

# Hemispheres



**The International Area Studies Outreach Consortium  
at the University of Texas at Austin**

**Latin America, the Middle East, Russia, East Europe & Eurasia, and South Asia**

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**Spring 2005 Newsletter**

## **In this issue:**

### *Notable Women from Around the World*

This issue of *Hemispheres* looks at four notable women from Chile, Iran, Russia, and India. Although they have different stories and come from diverse backgrounds as politicians, social activists, environmental activists and authors, their stories may inspire you and your students to learn more about them and their causes.

For more information about the women featured in this newsletter, and about women's issues in general, log on to the Hemispheres Web site and click on "featured links."

## **New and Noteworthy:**

### *Understanding Migration*

Log on to the Hemispheres Web site to download our new curriculum unit *Understanding Migration: Curriculum Resources for Texas Educators*. Designed around the TEKS and TAKS objectives pertaining to migration patterns, this unit explores real-world examples of both contemporary and historical migration through primary source documents, role playing, and other activities. The unit is designed for use at the middle and high school level, and it's free!  
<http://inic.utexas.edu/hemispheres/units/migration/>

### *Hemispheres at Region III ESC*

If you live in the Victoria or Region III service areas, you may be able to attend a day-long Hemispheres workshop without having to travel all the way to Austin! Hemispheres is coming to Region III ESC on Thursday, April 7 for a day of professional development for world history and world geography educators. For more information and registration information, log on to the Region III Staff Development Web site at <http://www.esc3.net/sd/> and search for WS # 19633, or contact Gayle Parenica at [gparenica@esc3.net](mailto:gparenica@esc3.net).

If you don't live in the Region III area, check out the Hemispheres calendar on our Web site for information about staff development opportunities throughout the state!

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## Michelle Bachelet: Chile's Next President?

Chile's presidential election, set for December 2005, is many months away but many are predicting that Michelle Bachelet, currently leading in the polls, will be their first woman president.

Michelle Bachelet, born in 1951 to Alberto Bachelet, a General in the Chilean Air Force, and Angela Jeria, an anthropologist, grew up in a challenging period in Chile's history, as the government struggled to improve the economy and address socioeconomic problems. Bachelet, however, grew up in a comfortable, well-educated family, and in 1970 entered the University of Chile to study medicine.

Bachelet's medical studies were soon interrupted. On September 11, 1973, the military overthrew Chile's democratically-elected Socialist president, Salvador Allende. The military, led by General Augusto Pinochet, bombed the presidential palace and took control of the government. Bachelet's father, who had worked in the Allende government, was soon arrested as a traitor. As a result of brutal torture, he suffered a cardiac arrest and died from lack of medical attention in 1974.

In 1975, Bachelet and her mother were also arrested and held in Villa Grimaldi, an infamous detention and torture center. Pinochet's government was very repressive, and those suspected of subversive activities were quickly arrested and often "disappeared."

Bachelet had been involved in secret political activities with the Socialist Party—including meetings where students analyzed current events—but she didn't know exactly why she was being detained.

In prison, she and her fellow prisoners were blindfolded for most of the day and fed very little. In recent interviews, she has spoken some about being tortured, but quickly points out that it was minimal compared to what others suffered. Many lost their lives and their families never knew what happened to them. But Bachelet's influential relatives, including an uncle who was a general, worked aggressively to get her out of prison; she believes she owes her life to their efforts.

After being detained for a month, she and her mother were released. In 1975, they went into exile in Australia to live with Bachelet's brother Alberto. Soon after, Bachelet moved to Germany, where she continued her studies in medicine. She returned to



Chile in 1979, although Pinochet was still in power, and returned to her studies at the University of Chile. She graduated as a surgeon in 1982.

During the 1980s, Bachelet worked at the Robert del Río Children's Hospital and for various non-governmental agencies, including consulting work for the Panamerican Health Organization and the World Health Organization. During these years she returned to political activism, working for the return of democracy and collaborating professionally with organizations that offered assistance to children of the tortured and disappeared.

In 1990, when Pinochet's rule came to an end and democracy returned, Bachelet went to work for Chile's Ministry of Health. From 1994 to 1997, she worked as an adviser to the Undersecretary of Health.

