

The curious case of 'Sunita Paul'

"Sunita Paul" does not exist. To prove this, Shuchinta Foundation is happy to welcome and host "Sunita Paul" to visit Bangladesh and meet us. I am sure she will not be taking up the offer because she does not exist in actuality.

MUHAMMAD A. ARAFAT

I stand greatly impressed: "Sunita Paul" of Kochin (India), born deaf and dumb, has apparently taken up the mighty pen to express herself. She has purportedly obtained her masters in political science and journalism, worked in various research institutions and authored countless articles at home and abroad.

The outstanding array of newspapers and periodicals that have published her articles include the *Herald Tribune*, *New Yorker*, *Washington Times*, *Outlook*, *Frontline*, and *Telegraph*. She has also established herself as a tireless Bangladesh analyst, writing one article after another on our beloved country.

"Sunita Paul" has clearly built a reputation for herself that deserves an international award. However, there is only one problem: she is a fake.

There is no evidence of any educational institution awarding her degrees or research institution employing her. There is no mention of "Sunita Paul" on the web-site of any research institutions, think-tank or university (very surprising given her claim of having "worked with a

number of research institutions"). No journalist in India has ever heard of her name or met her (surely it wouldn't be hard to forget her so easily).

Her publication history is yet another lie because there are no articles by her name in the archives of the prestigious newspapers and magazines she names, beyond the unknown but pompously titled website American Chronicle (a website with freelance contributors).

The only places where "Sunita Paul" is mentioned include open source online websites or electronic groups. Not only that, there is no city by the name of "Kochin" in India. The bottom line is "Sunita Paul" does not exist.

It is often common for writers to use pseudonyms. However, "Sunita Paul" should not be magnanimously mistaken as a harmless pseudonym for another writer. Writers who use pseudonyms do not go to such lengths to create a fake persona and identity.

"Sunita Paul" has even uploaded a photograph to her online profile to prove her so-called existence. This is outright deception, fraud, and dishonesty for ulterior motives. It is therefore important at this juncture to distinguish



Will the real "Sunita Paul" please stand up?

between harmless pseudonyms and deceptive masks like "Sunita Paul."

The fraud of "Sunita Paul" is made evident by her own photographs online. She has, astonishingly, uploaded two photographs with stark differences. It is hard to find any resemblance between the two photos, which is not surprising because these are photographs of two different people. "Sunita Paul" has apparently resorted to using anonymous photographs to prove her non-existence as existence. The photographs leave no doubt as to her fake profile.

The critical question is why would someone (or most likely a group of people) go to such lengths to create a false persona to propagate their views? Why

are they hiding behind a deceptive mask if they are so confident about the veracity of their reports? Why are they not willing to expose themselves in the public eye if they hold the courage of their convictions?

The "Sunita Paul" mask allows vested groups to spread malicious rumours and fabricated lies without any accountability. The ill-motive of the conspirators is evident from the extent of lies used to create the fictional character "Sunita Paul."

The next question is: who is "Sunita Paul"? There is no reason to believe the "Sunita Paul" mask is a harmless and playful exercise. It is obvious that the "Sunita Paul" fraud is part of a well-

planned, organised, and systematic campaign to misinform the people and international community.

This is evident from the identical and synchronised misinformation coming from disparate but like-minded camp of newspapers and magazines in the country, including conservative newspapers openly supporting radical groups in Bangladesh. What is the missing link between "Sunita Paul" and them?

Moreover, it is regrettable that leader of the opposition quoted questions in parliament that appeared to be lifted directly from one of Paul's malicious articles. One would expect a leader of the opposition (who is also a former prime minister) to exercise greater discretion, maturity, and prudence to not spread unfounded rumours circulated by a fictional character.

It may be mentioned here that "Sunita Paul" has already been exposed as a plagiarist by bloggers. She has quoted verbatim from other blogs on more than one occasion. A supposedly trained journalist and researcher should know better. It is not surprising that "Sunita Paul" has shameless plagiarised, because it is already clear to us that her very existence is a fraud.

Who are the courageous individuals hiding behind the mask of "Sunita Paul" and what are their motives? What is their agenda? Let us look at their list of targets. Their targets have included Mahfuz Anam, Matiur Rahman, Tania Amir, and Shahriar Kabir. They have written against *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*.

They have also written against Prof. Yunus and Grameen Bank.

