

**SURVIVAL OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

**Upto The Sikkimese To Preserve Their Culture**

Imagine a world without diversity. Every place serving the same food, all the fields growing the same vegetables, everyone celebrating the same festivals, sporting the same styles and speaking the same language. Wouldn't it be boring? And yet, aren't we headed in that direction?

In the name of economic growth and free-trade a worldwide trend towards standardising and monopolising in all fields is taking its toll. Local cuisine is being replaced by junk food and everyone seems to be following the same fashion trends. How come men abandon their cultural attire so easily in favour of the stiff suit and tight tie? Instead of a crowd of men dressed in grey and black, imagine the UN delegates wearing their respective national dresses. What a feast of colour and diversity it would be!

Patronising western standards has become so rampant that today, in many parts of the world, people feel ashamed to wear their traditional clothes. Besides preferring fast-food, sporting flashy dark glasses and blue jeans, members of this new mono-culture tend to watch lots of TV and either boast of their slashing English skills or are extremely embarrassed about the lack thereof.

English, as a means of mass communication, has also become the weapon of mass manipulation for a few international corporations. The notion of 'West is Best' is implanted into millions of minds through television. The world's most powerful brainwasher is being (ab)used to continuously create new consumers and convert the remaining so called backward peoples of this world into materialists. If this international standardisation-trend continues, the world will have lost countless rich cultures and the languages in the next few decades. Some languages may be preserved in dictionaries, but a language, and thus a culture, cannot survive unless it is spoken by living people in daily life.

It may be argued that at this time of international competition there is no use for the preservation of languages spoken by minorities. This is like arguing that the cultivation of different types of fruits is pointless since just one type suffices well enough.

Sikkim is one of the biodiversity hot-spots in the world today. The Sikkimese

Mono-culturisation threatens diversity and Sikkim's heritage is threatened, too. It is now upto the Sikkimese to hold on to or cast away their cultural moorings, writes  
**HELEN KAEMPF TAKAPA**

should be equally proud of their cultural diversity. But just like deforestation and environmental degradation threaten ecological diversity, so does standardising and mono-culturalising threaten Sikkim's rich cultural diversity. They say that if a people loses its language it loses its culture. The identity of Sikkim's original people has watered down to such an extent that their respective languages are now on the brink of extinction. Though many parents still speak their language, its only amongst themselves and no longer use it in communicating with their children.

Lepcha and Bhotia languages are taught at government schools, but since they are not compulsory, few choose to attend these classes. Furthermore, hardly any private schools include the native languages in their syllabus. Importance is placed on Nepali, Hindi and English only and the new generation of native Sikkimese grows up deprived of not only their own language but also their history and their cultural identity.

In Sikkim today the ethnic languages are fast vanishing in favour of Nepali. Tomorrow, Nepali may vanish in favour of English. The point is that every language represents a culture and every culture is part of the great human heritage and that heritage must not only be preserved but must continue to live and evolve.

The consequences of a people loses its cultural mooring can be devastating. The high crime rates amongst the Afro-American community in North America may well be linked to their lost roots. Centuries ago they were brutally taken away from their native lands and shipped away as slaves. They lost their country, their lifestyle, their culture and their language. Similarly native peoples the world over have been displaced in order to make place for 'civilisation' and have been forced to give up their language and lifestyle. Many of them were forced to

speak a colonial language and punished if they did not obey. Made to believe that they are backward and after having lost their sense of belonging they often turn to alcohol and drugs, such as is the case with many members of the Aborigine people of Australia.

In Sikkim, as in so many other parts of the world, officials from the 'big cities' have overwhelmed this so-called backward country with the unquestioned idea that people here are primitive and backward. Individuals fluent in English are still looked upon as superior to those who speak only the local languages of Sikkim! Arrogant colonisation has taken its toll and eroded the native peoples self confidence and pride in their roots. Ironically, now the perpetrators of this colonisation, having experienced the many unpleasant side-effects of consumerism and after awakening disillusioned, are adopting values and aspects of the lifestyle of native peoples formerly labelled as backward. This is apparent in the growing popularity of spirituality, natural medicine, natural foods and ecological housing.

