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UNITED STATES OF LITTLE INDIA

- 6** The Wedding Sutra
by Lavina Melwani
NRI weddings are getting sophisticated and innovative.



- 20** Om-My!
by Michelle Boorstein
Yoga is more than a path to a better butt.



DEPARTMENTS

2

Editorial

3

Bollywood World

6

Cover Story

15

Gleanings

18

Cuisine

20

InMerica

22

Artists of Little India

26

Abroad at Home

29

Unconventional

Cover
Bride: Komal Pandya
Photographer: Jay Seth
Design: Isac Jo

FEATURES

- 3** Revenge of the Former Colony
by Salil Tripathi
Bollywood and Indian popular culture invaded the United Kingdom.



- 29** A Combative Career
by David Glenn
Jagdish Bhagwati's crusade.



This Ain't Funny

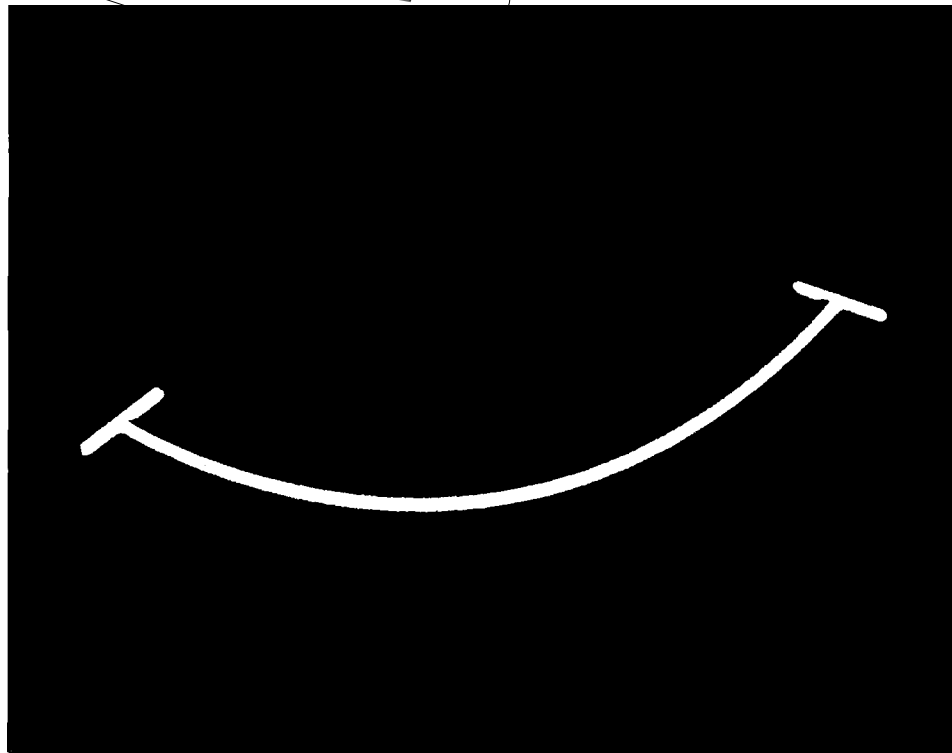
Silly things aren't funny anymore.

We discovered that recently, when a new year's greeting card from India landed on our doors, nearly three months after we had already rung in the new year.

The card from the *Times of India* group featured a wide smile. Outside, on the envelope, a bold red warning read, CAUTION: HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS

CONTENTS WITHIN.

In the post-9/11 world of anthrax scares, the eccentric punch line did not amuse the U.S. postal inspectors, who presumably detained the card for inspection at the JFK International Service Center. The card was ultimately cleared by U.S. Postal Inspection Service on March 2 and delivered later that month.



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IT'S A BOLLYWOOD WORLD!

Revenge of the Former Colony

Bollywood and Indian popular
culture invade Britain.

BY SALIL TRIPATHI

Nothing, it seems, is sacred on these pristine British Isles anymore. Its favorite food is chicken tikka masala, not fish and chips. Curry restaurants employ more people in Britain than the steel industry does. Its discos blare out bhangra music. The corner stores in this nation of shopkeepers are taken over by South Asians, and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair is busy writing letters recommending businessmen like Laxmi Mittal. Their cricket captain Nasser Hussain was born in Madras, and the durable batsman at the other end of the crease is Mark Ramprakash. The theater at West End is showing *Lagaan*, and the one at Leicester Square has *Monsoon Wedding*. Still feeling home sick? Then look at the red top double-decker buses that pass by Big Ben (which looks just like Rajabai Tower, I swear), and what's that advertisement that you see on that bus? Andrew Lloyd Webber presents A.R. Rahman's *Bombay Dreams*, it says.

Click on www.bombaydreamsthemusical.com, and fireworks will explode in a clear, blue sky with twinkling stars, accompanied by *Chal chhaiya chhaiya*, and you enter the world of "City of extremes, anything is possible in Bombay dreams," the new musical opening at a West End theater in June, produced by Shekhar Kapur and Lloyd Webber, scripted by Meera Syal, to the musical score of Rahman.

At its launch, Lloyd Webber said: "I have been watching Indian films for some time and I think the Bollywood culture has a lot to offer to international audiences. There is tremendous talent in India and I am excited. This is a very serious project. We will follow the style of a Bollywood film and slowly move on to an international format. It will be an extension of Indian culture presented in English to a wider audience . . . We have to laugh with the show and not at it."

Dr. Rachel Dwyer, who teaches comparative literature at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, and recently wrote a book on Yash Chopra, the



Britain's First Lady Cherie Blair in a Banjara tribal dress.

IT'S A BOLLYWOOD WORLD!

Bollywood director, describes the musical as a groundbreaking and financially shrewd move by the British peer. "This is something quite new. I hope it goes to India, too. There hasn't really been much in the way of Western-style musicals in Bombay. They do perform Westernized theatre but that only applies to a fairly small elite audience in English and Hindi. Certainly people in India know the Lloyd Webber name and it is a very good way for him to tap into the huge Indian market."

The revenge of the former colony, it seems, is complete, as Bollywood and popular Indian culture together command an unusual following and unprecedented interest in British society. A new generation of British Asian filmmakers has emerged, making movies about growing pangs and the culture of dislocation. Popular TV shows like *Goodness Gracious Me!*, and the *Kumar's at #42*, are drawing larger audiences. Theaters are dedicating themselves to showing Bollywood films. Birmingham is opening a Cineplex that will only show Bollywood films. And the most eagerly-awaited comedy (This year's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, we are told) is *Bend it like Beckham*, a soccer comedy involving a Sikh family in the Midlands, made by the celebrated Kenya-born, Britain-based filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, whose first feature, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), drew her numerous fans.

Just as *American Desi* and *ABCD* are regarded as seminal movies in the United States, Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* is regarded as a trendsetter in Britain. It traced the adventures of a busload of Asian women on holiday in the popular British seaside resort of Blackpool, momentarily leaving their lives. There they were in their element, exploring the forbidden, laughing at the risqué, and sharing personal traumas amid numbing equilibrium.

Then there was *My Son the Fanatic*, based on a Hanif Kureishi story. The story is set around a cultural clash, where the bride's father is a ranking English police officer, and the groom's father is a taxi driver. Expertly played by Om Puri, the

taxi driver Parvez delights us with Indianisms ("Please, sir, no smoking indoors. Smell is deafening,") as he realizes that his routine, dutiful life is changing fundamentally. Parvez finds problems he cannot solve everywhere. Caught between a wife that doesn't understand him, a Hindu classmate who has become a successful entrepreneur, a white prostitute who must administer to other clients, and his son, who breaks off the engagement to turn towards Islamic fundamentalism, Parvez's final outburst is one of the film's great moments, providing an accurate portrayal of the dismal life in the deindustrializing North England.

Another film to tackle a similar theme was *East is East*, Damien O'Donnell's rip-roaring film, made in 1999, about a mixed family in Salford in the 1970s. Funny without being paternalistic and stereotypical, the film successfully avoids looking down on Asians. Once again, Om Puri shines, this time as George Khan, a Pakistani chip shop owner who, like the Fiddler on the Roof, would like to arrange marriages of each of his children. The children call him Genghis, but Puri's stern rules are meant to protect the children from the bad influences around them. and such influences abound: it is 1970s, Pakistan is breaking up, and in Britain, Enoch Powell's speech of rivers of blood resounds, as racism flexes its muscles.

And now comes *Bend it Like Beckham*, in which another Bollywood stalwart, Anupam Kher, acts. It is a comedy about an 18-year-old Indian girl called Jess (Parminder Nagra) who dreams of playing professional football and mastering David Beckham's ability to bend the ball around the wall. As her big final match approaches it lands on the same day as her eldest sister's Pinky's massive Punjabi wedding. She has to decide what she should do — keep her parents happy, or follow her own dreams.

As a new generation of British Asians comes of age, it is also rediscovering the drama and romance of Bollywood. These films and their successful release in mainstream cinemas across Britain, is

testimony to the fact that British Asian films have arrived. BBCDs, or British-Born Confused Desis, who had begun with literature and television, are now demanding space on the silver screen. There, they are competing with the real Bollywood. And BBCD fans are taking to Bollywood with the same gusto with which they had earlier taken to Disco Bhangra. Parents are pleased about it, too; they like their children spending time seeing *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Dil to Pagal Hai*, rather than western shows on TV and DVDs.

This is at least partly because the defining trait of a Hindi film continues to be morality; good always overcomes evil, love triumphs over hate, the hero and heroine live happily ever after. And the family comes together, in the end. The Bollywood experience is a life-affirming one, says Kishan Desai, who runs a printing press in North London.

For British sociologists, Asians going to see a movie is an anthropological marvel because these are genuine family events. "For British society, the sight of three generations of a family, men and women, boys and girls, willingly and happily going together at any public event, is now a novelty," says Joseph Rickerd, a banker who has lived several years in the Far East. And managers of cinemas are noticing another trend: that Bollywood's appeal goes beyond the Asian community. Even in theaters, which show films without subtitles, Bollywood cinema is attracting growing numbers of non-Asians.

Some are discovering Bollywood after the ringing endorsement of film directors like Baz Luhrmann. At the screening of *Moulin Rouge* at the National Film Theater in London last year, Luhrmann acknowledged: "I was directly influenced by Bollywood and I am very, very happy about it. I owe much to my experiences in India. I don't want to be seen as stealing someone else's culture, but I owe much to my experiences in India and the influence is clear in *Moulin Rouge*."

Pravesh Kumar, whose musical *Bollywood 2000: Yet Another Love Story* was

IT'S A BOLLYWOOD WORLD!

staged in London last year, says: "The appeal of Bollywood is astonishing. Our play has attracted many non-Indians in the audience." His play was loosely based on *Yaadon ki Baraat*, *Deewar*, *Sholay*, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, and many other films that deal with the same general theme of loss, separation, reunion, love, tears, hate, and humor. What-happens-next is not important; in fact, to that extent, Hindi films belong to the genre of myths and epic, where the audiences know the stories and the plots, but come for the experience.

Bollywood 2000: Yet Another Love Story is a lively, enthusiastic tribute, with some brilliant acting by Amit Channa as the mother-worshipping hero, and Ajay Chhabra and Kiran Dadlani are genuinely funny. And then there is Britain's answer to Madhuri Dixit, Shivani Ghai. The sultry siren, like the Juhi Chawlas and Taboos and Kajols before her, transforms from a tight-skirt-wearing spoilt rich girl to a *churidar-kurta*-wearing fiancée, and then, lo and behold, a sari-clad *arya nari*, all within the promised two hours. Only the waterfall is missing.

Britain has become the biggest market for Hindi films outside India and as many as five Bollywood films reached the top ten lists last year, including *Lagaan* and *Gadr: Ek Prem Katha*. The appetite for Bollywood films in Britain is immense (four films — *Dil Se*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Biwi Number One*, and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, have in the past two years smashed box-office records by entering the UK Top 20 on release). Little wonder then that the Bollywood Awards for 2000 were staged at Dome, in London.

In Birmingham, where Asians account for 25 per cent of the population, the potential audience is huge, particularly since the Federation Against Copyright Theft began its clampdown on imitation Bollywood videos. Andy Stone, who runs the Bollywood-dedicated multiplex in Birmingham, says: "People will come to us from all over Britain." In the next five years, analysts expect that more Asian-dedicated multiplexes will spring up in Asian populated areas of Britain. According to



Amitabh Bachchan checks out his wax goatee at Madam Tussaud's museum in London.

The Times, the Cineworld multiplex in Feltham, West London, for example, whose catchment area includes Southall and Hounslow, says 26.5 per cent of its business comes from Bollywood films. And Britons were startled when they discovered that BBC's online millennium poll to determine the greatest actor of the century was won by Amitabh Bachchan, beating out Sir Laurence Olivier.

