

# imprint

## The Doon School Network: *How a single school dominates the elite*



Standing (L to R): BG Verghese, Rajan Nanda, Akbar Ahmed, Lakshman Singh, Kamal Nath, Roshan Seth  
 Sitting (L to R): Piloo Mody, Ajit Haksar, Rajiv Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, Karan Singh, Bhaskar Menon

**Love on the rocks?  
 Mrs Gandhi and  
 the Foreign Press**

**International Banks  
 and India:  
 The moneylenders fly in**

Salman Rushdie's Bombay

*Traditionally  
Fashionable-*



**Khatau**  
VOILES

# imprint

- A BUSINESS PRESS PUBLICATION -

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# on the marquee

THE ENLARGEMENT OF our format to a new, more conventional magazine size is not the only change at **Imprint**. Arun Gandhi has moved to our Directories Division to launch *Who's Who in India*. Stepping in is Vir Sanghvi, 26, formerly the Managing Editor of the *Bombay* magazine. Vir studied at the Mayo College, Ajmer and Mill Hill School, London, before going up to Oxford to read Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Before joining us, he travelled across the United States and the United Kingdom for a year, on an Inlaks Fellowship researching a forthcoming book on India and the Anglo-American Press.

And I am returning to this page, after a very long absence.

\* \* \*

These are troubled times for India. In the north-east, Assam is in continuous agitation and in continuous agony. The Punjab is in a threatening mood—give us this and give us that or else we will take all. The South seems to be saying 'enough is enough'; following in the footsteps of the Tamils, putting Andhras first in Andhra; Kannadigas first in Karnataka. The drought in Tamil Nadu will put the Centre to a severe test in the months to follow, but nowhere are there indications that New Delhi has realised the magnitude of the challenges ahead. Conditions in West Bengal, in MP, in Bihar, in UP and in Maharashtra continue to deteriorate.

And this is an incomplete picture. Even the Ministry of Agriculture in New Delhi has no idea how much food will have to be imported in 1983-84. The Ministry of Finance has no clue as to what actual deficits and shortfalls are currently accumulating in the economy—several of its top departments are headless.

The textile strike in India's biggest industry, in India's largest city, is in its *fifteenth* month. The law and order situation is bad, very bad, everywhere. Unemployment is mounting and purchasing power in the countryside is dwindling. The administrative scene is chaotic. Petty mindedness seems to be all-pervasive: chairmen and executives of large, nationalised banks need permission from New Delhi for a visit abroad (where all the profit centres of Indian banks are).

The Prime Minister's face, recently, on the TV and in pictures from Assam and from Madras, reflects the pain and anguish of these troubled times. Yet, there are no signs that we are doing anything about Assam, about the Punjab, about the South, that is *realistic*.

"Where will they go?" Mrs Gandhi has asked. 'They' are the new settlers in Assam. Most of us rejoiced when Pakistan was dismembered. Shared responsibility and compassion require that the 21 other states and nine union territories take in sufficient numbers of 'foreign' settlers from Assam to reduce what the Assamese consider their almost overwhelming presence in that state. This is not an easy solution. But what other solution is there, anyway?

The answer to the demands of the Sikhs and the aspirations of the South, lies in greater autonomy. It lies in giving the Sikhs and the Southerners, greater responsibility for themselves. And, in giving greater responsibility to the Biharis for Bihar; in making Lucknow severely accountable for UP. That, more than anything else, will be seen to be doing justice to the South.

India is too big and too diverse a country to be entirely ruled from New Delhi. The notion of a very strong centre is not a prerequisite for a manageable India. But a system of stronger, freer and more accountable states is.

*R.V. Pandit*

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# TUGHLAQIAN EXTRAVAGANCES

*Riding on the NAM gravy train*

**DELHI HAS RETURNED** to its characteristic bureaucratic somnolence. For the two weeks of the non-aligned jamboree, elite parts of the city were hyperactive. Now everyone's back to normal—lethargic, callous and corrupt.

During the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit there were two kinds of Delhi-wallahs, more or less like the North and South which generated so much fire at the meet itself. There were those connected with the Summit and the hoi-polloi.

The Summit crowd got a taste of the North's opulence—the finest food and drink, often free. And, you won't believe it, free Delhi Transport Corporation buses, with courteous staff, running with pin-point precision. The others remained untouched by the crores spent so lavishly in one of the biggest circuses the country has seen.

Obviously, it cost a great deal of money to host all the leaders, the 101 delegations and keep them secure in gilded comfort reminiscent of our legendary maharajahs. If only we were equally prompt in spending Asiad and NAM-type money to reduce the disparities between India's own minuscule North and enormous South! But as a perceptive observer remarked, "Even if the money had been saved, it would hardly have gone to development projects."

\* \* \*

FOR SUCH PRIVILEGED members of society as the Indian and indeed international press, the Summit was a gravy train. That probably made up for the slim journalistic pickings, or was that planned? The handouts started with gifts of VIP briefcases to each of the 1,500 accredited correspondents, with the Rs 360 tag intact. Rumour has it the price of smaller briefcases crashed precipitously, as the market was sud-



denly flooded with them.

The press was served excellent, choice food at the ITDC (India Tourism Development Corporation) restaurant attached to the Press Lounge at modest prices, not forgetting the cheapest beer in town and foreign liquor at the bar. The ITDC suddenly outdid itself by making beer free in an adjacent lawn. Several thousand crates were consumed as pressmen alleviated the boredom of long, unproductive daylight hours. Meanwhile, the fight against western imperialism and their economic domination on behalf of the unprivileged Third and Fourth Worlds continued in adjacent Vigyan Bhavan.

\* \* \*

BETWEEN BOREDOM, THE Indian press' desire for a story and traditional distrust of Pakistan, an innocuous and reasonable reference to the Kashmir problem suddenly threatened to set back the tortuously slow, though perceptible, progress in Indo-Pakistan relations. Hypersensitive foreign office officials were equally to blame.

As soon as printed copies of President Zia's speech were distributed and the line on the need for a just solution to the Kashmir problem spotted, news-

men took it out of its positive context and began a needless song and dance. Shortly afterwards, an agitated senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs burst into the Media Centre declaring, "The bastards are at it again."

Immediate official comments seemed equally irate. There was some worry about what all this might do to the Indo-Pakistan Joint Commission, perhaps the most positive sign in bilateral relations for a long time. It was due to be formally set up by the respective foreign ministers the following morning, in the presence of Mrs Gandhi and General Zia. Fortunately,

everything went as scheduled, and the stage is set for further snail-like progress in relations with our 'feared' north-western neighbour.

\* \* \*

**THE RACE FOR** Foreign Secretary is on with the extension of the present Foreign Secretary, Mr MK Rasgotra's term expiring this September. In view of the recent directive from the Prime Minister's office regarding officials past retirement, his number appears to be up.

Leading the pack of officials in the race is K Natwar Singh, now a Secretary in the Ministry. Considered a likely winner, because of his long and close association with Mrs Gandhi, his career got a further boost by the undeniably efficient manner in which he organised and conducted the Non-Aligned Summit.

Unfortunately, all the backroom boys from Mrs Gandhi's close circle of advisors are quiet, unobtrusive men who shun the limelight. If anything, Mr Natwar Singh actively seeks it. The stories of his penchant for publicity are legendary. But then his current race is just for the Foreign Secretary's job and nothing more. Yet. ♦



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BY SUNAINA LOWE

# THE MONEYLENDERS FLY IN

*The world banking community discovers India*

**THE RENOVATIONS AND** activity started in Bombay's business district in 1980. The old and mildewed Gourdon's restaurant was demolished, steaks and all, and in its place came up a smart, new, polished granite frontage with split-level contouring within. There was a lot of bustle outside the Air India building at Nariman Point. The ground floor was stripped and redone with Arabic lettering, brass fittings, and plate-glass swing doors. Opposite Bombay University there was another new facade, long polished counters and teller booths. It was spring in banking circles and there were banks mushrooming all over the place. Foreign banks.

The thaw began to set in five years ago. There was a perceptible warming-up of the government's attitude towards foreign banks and their operations in the country. Where earlier there had existed a mutual distrust and a cold, conscious design to limit, on the part of the government, there is now a feeling of symbiosis and several foreign banks have been allowed to open branches or representative offices since 1978. Four banks were accorded licences in 1980-81: European-Asian Bank of West Germany, Indo-Suez Bank of France, Bank of Oman and Emirates Commercial Bank from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Along with these, at least 13 international banking institutions have been allowed representative facilities in the country. These include Barclays Bank, Midlands Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, Credit Lyonnaise, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company and others. Recently the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) and the Bank of Nova Scotia too, have been awarded branch licences, while the Irving Trust Company of the United States has been permitted a representative office.

Under the old, conservative banking

policies of the Government of India, the granting of branch licences had always been a touchy subject. After Independence till the nationalisation of major banks in 1969 and even upto the early '70s, the idea had been to protect the local banking industry from aggressive overseas competition so that it would be allowed to grow and shift its priorities from mainly metropolitan and industrial operations to rural and agricultural ones. Only the established foreign banks like Grindlays and Chartered were allowed to continue working undisturbed, because of historical ties.

By the early '70s Indian banking had more or less come of age although only in the domestic market. Overseas operations were few and limited in scope. With the Gulf boom and the rise in oil prices there was a sudden flow in foreign exchange remittances from the countries where Indian manpower and expertise had gone. This unexpected windfall forced the government into changing its stance.

"Obviously, there was a lucrative business in handling these remittances," says an erstwhile Chairman of the Bank of Baroda, who had been actively involved in the bank's overseas

operations. "Indian banks wanted to expand to those countries wherever there was an Indian community. But the government realised that any government allowing an Indian bank to operate on its soil would demand a reciprocal agreement with India. So, if Indian banks wished to expand abroad, they would have to be prepared for similar demands from foreign governments."

The Government of India decided a change of policy was in order. As Indian banks moved into the Gulf market, under the principle of reciprocity, two Gulf banks were allowed to open branches in

Bombay. The State Bank of India and the Bank of India started operations in Paris and two French banks were allowed representative offices here. The Indo-Suez Bank, also French, whose application for a licence had been pending for quite a while, was quickly granted one.

In addition to the increased volume of foreign exchange transactions (because of the flood of remittances), and the pressure for reciprocal agreements, there was another compelling reason for allowing the foreign banks in.

Over the last three years, the deterioration in the terms of trade has caused the trade gap to increase. At the same time, a worsening of the foreign trade climate has led to a drop in the funds available to India from such bodies as the World Bank. When the Sixth Five Year Plan was formulated in 1980, it allowed for a limited drawing on the country's foreign exchange reserves and very little commercial borrowing. As it turned out, the government has had to draw some \$150 million a month from the reserves since the Plan was made out. Faced with a paucity of aid funds and fast depleting reserves, India has resorted



## *With India's increased commercial borrowing foreign banks have an important role to play.*

to precisely the sort of commercial borrowing on the international market that the Plan had hoped would be virtually negligible. In 1982-83, commercial borrowings abroad are expected to total \$1.5 billion.

In such a situation, foreign banks clearly have a role to play. With worldwide networks of branches and impressive reputations for loan syndication, they were ideally placed to arrange foreign finance.

For the banks themselves, the opening up of an Indian operation made sense. India has always maintained an extremely high credit rating on the international market and there has never been the fear of a default. But as the Emirates Commercial Bank's AT Shipchandler says, "India has never taken advantage of credit or tried to borrow aggressively though it could have." Moreover, a sum of \$1.5 billion, large as it seems, remains relatively small in international terms. Thus, there is no danger that the country will now over-extend itself.

In the current recessionary world climate, India offers foreign banks a safe and stable option. While the government has reservations about allowing them full branch banking facilities, many of them also seem to prefer to wait and see how both, India's borrowing requirements, and the government's policy towards them, develop over the next few years. A representative office requires relatively little investment and serves as a listening post that guides business to the parent organisation and headquarters. It also enables foreign investors to take a closer look at the investment potential in the country. Such offices present no immediate threat to domestic Indian banking and the government has clearly found them useful. The representative offices, too, find operations in India lucrative. As N Hird of Barclays Bank Representative Office says, "On the international banking scene, India has considerable potential." A representative office means a

presence in the country, and banks with these offices can always retain the option to have them upgraded to branches—if the Government of India allows.

