

The Periphery: Rural Development In Hunza*

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One almost gets whiplashed between the centuries: the old, the new; the fading, the modern. And yet I would not have us lose sight of the point I wish to make. In the Hissar canals and their tail-end shortages we see the legacy of the Ganges canals. In the pampered cattle of the Government Livestock Farm we see the agricultural-research-station mentality bequeathed by Pusa. In the corpse of agricultural extension at Pardeep's village we see Etawah's child. Yet we see more than the failings of the culture of development; we see as well the tremendous impact it has had on the agriculturally most productive part of India. A new landscape is emerging; it is being shaped by the culture whose origins we have explored, and it is being shaped as though tradition did not matter, as though beauty could be dismissed because it is subjective, should be dismissed because it is a luxury.

Yet the tide of development does not wash over productive plains alone. On the contrary, to a lesser degree it now washes over Asia's most remote mountain fastnesses. How shall I prove it? Let me choose Hunza as my example from the periphery. My point is that the preservation of traditional landscapes is most likely to occur in such places, which are not needed to produce the world's food and where the introduction of modern methods is not likely to save them from abandonment.

Formerly part of Indian Kashmir but now in northernmost Pakistan, Hunza has never been better described than it was in 1899, when George Nathaniel Curzon made a short visit there shortly before his appointment as viceroy. Curzon saw Rakaposhi, the magnificent white pyramid that anchors the western end of the Karakoram, and he wrote: "Rakaposhi stands there and will stand as long as this orb endures, under the heavenly vault, under the eternal stars, ancestral, godlike, sublime, tremendous." Purple? Yes, but true, too. Curzon went on to describe the orchards in the Hunza Valley below -- their "rich spoil of apricots, walnuts, apples, pears, melons, mulberries, peaches, and grapes." It's still true, despite precipitation averaging less than ten inches a year. Everything depends on irrigation -- and has for a very long time.

Even before Curzon's visit Algernon Durand described the vital irrigation ditch that still today irrigates the fields around Karimabad, Hunza's largest settlement. "On this channel," Durand wrote, "the cultivation of Hunza proper entirely depends; should it fail, starvation stares the people in the face. It is not surprising, therefore, that the greatest care should be expended on its preservation. But what is wonderful is the excellence of the result arrived at... The people have no proper tools, no crowbars and dynamite.... The use of

mortar is unknown.... Yet with all these disadvantages, with nothing but their eye as a guide to levels, they have carried this great irrigation channel for six miles, and turned an arid desert into a garden.... It is a splendid work, and I admired it more every time I walked along it."

There cannot be many places where you can get up at dawn and walk directly from a hotel to irrigated terraces--walk past tiny fields of corn and stacks of unthreshed wheat, walk past gardens with grapes and apples. There must be a thousand paths, some following the main ditches along contours, others winding downhill to the cliffs that overlook the Hunza River, grim as the Indus. The houses are mostly of cobbles, with pueblo-style ladders leading to upper floors. Early in the morning, observant goats watch visitors through slatted doorways; all day in summer, halved apricots--moist at first, later like leather--lie drying on rooftops under the hot sun.

Although you can fly here from Islamabad--and the mountain views are immense--the drive is more spectacular, especially if you approach it indirectly by going from Peshawar to Swat, then over the Shangla Pass and down to the Karakoram Highway at Besham. Not far from that point, where the Shangla Pass road joins the highway at the Indus River, there is a notorious rock slide near the village of Patan. At its start there is a small road-sign masterpiece of understatement. It says only "Good Luck."

Near Chilas--say four hours upstream from Besham and halfway to Gilgit--the trees quit. So, too, of necessity, does the spectacular logging that one sees farther downstream, where timbers are skidded down ravines and swung on cables across rivers. The Indus now looks like a river in California's Death Valley, though heavy roofs of cloud can block out the summits on either side and seem to laugh at anyone expecting rain.

A couple of hours farther on, you meet the road that leads to Astor, a strange name to American ears but no relation. Astor is significant chiefly because it marks the old and now closed route from Kashmir: Curzon's route, built by the British when they established themselves here in the 1890s. They did it to block imperial Russia, and that is why Gilgit had a major garrison and an airstrip, now used by civilian as well as military flights. You're always passing the airstrip on your way in and out of town, which means that, once you know how often the flights are canceled because of bad weather, you're always wondering if the link to the outside world is up and running today.