Indian filmmakers are also tapping British locales for filming. Yash Johar selected locations in Oxford, London and Bath for his *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*. More and more Indian films are being shot in Scotland, which is now the most popular film location outside India for Bollywood musicals. Kevin Cowle, of Scottish Screen, a publicly funded film promotion body, said last year: "As far as I can tell Indian audiences are voracious for new images. They're looking for novelty in the way a movie looks, which is why they've had a long connection with Switzerland."

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai was partly filmed in Scotland. Ashwani Chopra, head of Trimurti Films, one of Bombay's biggest

and oldest production companies, explained the choice of Scotland for *Pyar, Ishq Aur Mohabbat*, saying "We chose Scotland because it gives a different backdrop and we don't want anything we have already exploited. England has been exploited in other films. Everyone shows Trafalgar Square and Big Ben because they want to show that they are filming abroad." The British Tourist Authority says that 15 Bollywood films will be made in Britain in this year; directors have shown preference for such diverse locations as Blenheim Palace, London tourist spots, the Scottish Highlands and the Bluewater shopping center in Kent.

But for now, fans wait for June, when the Selfridges Department Store will unveil a promotion of Bollywood-inspired fashions, and more buses will drive around the city with posters of Bombay Dreams. The Indian cricket team, too, will be in town, taking on Hussain's Englishmen. And the newest show in town will be about a boy and a girl in a big city, chasing a dream, accompanied by songs and dance. *Yeh hai Bambaai, meri jaan.*

COVER STORY

by LAVINA MELWANI

They came in a horse-driven carriage to get married in an idyllic village, at a beautiful little temple, surrounded by thatched huts and bullock carts. But this village was nowhere near India — it had been recreated in red, white and blue All-American Connecticut. Mahendra Patel, a prominent motel owner, went all out when his daughter Reshma got married to Amit Patel, transforming ten acres of land into a desi village. The hundreds of bejeweled guests feasted at colorful rustic stalls serving dhaba snacks like bhel puri and chaat. This entire illuminated village with its 30 foot decorated gateway was encompassed in a vast tent, just minutes away from the country clubs and malls of America.

Oh, the ingenuity of Indian immigrants: if you can't go to India, you can always bring India to America!

NRI weddings are certainly getting sophisticated and innovative. When New



Above: Lakshmi and Pradeep Masand.



PHOTO BY JAY SETH

Kamal Patel.

THE WEDDING SUT

COVER STORY

Yorkers doctors Nitin and Leena Doshi were organizing the wedding of their daughter Neeli to Todd, they flew their guests — all 300 of them — to Amelia Island off the coast of Jacksonville in Florida. They put up all the guests in bungalows on a luxurious resort and had wedding celebrations that lasted for three days. The wedding, a wonderful mix of West and East, included a Caribbean party by the poolside, a complete Indian wedding with the bride carried in a doli on the shoulders of her brothers and cousins, and a rousing reception where guests danced the raas and garba. The Western wedding ceremony was held on the beach, with everyone dressed in pastel colors.

In India marriage is usually a big three-ring circus with matchmakers, parents, in-laws, astrologers, jewelers, wedding planners, dancing eunuchs, and of course, 33,000 Gods and Goddesses watching over the grand occasion. And now, thanks to the booming population of second-generation IndianAmericans, this same hangama is being recreated in the United States as well (except for the dancing eunuchs) — and a bustling multimillion-



PHOTOS BY SUMIT ARYA



Michelle Dhanraj of Guyana poses at her wedding reception.

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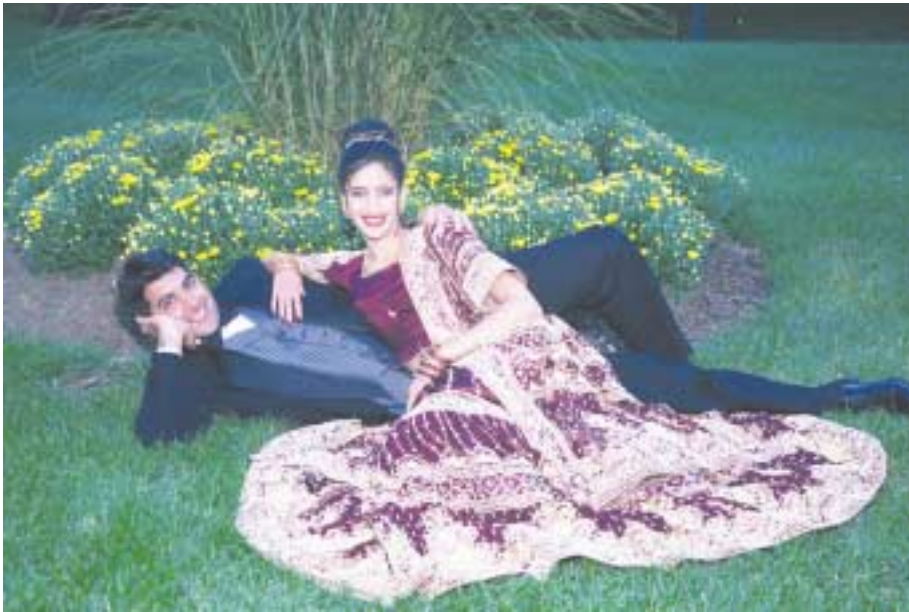


PHOTO BY AJAY MADAN



PHOTO BY SUMIT ARYA

Bottom: Parula and Ashish Sitapara.

dollar wedding industry has sprouted up to meet the demand.

As the children of the immigrants of the 60's come of age, they are meeting their life partners at work and in social settings, on college campuses and chat rooms on the Net, where matrimonial sites have proliferated. Others are encountering their mates via matrimonial ads in the ethnic papers and at old fashioned wedding fairs.

The Gujarati community hosts a very successful marriage fair where prospective brides and grooms meet suitable mates from the same background.

Whichever way the couples meet, the final destination is marriage and surprise, surprise, no longer are the families traveling to India to tie the knot. America has become home — and the place for the perfect wedding. Earlier, many NRIs were

traveling to India to recreate grand celebrations, but now showy weddings in India are passe. While some overseas Indians experimented and had grand weddings in Paris, Madrid or Bali, those living in America are increasingly discovering the ideal marriage spot in their own backyard.

The growing Indian population has ensured that just about all the ingredients for a desi wedding are available right here in the US of A, right from bridal garlands to wedding outfits and boxes of sweets. Every Little India from New York's Jackson Heights and Flushing to Iselin in New Jersey to Decatur in Georgia and Artesia in California seems to have jumped into the wedding procession.

Although the wedding season is typically from March to December, couples are celebrating weddings even in the cold of January. Ceremonies are being held in countless temples, Indian restaurants and catering halls as well as five star hotels. Elegant weddings are held in the upscale hotels like the Pierre and the Plaza as well as the Hilton, Marriott and Hyatt chains.

One banquet hall, which has arisen to meet the particularly desi needs, is Royal Albert Palace in Woodbridge, NJ. This resplendent catering hall shimmers like a maharaja's place with three halls that can host 2,000 people simultaneously, and Shabri, a restaurant masquerading as an Indian village. On weekends, it's a constant wedding-go-round with five to six weddings.

Desis love their spicy Moghlai cuisine and Indian restaurants in New York and New Jersey in New Jersey are doing a rip-roaring business catering food for the many celebrations that are held during the weddings. Every big city from Atlanta to Los Angeles has similar restaurants catering to the wedding crowd.

Many mainstream hotels and catering halls have recognized this clientele and accept outside catering and scores of caterers service five star hotels that host such weddings. Indian caterers include novel touches like Japanese, Chinese and

COVER STORY



When New Yorkers doctors Nitin and Leena Doshi were organizing the wedding of their daughter Neeli to Todd, they flew their guests to Amelia Island off the coast of Jacksonville in Florida.

Thai dishes to the Indian table, Ganesh ice sculptures and dessert-laden tables heralded by a burst of sparklers.

A whole sub-culture of wedding planners, musicians, entertainers, florists, bridal makeup artists, mehndi-walis, jewelers and designers has sprung up to fill the constant demand for wedding services. In fact, desis now have their own bridal magazine, titled *Bibi*. This Houston-based self-help magazine and website explores everything from the latest trends in bridal fashions to wedding decor and honeymoon destinations, and is particularly popular with young South Asians.

Since location is of no consequence on the web, many websites catering to brides and the marriage market have sprung up in India, such as shadionline, indiawalibrides.com and weddingsutra.com.

ShadiCenter.com is a virtual wedding mall on the web where you can search for a local wedding professional, shop, find wedding songs, plus find ideas for weddings in seaside resorts and palaces, and even a special web cast so friends who aren't able to come to the wedding can still watch it in real time.

Weddingsutra.com was founded by Madhulika Mathur and Parthip Thyagarajan both of whom were classmates in Business School. Observes Thyagarajan, "Brides and grooms fall in the demographic age group, that currently comprises a large percentage of all (38% in India) of all Web users. As Internet use continues to increase, engaged couples are more

likely to turn to online resources as the first place they look for wedding products, information and services."

The site was nominated for the best Indian Web Site Award by Chip India, and has been ranked in the top 100 Indian Web Sites by "Computers@Home. It includes several features including the Trousseau Finder and Grooms Wardrobe, which contain a collection of close to a thousand outfits, jewelry and accessories from designers like JJ Vallaya and Tarun Tahiliani.

"Today's couples are young, net-friendly, hungry for information, and most important, ready to spend," says Mathur. "We expect the impact of the Internet on the wedding market to be significant."

Alia Khan, who grew up in the United States and has designed for mainstream clients, has also brought a new twist to the wedding scene, the mail order catalog. The designer travels constantly to India and Pakistan, and provides hundreds of couture outfits in *Asian Andaz*, a print catalogue, and website, Asianandaz.com. She says, "I created it to cater to the fashion elite and their demand for elegant and wearable

formal and bridal wear for both men and women, including fusion and western wear. Fashion is no longer something to go abroad for, with Asian Andaz you can have it all with a simple click of a mouse on your PC or at your fingertips with the exclusive full color catalog."

Indeed, it may be a good solution since except for a handful of elite boutiques in cities like Houston, Atlanta, New Jersey, Chicago and Los Angeles, most stores sell mass fashions. Observes Khan, "The 'Azara' as well as other bridal pieces from my collection are drenched with genuine Swarovski crystals, dhubka, sequins, beads and gem stones which are hand picked and intricately hand placed on every garment along with fine hand embroideries in. My clients are mostly professionals such as doctors, and lawyers who are pressed for time and yet want customized service, exclusivity and uniqueness in the clothes they wear."

The big cities in the United States Atlanta to New York to Los Angeles have their Little Indias and every imaginable convenience, such as mehndiwalis to mithais. Smaller cities are using UPS services to get everything from wedding outfits to wedding fresh flower garlands delivered by next day air.

One of the oldest wedding planning services in the tristate area is that offered by House of Dipali, which has outlets in India, London, New York and New Jersey. Mitesh Patel, the owner, likes to call it the largest supplier of traditional wedding invitations, wedding services, statues and temples — and it may well be true. After all, their 7,000 sq. foot showroom in Bellerose, Queens, has over 10,000 statues, 13 different types of mandaps and thousands of invitation cards, and is capable of juggling 4-5 weddings on a given day.

Patel, who organizes the decor for all the wedding events right from the wedding hall to the honeymoon suite, which Indians traditionally like to decorate with flowers, says, "The market is increasing 30 to 40 percent every year. According to my estimate, there are a minimum of 20

weddings a week in the tri-state area.”

Scores of wedding planners are doing a thriving business in major metropolises across America. Perhaps the first one to provide services to the Indian community was Bhanu Shetty of Sai Paans and Garlands. Living in Jackson Heights, she catered to the burgeoning bridal market by creating garlands and floral jewelry, as well as the mandap dēcor. Her skillful fingers manipulated flowers into headpieces, earrings and bracelets for brides with an Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage.

“I cater to everybody so I have to be prepared for all the different customs,” says Shetty. She makes the sehra, a floral veil, which Punjabi bridegrooms must wear in traditional weddings and the floral jewelry with which the in-laws dress up a Muslim bride-to-be, a few days before the wedding. She even knows how to make badi or criss-cross garlands that lock the Hyderabad Muslim bride and groom together, and a four-foot long sehra which goes up to the knees of the bridegroom.

Anuradha and Lata Patel are partners in Mandap, a full-fledged wedding dēcor company that creates fantasy wedding settings as well as the traditional dēcor. Recently mandaps dressed in tissue, bandhani fabrics as well as flowers and traditional diyas are hot. Her latest is handpainted mandaps, and she recently introduced five new designs inspired by Khajuraho and other places in India.

Mandap, which has a showroom in New Jersey, does everything from the grand gateway arches to the Ganesh table at the entrance, as well as ice sculptures and umbrellas at the food stations. Last year the company claims it organized over 85 weddings in the tristate area. It have also undertaken weddings in Florida and Michigan, creating the mandap dēcor, sending the equipment by road while handlers fly to the wedding site. It has conducted several big weddings in the Myrtle Beach area, home of the Motel Patels. Says Lata Patel, “It’s a very large community and over 1,200 people turn up. Sometimes we have the weddings in huge convention halls for 1,500 to 2,000 people.



