From the Publisher:

 INDIA!

The printed word has revealed to us the depths, the passions, and the strengths of India in the works of Tagore, RadhaKrishnan, Nehru, and many others. But the enormity of India's sights and sounds eludes the printed page, and even masterworks reach only relatively small numbers of readers. Novelists, Indian and British, have given us glimpses of the way some Indians act and think, but upon them, too, the print medium lays its constraints.

Cinema, big in its visual comprehensiveness and its audiences, is the medium that can, in its great moments, encompass and translate for us the Indian reality. To story line and dialogue it quietly adds all the unspoken values of setting, costume, color, gesture, and custom—the world, in sum, in which the characters act.

But filming India is difficult. Jean Renoir came close—without complete success—to mirroring Indian reality in his lovely film The River. And although Louis Malle's documentary on Calcutta for the BBC was honestly intended, it focused too narrowly on one particular tile of the enormous Indian mosaic. Foreign audiences, lacking knowledge of India, made inaccurate generalizations, and anguish and fury exploded in New Delhi.

Satyajit Ray, whom ASIA honors in this issue along with his motherland, India, combines the art of cinema with great human understanding. His work, with its probing insights into the essence of Indian life and the souls of its men and women, has rendered that country understandable to millions around the world. Influenced by his genius and his vision, a new generation of Indian film makers has arisen.

In June June The Asia Society, ASIA's parent, together with the Museum of Modern Art and the Indian Directorate of Film Festivals, launched in New York an unprecedented "Film India" festival that will eventually travel to many American cities. At its center is a complete retrospective of Mr. Ray's work.

And at the center of the retrospective is Mr. Ray himself. Welcome, Mr. Ray.

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

In the article on Afghanistan's Kabul Museum [ASIA March/April 1981], it is stated that the museum's art treasures were "carted off to an unknown destination," a rumor oft repeated. I should like to share with you a participant's account of the museum's move by an eyewitness observer, Carla Grissmann, adviser to the Kabul Museum, in a letter to me dated June 9, 1979.

"There had been talk for several months about moving the museum to the People's House between 1884-1973; the Presidential Palace from 1973-1978 [N.H.D.]. This filled us with horror. Then, on April 18, 1979, someone from the Ministry of Defense called Mr. Aziz (the museum director) and said, 'MOVE.' It was not an order, it was a command. I attended Wednesday morning quite happily as usual, saw tons of a bucket brigade carrying out bits of wood and scuffy pieces of carpeting. Still unsuspecting, I went into my office. EMPTY. To make a long story short, Mr. Aziz had gone out the afternoon before, rounded up as many museum staff as he could, and they worked until 10:30 that night beginning the demolition. I look back on it all as a total nightmare, interspersed with high humor.

'It took them exactly three weeks to pack up and move out, although they had been told to do it in three days! Most of the museum staff stayed all night—sleeping on the cement floor of the ethnographic room rolled up in curtains to keep warm. They worked like slaves, half of them coming down with colds and dust allergies, despite the cloths they wound over their faces and the lemons they were constantly eating.

"Everything was moved into Naim's house, which now looks like the biggest junkyard in the world. Some of the upstairs windows of the house are blown out and the facade is patterned with machine gun bullet holes from the year before. [Prince Naim, President Daoud's brother, was shot with the president on April 28, 1978; he lived next door to the French Embassy, close to the People's House-N.H.D.]

"As far as the objects are concerned— I don't know the extent of damage, but they did their best, and that's God's truth. Amidst chaos and madness of the situation they sincerely tried to pack things with care and tried to maintain some order—although this was almost hopeless. The older staff had to struggle with the 'new boys' assigned to the museum after the first coup—these young boys, most of whom are from the provinces (one had never seen a telephone before). We looked at some [second century Kushan-N.H.D.] potholders from Sutha Kotai, for instance, and say: 'What are all these broken pieces? Throw them in the river!'

"So, here we are. All the objects are crammed in the rooms upstairs and downstairs in the hallways, in the garages, in the front driveway and out in the back. The tahwilars (storekeepers) and guards are packed in the small greenhouse and the staff is packed into the servants' quarters. The courtyard, part of the garden, and all the area around the house [are] strewn with broken showcases, shelves, rusting coin cases, boxes, pedestals, and office furniture—everything piled higgledy-piggledy in a jagged jungle of chaos. The museum seems to have vanished on some distant horizon.

