replaced statecraft," writes the external affairs minister. 'It is pathetic to read outpourings like those of Pandit Nehru that no one asked that earlier what if the Chinese behaved differently from what they had till then been doing?'

thy that all efforts at reforming the system have always foundered against a rock of ossified thought."

"Occasionally, half-hearted and half-digested thoughts like policy planning cells etc have been set up but as the spirit is wanting, the functioning of such cells has scarcely had any effect on real policy-making... it has at best been marginal, at the worst inconsequential."

The ex-army man turned politician-author attributes Gandhi's pacifism as having left "direct and a far more telling influence on the fledgling ministry of defence."

Singh, who has been holding parleys with the US on the nuclear issue as prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's special envoy has also flayed the Nehruvian foreign policy for influenc-

ing India's security perception for last five decades.

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There was an element of "unstated apprehension too," in not allowing the forces to grow and build on their own, "which over the time only got cemented as in Pakistan, democracy was easily brushed aside and repeated coups followed."

"In consequence, a system got devised that today requires every possible need of the armed forces to travel to the ministry where it is examined afresh, then scrutinised inhouse from the financial angle and only after 'elephantine file' makes it way to the cabinet; whereafter again for a second financial scrutiny."

"Time wasted by this over elaborate procedure is incalculable in terms of efficiency," he rues.

According to Singh, in the last half century, Indian political-military leadership has not displayed the required strategic sense. Indian national interests were not adequately served. The leadership failed if even just one criterion of evaluation is taken into account - that of maintaining the frontiers of India as inviolable.

"That is the consequences which still

trouble us," he continues.

"India remains possibly the only country of its size and importance that has for so long had an undefined land frontier; it is amongst those few countries of importance that continues to have major border disputes with two of its principal neighbours," he notes.

Singh attributes it "to that very same legacy - of an absence of proper strategic thinking, planning..."

For the future, "we need to reflect upon, for example, a major failure in the 17th and 18th centuries to make proper assessment of the importance of Indian ocean and sea routes to India resulted in the arrival of foreign powers."

"India (also) ought to reflect deeply upon where it went wrong in the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)," he says.

"The onus on efficiency, then, that

confronts the Ministry of Defence (mod) in general and the armed forces in particular demands the establishment of a rational and more current manpower and equipment policy," Singh says.

This by itself, calls for 'revamping' the entire force structure, he notes, adding "this rationalization of force structures will by the sheer force of its momentum, also change the designs of India's war fighting capability."

"The concept of combined forces and capability based formations has to take root in the Indian defence and security planning mechanisms," he notes.

Further maintaining that no longer can conventional formations undertake the tasks of wars of tomorrow, he says "in the decades to come India shall have to continue to contend with covert operations or clandestine war."

Cautioning that the response mechanism and methodology hitherto being practised will not work, he says "striking a balance between the over burgeoning demand for resources and a scarcity of them, the country will have to review the structure of its forces and move towards not simply integrating them but also build much higher levels of sustainability."

(About the book: "Defending India," Author: Jaswant Singh, published by McMillian India Ltd, pp 337, price: not mentioned.)

— APB