PHOTO BY AJAY MADHAN

Menu of Long Island.

Elegant Affairs, based in Fairfield, NJ, was founded by two sisters Sharda Shenoy and Shobha Rao. They have a 10,000 sq ft. showroom and claim to organize 400

weddings a year. Shenoy says, “We came here in 1974 and even our children have grown up now. Right now because of this young generation”— some like it very

COVER STORY



PHOTO BY AJAY MADAN



PHOTO BY SUMIT ARYA



PHOTO BY JAY SETH

Left: Dev and Vimmi. Above: Shreya Jani and Sven Prudlo. Bottom: Sumaira Habib and Nadeem Ali Khan.

traditional while others like it contemporary — it's all mix and match."

Although most of Elegant Affairs' clients are in the tristate area, the sisters travel to many states including Chicago, West Virginia and Ohio. Some weddings can be very elaborate such as one in Cincinnati where the decoration included twelve huge arches and traditional 'bethak' style

decor for the sangeet. The wedding decor starts at \$4,000-5,000 and can go to \$35,000 to 40,000.

What makes weddings so stress-free in the United States is that the whole infrastructure is in place from wedding photographers to caterers and limousine services. Jay Seth of Image Matters has been a photographer in Flushing, Queens, for the past 26 years. In the early years he used to shoot only Christian and Jewish weddings, but in the last 10 years he has started specializing in Indian weddings. He says, "These are much bigger and grander weddings. I guess Indians are also in more secure positions and are spending more. There's a huge change in the brides, especially in the last five years. They are born here'— they are a lot more particular and detail-oriented."

Indeed, the young couples have firm ideas of how they want the wedding to happen. They often tend to override their parents. Fifteen years ago it was a different

scenario, says Seth, now the brides feel the pictures are very important. Hia wedding package stars at \$5000 per day and include ceremony, portraits and album, and can go up to \$25,000.

In the New York/New Jersey area there are at least 25-30 bridal photographers. Says Seth, "There are a lot more photographers now, but there are a lot more weddings too. We all know each other so there's no sense of rivalry. We've all cultivated our own clientele."

Sumit Arya came to the United States from Haryana for his premedical studies, but took one photography class and was hooked. He's been doing it fulltime since 1980 and does about 60 weddings a year, many of them multiple projects including photography, videos and renting of the mandaps. He has a one-stop bridal services store in New Jersey and does invitation cards too.

He says, "It's like Chandni Chowk and Buleshwar is right here," because he carries all the wedding paraphernalia that those places are famous for, such as ethnic garb, turbans and ritual jewelry. He organizes the whole event, from mandaps and Ganesh tables to flower decorations. The starting package is \$5,000 but it can go up to \$20,000 for the full package.

Has the wedding industry grown? He laughs, "In the last two years it has revolutionized. The people who were hobbyists have chosen it as a career. There are now hundreds of DJs. DJs who used to do it on the weekends while they went to college, have graduated and taken it as a fulltime career."

Ajay Madan of Precious Video Memories in New Jersey has been in the business of bridal video and photography for the past 12 years. Madan does the photography and the videography and also guides the clients through the wedding hurdles. "People think they can hire any priest and have a wonderful wedding; no, it doesn't happen," he says. "You need the right priest and a DJ who can control the crowd; there are 600 people at a wedding and you don't want the couple to come in



PHOTO BY SUMIT ARYA

Harbinder Singh and Gurmeet Kaur Sodhi.

with everyone walking and talking as if at a flea market! It's how you plan it that makes a better wedding, not how much money you pump into it."

The cost for his services is \$5,000 and up. Aren't Indians a frugal lot who don't like to shell out big bucks? Says Madan, "Weddings are so important to them. Gujaratis, especially, go all out. 80 percent of my clients are Gujaratis and though they may come from small villages, here they all are doing very well and for them it's a prestige issue to do it right." He has so many clients in New Jersey that he moved from Queens and set up a high tech studio there.

Madan does 18-20 weddings a year — what he calls "limited, quality work," which is very creative and not mass produced. Madan says he makes entertaining videos, shooting in parks and indoor locales, making a love story out of it. The market has certainly burgeoned. Jokes Madan, "Every block, every corner has a videographer or photographer. Anyone who has a camera thinks he's a

videographer. Everybody who has ten CDs says "I'm a DJ!"

So how do you separate the wheat from the chaff, how do you know who's really good and who's going to really make you weep at your wedding? The most reliable way still is word of mouth and checking out the work of each vendor the bride plans to hire. Most have intensive videos and look books of their work at their studios. And now of course, a first stop is at the vendor's website.

Indian beauty salons specializing in threading and bridal makeup have sprung up in almost every suburb with an Indian population. Imoi Li, who owns a beauty parlor in Mumbai, freelances in Manhattan, has a long line of bridal clients. She says, "The Indian-American brides go for traditional make-up, but mix it with a more Western, more natural look." Beauticians and hairdressers now carry cell phones and make house calls, doing the makeup and hair for not only the bride, but for the bridal party too.

COVER STORY

PHOTO BY SUMIT ARYA



Meeta and Jeff.

Scores of boutiques catering to brides have cropped up in Queens and New Jersey, including Khazana, which carries designer wear from noted Indian designers. However, many brides-to-be like to make the pilgrimage to Mumbai and Delhi to buy elaborate outfits for their trousseau and the wedding ceremony from top designers like Ritu Kumar, Abu Jani, Sandeep Khosla, Tarun Tahiliani, JJ Valaya, and Rohit Bahl.

Although some NRIs turn to the big names like Nitin Mukesh for wedding entertainment, the majority hire local talent from singers to dancers and dhol players. Jayesh Vyas of Queens and his popular Jai Group perform dandia raas at weddings while he himself plays the dhol and sings popular film hits like “Kuri Punjaban” and “Doli Taro Dhol Baje.” He says, “It’s all increased tremendously’— you have baraats (wedding processions) just like in India!” Another interesting twist is the hiring of local American high school bands to play the Indian music for the baraat.

Mitch Greenberg, an American classical musician who received his training in bansuri and shenai in Allahabad, has got drawn into the New Jersey desi wedding circle. People have come to know of him by word of mouth and he finds himself playing the plaintive notes of the shenai at Indian weddings. “Now weddings are

getting to be around the year — December and January! I had to cancel a wedding in West Virginia because of a gigantic blizzard. They even risk an outdoor “baraat” in the cold weather. It was late November and everyone was freezing as I lead the horse out front.”

Greenberg sees a change in the past few years and that is the increasing clout of the deejays: “What in the past was tradition, in the future will be what people merely remember. I cannot imagine the younger generation understands classical music to the degree their parents do, or the significance of it. Now the disco companies are bringing larger and louder equipment and they are now a requirement whereas the live musician is a secondary factor that is budgeted only if possible.”

Indeed, the deejays are very much a part of a desi wedding and while there were just a handful of deejays about five years back, there are now literally scores of them. One of the most popular is Magic Mike who does weddings across the country and in the Caribbean Island.

Whether it is Bhangra, Bollywood numbers or Western music, Indian deejays mix up a potent brew to create the effervescence of the wedding.

American horses have also been recruited into the service of desi weddings and several stables in the New Jersey area

provide the “ghori” for the baraat. A and T Stable in Jackson, NJ, was in the business of organizing horse carriages for American weddings when they got a call from an Indian for a white horse for the baraat. After that so many requests came in that they even bought the horse’s costume from India’— red silk with sequins, gold embroidery and pearls. So now the American horses get ready for desi celebrations and participate in over 50 weddings a year.

According to stable owner Bonnie Poling, there are just two or three other stables that do Indian weddings for as she explains,—“You have to have a certain kind of horse for an Indian wedding. The revelers go right behind the horse — there’s yelling, clapping, music, dancing, and the drums and the tambourine. You have to have a horse that can handle all that!”

As Indian American couples create their own contemporary trends and mix them with the old traditions of their parents, weddings are getting ever more elaborate. Kavita Lund, a New Yorker for 35 years, who has seen the wedding scene evolve, observes: “Weddings are taking place in the most unusual settings, in clubs on the waters. The ceremonies are being conducted in flower-laden gazebos in the open air facing the ocean. Anything that can be done in India is being done here — and more!”

A whole new dimension has been added to the wedding game with the many intercultural weddings taking place, where a Western wedding ceremony and bridal showers, best man and bridesmaid are added to the mix. Mitesh Patel of House of Dipali has certainly seen some changes in the 14 years that he has been a wedding planner.

Patel, who did the decorations for the elaborate Doshi wedding in Florida and created the village ambiance for the Patel wedding in Connecticut, says that earlier there were only a handful of intercultural weddings, but now they constitute almost 20 percent of the weddings that he organizes.

Patel says that major country clubs and catering halls that used to do only American weddings are opening up their doors to Indian clients as they see the big money potential. After all, Indian weddings are huge, hosting 400 to 800 people.

Davinder Kumar, a businessman who came to the United States from New Delhi 16 years ago became the father of the bride this March, and has been caught up in the tumultuous carousel of celebrations that accompany a typical desi wedding. While a wedding in India would have meant shared responsibilities since so many family members are there, he decided to have the wedding in New Jersey. Simply, this is now home.

It is where the friends are and where the children have grown up and have their friends. Besides, he points out, everything is available here.

“The demand is so great and there are still a relatively small number of vendors, so the prices are sky-rocketing. Of course, the father wants the best for the wedding, and the couple expect the best because it means a lifetime of memories.”

The wedding was held at Rockleigh Country Club in New Jersey with over 400 guests. The bride, Shibani, had known the groom, Vikram, when they were both in 7th grade in school in India. Like the protagonists in a Bollywood film, fate separated them. Shibani came to the United States and became a rehab specialist while Vikram went to the Ukraine to train as a doctor. Then mischievous fate — and parents — brought them together again.

Shibani did all their shopping in India but wanted the wedding in the United States because this is home, where her family and friends are. She says, “It’s much more expensive to do it here, but it’s very exciting because my friends are here, my parents are here, we live here and we work here. I have connections with people here rather than in India.”

Interestingly enough, one of the benefits of a wedding here is more autonomy for the bride. Says Shibani, “Here, with my friends, I get to plan a lot of the things myself whereas in India the



PHOTO BY SUMIT ARYA

Top: Rajeev Paliwala; Middle: Jaya and Shyam.

bride doesn’t really get to take part in the wedding. Over there everyone expects the bride to just sit around and look pretty. Here I’ve been the main wedding planner, running round doing everything. I was able to get involved with who the deejay is, the choice of a photographer, the kind of decorations.”

Shibani says of her wedding organizer, “They made my wedding look like it was out of the movies! I wanted it to be a real Indian wedding in the US and I got it! I’ve been able to have a combination of Indian

and American traditions. I had a bridal shower although that’s not a part of Indian traditions. I’m also having a mehndi ceremony and a ladies sangeet. It’s like getting the best of both. So I really get to live all my dreams — so that’s why it’s very exciting for me.”

And yes, it’s very exciting times too for the scores of wedding planners, musicians, deejays and photographers. Along with the bride and groom, they are dancing and smiling — all the way to the bank!

Get a Handle on your Moustache!

CHETNA KAPOOR

looks at the world gone awry.

When his moustache cost him his job. For some strange reason officials of Indian Airlines developed a dislike for the handle bar moustache of purser Victor Joyanath De and forced him into compulsory retirement in January 2001. However, the Calcutta High Court has ruled that De should be reinstated as no rules prohibiting moustaches are laid down in the Airlines original operations manual. Got a handle on that?

Strange Feats. An eye of a needle for one who has his eye on record books. Pawan Kumar Kailey, a tailor from Goraya in Punjab, labored for three and a half hours daily for ten days to pass 84 threads through the eye of a needle hoping to get a place in the Limca Book of Records. He has stitched trousers, which can be worn in 10 different ways and a set of 35 jackets, which can be worn in 9,800 ways. However, these did not get him into any books of records or even on the front page news of any leading newspaper of the country. However a workshop on 17 ways to wear a saree in 30 seconds flat by a leading designer in a five star hotel in Kolkata earns a coverage in one of the most prestigious financial newspapers. What are they eyeing?

Jai Ganesh. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders have taken strong objection to artists of India origin elevating ace footballer David Beckham and his family to the status of Hindu Gods, Ganesh,

Parvati and Shiv. This piece of art is to be exhibited at the Queen's Jubilee celebrations to which this year's Commonwealth games have been dedicated. The figures in the painting appear to bear greater resemblance to kings and queens of medieval Europe than the Gods and Goddesses in Hindu mythology. But then the VHP's expertise on art and European history is somewhat restricted.