"They say we shall move as soon as the Khao-i-Khalij [People's House] is liberated. . .

In the meantime we gather every morning at Naim's house. Nobody as yet has anything to do. . . Mullah Yaqub [the senior tahwil- dar-N.H.D.]. wanders through the destruction murmuring to himself, peering into broken showcases looking for 'his things.' He still has not quite understood what has happened . . .

Also deserving comment is the careful concern afforded the amazing golden hoard jointly excavated from Tillye-tepe (Golden Hill) by the internationally respected Russian archaeologist Professor Victor Ivanovich Sarpanidze and Dr. Zemaryalai Tarzi, then director of the Afghan Institute of Archaeology. Dr. Sarapandidze displayed some of the finest examples from the hoard at an international conference on Kushan studies held in Kabul from November 15-21, 1978, well before the Time announcement appeared (July 2, 1979). These specimens were seen and examined by Italian, French, British, and American scholars, among others. Later, when he delivered the 20,000-old gold artifacts to the museum in January 1979, Dr. Sarapandidze described the finds at length emphasizing their importance.

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in illuminating Afghanistan's rich cultural past. This interview was published in the local Kabul newspapers, such as *The Kabul Times*, January 23, 1979, pp. 1. Subsequently, worldwide publicity was given to the unique discovery through Dr. Sarianidt's learned articles listed in Professor Taddel's letter [below], to which may be added the French journal *Archaeologia*, no. 135 (1979), pp. 18-27. In addition, Habib A'zami, writing in Persian in Kabul's *Afghanistan Archeological Review*, states that 21,818 gold objects were recovered from the excavations.

Certainly, it is more than unkind to even infer that the Russian archaeologists attempted to keep the finds secret. Nor is it charitable to suggest that the museum staff was negligent in its charge of the hoard. In January 1979 a senior curator worked for eight days, under police guard, measuring and numbering each object. The pieces were then placed in boxes and handed over to the care of Mullah Yaqub, the oldest, most competent and reliable tahwidar. After the move, during the summer of 1979, each object was sketched and photographed, again under police guard and, more strictly, for he was personally accountable for each piece. Under the eagle eye of Mullah Yaqub, to whom the objects were registered, one by one, on fiches, each with its own photograph. A copy of this book of photographs also resides at the office of the French archaeological mission, the *Délegation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan* (DAFA), which has been working in Afghanistan since September 1922. French and British experts in Kabul today emphasize that they are "absolutely convinced that the treasure is intact."

The appearance of similar pieces for sale in Kabul's antique shops, however, gave rise to another rumor that the excavated Tillya-tepe artifacts were being systematically stolen from the museum. Ironically, one of the first reports of alleged thefts came from *Ivestroja*, which accused the Americans of the crime.

It would seem, rather, that villagers continue to find odd pieces— or who knows, perhaps another hoard awaits discovery. My husband and I saw, and photographed, objects of comparable style and artistry, probably from the same period, as early as the summer of 1977, well before Dr. Sarianidt's stunning find in 1978, and before the April 1978 coup d'état. In addition, of the seven graves found, only six were excavated (Sarianidt, *American Journal of Archaeology*, April 1980, 84:2, 125). News of the fabulous finds has probably tempted illegal local excavators. Possibly workmen at the site had sticky fingers.

International concern for the safety of the museum artifacts was expressed early. In November 1979 Monseur Jacques Hardouin, representing UNESCO, submitted a proposal. The Afghan government of Babak Karmal addressed itself to the plight of the museum soon after it was installed in the wake of the Soviet invasion of December 24, 1979.

