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# OPINION

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## THE US-IRAN AFFAIR

TO what depths of degradation will individuals and nations not descend to preserve their affluence and save their comforts ! The present US-Iran imbroglio is a case in point. Having failed in honour by refusing to let a friend, the Shah, take refuge in their land when his difficulties and faults had overcome him, the Americans now add to their dishonour by refusing to do anything firm and effective even when their territory (for that is what a nation's embassy is) is invaded and a large number of its inhabitants are held as hostages by a fanatical mob backed by a fanatical leader, who demand that the Shah should be sent to them, having been permitted as a special act of charity to enter an American hospital for treatment of a disease likely to end fatally. The Shah's stay will terminate as soon as his doctors permit him to travel, the Americans assure the Iranian leaders and mob, but they are not satisfied, and threaten dire consequences to the hostages. President Carter sends envoys to discuss the position. They cannot reach Iran because permission to land is not given.

Now why is all this ? One word, Oil, is the reason. The flow of Iranian oil to the States must continue. And if it doesn't ? Will the whole country come to a standstill ? Nothing of the kind. At most people will be subjected to some discomfort, the speeds at which cars travel will have to be reduced, there may even be some difficulty in heating as now houses and factories. In other words some discomfort the people will have to bear, some production may be lost. And this tips the scale against permitting a friend in distress to seek refuge, even against uncivilised behaviour to one's own citizens and officials in their own Embassy.

Had the Americans set about the business of developing their own oil resources and other forms of energy from the time oil prices first rose, had they lowered their consumption of oil by all means, mostly simple, within their power, they would not have been faced with this threatening position today. They did not do it, so they must bear greater discomfort now, be prepared for a greater deprivation, though nothing really very much in comparison with the loss suffered by much poorer countries from the rise in the price of oil, which too have shown little enterprise and initiative in developing alternative sources of energy. Let the American leaders and people say to themselves, "To Hell with the Iranian oil ! If it does not come, we'll do without it. But we will not tolerate the disgrace that has now been inflicted on our nation. We have smirched our honour already. We will not utterly lose it. To Khomeini

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we shall say, "Release our people whom you hold prisoner. The Shah to whom we have extended the hospitality of medical treatment, a service of which your own Holy Prophet would undoubtedly approve, will only leave our land when he sees fit. He is a guest and we do not hand over guests to their enemies, so that they may slay them. And we promise you this, should a single one of our people whom you hold prisoner be killed or badly wounded, your holy city of Qum will be rubble within two hours of our getting the news. If, having released the prisoners, you want no relationship with us, that is your privilege. We will not object to ending diplomatic relations with you and withdrawing all our citizens from your country. You can also keep your oil and use it as you will and may the God of all our faiths add to your wisdom and your perspicacity."

Thus may the issue be resolved, if the Americans regard honour as something real and not just a bauble, an airy nothing. And if they have the will and resolution to carry into practise their words. The Shah was a bad ruler, a nepotist, a tyrant and the Iranians did well to get rid of him. Their course since his departure has, however, caused deep distress to all their real friends. To overthrow a tyrant is good; having overthrown him to set up a worse regime than his is not only a blunder but a crime. May the Iranians soon understand this! As to the present Iran authorities seeking Russian interventions in case of their murder of the hostages and the consequent American reprisal, the chances are small. Khomeini knows that such a move would be an open invitation to the Russian Communists to take over the country, and once the Bear of the North has seized his prey, he never releases him. As to those citizens of other countries who would brand the American message Neo-Imperialist, let them consider what their own feelings would have been if such treatment had been accorded to their own Embassy and officials in a foreign capital, and what action they would have taken in the circumstances, supposing they had the power.

## DRIFTWOOD

GAURI DESHPANDE

**S**TANGE and spiky protuberances aiming their shafts at your throat. Great knobby smoothnesses inviting a sliding touch. Intricate inter-twinings calling themselves a labyrinth. It was a collection of driftwood. A man had roamed the country and seen the strange shapes of his mind reflected in the flotsam that got left behind at ebb tide. He had picked them off the beaches, the banks, the forest floors and scrubbed them and rubbed them and polished them until you thought you glimpsed a dinosaur, a dolphin, a priest, an antler. You stood before the involuted twisting and imagined the woody textures spiral into the earth.

