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*Asia Pacific: Perspectives*  
Center for the Pacific Rim  
2130 Fulton St  
San Francisco, CA  
94117-1080

Tel: (415) 422-6357  
Fax: (415) 422-5933  
perspectives@usfca.edu

# Asia Pacific:

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*Asia Pacific: Perspectives* is a peer-reviewed journal published at least once a year, usually in April/May. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities with relevance to the Asia Pacific region.\* In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

Our task is to inform public opinion by a broad hospitality to divergent views and ideas that promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the dissemination of knowledge unreservedly. Papers adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary approach will be especially welcome. **Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit their work for consideration.**

\* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

## Gathering Reactions on the Mumbai Attacks, India's '9/11' on November 26th, 2008

By Lotika Gulvadi, M.S.

(Editors Note: The following commentary by an Indian citizen living in the San Francisco Bay Area is representative of the deeply personal feelings held by many Indians after the Mumbai attacks. It was solicited by one of the editors of Asia Pacific: Perspectives in order to provide a non-academic and subjective reflection about a local incident with regional and global repercussions. The views of the author are hers alone, as is the title of the piece.)

It's difficult to reflect on such a great tragedy. As I try to gather my thoughts, I have also reached out to a few friends to contribute and share their feelings on the Mumbai attacks that started on November 26th, 2008 and held the historic Indian city, its people, and its soul hostage for four long days.

Typical of the day before Thanksgiving holidays in America, the office where I work was abuzz with talks of dinner menus and family traditions. Contently buried in my Master's in Marketing coursework at Golden Gate University in downtown San Francisco California, I was anxiously looking forward to the four-day holiday break. It was when my friend, Nitin, asked me to "check the news and call home" that everything came to a crashing halt. My first reaction was to call my mother's family living in Mumbai, frantically trying to reach the younger cousins and relatives who I knew would be out at night with their friends. Though not from Mumbai myself and having lived abroad for five years, it is still hard to be detached when people from your country are attacked and precious lives are lost. I could not help but feel their pain, many time zones away.

During those tortuous four days and in many days after, I reached out to fellow Indian friends here in San Francisco for emotional support and to try and make sense of this nightmare. Everyone we spoke to in India and abroad were confused about the motive behind this slaughter and were filled with pain and tears. It was chilling to see images more appropriate for horrifying terror movies come to reality. Bollywood movies have for a long time focused on strained relationships between India and Pakistan. Some western movies too show brutal killings by terrorists. Watching videos and narratives of how the terror operations were carried out, as well as listening to the rescued people from the hotel tell their story, reminded me of something I would see in a movie but could not imagine happening in real life. Even harder to believe was that human beings were capable of such atrocities. I kept asking, "What kind of person could kill a pregnant woman"? With the global media giving detailed, sometimes gory, up-to-date information with graphic pictures and rich details, I could not help but break down in

tears and frustration.

One of my close friends told me:

"My first reaction was a feeling of outrage that a terrorist attack happened again in my country. I couldn't take my eyes off the online news channels for the next couple of days as the drama unfolded. Watching the loss of innocent lives and the pain of the victims' relatives was heart-rending. I was looking for some retribution from the Government and was angered that no immediate action was being taken."

Nitin Ramamurthy, San Francisco, California, USA.

I left for India right after Thanksgiving to spend Christmas and New Year's with my family in Chennai (formerly Madras), on the southeastern coast of India. Mumbai, (formerly Bombay), is located on the western side of the sub-continent facing the Arabian Sea. As I landed in Chennai I could feel that there was gloom and despair all around though we were geographically thousands of kilometers away from Mumbai. Not surprisingly, December, a month usually marked with colorful multi-ethnic celebrations and festivities, was now a period of sad mourning for the whole country as citizens tried to brace themselves to the reality of what had just happened. Out of respect and as a sign of our solidarity in tough times, people all over India, including hotels and some restaurants, cancelled Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations as we remembered every one of those people, both adults and young children, who lost their lives in vain.

The Mumbai incident sparked many strong feelings within the youth of India as people finally woke up to the fact that despite India progressing at a rapid growth rate and so much hooked into globalization, we still have a dysfunctional political and security system. It seems that this lack of leadership and foresight from politicians and bureaucrats cost many lives. According to reports that followed on NDTV News and IBNlive.com, the Indian government had been warned previously that attacks of this nature are likely to occur. Unfortunately, national, provincial, and municipal authorities did not take this security threat seriously and thus resulted in the tragedy that the world witnessed in great detail.

Lauding the resilience of Mumbaiites is no longer justified; people have no choice but to go on with their lives. Nearly eight months after the attacks, nothing has been fully resolved. I still read in the internet news and watch on TV of the drawn out trial of the one terrorist that was captured and the unending dialogue between India and Pakistan that is leaving many Indian citizens both in India and abroad restless and increasingly impatient. Pakistani citizens are also in the doldrums. Political tensions between India and Pakistan go back more than fifty years, ever since they have been fighting over the ownership of Kashmir. Despite evidence and statements from the captured terrorist, Pakistan still denies that these operations were conceived and carried out by terror groups in Pakistan. They have also not taken any action or been proactive about cracking down on terror groups in Pakistan. (Editor's note: this account was written before the extensive autumn 2009 Pakistan military campaign against insurgents in the remote tribal regions).

As I end this reflection, I am including thoughts from a friend who was in Mumbai at that time...

"There were two sights that are irreversibly etched in my memory and will remain with me for the rest of my life....That of the Taj Mahal with its domes on fire.... I just couldn't help but think....'My baby sister could have been one of the several victims who were shot!'

"The second was the old man old man being rescued from Nariman Bhavan after over two days of being held hostage by the terrorists. The sight of the old man with his bag and a walking stick made me wonder what he had done to deserve this in the last few years of his life!

"Even talking about that dreadful four day period today, a full eight months after the attacks, brings tears to my eyes... thinking of the innocent lives that were lost, the trauma that the people of Mumbai went through, and the permanent damage that was caused to the Taj Mahal, one of the foremost symbols of Mumbai.

"The very day that the Taj re-opened its doors for guests....my family was there to support the heritage site that we all love so much. What we saw in the Taj evoked in us a sense of pride in Mumbai and its residents..The restaurants were all packed to capacity in collective support for the structure that had borne so much just a few days ago and the strong defiance against terrorism in the hearts and minds of the Mumbaiites."

Janhavi Kandalgaonkar, Mumbai, India

**Lotika Gulvadi**, an international student from Chennai, India, just completed her Master's degree in Marketing from Golden Gate University. Lotika started writing brief articles and journals while completing her Bachelor's degree in English Literature in India and since her time at Golden Gate University, has been contributing frequently to newsletters and reviews for the San Francisco American Marketing Association.