No inverte can match that which the Babak regime heaped upon Hafizullah Amin, prime minister at the time of the museum's great move. A statement issued by the Ministry of Information and Culture on February 10, 1980, states in part—a very minuscule part—that "the blood-thirsty Amiens has stepped further to plunder and in a barbaric and fascist manner wipe out national historical relics in a way unprecedented in the darkest eras of human history." (*Kabul New Times*, February 10, 1980, p. 1.) In an attempt to rectify the situation, on March 1, 1980, the Council of Ministers appointed a commission of surviving well-known Afghan scholars to assess the losses and damage, and catalogue and photograph the entire collection preparatory to its transfer back to the museum. The commission commenced its work on March 16 with the distinguished historian Professor Abdul Hai Habibi acting as president. The commission remains active today. Museum staff continue to register and make inventories of the reserve collections, which still remain at Naim's house.

Then, on October 13, 1980, the National Museum of Afghanistan reopened in its former building after "two months of hard work," according to one curator. Franz Grenier of DAFA attended the opening ceremonies and reported favorably, saying that the interior sparkled with a fresh coat of paint and the objects did not seem to have suffered unduly.

The museum was opened by Mr. Sultan Ali Khestmand, member of the Politburo and minister of planning. In his opening address to himself and the government of Babrak Karmal and minister of planning, in his opening address to himself and the government of Babrak Karmal, Mr. Khestmand said: "This interview with Mr. T. Tillya-tepe century) was expressed early. Among seven noted missing artifacts, the Tillya-tepe glasses, gold repousse elephant masks that once formed tiny spouts for a now lost glass vessel. The former part of the Bagram collection. To personal knowledge, for I was in Kabul at the time, these were stolen from a display case November 28, 1978."

Exhibits of new finds since the publication of the guide are also mentioned in the report from MacMakin and Pinder-Wilson, such as: "the Delbarjin Room with some 20 to 30 paintings (fourth to fifth century—N.H.D. (which was) a complete and stunning surprise and "the new astonishingly beautiful white marble Sun God which Soviet soldiers turn up accidentally with their tanks at Khar Khai (on the outskirts of Kabul—N.H.D.) Eve to his sensuous moustache he seems perfect itself."

The Delbarjin exhibits occupy the former Ethnographic Room, in the heart of the museum, which once contained the fascinating Nirisani wood carvings (listed as absent in the present display). These are still being kept at Naim's house awaiting the opening of a separate ethnographic museum that is planned according to current rumor, to be set up next to the center of Kabul.

It is unfortunately true that the site museum at Hadda has been badly damaged. This has been confirmed by Dr. Willi Steul, a German journalist friend, who was flown, with 11 other European journalists, to Hadda in the last week of March 1981. The Afghan government officials accompanying them reported that the damage had been inflicted by the mujahideen (freedom fighters). The ruins are, therefore, not now being purposely exhibited by the current regime to discredit the mujahideen. Mujahideen friends in Peshawar told us a different story about a year ago. They said that some of their companions attempting to escape from government troops sought cover in the museum. The troops opened fire, and the roo caught fire and crashed.

Still another version credits dissident local villagers with the destruction, because it is an Afghan government excavation site. Damage to the glazing protecting the sculpture in the outer court occurred in March of last year when a group of archaeologists from the Afghan Institute of Archaeology were finishing up their season of excavations. Later, the window roof over the main wazir was set ablaze under undetermined circumstances. Resident archaeologists believe, however, that some of the beautiful highly fragile, clay sculpture may remain
We are no more in the times of Napoleon or Goering and a real danger for the cultural properties of "developing" countries is represented more by peaceful antique dealers than by foreign armies.

Western European colleagues who are at present based in Kabul have written to me that nothing seems to be missing from the Kabul Museum collections, though it is quite possible, I would say almost unavoidable, that some of the pieces underwent those damages that are usually caused by a hurried removal. A committee is also at work to assess the damage, arrange a new display, catalogue, etc.

The story of the precious metal objects discovered by the Afghan-Soviet Mission at Tillya Tepe in 1978 which then disappeared (i.e., were stolen and taken to the Soviet Union) is so funny that I wonder who could ever concoct it and hope it to be taken seriously. Actually the very first gold pieces discovered at Tillya Tepe were shown two days later by Viktor Ivanovich Sarianidi to Afghan and foreign colleagues (including myself) at the International Conference on Kushan Studies held in Kabul in November 1978. There is no ground for doubting that all the objects from Tillya Tepe either are already in the Kabul Museum or will be placed there in due time.