Want to be the Maharaja's (paying) guest? The erstwhile Indian Maharajas are finding a political vacuum in their lives and are running short of finances to maintain their sprawling palaces. So they are converting their palaces into heritage hotels. Those who have secretly desired to have a taste of life in palaces can now fulfill those dreams, but of course at a price. The Indian Habitat Center saw a large gathering, including of course the Maharajas and Maharanis at the launch of the website www.indianheritagehotels.com. Kunwar Uday Singh who along with his wife, Maharani of Ujjal, runs the Woodville hotel in Simla, Brajraj Singh of Kishangarh, Gaj Singh of Jodhpur were some of the royalties present. Arvind Singh of Mewar however is rather doubtful of the ambitious plans of his counterparts.

Power of Yagnas. Lord Ram performed the Yagna, Putra Kameshti, before he could sire his four sons Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughan. Kings in ancient India performed the

Ashwamedha yagna to assert invincibility and Raja Suya yagna to exert authority and seek divine blessings. Yagnas were performed to save the kingdom from natural disasters. However none of these caused any discomfiture to the common man. Rather, the poor were fed and endowed with gifts, but today these yagnas are symbolised by traffic jams and pollution. Maha Yagna was performed at Bandra, Mumbai, for world peace. In the light of the earth shaking events that have taken place in the recent past we can understand the desperation for this elusive quality. But surely 1 lakh of Modaks to Lord Ganesh won't bring that. Lord Krishna had stated that Hawan Kund is karambhumi and offerings are actions — not mounds of ghee and modaks. Then, of course, there are the Rath yatras of our leaders, which brought about only bloodshed and disunity.

Cheek-y son-in-law. A dinner invitation to her daughter and son-in-law proved horrifying for Shanti's mother. During the course of an argument over the meal, Ramesh bit off his mother-in-law's cheek. Surely that could not have tasted any better than the meal they argued over. The lady was admitted in Coimbatore Medical College to have the severed parts of her cheeks stitched back. On the other extreme we have young Raju from Sirkazi in Nagapattinam district, offering his tongue to Lord Venkateswara in

Thirupathi as gratification for his Amma becoming the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. And to think that this Amma is neither his mother or mother in law.

Bollywood ishtyle escapade. Umesh Reddy of Karnataka has us convinced that Bollywood stories are not as unreal as we think them to be. Umesh, an ex constable turned criminal has managed to escape five times from the clutches of the police. His modus operandi this time was answering nature's call. He gave one push to the policeman holding him by chains and made good his escape. Why a criminal who had successfully escaped four times earlier was not handcuffed is anyone's guess. One explanation given is that Umesh had complained earlier of his inability to walk, hence it was presumed that he could not run away. The police believed him. That's their nature.

Mujhe Rang De. The National Botanical Garden in Lucknow seems to be working overtime. First it was the creation of a unique garden, which could bring freshness into the lives of those who cannot see nature's beauty. The plants in this garden are placed at convenient heights and mainly include those varieties which can be distinguished by their texture and scent. For the blind, boards with all details of the plants have been put up in Braille. This is the first of its kind in India and second in the world. Now with Holi round the corner they have after long research produced environmental friendly herbal Gulal which is friendly on the skin too. The real test of course is how successfully they are able to market the product, which is priced at Rs. 20 per 100 gms., far higher than the ordinary gulal.

Sa Re Ga MA for your ailing pet. Moitri Veterinary clinic is the first in India to adopt music therapy for sick animals and their anxious wards. The proprietor, Kishore Ganguly's inspiration was the programme "Tomorrow's World" on BBC. Tomatoes in a farm in France grew twice to their normal size when Indian classical music was played to them. Ganguly felt that animals being more

Shrine Shines

Thousands of pilgrims thronged to the shrine of an Islamic saint in northwestern India on Friday after reports that an apparition had appeared on the dome of the 800-year-old building.

Police said more than 50,000 people have visited the shrine of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti in Rajasthan state since workers said they had seen images on its dome.

Additional police were being deployed to keep order at the shrine, said Saurab Shrivastav, police superintendent of Ajmer.

The shrine is in Ajmer, 80 miles southwest of Jaipur, the state capital. Shrine workers said they first saw the images of two bearded men on the central dome Wednesday evening.

Syed Irfan Usmani, a shrine worker, said one of the bearded men appeared to be Khwaja, "who made his appearance to spread the message of goodwill and peace after the recent carnage in

Gujarat."

A television station reported that the shrine's dome had been painted recently and the vision was due to light reflecting off the shiny paint.

Some local residents dismissed the phenomenon as an invention of the shrine workers, known as "khadims," to draw more pilgrims to the site.

"It appears to be a gimmick by the khadims to attract pilgrims whose numbers have fallen drastically after recent riots in Gujarat," said Vivek Munot, who owns a hardware store near the shrine.

Khadims make their money from pilgrims by acting as tour guides and getting the pilgrims to make donations.

Ajmer is a popular pilgrimage site for both Muslims and Hindus. According to legend, those who pray at the saint's tomb and tie a red thread on its marble lattice screens will have their wishes granted.

— By P.B. CHANDRA

sensitive than plants, would respond more favorably to this therapy. He has a very envious collection of Indian music CDs for this purpose.

Not potatoes but Micro Chips for Delhi Zoo animals. Technology is all set to enter into our Zoos. Microchips will be implanted under the skin, near the tails of animals. This is being done to achieve ethical breeding and prevent inbreeding. The electronic identifier will help to separate a female in heat from her parents and siblings.

More on animals and zoos. A panther in heat had been sneaking into a zoo in Vandalur town in South India to satisfy his urges. The authorities in

desperation closed down the zoo for a month but failed to catch him. So they did the next best thing. They enticed the male panther by keeping a female panther in heat and caught him Red handed!

Kolkatans wishes for Bhuvan for his cricket match against the firangees. A jumbo sized kurta like the one Aamir Khan wore in his movie Lagaan is filled with good wishes scribbled by Aamir fans in Kolkata. This kurta was to be gifted to Aamir the day prior to the Oscars. Meanwhile fans are thronging the music outlet where this Kurta is on display to squeeze in their wishes and maybe boost the sales of the music outlet too in the bargain.

Changing Positions

New translation hopes to show
Kamasutra in new light
reports **JILL LAWLESS**



More than 1,700 years after it was completed by an enigmatic Indian scribe, the *Kamasutra* is among the most famous Hindu books ever written — and, many believe, the most misunderstood.

Most who have encountered the book recall it as a do-it-yourself sex manual, an eye-opening encyclopedia of acrobatic positions.

Academics hope a frank new translation will help the *Kamasutra* — which means “a treatise on desire” — shake its saucy reputation and regain its status as a literary classic.

“It’s by far the most complete and interesting work about sexual psychology that has been written — a cross between *The Joy of Sex* and *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*,” said Wendy Doniger, who translated the book from the original Sanskrit with psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar.

“The great misconception is that it is about the positions, which is the silliest part of the book, and a very short part of the book,” she added.

Kamasutra was released last month in Britain and Oxford University Press will hit bookstores in the United States in June.

Written probably in 3rd-century Northern India by Vatsyayana Mallanaga, *Kamasutra* catalogs sexual positions, enumerates the varieties of kissing and expounds on the amorous role of scratching and biting.

But it also tells readers how to flirt, conduct a lovers’ quarrel, seduce someone

else’s spouse and blend potions to stimulate a sagging libido.

It even advises a woman on ways to dump an unwanted lover: “She talks about things he does not know about. She shows no amazement, but only contempt, for the things he does know about. She punctures his pride.”

With its aphoristic advice on attracting, satisfying, keeping and shedding a partner, the book is often more “Sex in the City” than sex manual.

“It is always said to be a book about man’s manipulation of women, but a great deal of it is about women’s manipulation of men,” Doniger says. “It’s really about power, politics and sex.”

Doniger, who teaches the history of religion at the University of Chicago, says the *Kamasutra* has been ill-served by its best-known English translation, completed in 1883 by British writer-explorer Sir Richard Burton.

Doniger says Burton’s language is “Victorian and flowery,” while the original Sanskrit is direct and robust.

“The *Kamasutra* is punchy, Hemingwayesque — he touches her here, she bites him there,” Doniger said.

“Burton uses the Hindu words ‘lingam’ and ‘yoni’ to refer to the sexual organs. These words are not in the original text. ... Burton takes all the ambiguity out, and makes it sound like some weird ‘Orientalist’ thing, whereas the book is about us.”

The new Oxford Classics edition is noticeably more direct than its Victorian predecessor. What Burton calls “supported congress,” the new book terms “sex standing up.”

The two editions agree, however, on the “lotus” position and the gymnastic embrace called “splitting the bamboo.”

That kind of exotic eroticism has made *Kamasutra* the bane of generations of parents and teachers, and the book remains controversial. Indian-born director Mira Nair’s 1996 film, *Kamasutra — a Tale of Love*, loosely based on the book, was stalled for more than a year by Indian censors before finally being screened.

Doniger says the book’s reputation has obscured its value as a work of literature. She says it can be read as a play in seven acts, following its male and female protagonists from seduction through separation, and as an idealized portrait of a sophisticated, monied society.

“No one in this book ever goes to the shop, no one ever goes to see his mother. All you do all day is plan for the night and get ready for it,” she said. “It’s like a *Playboy Mansion* life.”

“Training parrots and mynah birds to talk and going to cockfights, what sort of food and liquor to serve at a party — the life of pleasure is beautifully evoked. But a lot of it is about men and women in ways that have not changed.”

“It’s an enormously complicated book on the psychology of sex, the psychology of erotic arousal.”

And those illustrations — they were added much later.

“They’re an afterthought,” Doniger said. “A very famous afterthought.”



Non-Vegetarian Friends Please

ANITA NIGAM
is worried stiff
that America may
turn vegetarian.

One more vegetarian restaurant opened in Manhattan recently. Apparently, this one was inspired by the success of a similar Indian vegetarian restaurant nearby. This is starting to worry me a little. What is New York City coming to? In this trend setting city, arguably the restaurant capital of the world, where more people eat out than at home, where following the latest trend is always “in,” is this the latest fad? And if this new “in” thing swells and consumes the city, then the world, what’s going to happen to people like me?

I am a strict non-vegetarian. What that means is that most of the time I am 70 to 80 percent vegetarian and 20 to 30 per cent non-vegetarian. But that 20-30 percent is very important to me. I come from a long line of food-loving strict non-vegetarians. In my house — in my mother’s house that is — a vegetable and dal is cooked every day to go with rice and chapatti, but it needs to be made palatable by a side dish of either fried fish or fish curry.† My father likes to eat vegetables but my mother and brother are “allergic” to them (although both will vehemently deny this). During the monsoon season if the fish supply is low or nobody has been to the market in a day or two, my brother’s dinner will have to be enlivened by a fried egg.† In the annals of my family’s history it would be a rare occasion when we went without fish for more than two or three days. Perhaps only when that 13 day mandatory

mourning period had to be observed after the demise of a close relative.

My mother has a favorite story of her family’s dependency on fish. She comes from a big joint family from a small coastal town in the Konkan region of Western India. In her childhood, during the fortnight-long Ganesh festival, while a statue of Lord Ganesh presided over the main sitting room of her family’s ancestral home, fresh catch of the day was smuggled into the kitchen through the back door. And even her notoriously picky elderly aunts, who were so particular about executing to perfection the smallest detail of hospitality extended to their annual visitor, relaxed their rules and let the hosts devour something that would not be offered the divine guest.†

Some non-vegetarian families I know avoid eating meat and fish in the Indian month of Shravan. A few stretch that period to four months beginning with Shravan. Many others set aside certain days of the week, like Tuesdays and Thursdays and Fridays, to be observed as meat-n-fish-free days.† Some set aside Wednesdays and Sundays as the non-veg days. Not my family. 365 days a year, rain or shine, festival or no festival we loved our fish.

My husband’s family comes from the hilly Ghats of western Maharashtra. If a Ghati was invited to a relative’s home and served bhindi and alu gobi or even fish for that matter, it would be construed as an

insult. Spicy mutton curry with red-hot layer of oil floating on top is the heritage of Ghatias. It is not for the uninitiated. No true-blue Ghati will respect a mutton curry unless and until his eyes and nose start to water from its intense heat. Unfortunately years in Mumbai have spoiled my in-laws palate. My health-conscious mother-in-law mixes Soya with her chapatti flour and cooks medically correct, bland, mostly vegetarian food, especially since father-in-laws by-pass surgery.

Not my family. Whether diagnosed with diabetes or blood pressure, they’d rather pop the pills, prescribed by their doctors to keep it under control than change their diet.

This non-vegetarian family culture created a slight problem for me when I came to the United States. When I joined my husband here in New York City I soon realized that all his Indian friends, with the exception of one or two couples, were strictly vegetarian. All my friends in Bombay had been non-veg-loving.† My father’s friends, even if vegetarian in their own homes, came to our house to eat my mother’s fried fish and chicken curry. Cooking a complete vegetarian meal for invited guests was something that almost never happened in my mother’s house. After my husband and I finished our round of visits to his friends’ homes, came time for me to invite them to our house. Being a new bride, I aspired to be a great hostess

CUISINE OF LITTLE INDIA

and wanted to serve my guests the best vegetarian meal I could possibly prepare. So I set about planning a menu and took out all the recipe books that I had carefully picked and brought with me from India. To my surprise, I discovered that all of them, bar none, offered only fish and meat recipes. I had to send an SOS to my mother to send me a book of vegetarian recipes.

