

“Disarming Violence”: Development, Democracy, and Security on the Borders of India

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This article offers a critical analysis of the growing emphasis on security in South Asia through an ethnographic study of Operation Sadbhavna, an Indian military initiative that was launched in 2001 after the Kargil War between India and Pakistan. It demonstrates how a renewed emphasis placed on security requirements through the adoption of the development paradigm and discourses of peace building and human security further legitimizes the military’s role in governance and civil society in postcolonial democratic states such as India. The data for this article derive from the project’s application in the Ladakh region of the disputed Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The ways in which the official objectives of the project were interpreted and incorporated into the political, cultural, and economic aspirations of communities in Ladakh reveal both the coercive and ambiguous nature of democracy and state power in South Asia today.

I believe that in conflict areas, the military must play a larger proactive role—facilitate good governance, especially strategies in human development and border development. In a democracy, a military cannot be an instrument of state coercion; it is an institution of nation-building. If the military can send peacekeeping contingents to all trouble spots in the world, why should it hesitate when it comes to peace-building within the country?

—Lieutenant General Arjun Ray¹

IN THE AFTERMATH OF the 1999 war fought between India and Pakistan in the high-altitude district of Kargil, Lieutenant General Arjun Ray laid out his vision for the ideal military of the future. Kargil is one of two districts in the region of Ladakh, located in the strife-torn state of Jammu and Kashmir. Two years following the Kargil War, Lieutenant General Ray assumed leadership of the 14th Corps in the Northern Command of the Indian army, created specially for the Ladakh region. Ray embarked on a vigorous mission to win the

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¹See http://www.generalarjunray.com/speech_change_leadership_sadbhavana.htm [accessed June 20, 2006].

cooperation of border citizens with Operation Sadbhavna (Operation Goodwill), a development and welfare initiative that was financed by reserves from the central government's Border Area Development Fund and from the Ministry of Defense for building what one reporter described as "a human defense line."² Through this goodwill gesture, the military intended to redress the credibility of the government and its associated institutions, which had been eroded to a great degree over a decade of civil insurgency and wars in Jammu and Kashmir. Rather than militants or enemy soldiers, however, the challenges that the armed forces took on in Operation Sadbhavna included improving developmental facilities for civilians and inculcating a sense of patriotism in disaffected hearts. While the intervention of the military in developmental efforts as a subsidiary organization and as an "aid to the civil government" was not a new phenomenon for India, Sadbhavna marked the crystallization of hitherto isolated developmental and welfare efforts by the military into a comprehensive program especially geared toward border communities.

Operation Sadbhavna reflects the dual agenda of military organization in the post-Cold War period, where the intensification of armed violence for national security is offset by the rhetoric of "disarming violence," in which democracy and development, not war, are put forth as the justifications for militarization. In this paper, we locate military policies within the framework of development and argue that development can in fact consolidate the military in democratic societies and lead to further entrenchment of its power base. Unlike studies on the peacekeeping activities of the military, which have tended to concentrate on militaries abroad, our inquiry centers on the role of the military at home, within the territorial parameters of the nation-state. By demonstrating how different divisions of the state (the civil bureaucracy and the military) become manifest in the "development-security complex" within which Sadbhavna functions, we move away from viewing civil and military domains as distinct and focus instead on what Catherine Lutz (2002) has described as the "mode of warfare" and the logic of "militarism"—the material realities, ideological systems, and realms of discourse through which bodies and identities are civilized and shaped into conformity. Following Lutz's insight that "capillaries of militarization [feed] and [mold] social institutions little connected to battle" (2002, 724), this article posits that development is one such arena that is increasingly becoming militarized along the borders of India. Additionally, we contend that while globalization and transnational capital may have blurred the boundaries between states, renewed emphasis on security requirements has led to the intensification of the nation-state's military role even as it has affected the functioning of its democratic institutions.

²"Operation Hope," *Indiareacts.com*, 2001, <http://www.indiareacts.com/Story31.htm> [accessed June 20, 2006].

A crucial backdrop to our inquiry regarding the form and content of military practices in Ladakh is the shifting meaning attributed to the state as a result of economic restructuring and geopolitical exigencies, an aspect that has been addressed meaningfully in recent scholarship in postcolonial studies (Fuller and Bénéï 2000; Gupta et al. 2006; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Mitchell 1999). Within South Asian studies, the linkages between military governance and the civil state have been the subject of scholarly evaluation in Pakistan (see, e.g., Jalal 1990; Rizvi 2000), but have been largely neglected in the study of postcolonial India. By deconstructing the implications of the social, political, and economic “goodwill” underlying Operation Sadbhavna, we offer a critical framework for questions of governance, development, and security in the borderlands of India.

The construction of Ladakh as a “natural” border for India began in the nineteenth century, when the area was captured by the Dogra rulers of Jammu with the sanction of the colonial British regime. This invasion of a hitherto independent kingdom harkened Ladakh’s eventual and disputed incorporation into the postcolonial Indian state.³ In the national imagination, Ladakh is still largely perceived as a remote, underdeveloped, and barren area that is significant for its strategic location on India’s borders with Pakistan and China. In this article, we draw from approaches that view the border as a privileged site for assessing the power and limitations of the nation-state (Aggarwal 2004; Van Schendel 2002; Wilson and Donnan 1998), for it is at its borders that the state repeatedly asserts physical and symbolic authority over its citizens by reinforcing the “univocal narrative of modern nationalism” (Krishna 1994, 507).

The data for this article derive from ethnographic research conducted in four villages in the Inner Line region of lower Ladakh and the district centers of Leh and Kargil from 2000 to 2006.⁴ Scholars working in Ladakh and adjoining border areas have often been subjected to scrutiny and suspicion by the armed forces, even after obtaining permission from the civil administration in Ladakh to do research in disputed zones. After the implementation of Operation Sadbhavna, however, access to information was unusually possible, as the military was invested in presenting a different public face and conveying its sensitivity to the civilian population. Structured interviews aided us in gathering data from

³At the time of independence in 1947, princely states in India were given the option to secede to one nation or the other. Because of a variety of factors, the maharaja of Kashmir signed the Instrument of Accession, whereby Ladakh and the rest of Jammu and Kashmir came under the jurisdiction of India.