Coming in from the airport, you pass miles of shops along a main street. Climb the great ridge that rises just south of town, however; and much of the main street turns out to be false front--highway frontage walled off from the irrigated fields that stretch behind. The bazaar itself has little to offer, apart from dried apricots and unbelievably acidic apricot juice. Both come from Hunza, across the Gilgit River and up the Hunza River, which joins it here.

It was my first visit and I wanted to go to Chaprot, about halfway to Hunza but a few miles off the Karakoram Highway. Why Chaprot? The answer is a book by a Colonel R. C. F. Schomberg, *Between the Oxus and the Indus*. Schomberg traveled here in the 1930s, when tourism was physically difficult and officially prohibited, and he speaks of Chaprot as "more beautiful than any other valley in the whole of the Gilgit Agency." That was good enough for me.

The Karakoram Highway is two lanes wide, but north of Gilgit you often see traces of the vertiginously narrow older roads on the opposite and near-vertical walls of the Hunza River's canyon. Some of them look impassable even by a mule, but a French expedition back in the summer of 1930 actually got some tracked vehicles over them -- the first vehicles ever to reach Hunza. The trip was described in the *National Geographic Magazine* for March of 1932. Did that issue come to the attention of James Hilton? He was soon to write *Lost Horizon*, and his description of Shangri-La bears a very close resemblance to that issue's photograph of Karimabad.

An hour outside Gilgit I looked across at a natural terrace: cliff walled, level, green with trees and fodder. It was about a hundred feet above the Hunza River. We turned off the highway and crossed a one-lane wooden suspension bridge. On its far side the bridge nosed straight toward a cliff, at whose face the jeep made an amazingly abrupt 90-degree turn to the left. Within a few hundred yards I was in the village of Chalt, to which the irrigated terrace belongs. I had no idea how far Chaprot was, and so we just drove on through.

The clouds laughed again and turned into uncompromising rain that stayed with us for the five or six slow miles to Chaprot. We crossed steep bridges, made hairpin turns, and went past terraced fields of young wheat and Lombardy poplars. We trashed thousands of pink apricot blossoms, knocked off the trees by the rain. Our tires buried them.

We finally came to a village and a collapsed bridge; the driver asked around and told me: "Chaprot." I asked for clarification: yes, this was it. There weren't a lot of people around, and the road was steep and slippery. Apart from their doors, which were built of planks so short that one had to stoop to enter, the buildings were built entirely of rock--some cut but most just unchinked river boulders: even the roofs were mantled with rocks. So, too, were the paths between buildings, which were hardly more than rock slits opening upward to a gray-white sky above buildings so primitive that I could only distinguish homes from barns by listening for crying children.

Eventually some children came outside: the boys wore drab hooded jackets of Western style but the girls' attire was in bright colors--the only color in Chaprot, outside the village fields. Their mothers withdrew, but boys and girls posed. One girl stood on the main road with her back close to a stone wall

neatly built of alternated slabs and blocks. There was a doorway a foot past her: it was open, and its wooden framework was visible, along with a tree in the courtyard. She wore that characteristic Pakistani dress: a colorful knee-length shirt over matching trousers, but she was wrapped in a magenta-pink shawl that framed the Tibetan features of her face and hung nearly to mid-thigh. It made a fine picture, even though viewers are unlikely to know how miserable the day really was.

Even now I find it therapeutic to remember this day: it helps me remind myself that Hunza isn't paradise. The average "farm," I could add, covers all of four acres. Low-earning wheat is the main crop; it covers about half of the cultivated land, though it is followed at lower elevations by a corn crop. The average household supplements those grains with 40 fruit trees, mostly apricot; it has about 200 other trees, chiefly fast-growing poplars for roof timbers, fuel, and fodder for 15 animals. The manure of those animals is absolutely essential to maintaining the fertility of the terraces, whose soil is hardly more than highly porous glacial silt.

Apparently the British encouraged the Hunzans to build additional irrigation channels during the 1920s and 1930s. The population therefore began to increase, and despite infant mortality rates approaching one in every five births, the population has more than doubled during the last 30 years alone. The British seem to have done little else in the way of development work, apart from providing a doctor who was withdrawn in 1947, when Pakistan needed him more elsewhere. So far as I know, the only other development work in Hunza before 1950 was sponsored by the Aga Khan. The people of Hunza are chiefly Ismaili Muslims, a Shia sect devoted to him, and at the end of World War II he began paying for boys' schools.

Then an outsider came, an American geologist named John Clark. Like the extensionist Horace Holmes at Etawah, Clark had been in China during the war; like so many people at the time he saw the Chinese Communist victory and feared for his own country. After an exploratory trip through northern Pakistan and western China, he decided in 1949 to try bringing to Hunza a kind of development that would avert what he saw as the otherwise inevitable victory of Communism throughout Asia.