I eventually learned to cook elaborate vegetarian meals but rediscovered something I had always known- that I enjoy cooking chicken curry more than alu mutter. I also learned to order and eat vegetables in restaurants.

In India, before my marriage whenever we went to eat out as a family, we'd never even think of ordering a vegetable dish. Nobody liked to eat those restaurant-style vegetables. I got over my aversion to them when I had no choice but to eat the veg korma and chana-bhatura available in the university canteen. Even then, once in a week or two, if my friends and I saw chicken biryani written in the menu on the blackboard, our afternoon was made.

As I said no one in my family would imagine radically altering their diet but we have always been supportive of friends and relatives who have tried to do so. Therefore a few years ago when I came to know that my sister-in-law and her husband had become followers of a Swamiji and had given up non-veg food and alcoholic beverages, I was, a bit unhappily perhaps but nonetheless, respectful of their decision. Their own teen-age daughters however, were not so understanding and refused to follow in their parents' footsteps.† So my sister-in-law continued to cook chicken and fish for her daughters even though she herself would not eat a morsel of that. I admire her restraint. On my last India trip I learned that Swamiji has since passed on and the brother-in-law had returned with gusto to non-veg food and occasional drinking.† Sister-in-law, the lone soldier, was still carrying on with her vegetarianism.

In this day and age, when the whole world seems to be trying to cut down on



meat, to be a loyal non-vegetarian is probably as politically incorrect as wearing fur. And I hope no animal-rights activist will come up and throw a pie in my face for admitting to be one. Seriously, I know I really ought to try and increase the percentage of vegetarian food in my diet. At least that's what the research du jour recommends.

Still on a recent India trip it was quite heartening to see our young nieces, otherwise so conscious of their health and looks, enthusiastically order a full non-veg thali then totally ignore the vegetable katori that came with; or my small nephew wolfing down chicken lollipop, an appetizer I had never heard of 10-11 years ago but that seems to have become very popular there in my absence.

From what I've seen in my last few trips, the current trend in Mumbai appears to be that of seafood restaurants specializing in coastal cuisine. You see them everywhere- from business districts of south Bombay to alleys and by-lanes of suburban neighborhoods. Mostly they are non-nonsense eating joints serving tasty, home-type, no frills food at reasonable prices. So far they have made our journeys there delightfully delicious.† We arrive in

Mumbai late in the night or early morning, a few hours later have lunch in any one such restaurant near the house; for the last dinner off that trip- back to the same place, order some not-available-in-America fish like stuffed pomfret or fried bombay-duck, wash it down with kokam saar made from freshly squeezed coconut milk; gather enough memories and lingering tastes to last over the next year, then board the plane for New York. Arrive in New York City twenty-four hours later, if hungry and too tired to cook, order a tandoori brook trout from a mughlai place just a few blocks away and it'll be delivered home. So far so good. But the recent developments are worrisome. When all the latest fashion trends and cyber trends can travel from here to there within a matter of days, will it be long before the current Manhattan restaurant trend reaches the shores of Arabian Sea?†

My husband and I have always done our share to help the cause of vegetarian restaurants- by snacking on hundreds of idli-sambar and pav bhajis and rava-dosas over the years. Now I hope we'll have enough friends both in Manhattan and in Mumbai, to keep the flag over the non-veg restaurants flying into the future.

Om-my!

Yoga purists seek to reclaim ancient discipline as more than the path to a better butt, reports
MICHELLE BOORSTEIN



Heated to precisely 105 Fahrenheit (41 degrees Celsius), the Bikram yoga studio is so hot the windows look like it's raining — inside. And then there are the 25 very sweaty bodies, all trying to stretch themselves into increasingly strenuous positions as the teacher calls out an occasional: "Don't panic!"

Sometimes they do, bolting from the carpeted sweatbox for a few minutes respite in the hall. "The smell is intense in there," says one man, guzzling water and pacing the corridor before heading back inside to finish the 90-minute class.

To some who practice yoga, there is something far more offensive at the Manhattan studio than the heat or stench. To them, this newfangled yoga represents the biggest threat the spiritual discipline has faced since people began practicing it more than 5,000 years ago in India, fasting, abstaining from sex and meditating in search of higher consciousness.

They fear that the discovery of yoga by millions of Americans in recent years is killing its soul, distorting the purpose from pursuit of a better self to pursuit of a better butt.

Among the things that scare them:

\$38 skimpy "chakra" tanktops, disco yoga and a Web site called "Yogasm: Where Yoga Meets Fashion." Car advertisements that show a person meditating in front of an SUV. Aerobics teachers who take two-day yoga courses that supposedly prepare them to do a job intended for spiritual gurus. Yoga golf.

Now a movement is afoot to return yoga to its more traditional roots. To replace sweating with meditation, hip hop with silence. To supplant Madonna as the face of yoga with people more the likes of Patanjali, the man who standardized the ancient philosophical texts about 800 years ago.

"When yoga was in its womb in India, it was safe and protected, but as it ventures into the harsh world, it is in danger of disintegrating," said Dr. Scott Gerson, a prominent alternative medicine expert and internist in New York who has practiced yoga since the 1970s. Gerson refers to most of the newer yoga classes as "debauchment."

Yoga holy warriors like Gerson are calling for a return to teaching yoga in its original form, a program aimed at seeking self-enlightenment by training the mind. The physical postures, or asanas, most people think of as yoga are just one segment, and were meant to be part of a yearslong path of study that includes practicing non-violence, restraint and meditation.

In the past decade, however, yoga has been vigorously Americanized, repackaged and remarketed and spit out in a multitude of images, primarily one with a hard body. It is now taught everywhere from hip city gyms like Crunch on Miami's South Beach to grimy basement studios on Manhattan's Lower East Side to the Monroeville,

Pennsylvania, Senior Center, where class meets right before quilting and pinochle.

According to *Yoga Journal*, the industry's biggest magazine, 15 million people practice yoga in the United States, up from 12 million in 1998. In that period, the magazine's circulation nearly tripled, to 250,000.

A frequent target for yoga purists is the genre practiced by Bikram instructor Raffael Pacitti, a popular form known as "hot yoga" because it calls for 90 minutes of deep stretching in a heated, carpeted room. Founder Bikram Choudhury, a childhood yoga champion in his native India who now lives in Beverly Hills, California, says the heat means it is easier to stretch. It also means the air smells like a massive pile of soiled gym clothes.

"The most exciting, hardworking, effective, amusing and glamorous yoga class in the world!" promises the Bikram Yoga Web site.

The fear of purists is embodied in the locker room at Bikram, where one sweaty young woman finished the class and exulted, "I could die right now and be perfectly happy."

Most of the women leaving Pacitti's class don't know that classical yoga often has little to do with stretching, and certainly not with strenuous positions or movements fast enough to make you sweat.

Maty Ezraty, who runs a popular yoga center in Santa Monica, California, sounds heartbroken when she talks about Americans' "physical addiction to sweating" and how she feels it is afflicting yoga.

As a longtime yoga practitioner, Ezraty feels she is seeing a profound philosophy and lifestyle reduced to nothing more than an alternative to step aerobics or kickboxing. But as a businesswoman, she knows she can't fight the market.

At YogaWorks, Ezraty offers the athletic style Ashtanga, or "power yoga," as well as meditation and deep breathing.

"Senior people are looking in awe at these sweat classes, and it's really sad," she says. "But it's a real dilemma, because these workout classes are so popular — there's

no stopping them. Yoga teachers who see yoga as more than exercise are caught."

The bandwagon of those cashing in on yoga's popularity is crowded. It ranges from YogaFit, a company that trains teachers over a single weekend to individuals like Alan Ripka and Ashok Wahi.

Last year Ripka, a Manhattan lawyer, opened a yoga center whose classes are broadcast live on the Internet. It caters to businesspeople too busy to leave their office and stay-at-home parents. Wahi, a mechanical engineer and longtime yoga practitioner from Hillsborough, NJ, designed a 9-minute program specifically for golfers. He began selling it last year.

Wahi brushes off criticism about the mainstreaming of yoga. "It's like math vs. applied math; my approach is applied yoga."

John Tunney understands that middle ground. A yoga teacher and founder of one of the biggest yoga information Web sites — www.yogasite.com — Tunney sees everything from new teachers ignorant of basic yoga terminology to those who want to know if yoga can reduce knee flab.

While he understands purists' desire to aim for total self-realization, Tunney thinks it may be unrealistic to create the ideal cocoon in busy American life.

"I treat it as a spiritual discipline, but that doesn't mean I expect to be a long-bearded swami sitting on a mountain. For me, yoga is about being in the world." That said, he thinks the spiritual benefits of yoga sneak up on even those on a quest for a toned tummy.

"The thing about yoga is that it works whether you believe in it or not," said Tunney, of West Orange, New Jersey.

Regardless, the movement to revive yoga's classic principles is on. The Yoga Alliance, a group of prominent yoga teachers, launched a formal registry of trained teachers in 1997. Teachers who have the alliance stamp must have at least 200 hours of training, including 30 hours of philosophy and their own teacher — something closer to the ancient system of apprenticeship.

Even in mainstream *Yoga Journal*, an ad reminds readers: "Asana is just the



beginning," while a letter to the editor asks why the magazine uses photographs of women who "look like they belong in *Cosmopolitan*." The author closes with: "I wonder what the ancients would think of this?"

Concern about the future of yoga is also coming from the home of its past, India. Several prominent conferences there in recent years have focused on how to bring yoga back to its roots. Subodh Tiwari, administrator of the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute in Lonavala, India, said leaders from most different yoga wings agreed in 1998 to promote yoga in its authentic form.

"We can't modify yoga to suit persons, because persons have various personalities and we can't change it according to each and every person," he said from Lonavala.

Tiwari said the practice of newfangled, sweat-oriented yoga has bounced back overseas to India.

At the Chicago branch of Sivananda, one of the most traditional yoga schools, director Chandrashekara is reluctant to criticize the new yoga classes. After all, he says, "being judgmental isn't good for our health."

However, he offers his opinion in an apt metaphor: "To call these classes yoga, it's really a stretch."

Painting Rajasthan's Wild Side

William Matthews in the
Land of the Rajput
By **LAVINA MELWANI**



All watercolors courtesy William Matthews Gallery



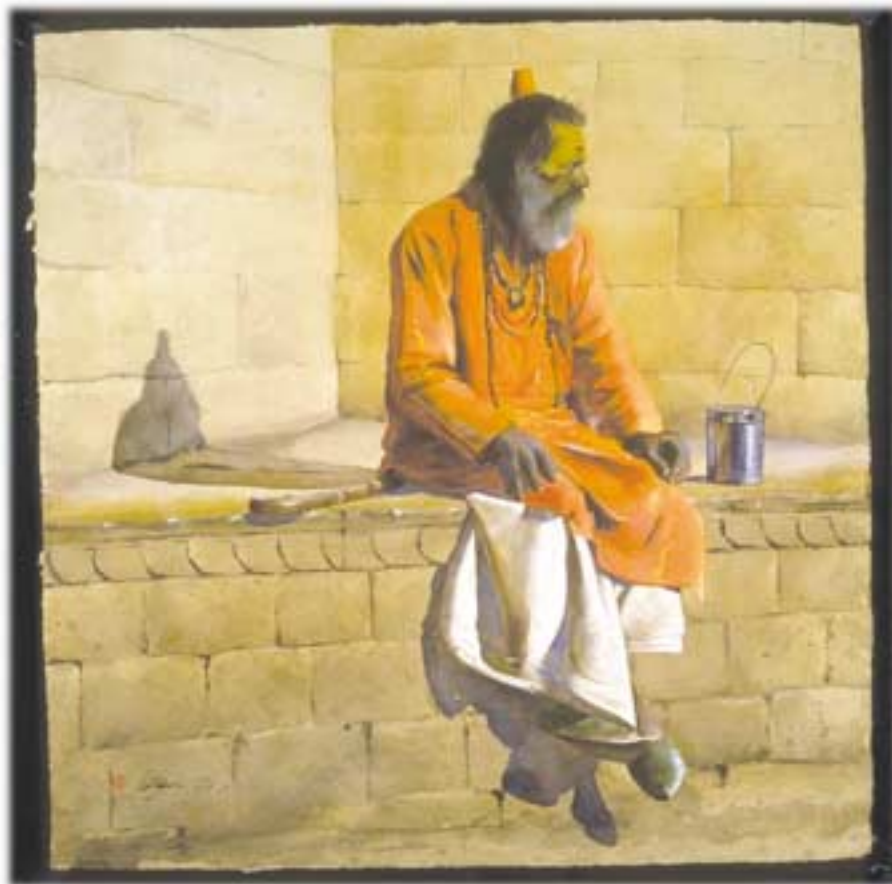
ARTISTS OF LITTLE INDIA

When American watercolorist William Matthews traveled from Denver to Rajasthan to paint, he ran out of colors. Not surprising — considering the brilliant hues of India. “Who knew the clothing would be as bright as that? Or the sand so chalky? I ran out of Naples yellow and titanium white. I ended up using reds and pinks I had never needed before, particularly for the turbans,” he recalls.