Moreover, in the last few years India's foreign trade—both exports and imports—has increased tremendously. "The government had a definite policy of promoting export consciousness," says Ramu Pandit, Secretary of the Indian Merchants' Chamber, and an ex-banker himself. "It used to penalise non-exporting companies but in the '60s some textile mills used to proudly pay the penalties rather than have to export. Also, the local market was so vast and exporting meant a lot of hassle." But, with the opening of the Gulf market and the newly inculcated export consciousness, private companies have found it profitable to go transnational. The liberalisation of the import policy allows for imports in the 'core' fields of high technology and of capital goods for the export sector. This has generated greater foreign currency transactions and business. Whereas earlier, government institutions like the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) and the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) were the only agencies borrowing abroad for private Indian industry, "companies are now encouraged to solicit funds on their own in the international market, on the basis of their reputations and credit worthiness," says Ramu Pandit. This has been a boon to the foreign banks operating in India as they are the obvious advisors for Indian businessmen in these matters.

The government has also, recently, taken measures to encourage non-resident investment in India. "There are a lot of Indians in the Gulf," says Mr Shipchandler of the Emirates Commercial Bank, "who realise that their stay in those countries abroad is limited. They would like to have an investment base in India." Banks of these countries operating in India would be

the ideal via-media for arranging these investments.

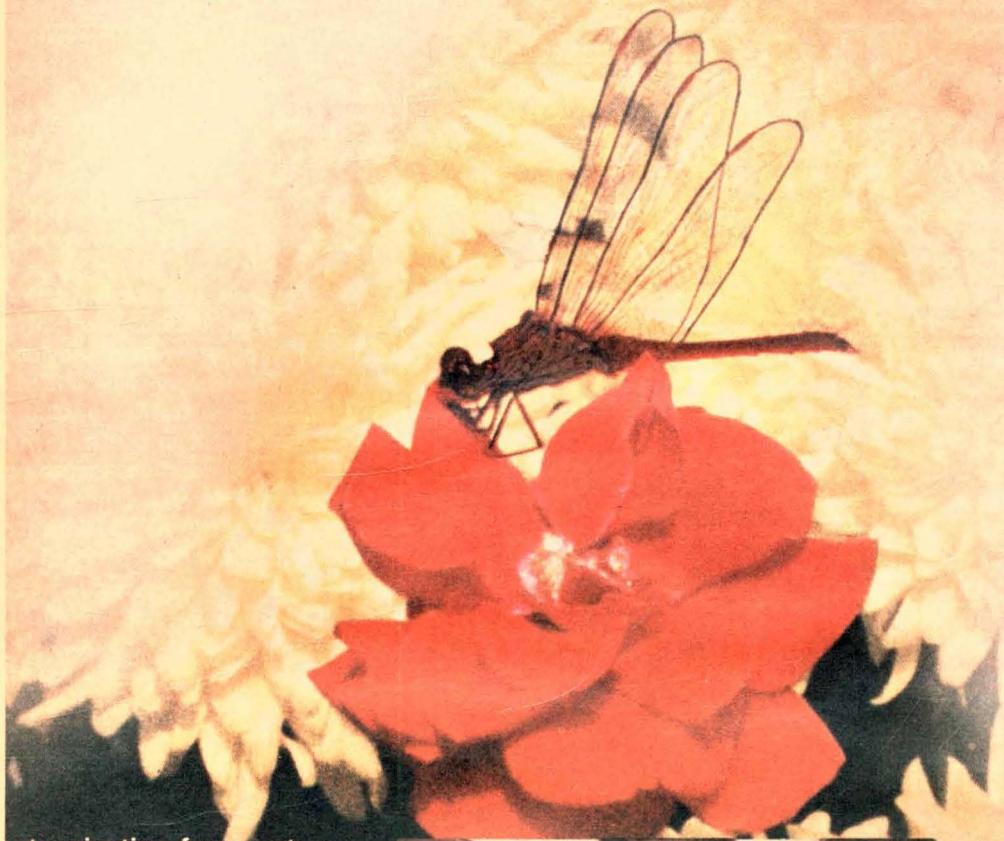
Despite the obvious disadvantages of running an Indian branch operation—a high rate of taxation and white collar unionism among them—several banks have expressed a desire to explore that option. Certainly, banks from countries where a substantial Indian community has settled, have a ready-made traffic in remittances to keep them in profit. In its very first year of operation, the single branch of the Emirates Commercial Bank made a profit of Rs 17 lakhs. Its management insists that remittances were only part of the success story. Rather, it was efficient, computerised service that did it.

There is a feeling that, compared to some of the more inefficient nationalised banks, foreign banks will seem extremely attractive to Indian customers. While the taxation problems remain, it is probable that a well-run bank would make a neat profit.

But if the foreign banks were to start competing with the nationalised sector, then it is certain that the government would intervene. Already the government is restricting branches to port cities and big business centres. So what seems likely, is that branches will only be allowed when the reciprocity principle demands it. Otherwise, foreign banks will be restricted to foreign business transactions—letters of credit, loan management and commercial borrowing. Yet, the foreign banks are already competing with the nationalised banks in a limited way for large loan syndications and commercial borrowings of Indian companies. The general feeling, however, is that the market is large enough for everybody and nationalised banks are still the only ones capable of providing credit at extremely favourable terms.

However, even that represents a considerable shift in government policy. As the Indian economy gets more internationalised, so does the country's banking system. ♦

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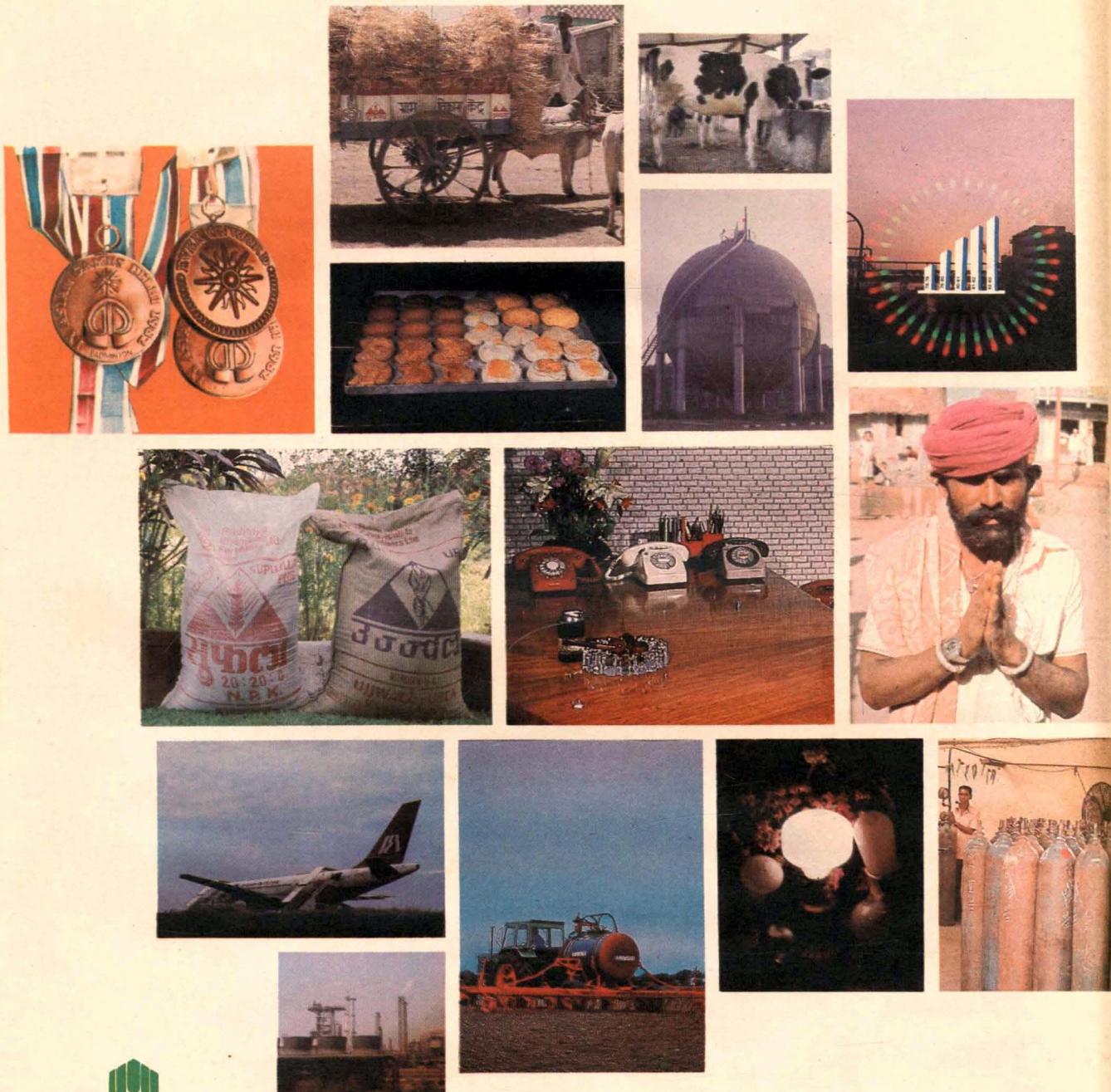
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BY RAM JETHMALANI

## TOEING THE RUSSIAN LINE

*Our foreign policy lies in shambles*

NOW THAT THE media spectacle of the Non-Aligned Nations conference is over, perhaps the time has come to ask some serious questions about the origin and direction of India's foreign policy. Because foreign affairs have always been a preserve of the elite, and because the government cloaks it with a smoke-screen of unnecessary secrecy to ward off criticism and scrutiny, it has not been widely perceived just how morally and politically bankrupt our foreign policy really is.

We faithfully toe the Soviet line even when it does not suit us, we identify ourselves with (and lead) a movement that ignores human rights, we blindly support a West Asia policy that is not only unfair but also fails to advance our own interests, and we base major foreign affairs decisions on the constraints of domestic, electoral strategy.

Despite claims to the contrary, we have become subservient to the Soviet Union. At the Non-Aligned Summit, we furthered Soviet purposes and tried to deflect criticism of the Soviets. It was left to Malaysia and tiny Singapore to raise the issue of the occupation of Afghanistan. We did not say one word about the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea. As far as I am concerned, Lon Nol and Pol Pot may well be Tweedledee and Tweedledum, but the withdrawal of foreign forces may have helped bring some peace to this strife-torn area. We were also unwilling to talk about the non-implementation of the Helsinki Accord and the tragedy of Poland.

Instead we spoke about such issues as converting the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace. It is well known that the Ocean is bordered mostly by the Soviet Union's client states in Africa and South East Asia. Only Western democratic countries have to send their naval forces there, from a di-



tance. So basically, the demand for withdrawal of military forces from the Ocean is an attempt to make the democratic countries withdraw their forces.

Our demand for a world-wide nuclear freeze has a similar origin. A nuclear freeze makes sense only when the two opposing sides have achieved a certain parity. At the moment, there is no parity at all. A freeze on nuclear weapon-building would give the Soviets the advantage. Perhaps the only redeeming feature of the disarmament resolution passed at the Non-Aligned Summit was its vagueness!

We attempt to justify our pro-Soviet bias with talk of anti-colonialism. Of course, it is only natural for a country that has suffered 200 years of colonial rule to oppose colonialism. But the fact is that the old colonial powers have shed their colonial policies. The only colonialism present today is Soviet colonialism. The poor Polish worker wants nothing more than food and freedom. What he gets are Russian bullies with tanks and guns. Millions of unhappy people are trapped within the Soviet Empire. The Indian government however, remains silent about their plight.

Much has been said in recent months

about the aims and objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement. Not enough attention has however, been focussed on one of the central tenets of the movement—non-interference in a country's domestic affairs. Such a tenet is in direct conflict with modern international law and the human rights provisions of the United Nations. The observance of basic human rights is no longer a matter of domestic concern—it is now a matter of international concern. The world cannot be expected to remain silent about regimes that trample on basic human freedoms. A denial of human rights is now

valid provocation for declaring a state just short of war.

