OUR NEIGHBOURS
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By Chandralekha Mehta
Illustrated by Pulak Biswas

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We all have neighbours. The people whose houses are next to our own are our neighbours, and the ones who live along the same street as we do are also our neighbours. We see them often and recognize them. Those whom we see most, we greet on meeting and sometimes we become friendly with
them. A neighbour is someone to whom one should be able to turn in times of difficulty. When neighbours work together, helping one another, they can do many things to improve their community. A good neighbour should be a friend.

Countries, like people, also have neighbours. Even though these neighbours are not as close to us as those who live next door, they are not really too far away. Aeroplanes can take us to them in just a few hours. Every day the newspapers, TV and the radio bring us news about them and tell us what they are thinking and doing about many important matters.

Like people, countries can be good or otherwise. When they are unfriendly to one another, they can make trouble for their peoples, sometimes even cause wars. But when their feelings for one another are kind and friendly, as they should be, they can come closer together. Collectively they can try to get over their problems, and make life happier for their peoples. We can help people much better when we get to know them. And as we become acquainted we often find that others are not really as different from us as we had imagined. Our ways of living and many of our ideas are the same and this helps us to be friends. Even the things which seem strange need not come in the way of our understanding each other.

Who are India's closest neighbours? Near the southernmost tip of our country, not very far from Kanya Kumari, is the island of Sri Lanka. In the north, nestling among the world's highest mountains, lies the kingdom of Nepal. Near Nepal is the rugged Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, which has a special relationship with India. In the north-west is Pakistan; and in the north-east is Bangladesh. In the east is Myanmar, which juts into the Bay of Bengal. Let us take a look at these neighbours of ours and see what they are like.
SRI LANKA

The island of Sri Lanka is like a big garden. It is green all the year round. It has paddy fields, tea and rubber estates, and miles of sandy beaches edged with coconut palms, and also tropical jungles where the trees seem to be stretching towards the sky. The fruits and flowers of Sri Lanka also grow in India. These are jackfruits, cashew nuts, areca nuts, coconuts, pineapples, mangoes, and bananas. The countryside is colourful with bougainvillea, hibiscus, champak, canna, and other flowers which also grow in India. Sri Lanka also has bread-fruit, mangosteen, and cocoa.

The climate is hot throughout the year and there is plenty of rainfall. But in the centre of the island there are mountains which rise over 8,000 feet above sea level. Here the weather is cool and, instead of jungle, there are plants which grow in cooler climates. The countryside is dotted with crimson rhododendron shrubs. There are waterfalls, and streams in which rainbow trout swim. Tea is grown on the terraced slopes of these hills. Nuwara Eliya is a health resort where people can spend their summer holidays.
The main city of Sri Lanka is Colombo, which is called a garden city because it has lots of flowering trees and many parks. It is built around a big harbour where large ships stop on their way from the West to the Far East. Outside Colombo there is a good zoo which looks like a park, because the animals roam about instead of being kept in cages. In olden days Sri Lanka's capital was at Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, Yapahuwa, or Kandy; today Colombo is the capital.

Kandy is built around a lake and is surrounded by hills. It is pretty, especially at night when the twinkling lights of the town are reflected in the water. A famous temple there, called Dalada Maligawa or the Temple of the Tooth contains a sacred relic, a tooth of the Lord Buddha. Every year in the month of July or August there is a religious festival which lasts several days. During the celebrations, a procession is taken out through the streets, with
more than sixty gaily decorated elephants, accompanied by the chiefs of the temple who are dressed in the old costume of Kandy and covered with jewels. The sacred relic is kept in a special casket and is carried on the back of a magnificent tusker. Leading the procession are Kandyan dancers, moving to the rhythm of drums. It is a wonderful sight.

The Kandyan dance is an old one. The dancers wear dhotis and elaborate head-dresses like large crowns. They are covered with necklaces and armlets. The drums they use are something like the mridang used in India. In another traditional dance of Sri Lanka the dancers wear masks. This is usually a dance drama, in which old stories are enacted by the performers. These dances are performed at all festivals and on special occasions.

The ancient capitals are in ruins today, but they are interesting because there one can see fine old monuments.