The find was never kept secret and Ms. Klass, instead of hunting for confidential pieces of information through Time's Moscow bureau, could have easily read Sarianidi's first reports published in several languages and in such scientific journals as Vestnik Akademii Nauk SSSR (Moscow 1979, in Russian), Afghanistan Journal (Graz 1979, in German), Archaeology (New York 1980, in English), American Journal of Archaeology (New York 1980, in English), Das Altertum (Berlin 1980, in German), Mesopotamia (Turin 1980, in Italian), etc. M. Paul Bernard, the French archaeologist, was also able to see some of the objects in the Kabul Museum, as he states in his article published in the Journal des Savants, October-December 1979.

Lastly, I take pleasure in informing you that the excavations of the Italian Archaelogical Mission at Ghazni underwent no damage from shelling or other military activity. The Italian Mission is regularly sending money for the routine maintenance of the ruins and storehouse.

Prof. Maurizio Taddei
Director, Italian Archaeological Mission to Afghanistan

Erratum

In the article entitled "Calcutta's Long Dig," which appeared in the May/June 1981 issue of ASIA, it was stated that Calcutta's subway was planned for a 10-mile stretch between Dum Dum Airport and Tollyganj. Actually, it is planned to run between Tollyganj and Dum Dum Railway Station.
Missing in Action: Treasures of Afghanistan

Out of an embattled country leaks a tragic story about the plunder and destruction of some of the world’s rarest art

by Rosanne Klass

Some months ago I sat in the coffee shop of the Holiday Inn in Islamabad, Pakistan, with three members of Afghanistan’s foreign community and heard an extraordinary story. In April 1979 the entire contents of the Kabul Museum vanished. Soldiers of the Soviet-backed Taraki-Amin regime, which had seized power by a military coup in 1978, simply crated everything up and carted it off to an unknown destination.

To understand the enormity of the theft, one must know that the museum contained some of the rarest treasures of Asian art, which archaeologists had been systematically uncovering in Afghanistan since World War I. This may surprise many for whom the name “Afghanistan” conjures up the image of turbaned tribesmen leading a string of camels across a barren mountainous landscape. But for thousands of years before Magellan opened the sea lanes from Europe to Asia, the country was one of the most important centers of civilization in the world, the crossroads of the great overland paths of commerce and conquest between East and West. Here cultures mingled and new ideas arose, spreading out to influence the art and thought of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and the West. Afghanistan’s glorious Herat can even claim the distinction—one shared with Athens—of being designated by UNESCO at its 1975-76 conference an international cultural city subject to preservationist concern and aid.

If the human cost of the Soviet-backed takeover and subsequent Soviet invasion is at least partly visible in the news columns of the world press, the loss and destruction of an important part of this cultural heritage have gone almost entirely unnoticed. The Kabul Museum is only one of many losses up to now, and more are likely to follow.

A number of important archaeological sites around the country have been damaged in the continued fighting—some intentionally, some incidentally. Because foreign journalists (continued on page 30)
and observers have not been allowed into Afghanistan since the early months of 1980. However, information on the condition of these sites is incomplete. Only sporadically does some word leak out.

Particularly distressing are reports about the fate of Hadda, the site of a great artistic center of the Greco-Buddhist period (second century B.C. to seventh century A.D.) that followed the invasion of Alexander the Great in 329 B.C. Alexander built cities and left behind the Seleucid Greek satrapies in Bactria and Gandhara that so influenced the development of Buddhist art. The earliest images of the Buddha, which wedded Western form to Eastern content, were created in the kingdom of Gandhara.

Hadda, a Gandharan city located near modern Jalalabad, was for centuries one of the most sacred shrines of the Buddhist world, a magnet for pilgrims from all over Asia. The Buddha himself had visited there in his lifetime, performing miracles and leaving behind sacred relics. Here were discovered the heads of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and demons—mostly made of a thin layer of stucco shaped over a clay core—that bear a startling resemblance not only to the Apollos and Floras of Greece and Rome but to the sculpture on the 13th-century cathedrals of Reims, Amiens, and Notre Dame de Paris, with which they share common roots.