⁴The Inner Line areas are regions near India’s borders that are restricted in terms of access to outsiders for security reasons. Special permits are required by nonresidents to travel into these zones, and they are characterized by a visible military presence. The system of declaring certain areas protected was created by the British government in 1873 with the Bengal-Eastern Frontier Regulation for the hill areas in the northeast parts of India to prevent people from the plains from moving there.

civil administrators, political leaders, and military officers on the design, logic, and implementation of Operation Sadbhavna.

Given the lack of field studies on the relationship between security, militarization, and development, the implications of state-centric agendas on individuals and communities are often glossed over. Arguing for the centrality of field research to complicate current debates on this subject, we explore how such agendas shape and, in turn, are shaped by local struggles over history and collective identity. Studies of militarization in other parts of the world have revealed that militarization is key to the constitution of racial, gendered, and class subjectivities (D'Amico 1997; Enloe 2000). Analyses of the way in which military bases engendered social identities and economic development in East and Southeast Asia following the Korean and Vietnam wars have contributed valuable guidelines for understanding the military in a broader socioeconomic context (see Richter 1989). In Ladakh, too, militarization is a social process that both relies on and produces religious and ethnic identities and social hierarchies. Accordingly, our study interrogated the interreligious relations between Buddhists and Muslims (the two dominant religious groups in the region) and documented political and identity-based struggles within Ladakh. Through intensive participant observation and detailed semistructured interviews, we were able to record the effects of border policies in village communities. We also consulted newspaper articles in the national and local media and other official documents to understand the political rhetoric and perceived achievements and drawbacks of the operation.

In the sections that follow, we analyze the major ideological and institutional spheres of governance and civil society into which Operation Sadbhavna extended. How the official objectives of the project were interpreted and incorporated into the political, cultural, and economic aspirations of communities in Ladakh reveals both the coercive and the ambiguous nature of democracy and state power in India.

THE MILITARY AND THE DEVELOPMENT-SECURITY COMPLEX

Security has long been identified as a primary index of development, but it was only after the end of the Cold War that an explicit relationship between security and development was acknowledged. Debates that had been central during the Cold War as to whether militaries were impediments to modernization (Ball 1988; Deger and Sen 1983; Faini, Annez, and Taylor 1984; Hurewitz 1969; Shils 1962) or dynamic agents of social change and economic development (Alexander 1995; Benoit 1973; Berger 1960; Bill 1969; Halpern 1963; Johnson 1962; Kusi 1994) shifted in the post-Cold War era. Emphasis was laid on the demilitarization process, marking a transformation in the role of the military from "defense to development" (Cock and Mckenzie 1998; D'souza 1995). Political economists

prescribed that poor or developing countries needed to spend to ensure “human security” rather than state security, as it could not be assumed that investing in the latter would guarantee the security of the people (Cawthra 1998; Thomas 1991). Moreover, because democracy was considered a prerequisite for development, it was argued that militarism was largely antidevelopmental (Cawthra 1998). With security being linked increasingly with “meeting basic needs,” maintaining militaries was viewed as an expense that went against the very interests they were supposed to perpetuate, such as upholding order and security and reducing the chaos resulting from the transfer of power to newly formed states (Cock and Mckenzie 1998, 16).

In the case of postapartheid and post–Cold War South Africa, the process of demilitarization led to the downsizing of personnel, noticeable reductions in defense expenditures, the shutting down of military bases, and the abolition of conscription, even though, as Cock and Mckenzie (1998) contend, the motive behind demilitarization was not simply a diversion of funds toward development, but also to bring about the subordination of the military to civilian control. In contrast, the military in India had already been subsumed within the larger civil state apparatus from colonial times, although there were instances that threatened to disrupt this hierarchy. Thus, in India, the recasting of the military’s role in development was not accompanied by demilitarization efforts by the state.

The post–Cold War period also called for the examination of the military as a partner in a strategic complex comprising national governments, nongovernmental organizations, and international aid agencies for curbing conflicts (Duffield 2001). As anthropologist Mark Duffield contends in his provocative book *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (2001, 40), the incorporation of warfare into development discourse has radicalized the way in which development is done and thought about. Duffield alludes to “new wars” as instabilities fomented in the south through conflicts, criminal activities, and terrorism, the causes of which he attributes to “developmental malaise of poverty, resource competition and weak and predatory institutions” (2001, 16). According to Duffield, what has become an explicit aim rather than a presupposed outcome of development policies is the transformation of societies in order to restrict factors that exacerbate such conflicts. In Duffield’s model, the success of future development projects rests upon correcting the political, economic, and social instabilities that have hindered earlier development policies in bringing about social change.

Duffield’s analysis astutely points to the limits of realizing human security under conditions in which the global distribution of capital is so unequal. What is suggested but not sufficiently explored by Duffield is the way in which discourses of development and security have been embraced by the military in democratic nations for securing state borders and controlling the civilian population. This is particularly relevant in the post-9/11 world scenario, in which the “war on terror” has been justified as a crusade against human oppression

and the military has once again surfaced as an agent for accomplishing democratic goals (see Lutz 2002).⁵ Even though this is an act of external combat for the United States, the rhetoric of obtaining freedom and democracy for Iraq has been accompanied by the curtailing of civil rights domestically and the tightening of state borders at home, calling into question the post–Cold War supposition of the universal disappearance of state borders, most visibly harkened by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the formation of the European Union.

The post–Cold War years have ushered in paradoxical roles for postcolonial democratic states. On the one hand, neoliberal factors have strengthened the power of corporate capital and nongovernmental initiatives, leading to a comparative reduction of state control in areas of economic development. On the other hand, the encroachment of state structures in a “world of expanding deterritorialized identit[ies],” to use Wilson and Donnan’s (1998) phrase, has deepened. As territoriality has become a prerequisite for the state’s existence (Wilson and Donnan 1998), ensuring that territorial demarcations remain intact, and not vulnerable to external and internal threats such as terrorism, is being propagated through policies such as Operation Sadbhavana in the border regions of India. Territoriality, security, and militarization, therefore, are directly linked to formations of nationhood and the state in colonial times; they also continue to frame the democratic state in the postcolonial period.

CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS IN INDIA

Questions about delineating the domains of “military” and “politics” have been debated in India since colonial times (Cohen 1971). The civilian government retained its precedence over the military through administrative and organizational changes such as the Charter Act of 1833. In addition, the civil service–dominated Ministry of Defense was further strengthened in 1947 with the abolition of the position of Commander-in-Chief, the only military advisor in the Indian civil government (Cohen 1971). In postcolonial years, too, the dominant ideology that has been associated with the Indian state is its emphasis on democratic institutions and the primacy of electoral processes. In contrast, in Pakistan, where state survival was seen as severely threatened by extraneous security factors, state control was ensured by relying on a robust military force, a political direction that critics allege was accomplished at the expense of debilitating the civil state apparatus and participatory political processes (Rizvi 2000).

⁵For a critique of the widespread perception of war as “the health of the state” in the United States, see Catherine Lutz (2002). In the Indian context, Joya Chatterji (1999) shows how the partition of India into two nations that accompanied its independence from British rule was also described as a neat and clean surgical process, ignoring the political machinations that went into it and the devastating displacements that ensued.

In spite of the stress on civil democracy, India’s military spending has escalated against the background of recurring border wars. For instance, after the Kargil War, India raised its military expenditure by 28 percent (a total of \$3 billion), a decision that reflected India’s continued investment as a military superpower on the subcontinent (see <http://www.paklinks.com/gs/archive/index.php/t-20962.html>). The increase in defense spending has gradually extended the scope of the military so that the traditionally civil domain of development is justified as a military pursuit on the grounds of national security.⁶ According to Eustace D’souza (1995, 157), a retired major general of the Indian army, although the military’s primary role of border defense cannot be compromised, its need to contribute to sustainable development as a means to ensure national security should also be recognized. D’souza’s study is one of the few that documents military involvement in civil development in India. He cites case studies from different states in India that highlight the successful role of the military in sustainable development, mainly through environmental protection exercises. His examples bring together a range of environmental activities that are being carried out in Bombay, Kotah, Jammu and Kashmir, and Gujarat to ensure prevention of soil erosion, development and maintenance of forest cover, conservation of rare species, and construction of watersheds for irrigation purposes. Calling army cadres “eco-battalions,” the author argues that the “structure, organization, training, leadership, and infrastructure of the various branches of the military can make them ideal partners with their civilian counterparts in protecting the environment” (1995, 165).

D’souza’s study, however, is only a detailed descriptive account, lacking critical reflection. What the redefinition and expansion of the military’s role as a facilitator of development entails for the local population, for civil–military relations in particular regions, and for the military’s own organizational and hierarchical structure remain untouched. Therefore, a close understanding of an undertaking such as Operation Sadbhavana provides an opportunity to assess the complexities that arise from the military’s role in security, governance, and development in the Indian democratic context.

THE INDIAN MILITARY: “IN THE LIFE OF LADAKH AND PART OF IT”

Recruitment to the army in modern Ladakh dates to the postindependence period, when the Home Guards were formed by a group of civilians to resist the Gilgit Scouts and the Kabayilis who overtook parts of Jammu and Kashmir. On June 1, 1963, following the stationing of large numbers of troops in Ladakh after the Sino-Indian War, the paramilitary outfit, the Ladakh Scouts, came into existence through the merger of the 7th and 14th Jammu and Kashmir

⁶For a historical background of the military in India, see also David Omissi (1994).

militias, which had been formed in the 1950s. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the Ladakh Scouts launched an attack in the Turtuk sector and were successful in capturing an area of 804 square kilometers (*Daily Excelsior* 2002). During the 1990s, Ladakhis were increasingly involved in counterinsurgency operations in the Kashmir Valley. But it was only after the Kargil War of 1999 provided lessons about the difficulties of high-altitude combat and the indispensability of local troops that the Ladakh Scouts were finally awarded regiment status. After this war, the number of Indian troops stationed in the region rose from 3,000 from the earlier 3rd Infantry Division to 20,000, entrenching the army further in the lives and livelihoods of Ladakhis.

Besides direct recruitment, interactions between civilians and the military have been a vital part of Ladakh's political economy, especially since the Sino-Indian War of 1961–62. The army has a multifaceted presence in Ladakh: Ladakhis can find employment, largely in its paramilitary forces (such as the Ladakh Scouts and Indo-Tibetan Border Security Forces) and as porters and cooks. The presence of the army has also meant an instant outlet for poultry, fruits, and vegetables, and, in turn, villagers can avail themselves of coveted canteen goods such as rum, cooking oil, condensed milk, and even petrol at low rates. The army occasionally makes its resources available to civilians, offering rides to stranded patients, allowing the public to view films in its Trishul theater, and donating funds to charitable causes. Moreover, it is the military that is frequently responsible for initiating and maintaining transportation and communication links. Through its Border Road Organization and Himank divisions, the military built a highway connecting Leh to Srinagar and engaged local subcontractors for the construction. All along this highway, the landscape of Ladakh reverberates with traces of the armed forces—from golf courses to tin-roofed barracks to road signs that blaze slogans such as “Himank—The Mountain Tamers” and “BRO—In the Life of Ladakh and Part of It.”

Despite the military's claim that it is part of Ladakh's life, the relationship between Ladakhi civilians and the armed forces was for a long period governed by a culture of fear and difference. Operation Sadbhavna aimed to transform this alienated relationship into one of mutual cooperation and trust. Whereas in the past, confrontations and distrust between civilians and the military had arisen over reported cases of army assaults on local women, now empowering women became one of the army's core objectives; vocational centers offering training in carpet weaving, knitting and sewing, and even computer training were started for this purpose. Whereas intelligence had once been associated with a system of interrogation and espionage, now the military aimed to tap into and develop the intelligence potential of Ladakh's students by opening schools in twelve villages (schools equipped with music systems and computers) and Bal ashrams for orphaned and disabled children, claiming to nourish the body and mind by offering midday meals. Hospitals and medical centers were started for dealing with complicated illnesses, and serious patients were flown to major

cities in India for special treatment. Implemented in 190 villages and towns along the border in 2001, Operation Sadbhavna catered to a population of approximately 110,000, with a financial outlay of 14,000,000 Indian rupees (Sridhar 2001).⁷

Self-described as a social healer and by others as a soldier-scholar, Arjun Ray explained the reasoning behind Operation Sadbhavna, declaring “coercive diplomacy” to be a losing battle that was politically motivated and had yielded no resolution. The army would now play the role of a mediator rather than aggressor.

