

World & Nation

Rethinking 9/11:

A Perspective from Southern Asia

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STAFF WRITER

I was supposed to begin my journey to India on Sept. 11 - in the Boston Airport. Two anxious weeks passed before I finally flew . . . and then I was in Southern India, studying ecological and social politics.

As I bought flowers, mango juice, or cloth, Indian merchants often asked, "You are coming from where?" and when I said "the U.S.A.," they often pantomimed an explosion; they had watched television coverage of the World Trade Center attacks. Many then commented, in their limited English, that, although the deaths in New York City were sad, war is very bad.

Because of tension between Hindus and Muslims, most Indians aren't fans of Osama bin Laden. However, many also resent the United States. When I heard Noam Chomsky speak, one man wore a tee shirt that said

Ugly
Slaughter
Arrogant

I saw a couple of main reasons for this tension: first, American corporations create intense social and emotional poverty by selling exotic images of Westerners wearing jeans, drinking Coca-Cola, and eating packaged foods. Citizens of the South Indian state Kerala have largely abandoned subsistence agriculture for a cash economy so that they can buy Western things. However, they are finding that a few coconut trees (the staple crop) cannot support a Westernized lifestyle. In addition, coconut prices have dropped severely because of "free trade" laws as well as a global market, which increases competition. Chomsky pointed out that "... a globalizing economy ... is expected to increase the divide between the haves and have-nots."

Second, the mainstream news media in the United States does not talk about the United States' historical role in the region of Afghanistan. Indian news magazines like *Frontline* and *Outlook* published articles by Noam Chomsky and Arundhati Roy, which detail how Reagan

armed and funded al-Qaeda to fight the Soviets, who invaded Afghanistan in the 1980s. In *Frontline*, Noam Chomsky called the United States' attacks on Afghanistan "terrorism," which, of course, simply would not be published by the likes of *Newsweek* or *Time*. He pointed out that, as a world superpower (or bully) the United States can define attacks upon its property and citizens as terrorism, but ignore the atrocities that it has committed in places like Iraq, Sudan, and, of course, Vietnam. Indians have this perspective that mostly stays hidden from Americans.

People asked why I still traveled after Sept. 11. The attacks made it more important to see the world from a broader perspective, to be an informed citizen, not just of the United States, but of the global community.

The events of Sept. 11 were, without question, tragic and horrifying, but by refusing to examine how the United States has gotten into this situation, the mainstream news media is doing its citizens, and ultimately the entire world, a major disservice.



The writer visited India in the fall amidst anti-American sentiment.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE WRITER

Katy and Amanda are doing an independent study.



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