The non-aligned nations accept this in part. They do not regard the racist policies of South Africa as being part of that country's internal affairs. However, the Non-Aligned Movement exercises strange double standards when it comes to judging other dictatorial regimes. Then, the human rights issue is forgotten and dismissed as an internal affair.

The Movement also seeks to focus attention on the New International Economic Order and the need for North-South dialogue. Such talk has credibility only if the developing countries themselves are prepared to accept the doctrine that the wealth of each state is part of a trust for the world's poor. In fact, the biggest exploiters of an inequitable pricing structure have been the member-states of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The greatest economic injury that India suffered in the last decade was the oil price hike, which was initiated and continued by members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Ram Jethmalani, MP, is the Vice-President of The Bharatiya Janata Party.

Tea time never  
meant much to me.  
And then...



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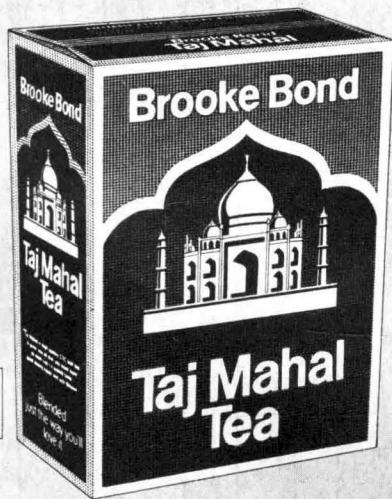
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## *The Russians have never given us anything without making us pay the price.*

Of course this was never discussed at the Non-Aligned Summit and the same rhetoric about the North and the South was employed once again.

We remain silent about the damage the Arabs have done to our economy, and indeed, we remain silent about many of the issues pertaining to West Asia. Recently, I asked the External Affairs Minister on the floor of the Lok Sabha, if India had advised the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to do what we did 30 years ago, and recognize the State of Israel. I asked if we had advised the PLO to accept all the West Asia resolutions of the United Nations including the Partition Resolution and Resolution 242. I asked if we had ever talked to the Arabs about the philosophy of Gandhiji and about building bridges of love and affection between countries rather than believing in eternal conflict. I got no satisfactory answers because this government is determined to support an Arab policy of *jihad* which is the antithesis of secularism.

Our stand on West Asia is not only undoubtedly unfair, but also not particularly pragmatic. Years of blind support for the Arabs have not helped us. We can count on no Arab support against Pakistan nor can we expect to be exempted from their oil price hikes.

The same is true of our pro-Soviet policy. Despite our enthusiastic support, the Russians have never given us anything without making us pay the price. It now seems clear that, to the Russians, detente is only a brief interruption in the Cold War—a time when they do not consider war feasible, a time when they can advance their interests by means more subtle than war. When their conflict with the Free World does intensify, India is going to find herself in an awkward situation. Our interests will lie with the democratic states of the West and yet, we will have identified ourselves with the Soviet Empire.

Why then, one may legitimately ask, do we follow this illogical foreign

policy that has neither moral nor practical justification. Are we not concerned about protecting our own interests? Doesn't the government recognize that such a policy will cost us heavily in the long run? The answer lies in the demands of domestic policy. Mrs Gandhi's electoral strategy depends on courting the communists and the communalists. Blind support of the Soviet Union pleases the communists, and support of the Arab cause pleases our Muslim fanatics. Mrs Gandhi goes to Moscow to influence our local communists and she feels that an immoral West Asia policy will gain her the support of the more fanatical Muslims.

Thus, because of her narrow political considerations, India is now in a situation where the Arabs take us for granted, the Western democracies believe that in the final conflict we will be ranged against them, and even the Russians have no respect for us. They know that militarily we do not count. And they have pushed us into a situation where we can no longer play them off against the West.

Quite simply, we have no cards left to play. Fortunately, our interests are not in conflict with those of the Soviets today. But if that were ever to change, then our true state of defencelessness and isolation would be revealed.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this government will change its policies. Diplomatic niceties also require that critics of our foreign policy must restrain their voices. When Yassar Arafat calls Mrs Gandhi his 'sister', what can one say? What happens if you believe that Arafat is an international gangster?

But, the best hope for the country lies in a return to the policy of genuine non-alignment that we followed in the years just after Independence. We should appreciate that non-alignment and concern for human rights are not incompatible. We should also recognise that a policy of selective non-alignment will not work. We cannot align ourselves to the Russian cause and then claim to be non-aligned. ♦

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# THE DOON SCHOOL NETWORK

By Malavika Rajbans Sanghvi

*Forget about Sanjay and Rajiv. There's much more to the Doon School network than the Gandhis.*

THE ROLL-CALL reads like a veritable *Who's Who*: heir apparent Rajiv Gandhi, multi-national manager Bhaskar Menon, maharajah and politician Karan Singh, diplomat Ram Sathe, super-executive Ajit Haksar, editor BG Verghese, publicity-shy industrialist Vittal Mallya, artist Vivan Sundaram and golfer Lakshman Singh. There are many others: politicians Dinesh Singh and CPN Singh; entrepreneurs Rajan Nanda, LM Thapar, and Gautam Khanna; civil servants Lovraj Kumar, K Shankar Bajpai; journalists Aroon Purie, Prem Jha, Shyam Bhatia and Rahul Singh, and of course the Sanjay

'gang' of Akbar Ahmed, Kamal Nath, and Harish Jain. Names that constitute the Indian meritocracy of achievers and winners. Heirs to the Prime Ministership, business empires and thrones. Fly-by-night wheeler-dealers, certified mavericks, flamboyant conglomerate heads—Doon School seems to have bred them all.

The phenomenon by itself is not new. England has Eton and Winchester which, together, turn out a large section of the elite, and in many other countries a few schools dominate the meritocracy. However, India had, until recently escaped this trend. It's many elite schools like Ajmer's Mayo College, Bombay's Cathedral, Delhi's St Columbus, Darjeeling's St Paul's and Lovedale's Lawrence School have always educated the children of the wealthy, but till now, no single school has emerged as our counterpart of

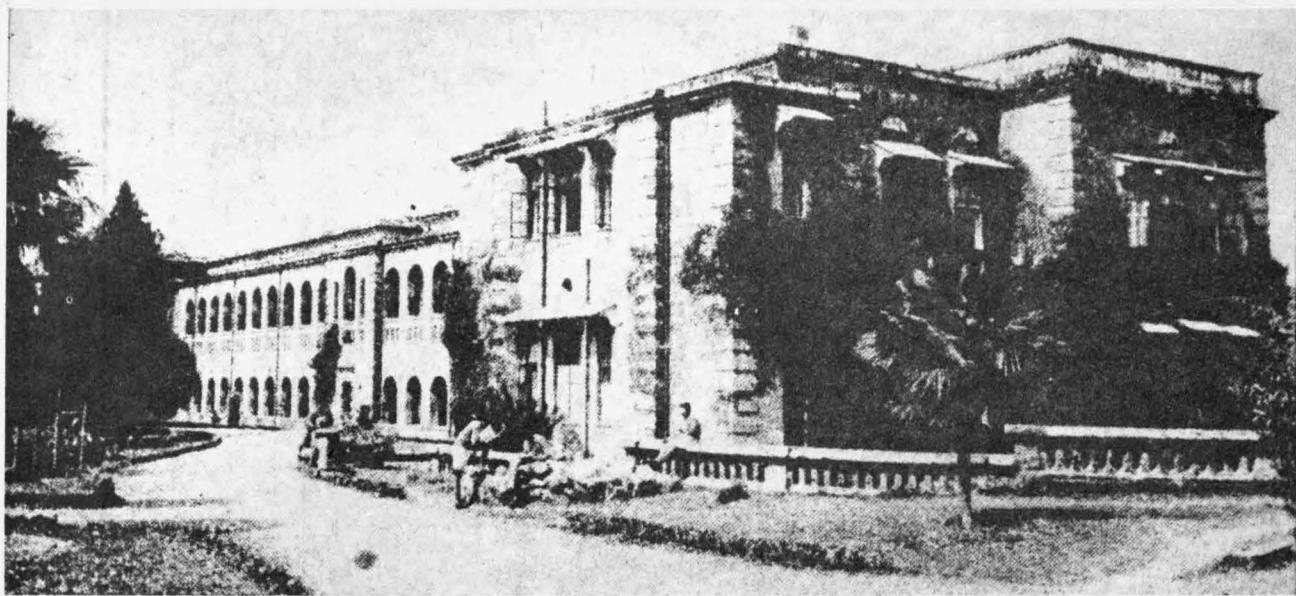
Eton. Of no other school could it be said that its old boys formed a network that all but dominated the upper echelons of the elite.

Doon has now come to occupy this position. It is unquestionably India's leading school and a breeding ground for the movers and shakers (and reapers) of Indian society. Even if one discounts the fame and notoriety that attached themselves to some Doon School products during the Emergency, and dismisses the Sanjay Gandhi era as an exceptional phenomenon, there can be no denying the Doon domination of many other fields of life.

In the 48 years since it opened its doors, the Doon School has more than fulfilled the ambitions of Satish Ranjan Das, its founder. Das had intended to create India's first real public school—as distinct from a 'Chiefs' College'—with its objective as 'the ethical and

Malavika Rajbans Sanghvi is a Bombay-based freelance writer and a columnist for the *Express Magazine*. She is also the author of *In Search Of Saleem Sinai* on page 61.





The main entrance to the Doon School.

moral training of the boys with a view to develop in them a sense of individual and corporate responsibility for leading lives of service.' He had planned to raise Rs 30 lakhs to give the school a secure financial base but died before he could collect more than a third of that sum. Nevertheless, his wife and other eminent Indians persisted and the money was found. A verdant 70-acre estate in Dehra Dun called Chandbagh was acquired and school opened on October 27, 1935, with a complement of 70 boys. It's first Headmaster, AE Foot assured parents that his students would "leave the Doon School as members of an aristocracy, but it must be an aristocracy of service inspired by ideals of unselfishness, not one of privilege, wealth and position."

Since those early days, Doon has grown in reputation and stature. A boy's boarding school, it has copied many of the institutions of the British public school system—an emphasis on sports, a house system and a routine that tries to develop an 'all-round' personality, even if it is at the expense of academics—but it has always adapted them to local conditions. Its first lot of students included many who were later to become famous (diplomats Ram Sathe and Uma Shankar Bajpai, industrialist Vittal Mallya, journalists George Verghese and Balram Tandon and technocrat Vasant Rajadhyaksha) and Doon has kept up its record of producing generations of leaders.