He talks poetically of the mountains of red chilies, shining brass pots and multi-hued ornamental fabrics piled in the desert between tents and the lines of camels that he saw in Rajasthan: “It was subsistence living with enormous flair.” The vibrant colors of India drew Matthews, who is a self-confessed vagabond with wanderlust for new places. His visits to Ireland, Spain, Egypt and China have yielded many watercolor impressions of the landscapes and the people. He says, “Part of my interest in going to India was an extension of pursuing the world in general.”

“Anyone who came of age in the 60’s, in San Francisco, as I did, was exposed to elements of Indian culture,” he observes. “We all made curries and became vegetarians for a while, and went to hear Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan. I liked all that and felt its mystery and wanted to see the real lives from which all these elements came.”

At the same time, Matthews, who spent many years in the West has a passion for the frontier country, horses, and the cowboy culture. Surprisingly he found many similar features in the harsh deserts



ARTISTS OF LITTLE INDIA



of Rajasthan: “It seems to have a lot of the elements of the American West that I am drawn to. The people have the same steely toughness and ability to exist in very difficult circumstances.”

“Sand covers this country in every direction. Acacia trees and thorns stick up out of it. Everything alive is armored with thick skin or spikes. Green grass gets eaten by grazing animals sooner than it comes all the way up. The landscape and the weather are both like Colorado: hot, dry and endless blue sky. The sameness nearly drove me wild. I enlisted the services of an intrepid driver named Anil and his version of a Land Cruiser to seek out variations in landscape.

“We started out early each morning, sometimes before dawn, driving in some certain direction. Three or four women might be out, in brilliant orange and pink saris with fat-bellied pots on their heads, walking to the well — Rajasthan’s answer to the post-office. I was driven to paint, sometimes as many as a dozen plein air sketches a day. Although we did not share much language, Anil and I had a system. ‘I

need to paint,’ I would say. He’d pull over to the middle of what seemed to him like nowhere and arrange brushes and painting water for me from a supply of bottled drinking water. I’d sit on the tailgate with a watercolor block on my lap, painting a faraway settlement while children and curious onlookers appeared out of the empty desert to inspect us. Soon a crowd grew. Anil was tactful and amusing. Many of the plein air sketches in this show can be attributed to his capable crowd control.”

After spending almost a month in Rajasthan and Varanasi, Matthews returned to the U.S. with over 200 sketches and paintings. Now many of them are on view at the William Matthews Gallery in Denver in ‘Land of the Rajput.’ The exhibition includes several watercolors which capture the ambience of the desert: *Cameleer*, which captures the close relationship of man and camel; *Rajasthani Tunes* shows a sunburnt turbaned musician with his ancient instrument; *Hot tea and Shade* has villagers enjoying a tete a tete at a dhaba, a world complete in itself; in *The Harvest* a villager guides his bullock cart

laden with bundles of grain, colorful wrappings which capture the rainbow hues of Rajasthan. There are over 30 major works highlighting desert landscapes, rural life, old forts and palaces, and the Ganges River in Varanasi. As a first time visitor to India, Matthews was fascinated by Varanasi: “It was amazing to be in a community where in many cases people had nothing except their beliefs and their devotion.”

This was indeed a different world for Matthews who was born in New York in 1949 and lived in San Francisco, where he attended the San Francisco Art Institute and later worked as a graphic designer. His visits to foreign lands lead to watercolors depicting the people and landscapes while in his home in Colorado he painted the Western buckaroos and horses that won him a large following. His work is in many collections including the Buffalo Bill Historical Center and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City.

It was quite a jump from cowboys and racehorses to the village wells and camels of Rajasthan. Many of these sketches were made in the course of a car journey through

ARTISTS OF LITTLE INDIA



the Thar Desert, often stopping in the middle of nowhere. Matthews painted constantly from early morning to evening, and what fascinated him most were ordinary people and the loving interaction they had with their animals, be it elephants, camels or horses. He says, "The human-to-human connections, and even our



relationships with the big working animals, unite us."

"I really wanted to paint elephants. Men travel through Rajasthan, elephant-back, their howdahs packed with buckets and staffs, like roof racks. You could feel an elephant coming. At first there was a dull silence and then vibrations underfoot. You could feel the hugeness of the thing and then hear the bells, one on each side of the elephant's head and sometimes one under the chin. Elephants are mainly docile and they seem, perhaps for that reason, enlightened. You see it in their eyes and in the peacefulness of them, and in the way they cooperate as they lay down and turn over to be washed by the mahouts. I paid men to hold them still while I sketched. A man's time is not, as you can imagine, prohibitively expensive in Rajasthan."

Matthews was charmed by the warmth and friendliness of the people. He recalls twisting his ankle while playing with some village children. For the next few days he was hobbling and wherever he went, he had solicitous villagers offering him massages. He recalls, "They have a very giving nature and a wonderful way about them."

His beautiful watercolors reveal a kind of idealized India, with the frenzied,

teeming life of modern day India largely absent from these canvases. His images lovingly linger over men with their camels, women at the village well and over mighty elephants. Says Matthews, "In India it's very hard to get any kind of isolation because there are so many people and it's so compressed. My sense is to isolate these figures in my paintings for, as an artist, it makes you look at individuals and their interactions."

Matthews translates what he sees into lush watercolors and as someone new to the Indian culture, he admits that he is still learning about the culture: "You want it to be personal and true and accurate. And that's what I hope it is."

Even the turbans. "Rajasthanis are known for their huge turbans, twenty yards of silk wrapped around a man's head. Putting one on was a two-man job; painting one was easier."

While not many Indian-Americans seem to be aware of Matthews' paintings, his regular clientele has bought up many of the India series. The sketches sell for \$800-\$1500 while the larger paintings go for \$15,000, with the average at \$5000. Matthews sells through his website and also through New York's Spanierman Gallery.

While William Matthews may travel to many other parts of the globe, he carries away some strong memories of India. "The diffused early morning light was amazing. Holi on a full moon night was one of the things I'll never forget as long as I live," he says.

"What I also found overwhelmingly moving was the fundamental purity of the people, their basic quality of goodness and innate belief system."



The Brahmin of the Burning Ghats

JEFFREY TAYLER'S
unforgettable encounter.



The last breeze of the day was stirring the Ganges, rippling the steeped reflections of the temples in its torpid waters, wobbling the stately images of the peepul trees. Since morning, the river had teemed with bathers performing ablutions on the landings, or ghats; now, with the sun expiring, sending molten feelers out into a mackerel sky, bathers were few, and the ghats were reacquiring a serene, timeless air.

Life in Varanasi, the holiest city of Hinduism, and one of the oldest living

cities on Earth, centered around the ghats. Each ghat was distinct: Dashashwamedha Ghat was lined with crooked umbrellas, under which usually sat facial masseurs and officious priests; Bhonsale Ghat had its sandstone tenements and terraced hostels; Scindia Ghat was marked by the leaning and half-submerged Temple of Shiva. As the breeze died, the bluing dusk subsumed them all.

Having just alighted from a skiff tour, I stood regaining my land legs in the glow of lanterns at Dashashwamedha Ghat,

under a giant, many-armed depiction of Lord Shiva painted on a water tank. From the skiff I had caught a glimpse of the Mosque of Alamgir, high above the river. The moon was out; the Mosque of Alamgir would afford me a sweeping view of Varanasi in the moonlight, so I decided to hike there, walking from ghat to ghat along the bank until I reached a point from where I could make an ascent to it via the narrow lanes of the riverside Old City.

I set out. Away from the lanterns my progress slowed. I stumbled half-blind in

ABROAD AT HOME

the shadows; I moved cautiously around the corners of temples, coming now upon a recumbent cow, now upon a column bathed in moonbeams. When, hoping to make better time, I stepped away from the river into the Old City, I was met by heat and a fetor of urine and jasmine petals and buffalo dung; the Old City was a maze of yard-wide alleys choked with surging throngs of animals and people. Stymied by the labyrinth, unable to breathe, with sweat drenching my shirt, I retraced my steps and resolved to keep to the bank until I could make a direct climb to my destination.

A short distance on, the air turned acrid. I made my way around another corner, jumped across a minor divide between ghats, and found myself looking onto great fires flaring behind a railing. Above the fires rose an edifice resembling a Gothic castle, soot-blackened and many-storied, culminating in a high tower topped with a handless clock. Men enrobed in white lingering by the railing turned and glared at me, as though I had stumbled into a private affair. I looked back — there was no other path save the one by which I had arrived, and the way ahead was blocked by the fires.

A hand grabbed my wrist. “De dead — de dead is boorning in dere. You want to see de dead?”

A runtish youth with a soot-blackened face and jaundiced eyes started pulling me toward the fires. “Come see de dead. I am working here boorning de dead.”

I yanked my arm loose. “What is this place?”

“De Boorning Ghats!”

The Burning Ghats of Jalasi, the largest, and most sacred, crematorium of India! I had read about them in my guidebook, but I wanted to avoid them — it seemed obscene to tour the grief of strangers, and I couldn't help fearing the sight of corpses, of what fire might do to flesh.

The runt grabbed my arm again. “For 50 rupees I show you de bodies and de fires. Dat is a lady boorning in fire. See?”

Looking away, I pulled free of him, and, not wanting to retrace my steps,

headed up into a dark airless lane, in what I hoped to be the direction of the mosque. Lurching from wall to wall in the black, feeling my way ahead with my arms outstretched, gasping for breath, I found a staircase and mounted it. The staircase took me up to a landing. There I was confronted by a face half-covered in a checkered silk gamcha, or scarf.

“You are lost?”

“Please, tell me how to get out of here.”

“Come this way.”

I followed the stranger up another staircase, this one leading up through blackened halls. We climbed more stairs and emerged onto a balcony flooded with moonlight and scattered with supine figures in white shrouds. Directly above us, wreathed in smoke, loomed the tower with the handless clock.

The man halted and undid his gamcha, revealing a majestic and angular face. Around us in a concave array stood soot-covered temples that were once the color of bone; with their glassless gaping windows and jutting, cheek-like faades, they called to mind an assembly of giant skulls. Below, on a square of charred earth and ash, 10 or 12 pyres, each 10 feet across and 4 feet high, flamed and belched smoke and sparks, the bodies burning therein, lodged between logs, hardly recognizable as such. The pyres were stoked by veiled laborers whose eyes reflected the fire, whose sweat scintillated in the fierce light. Beyond the pyres stretched the void of the Ganges, an infinity of black glass over which the moon waxed and mists gathered. It was a humbling sight.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“My name is Kasi Baba,” he answered in poised English. “I am a Brahmin of the Burning Ghats.”

Behind him a withered arm emerged from the folds of a white shroud. It belonged to an old woman, who sat up and beckoned to Kasi Baba. She was almost bald. Her shroud slipped down to reveal a bony sternum with no breast flesh. She did not try to hide this. She rasped out a few

words and slumped back to the floor. He brought her a ladle of water and placed a plate of bhat, or cooked rice, by her head.

He adjusted his gamcha and turned back to me. “You are in the House of the Dying. I am the caretaker here. These people have come to Varanasi to die and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death and rebirth — what we call samsara. To be cremated here means everlasting death, it means peace for tired souls, it means moksha — enlightenment. These are the largest burning ghats of India. We cremate a hundred bodies a day here, and sometimes more. The fires never stop. They have not stopped for 3,000 years.”

Tiny bats flitted about our heads. Above, from the cornice surmounting the walls, hung bats a foot long. The fires sent waves of heat and smoke our way, and sweat poured down the sides of my face. The humidity was insufferable, and I became dizzy; I had to grasp the side of the balcony to keep from falling over.

Kasi Baba pointed to another soot-darkened building. “That hostel is for those dying ill, with family. And that one farther on is for the sick who are dying alone. The people in my care are all dying healthy, they are just old.”

A pop-hiss resounded from one of the pyres — the skull of a dead man exploding. The brains boil in the fire and the heads blow up.

Kasi Baba looked toward the men stoking the fires. “Those are the Dom. The Dom are Untouchables who work the fires all their lives. They live with the eternal fire of Shiva in the temple there” — he gestured to a glowing chamber at the inner end of the concave complex. “The Fire of Shiva liberates the elements of our body.”

Clouds drifted over the moon. There was a creak of oars. The cries of boatmen rang out over the river, boatmen making the last run of the day, bringing the pilgrims back from the ghats on the far bank. But there was a rising chant from the square below. Four men were bearing a stretcher with a body enshrouded in white, singing “Ram nam sach hai! Ram nam sach hai!”