A dancer in front of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy
and sculptures, and imagine how splendid these places must have been. Anuradhapura, the oldest of them all, was forgotten for a long time and was covered by the growth of the jungle. For hundreds of years it was the capital of the kings of Sri Lanka. They built there many beautiful palaces and buildings, tanks which stored water for the dry season, monasteries where monks lived and taught, and enormous statues of the Buddha. In Anuradhapura there is a large building with a white dome and a gilded spire, which is called the Ruwanveli Dagoba. A dagoba is a round building made to honour the Buddha. In India there are several such buildings. They are called stupas.

In Sigiriya, which was the capital at a later date, there is a great rock fortress where the king built his palace in order to be safe from his enemies. Along the wall of this fortress there are frescoes, paintings done on the wall. These are
famous all over the world. In every part of Sri Lanka there are sculptures and figures of the Buddha, and carvings which tell the story of his life and his teachings.

Most of the people of Sri Lanka are Buddhists. Many hundreds of years ago Emperor Ashoka, who was one of India’s greatest rulers, became a follower of the Buddha’s teachings. As a young man, he gave up the idea of war when he realized what terrible sufferings were caused by people fighting and killing each other. This was a very unusual thing for a king to do. Ashoka spent his life spreading the teachings of the Buddha among his people and sending messengers to other countries as well, to tell them about the lesson of love and peace which has been taught by the Buddha.

Ashoka sent his son, Mahendra, and his daughter, Sanghamitra, to Sri Lanka. Mahendra carried with him a branch of the Bodhi tree from Gaya, under which Gautama had prayed and meditated until he attained Enlightenment and became the Buddha. This branch was planted in Anuradhapura and the ancient tree which is flourishing there to this day is believed to be a descendant of it.

*Working in a paddy field*
Mahendra was received by King Devanam-piya-tissa, who welcomed the message he brought. It is said that Mahendra wrote down from memory all the Buddha's teachings and also the laws of Buddhism in Sinhalese, the language of Sri Lanka, which was like Pali, the language spoken in India at that time.

Although most of the people of Sri Lanka are Buddhists, there are also Hindus, Christians, and Muslims there.

The main food of the people is rice and everywhere one can see paddy fields with men and women working in them. Rice is eaten with hot curries of fish and vegetables, and coconut is used in cooking. A popular dish of Sri Lanka is called hoppers. These are delicious puffy pancakes made of rice flour.

Just like people, countries have to earn their living. Sri Lanka earns its living by cultivating tea, rubber, cocoa, and coconuts. Tea grows on hill-slopes, and women in bright-coloured saris pluck two leaves and a bud and toss them into a basket carried on their backs. Sri Lanka's tea is well known in many parts of the world and earns money to enable the country to buy the things it needs but does not have.

The milky latex which comes from the rubber tree is a valuable product and is also exported from Sri Lanka. Rubber has many
uses in our lives today. Dried coconut is also exported, while coconut fibres are used to make mats, ropes, and other things. Many beautiful products made of ivory, ebony, tortoise-shell, silver, and brass are made by hand in Sri Lanka.

In the south-west of the island, at Ratnapura, which means 'the city of jewels', many kinds of precious and semi-precious stones are mined. Among these are blue sapphires, green cat's-eyes, golden topazes, and milky moonstones. These jewels have been known from ancient times and Arab traders used to come for them in their sailing ships. Marco Polo (13th century), the famous traveller from Venice, took them to Italy. Today they are sold all over the world.

The thick jungles of Sri Lanka are full of wild animals. Elephants, leopards, sambar and other types of deer, wild boar, and many varieties of birds live in them. Visitors can see some of these animals in their natural surroundings in the sanctuaries, where shooting is not allowed. In Sri Lanka elephants are tamed and made to work as they do in India. It is a common sight to come across these animals bathing in a river and squirting one another with water from their trunks.

Camphor and also the spices which we use in our cooking every day, such as pepper, cinnamon, and cloves, grow well in Sri Lanka. About 500 years ago, explorers and sailors from the West began a search for new sea routes. They discovered that the lands of Asia were rich in many things which Europe did not have and they took these home with them. Among these things were spices to flavour their food. These spices were so expensive in Europe that the spice trade attracted adventurous men who wanted to become rich by selling spices to the countries of the West. The Portuguese were the first people to come from Europe to trade with Sri Lanka. They were followed by the Dutch, who built settlements and
forts and formed a special trading company to earn money from the riches of Sri Lanka. After they had been there quite a long time, they were driven out by the British, who took over the trade and in time got control of the whole island.