"We had certain advantages to begin with," claims Kali Mody, 60, the affable businessman who is the son

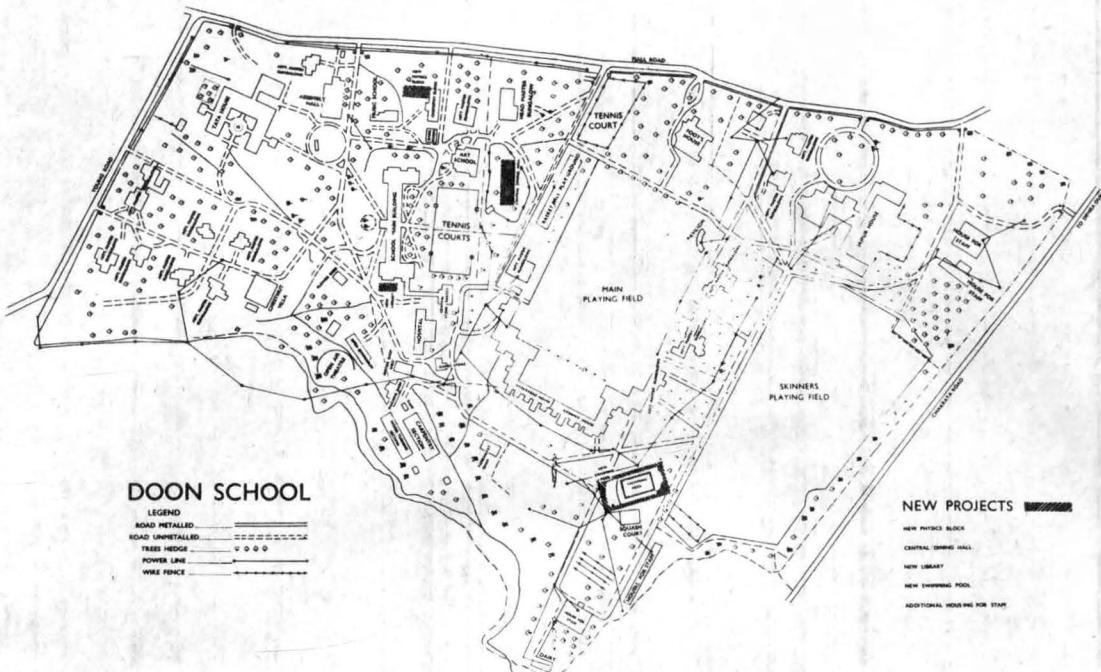
of Sir Homi Mody and elder brother of the late Piloo. "Our fathers would have made sure that we would have got good jobs anyhow." To an extent Mody is right. It is for example difficult to detect traces of exceptional ability in Rajiv Gandhi. And Karan Singh would have been the Maharajah of Kashmir even if he had never set foot inside Doon's corridors. In a sense, Doon has served the interests of a lot of very successful men by bringing together their sons and training them for the prominent positions that their fathers had already secured for them. The Doon School connection does show signs of nepotism but this is not the entire story. Neither Mayo, nor St Paul's have managed to turn out so many outstanding products, despite drawing their students from similar backgrounds. Clearly there is more to the Doon School than being born into privilege!

"Its ex-students are the first to accept this," writes Karan Singh, 52, in his autobiography *Heir Apparent*. "Sending me to the Doon School was an imaginative and forward-looking decision which had a lasting influence on my future life. Had I not been obliged to go through four rather unpleasant years at Doon, it would have been much more difficult for me to make the transition between feudal to democratic life." Others are almost schoolboy-like in their enthusiasm. "My years at school taught me the value of independence, initiative, sportsmanship and camaraderie," says Bhaskar Menon, 49, Chairman and Chief Executive of EMI

Music, worldwide. "In Doon we inculcated the best traditions of leadership and duty," says Michael Dalvi, 38, cricketer.

**W**HAT IS IT about Doon then, that makes grown men set aside individual identities, hard-nosed business interests and professional rivalries and allow an old fraternity to take over? What is that intangible, intriguing emotion that calls forth such strong loyalties from men who have, in most cases, nothing more in common than the fact that they happened to have attended the same school? What is it that makes every Doon School student a member of a network so strong yet so invisible that its workings are often insidious, and intriguing? It isn't quite a Masonic lodge but Doon School old boys look after their own. Whereas their Mayo counterparts hardly ever keep in touch properly, Doon School alumni are efficient at organising re-unions, get-togethers and cricket matches. Along with the fun and nostalgia, comes something more tangible—a network of professional contacts and innumerable opportunities for advancement.

"My taking over Diners Club can be traced to a Doon School connection," says Shamsunder Agarwal, 46, Chairman and Managing Director of the successful credit-card company. "Though Kali Mody was much senior to me in school, we were in close contact because of several fund-raising efforts we did together for the school. It was our friendship and fraternal feel-



### **A map of the sprawling, 70-acre, Chandbagh campus.**

ings that led to my joining the Diners Club board in 1968 and then complete take-over in 1976."

Ashok Agarwal, 33, one of the few Doon School boys to have entered the film-industry has an interesting story that drives the point home. "While waiting for my admission to the Film Institute, I found that I was the only boy of my batch without a job. So I wrote off applications to all the tea companies in Calcutta, with no luck. 'Jobless?' said my Principal, JAK Martyn, who I had the good fortune of meeting at a Calcutta old boys dinner. 'We must do something about it.' He wrote off to the same companies which were headed by many ex-Doon students, recommending that they should help me because of the old boy network. In a couple of weeks, I was flooded with offers from the companies that had rejected me. One Managing Director, an old boy, explained it simply, 'We know your background,' he said. 'We trust you.' "

Often the help is a little more formal. Vilas Nath, 43, the efficient Bombay representative of the Old Boys Association, sometimes receives letters from Doon School boys who head tea companies, asking if any old boy needs a job. Says alumnus Shatrujit Singh 'Bapa' Deo, 39, the Yuvraj of Dhran-

gdhra, "I think its fair to say that if an ex-Doon man is interviewing two candidates for a job and he finds that they are both equally qualified, except that one went to Doon, the chap from Doon will get the job."

The upper crust may only be a lot of crumbs sticking together, but that's the way the cookie crumbles! And even Vasant Rajadhyaksha, 59, former chairman of Hindustan Lever, who emphasizes that the Doon connection is not necessarily nepotistic, admits that this is 'not always' the case, and that it does help when it comes to jobs, business and promotions. Cricketer Michael Dalvi offers an instance of how the network helped him. "I was working for Binny's, the Madras-based textile giant and languishing somewhat, when an old Dosco (Doon School boy) called SK 'Tishi' Khanna, put me in contact with a classmate of his in Doon, who is the Chairman of my present company (The Jorehaut Group)—Basant K Dubey. I suppose that speaks for itself."

"I often have to do business with the Defence Services," says Udai Pashricha, 33, businessman, "and it really helps being an ex-Dosco, even for things like getting entry passes to cordoned off areas—there's always an ex-Doon officer somewhere who makes it

easier." Certainly, along with other business houses like Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC, and Reckitt and Coleman, the Defence Services seem to be dominated by Doon. And the memories of alumni are littered with the leather and gunmetal cloak-and-dagger style of military adventure. "During the 1971 war on the Pakistan border, a famous commander of an Indian regiment took his foghorn and shouted over to the other side, 'Any Doon students out there?' When the answer came back in the negative he said, 'OK, then, fire!'" narrates PK 'Taggy' Tagore, 59, an ardent Doon-school alumnus, who still wears his school blazer and keeps his old boy record book under lock and key in his office.

There are other stories about the Doon school connection uniting the opposing armies during the Indo-Pakistan Wars. A dramatic instance concerns an Indian officer who was taken prisoner by the Pakistanis. It was only after he had been captured and was about to be led away that a Pakistani officer recognized him. "Weren't you at Doon?" he asked. Yes, said the Indian, he was. "I'll see what I can do," said the Pakistani. True to his word, he risked his position by smuggling him out of captivity and escorting him clandestinely to the Indian border.

The two schoolfriends still keep in touch, but the Pakistani officer's name cannot be published for fear of damaging his career.

**O**F COURSE NOTHING demonstrated the power of the Doon network as much as the Sanjay Gandhi era. Even though Sanjay was hardly in Doon for three years and there is many an alumnus who takes objection to his inclusion in the old boy lists, the fact remains that Doon left an indelible impression on the younger Gandhi's mind.

Suddenly during the Sanjay days, there emerged from the woodwork hundreds of Doon School boys clutching their school loyalties like tattered flags to their chests. Schoolboy nicknames such as 'Roly-Poly' and 'Dumpy' became household words, and everyone had a cutesey 'what-Sanjay-was-really-like-in-school' story to drop on the cocktail circuit. The power ship that was going to bulldoze its way to the nation's throne was, it seemed being powered by nothing more than schoolboy loyalty. The network during the Sanjay era, was alive, omnipotent and many-tentacled. Even though Doon School boys of earlier generations like Ajit Haksar, Uma Shankar Bajpai, Piloo Mody and John Mathai had enhanced the legend that was Doon, it took a Sanjay to make it a national phenomenon. After Sanjay, everyone knew what Doon signified: it was, simply, a breeding ground for the new royalty—and of course the most exclusive club in India.

Dilip Mehta, 31, alumnus and photographer for magazines like *Time*, and *Paris Match* tells of the period when he had been flown down by *Time*, during the 1977 elections to photograph Sanjay's desperate campaigning in Amethi. Having sweet-talked Sanjay's aides into letting him get near the campaign jeep, Dilip was discovered crouching in the car, by an infuriated Sanjay. In the tense, pin-drop silence that preceded the inevitable explosion (Sanjay was not on the best of terms with the press during that period), Dilip had to do some quick thinking. Falling back on the old school links, he launched into a nostalgic, 'We're-from-the-same-house' routine. "It worked," he recalls, "not only was I allowed to follow Sanjay around, but he later invited me to 1 Safdarjang Road, and I took pictures of the entire Gandhi clan."

## The Doon School Who's Who



RD Sathe



BG Verghese



Dinesh Singh



Karan Singh

### ENTRANCES 1935-39

**Umashankar Bajpai:** Formerly Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs. Now administers India International Centre, New Delhi.

**VKV Bhide:** Major General (Retd.), Engineers, Indian Army.

**Ajit Haksar:** Chairman Emeritus, ITC.

**Gautam Khanna:** Senior Vice President, Oberoi Hotels.

**Lovraj Kumar:** First Indian Rhodes Scholar (1947). Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum.

**Ravi John Matthai:** Senior Professor at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

**Vittal Mallya:** Chairman, United Breweries, Chairman, Hoechst Pharmaceuticals Ltd and Chairman, Hindustan Cocoa Products Ltd.

**Kali Mody:** Brought Diners Club to India and was its first Chairman.

**Vasant Rajadhyaksha:** Former Chairman, Hindustan Lever and Member, Planning Commission.

**Gulab Ramchandani:** Headmaster of The Doon School since 1979.

**Ram D Sathe:** Former Foreign Secretary. Now, Ambassador to West Germany.

**Dinesh Singh:** Former Foreign Minister of India (1967-69).

**Balram Tandon:** Delhi correspondent for *Daily Telegraph*, London.

**BG Verghese:** Editor, *Indian Express*.

### ENTRANCES 1940-44

**Piloo Mody:** Member of Parliament, Died, January 1983.

**Bhawani Singh:** Maharajah of Jaipur.

**Karan Singh:** Maharajah of Kashmir, former Minister for Health.

**Lalit Mohan Thapar:** President and Managing Director, Ballarpur Industries.

**Man Mohan Thapar:** Director, Ballarpur Industries.

**Indu Vira:** General Manager, Indian Oil Corporation.

### ENTRANCES 1945-49

**Shamsunder Agarwal:** Chairman, Diners Club.

**Shomie Ranjan Das:** Headmaster, The Lawrence School, Sanawar.

**Manabendra Deb:** Journalist, *Financial Times*, London.

**Ravi Gulhati:** Director, Department of



Piloo Mody



SS Agarwal



CPN Singh



Bhaskar Menon



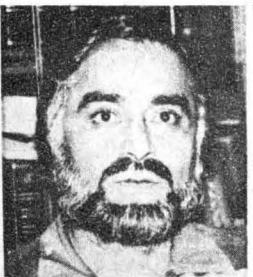
Prem Jha



Rajan Nanda



Roshan Seth



Rahul Singh



Rajiv Gandhi

Development Economics, World Bank.