— The name of God is truth! — making their way between the pyres and passing down the steps to the banks. There they lowered the stretcher through the mist into the water, then raised it, shouldered it and started back, resuming their chant: “Ram nam sach hai! Ram nam sach hai!”

Another skull exploded. A pyre roared in a fulsome, consuming blaze. Behind us one of the moribund let out a shrill cry.

“The relatives take the body for a last dip in the Ganges,” Kasi Baba said, motioning toward the procession now winding its way up the bank. “The body must be cleansed with Ganges water before the burning, you see. Then we clip the nails and trim the hair to ready it for the fire.”

Five men carried another body to a dormant pyre stacked with wood, and placed it on top. From the Temple of Shiva a Dom appeared with a lit torch. He circled the pyre, touching fire to wood. Slowly the flames caught and came to life.

“That body must now burn for three hours.” Around the pyre gathered relatives of the cremated. They said nothing, there was no weeping. The soul of their beloved one was about to attain moksha; the cremation ceremony, though not a cause for joy, in fact marked the advent of peace, and was not an occasion for grief.

“What happens to the ashes of the dead?” I asked.

“In the morning the Dom shovel them into the river, and so deliver the dead to Ganga Ma (Mother Ganges). The hips of women and the rib cages of men do not burn, so they are taken out by boat into the middle of the river and dropped in.”

India has almost a billion people, and most are Hindus. How could the Jalasi Ghats meet the demand for cremation?

“There are criteria for being cremated here. The person must be Hindu. He must not be a leper, a holy man or an infant. And of course —” here he adjusted his gamcha — “he must have money for the wood. Sandalwood is the fuel of choice.”

“How much does it cost?”

“Two hundred kilos of sandalwood, enough to burn a body for three hours,

costs 19,000 rupees (almost \$500). This is much money for us. Many, such as the dying here in my hostel, have saved all their lives for their cremation wood. Of course the poor cannot pay this, so they, shall we say, go for the discount alternative.”

“Which is?”

“The body stone. For 200 rupees the Dom will tie a stone to your body, row you out to mid-river and dump you in.” The skiffs moored by the ashes were used for this, he said. “The poor have one other option. To rely on charity. From people like you, for example.”

We looked into each other’s eyes. The point of this long, articulate explanation became clear to me. Kasi Baba addressed one of the moribund, brought him a shard of chapati and returned.

“So, will you please buy a load of wood for a poor man? I will accept your generosity on behalf of the poor. For a mere 19,000 rupees you can bring a beggar to moksha.” He extended his palm.

The pyres roared, the bats fluttered, the dying groaned at our sides. I examined Kasi Baba. By his fastidious manner, his regal bearing and his knowledge of the Burning Ghats’ ceremonies, I judged him to be a Brahmin employed, as he said, as caretaker of the hostel. But his extended palm, his request for a large sum of money and his pitchman’s finish suggested that he was not above using his pyreside position for personal gain; no doubt he would pocket every rupee I gave him.

If mulcting tourists didn’t accord with the gravity of his duties, it was, in a way, understandable. India is an ancient country used to colonialists and marauders, visitors and curiosity-seekers. Varanasi has drawn foreign travelers since the Buddha’s time; its inhabitants long ago discerned that there was money to be made from them. Still, Kasi Baba’s ruse indicated more than material want. It spoke to my castelessness — to my exclusion as a non-Hindu from the universe constructed for him by his faith, to my inferior status, in his eyes. Why should a Brahmin not make a few rupees from a casteless one wandering into his domain?

Despite our different faiths, one thing, however, united us: Some day, by one means or another, the elements of the both of us, Hindu and non-Hindu alike, would be liberated, whether in the fires of the Burning Ghats or elsewhere, and our sufferings and joys, our conceits and fears and petty concerns would become as mists. If his overture affronted the solemnity of the Burning Ghats, it would be an even greater affront for me to give him nothing in return for his edifying discourse. I handed him 100 rupees — roughly twice the usual guide fee. He examined the bills.

“But this will not buy even one kilo of wood ... Perhaps you will go for the purchase of a body stone for a mere hundred rupees more?”

“This will have to do. Thank you very much for the talk. You’re a knowledgeable guide.”

Kasi Baba sighed and nodded, and slipped the rupees into the pocket of his robe. He walked me to the stairs, and we descended, then followed the alley back to the bank. I thanked him and left him adjusting his gamcha, the great handleless clock tower rising high above him, flickering with light from the pyres.

As I walked around the edge of the square I gave up the idea of walking to the Mosque of Alamgir — in the dark, without someone to show me the way, I would never reach it. I headed back to Dashashwamedha Ghat.

Eventually I reached Dashashwamedha Ghat. There, there was no hint of pyres or death. Above the lantern-lit umbrellas and skiffs, where soft drink stands stood in the blaze of dangling bare bulbs and Coca-Cola adverts covered the sides of freezers, I turned up the road to catch a rickshaw to my hotel. Over the Ganges spread a blackness, a blackness studded by fireflies pulsing and waning on their lonely peregrinations throughout the night.

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Jagdish Bhagwati's Combative Career

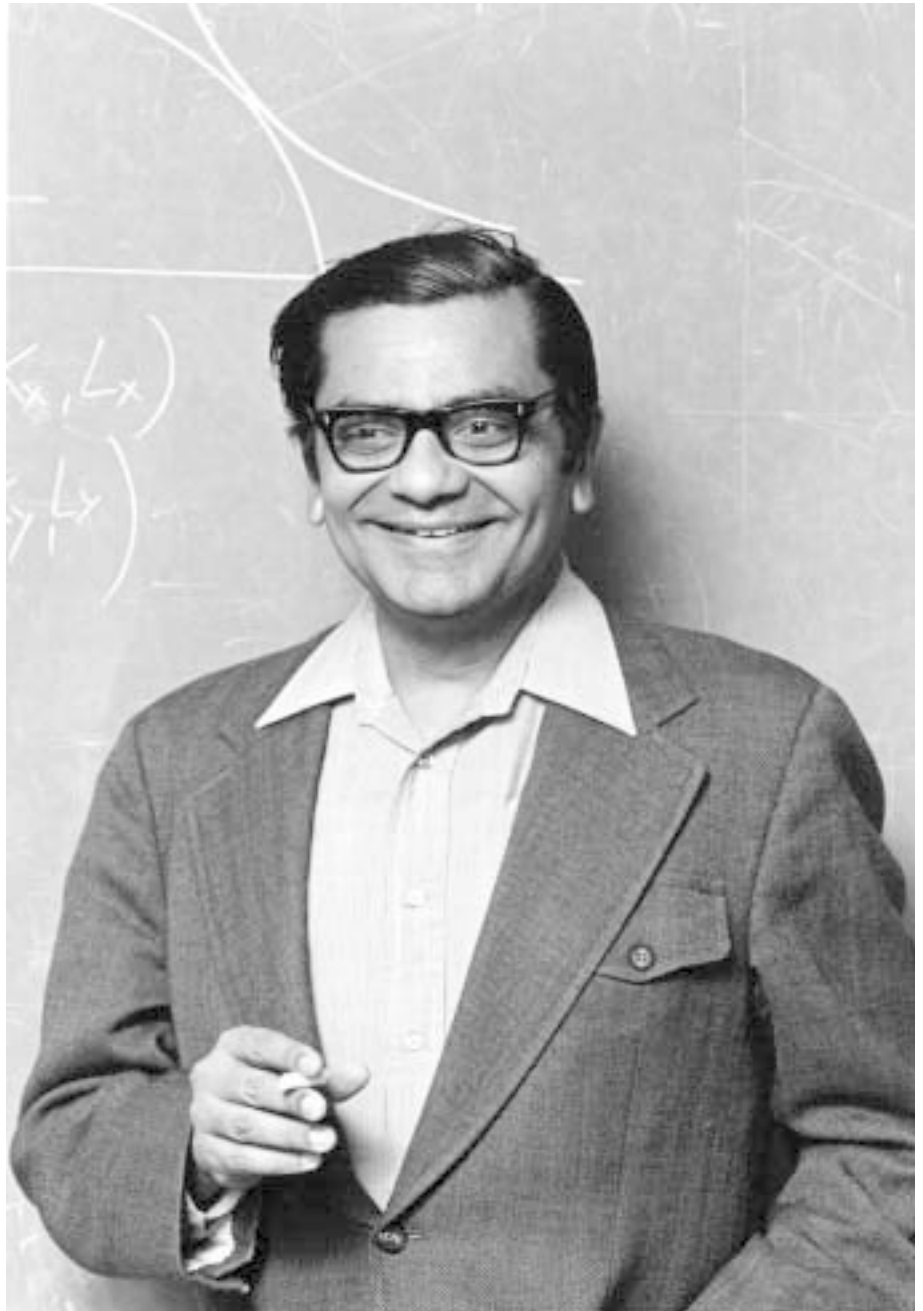
By **DAVID GLENN**

In theory, Jagdish N. Bhagwati is spending a peaceful semester away from teaching and public life. He's ensconced in a quiet, spare office at the Council on Foreign Relations, working on a book about global institutions, trying to avoid distractions.

But on the morning of March 6, Mr. Bhagwati's telephone was ringing off the hook, and the callers were expecting red meat.

First *The Wall Street Journal*; then a Boston public-radio station; then *The Guardian*. All of them wanted Mr. Bhagwati's verdict on the Bush administration's plan, announced the previous afternoon, to place 30-percent tariffs on certain steel imports. Mr. Bhagwati, a professor of economics and political science at Columbia University, is known as one of the world's most tenacious critics of protectionism. His new book, *Free Trade Today* (Princeton University Press), summarizes his 44 years of work in trade economics. In it, he denounces U.S. politicians' attempts to protect the steel industry as "cynically manipulative," saying the notion that foreign producers are dumping steel on the U.S. market "[flies] in the face of economic logic."

Mr. Bhagwati is not one to shrink from a fight. During the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, with turmoil in the streets outside, he debated Ralph Nader before a large (and largely hostile) audience. And this year, he raised hackles with an essay in *Foreign Affairs* that



all fertile breeding grounds” for nihilism and anticapitalism.

So surely he could offer the news media a few choice epithets against Washington’s new steel tariffs?

In fact, Mr. Bhagwati politely turned down all of the morning’s requests. His attitudes about the steel dispute are actually quite complex, he said, and he didn’t feel he could speak intelligently about it without doing some fresh research.

“It’s so easy to get sidetracked,” he said after one phone call. “I see my name in the paper enough as it is.” At the age of 67, Mr. Bhagwati is an engaging presence with a professorial slouch, making fluid, circular gestures with his hands as he argues a point.

With a little prodding, he does offer a few thoughts about the steel tariffs. They are a disaster. But he also believes — and here he leans forward, speaking quickly in numbered points, with a melodious Gujarati-cum-Oxbridge accent — that, fact No. 1, there is tremendous excess capacity in the steel industry worldwide, and, fact No. 2, the United States could attempt to organize a worldwide agreement, a sort of cartel, to close steel plants in a controlled manner, and, fact No. 3, in connection with such an emergency plan, the U.S. government should offer “golden parachutes” to displaced American steelworkers.

Proposals like those are far removed from the *laissez-faire* doctrine often associated with free-trade advocates. But they are characteristic of Mr. Bhagwati’s complexities — or, in his critics’ eyes, contradictions. He calls himself a social democrat and a trade-union supporter, and he speaks disparagingly of “Reaganites.” At the same time, he is staunchly opposed to the campus “anti-sweatshop” movement, declaring that it is meaningless to describe wages in overseas factories as too low.

Those attitudes may sound wildly inconsistent. But in fact, they’re congruent with an argument Mr. Bhagwati has been crafting since the early 1960s, when he wrote a number of hugely influential papers on international trade. The gist of the



An October 2001 straw poll of Swedish economists voted him the most deserving of the next Nobel Prize.

argument is this: Market distortions (like the overcapacity crisis in steel) are real and serious phenomena, and sometimes require government intervention. But such interventions should never take the form of tariffs or other trade barriers; those remedies are always the wrong tool for the job. Nothing should be permitted to reduce the flow of international trade. Export-oriented industrialization (including a temporary period of “sweatshops”) is the only proven way for developing countries to reach mass prosperity.

Mr. Bhagwati’s critics, both on the left and on the right, say he hasn’t successfully ironed out the tensions within his thought. They charge him with focusing too narrowly on a single solution——multilateral trade liberalization — for all the world’s economic ills.

But even some of those very critics regard Mr. Bhagwati as a giant of the discipline. (An October 2001 straw poll of Swedish economists voted him the most deserving of the next Nobel Prize.) J. Bradford DeLong, a professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley and a former Clinton-administration

official, has sparred publicly with Mr. Bhagwati over whom to blame for the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Yet “it’s hard to avoid learning something important from any interaction with [Mr. Bhagwati] or his work,” Mr. DeLong says. “He’s dedicated to pursuing ideas whether or not they will lead to conclusions that are ‘politically correct’ from the standpoint of his precommitments.”