In a book published in 1956 and called simply *Hunza*, Clark states that his project was "a sort of pilot model for larger efforts." He explains how he formed a small foundation, the Central Asiatic Research Foundation, which provided him with \$20,000 for an initial two-year period of residence in Hunza. Clark's strategy was to provide educational and medical services, set up a woodworking school to manufacture craft items from apricot wood, introduce American vegetable seeds, and generate some export income by catching butterflies for American museums and planting wildflowers for their seed, which would be sent to the United States for sale. Meanwhile he would rely on

his professional skills to hunt for valuable minerals that would please the government of Pakistan and perhaps create some additional income for the people of Hunza.

Clark's supplies had to be flown to Gilgit, then packed to Hunza. Once there, Clark faced political problems from the start, not helped by the fact that he put a small American flag on the lead pack horse. Rumors immediately began circulating that he was scheming to make Hunza part of the United States. Then the mir of Hunza and the government of Pakistan began to think that, in talking of progress, Clark would inevitably create discontent with the status quo. The mir thought that this would undermine his authority, although in fact he survived until 1974, and his successor still resides as a private citizen in Karimabad. The government feared that talk of change would incline the people toward Communism. Ironic in light of Clark's actual purpose, this fear doomed Clark, who the government forced to leave Pakistan when his initial two years were finished.

Clark began those years optimistically, however, setting up shop in the mir's palace at Karimabad. He prospected widely, though without success. He established his crafts school, collected wildflower seeds, and planted his garden--too deeply: many of the vegetables never germinated. Most of his time was spent running his clinic: the job was overwhelming, and he wrote that "I felt like a man trying to stop a thunderstorm." Sometimes he felt appreciated; at other times, the local people "were regarding me as just another foreign traveler to yield revenue as he passed by."

Finally, the government told him he could stay no longer: "I was raising their standards of living too fast. This would make Communists of them.... Although my motives were undoubtedly meritorious, from a military standpoint I was endangering the safety of the frontier -- stirring up the local people." Clark tried to interest the Ford Foundation in taking over his work, but the foundation declined, in spite of its almost simultaneous commitment to expand the work at Etawah. Perhaps Hunza was too remote and the political situation too precarious. Perhaps it was the foundation's historic tendency to fund projects whose germinal idea the foundation considers its own, though the projects are executed by grantees discretely given credit for the work. In any event Clark left; his final words lament the "tyranny I had not broken, ignorance I had not lifted, poverty that I had not relieved."

I found older people in Hunza today who remembered Clark, but his work has been forgotten by development organizations, chiefly because so much attention is paid to the expanded efforts of the Aga Khan. Even the most casual tourist on the Karakoram Highway will notice the little green and white signs every few miles, the ones with the letters AKRSP. They are never pronounced as an acronym, just as letters. But the letters come easily after a while, for the

Aga Khan Rural Support Project was to the 1980s what Etawah was to the 1950s.

In fact, there is a direct linkage between Etawah and the AKRSP. It consists of one man: Akhter Hameed Khan, a Pakistani Muslim and holder of an M.A. degree in English literature from Agra University. In 1936, when he was 24, Khan joined the elite Indian Civil Service. He spent two probationary years at Cambridge, then was posted as a subdivisional officer to Bengal. There he saw how the British, seeking to resist an apparently imminent Japanese invasion, confiscated all local boats and disrupted the rice industry so thoroughly that a great famine resulted, a famine greater than any in India since.

Like his peers, the young Khan followed instructions to exhort the farmers to grow more food: "I made patriotic speeches to rural gatherings. I inspected manure pits, inaugurated exhibitions, and gave away many prizes. Lecturing obsequious audiences and listening to flattering addresses, I imagined myself to be an engine of development. Later, after the flush of youth passed away, I realized that, notwithstanding official efforts, there was no perceptible change in production."

In 1945 Khan resigned from the ICS to become a locksmith. There cannot be another case quite like it, but there were few if any ICS members who, like Khan, were also both Sufis and Tolstoyans. Apparently Khan made good locks, but two years later he quit, unable to support his family or, in his words, to "live without books and leisure." This time he became a teacher in Delhi; then, in 1950, principal of the small Victoria College in Comilla, East Pakistan, an hour's drive east of Dhaka. It was there that he ran into the Americans.