**Jehangir Guzder:** Photographer for *Time - Life*.

**Satish Malhotra:** Chairman, Empire Industries.

**Bhaskar Menon:** Chairman, EMI Music, Worldwide.

**CPN Singh:** Minister of State for Science and Technology, Government of India.

#### ENTRANCES 1950-54

**Swaminathan Aiyer:** Former Editor, *Eastern Economist*. Now with *Indian Express*.

**Arun Bharatram:** Managing Director, Shriram Fibres.

**Suman Dubey:** Managing Editor, *India Today*.

**Anil Gore:** Publisher, *Reader's Digest*.

**Prem Jha:** Senior Assistant Editor, *Times of India*.

**Jai Kala:** Painter, was the first undergraduate to paint a mural for Oxford University.

**Deepak Lal:** Lecturer in Economics, London University and Consultant to World Bank.

**Ashok Malik:** Champion Golfer.

**Rajan Nanda:** Managing Director, Escorts Ltd.

**Padmanabh Pillai:** Leading Chinawatcher at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

**Roshan Seth:** Actor, played Nehru in *Gandhi*. Now at the National Theatre, London.

**Ranjit Sikand:** First Indian Managing Director of Reckitt & Coleman.

**Rahul Singh:** Resident Editor, *Indian Express*.

#### ENTRANCES 1955-59

**Anil Agarwal:** Technical Director, *Indian Express*.

**Ashok Agarwal:** Chief Assistant Director, Deluxe Films.

**Akbar Ahmed:** Leader, Rashtriya Sanjay Manch.

**Inderjit Badhwar:** Works for The Jack Anderson Column, Washington. Also Washington correspondent, *India Today*.

**Shekhar Bajaj:** Managing Director, Bajaj International.

**Vivek Bharatram:** Industrialist, DCM group.

**Subrata Chakravarty:** Associate Editor, *Forbes* magazine, New York.

**Siddhartha Charatram:** Industrialist, DCM Group.

**Michael Dalvi:** Cricketer.

**Ravi Ghai:** Hotelier, Natraj Hotel, Bombay.

**Rajiv Gandhi:** Former Indian Airlines pilot. Now General Secretary, All India Congress Committee (I).

**Sanjay Gandhi:** Member of Parliament and 'Youth Leader'. Died, June 1980.

**Kamal Nath:** Member of Parliament.

**Aroon Purie:** Editor, *India Today*.

**Bunker Roy:** Former National Squash Champion. Now doing social work in Tilonia, Rajasthan.

**Arun Singh:** Formerly with Reckitt & Coleman. Currently a close associate of Rajiv Gandhi.

**Martand Singh:** Consultant, Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.

**Vivan Sundaram:** Artist.

**Vikram Thapar:** Industrialist, Ballarpur Industries.

**Gautam Vohra:** Assistant Editor, *Times of India*.

#### ENTRANCES 1960-64

**Yogi Agarwal:** Formerly Assistant Editor, *Sunday Observer*, Bombay.

**Suman Berry:** Economist, World Bank.

**Shyam Bhatia:** Correspondent, *Observer*, London.

**Ashok Khanna:** Project Manager, Oberoi Hotels.

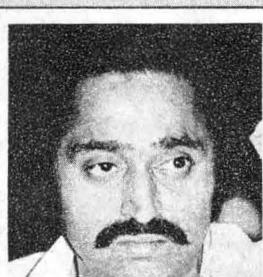
**Dilip Mehta:** Photographer for *Paris Match*.

**Bharat Sahgal:** Vice President, Bache Halsey, Stuart Shields.

**Lakshman Singh:** Golfer, Asian Games gold medallist.



Sanjay Gandhi



Kamal Nath



Gautam Vohra



Akbar Ahmed



Lakshman Singh

Dilip Mehta's story is probably one of the more innocuous instances of the network in operation. Because during the Sanjay era, Sanjay's school friends were known to be involved in businesses that were infinitely more unwholesome. *Imprint* asked Kamal Nath, 35, if he had benefitted at all from the Doon connection. "There have been many occasions where old Doon school boys have helped me, some of which I would not like to disclose," he replied adding that 'the list will be too long'. For Nath, the Doon School influenced him most "by instilling in us the feeling of comradeship and standing by one's colleagues". His own experiences probably prove his point.

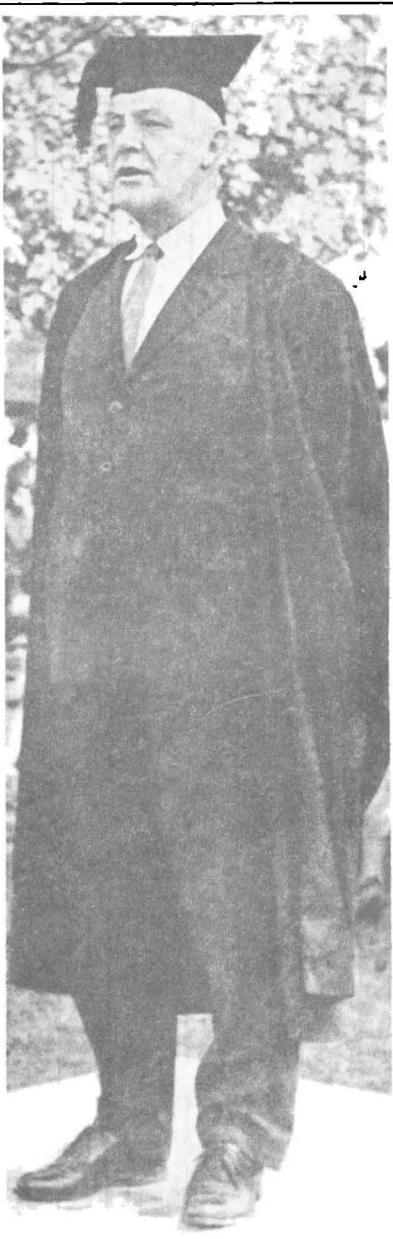
Even when the Gandhis returned to power in 1980, the Doon connection was still much in evidence, as Arun Shourie's exposé of the Kuo Oil Deal showed. In February 1980, Harish Jain, a Doon School alumnus, who ran a small company called Hindustan Monark, suggested to Kamal Nath, that his firm could organise a supply of oil for the government. The deal, to be awarded to Hong Kong's Kuo Oil Company (represented here by Monark), was worth \$175 million, and it now seems clear, was not in the country's best interests. Nevertheless, Nath took the matter to Sanjay who instructed Petroleum Minister, PC Sethi, to push the deal through. Though his officials protested, Sethi did Sanjay's bidding and Harish Jain had his contract.

Later, when the matter was debated in the Lok Sabha, KP Unnikrishnan, the Congress (S) MP, attributed the exposé to 'gang-warfare between two Doon School gangs'. According to Unnikrishnan, Rajiv Gandhi's school friends, who had replaced Sanjay's clique after the fateful Pitts crash, had brought this shady business to public attention to advance their own interests. So even in the exposé, the Doon School connection showed through quite clearly!

**W**HO WOULD HAVE thought that the Doon School would have such an impact on the nation's life? SR Das, however ambitious for the school's success, had clearly not planned the kind of fame it was attracting thanks to Sanjay. Its founders had tried to pattern it on the lines of Harrow and a major part of its teaching cadre, was drawn out of Harrow, Eton and other well-known British

public schools. Till then, all the other public boarding schools in India had been little more than 'Chiefs' Colleges' where the sons of maharajahs and nawabs could pass their schooldays in comfort and luxury with liveried butlers and lavish meals. Doon, it was hoped, would put an end to all that.

"Though slavish imitation is to be



**JAK Martyn, the legendary Headmaster.**

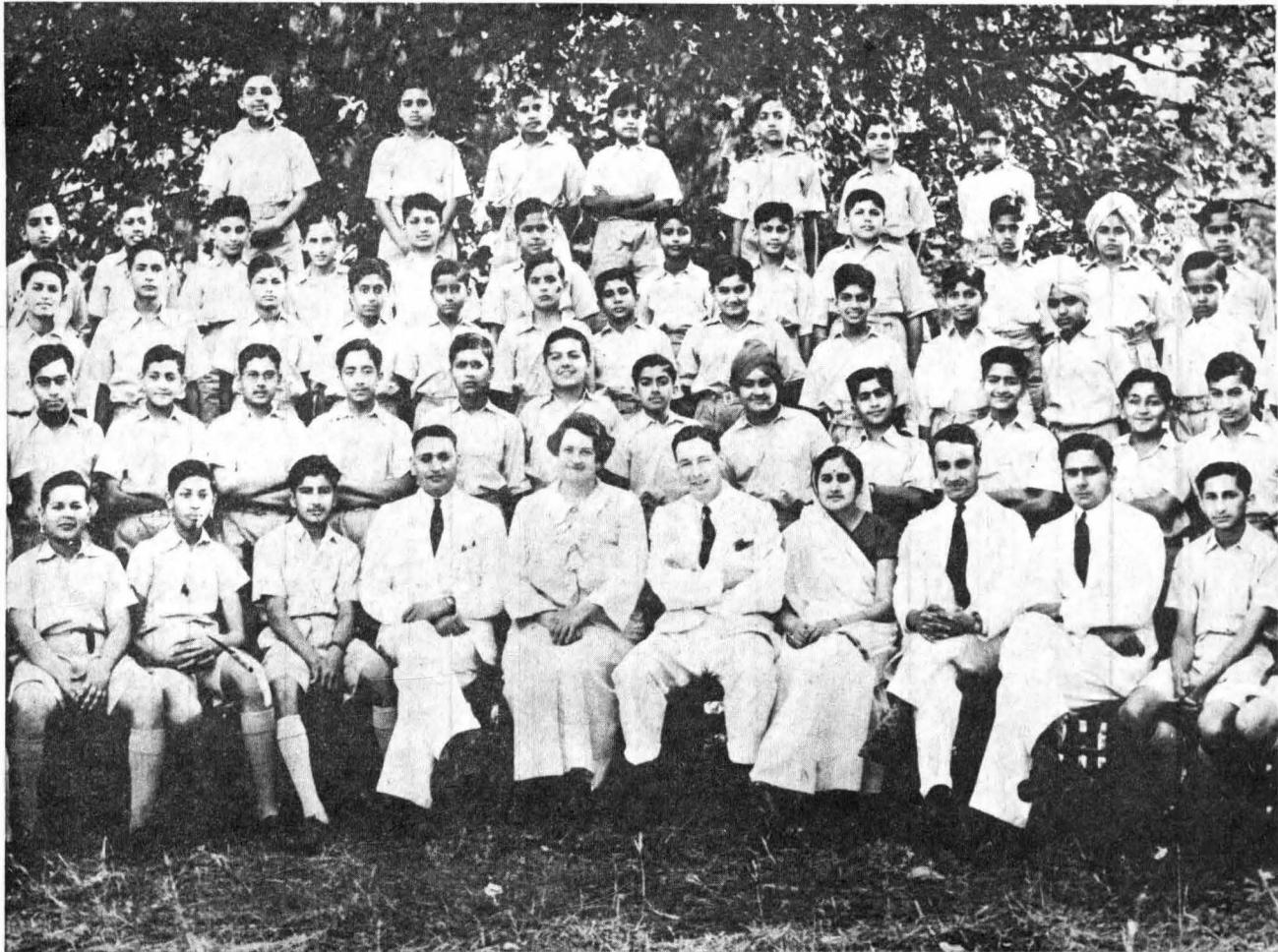
avoided, the proposed school will attempt to develop in an atmosphere of Indian culture and social environment many of the best features of English public schools," wrote the promoters of the school, in the original advertisement for the post of Headmaster. "Physical training will also receive special attention. Every boy will be required to take part in the usual

games. Efforts will also be made to impress on the boys the dignity of manual labour and to arouse in them an interest in the land and a love of the beauties of nature," it continued. The emphasis on physical culture, as in most other boarding schools was the top priority. "You were somebody of importance, depending on how you fared on the sports field," says Vilas Nath, himself member of half a dozen school sports teams. "True to the public school obsession with physical fitness, there was a good deal of stress on excelling at games, team as well as individual events," writes Karan Singh. "The four houses competed fiercely against one another in every game and the whole school took part in the annual Dehra Dun district sports meet. I was never in any of the school teams except chess, which I captained for two years," says the ex-maharajah.

Clearly, the school succeeded in ensuring that boys were judged not by their backgrounds and pedigree, but by their individual achievements. "I remember," says the Yuvraj of Dhramgadhra, Shatrujit Singh Deo, "that while leaving school, we were all exchanging addresses and telling each other to keep in touch. It was then that a close friend of mine, on reading my address, realized I was a prince. And we'd been together for seven years."

Sometimes though, the cloak of anonymity slipped away. "We had the Maharajah of Gondal, who nonchalantly wore one carat diamond buttons on his *sherwani* as if they were made of tin," says another student. "We used to see them lying around in his room; nobody would think twice about them. Their worth was only brought home to me later, after leaving school, when I realized that they could have bought me a Rolls Royce!" Even if sometimes the uniforms ripped to reveal titles, palaces, industrial empires, it was rare. At most times, boys had to fall back on their own talents and enterprise to make an impression.