It is clear from the above list of victims what are "Sunita Paul"'s motives and agenda. Since late December, she has written 25 articles, including 12 on the BDR tragedy. There is no doubt that "Sunita Paul" is trying to misinform people about the BDR tragedy as part of a larger conspiracy against our country.

We should be weary of "Sunita Paul" as she is part of the nexus that is trying to divide the country. We urge the conspirators behind the "Sunita Paul" mask to stop the fraud. "Sunita Paul" does not exist.

To prove this, Shuchinta Foundation is happy to welcome and host "Sunita Paul" to visit Bangladesh and meet us. I am sure she will not be taking up the offer because she does not exist in actuality.

Given the fraud that "Sunita Paul" is, I would like to also urge policymakers, readers and the international community to disregard her articles and write-ups based on ill-motivated rumour and hearsay.

"Sunita Paul" represents a strong anti-Bangladesh agenda that must not succeed. Let us remain vigilant against such fictional journalists and their misinformation that may hamper the proper trial of the BDR tragedy.

The writer is CEO of Analytica, Lecturer of Independent University Bangladesh, and Convener of Shuchinta Bangladesh.

Inclusive development in South Asia

There are diversities in tradition, in culture and religion, in social fabric, in governance and in social and natural endowments in South Asia. But we also have things in common. As a nation we can address the issues nationally, while regional cooperation can complement our efforts.

HARADHAN GANGULY

EVERYBODY must be equitably included in all social transformation processes -- economic, social, political and environmental. This implies that human rights, social justice and rule of law have to be ensured for all, and high moral and ethical standards as well as transparency and accountability have to be established in all spheres.

There are diversities in tradition, in culture and religion, in social fabric, in governance and in social and natural endowments in South Asia. But we also have things in common, like social, economic, political exclusion and deprivation. So we need unity and cooperation. As a nation we can address the issues nationally, while regional cooperation can complement our efforts.

Key performance indicators of the region's economy indicate that respectable, even high or remarkable, economic growth rates have been achieved in recent years, but complacency fades away when we see that social-economic disparity has been increasing day by day. Noted economist Dr. Q.K. Ahmad estimates that, in South Asia, about one-third of the population lives on less than

\$1 (PPP) per person per day, and about 79% on less than \$1 (PPP) per person per day.

The overwhelming majority of South Asians, who earn below \$2 (PPP) a person/day, are deprived not only in economic terms but also in social, legal and political terms, and belong to a category of people suffering from human dignity deficits and social exclusion.

However, if the focus were on the most disadvantaged and marginalised people, it would be on the half a billion people below \$1 (PPP) per person per day mark.

These extremely poor people are deprived of opportunities and facilities to break out of the present conundrum and move on to a path of sustained socio-economic progress, therefore, they suffer from social exclusion.

They include the landless, unemployed and underemployed, employed but earning very low incomes, disadvantaged women, ethnic minorities, untouchables, the mentally and physically handicapped, and people living in the frontline of severe natural disasters such as cyclones, floods and river erosion.

As opposed to the unethical neo-liberal paradigm, South Asia should establish people's perspectives in the management of the affairs of the state and the economy. The market will still play an important role, but will be required to operate under effective regulatory systems and will be obliged to fulfill all the legitimate corporate social responsibilities.

South Asian countries are different in nature, polity, structure, culture and



Is this a sign of inclusiveness?

tradition, and the extent of development, hence the question of monetisation and socio-economic priority determinations. So, an orchestrated approach using all the tools of economic management will fail to address the reality of diversity.

A two-pronged approach has to be promoted. First, by raising awareness among the people to articulate and voice their legitimate demand for equitable access to economic, social and political processes.

Second, by sensitising the decision

making circles at the national and regional levels with concrete proposals for moving on to an inclusive development pathway, based on an analysis of the existing international and regional realities and the voices of the socially excluded in South Asia.

Evolving a socially responsible market instead of neo-liberal paradigm, ensuring gender equity, ensuring distribution of growth, restructuring of investment pattern to ensure people's participation as owners or employees, democratisation

of institution, ensuring freedom of speech, media freedom and right to information, strengthening connectivity across South Asian countries, mutual respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversities, ensuring dignity of women and rights of access to their entitlement, and operationalising a food bank established by Saarc, might be the dynamics of positive bondage for South Asia.

Haradhan Ganguly is a retired Principal, Government College. E-mail: ganguly@gmail.com.