In addition to her healthcare work, Bachelet's political activism continued. In 1995, she became a member of the Central Committee of Chile's Socialist Party. Her interest in the normalization of relations between civilians and the military, so as not to repeat the coup of 1973, led her to a course in military strategy at the National Academy for Political,

Strategic, and Defense Studies. She was first in her class, and received a scholarship from the President to study at the Interamerican Defense College in Washington, DC. When she returned to Chile in 1998, she began to work for the Ministry of Defense.

In 2000, Bachelet was named Minister of Health and, in 2002, Minister of National Defense, becoming the first woman in Chile and in Latin America to take on such a post. Her nomination also signaled the return of a socialist, the first since Allende's government, to Chile's Ministry of Defense.

Now, in 2005, she's seeking to become the first female president of Chile. She's a favorite to win and, according to the magazine *America Economía*, one of the ten most powerful women in Latin America (and the only Chilean on the list). Bachelet has earned her place among Chile's leaders through her intelligence, compassion, and fierce dedication to the political values with which she was raised.

For more information:

Bachelet for President Web site (in Spanish):

<http://www.bacheletpresidente.cl/>

## Shirin Ebadi: Iran's Nobel Laureate

When it was announced that a female judge in Iran whom most people had never heard of had been chosen as the recipient of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, there was an astonished reaction from many parts of the world. The tribute, it was argued by some, was politically motivated: the Prize Committee was trying to influence Iran politically; it was trying to appease the Islamic world by choosing a recipient from among its ranks; it was trying to bring attention to the struggles of women throughout the world. For those familiar with her work, however, the choice of Shirin Ebadi, who was the first woman ever to be appointed as a judge in Iran, was a fitting tribute to a tireless activist, feminist, and Muslim that needs no further explanation.

Dr. Ebadi was born in Hamadan, a city in northwest Iran, in 1947, and moved with her family to the capital, Tehran, when she was a year old. At that time, Iran was just beginning to explore the resources offered by its oil industry, and by the time she reached adulthood, the government had opened new universities and schools throughout the country. This allowed more Iranians to earn higher degrees without leaving the country to study abroad. After passing the Iranian equivalent of the bar exam, she was appointed as a lower court judge in 1969. In 1975, she was appointed to the Bench of the Tehran City Court, the highest judicial appointment ever granted to a woman in Iran at that time.

In 1979, however, fortunes changed. After decades of oppression by the government of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (*shah* is the Persian title for king), a popular revolution overthrew his government and replaced it with an Islamic government headed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (an *ayatollah* is a high-ranking cleric in Shi'ite Islam). The Ayatollah decided that women should not be allowed to serve as judges, and Dr. Ebadi and her female colleagues found themselves re-appointed as clerks in the same courts where they had been justices. Rather than serve in a position she found embarrassing, Dr. Ebadi and many of the other former judges decided to retire.

After her retirement from the bench, Dr. Ebadi wrote several books dealing with family law, chil-

dren's rights, women's rights, refugee rights, and other human rights issues. Her philosophy since then has been to promote new thinking about the law within the framework of Islamic law, the *sharia*, which forms the basis for Iranian law. She argues that fundamental human rights such as gender equality and freedom of speech are not only compatible with Islamic law but a necessary and integral part of it.

In 1992, Dr. Ebadi was able to reinstate her membership to the Iranian Bar Association and began practicing law again. Many of the cases that she accepted involved crimes committed against women, children, or people from low social classes. In the late 1990s, there was a government crackdown on free press, in spite of the laws governing press freedom in Iran. Dr. Ebadi represented many of the newspaper owners and reporters who were persecuted during the crackdown. One of the most emotional cases she dealt with involved a police raid on a Tehran University dormitory in 1999 in which several students were killed. During the course of her investigation, she was jailed herself.

Outside of her law work, Dr. Ebadi has put forth considerable effort for the causes she supports. In 1995, she co-founded the Association for Support of Children's Rights, and served as director for five years. In 2001, she founded the Human Rights Defense Center in Tehran with four other lawyers. Dr. Ebadi is also a member of the Tehran University Law School faculty, where she offers a popular course on human rights training.