Ladakhi leaders initially hailed Operation Sadbhavna as a revolutionary and progressive initiative that would bridge the existing gap between the missions and objectives of the armed forces and the lifestyles and expectations of the civilians they were deployed to protect. A promotional video for Operation Sadbhavna shows schoolchildren singing to the tune of *When You’re Happy and You Know It*, students composing poems about their village on computers, and villagers, volunteers, and local leaders testifying to the benefits of its various schemes. In a state where the image of the army once conjured torture, brutality, rape, and hopelessness, Ray’s vision of a military engaged in peace activities and humanitarian work seemed like a benign solution.

The name “Operation Sadbhavna” was taken from a program first launched in 1999 by the 15th Corps in Kashmir with a starting budget of \$700,000. That program aimed to redress the hardships suffered by those populations that had been affected by militancy by supplying artificial limbs and undertaking development projects in the Baramulla and Kupwara border districts (http://www.armyinkashmir.org/army_people/armyrole1.html, accessed June 20, 2006).

This predecessor to Ray’s program for rehabilitating the Kashmir Valley functioned as a philanthropic substitute for the breakdown of state machinery and its corresponding functions in a conflict-ridden zone. As opposed to this, Ray’s program marked an ideological shift from rehabilitation to development and toward an investment in building future citizens. The premise was that if a rigorous mission to win the “hearts and minds” of Ladakhi communities was not carried out in time, Ladakh would also experience civil unrest and insurgency, a premise that conflated Ladakhis with Kashmiris and glossed over their distinct political struggles.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CIVIL STATE

Operation Sadbhavna was marketed as a “nation building activity, with the army acting as a facilitator and not a substitute [for the civil state machinery]”

⁷Sadbhavna received funds primarily from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and from the Border Area Development Fund (BADP). While the BADP allocation in 2003–4 was 28,800,00 Indian rupees and the MoD allocation for the same year was 3,74,00,000 Indian rupees, the Information Technology Ministry of the central government in 2001 provided an assistance of 2,00,00,000 Indian rupees (for details, see Bhan 2006).

(*India Today* 2001). The activities of the civil state machinery in Ladakh, however, were substantially influenced by national security concerns. After the Sino-Indian War, a development committee was constituted in 1965 to intensify work on electrical power, education, and irrigation and to rectify regional imbalances within the state. As Ladakh's significance as a border area increased, subsidized foods flooded in, making local agriculture less viable and generating a culture of dependency. The 1971 war with Pakistan led to the development of communications and the establishment of an All India Radio Station. In the years following the escalation of civil insurgency in Kashmir, Ladakh was granted the status of Scheduled Tribe (in 1989) and Autonomous Hill Development Council (in 1995). Just after the Kargil War, the most visible state program in Kargil was, once again, the promotion of war sites as tourist destinations. The underlying bias in official portrayals of Ladakh was that it was an economically unproductive and barren border area that had value only by virtue of its territory and border location (Aggarwal 2004).

Echoing some of this developmental discourse and replete with the mission of bringing modernity to Ladakh, Operation Sadbhavna was designed to make a difference in areas that were beyond the reach of the government bureaucracy, thereby providing a partnership rather than competing with or overtaking existing structures. In many instances, however, Sadbhavna programs competed with and furthered the apathy of state agencies. According to one prominent civil official who was quoted in a biweekly national magazine, "[T]he civil administration is upset that the army is creating a parallel infrastructure. [Since], clearly army-civil-administration synergy is still a far cry, this puts a question mark on the sustainability of the new model of border management" (*India Today* 2001).

While some civil state officials recognized the need for the army to "build bridges," they were uncomfortable with the implication that military intervention was necessary because of the failure of the civil administration in Ladakh. Said one administrator,

Sadbhavna is a good idea . . . it is not a great idea, because you should not try to civilianize the military. It is not difficult to build parks etc. It is the easiest thing in the world. We have built amazing number of parks. Army builds a park and gets credit for it. This is not development. It is ad hocism. I don't think it was ever projected as a development operation. Had this been the case, the Central government would have never accepted it in the first place. It is alright to create goodwill through some haphazard welfare projects, but to be loud about it, and make it an ego tussle is what leads to an unnecessary clash of interests between the civil administration and the military.⁸

⁸Personal communication with Mona Bhan.

Misgivings among civil state officials concerning the efficacy of military efforts were enhanced when existing government schools were abandoned for schools newly constructed by the military, duplicating rather than consolidating the existing infrastructure. Similarly, military projects such as soup kitchens did not take lessons from the poor performance of a similar Anganwadi soup kitchen project run by the civil government in rural areas of Ladakh.

Yet even though Operation Sadbhavna was criticized for its numerous omissions, some Ladakhis acknowledged that the military was more successful than the civil administration had been in helping them lead a comfortable life. Thus, rather than looking at Sadbhavna as a package of discrete developmental activities, it is useful to trace its evolution into a relationship that continues to shape mutual expectations between the villagers and the army. The Brogpa community of Ladakh, for instance, was involved with the military, mostly providing porters for lugging supplies to defense posts. The Kargil War of 1999 made the army not only ubiquitous in the region but also more accessible. With the setting up of military units close to Brogpa villages, porting became the mainstay of the economy. The establishment of the Ladakh Scouts as a full-fledged regiment comprising several military units after 1999 had a direct bearing on the number of people from Brogpa villages who were employed as military recruits. In addition to creating a consistent source of income for the villagers, military recruits became symbols of “modernity” for the villagers. According to a Brogpa recruit from the village,

Recruits return wearing denim jeans, cash in their pockets, sunglasses shielding their eyes. They also gain lot of exposure through their interactions with outsiders, and become conscious about issues such as cleanliness that is so much lacking in the village. I remember a boy from Hanu whose feet smelt terribly during the recruitment drive. Somehow he got into the military and these days he looks so neat and clean.⁹

In contrast to the qualifications needed to take advantage of benefits from the Scheduled Tribe designation offered by the civil state, the recruitment criterion for the military is minimum education up to the eighth standard. This makes military recruitment not only a lucrative opportunity for the villagers, but often the only viable employment alternative. Besides accessibility to employment opportunities, villagers in the Brogpa areas often found the military more accessible in terms of the distance they had to travel to meet a military official in the brigade set up 60 kilometers away versus a civil state representative in the district center of Kargil, a 70-kilometer journey. Villagers often demanded facilities such as water pumps from the army, which were often provided to them promptly, as

⁹Personal communication with Mona Bhan.

opposed to the several months that the district administration took to sanction them.