In 1953 they were busy exporting community development from Etawah, and Khan was made director of the East Pakistan program. Community development at that time, he later wrote, was a rainbow. People thought that it "promised political peace by including everyone in a harmonious community." In fact, the program in East Pakistan was a disaster; Khan quit in a year and returned to his college. Two years later, however, the Americans were back, this time in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, which proceeded in 1958 to spend about \$2,000,000 bringing East Pakistanis to Michigan State University and then, in the following year, bringing Michigan State professors to the newly created Pakistan Academy of Rural Development. It was located in Comilla, just so Khan would agree to head it. Once again Khan left his college post. He induced the government to allot to the academy a 100-square-mile block of Comilla District, which became the academy's laboratory. Despite his disavowals, Khan became "Mr. Comilla."

"In particular the Americans loved him." So writes a later head of the academy. "In him," this man continues, "they saw their Asian fantasies compounded of

Gandhian, Sufistic and Buddhist ideals. For them he became the living prophet of rural development

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How much of the Comilla work was really Khan's idea is hard to say. The Americans considered him indispensable, but Khan writes that matters of policy were set by high officials in the government of East Pakistan: "We could, at best, slightly modify or refine and polish." Of the U.S. government and the Ford Foundation, Khan writes that "as paymasters they usually dictated the tune."

The leaders of the work at Comilla reinvented the wheel first shaped by Allan Octavian Hume. In the words of a vice president of the Ford Foundation who was soon to become a senior official of the World Bank, Comilla taught that "anyone who seeks to assist Bengali villagers must approach them ready to listen and learn, not to talk and instruct." Khan responded, however, that "educated people will go to the village, only when the village is made fit for their habitation, that is, when it has schools and when it has medical services. Before that happens they will go there as the village-level workers are going today, that is, like people on a railway station platform; they just wait there for the next train home."

And so the Comilla Approach, as it became known, focused instead on hardware--mostly roads and tube wells for irrigation--and, more originally, on community training centers and cooperatives. More than 300 of these cooperatives were formed by the late 1960s: most were agricultural, but others served merchants and masons, blacksmiths and bookbinders, rickshaw pullers and truck drivers. Americans working with the project at the time thought it was a tremendous achievement, and something of Khan's charisma may be seen in the words he spoke to members of those cooperatives in 1962: "Even if you don't eat, you must save your money. If you don't make your own capital, this whole society will vanish like the mist. Not a trace will remain. Money is the basis of all this work. And all this money will come from your hands. It will not come from outside."

As in India, there was great pressure to expand the program, and in 1964 Khan agreed to do so. As the "Integrated Rural Development Program," the work at Comilla seemed set to go national. In 1967, however, civil war came to Pakistan. By 1971 East Pakistan was Bangladesh, and Khan, originally from the North West Frontier Province, returned home. And the program? "In Pakistan," Khan would write, "where revolution is more popular than reform, the programme, after only seven years, was abolished instead of being improved. It needed re-direction. It was annihilated."

After two abortive starts with rural development projects in northern Pakistan, Khan moved to Karachi, where in 1991 he was still living and working with a

community development project. At the same time, however, he became deeply involved with the expanding development program sponsored by the Aga Khan in Hunza. The man the foundation chose to run the AKRSP was a Khan protégé who in years to come would turn to Khan in critical moments and who would call him the AKRSP's "mentor and guide."

What did the AKRSP accomplish? In an echo of the Comilla cooperatives, the AKRSP had tried to organize villagers into "VOs," village organizations. To do this, "SOs" or social organizers were sent to the field to meet with the villagers and discover the "social activist" who might play a leading role in each community. The AKRSP offered a cash incentive for creating a village organization. This incentive was applied to the village's "PPI," or "productive physical infrastructure." The AKRSP, in other words, tried to discover what the villagers themselves believed they needed most. Perhaps it was a new irrigation channel, or perhaps a road; the only things categorically excluded were those, like domestic water supplies, that would not be productive--would not create wealth. Once the PPI had been determined, the AKRSP would provide not only technical guidance but money to cover the cost of materials and to pay for the labor provided by the villagers to build the PPI.

But completing PPIs was not the goal of the AKRSP: PPIs were the AKRSP's means of building village organizations that would go on to undertake other cooperative tasks. Those tasks would be built *without* subsidy and by borrowing against the security of the money in the village organization's savings account, which was required by the AKRSP in return for its contribution to the PPI. These savings accounts were so central to the AKRSP that by 1990 there was talk about the village organizations becoming self-sustaining village banks.