And often, those who shone in later life, were considered bland and hopelessly mediocre at school. "Rajan Nanda was quite mediocre and undistinguished during his Doon days," says a contemporary. "Now he is dynamic and successful; he probably bloomed after leaving school." Kamal Nath, though a popular student, was hardly the reckless, street-wise individual he was to become. "I remember going with Kamal Nath on an expedition to the



The first Kashmir House photograph.

Chatrakot Chor peak," says Gautam Vohra, 36, Assistant Editor of the *Times of India*. "Midway, Roly-Poly decided he couldn't take any more. So me and the guide left him mid-summit, with instructions that he was to cook our rice on a makeshift stove. But when we returned tired and hungry, guess what we found? Our rice had long since been eaten up by a bear and Roly-Poly was fast asleep. Well it was getting dark and the guide refused to stay on and Roly-Poly refused to budge so I had to remain there with him in the cold and dark, scared of bears, till morning came."

Other famous students were more in character. Roshan Seth, as expected, excelled in dramatics, and won the best speaker prize by a large margin. His enunciation of the 'Warren Hastings declamation' delivered in clipped tones, in the Rose Bowl amphitheatre is still remembered by old boys.

Renowned Baroda artist, Vivan Sundaram, was the artmaster's favourite and most imaginative pupil, given to splashing colours wildly and often

punctuating his promising canvasses with pebbles, according to a contemporary. Ajit Haksar, always led the class academically and Piloo Mody distinguished himself by being an excellent debator and musician. "He was the general secretary of the Western Music Association," says PK Tagore, 54, who struck up a friendship with Mody, while sharing the same nursing ward as him, on one occasion. "We were both down with chickenpox, and I can still see him lying in bed, with these great bottles of expensive eau-de-cologne beside him, dabbing his pox with sweet-smelling colognes," says Tagore, who was also in the Kashmir House with Mody.

**I**N 1966, WHEN the school needed to expand its facilities, it issued an Appeal. The brochure that accompanied this fund-raising effort included the statement, "A school is judged not so much by what it stands for, as by the achievements of its alumni." It went on to list then successful old boys—a Minister, a Gov-

ernor, four Rhodes scholars and so on. "But," it insisted, "the majority of Dosconians go quietly about the business of being useful and respectable citizens. Who could ask for more?"

A study of *The Doon School Record*—the school's register of its alumni—shows what those students not in the public eye, do with their lives. From 1935 to the present day, the most popular profession has been that of being an executive in a large company. From 1935-40, the school turned out 75 executives; between 1941-50, there were 97; in 1951-60: 90 and of the most recent lot to have settled down, 47 between 1961-65. Similarly, many students have gone into business and industry. In some cases, these have been family businesses (several scions of industrial families such as the Bajajs, the Thapars and the Poddars are ex-Doscos). Between 1935-40, over 40 students went into business; 61 between 1941-50, 75 between 1951-60 and 55 between 1961-65.

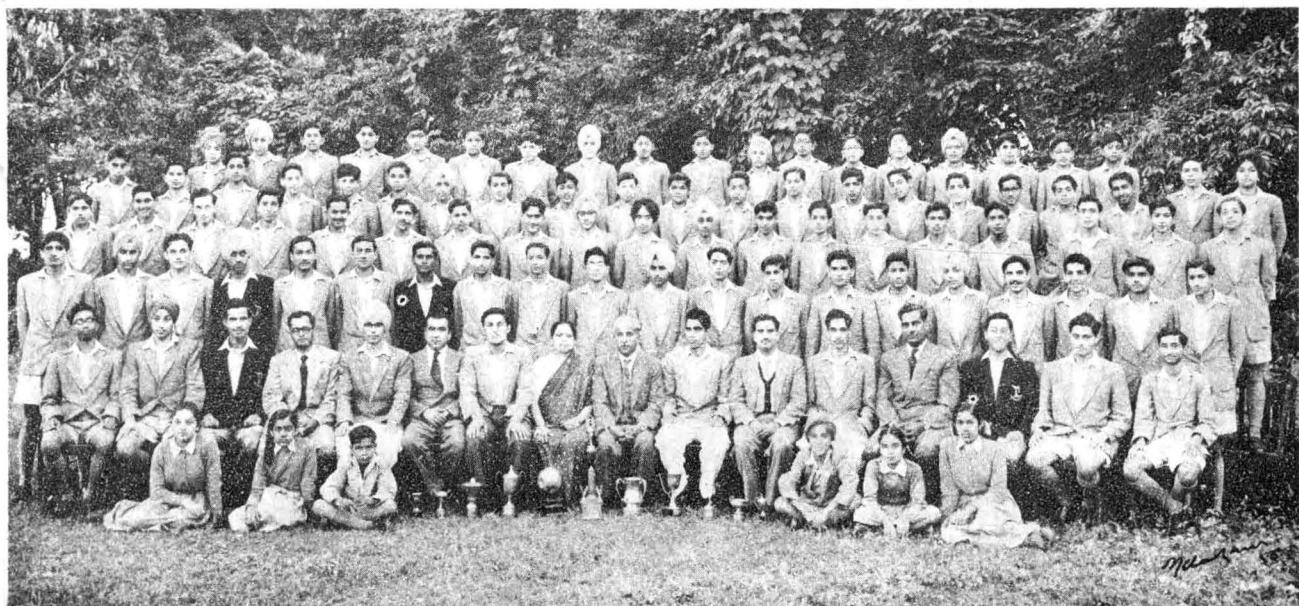
Apart from those two fields, professions have risen and fallen in popularity.

# The Doon School Ethos

"IT MIGHT SOUND a bit poetic, and even a bit absurd, but the years one spends in Doon, the conglomeration of living together, studying together, loving, hating, suffering and feeling happy together creates a sort of powerful spiritual life, that remains with one, all one's life, in the form of memories. These memories have a pulsating glow and never get put out. Since each Doon boy probably has similar memories of common experiences, they forge a mysterious, indefinable bond between old boys. Doscos are connected with

mountain features in Geography or saving the House from an innings defeat to the astonishment of 'Holdy' (since I had never learnt to cover drive) or rock-climbing with 'Buru' near Roberts Cave, or the very moving experience in the Rose Bowl, of listening to John Martyn paying homage to Sarojini Naidu on her death, the education was as complete as it could ever be in any school," writes Shomie Ranjan Das, (1946-51), present principal of The Lawrence School, Sanawar. Other old boys seem to agree. Anil Gore, (1950-54), Manag-

ing, was also a triple blue at Oxford (boxing, football and cricket). "He cherished most what he called the school trophies of blood, toil and sweat: boxing, PT and crosscountry-running. He was also a distinguished angler, famous mountaineer (he smoked a pipe on Mt Kamet at 25,000' plus) and shikari. Holdy was a man's man," says Dalvi. Dalvi recalls an incident during cricket practice at the nets. He was then school cricket captain, and noticed that the *mali* 'Panchoo' had obviously not watered and



Jaipur House, 1958. In the first row: Bunker Roy (sixth from left). In the second row: Aroon Purie (eighth from left). In the third row: Suman Dubey (third from left) and Roshan Seth (third from right).

subtle links to the same chain. They may be widely diverse in nature and temperament, but through having shared the same past they have much in common," says Jai Kala, (Doon School 1950-57) who is now an artist in London.

And many a Dosco would agree. Whether it is an encounter with 'Holdy' (cricket master RL Holdsworth) or a trek to the hills, the happiest moments in most Doscos' lives seem to be contained within the 70 acres of Chandbagh. "Whether it was stealing lichees from Skinner's field with Chottu Hussain or settling a score with Vimal Bhagat or fishing in the Giri with Jack Gibson or being lost on the slopes of Nag Tibba during mid-terms and trying to remember what we had learnt on

ing Director of the *Readers' Digest*, remembers playing cricket for the house team. With five wickets down and half an hour left for lunch, the housemaster spotted him ambling up to the crease. "Run to the wicket," he shouted. "You will never get your 50 before lunch." "Needless to say," recalls Gore, "we won!"

Businessman Shamsunder Agarwal (1948-54) recalls his friends Pratapsingh and the late Jaisingh Koregaonkar who successfully climbed the Matterhorn with cricket boots, while in school. Cricketer Michael Dalvi (1958-63) recalls the masters of rare calibre, "Martyn, RL Holdsworth, Gurdial Singh Hari Dang, KNP Nair." Of Holdsworth he remembers that the master, besides being a rare human

rolled the matting strip carefully enough, so that the ball really flew. A fast bowler called Kiranjit 'Kinty' Paintal kept bowling to Dalvi who kept getting painfully hit though he was fully padded. "I started giving poor Panchoo a thorough drubbing. Holdsworth who was supervising, asked what the commotion was about. When told, he was livid! He instructed Kinty to bowl flat out at him and he batted in the same net with no protection, not even a bat, just the middle stump. Holdy was 65 years old then, and I," writes Dalvi, "was the most ashamed 16-year-old in the Doon Valley. I've never forgotten that lesson."

Another lesson was taught to VG Rajadhyaksha (1936-41), former Hindustan Lever Chairman. "I used to

represent the school in boxing, although it was a sport I disliked intensely. One day I was asked to box against a younger boy in my House. He weighed as much as I did but being stouter and shorter he did not have my reach. Without thinking about what I was doing, I probably gave this boy a moderately severe drubbing. I was immediately ticked off by my close friends and was socially ostracised—a very effective reminder that people must learn to be gentle with those over whom they have an advantage," says Rajadhyaksha.

For Kali Mody, the school brought out his pugnacious instinct. "Because I came from Harrow, was short and fair, some boys had the wrong idea about me," he says, referring to the homosexuality that is present in nearly every public school. "But did I set them right, by the time I left!" he chuckles. "Not only that, but I used to protect the younger boys against the bullies. I was like Robin Hood—someone like the Walihid of Swat, being short and slight, I took under my wing."

"In my days," says Bapa Dhrangdhra (1954-61), "the ultimate offence was breaking bounds. And the ultimate excitement was having a mixed grill at the local Kwality restaurant." Later, things seemed to have got worse. "In my time it was going whoring," says photographer Dilip Mehta (1963-68), while his cousin Sanjay (1968-73) says that by his time, drugs had taken over.

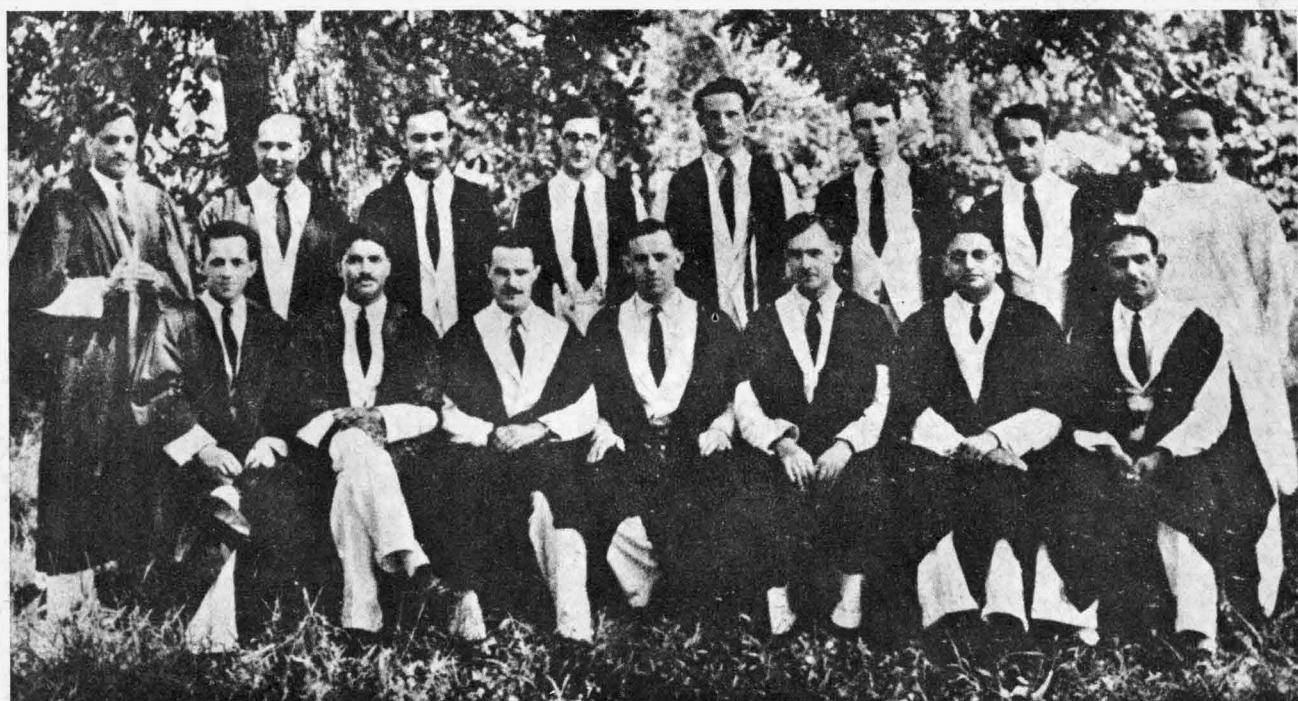
Through it all, punishments were fairly respectable and dignified. "There was the card system," says businessman Vilas Nath (1952-57). "You got a blue, yellow or red card depending on your offence." "We wanted to do away with corporal punishment," writes former Headmaster JAK Martyn, who had joined the school after a decade at Harrow. The school did not have a flogging system either. (Flogging, despite what it connotes today, is the fairly innocent institution of senior boys getting junior boys to do menial tasks.)