The failure of the state in resolving political upheaval or ensuring free and fair elections in Kashmir added to a situation of uncertainty and insecurity in the area, which further undermined the effective functioning of the civil bureaucracy and democratic institutions and increased reliance on the military. Economic initiatives for developing Ladakh that the civil administration had identified and invested in, such as improving tourism and promoting markets for horticultural products and handicrafts, were adversely affected by border warfare. Development policies were often aimed at pacifying border citizens rather than creating long-range plans. At both the central and state levels, there were few checks and balances on spending and accounting for funds, given the atmosphere of instability. With the civil structure weakened in these respects, the military became more than a development partner; in fact, it proved to be a severe and powerful competitor to the civil state.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE

To negotiate a place for itself in civil affairs, the military extended the scope and outreach of Operation Sadbhavna to both the public and private sectors of the economy. A major strategy deployed in this management model for fostering goodwill was the establishment of partnerships, funding of networks, and development of working relationships with the private sector, especially with multinational corporations that stood to gain from a stable economic market. Arjun Ray gave lectures to private organizations and even the Bollywood film industry to spread his message, and he appointed popular entertainers in Kargil and Leh to act as special liaisons for publicizing the program.

Operation Sadbhavna was to be a development enterprise, reaching protected areas and regions along the Line of Control, where nonstate actors were not permitted. The Indian government closely monitors the participation of nongovernmental organizations that operate in Jammu and Kashmir and limits international mediation in negotiating the political status of the region on the basis of security considerations and arguments of internal affairs. As a result, the discourses through which nonstate actors have been able to participate in development are economic and cultural, focusing on developing a marginalized and backward area or preserving Ladakh's cultural heritage. Within the district of Leh, there is a substantial nonprofit presence in selected areas. The emergence of neo-Buddhist interests on the global scene has been instrumental in harnessing aid and funds for nongovernmental organizations. This internationally publicized presence, together with Ray's cosmopolitan persona, and a self-conscious refashioning of army rhetoric to improve its image abroad and its public face in general, led to the adoption of a discourse in military operations

that was similar to that used by nonprofit agencies. For example, accused of severe human rights abuses in the Kashmir Valley by Amnesty International and domestic protest groups, the Web site of the Indian army featured a section called “Human Rights Violations by Terrorists” (http://www.armyinkashmir.org/human_rights/index.html, accessed June 20, 2006), a strategic ploy that Jennifer Schirmer (1997), in her study of the way in which the Guatemalan military hijacked human rights and democratic discourses during the 1980s, calls “dramatic camouflage.”

Sadbhavna’s response to the issue of development in Ladakh was steeped in the discourse of grassroots empowerment, sustainability, and local initiative. Initially, volunteers trained in information technology from India’s Silicon Valley in Bangalore were invited to participate in Sadbhavna initiatives. As a site of war, Kargil had become imprinted in the national imagination, and an invitation was extended to the youth of metropolitan centers to lend their skills for the service of the nation. But given that Operation Sadbhavna targeted villages in the Inner Line zones, and Inner Lines zones were subject to security surveillance and restricted entry, when the volunteers’ understandings of development differed from that of the military, they had little recourse. Once Arjun Ray had left, some volunteers were treated shabbily and refused basic facilities. Besides, volunteers could not demand accountability under the silent threat of expulsion.

Operation Sadbhavna programs that involved academics, doctors, and volunteers from as far as Bangalore were slotted to run even after the volunteers had left their allocated villages. The idea was to “make these people self-sufficient so that they can stand on their own feet. Charity alone cannot be the engine of growth. Charity has to necessarily begin the process, since these people have been neglected for so long, but it must be withdrawn gradually for full empowerment. The process is a tight-rope walk” (Deb and Panjari 2001). The notion of full empowerment entailed devolving responsibilities to local people gradually, although with some measure of military control. This, it was thought, would best be achieved by imparting training to local people so that they could become self-sufficient (Bhan 2006). For instance, in the year 2001, two teachers were selected from among the local women in the village of Dartsigs to teach in the Sadbhavna school. The army principal was replaced by a local principal. As several villagers had already withdrawn their children from government-run schools because of the poor quality of education these schools offered, the devolution of teaching and management of the school to local hands did not necessarily please the villagers. “It was primarily because of a strong emphasis on the English language that I admitted one of my kids to the Sadbhavna school, but what is the point if they are now being taught by locals who themselves have a poor grounding in the language,” said one villager. Reinforcing the villagers’ perspective to an extent, one of the seniormost civil state officials commented, “Quality of education offered by Sadbhavna was thought to be high since

outside knowledge is always considered better. A mediocrity from Bangalore will always be considered better than a mediocrity from Ladakh by the locals in Ladakh.”

Random recruitments of teachers and other staff led to resentment among the villagers, and this was often expressed as one of the primary critiques of *Sadbhavna*. The army’s initiatives were not considered complementary developmental activities and were evaluated using the same parameters that people employed to evaluate civil state development initiatives. According to one villager,

Sadbhavna is not for poor people. The military should have held group meetings in order to find candidates best suited for the jobs they have created through their educational and vocational centers. Now one of the teachers post has gone to a family where there are already three teachers. They should have tried to reach poorer sections of the village. Unfortunately, in our India, a strange disease has engulfed everybody. People who keep favoring officials with apricot oil are the ones who get benefited whether or not they truly deserve any *Sadbhavna*. The military, through its *Sadbhavna* scheme also provides free ration to people even though the family owns huge tracts of land. So *Sadbhavna* is not really development . . . it is sort of a scheme to fill people’s stomachs. Anybody can do that even by begging. What is required is real education.¹⁰