Over a period of centuries, the almost purely Greek and Roman forms of Gandharan sculpture gradually evolved into completely Asian ones under the influence of Gupta India, Sassanian Iran, and Han China.

From the 1920’s on, excavation had continued among the nearly 1,000 stupas and monasteries at Hadda, and such quantities of sculpture, frescoes, and other art were uncovered that a museum was built there to house them. In more recent digs like the Tepe-i-Shotor stupa complex, the splendid monumental sculpture and other art was restored and left in place. Much yet remained to be explored.

According to an Afghan who recently visited there, Hadda was...
bombed last year by Russian forces who suspected that resistance groups in the Jalalabad area were operating near it. The museum, stupas, and entire site were reduced to rubble.

Also apparently threatened are the two colossal Buddhas, 125 and 175 feet high, of the Bamian Valley, which was, like Hadda, one of the great pilgrimage centers of Buddhism for 500 years from the second to the seventh century A.D. Although they appear to be carved from the mountainside, the Buddhas are actually stucco over an armature and clay base, as are the surviving frescoes that once covered their domed niches; and the mountainside behind them is honeycombed with monastic cells and passageways.

The valley has been a center of stubborn resistance to the Communist takeover since 1978, and there has been some bombing in the area.

Treasures unearthed from Kushan palace in Bagram, buried in the 3d century, became the crowning centerpiece of the Kabul Museum:

Among them was a Roman glass bottle laced with glass (right) and the exquisitely engraved top of an ivory coffer from India (below).
every quarter of the ancient world. These finds became the centerpiece of the Kabul Museum collection.

There is no reliable word on the proximity of Soviet installations to Bagram's palace sites—or whether those sites now lie under tarmac runways and tank parks. But one can hardly expect the preservation of antiquities to rank high on the list of military priorities.

Later Islamic sites such as Ghazni are equally endangered. In the early 11th century the ruler Mahmud, who spread Islam across northern India through conquest, made Ghazni his imperial capital, transforming it into a city of carved marble and star-shaped minarets to rival Baghdad. Artists and poets of the Muslim world flocked to the city for Mahmud's patronage.

Excavations in the 1960's unearthed splendidly wrought metal vessels, lustreware pottery and tile, and fragments of carved marble; and a museum was built there a few years ago to house Islamic antiquities. Over the past 18 months, however, news reports have repeatedly told of heavy fighting in Ghazni between mutinous Afghan troops and Soviet armor, tanks, and bombers. The condition of the antiquities and monuments is unknown.

In the 15th century Tamerlane's descendants, the Timurid dynasty, built gorgeous tiled monuments in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif. There has been comparatively little fighting so far around Mazar-i-Sharif (headquarters of the Soviet general staff), where the shimmering sky-blue dome of the Shrine of Hazrat Ali still floats above the city rooftops like a bit of the heavens brought within reach.

But Herat has been since early 1979 the scene of repeated, and bloody, uprisings, ferociously put down. In the fall of 1980, moreover, news services reported attacks on the city with war planes and heavy artillery. All this has occurred in the neighborhood of the magnificent Great Mosque and Musalla complexes called by Lord Byron "the most beautiful example in colour in architecture ever devised by man to the glory of his God and himself."

One of two giant Buddhas of the Bamiyan Valley, a magnet for 2d- to 7th-century pilgrims, is still awesome despite fragility.
No detailed information is available, but it is feared that these and other monuments, which led UNESCO to rank Herat with Athens, may not have remained unscathed. And this is the fate of only the most famous of the known treasures in a land where every footstep may tread on others still unknown and unseen—but not impervious to bombs and land mines. Some scholars suspect that Afghanistan was the birthplace of the Bronze Age and, certainly, the oldest piece of stone sculpture yet found in Asia, carbon-dated to 20,000 B.C., was found there.

When the extraordinary number of archaeological finds had made it clear that Afghanistan was a veritable treasure house, the Afghan government began to take action to guard its wealth. From the 1960's on, objects could be removed only with special permission and then only temporarily for study. All finds were claimed as the property of the Afghan people and had to be returned to Afghanistan. By the 1970's the Ministry of Information and Culture had developed a detailed plan for uncovering and preserving the country's treasures. Unfortunately, that plan now seems no more than a pipe dream.