In 1947, India’s long struggle for freedom led to the British leaving the country and, soon after, a number of other countries which had been ruled by Britain also became free. Sri Lanka was one of them and it is an independent land once more. The flag of Sri Lanka has broad green and saffron stripes with a golden lion holding a sword, against a dark red background. This lion is a symbol of the ancient kings of Kandy.

From ancient times India and Sri Lanka have had close relations. As a result, a large number of people from South India, especially Tamilnadu, had gone to Sri Lanka. They played an important role in its economic development and in other areas, too. This Tamil population is concentrated in the eastern and northern parts—especially in Jaffna, the centre of trade and commerce.

Under the Indo-Sri Lanka accord signed on July 29, 1987, the northern and eastern provinces are to merge, and be administered by a single elected provincial council. The accord also provides for Tamil to be made an official language of Sri Lanka.
Until the year 1971 Pakistan consisted of two parts, with more than a thousand miles between the two. These were called West and East Pakistan. Now only the western part comprises Pakistan.

Pakistan has the snow-capped ranges of the Hindu-Kush in the north-west. In the cool climate of the north, various fruits, such as peaches, apples, and grapes grow. Through the rich plains flow the river Indus and its tributaries. In the fertile land wheat, maize, sugarcane, lentils and cotton are grown. Sind is mainly a desert where practically nothing grows. Camels are used for transport. The capital city of Pakistan is Islamabad which has been newly built. The other major cities are Karachi, Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Hyderabad.

As Indians and Pakistanis were one people for hundreds of years, we share the same history until the time of partition. This was an exciting history.
In the desert, not very far from Karachi, are the ruins of a very ancient city about 5,000 years old. The ruins have been dug up from under the ground. This place is known as Mohenjo-daro. North of this, near Multan, another such city has been found which is called Harappa. These cities belonged to what is known as the Indus Valley Civilization. From the ruins we have learnt that the people of these cities lived in fine brick houses. Their streets were well paved and they kept them clean with covered drains. There was also a large public bath.

The people grew cotton for cloth, and used ornaments and jewellery made of ivory and different kinds of stones. Their children played with clay toys. Pottery was used to store food and water. Copper and brass implements have been found there and also hundreds of seals with bulls, rhinoceroses and elephants drawn on them. They also had picture writing which, to us, looks like a secret code. Some day, when this code is figured out, we may be able to learn more about these ancient people of the Indus Valley.

In the north of the country are the ruins of the once famous university of Taxila. This was a centre of learning for hundreds of years and the city of Emperor Kanishka. Learned men and students from all over India and other countries came to Taxila.
to study and to hold discussions. Some of them had to make long and dangerous journeys to reach it. One of these was the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, who crossed Central Asia on his way to Taxila. In the ruins, which can still be seen today, is the monastery which was the centre of the university and also the rooms where the students lived. There are also the places of worship, stupas to honour the Buddha and many sculptures.

In the north-west is the Khyber Pass. From earliest times, through this rugged pass in the high mountains, traders have come with caravans bringing goods from Central Asia and China to sell and to take away the produce of India. Also, through this and other passes in the Himalayan mountains, many different people have come into the plains of India and what is now Pakistan. Some have come in peace to find a home and others have come to wage wars and carry away treasures.

Amongst our forefathers, the Aryans came from this direction and also, centuries later, Alexander, the Greek king. The Huns and the Mongols and many other fighting people swept into India. Some of them settled down and became
Indians, such as the Mughals, who became a part of Indian history.

The Mughals also built many gardens, one of the most famous of which is Shalimar, near Lahore. It still retains some of its former glory and is a well-visited place.

Lahore (West Punjab) is Pakistan's second largest city. Lahore, which was an important Mughal centre of trade, administration and learning, contains some of the finest examples of Muslim architecture like the Badshahi Mosque.

The people of Pakistan are no strangers to us because they were our countrymen not long ago. We are alike in so many ways, in language, food, clothes. The ordinary dress of the people is salwar and kameez. Punjabi, Sindhi and Pashto are spoken in different parts of Pakistan. Urdu is the national language. These are also known in India.