Villagers in the area of Dartsigs and Garkon reconciled themselves to the fact of having local teachers in *Sadbhavna* schools instead of the better-qualified and better-trained teachers from Bangalore, but the other issue that people had to grapple with was inconsistency in the medium of instruction. Operation *Sadbhavna* programs had been implemented with little research on the lessons of literacy and education that had already been learned by nonstate agencies involved in these fields. Assessments of the high failure rates in Ladakh’s government schools had identified the neglect of the Ladakhi language as one of the key problems in education, a problem that was not addressed by the *Sadbhavna* staff.¹¹ Moreover, the *Sadbhavna* school for the Dartsigs-Garkon area was established as a primary school, imparting education in English only to the fifth standard. The village residents were assured that the school would be upgraded to a middle school and that it would eventually accommodate students to the eighth standard. As the local medium of instruction in government schools was largely Urdu, this upgrade would have ensured that students studying in English did not face any inconsistency in the medium of instruction at the middle school level. But the school could not be upgraded to a middle school, and the students found it difficult to adapt to Urdu as a medium of instruction after they returned to

¹⁰Personal communication with Mona Bhan.

¹¹For detailed discussions of language debates in Ladakh, see Ravina Aggarwal (2001).

government schools for further education. Villagers had also proposed that if the army could arrange qualified teachers for the school from outside Jammu and Kashmir, they would contribute 300 rupees (US\$7.50) per student. This amount, according to the villagers, would have taken care of the expenditures on transportation, teacher's salaries, food, and lodging. “We end up paying lots of money on tuitions in towns of Leh and Kargil. This would curtail our costs by a huge margin.” The proposal was rejected by the army, however, under the pretext that accepting such funds would be against its regulations.

Consistent with the broader discourse on women's empowerment, the army established adult education centers for women in the villages. Two teachers, who had cleared their matriculation exam as far back as 1987 and could not be accommodated by the state government, were recruited as Sadbhavna adult education teachers at a monthly salary of 700 rupees (US\$17.50). While the army expected women to attend classes three times a week, it was a surprise to them that the women were not interested in “learning” despite the resources that were provided to them. In Ladakh, it is in the summer months, from May to August, that people have to amass resources for the long and arduous winter. Thus, summer months in Ladakh are extremely busy, more so for women, who do most of the household and agricultural work. Adult education teachers often tried to fill in and mark their registers so that they did not have to explain their absence to their supervisors. While the military did realize that absenteeism was a rampant phenomenon, there was an unacknowledged understanding that resources would not be pulled out of the village despite the poor functioning of the school because it had been advertised widely.

Symbolic tokens of Sadbhavna, irrespective of their functionality, these new constructions were strong reminders of military presence in the region. Even though Operation Sadbhavna helped the military establish a stronger rapport with the villagers, the underlying logic was to create a social and political ambience in which any threat to national security did not go undetected and was brought to the military's notice by locals who could act as complementary vigils. Sadbhavna was not only identified locally as a developmental or welfare activity. It was conceptualized as a relationship that continued to define people's interactions with the military. An army bus was allocated by the military to pick up students from the villages and drop them off at their particular schools. Villagers were expected to sell fruits and vegetables to the military rather than take them to the district headquarters of Leh and Kargil. Sadbhavna meetings between villagers and military personnel were held every three months, at which the villagers were supposed to voice their grievances, and in turn, the army was expected to communicate its objectives. Dependency on the army increased to such an extent that one frustrated official remarked, “In the Sadbhavna meetings held every three months with military officials to discuss donkey and vegetable rates, people have started voicing ridiculous demands. A person from Da the other day told the Commander that the growing

population of dogs in their village has become a menace and the military should do something about it.”

In the past two years, since Arjun Ray’s retirement, as Operation Sadbhavna has declined in scope and intensity, one civil state official evaluated its contribution as a

cosmetic exercise, with the military initiative based on a very superficial understanding of people’s needs, an ambitious endeavor to assume the role of the civil-state apparatus, a one-man show with a holier than thou’ attitude. Sadbhavna certainly helped the military reach out to people, but to label it a development operation would be a fallacy. It was simply a gesture to communicate to people that since we are living in a big family, we need to co-operate and co-exist. Psychologically, it meant knowing people and knowing how to use them to their advantage. It is only one to one interaction that ensures everything is in order. Distance from people can only lead to peril.¹²

RESIDUAL OR FUTURE ASSET? RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND DIFFERING CONCEPTS OF GOODWILL

Sadbhavna was conceived as a border management exercise with an explicit aim to “win the hearts and minds” of the local population so as to forestall further destabilization resulting from people’s growing alienation from the nation. According to one senior military officer,

People are going to the other side because they have nothing else to do. Since the chap has nothing else to do, he says, O.K., this fellow at least is giving me 100 rupees for planting a bomb, I might as well go with him. He is not getting a job, the state machinery is redundant [and] defunct. Whatever jobs are being given, are being given only to the relatives or to people who give bribes. So since corruption is so much that human being is not being given the right due . . . what he or she deserves, so the chap says, O.K., let me go off . . . the nation is doing nothing for me, let me do something for myself. Sadbhavna thus is to curb anti-national feelings, anti-national propaganda and anti-national activities. Kargil war was an indication that if something is not done real quick, Ladakh would go the way Kashmir has gone.¹³

Describing his vision in an address to the executives of Britannia on October 11, 2002, Arjun Ray remarked,

¹²Personal communication with Mona Bhan.

¹³Personal communication with Mona Bhan.

When I assumed command, the situation was quite grim. Insurgency had spread to every region of Jammu and Kashmir, excepting Ladakh. And it was only a matter of “when” and not “if” that it would spill over into the region. All the obvious signs of incipient insurgency were staring us in the face. Alienation was complete, and mass rallies were being held demanding azadi or independence. Arms caches, underground cells, over-ground workers and infiltration from across the Line of Control were pronounced.¹⁴

Operation Sadbhavna worked with the goal of creating future citizens and allaying the realization of incipient militancy prevailing in Ladakhi society. Yet its insistence on assuming control over the business of development for converting latent militants into *future* citizens ignored a vital aspect of the definition of goodwill. It neglected to measure goodwill in the sense of assets and opportunities for enhancing profitability that had been established in the *past* by agents already involved in nation building. While militancy in the adjoining provinces of Jammu and Kashmir has been an ongoing phenomenon for more than a decade now, Ladakh has remained relatively peaceful internally because of its strong ethnic and cultural differences from Kashmir, and the distanced posture of Ladakhis toward the causes of militancy in Kashmir.