Where the Soviet invaders have shown an interest in antiquities, it is highly unlikely that Afghans will be the beneficiaries of their concern. In 1979, Time magazine learned that the previous year Soviet archaeologists digging at Tillya Tepe, which is near Shibarghan in northern Afghanistan, had struck a spectacular double find rivaling King Tut's tomb both in golden magnificence and historical importance. After uncovering a temple, possibly Aryan, dating to 1000 B.C., they found nearby a group of first-century Bactrian royal graves filled with gold. In their first season of excavation, the Russians had already uncovered more than 20,000 beautifully wrought pieces of jewelry, bowls, coins, figurines, and other gold objects, some of them weighing as much as two pounds, and more graves remained to be explored. The unique mingling of artistic styles promised to make the objects the key to a lost chapter of history.

Time's Moscow bureau was able to confirm the find and get a few details and photographs but could not find out where the treasures were being kept before the Soviet archaeologists suddenly refused to talk further. According to Afghan law, they should have been taken to Kabul, but former Afghan officials say that the treasures were never seen there, or even heard of, except for the story that appeared in Time. They suspect that
the dazzling Shibarghan hoard has been added to the famous collection of Scythian gold in the Hermitage Museum.

And what has become of the magnificent treasures of the Kabul Museum, which had served since 1922 as the chief repository for archaeological finds unearthed throughout the country? The collection contained hundreds of Gandharan sculptures and frescoes from Hadda and Bamiyan. These culminated in some of the most sophisticated mannerist art ever created: the brilliant frescoes and polychromed figures of lightly baked clay discovered near the village of Fondukistan that depict the celestial joys of paradise in a singularly elegant style—elongated and sinuous, mingling utter serenity with a delicate sensuality—comparable only to the paintings of Ajanta in India.

The museum also possessed a nearly equaled collection of ancient coinage of the Seleucid Greek kingdoms, widely considered to be the most beautiful ever minted, along with that of the Kushan, Persian, Parthian, Scythian, Hindu, and Muslim rulers who followed them. Artifacts from the excavations at Ghazni and other Islamic sites swelled the museum's extensive Islamic collection of Mughal and Persian miniature paintings and calligraphy.

The prehistoric collection had also been growing, particularly after the adoption of laws that prohibited foreign expeditions from taking home a portion of their finds. In addition to numerous Bronze Age and Neolithic objects dating from 3000 B.C., there was an increasing number of earlier objects, including the unique smooth stone into which human features were incised over 20,000 years ago.

But the crowning glories of the Kabul Museum were the fabulous ancient pieces hidden in the Kushan palace at Bagram in the third century. These included lacquer from China and from the Mediterranean world, vessels of porphyry and alabaster, bronze figurines (such as a unique hybrid Serapis-Hercules), and Alexandrian glass—bowls and bottles cups and dolphin-shaped perfume flasks, painted, carved, millefiori decorated with glass ribbons—the finest examples of Roman glass yet discovered. There were 30 plaster reliefs cast from Greek originals the world has since lost.

Above all, there were many exquisitely engraved and carved ivory plaques and figurines from India, saved by burial from the air and moisture that have destroyed most ancient ivories. There were thin, fragile, ornately carved sheets of ivory that had covered the surfaces of thrones and jewel caskets—some of them masterpieces from Mathura, the southern capital of the Kushans in India, and others unparalleled in Indian sculpture and suggesting a lost school of Indian painting.

In accordance with Afghan law in the late 1930's, the French archeological team did take a few examples of the Bagram discoveries for the Musée Guimet in Paris, as they had
earlier taken examples of art from Hadda and other sites. But the great bulk of the Bagram treasures, like those from other digs, were installed permanently in the Kabul Museum, too delicate to risk being sent abroad for display. (Even such institutions as the Louvre and the British Museum were unable to persuade the Afghans to allow the fragile art to travel. In 1966, however, in a special gesture of friendship for The Asia Society, the king permitted a few of the ivory and glass objects to be shown at Asia House in New York and at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.)