The echoes of Comilla grow still louder. Social organizers facilitated the establishment of over a thousand village organizations. Hundreds of PPIs were completed -- mostly irrigation channels or short roads linking villages to the Karakoram Highway or other main roads. By 1990 some 55,000 acres were being newly irrigated from completed PPIs; more than 70,000 were getting additional or supplemental water supplies.

There were dozens of follow-on programs. Villagers could borrow against their savings to buy fruit trees, most commonly apple. They could borrow to establish themselves in seed-potato production, particularly for sale to the lowlands of the Punjab. There were programs for artificial insemination of livestock, for vaccination, for cooperative purchase of electric churns. All were funded on a loan basis, with the village organization providing collateral in the form of its own cash savings and the AKRSP providing not only the loan but training in the activities.

The World Bank, not given to praise of other development organizations, sent a team to evaluate the AKRSP in 1986. "Outstanding" was the verdict. Yet a

critic might ask if the AKRSP's success was the result of the long local tradition of cooperation in matters such as irrigation-channel maintenance. How much of the AKRSP's success was the result of deference to the Aga Khan? What would happen if the project were exported to non-Ismaili areas?

By the mid-1980s some VOs were dormant; others had split in two, apparently because groups larger than 50 households had trouble cohering. Could a group of this size run its own bank? Could a group of any size cohere for years to come? On a visit to one village, the AKRSP's general manager was bluntly told: "No one is honest. We fight when we get together because we are desperate. We would be happy to see everyone in adversity."

One afternoon I went to take a look at one particularly well-known PPI. I went down the Gilgit River toward its confluence with the Indus. There I turned off the Karakoram Highway and began going upstream against that great river; turbulent and khaki at the bottom of a rocky canyon. There are about seven inches of annual precipitation here, and there was nothing green except patches of tough brush. My destination was the Hanuchal Channel, described in the AKRSP's own files as "peerless and unique," in positively Persian diction as "beloved."

The village of Hanuchal stands on a patch of irrigated land on a right-bank bench. The villagers had traditionally relied for their water on the local Hanuchal creek; then, with the AKRSP's help, they decided to tap Maruk Creek, a few miles farther up the Indus. With five more cusecs of water, the villagers could reclaim an additional 300 acres of their bench. By the time of my visit the work was done; the villagers had distributed the first 100 acres of new land among some 25 of the village's 110 households. They had taken out a loan for fruit trees to be planted on that land, which would be sown as well with two annual crops of grain, planted between the trees.

Looking up a cliff face about two miles past the village, I wondered if that notch I saw could possibly be what I wanted. I doubted it, simply because the cliff face was so sheer, but here was a green AKRSP sign with the plain words "Hanuchal Channel." I started scrambling up a difficult slope of broken rock created from the rubble tossed down when the channel was built. At the top I was giddy. From perhaps 300 feet above the road the Indus looked small, and I had whispers of vertigo whenever I looked away from the channel-side path. Worse: within a few hundred yards downstream I was forced to squat at a place where the cliff face was not vertical but overhanging. There could not have been more than three feet of vertical space between the channel and the rock ceiling that projected laterally perhaps ten feet beyond the cliff face.

It may sound odd that I was impressed to find that the channel was fitted with homemade escapes: there was nothing fancy here, nothing of metal, just wooden slats and wedges fitted into a gap in the channel wall, wedges that

could be lifted up to open the escape in case of a channel break. I was impressed: these escapes could be locally maintained and, if necessary, locally replaced. That's a great deal more than can be said for the thousands of more sophisticated gates installed by irrigation and aid agencies elsewhere in the world.

I turned around and began walking all the way upstream to the channel head. It was a test of my none-too-strong resistance to vertigo, especially when the channel turned away from the Indus and began heading up the tributary Maruk. The path was perhaps two feet across, but the drop was a fatal one at many places, with boiling waters below. I would have turned around, but irrigation channels have a powerful allure, and half an hour later I came to the channel head. It consisted of nothing more than a few rocks placed to shunt water over to the right bank and into a channel which at first was only a few inches above the creek. It was the height of informality.

A few days later I visited a PPI with a very different history. This was at Passu, an hour's drive north of Karimabad. The morning was still cold when I headed upriver at six o'clock through shade-dark canyons dotted with villages, each with its own irrigation channel. Within an hour I was in open-sun Gulmit, and the day was warm. A man was cutting wheat with a sickle; a niece wearing a red machine-made sweater watched him. His English was good; it turned out he was a local schoolteacher, farming part-time. A new suspension bridge crossed the Hunza River here. It was a good one, according to a woman using it. It hung from steel cables, but the floor slats were wood and laid so that one slat was followed by empty space for two. So long as the wind was calm and you had two free hands for the side-rail cables, it was okay.