Generally, boys seem to have been good humoured about their punishment. Former Foreign Secretary, Ram Sathe (1931-40), recalls an incident involving Aurangzeb, the Prince of Swat, who is now a highly respected person in Pakistan. As a boy, he was forever getting into trouble and collected a large number of punishment cards. On one occasion, as AE Foot, the Headmaster was about to hand him a card, recalls Sathe, Aurangzeb "put his hand into his pocket and drew out another card and said to Mr Foot, 'You cannot give me another card because I already have one.' And then with the other hand, he fished some peanuts out of his pocket and promptly offered them to Mr Foot as if to indicate that a compromise could be reached if Mr Foot accepted the peanuts. I believe this was the only known case of a Doon School boy trying to bribe the late Mr Foot."

Nearly every Doon School boy has some anecdote about the four Englishmen who dominated the staff—Foot, Martyn, Holdsworth and Jack Gibson. Later Gibson was to take over as Principal of Ajmer's Mayo College, which he remodelled on the Doon pattern. As it turned out, Gibson's successor at Mayo was Shomie Ranjan Das, one of his ex-students at Doon. Gibson had taken his *mali* from Dehra Dun to Ajmer with him, and the *mali* recognized Das at once. "You are the boy who used to come and steal vegetables from our garden," he told the new Principal.

Life at Doon revolved around the four boarding houses (Tata, Jaipur, Hyderabad and Kashmir), and the sportsfields, but other activities were not neglected. Many old boys have fond memories of Sudhir Khastigar, the art master who joined in the early days of the school and encouraged generations of budding artists. Film director Chetan Anand was one of the earliest masters and boys were much in awe of him because of his striking looks and because they thought he was from Oxford. (He wasn't.)

The new generation of Doscos seems determined to keep up with its old school. At re-unions and dinners, the ages of the participants vary from 20 to 70. That the links between the alumni and school should endure for so long, is a tribute to Doon and its ethos.



The first batch of Doon School masters.

ity. From 1935-40, 60 students went into the armed forces, by 1951-60, the figure was down to 28. Less people are also going into farming or tea-planting. Between 1941-50, 62 boys opted for life in the wide-open spaces. By 1951-60, the number was down to 30.

In the late '50s, new professions emerged. Accountancy became a firm favourite and catering soon began to attract a relatively large number. Journalism, banking and the merchant navy became popular. Such old favourites as medicine, engineering and the railways began to lose out.

If there is a trend in all of this, it is that the Doon School's products have tended to follow the money. As professions like the armed forces and the railways have become relatively poorly paid, Doon's students have lost interest. New, better-paid professions such as accountancy and hoteliering have been preferred. In this sense, the school is no different from any other elite school in India.

Nevertheless, there remain certain fields, that Doon products seem to excel in. The number of successful journalists that Doon has produced is phenomenal—George Verghese, Aroon Purie, Suman Dubey, Prem Jha, Rahul Singh, Shyam Bhatia, Subrata Chakravarty, Karan Thapar, Gautam Vohra, Balram Tandon, Inder Badhwar, Manabendra Deb, to name just a few. One explanation could be *The Doon School Weekly*, the remarkable school paper.

On the other hand, many of these journalists, never wrote for *The Weekly*.

More difficult to explain is the school's failure to produce outstanding sportsmen. Cricketer Michael Dalvi, golfers Lakshman Singh and Ashok Malik, squash player Bunker Roy and a few others, remain the only sportsmen of note to have emerged from Doon. Considering that the school routine emphasized sport to the exclusion of many other things, this failure to produce sportsmen of calibre is strangely mystifying. Vilas Nath offers one explanation. "In school," he says, "we were given every sports facility on a platter. But later on in life, when you get involved in work and nine-to-five jobs, if you have to go out and search for sports facilities, you don't make the effort."

It took Sanjay Gandhi to get the Doon School Network onto the front pages. Rajiv Gandhi seems equally willing to depend on old school friends like Arun Singh, Romi Chopra and Mohan Thadani. Clearly, the Doon domination, if all goes well, will endure for some years to come.

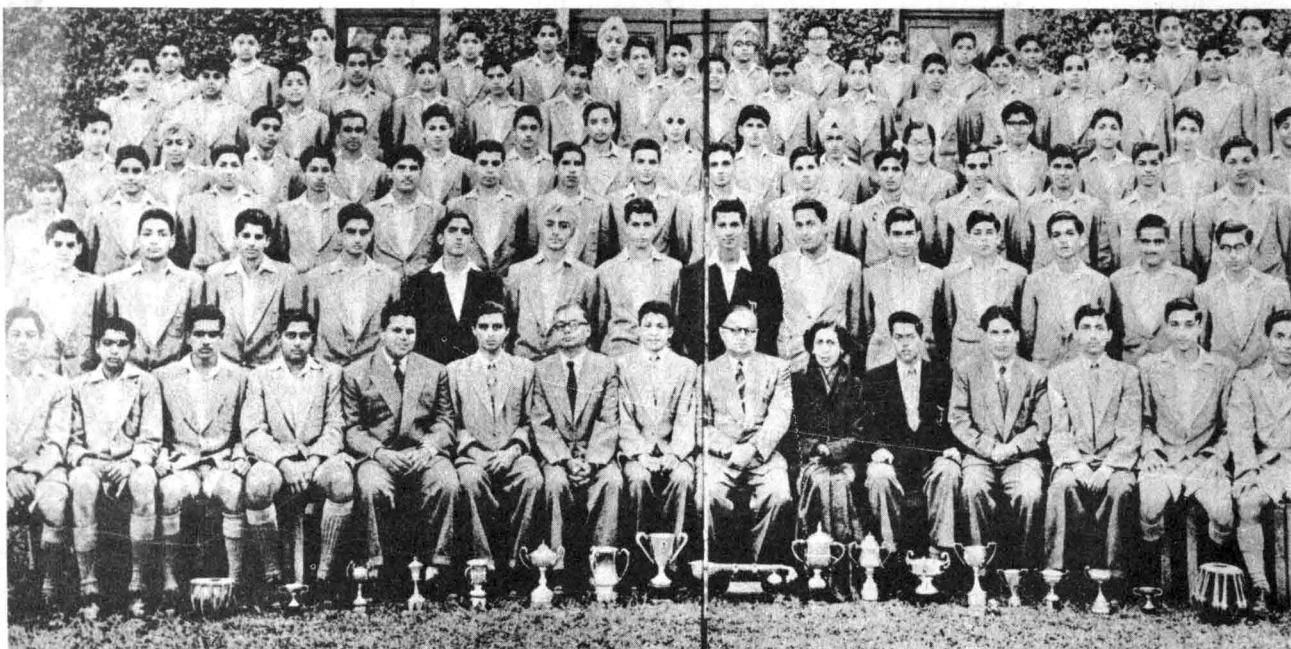
Some thoughtful Doscos though, do admit to a few nagging doubts. "All our lives," says one, "we knew that we were the best and the brightest. We would look at the people who were running the country with disdain. We knew we could do better. And yet, now that we have had a chance, because

of the Gandhis, have we done any better? Has Doon School really contributed anything to India?"

There are many people who would say 'no'; and indeed, it has been said that politics is too important a matter to be left to Doon School boys. During the Sanjay era, the school was referred to as 'The Goon School', and even today, there are those who doubt that the newly influential Doscos are committed to anything more profound than enriching themselves.

Seen in perspective, such a view is clearly misconceived. It is unfair to judge the school on the basis of a few of its less distinguished products whom fate catapulted to positions of power. For every political goon, there are at least ten Doscos who have made meaningful and substantial contributions to Indian society. But the danger remains. When a school is in the business of turning out the Indian elite, it is judged not just by the success of its alumni but by their contribution to their environment.

In two years, the Doon School will be 50. It will probably be a glorious birthday, and an occasion for rejoicing. After all, Doon has achieved more in its 50 years than most elite schools anywhere in the world. SR Das's dream has come true. But it is the next half-century that will decide whether the Doon School phenomenon has been just a flash in the pan or the genuine article. ♦

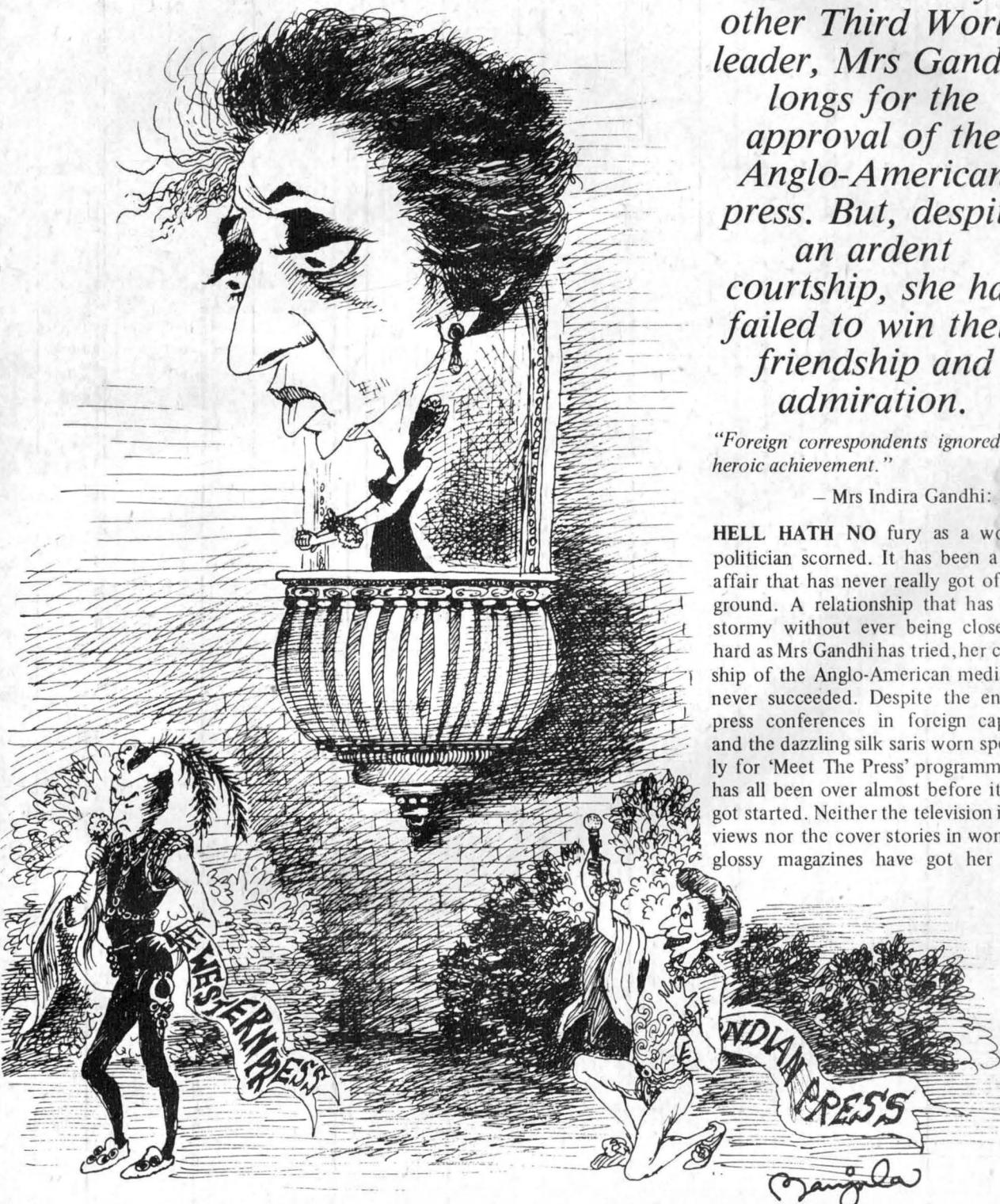


Kashmir House in the Rajiv-Sanjay era. Sanjay is third from left in the last row and Rajiv is first from left in the second row. Others in the picture include: second row – Vivek Bharatram (sixth from right), Chickoo Charatram (fifth from right), fifth row – Ravi Ghai (third from left) and Arun Singh (third from right).

