

Body and Witchcraft: Victim Cremated

By Shobha Gautam

In Kathmandu, Nepal, the young woman Saraswati Adhikari died after being beaten, burned, and denied food and water for three days. This was what her husband claimed to be "the proper treatment for a witch."

Saraswati's husband and the "witch doctor" who tortured her are under investigation in police custody.

The victim's dead body was taken for cremation the day of her death by a rally of journalists, human rights activists, and women's activists, several of whom had tried to rescue her.

Saraswati was brutally treated by her husband after she was reportedly possessed by spirits. She was tied to a plank and kept in an outhouse above the toilet for three days.

When she started complaining of excruciating pain, her husband brought the "witch doctor" to their home.

This woman declared that Saraswati was a witch and needed treatment that could only be done at her house.

When activists came to rescue her, she smelled horribly and was almost unconscious. She was in no condition to speak and only opened her eyes after her children called to her. After some time, Saraswati asked for water and, after drinking the water, she repeated, "I have not done anything," again and again. Shortly thereafter, she lost

consciousness again and never recovered.

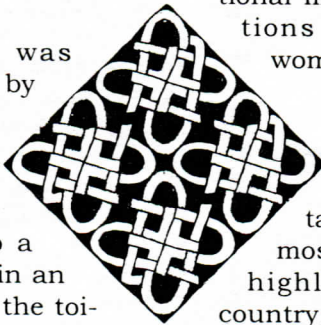
The activists raided the witch doctor's home with the help of the local police, but Saraswati's neighbors remained silent spectators. Not one raised a finger to help her. Even the police did not take the report seriously and arrived a half-hour too late. Since the victim was a woman, they did not take immediate action.

In Nepal, 80 percent of all women suffer from anemia. Saraswati was also severely anemic, and her weakness only contributed to her suffering.

Accusations of witchcraft are common in Nepal, where many ills are treated by traditional medicine and superstitions persistently use women as scapegoats.

Perhaps most shocking of all, this crime took place in Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, which is the most abundant and most highly developed in the country. Now the city with the best medical care in Nepal witnesses a woman killed for supposedly being a witch.

Source: *Women's Health Journal*, 3/97



Northern Marianas No Paradise for Foreign Workers

By William Branigin
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON—Older Americans remember the Northern Mariana Islands as the scene of horrific fighting between US Marines and Japanese troops during World War II.

Today they are a battleground of a different sort, a remote US commonwealth in the western Pacific where local politicians, federal officials, and members of Congress have been slugging it out over immigration laws, the minimum wage, garment sweatshops, and the alleged exploitation of foreign workers.

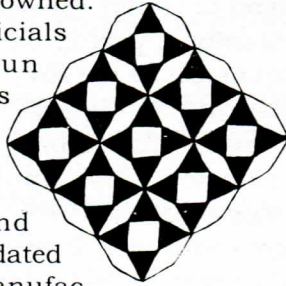
Those differences came to a head last October with a lobbying visit here by the island's governor, Froilan Tenorio, and the introduction in the Senate of legislation aimed at reining in what the Clinton administration regards as the territory's abuses of its privileges under a 1976 "covenant" with the United States.

The governor, a Democrat, strongly opposes the bill and has completely fallen out with the Clinton administration. In a campaign to defeat the proposed legislation—and to help advance his bid for reelection next month against a Republican who happens to be his uncle—Tenorio has been courting the GOP in Congress. Over the past year, he has invited several members of Congress and dozens of staff members to visit his tropical isles on expense-paid junkets.

The proposed legislation, introduced by Sens. Frank Murkowski, R-Alaska, and Daniel K. Akaka, D-Hawaii, would extend federal immigration and minimum-wage laws to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and restrict the use of "Made in the USA" labels by its \$625 million-a-year garment industry. The powerful industry has benefited from local control of immigration and the minimum wage by bringing in thousands of cheap and docile temporary

foreign workers, mostly Chinese, to toil in factories that turn out clothing for the US market.

Because the commonwealth is a US territory, the garments made there carry the "Made in USA" labels and enter the United States without duties or quotas, even though the workers and materials are all imported and the factories are largely foreign-owned. The result, US officials say, is an end-run around the quotas and tariffs that apply to garment import, as well as the minimum wage and workers' rights mandated in US domestic manufacturing.



Moreover, garment factories in the Northern Marianas often pay their workers less than the islands' current \$3.05-an-hour-minimum wage, force them to work long hours with no overtime, and require them to live in crowded "barracks" with restrictions on their freedom, according to workers and human rights organizations. Before they leave China, workers must sign contracts with the Chinese government that violate their rights on US soil, the Interior Department says.

One such contract says the worker "is forbidden from engaging in any political or religious activity" on the islands, must not request a raise or go on strike, and "cannot fall in love or get married." Violators face penalties back in China.

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