Passu itself was another half hour up the road and around a good-sized hill. My first view of it came dramatically when, just short of the last curve, I got out and trudged over the ridge that the road encircles. At the top I looked down into a glacial valley with lateral moraines extending upstream to my left to a rocky ice tongue a mile farther upstream. Passu lay to my right; a small place of perhaps 60 families, their homes surrounded by a few hundred acres of land patchily cultivated along the Hunza River.

Such water as Passu got was spread unevenly over a broad terrace, its half-abandoned fields rimmed with stone walls. The village itself seemed mysteriously deserted of all but secretive women and children, who skillfully sequestered themselves among red hollyhocks behind garden gates. Channels ran through the village proper, some of them lined with concrete.

I had come to see Passu's PPI, a new channel almost three miles long. I nearly missed it, however: you have to go a few miles past Passu proper to see the terrace the new channel irrigates, and a few miles farther still to catch the channel at a point handy for walking to its head.

Once again the headworks hardly merited the name, but I grew chilly as I approached them along the rocky, almost lunar desolation of the channel's upper course. The day was hot, though, and I could see no ice ahead. It was only at the very head of the channel that I realized that the pile of boulders ahead was actually the rubbly snout of the Batura Glacier, over which a breeze blew and sent chilly air downstream.

I wanted to return to the area irrigated by the channel, but before doing so I crossed the Hunza River at another AKRSP sign, pointing in this case to a new link road built as the PPI of Shimshal village, which lies some miles upstream. Three or four miles up the road a slide blocked the road. I walked steadily for an hour through a canyon now very hot, the silt-choked river as mocking as if it were salt. Twice there was some relief, once when a clear trickle came in from the side, and once again when the canyon choked down to an almost vertical slit that funneled a cool breeze. Eventually I came to a couple of work sites -- mines I thought. Then I realized that the road upstream disappeared; there was nothing but the roughest of canyons ahead. The "miners" were road crews.

Near the good water along this walk there was a massive boulder on which someone had written an invitation to stay at a guest house in Shimshal. It's ironic, since Shimshal was the traditional penal colony of Hunza. Times change. And how would tourism change Shimshal, once the road was complete and visitors such as me could drive in?

I ask the question because of what I found at Passu. The fields, both old and new, were being cultivated desultorily, for the highway had brought new and easier ways to make money. Passu's village activist had quit working with the AKRSP the year the highway opened. He had opened a hotel.

The heavy guns had been brought in, not only the project's general manager but Akhter Hameed Khan. What happened then is described in the project files. "You have to decide," Khan told the villagers, "whether what Almighty Allah has given you in these mountains is a blessing or a curse." The villagers, he continued, must choose whether or not to develop land "that has sustained generations of your ancestors." Depending on tourists, Khan said, was "false gold," for politics in Pakistan were unstable: the road might be closed as abruptly as it had been opened.

The villagers were unimpressed, and Khan turned punitive. Tell them, he said in Urdu to the translator who was speaking to the villagers in Wakhi, that His Highness, the Aga Khan, is planning a visit to the valley. If the villagers are not more cooperative with the project "we will try our utmost that he doesn't visit Passu." Why should His Highness come, Khan said, "to grieve at what you have done?" The villagers sat stolidly. Khan said: "Tell them the AKRSP extended them its hand of friendship, assisted them in every way, gave them strength,

and loved them, and they spat in our faces." There was no response, and Khan said, "Let us go." The minutes of the meeting state that at this point the "meeting broke up in pandemonium," with one villager "grabbing his shoe to use as a weapon."

Perhaps it was a glimpse of Akhter Hameed Khan's old ICS training. Certainly it contradicts what the Americans thought was the chief lesson of Comilla. The relationship of the AKRSP to the villagers, Khan said on the drive back to Gilgit, should be not social but "like a teacher -- who uses the rod occasionally." Ironically, the AKRSP's own first annual review had reviewed the history of community development in India and criticized the Gurgaon Experiment for its air of "superior wisdom."