I remember collecting my first piece of driftwood on a small and deserted beach in California. It was, I thought, a small bird, rather grey

and bedraggled to suit the afternoon. I carried it about for a long time in spite of the fact that it did not bring with it any happy memories. It used to sit on my desk, forgotten for the most part. And then one day, I looked for it and it had vanished as though it had been called to its roots and had simply crumbled away. After that I collected a few bits and pieces here and there ; a pelican, a crocodile ; but I left them alone and they hung about looking like grey bits of unfinished sculpture. I am very fond of them and the idea that I could polish and fashion them into objects d'art never occurred to me. They were simply textures and shapes that pleased me, that were parts of a picnic, an evening, a love affair.

Wood is fascinating in itself, an endless feast of colour, pattern and texture : from the deep, almost black rosewood which hides all its patterns and makes itself felt only as a dark glow like the sun seen through an eclipse, to the light transparent wood that shout out to you every knot of their heart ; from the heavy, rich and mellow mirror gloss of an heirloom of a sideboard to the battle-scarred, redolent deal of a kitchen counter ; the incomparable brown of teak and the laughing blond of the pine, from the silken sheen of a grand piano to the crocodile back of the butcher's block. There's hardly a sense that wood doesn't satisfy with its living and changing variety. Even for smell you can hardly find any fragrance to compare with sandal or aloes.

Those who have fallen in love with wood, feel oppressed in front of the ponderous weight of stone, turn from its cold rigidity. It is very seldom and only in the hands of the greatest sculptors that stone may acquire the pliable fluidity of wood. A sculptor like Mestrovic who worked happily in both seems to suggest an excessive stoniness in his stonework, perhaps to emphasise how different it really is from his work in wood. Even a stone head of a small child has a solid massivity lacking in a large standing figure in wood, which is mostly a huge trunk of a tree with the minimum of working. Having seen his wooden bas-relief of scenes from Christ's life, one cannot imagine the possibility of its being done in stone and so is it equally impossible to think that he could have chosen anything but marble for studies of his wife's head.

All the woody qualities of wood seem to me to be enhanced in driftwood. The grain is deepened by the caress of flowing water which at the same time smoothes the ridges. While it reduces snapped off arrowheads to knobs like those at the end of the tibia, some knobs it hones to rapier points. I still remember an unforgettable driftwood statue in a sculptor's show-window, a long, massive, ridged piece on which the sculptor had worked as little as possible ; just a hint of a girl's down-turned face and the rest of the enormous, water-combed length was her endlessly flowing hair. What drifting adds to wood is what time adds to a monument : memory. Just as the garish horror of a brand-new railway station is tolerated, absorbed by a city until the millions of glances falling on it in passing rub it smooth of its ugliness, making it, in time, a beloved landmark, so with wood. A brooding, dark quality of deep patience and endurance attaches itself to wood that has suffered a sea-change. The

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heavy massiveness of huge trees is carved and eaten away until the wood is light. Airy and porous; until the tree becomes almost a will o'th wisp.

It seems to me that a man who collects driftwood with an idea of imposing upon the work of water his own will and shaping it into sculptures must, forever keep in front of his eyes the qualities which set driftwood apart from virgin wood. Driftwood sculpture must not be too smooth, too polished, too worked over, too laboured. The man must remember that the real sculptors are water and time. He is merely a finder, a hinter. The only ingredients that he could add are a certain tidiness, a certain direction, and above all, love and reverence, for without these last two, driftwood is simply an eroded and rotting piece of wood. Any wood bears upon itself the lines of its life, like the laughter-lines and the painlines and the squinting-in-the sun lines that etch character and individuality to a human face, the lines in a wood are emphasised and brought to the surface by the life it leads as driftwood. And just as a fifty year old woman with her face lifted becomes just another pretty matron, fighting time, the smoothed and pampered driftwood loses its real being, becoming merely a slightly less imaginative, slightly less honest wooden sculpture.

Most of all, the relationship between a piece of driftwood and its finder must be understood to be emotional, private, organic. To search out a piece of driftwood with a view to its commercial exploitation strikes at the very base of this bond and such basic treachery reveals itself as a facile shallowness in the so-called 'found' driftwood sculptures. One must remember, after all, that it was the driftwood which found you, and which is to call which driftwood after all, you or it ?\*

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\* This essay arose out of the dissatisfaction that I felt upon viewing an exhibition of driftwood sculptures recently at the Jehangir.

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