In native societies it is by means of story telling in the respective language that wisdom and history is passed on to the next generation. Since the native languages are increasingly being abolished so is story telling. As if it is not enough to be deprived of ones own language, Sikkimese children are also kept in the dark about Sikkim's rich history. It does not make any sense to study the history of mainland India without having studied the history of one's own land. Why is the history of Sikkim ignored and excluded from the syllabus? What is the reason behind keeping people in the dark about Sikkim's rich historical background? Due to lack of awareness of the importance of the cultural heritage, Sikkimese children are increasingly deprived of not only their language but also their history.

It is time that the Sikkimese start appreciating and preserving their culture and lifestyle. With realisation should come individual contributions towards the task of preservation. Parents who still speak their native languages must pass it on to their children. It is easy to learn languages during

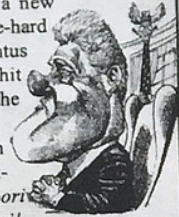
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**DELHI Underbelly**

by **RAMESH SHARMA**

**Clintus Interruptus**

The broadsheet Pun-dits have Billed almost every phenomenon in the last fortnight - be it the sighting of a UFO in the jungles behind Rashtrapati Bhavan or a new strain of the mad cow virus afflicting die-hard supporters of Laloo Prasad Yadav - to Clintus Interruptus, an American tornado that hit India for full five days, not to mention the nights.



Mercifully we didn't have the Indian tabloids screaming on top of their mastheads, juicy news like - *Bill Loves Tandoori Chicks!*, or, *Chelsea Ne Maari Pichkaari!* - (a reference to the world's first daughter playing Holi with the Jodhpur royalty) or - *Maneka Discusses Animal Rights With Bill's Buddy!*

Of course, wherever Bill went, whatever he saw and whether or not he concurred, created miles of news in print and on television. A look at the sweeping (literally) changes in the foremath and aftermath of the fourth American tornado to hit India:

**BILL IT TO BILLY BOY:** It's amazing, one American dude decides to drop by at the fag end of his presidential career and the civic problems of half a dozen Indian cities are solved in a jiffy. Snap, just like that. No amount of public interest litigations or the numerous complaints in the readers' forum of newspapers could get the municipal babus to clean the drains, repair the streetlights or iron out pot-holed roads. But one drain inspector from Washington DC announces his visit, and suddenly Delhi is awash with frenetic spring-cleaning. Like all things uniquely Indian, we need a danda (the stick) to perform routine tasks. Blame it on Bill, but the municipal authorities will have us believe that much of these repairs and denting-painting were long overdue anyway.

**SECURE IN A DILEMMA:** All those who have been hailing the American tornado as a 'new era' in Indo-US relations, must have realised by now that the truth is couched in diplomatese. As per one report, it's all a question of give and take, the tornado obviously takes more than the tokens it gifts. Apparently, Air Force One, the mammoth flying White House does not take to the skies without calculating the economics of the trip. The Americans, like most developed nations, first work out their business interest and only then talk about diplomacy and good relations. The 200-strong team accompanying Bill knows that it stands to gain handsomely from the cheap indentured labour it has been importing for its slave factories in Silicon Valley. Curry is the flavour of the season and hence the Indian software brain is commanding a premium in the e-commerce millennium. So it's not a question of whether to bill the visit as a success or a waste, for such dilemmas are best left to the diplomatic corp to debate. People in general should rest secure in the fact that we had nothing to lose anyway, give or take a few hundred green cards.

**THE CLINTUS ROADSHOW:** Dil to pagal hai na! And then, Bill kya kare jab kisiko kisi se pyar ho jaaye! So, the women of Nyala village on the outskirts (no pun intended) of Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, had been told not to wear their purdah long, but to keep their mouths shut. In short, they were warned, and so we are told. One thing is sure, none of them went by the name of Monika, or Monica, or Maneka (animal rights Gandhians are humans too). We also don't know who and all have applied for internship at the White House, but there are reports that a request was made that the Big Bill adopt Nyala village. Perhaps like Carterpuri - the village in Haryana renamed after the Peanut Farmer President who visited it in 1978 - Nyala residents too would weigh the pros and cons of re-christening. The risk of a-Billpuri becoming a 'Bhelpuri' is always there, not to mention the disaster that a Clinton Gaon (village) could invite.

PS: So, as we sing paeans to the scar-strangled banner, let us not forget that the Clintus Interruptus was after all a good break from all that we were doing ever so laboriously. A five-day shake-up that showed that so much can be achieved in so little time when the white plaque comes calling. Working fountains, new coat of paint all over, gardens and traffic islands in full bloom made this Holi a truly colourful affair. Wonder who's coming for Diwali dinner. John Major with a bang?