Five years had passed from that Passu meeting to the time I came by; five years during which, as the project staff had correctly predicted, the project would stagnate. The new canal brought an enlarged water supply, but it dropped over a bluff and bubbled happily down to a terrace unirrigated since the beginning of time. By now, the terrace ought to have been green and golden: after all, the Passu villagers had gone beyond their PPI and borrowed another \$4,000 for land development, fruit trees, and fertilizer. But there seemed little likelihood that the loans could be repaid from the patchy alfalfa and scattered fruit trees I saw. No one was at work. My own jeep driver was from a village closer to Karimabad, and on the nights I spent there he went home to sleep. Farming wasn't for him either.

With the highway open, in fact, some two-thirds of the Gilgit District's households now rely on nonfarm income, which provides about a quarter of the district's total household income. Those Hunza villagers who *do* farm are changing fast, too. There was a combine working on the wheat fields down in Gilgit, and even in small villages near Karimabad I saw wheat being threshed mechanically. Great clouds of dust were thrown into the air, while off in other fields men were doing the same thing more quietly, with wooden forks. What kind of wheat? For 20 years or so, improved varieties of wheat had been arriving from the lowlands. They hadn't been accepted very quickly, because the new varieties didn't produce as much straw as the old ones but required more fertilizer. The farmers who did adopt the new varieties were those who had off-farm jobs and who found that the rapid growth of the new varieties allowed them to stay at those jobs an extra week.

Rising expectations had come even to Chaprot. On a clear and hot July day I crossed the Hunza River once again, made that incredible cliff-face turn, and headed back through Chalt. The road had reverted from mud to dirt. On the cold days of spring I had not noticed the many spring-houses; now I did, and I wondered what they were for, since channels led both in and out. Why bother with a covered pool? The channels might not run all the time, of course, but was there another reason? Perhaps it was a way of letting the dust in the

glacial meltwater settle before one drank it. Then I noticed the long-handled wooden ladles parked outside the wells. I looked inside and saw wooden churns floating on the water.

This time I stuck my nose through open gates and saw brightly flowering gardens. Rakaposhi's snow, lost in the clouds on my last visit, was brilliant against the blue sky, and the fields below were in knee-high corn. Often the mountain was juxtaposed even more lusciously against rooftops that were covered with apricots.

A mile farther along the road to Chaprot I got out to walk and came upon a man sitting outside his green-porched house. "Salaam aleikum." Picking up on my abominable accent, Malik Akhdar began speaking English. He was a teacher, a college graduate. He said he knew how beautiful Chaprot was; it was famed, he said, for having everything one needed: water, food, wood, and fodder.

That was the theory; the practice was that he would leave if he could. Not that he was poor: he had electricity in his house and, with it, lights and a radio. (As he said this, his old mother sat spinning wool on the porch.) But he also had eight children. The education they could get locally was, in his phrase, "not competitive." Malik wanted his sons to become government officers and said that if he had a choice he would move to Islamabad. His oldest son was already in college in Karachi, but that didn't persuade Malik to stay put. His four other boys still had to make the grade, and he wanted every advantage for them.

His daughters? It was a foolish question to ask, for the whole village of Chaprot is Shia rather than Ismaili. Malik answered simply: "It is against our religion." His daughters, he went on, would leave school at 15 or 16. Later on, with an army officer; I would raise the question of whether Pakistan understood that it was trying to climb the ladder of development with one hand tied behind its back; his answer was yes but that resistance to female emancipation was fading very slowly.

Malik asked for a portrait of himself with his sons, and he insisted on posing with a Victorian solemnity. We wound up with a portrait as grim as lockjaw. I drove farther up the valley, parked at Chaprot, and started walking. There was an intensely blue sky, there was snow at the horizon on all sides, there were rugged hills closer in, often just bare rock. Finally there was the village itself and its creek-hugging swath of cultivated land. It was dotted with stacks of wheat, some still unthreshed. And here, too, were the children with dirty faces, often marked with rashes. I walked for a while behind an old man who labored up a long, steep hill with at least a hundred pounds of lumber roped to his back.

The Aga Khan Foundation was sponsoring the Baltit Heritage Trust, which was restoring the abandoned castle of the mir of Hunza. Next to it, a traditional

Hunza house had been made into a museum, simple but interesting. The foundation had also brought over an American architect with a dozen students; they were working to map the complex pattern of houses surrounding the palace. From there, the architect said, they would fan out to study water supply and sewerage. (The local water was so full of silt that managers of hotels in Karimabad sent the hotel laundry 50 miles to Gilgit.)

The Aga Khan people had enough clout to make things happen. A brick factory was under construction just upstream from Karimabad: Pakistani capital, Chinese labor. The American architect mapping Karimabad was opposed to it -- said that brick houses would collapse in a seismically active area such as Hunza unless they were expensively reinforced. Word had been passed along, and the general manager of the AKRSP had just caught the ear of the prime minister of Pakistan. Work on the brick factory would be stopped.