The Kargil War and Operation Sadbhavna, however, opened up new sites for debating patriotism and citizenship. In the region of Kargil itself, Kargilis objected to the lens of suspicion through which the military routinely viewed them (Aggarwal 2004). “Do you know,” said a Kargili youth leader in 1999, “that it was shepherds from Batalik that first detected the infiltrators but the army beat them up and accused them of lying. They suspected us even during the Kargil war.” Sheikh Azgar Karbalai, vice president of the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust, reported that an army officer had confessed to him with tears in his eyes, “When we go to Manipur or Kashmir, they call us Indian and themselves Manipuri or Kashmiri. But in Kargil I feel how much they identify as Indians.” As evidence of Muslim loyalty to India, Kargilis gave examples of patriotic songs that they had composed during the war. During the Kargil War, villagers on the border were taken to the frontline as porters, carrying loads of 35 kilos of ammunition on their backs in exchange for a remuneration of 300 rupees. Said Ghulam Hassan Khan, Ladakh’s member of Parliament from Kargil at the time,

About our patriotism, I have this to say, the other day, I met a General and this is what he told me. You know the religious songs that we sing during our weddings—they are called *kasida*. The General said that last year in the villages, the women folk and children were running helter-skelter after the Pakistani shelling and the males were taken to

¹⁴http://www.generalarjunray.com/speech_change_leadership_sadbhavana.htm [accessed June 20, 2006].

the border—even then, they were sitting in the army Shaktiman trucks singing those songs faithfully. This proves that we are trustworthy.¹⁵

Lieutenant General Ray cited an incident that had occurred shortly after his appointment in the village of Dras in the Kargil district as one of the motivating factors that had led to his championing of Operation Sadbhavna. According to Ray, he had waved at the villagers but nobody had waved back, a body language that he considered representational of the chasm between civilians and the military. Hassan Khan, on the other hand, depicted the residents of Dras as the true heroes of independence, contending, “There is no Indian like us. I am telling you the truth, no loyal citizen quite like us. In 1947, it was the people of Dras who rescued the Indian forces with snow shoes.” The episode that Khan referred to had occurred during the partition period when reinforcements were needed for the Indian defense side, which was stranded at the Zojila pass due to icy conditions (Aggarwal 2004). The people of Dras had made *mu-srog* (snow-shoes) so that a rescue mission with reinforcements could travel through the snow to the contingent of soldiers to enable them to cross the pass. In the stranded party was Sonam Norbu, an engineer, who reached Leh to design the first runway there, after which military planes were able to land. Eyewitness accounts mention this event as the turning point in the Indo-Pakistani battle for control of the Ladakhi territory.

Another proof of “incipient militancy” that Ray used as evidence was a cache of arms recovered from the Turtuk sector in the Nubra block of Ladakh and the explosion of two bombs prior to a visit he was to make there. When weapons were seized from Turtuk during the Kargil War, the village was blacklisted as a breeding ground for insurgents. The four villages of the Turtuk sector in India, however, had been captured by the military during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. Youths from Turtuk confessed that older people were still dazed about their national allegiance, especially as several of their kin had been left behind in Pakistan. Partition had made them repudiate their Indian connections to become citizens of Pakistan, and the 1971 war had demanded just the opposite. Security teams from the army constantly required them to cooperate in espionage and surveillance activities, whereas nonstate mercenary agents tried to win them over by distributing cash and weapons that were treasured for hunting. The case of Turtuk points us away from the essentialized identification of citizenship and homeland and reveals instead that they are historically contingent and multiple. But these isolated incidents in Dras and Turtuk, two border locations of Ladakh very distant from each other and with different political and cultural histories, were conflated in Sadbhavna ideology to create the profile of a Muslim who had yet to become a loyal citizen of India.

¹⁵Personal communication with Ravina Aggarwal.

Although Operation Sadbhavna’s stated objectives were the creation of a pluralistic society, such portrayals by the military fueled the flames of communalism and interreligious rivalry already extant between the Muslim and Buddhist communities within Ladakh.¹⁶ As security and patriotism were the few bargaining tools available to Ladakhis for making development in the region financially and operationally effective, the Ladakhi Buddhist leadership frequently put itself forward as a body of “true patriots” (Van Beek 1998) that had risen heroically to protect the nation’s frontiers time and again by joining the armed forces and sacrificing its own cultural aspirations for the sake of national integrity. Muslim leaders, on the other hand, had long criticized policies of recruitment to the army and the Ladakh Scouts, which employ an overwhelming majority of Buddhists, for being discriminatory. As recent research on the religious composition of the defense forces has revealed (Khalidi 2003), Muslims are widely underrepresented in the postcolonial Indian army, mostly because the prevailing culture of doubt about their loyalty leads to covert policies of exclusion and generates a sense of alienation within Muslim communities. In a move to reverse this exclusionary practice, Arjun Ray lobbied hard to get the Ladakh Scouts the status of a regiment and actively began recruiting Kargilis into the expanded unit.

Because of its outreach in border regions, Operation Sadbhavna provided a means to redress the regional and religious disparity in resources that were coming from sources outside the civil state bureaucracy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Islamic centers were supported by funds from Iran and Iraq, but for non-governmental organizations in the 1990s, with sources of transnational funding from the West, it was largely Buddhist areas that held appeal; thus, a substantial portion of Ladakh’s Muslim areas were ignored. For example, following the Kargil War, even though there was a flood of contributions and donations from all over India for families of soldiers and martyrs, barring the distribution of food packages, blankets, and firewood by Oxfam and Save the Children’s Fund, there was very little participation by nonstate agencies in either providing immediate relief measures or in assisting in refugee rehabilitation, sanitation, health, and social reconstruction of Kargil.