Pakistan did not inherit much of the traditional Indian classical dance styles. However, there are a few popular dances performed by men and women — of which the most popular is Kathak. Singing styles in Pakistan vary among the different linguistic areas of the country. Solo singing is more common in the country.

The country's flag is green with a white stripe and white crescent and star.
BANGLADESH

What was known as East Pakistan emerged as Bangladesh, a sovereign republic, in 1971. It lies between West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura.

Bangladesh presents a beautiful green landscape. Most of the country lies in the flat alluvial area called the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta, the largest of its kind in the world. The northern and eastern-most parts are hilly. The land contains a network of rivers and navigation by river is, therefore, the most important mode of communication. Mighty rivers flow through this land: Ganga, Padma, Brahmaputra, Meghna, Jamuna and Gomati.

Bangladesh gets heavy rainfall and is tropical in climate. During the monsoon, cyclones, coming from the Bay of Bengal, hit the coast and often do a great deal of damage. Floods are an annual occurrence.
The soil is rich and there is an abundance of crops. In the hills, around Sylhet, tea is grown, and in the plains paddy, jute, cotton, coconut, and betel-nuts. Tea and jute are important export items. Bangladesh produces 40 per cent of the total jute of the world. The country's warm climate and plentiful water supply cause many beautiful flowers like the orchid to bloom. There is also a profusion of flowering trees and creepers like the bougainvillea. There are many forests in the country too like the mangrove, sal and upland forests, which cover about 15 per cent of the land area. The thick forests provide timber and bamboo which are made into paper. These jungles are full of wild life and are the home of the beautiful but ferocious Royal Bengal tiger.

Chittagong and Khulna are two major ports. Dhaka is the capital which is near the ruins of the town built by Akbar's generals who added Bengal to the Mughal empire.
It became the main city of this region in Jahangir's days and it has long been known for its fine muslin cloth made by skilled weavers. There are ancient Buddhist monasteries in and around Mainamati in Comilla district.

Sylhet is one of the hilliest districts in the country. It is basically a large valley broken up by countless terraced tea gardens, dense tropical forests, pineapple plantations and orange groves. This district is considered the richest in the country with its natural resources and agricultural produce.

The people are culturally well advanced and good natured. The womenfolk wear saris and men wear dhotis. Fish is found in abundance in the rivers and ponds. Rice and fish, therefore, are the staple food of the people. The villagers live in thatched huts made of mud and bamboo. The roof is made of paddy stalks in a conical manner so that rain water does not seep in. The plinth is raised to keep away the over-flow of river water.

The people of Bangladesh speak Bengali and Hindi dialects. Popular dances of Bangladesh generally portray the rural culture. These include the Snake-charmer's dance, the Wedding dance, the Fisherman dance and so on. Then there is the Mystic dance which is performed at religious places, combining devotional singing and dancing; the Manipuri dance which originated among the Manipuris who live in north-east Bangladesh; and regional group dances.

Jatra, a drama performance, is a popular form of entertainment. It is based on traditional myths and legends. These dramas use colourful costumes and backdrops and usually begin in the evening and carry on for long hours. Kabigan, a form of debate in verse, is also common during festivals.

Rabindranath Tagore was very moved by the lush green scenery of this land. He often cruised in the turbulent Padma
and many of his finest poems were written on board. He had a house at Silaidaha; on the banks of the river. Men like Acharya P.C. Ray, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Acharya Jagdish Chandra Bose, Dr. Meghnad Saha were born in this country.

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, came into prominence in 1608 under the Mughals. It was then known as Jahangir Nagar. It is said that it derived its name on the orders of the first Mughal viceroy who was greeted by the sound of drums. Impressed, he ordered that all villages within hearing distance of the drums be called Dhaka. It is a derivation of dhak, the Bengali word for drum.

It is also said that the city was named after the goddess Dhakeswari.

The Mughals built many mosques, palaces, and gardens in the city.