I asked whether there was not an aesthetic as well as a safety argument to be made against brick, and the architect admitted that he preferred stone to "culturally inappropriate" brick. He, too, had observed the many new buildings going up in Karimabad not of traditional river boulders but of concrete blocks. Commercial buildings even had pull-down steel shutters. Still, the architect asked cuttingly if I had any idea how much more mortar was required by a building built of boulders than by one of rectangular blocks. And had I noticed how steep the streets here were, and how far down it was to the river? Did I think that in the villagers' place I would choose rock if a more convenient material was available?

What then, I asked, was both practical and beautiful? The architect suggested I look at the nearby Aga Khan Academy. This was a new girls' school made of concrete blocks whose ingredients were the natural color of the hillsides; its roof, though of corrugated sheet metal, had been painted the same shade of brown. The windows had a pointed arches at the top; even the wall around the school grounds had been beveled to soften its edge. This was in extraordinary contrast with my hotel, which was painted white and which had a shiny metal roof that winked from miles away. The architect argued that the school was not only appropriate but would slowly be copied by villagers building houses--copied, that is, except for the windows, which were too expensive.

He was right. A day later I came down an almost impossibly steep jeep trail and saw a house that looked very much like the academy. I stopped and found someone who said that the owner was a shopkeeper: I could find him down on the highway. It wasn't so easy, what with false leads to friendly and crowded shops where I was unable to make myself understood. An hour later, however, I did meet up with the owner, Khisro Khan, a middle-school teacher spending his vacation in a stationery shop that he had set up cooperatively with a dozen other teachers.

I told him that I was interested in his house, and he said that it had been built by his brother, who had indeed worked on the academy but who had now left Hunza for better paying work elsewhere. Sure enough, the windows were rectangular, and to save more money the metal roof had been replaced by wood.

But the natural-color concrete block was there, and the house blended into the countryside far better than any other new building I saw in Hunza. I couldn't help asking whether conditions in Hunza were better or worse now that the highway was open and plenty of tourists were coming through. "Better," Khan said without hesitation. Why? Before, he said, there had been nothing to buy.

I began to wonder if the Aga Khan Foundation's concern about cultural preservation might extend from architecture to rural landscapes. Might the builder of Hanuchal Channel have had an eye for the beauty of these places, as well as for their economies? Alas, the AKRSP engineer I talked with said that design decisions were driven solely by cost. He himself was equally proud of a PPI consisting of an electric pump that lifted water up to a bench. In fact, he gave me some directions to a place called Soni-Kot, whose traditional water supply had now been diverted to supply domestic water to Gilgit. The pumping station, when I found it, consisted of a depressingly utilitarian setup, with two electric motors driving pumps. They pushed water through an eight-inch iron pipe stuck in the Gilgit River; the pipe ran through a crude pump house and, at about breast-height, continued some two or three hundred yards uphill, until it discharged into a rectangular pond rimmed with concrete.

Discouraged, I went some six miles west of Gilgit to Kargah, famous for its stone figure of the Buddha, which was carved on a cliff face some 1,300 years ago. An old irrigation channel took off nearby and ran for several miles along the ridge south of Gilgit town -- ran on such a precise gradient that from Gilgit it looked like a geological intrusion.

The weather had turned around: heavy clouds now replaced four or five brilliantly blue July days. The rain didn't start until I was well away from the jeep; I huddled next to a tree and stayed dry for a while. The rain grew heavier, and I got wet. But when the shower had passed, my shirt dried quickly. On the uphill side of the channel there was only broken rock, scree smooth as formica. On the downhill side, irrigated fields stretched to the valley floor. From a distance, the contour-hugging canal looked like a coastline, with foamy green waters lapping a desert shore.

Just below that coastline there were homes with stone walls and wooden gates hiding fruit trees and flowers. At one point, the channel ran right past such a gate; the residents could not help hearing the gurgling. Fifty yards downstream the channel parted, then came together again. It puzzled me until I saw the drop, saw the hut, saw the race in the current. Sensible for people who were

several hours' walk from Gilgit: another mill, just like those of the North West Frontier Province and Eastern Jumna Canal.

I passed a half-dozen people. I felt that even if I could speak their language I could never make them see how much they stood to lose.

*Revised 2004 but not updated from Chapter 8 of *Losing Asia, Modernization and the Culture of Development*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.