Still, by shaping the portrait of the latent Muslim militant in Kargil in the image of militants in the Kashmir Valley, Sadbhavna aroused deep-seated insecurities that Buddhists felt toward the Jammu and Kashmir state government in Srinagar. This distrust had resulted in organized agitations for Union Territory status in Ladakh and the subsequent passage of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act in 1995, which placed greater control over finance and planning in the hands of the local government. Even though Sadbhavna was operational in both Buddhist and Muslim villages, Buddhist leaders who

¹⁶For more information on the tensions between Ladakh’s Buddhist and Muslim communities and the social boycott of 1989–92 that prohibited interreligious dining, marriage, and socializing, see Aggarwal (2004).

had supported it in the beginning came to look at it as another external threat that would undermine their hard-won political victories for self-government. These leaders objected to Sadbhavna rewarding “dubious patriots” and blamed it for widening social rifts between Buddhists and Muslims.

CONCLUSION

The contradictions in Operation Sadbhavna’s program reveal that even as the operation was a carefully orchestrated initiative to prevent future transgressions against India, there were slippages between state agendas and their intended effects. Within this context, this article has emphasized the significance of fieldwork to capture the complexities of civil–military interactions by exploring the everyday contradictions, negotiations, and struggles of local communities on India’s contested borders. Operation Sadbhavna’s ideological hegemony in Ladakh attains meaning through social divisions and historical insecurities that frame people’s response to and engagement with the military and the state. The interface between the military and local communities is therefore ideal for understanding the fragility of state power and its continued entrenchment in Ladakh through the rhetoric of development.

As a border development operation funded by the central government for utilizing the Indian army’s constant presence, Operation Sadbhavna was initiated to enhance state visibility on the borders of Ladakh and to befriend communities who otherwise conceptualized the military primarily as an “occupation force.” But it was largely identified by the masses, the military, and the civil state officials as “General Ray’s Doctrine” (Chenoy 2001). Local people as well as military officials were concerned as to whether Sadbhavna would continue once Ray’s tenure ended. According to one military official, “since military establishments are run by personalities, not policies,” Sadbhavna’s continuity would depend entirely on who replaced Ray once he was gone. National newspapers and magazines that highlighted Sadbhavna’s achievements also reflected the prevalent skepticism: “But what happens after Ray retires next year? Can all this goodwill last? Is Sadbhavna sustainable? For if the project loses steam, the people would see it as a betrayal, and the backlash could be dangerous” (*Outlook*, August 20, 2001).

The skepticism that Sadbhavna might not be a lasting endeavor has, to some extent, proved right. But to conclude that it has faded away completely would be a sweeping assertion precluding any discussion of what Sadbhavna was designed to achieve and create. Claims such as those mentioned in newspapers and often verbalized by local politicians that “a backlash might happen” if Sadbhavna is withdrawn are based on the assumption that a visible moment of disjuncture would happen and that people would rise in protest. What was underestimated was Sadbhavna’s persistence as a panopticon to control border citizens through its veneer of development and welfare ideology. Although reduced in scope

and intensity after Ray’s retirement, funding for Sadbhavna persists, and it has become a narrative around which the relationship between the military and the local people continues to be framed.

In the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where state corruption and popular disillusionment are everyday realities, Operation Sadbhavna is touted as the idealism of a civilian-sensitive military. Supporters from the military defend the program from critics, maintaining that, like numerous development projects that get off to a spluttering start, this one, too, can learn from its mistakes and transform itself in its next phase. Others argue that it has brought attitudinal changes and awakened a new humanitarian awareness among individual soldiers. Yet there are too many internal and external structural contradictions in the project’s own objectives and its possibilities of implementation. For one, Lieutenant General Ray resigned before his full term of office. In the public discourse circulating at this time, it was believed that Ray was forced out as a result of the dissatisfaction of higher officials and hardliners who thought that he had channeled excessive energy toward civilian endeavors and was therefore unfit for military command and battle. Another explanation, one that was favored by Ray, was that during the course of Sadbhavna, he had realized the limits of military intervention and was driven to devote his time to running an international school in Bangalore, where he continues his association with Ladakh today by awarding seats to Ladakhi children.

The resignation of its strongest benefactor was but one indicator of the problems inherent in the Operation Sadbhavna program. Our analysis of Sadbhavna illustrates that the military’s foray into governance was not merely a neutral or altruistic undertaking, but one that aided the military in strengthening its structures of power and pacification and capitalizing on the labor of border men serving as sentinels for their country. As demonstrated in the previous sections, while it aimed to rectify problems that the civil government had neglected, Sadbhavna often ended up duplicating and undermining civil state functions. Its attempts to elicit participation from civil society organizations by using both development-saturated campaigns to attract corporate actors and grassroots-sensitive promotion techniques to generate community support were ultimately undercut by the military’s own assignment of security and surveillance. Finally, Operation Sadbhavna claimed to benefit Buddhist and Muslim communities equally and without bias, but it still constructed Ladakh’s Muslim population as a potential threat and eventually failed to generate goodwill between Buddhists and Muslims, especially in an environment in which the Bharatiya Janata Party-run Indian government embraced policies that discriminated against ethnic and religious minorities in general and Muslims in particular.

Following the Kargil War, the deterioration of diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan resulted in an exponential increase in defense expenditures and combat-ready military positions along the border areas. Nationalized and privately owned media glorified the war in Kargil, while popular films celebrated

soldiers and displayed anti-Pakistani sentiments. Decisions regarding international relations were made by rejecting diplomacy as a solution, and the pursuit of combative nuclear technology put South Asia on what Praful Bidwai and Achan Vinaik (2001) call “a short fuse.” When ideologies of warfare and practices of militarism are incipiently planted in the wider polity, the question thus remains as to whether development, humanitarian aid, democratic freedom, and peace-building measures can truly be left to the goodwill of military institutions.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to state officials, political leaders, and village community members in the Leh and Kargil districts who shared their views with us. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented by Ravina Aggarwal at the annual conference of the Association for Asian Studies in 2003 and at a conference in 2004 on “Violence and the State in South Asia” held at Amherst College, and by Mona Bhan at the American Anthropological Association meeting in Washington, D.C., in 2005, and at the annual South Asian Studies Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2006. We thank Laura Ahearn, Dorothy Hodgson, David Hughes, and Suzanne Gottschang for their suggestions and valuable insights. Funding for Ravina Aggarwal’s research was provided by a Mellon Foundation grant and by grants from the Committee for Faculty and Curriculum Development at Smith College. Mona Bhan’s research was generously funded by the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University, and special study opportunity grants from the Dean’s office at Rutgers University.

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