Afghan and foreign observers in Kabul were therefore horrified when, on that spring day in 1979, soldiers of the new Communist regime unexpectedly arrived at the museum, took it over, and began dumping its collection into ordinary wooden crates, supervised by officers whose only interest was to hustle the job.

"Dumped" is the word used by those who saw it happen and told me about it a few months later in Pakistan. Jumbled into the rough crates went some of the most important, most magnificent, and most fragile treasures of Asian art, only recently resurrected from millennia of secret slumber in the Afghan earth.

In 1965, in the museum offices, I had listened to American and Afghan experts debate for hours the best way to pack a single piece for shipment to Asia House. It took only five days for the soldiers to strip the whole museum and box it up. When they were done, the crates were hauled outside into a courtyard and left to stand there, unattended, for nearly a week in the heavy spring rains. Then trucks pulled up, the crates were loaded aboard, the trucks drove off—and the Kabul Museum disappeared.

In the following months tourists, journalists, and others who wanted to visit the museum were told by the Afghan Government Tourist Office that its contents had been transferred to the newly named "House of the People," the former palace of the deposed king, and they were directed to go there. When they did, they found the doors locked. Afghans and members of the foreign colony who have left Kabul say that the "House of the People" was never open, and that there was never even a rumor, let alone an announcement, about the museum collection having been moved there.

Afghans who were high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Culture before the 1978 Communist coup and are now living abroad were unable to shed any light on the fate of the museum art. Immediately after the coup, they told me, every ministry—including the offices of President Taraki and Prime Minister Amin—was filled with hundreds of Soviet "advisers" who thereafter made all policy decisions, ordering the new Afghan officials nominally in (continued on page 52)
is no trace of the seasoned celebrity about her, no feeling of effects being artfully contrived. She speaks frankly but hesitantly, choosing her words with care, and without seeming overly modest takes pains to emphasize the cooperative nature of the Klong Toey school. She has, too, an innate refinement that comes as a surprise to some people. A reporter who covered one of her speaking engagements in southern Thailand wrote, “I now feel ashamed, but I must confess I was looking out for mistakes the girl would make, anything that would reveal her background, but I could find nothing that would speak against her. There was never too loud a laugh or the tiniest rude word.”

Beneficial as it has been for the people of Klong Toey, Prateep’s example has not resulted in any notable 
official moves to help the slum people in general. Eviction notices are still given, convenient fires still break out, and education and health services are still nonexistent for the great majority. Moreover, little has been done to stem the rural migration that still brings an estimated 100,000 newcomers a year, swelling the current slums and creating new ones.

Yet viewed from another angle, the situation has changed since the early 1970’s. and much of the credit must go to “the plain girl who grew up in the slum.” Because of her, there has been a subtle but significant change in public attitudes, and the slum people, if they still face desperate problems, can no longer be accurately described as inhabiting “an unrecognized country.”

Marshall B. Clinard, who has conducted slum development projects in India, has observed that “Improvement in slum living conditions cannot be achieved in a largely apathetic collection of individuals; its people themselves [must] desire change and [be] prepared to exercise their own initiative in planning and carrying out projects that meet their own needs.”

Prateep has carried out such a project and shown that it can be done, without official assistance—indeed, against official opposition. In doing so, she has brought a new sense of hope to Klong Toey and similar areas, along with the knowledge that a public airing of their grievances can produce positive results. The past few years have seen half a dozen demonstrations by squatters threatened with eviction, all prominently reported in the press and most resulting in some sort of compromise.

Politicians as well as social workers have also been more visible in the squalid alleyways. Recently, for example, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulamonda made a surprise visit to five of Bangkok’s major slums to get what the press called “a firsthand look at the living conditions.” Many of the residents took the opportunity to tell him some of their problems, among them one group that met in Prateep’s schoolyard.

A 1972 study for UNICEF stated that for years Klong Toey had “been a symbol of the social, health, educational, and housing problems which define a slum.” It still is, but partly because of Prateep it has become widely recognized as a challenge as well.

An admirer of Middle Eastern art, Rosanne Klass wrote Land of the High Flags, a book on Afghanistan.

Further Reading