Policy-Oriented Economics

Mr. Bhagwati had to deal with a different set of precommitments as a young man. He was born in 1934 in Bombay, the son of a prominent judge. His parents expected that he would follow his father’s path and study law. But as an undergraduate in Bombay in 1953, he found himself bored by the subject. Economics seemed much more intriguing — and much more relevant to the crisis facing postcolonial India. He went to the University of Cambridge to take a second degree in economics. (His parents got their wish with an older son, P.N. Bhagwati, who served as chief justice of the Supreme Court of India and is now a regional adviser to

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

the United Nations human-rights commission.)

Mr. Bhagwati came of age at the height of the Keynesian consensus in British economics, and he and his peers expected that they would someday occupy powerful roles steering the national economies of the world. “These were hands-on people, involved with policy,” he says. “They weren’t just interested in economics as a mathematical tool. Coming from a country like India, with so much poverty, this was much more appealing than the British system of legal education, which seemed totally abstract.”

At the age of 23, Mr. Bhagwati published his first significant paper: “Immiserizing Growth.” That article — still cited today — raised the counterintuitive possibility that, under certain conditions, rapid economic growth might actually reduce a developing country’s welfare by worsening its terms of trade. For example, if a burgeoning copper-exporting country became much more productive at mining copper, it might inadvertently flood the world copper market, lower the relative price of its exports, and find itself worse off than when it began.

For a young man still in graduate school, the article drew a huge amount of attention — “I really hit the jackpot,” says Mr. Bhagwati. But over time, he came to regret some of the paper’s influence. Policy makers in India and elsewhere took the danger of immiserizing growth extremely seriously. It fed their determination to build their economies without relying heavily on exports and trade, which is precisely what Mr. Bhagwati regards as their tragic mistake.

In 1961, following graduate work at Oxford University and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Mr. Bhagwati returned home to work for the Indian Statistical Institute in New Delhi. His job there had nothing directly to do with trade; he was sent to villages throughout the country to try to gather data about poverty and income distribution.

During evenings and off hours at the

institute, Mr. Bhagwati co-wrote his best-known paper: “Domestic Distortions, Tariffs and the Theory of Optimum Subsidy” (1963). A number of midcentury economists had argued that the classical theory of free trade — which holds that trade increases the welfare of all parties — is invalid in the presence of distortions such as monopolies or discriminatory wage policies. In such situations, those economists argued, tariffs might be the “second best” real-world policy. But in their 1963 paper, Mr. Bhagwati and his colleague V.K. Ramaswami developed a mathematical model that suggested that tariffs are never the most cost-effective way to reduce such distortions. Better to repair domestic distortions by enacting domestic reforms, they argued, than by mucking about with tariffs or other trade barriers.

“Once I’d figured it out,” he says, “I realized what the power of the idea was.” His peers’ qualms about trade were misguided. With proper domestic policies, he writes in his new book, “we could get back to endorsing free trade.” He has been exploring various iterations of that principle for the last four decades.

In 1968, Mr. Bhagwati accepted an offer to teach economics at MIT. He had loved the department during his brief tour of duty as a grad student; it included the future Nobel laureates Paul A. Samuelson and Robert Solow. The decision to move there was nonetheless a painful one. His intention had been to stay in India for the rest of his life, but his personal circumstances there had become intolerable. “It was really a personal decision,” he says. “My wife [the economist Padma Desai] had been married before, and we tried for seven years to get her a divorce, with no luck. Adultery was a criminal offense, so we couldn’t even live together. It got to be a ridiculous situation.” They finally obtained a divorce for Ms. Desai in a Mexican court, and then another one in Massachusetts.

During the ensuing dozen years, Mr. Bhagwati trained many of the next generation’s best-known trade economists,

including Paul Krugman and Gene M. Grossman of Princeton University and Robert C. Feenstra of the University of California at Davis. “What I found intriguing about him,” recalls Mr. Grossman, “is that he didn’t teach the material from the ground up. He always assumed that we’d done the reading and absorbed the material. He’d move straight into comment and critique.”

‘Prehistoric’ Criticism

In 1980, when Ms. Desai received an attractive offer from Columbia (she specializes in the study of communist and postcommunist economies), Mr. Bhagwati decided to move there as well.

In the two decades since, Mr. Bhagwati has turned his energies increasingly toward the public explication of economic ideas. He is a prolific writer of book reviews, op-eds, and letters to the editor. He has especially sought to do combat with Mr. Nader and other “anti-globalization” activists. (To his chagrin, his only child, Second Lt. Anuradha Kristina Bhagwati, voted for Mr. Nader in 1996. He affectionately refers to her as “the first leftist in the history of the U.S. Marines.”)

Fueling much of Mr. Bhagwati’s recent popular writing is an anguished sense that his home country has wasted its opportunities during the past four decades, whereas several East Asian nations have made the leap to mass prosperity. Despite a wave of reform in the early 1990s, India still has some of the highest tariffs in the world, and a large, inefficient public sector. “The electrical-grid system breaks down continuously,” he says, “and it’s all run by a state monopoly. So whom does that hurt? The middle classes have their own private generators, which are damned expensive. But the common person sleeping on a cot — he suffers like hell.”

How to explain the East Asian “miracle”? Mr. Bhagwati rejects assertions (common in some quarters of the right) that something about East Asian culture must be responsible. And he also dismisses arguments (common among some

economists on the left) that those Asian countries succeeded partly because of aggressive state intervention—— industrial policy, protection of infant industries, and so on. The Asian tigers succeeded despite their industrial policies, not because of them, Mr. Bhagwati says. The crucial point is that they (unlike India and much of Latin America) chose to orient their economies toward trade and exports.

That position is far too simple, argues James K. Galbraith, professor of public affairs and government at the University of Texas. Mr. Galbraith contends that the East Asian successes rest on a range of state interventions. To take just one example: “Land reform was a part of the [East Asian] mix in moving to very rapid growth,” he says. “They ended up with a kind of manageable industrial development. Contrast that with a place like Brazil, with no land reform. Brazil also had rapid industrial growth, but not enough growth to keep up with the flood of poor rural workers coming into the cities. That kind of uncontrolled urbanization carries huge social costs.”

When presented with this argument, Mr. Bhagwati doesn't disagree. Citing the Indian experience, he says, “Of course land reform needs to be put into place. But its efficacy depends on having a vibrant economy, so that [displaced large landowners] have other games to play, and don't spend all their lives in lawsuits and intimidation to win back their land. And having a vibrant economy in turn means having an outward orientation. These things need to go together.”

But would developing countries today in fact be allowed to pursue land-reform programs of the type Japan and South Korea enacted after World War II? Not necessarily, says Robert A. Blecker, a professor of economics at American University. “What we're calling trade agreements today go far beyond the simple reduction of tariffs. The WTO is putting new constraints on domestic policies of all sorts, and it's making illegal many of the things that East Asian countries did that were very successful in the past.”



“When my brother tells me about the kind of economic testimony they get at the human-rights commission, I die a thousand deaths! I mean, they are only jurists, after all.”

Mr. Blecker continues: “To his credit, Bhagwati has been one of the more honest people [on the pro-WTO side] about these issues. He's criticized the inclusion of intellectual-property rights, and so on.” Nonetheless, Mr. Blecker says, Mr. Bhagwati fails to grasp the need for new constraints on corporate power. In particular, Mr. Blecker would like to see the WTO adopt a “social clause” designed to protect workers' rights and the environment.

Nonsense, says Mr. Bhagwati. The WTO is equipped to deal with trade and tariff questions, not with other issues. Instead, different international bodies — such as the International Labor Organization and the U.N. Environment

Program — should be fortified to deal with cross-border disputes.

“Some people complain that the ILO has no teeth,” he explains. “But I say, God gave us not only teeth but also a tongue.” Pointing to Nike's recently enacted Code of Conduct, which mandates health and safety guidelines and forbids child labor, he says, “You can use moral suasion—— simply exposing the conditions in plants, and giving corporations a good tongue-lashing, can be very effective today. Whereas using WTO-style trade sanctions would just get people's backs up. If Sweden or Canada tried to use a [labor] sanction against the United States, we wouldn't stand for it. Congressmen would be running down the Capitol steps and

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

shouting “Who the bloody hell are you?”

Not all of Mr. Bhagwati’s arguments have been with the left. Like Mr. Nader, he opposed the inclusion of intellectual-property rights and “investor-protection” provisions, which allow foreign corporations to sue nations that enact new environmental or health regulations. Mr. Bhagwati sees such rights and provisions as extraneous baggage, like the social clause, that will distract the WTO from its core purpose of reducing tariffs.

And in 1998, in the aftermath of the East Asian economic crisis, he wrote a scathing article for *Foreign Affairs* in which he accused the “Wall Street-Treasury complex” of exposing East Asian nations to dangerously high levels of short-term capital infusions. The huge financial flows into Thailand and their abrupt reversal in late 1997 — represented a classic cycle of mania and panic, he says. (This position still perplexes Mr. DeLong of Berkeley. He writes in an e-mail message, “[Mr. Bhagwati] has an aggressive dislike for free trade in little pieces of paper — bonds or stocks or other forms of capital — that fits awkwardly with his bold and aggressive commitment to free trade in goods and services.”)

Ian Vasquez, director of the Cato Institute’s Project on Global Economic Liberty, also charges Mr. Bhagwati with inconsistency here. “The argument that there’s too much irrational behavior [among investors] is overblown.” Even in a painful case like the Asia crisis, he says, “it’s a much better option to allow the market to send signals to policy makers, than simply to depend on policy makers who have already proven themselves irresponsible.”

“That’s a kind of prehistoric statement,” Mr. Bhagwati says. “There are endless examples [in economics literature] of how you can get panics and manias on the basis of imperfect information. If I walk down the street in a strange city and see two restaurants, I’ll go into the one with a customer inside rather than the one that’s empty. And then the next person might see

two of us in there, and the whole thing could snowball, based on very little underlying reality.”

Full Circle

This year, Mr. Bhagwati has taken a couple of steps back from his late-1990s torrent of writing and debate. (In his case, however, slowing down is a relative thing. “I once joked that Jagdish is like Heisenberg’s particle,” says Ms. Desai. “You can determine his velocity or his position, but not both.”)

From his perch at the Council on Foreign Relations, he is concentrating on two forthcoming books. In September, MIT Press will publish his edited volume *On Going Alone: The Case for Relaxed Reciprocity in Freeing Trade*, a series of articles that argue that states can gain by reducing their tariffs unilaterally, even outside the context of trade negotiations. And he is writing a long book about the dilemmas of global governance: Exactly which institutions, under what ground rules, should regulate trade, labor rights, currency flows, and the environment?

The governance project, says Mr. Bhagwati, is deeply informed by the antiglobalization groups he has been debating. He hasn’t budged an inch on the core questions of tariffs or the social clause — but the Naderites have reminded him just how easily various business lobbies can capture global institutions. He’s become convinced, for example, that agribusiness and other commercial interests have too great a hold on the Codex Alimentarius commission, which governs international food-safety standards. “This is why I regard the NGO’s as allies, even when we argue,” he says. “They pay attention to things that no one else does.”

So this latest project has brought Mr. Bhagwati into a partial rapprochement with his ideological foes. And it has brought him full circle, back to the subject that bored him so badly in his youth: the law. Next year, Mr. Bhagwati will teach a pair of courses on global governance with faculty members at Columbia Law School.

His new partners may want to gird themselves. “Lawyers’ expertise on the economic level is the pits,” says Mr. Bhagwati, with a laugh. “When my brother tells me about the kind of economic testimony they get at the human-rights commission, I die a thousand deaths! I mean, they are only jurists, after all.”

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Loose Change

It’s lurking out there in sock drawers and coffee cans, ash trays and cigar boxes, wicker baskets and coconut shells. And, yes, in piggy banks.

By design or neglect, Americans have tucked away loose change to the tune of an estimated \$7.7 billion, enough to pay for the war in Afghanistan for nearly eight months.

An estimated 77 percent of Americans have a jug of coins around the house, worth an average \$30 to \$50. The figures are all courtesy of the folks at Coinstar, who have turned the coin-caching habit into a business by installing machines at supermarkets that will count your coins and turn them into cash. The company cashed in \$1.2 billion in loose change for Americans last year.

Sometimes, the coin-stashing habit takes on a life of its own. Sylvester Neal, a 58-year-old retiree in Auburn, Wash., started throwing coins in a coffee can when he was a teenager, and would fish out the silver ones when he ran short of money, leaving the pennies to accumulate. Did they ever.

His stash grew to more than a million pennies weighing more than five tons. When he moved from Alaska to Washington late last year, Neal cashed in most of that \$10,000 bonanza to avoid the expense of moving it.

— By NANCY BENAC