Pakistan's self-defeating army

All of these missteps point to the same conclusion; rather than serve as a bulwark against chaos, the army has helped to destabilise Pakistan. There is only one way to turn things around today; demilitarise Pakistani politics.

RAJESH M. BASUR and SUMIT GANGULY

FOR far too long, the myth that Pakistan's army is the only thing holding the country together -- and keeping the terrorists at bay -- has held sway in Washington. Now two bills making their way through Congress suggest that US is finally starting to reconsider these assumptions.

Both bills would set benchmarks that Pakistan has to meet in order to keep qualifying for US economic and military assistance. But the two measures don't go far enough. Pakistan will never be saved from the threat of religious extremists until it fundamentally restructures its deeply dysfunctional government. And that will require addressing the overwhelming influence of the military on Pakistani politics.

In four critical ways, the army has undermined constitutional governance in Pakistan ever since Mohammed Ali Jinnah led it to independence some 60

years ago. First, repeated coups have ensured that civilian governments never developed firm roots.

Second, successive military rulers, in attempts to boost their legitimacy, have promoted religious radicalism, either directly (as in the case of Zia ul Haq, who did this over the span of a decade) or by marginalising mainstream political parties and allowing the religious right to fill the vacuum (Pervez Musharraf's strategy before his ouster last year).

Third, the army became and remains a parasite feeding on the body politic by extracting "rent" in the form of land, bureaucratic appointments and other spoils of office in exchange for supposedly keeping Pakistan safe.

Finally, in a misbegotten quest for "strategic depth" against India, the army has promoted the radicalisation of Afghanistan, which has now spilled back onto its own territory and spun out of control.

All of these missteps point to the same conclusion; rather than serve as a bul-

wark against chaos, the army has helped to destabilise Pakistan. There is only one way to turn things around today; demilitarise Pakistani politics.

Doing so won't be easy. While there is significant popular support for democracy in Pakistan, the country's mainstream civilian parties have hardly distinguished themselves in their brief periods at the helm, and the current government of Asif Ali Zardari is no exception.

Still, the military bears most of the blame for blocking the evolution of a true

democratic process. And such a process -- for all its inevitable flaws and inefficiencies -- is the only way Pakistan will ever get a government truly responsive to the needs of its ordinary citizens, and one likely to crack down on the Taliban, whom most Pakistanis disdain.

So, how can Pakistan's government be "civilised?" Useful lessons can be drawn from the democratisation of other Praetorian states. The first thing to recognise is that depoliticising the army won't mean weakening it. Pakistan's



Pakistan army: Hindering rather than helping democracy?

senior officers must know that they have never been less popular than they are today; returning to their barracks for good would be the best way to revive their prestige.

This process has in fact already begun. It was started by the army itself in early 2008, when the new chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani forbade officers from holding civilian posts in government. But much more needs to be done. Parliament and the prime minister must assert themselves to limit the army's involvement in internal affairs.

The military will resist. But the recent victory of the lawyers' movement -- which forced the government to restore the Supreme Court's former chief justice, who'd been deposed by Musharraf -- shows that civilians can take on the generals and win.

Over time, the civilian government must shift national-intelligence functions from the military to a civilian organisation, curb the reach of the infamous Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) and strip the military of its responsibilities for maintaining security inside Pakistan, giving that duty to a paramilitary force governed by the ministry of interior (as in neighbouring India). Such a step was critical to the transitions from military to civilian government in Chile in 1990 and Indonesia in 1998.

Pakistan's nuclear infrastructure, meanwhile, should be split into military and civilian components, both under civilian authority. And most important, civilians must begin making critical national-security policy decisions. Implementation should still fall to the military, which should also retain a voice in defense policy -- but not the final one.

While some of the generals are likely to object to any reduction in their powers, it's in their own interests to accept a fundamental change. Letting the army maintain a degree of autonomy regarding its internal functions should also help bring it around. And Washington can contribute by demanding reforms of the sort outlined above.

Contrary to popular belief, the US has a great deal of leverage over Pakistan thanks to the enormous amounts of aid Washington disburses (likely to total \$7.5 billion over the next five years). Making these changes may still seem like a tall order. It is. But Pakistan's problems at this point are massive in scope -- and so must be the solution.

Basur is Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Ganguly is a Professor of Political Science and is Director of research at the Center on American and Global Security at Indiana University.

©Newsweek International. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.