The country’s flag is bottle green in colour bearing a red circle in the middle. The national anthem is ‘Amar Sonar Bangla....’ a song composed by Tagore.
NEPAL

When we think of Nepal we are reminded of snow-covered peaks and glaciers, of mountain ridges, and the deep valleys which lie between them. Some of the highest mountain peaks in the world are in Nepal. Among these are Annapurna, Dhaulagiri, Kanchenjunga, Makalu, and the tallest of them all, Everest. The Sherpas, a tough and hardy tribe of mountain people, come from Nepal and are as famous as the mountains of the land, for they have helped many mountaineering expeditions by working as porters. Without their knowledge of
the mountains and their strength, it would be difficult for climbers to carry all the equipment that is needed for big expeditions to the great snow peaks. Some of the Sherpas have become famous by scaling the highest peaks in the Himalayas. Tenzing who climbed the Everest with Hillary, belonged to the Sherpa tribe although he had long been a citizen of India. Because the route leading to the foot of the high Himalayas lies through Nepal territory, this country is well known all over the world to lovers of mountains and to those who would like to climb them.

Nepal is not only a land of cold and mountain peaks, however. In this small country, which is only 550 miles from east to west, there is the freezing climate of high altitudes and also the hot weather of the Terai. This is the name given to the land which lies along the foothills of the lower Himalayas. Some of it is rich and has stretches of valuable forests in which live tigers, bears, and other animals, while other parts are swampy and unhealthy.

In the Nepal valley the rivers are fed by the melting snow on the mountains, and they give water to the fields so that the farmers can grow rice, wheat, tobacco, sugarcane, jute and cotton. There is also dairy farming. The delicious cheese made in Nepal can be bought in markets in India.

For hundreds of years Nepal was cut off from other countries because there were hardly any roads by which people could travel. The few routes which had been used for years were over the mountains. In olden days traders took caravans to Nepal by the steep passes from Tibet or by difficult mountain roads from India. It was almost impossible for foreigners to get into Nepal. All goods which went to Nepal from India had to be carried on mules or by coolies, and even cars had to be taken on the backs of porters.
When travel by aeroplane became common, an airport was built in Kathmandu, the capital, and now a journey to Nepal is only a few hours from Delhi. India is also connected to Nepal by the Tribhuvan Rajpath, a highway which was completed in the early 1960’s. Other roads also are being built to make travel possible between Nepal and other places.

Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, is built between two rivers, the Bagmati and the Vishnumati. The town looks like a picture and is in a valley surrounded by snow-covered mountains. In winter it is very cold but the summers are warm. The town has many old Hindu and Buddhist temples, and the fronts of most old houses are covered with lovely wood carvings of birds and animals, the figures of gods and goddesses, and strange-looking imaginary creatures. The art of carving in wood is a very old one in Nepal, and it is still done by good workmen.
Most of the people of Nepal are Hindus but there are a large number of Buddhists also. Among the many temples in the country is the temple of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu. This is visited by Hindu pilgrims from many parts of India, especially during the festival of Shivaratri, when a big mela is held.

There are other old cities in Nepal besides Kathmandu. Patan, Bhadgaon, and Kirtipur were built some hundreds of years ago when a family of kings called the Mallas ruled in Nepal.

These old cities have a special way of building houses. These houses have several roofs, gracefully balanced one over the other and supported by carved wooden pillars. The smallest roof, at the top, has a triangular spire which often contains a bell.

The oldest building built in this style in Nepal is the Kashta Mandap in Kathmandu.

The people of Nepal say
that this style of building was started in their country and went to other places from there.

From Nepal come the Gurkhas, who serve as soldiers in the Indian army. These brave fighters have won fame for their acts of courage and determination in the many battles they have fought in different parts of the world.

In the north-east of Nepal is Solo Khumbu, the home of the Sherpas. This is rough country where the people work hard to grow wheat and potatoes and to keep herds of sheep and yaks which give them milk and wool. Yaks are shaggy mountain cattle which are very tough and can live at high altitudes. The main village in this district, Namche Bazar, has become well known because of the Everest expeditions which have made it their base-camp.

Like all mountain people the Nepalese have gay dances and lilting songs which are accompanied by drum, tambourine, and flute. There is classical dancing also but this is of a very different kind. At one time it was never done in public
but only before a few people connected with temple activities. The dancers use masks and special costumes.

The valley people eat rice and curry. There are green paddy fields all round Kathmandu and other towns near it. They make a strange contrast with the snow on the mountains, because we usually think of rice growing in flat, hot plains. In the distant high mountain areas there is no rice and the people who live there eat wheat and barley or potatoes with yak milk and cheese.