Upon her return to Iran after the Nobel award ceremony in October 2003, thousands of Iranians turned out at the airport to welcome her home. She continues to practice law and put forward her ideas about human rights through her Web site and in numerous articles published both in Iran and abroad.

### For more information:

Shirin Ebadi's official Web site (mostly Persian, but some sections in English):

<http://www.shirinebadi.ir>

The Alfred Nobel Foundation on Shirin Ebadi:

<http://www.nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/2003/>





## Svetlana Titova: Environmental Activist

Photo: Yuri Vorobiev



Svetlana Titova is an activist who shows that one person can make a difference. Amurskaya Oblast, a territory in the Russian Far East, has few major cities and vast tracts of forest or taiga. Despite the size of the forests, they are vulnerable when not properly protected. Poaching and

logging are just some of the problems that plague this area. The northern forests grow on permafrost, a permanent layer of frozen ground that only melts to a certain level in the summer. The practice of clear-cutting trees exposes the ground to the sun, which can melt the permafrost, changing the environment and creating bogs. Native seedlings cannot take root to replace the removed trees, invasive species are introduced, and the new plants can no longer support the native wildlife. The delicate balance of this fragile environment can take hundreds of years to restore.

Poaching is another problem in this area, as many endangered species are hunted for their valuable pelts and to create native medicines, and funds for rangers and ecological preserves are minimal.

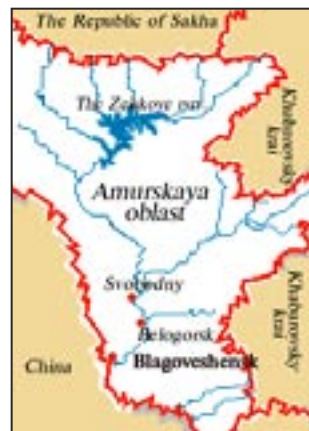
Trained as a wildlife biologist, Svetlana Titova spends lots of time in the wilderness. However, a single environmentalist on the ground cannot cover the huge territory of the Amur Region and can only have a small impact. It is Titova's work as a university teacher and Director of the Amur Socio-Ecological Union that has led to increased awareness of the critical environmental situation and a realization that the problem must be addressed.

The Amur Socio-Ecological Union (AmurSEU) is one of the most effective environmental organizations in the Amur Region, and is part of the Socio-Ecological Union, a network of environmental organizations across the former Soviet Union. One of the strengths of the organization has been enlisting the aid of students from the Far Eastern State Agricultural University. After significant training, students form "druzhinas" or environmental "brigades" that work to monitor specific nature preserves. The "druzhina" movement has proven popular with students, with brigades being formed in several regions. Some have even apprehended poachers and rooted out political environmental corruption.

The Amur Socio-Ecological Union has also worked to establish new nature preserves to protect the forests from clear-cutting and unmanaged logging.

Titova's organization has also taken environmental education into the schools, in an effort to make schoolchildren more aware of the value and fragility of nature so they can become ecological stewards themselves. Earth Day activities in the schools and nature camps also enhance their awareness.

In 2003 Svetlana Titova was recognized by the World Wildlife Fund for a "Women in Conservation" Award. She continues to work tirelessly to increase the environmental IQ of the public and to ensure that the valuable programs of her organization get the support they need to protect the ecosystems of this fragile land.



## Hemispheres

**HEMISPHERES NEWSLETTER** is distributed to schools throughout Texas to be shared with social studies, geography, language, English, literature, math, and science teachers within each school. This biannual newsletter is a tool for teachers who use, or would like to incorporate, area-studies materials in the classroom.

**Please distribute copies of *Hemispheres* to all who may benefit from our resources!**

**HEMISPHERES LISTSERV** You can sign up to receive workshop announcements and other information from the centers' outreach programs via this electronic distribution list. We also invite you to use this listserv to communicate with fellow teachers regarding area-studies issues.

**To subscribe to the list**, go to <http://inic.utexas.edu/hemispheres/> and fill out the form at the bottom of the page.

## Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy became famous as the author of *The God of Small Things*. This novel won the Booker Prize in 1997. The Booker Prize is the prestigious British award given out each year for the best full-length novel published in the British Commonwealth of Nations. *The God of Small Things* sold six million copies, has been published in twenty-one countries and was translated into forty languages. Roy was the first woman Indian author, and the first non-expatriate (Indian living in India) Indian to win the Booker Prize.

*The God of Small Things* was Roy's first novel and is filled with details that come from her own childhood. The novel's setting is the fictional town of Ayemenem, in Kerala state in the southwest of India, during the late 1960s when communism began to change the community and its views of the cast system. Ayemenem is based on the real village of Aymanam where Arundhati Roy

grew up. Still led by a Marxist government, Kerala is home to three major world religions: Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity.

Roy grew up in the Syrian Christian community that makes up 20% of Kerala's population. Her mother was Christian and her father was a Bengali Hindu, which means that he was a Hindu from a primarily Muslim region. In the story the main character's mother and father are separated, as were Roy's own parents.

When Roy was 16, she left home to live on her own. Eventually she went to school and studied architecture at the Delhi School of Architecture. But today she does not work as an architect or as an author. She is now well known for her work as a political activist. Roy has joined Narmada Bachao Andolan, a grassroots organization created to oppose the construction of large dams on the Narmada River. Not only did she join the organization and contribute her Booker Prize award money to the group, but she has also taken part in protests and has even been arrested. In March 2002, the Supreme Court in New Delhi, where she now lives, found Roy in contempt of the court after months of attempting to silence her criticism of the government. She was fined 2,000 rupees and sentenced to 24 hours in jail.

She has used her celebrity status and writing tal-

ent to raise public awareness of the issues she feels strongly about: large hydroelectric dams, nuclear power, religious violence, and racial violence to name a few. She has devoted herself to non-fiction and politics. In an interview in 2001 with *The Progressive* magazine, Roy said, "It is only to people in the outside world, who got to know me after *The God of Small Things*, that it seems like a transition.

In fact, I'd written political essays before I wrote the novel. These are issues I have been involved with for a while. I don't see a difference between *The God of Small Things* and my works of nonfiction. As I keep saying, fiction is truth. I think fiction is the truest thing there ever was. My whole effort now is to remove that distinction. I never do anything because I am a celebrity, as a rule. I do what I do as a citizen. I stand by what I write and follow through on what I write." She has turned down offers

to turn her award-winning novel into a movie. Instead she devotes her time to giving speeches all over the world and generally donates the honoraria to different grassroots organizations. When she was asked if she had plans to write more novels, she responded "I need fiction like you need to eat or exercise, but right now it's so difficult. I don't know how I'll ever be able to make the space to say, 'I'm writing a book now and I'm not going to be able to do x or y.'"

In 2004, Roy was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize for her work on social causes and her advocacy of non-violence. The Sydney Peace Prize is the only International Peace Prize awarded in Australia.

### For more information:

Arundhati Roy: The Progressive Interview. David Barnamian.

<http://www.progressive.org/intv0401.html>

Arundhati Roy: A Life Full of Beginnings and No Ends. Seby Barghese Thokkadam.

<http://www.chitram.org/mallu/ar.htm>

Arundhati Roy. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arundhati\\_Roy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arundhati_Roy)



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Antiquity  
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Egyptian pyramids. The Ramayana. Mayan temples. Scythian mummies. Ancient cultures are often presented, in our textbooks and classrooms, as civilizations that reached their height long ago, with little emphasis on the endurance of traditions. Although we are separated from “ancient” cultures by 500 to 5000 years, our lives today are marked by their presence. We can better understand the fabric of contemporary culture by studying the threads that weave us together with our past.

Join Hemispheres for a four-day workshop exploring the relationship of continuity and change from the ancient period to the modern era. For more information and registration forms, see the Hemispheres Web site: <http://inic.utexas.edu/hemispheres/> or contact Natalie Arsenault at [n.arsenault@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:n.arsenault@mail.utexas.edu), or (512) 232-2404.

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