There is a legend that a long time ago a good and holy man called Ne Muni went to Nepal. He was so loved and respected by the people that they named the valley after him, Nepal meaning ‘cherished by Ne’.

For centuries Nepal has been ruled by kings and it is one of the few countries left in the modern world where kings and queens remain. The Nepalese flag is two crimson triangles with a deep blue border, bearing white emblems of the crescent moon and the sun.

A Nepalese folk-dance
The Kingdom of Bhutan is bordered on the north by the province of Tibet in China and by the Indian States of Sikkim in the west, West Bengal and Assam in the south and Arunachal Pradesh in the east.

With an area of approximately 46,500 square kilometres, Bhutan has a north-south distance of 170 km. and an east-west distance of 300 km. Bhutan is almost entirely mountainous. Flat land is limited to a few, relatively broad north-south running river valleys and small areas below the foothills, along the Indian border.

Many rivers and their tributaries flow through Bhutan. The main rivers are the Manas, Sankosh, Wangchu, and Torsa.

The country can be divided into three climatic zones. The Southern Belt, rising to 1500 m., has a hot, humid climate with temperatures between 15-30 degrees centigrade and annual rainfall ranging between 2500 mm. and 5000 mm. The Inner Himalaya Region, ranging from 1500 m. to 3000 m.,
has a temperate climate with an average annual precipitation of approximately 1000 mm. The High Northern Region, ranging from 3000 m. to 7000 m., has a severe alpine climate with an annual precipitation of around 400 mm.

As a result of the diverse climate, different varieties of crops are grown in Bhutan. Wheat, barley, buckwheat and potatoes are grown in the high altitudes, while rice and chillies are grown in the lower valleys. Rice is the staple food of the Bhutanese.

Besides farming, the Bhutanese farmers keep flocks of sheep, horses and cattle including yaks. In the northern part of the country, some families are entirely dependent upon livestock for their livelihood. In the summer, the shepherd families take their cattle, sheep and yaks up the high pasture lands and move down to the lower valleys during winter to avoid the snow and severe cold.

Bhutan’s history has been marked by isolation and inaccessibility. The earliest inhabitants came to settle in the country many centuries ago. Over the years people from Tibet came and settled in Bhutan as well. At a later period people from Nepal migrated to Bhutan. The people of Nepali origin are mainly Hindus.

The Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion. There are thousands of lamas and they live in large monasteries and dzongs. All Bhutanese culture, art and architecture, drama, music and dance have a religious foundation. Art, paintings and drama are like life itself, reflecting the struggle between good and evil.

The lhakhangs (temples) of Bhutan contain statues of the Buddha and other Buddhist deities. The chapels house some of the finest fresco paintings, silk hangings (thangkas) and texts on the Buddha’s teachings.
The monks (lamas) living in these lhakhangs perform the annual 'tsechus' festivals. During such festivities elaborate dances are performed by the monks wearing colourful costumes and masks. These masks, made of wood and paper, are painted to represent the various characters from Buddhist texts and teachings. Apart from the large trumpets and flutes which provide the music, they use cymbals that clash with a great sound which echoes in the valleys. Local people of all ages participate in these annual festivals with great enthusiasm.

The population of Bhutan can be roughly divided into three major ethnic groups—the Ngalops of Tibetan origin in the west, the Sharchops who are of Indo-Mongoloid origin in the east and the Lhotsams of Nepalese origin in the south. Approximately 95 per cent of the population live in rural areas. The main cities are the capital, Thimphu, and Phuntsholing.

Bhutan is ruled by a hereditary monarch. The Wangchuk dynasty was established in 1907, when the people of Bhutan unanimously elected King Ugyen Wangchuk as the first king of Bhutan. Till then, Bhutan was governed by a dual government of a temporal ruler and a spiritual head. The year 1907 is significant in the history of Bhutan as it marks the beginning of the development of modern Bhutan.

The King of Bhutan is assisted by the National Assembly where two-third of its members are elected representatives of the people. The National Assembly is the highest decision-making body in Bhutan and it plays a crucial role in the enactment of national laws and public policies. The King also governs on the advice of the Lodge Tshogdey (Royal Advisory Council) and the Lhengyal Shungtshog (Council of Ministers or Cabinet) on matters of national importance.
Administratively the country is divided into dzongkhags (districts). The headquarters of each dzongkhag is located in a dzong. A dzong has many courtyards and lovely painted windows constructed using traditional design and architecture. These magnificent dzongs were first built in the seventeenth century by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a Bhutanese patron saint, who unified and politically consolidated the country for the first time in its history.

The national language of Bhutan is Dzongkha. But there are many local dialects spoken as well. English is used as the medium of instruction in schools and in official correspondence.

The people of Bhutan are well-built and good looking and the women are usually pretty. They are well-dressed in
hand-woven cloth of bright colours. The men dress in a 'gho' while the women wear a 'kira'.

The Bhutanese are by nature hard working yet fun-loving. Archery is the national sport of Bhutan. Archery competitions are a popular pastime and big contests are held every year.

Until the construction of the first motor road in 1962, a journey from the Indian border to the capital Thimphu took six days of trekking on foot or riding mules and horses through jungles and over steep mountain paths. Now with the Phuentsoling-Thimphu highway, it takes less than six hours to reach the capital.

Bhutan has a well-preserved natural environment, endowed with rich and varied flora and fauna. A number of rare animals like the takin, clouded leopard and golden langur are still a common sight in Bhutan.

The flag of Bhutan is halved diagonally by two

*Dancing with mask and tambourine*
colours, orange and saffron, and in the centre is a dragon in white.

The Ngultrum (Nu) is the official Bhutanese currency. It is set at par with the Indian rupee.
India's eastern neighbour is a land of towering teak trees, hilly places where precious stones and minerals are found, and miles upon miles of green paddy fields which supply food not only for Myanmar (formerly Burma) but also for other countries. The people of this land are light-hearted and full of laughter. Their dress is a colourful lungi with a white jacket, worn by both men and women. The women are known to be hard working and good-looking.
The wealth of Myanmar lies in its huge forests. Its teak and other valuable trees, like rosewood, are much in demand in many countries. The timber exported from Myanmar fetches it money to buy iron, coal, machinery, and other things. The jungles, where the teak trees grow, are so dense that trained elephants have to be used to disentangle the felled logs, and to push and drag them out of the thick forests. Then the logs are tied together in rafts and floated down the river until they reach the factories where they are cut up and shipped abroad.

Besides teak, another speciality of Myanmar is bamboo. Young bamboo shoots are a favourite food of elephants. Bamboos grow more than sixty feet high and every thirty-five or forty years they flower. The forest takes on a fairy look when the bamboo trees are in blossom, but after flowering the trees wither and die and it is some time before new ones grow from the seeds of the old.

Oil is produced in Myanmar. Around the cities of Pakokku, Minbu, and Magwe, where it is found, there are large refineries which prepare the oil for use. In the hills of the Shan State there are silver, zinc, tin, and lead mines. Sapphires and rubies are also mined. The ruby found in Myanmar has a deep red colour and is considered the best of its kind in the world. In the north of the country, around the Myitkyina district, jade and amber are found in the rocks.

In the flat land of the Irrawady and Sittang rivers rice is grown. Tobacco and cotton are grown and also chillies. Most of the vegetables and fruits grown are the same as we have in India. However, there is a well-liked fruit in Myanmar which we do not have in India. This is called durian. It belongs to the jackfruit family and has a very strong and peculiar smell. Those who have tasted it say that it is excellent.
Myanmar also has large plantations of rubber trees and exports rubber, rice, timber, besides lead and rubies.

Like the people of Sri Lanka, the people of Myanmar are Buddhists. Every young man is supposed to spend some part of his life, even a week, as a monk, living a simple life as the Buddha did, wearing a saffron-coloured robe.

A Buddhist temple in Myanmar is called a pagoda, and there are many of them all over the country. The Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Yangon (formerly Rangoon) is the most famous. Crowds of pilgrims from other countries go there every year; they also worship the great statue of the Buddha at the Kodatkyi Pagoda. The Shwe Dagon Pagoda is more than 368 feet high with fine carvings on the teak pillars. It has frescoes which
tell of the life and teachings of the Buddha. It is covered with pure gold from base to summit, and it has a huge dome topped by a spire, known as an umbrella, which is studded with diamonds. It looks like a big golden ornament and at night, when it is lit up, it glows above the sleeping city.

Yangon, the capital of Myanmar, is on the Rangoon river which is linked with the Irrawady river. Once a fishing village, it had grown into one of the larger ports of Asia. Within the city, there are gardens and lakes. The earlier capital, Mandalay, was built by Mindon Min, one of the old
kings of Myanmar. This lovely city has palaces, forts monasteries, and pagodas and is noted for its fine teak-wood carvings. It is also a centre of silk-weaving, and the hand-woven silks are made according to ancient design. Beautiful boxes and bowls of silver and lacquer are also made in Mandalay.

Nearby is the older city of Ava, which is in ruins today. Pegu is another old city which was once a magnificent place, but not much of its old glory remains except for a beautiful pagoda and some gigantic statues of the Buddha. One huge figure of the Buddha, lying down, was covered up by the jungle and nobody knew about it for a long time. It was discovered when workers cleared the jungle to build a railway line in that area.

There are many wild animals in the forests of Myanmar. Elephants are very numerous and also tigers, leopards, bison, and deer of many kinds. But because the jungles are so
thick and full of undergrowth, it is not easy to see them. People who go there to hunt must take experienced shikaris with them.

All kinds of sports are popular in the country. A special ball game which everyone likes is called chinlon. This game can be played by either one person or as many as six. The ball is hollow and made of cane, like a wicker-work basket, with holes in it. The point of the game is to keep tossing the ball in the air by using any part of the body even the head, but one is not allowed to touch it with the arms or hands. It is good exercise and fun as well. The people of Myanmar also have an art of self-defence called thaing, which is something like the judo of Japan. In the villages people enjoy holding bullock-cart races.

In the different parts of the country there are various traditional dresses, as in India, and different folk-dances. The classical dance is slow and complicated and the dancers have to be very supple to make the difficult movements. Another amusement is the marionette show, rather like our kathputli. Here there is singing, dancing, and clowning, all done with puppets.

The language of Myanmar is very different from Indian languages. It is called a tonal language which means that a word can be spoken in more than one tone of voice, like singing the different notes in a musical scale. There are three tones and the meaning of the word depends on the tone used. To say a word in a wrong tone changes the whole sentence and gives it a meaning different from what was intended.

When adventurers and traders went to Sri Lanka and India, they found their way to Myanmar’s coast as well and wanted to start trading there. The Portuguese, the Dutch,
and the French all tried to do so, but were not very successful. After the British took over control of India, they fought a series of wars with Myanmar and were able to defeat its army and exile King Thibaw. Then they added Myanmar to their empire, which already consisted of India and Sri Lanka. During the Second World War, the Japanese entered Myanmar and did much damage. When the war ended, the people of Myanmar who had fought for their freedom, became independent.

Myanmar’s flag is red with a dark blue rectangle in a top corner. This has a large white star which stands for the Union of Myanmar and is surrounded by five smaller white stars, one each for the five different peoples who make up the country.

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We have visited our closest neighbours and have taken a quick look at them. We have seen that while there are differences among us, there are also some things in common. In all these countries man has created beautiful works of art, and nature has made gifts which can be used to provide wealth for the people.
Yet India and her neighbours have not developed as fast as some other countries which have made great progress. What is the reason for this? Partly it is because India and some of her neighbours were ruled for many years by a foreign land and the wealth of the country was used not for its people, but for those who controlled it. Others among our neighbours were cut off from the world by some of the highest mountains known to man.

Over a long period when we should have been taking part in the scientific discoveries and inventions which brought prosperity and a new way of life to nations, we were unable to do so. After attaining independence we realize that we must work hard to catch up with those who have raced ahead of us. We are progressing in several directions.

We want to do away with poverty and have in its place, good health, more food, clean homes, and a better way of life for all our people. In order to do so we must work for what we want. At the same time we should be friendly and helpful to each other. By getting to know and understand our neighbours, we can feel close to them and co-operate in ways which will benefit us all.
We have taken a quick look at our closest neighbours and have seen that while there are differences among them, there are also some things in common. In all these countries, nature has created beautiful works of art, and nature has made gifts which can be used to provide wealth for the people.