# LOVE ON THE ROCKS

## *Mrs Gandhi And The Anglo-American Press*

### By Vir Sanghvi



*More than any other Third World leader, Mrs Gandhi longs for the approval of the Anglo-American press. But, despite an ardent courtship, she has failed to win their friendship and admiration.*

*"Foreign correspondents ignored our heroic achievement."*

— Mrs Indira Gandhi: 1976

**HELL HATH NO** fury as a woman politician scorned. It has been a love affair that has never really got off the ground. A relationship that has been stormy without ever being close. As hard as Mrs Gandhi has tried, her courtship of the Anglo-American media has never succeeded. Despite the endless press conferences in foreign capitals and the dazzling silk saris worn specially for 'Meet The Press' programmes, it has all been over almost before it ever got started. Neither the television interviews nor the cover stories in women's glossy magazines have got her any-



*"I am amused by the sudden love for democracy which is finding expression in the West and among much of our intelligentsia which is Western-oriented. Our doubts and fears are confirmed by the behaviour of important sections of the Western press, TV and radio. The most slanderous and malicious stories are appearing."*

**Mrs Indira Gandhi: August 1975**

where.

This is sad because, to Mrs Gandhi, it matters. The Indian press can say what it likes and she couldn't care less. The approval she seeks is in the pages of the *New York Times* or *The Guardian*. She wants them to realize that she is the Great Democrat, the proud inheritor of her father's glorious tradition and the greatest Asian statesman of her times. She is not, she longs to emphasize, like all the other Third World leaders. They may be unsophisticated demagogues, blood-thirsty dictators or slightly stupid generals. But Indira Nehru Gandhi is different. Elegant, capable, dignified, charming, witty, fluent in English and French, educated at Oxford and the Sorbonne, she is cast in a different mould from all the rest.

In a sense, Mrs Gandhi is only conforming to the trend that her father started. In the days before Independence, the American press had supported India's freedom struggle. And after 1947, even the British press (with a few exceptions) came round to the view that India's was a great democratic experiment. If it succeeded, it would show the world that bread and freedom were compatible, despite the Marxist view.

In the '50s, the two intellectuals in the government—Pandit Nehru and Dr S Radhakrishnan—had British and American papers delivered to their homes each morning. They read them

Adapted from a forthcoming book on the image of India abroad.

with interest for references to India and took care to see that the West felt that India's democratic experiment was working. Even in the case of Pandit Nehru, it was much easier for foreign correspondents to see him than it was for Indians. He knew, after all, that in those early, difficult days, the aid that came from the West was crucial.

It is difficult to say how much such considerations weighed on Mrs Gandhi's mind. She may well have wanted the West to appreciate the success of India's democracy. But in her interviews and statements, she has frequently given the impression that what mattered more was that the West appreciated how successful *she* was as a statesman. According to the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Mrs Gandhi told her that she was 'surrounded by fools', and suggested that she managed to run the country in spite of her democratically elected parliament and the cabinet she selected from it.

And yet, the Anglo-American press hasn't really seen her that way. At least, not for the last decade or so. Her last hurrah was the Bangladesh crisis of 1971, from which she emerged covered in glory. Since then alas, it has been downhill all the way. She has hardly an influential friend left in the media and her every action is regarded with suspicion and cynicism. To be sure, when she makes the odd state visit she is accorded the coverage usually meted out to visiting Prime Ministers and there are the friendly TV interviews

and the glowing profiles in minor journals. But it is never the serious stuff. No leader writer appreciates her statesmanship and no pundit praises her often expressed love for all things democratic.

What went so wrong? How could a woman who so eagerly sought the approval of the West, lose it so completely?

To begin with, Mrs Gandhi always had a favourable press. At the start of her first term, she combined the Nehru tradition with the novelty value of being a woman Prime Minister in a male-dominated society. The press saw her as a refreshing change from the bosses who then ran the Congress Party, and was sympathetic to her. The problems arose only when the Indian intelligentsia began to get disillusioned. In Mrs Gandhi's mind, there appears to exist a certain strange dichotomy. She puts what she considers 'irrelevant' domestic criticism in one compartment and concentrates instead on how the Western world views her. What she has never appreciated is that in an open society like India, foreign correspondents are certain to mingle with influential sections of the elite. And when the elite begins to have its doubts, these are faithfully reproduced by British and American papers. Mrs Gandhi's problem was that she believed that by ignoring the domestic elite and turning on the charm for the foreigners, she could keep her image intact. In fact, the Western Press' disillusionment with her has closely paralleled that of the

intelligentsia.

Still, Mrs Gandhi thought that she could balance the good with the bad. When the first cracks appeared in her image, with the abolition of privy purses and the derecognition of the princes the Western Press was shocked but still conscious of the fact that she was Nehru's daughter. Said Peter Hazelhurst in *The Times* in September 1970: "The Prime Minister was apparently unmoved by reminders that her father, Mr Nehru and India's founding leaders had pledged the nation's honour when they entered into a sacred covenant with the princes after independence." The tone was chiding, but the family background had been taken note of. And in 1971 when *The Economist* dubbed her 'The Empress of India', the title was not one that any parliamentary leader should have been proud of, but the article accompanying the title was almost affectionate and certainly respectful.

And whatever negative component there was in such reports, was more than balanced by some of the raves she received. When the Bengali refugees were streaming into India in 1971, Peter Hazelhurst gushed in *The Times*: "The world can be thankful for the forbearance and wisdom of the Nehru family."

Things started going wrong only in the run-up to the Emergency when it became increasingly clear that Mrs Gandhi was losing her grip on the administration. Nevertheless, when the Emergency was declared, many newspapers were, contrary to popular belief, not very critical at all. They remembered the Nehru connection and were sympathetic to her problems. Editorialized *The Daily Telegraph* in June 1975: "The Nehru dynasty's attempt to combine a socialist economy with an open and democratic society is failing." The general view was that the problems of governing a nation like India had forced this extreme step on Mrs Gandhi. In July 1975, *The Daily Telegraph* was still sympathetic: "Because she is the daughter of the great Nehru, because she bears the name of the Mahatma and also because she is an extremely astute politician, Mrs Gandhi has known great popularity." At around the same time, Gavin Young in *The Observer* asked if it was not possible that Mrs Gandhi might fashion something better out of India's imperfect democracy during the Emergency?

Despite this fund of goodwill, the

unusual willingness of the foreign press corps to wait before rushing into judgement, first Mrs Gandhi and then her son Sanjay set about systematically wrecking this goodwill.

Observers of Mrs Gandhi's political style often find it difficult to explain her behaviour during the Emergency. Why did she suddenly become so sensitive to criticism? Why was even the most harmless voice of dissent snuffed out at once? Nobody has any convincing answers, but it seems clear that Mrs Gandhi suddenly decided that there was a conspiracy out to 'get' her. Any negative thought, any flicker of disapproval was immediately ascribed to this conspiracy. Of course, that included the foreign press, who despite

and goons loose on an otherwise civilized country? Mrs Gandhi could have retorted by saying that this was unfortunate but necessary and that soon, things would be back to normal.

Instead she sought refuge in snide statements about the Western 'love of democracy' and even went so far as to tell a pressman, "The form of government that the people choose is their business and other countries have no say in the matter." (March 24, 1976). It seemed futile to point out that the people of India had never chosen the Emergency—so set was Mrs Gandhi in her view.

Further she reacted badly to the slightest critical comment. Not realizing that she was bringing much of the criticism on herself by being so short-sighted, she chose to take it out on the foreign correspondents. Lewis Simons of the *Washington Post* had carved out for himself an impressive reputation as an India lover. He wrote about the country with perception and sympathy. Yet, when the Emergency came round, he was harassed, his house watched, his movements observed till finally, he was expelled. William Borders of the *New York Times* had got here at the start of the Emergency and found that the government simply wasn't interested in helping him do his job. The telex links at his office were severed on one occasion and the government insisted that he sign a declaration that he would report responsibly. Particularly sad was the plight of R Ramanujam of *Newsweek* who was thrown out of his house and had his car stolen, apparently by officially sponsored hoodlums.

As the Emergency went on, foreign correspondents continued to get expelled. Peter Gill, Peter Hazelhurst (who had admired "the wisdom and forbearance of the Nehru family"), Martin Woolacott, Jacques Leslie, Larry Lifschultz and others were either expelled or found that their despatches were so badly censored that there was no point staying. Inevitably, this ham-fisted attitude ensured Mrs Gandhi's regime the kind of coverage such treatment deserved.

Lewis Simons flew to Bangkok where he sat down to file some comprehensive reports on what was happening in India. Before anybody else had noticed, Simons had spotted the hand of Sanjay in the Emergency events. From Bangkok he filed a report that was to be quoted all over the world: "A family friend who attended a din-

Mrs Gandhi suddenly decided that there was a conspiracy out to get her. That included the foreign press who had failed to appreciate the necessity for her actions.

her earnest courtship, had failed to appreciate the necessity of her actions. During the Emergency, RK Karanjia, editor of *Blitz* and a vocal supporter of the regime, wrote an angry letter to *The Times* suggesting that some reports critical of Mrs Gandhi could be attributed to 'the rascally CIA'. This was pretty much the official line.

Mrs Gandhi did not seem to realize that it was her own chosen persona that had caused some of her problems. If she wanted to be regarded as substantially different from the average Third World leader to whom human rights were meaningless, then she had to face a contradiction: how could such a person shut down the free press, lock up the opposition and let bullies

ner party with Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay, several months ago, said he saw the son slap his mother across the face six times. 'She didn't do a thing,' the friend says. 'She just stood there and took it. She's sacred to death of him.'

"I got the story from three different sources," recalls Simons, "but before printing it, I would normally have attempted to get a denial or at least to get the Gandhis' side of the story. Except that I had been expelled. How does one go about getting a denial from Bangkok?" Nobody will probably ever know if Simons' story was accurate but it certainly set the tone for all future reporting about Mrs Gandhi, Sanjay and the Emergency. The battle-lines were drawn and both sides had decided that there could be no ceasefire.

William Borders invited Sanjay to address the Foreign Press Club at the Ashoka Hotel. He was impressed that Sanjay came alone, without an entourage, but a little taken aback by the vehemence with which Sanjay tore into the Western media. Nearly everybody else had similar experiences with Sanjay. It was left to Indian journalists playing safe to sing the praises of the heir-apparent. Saeed Naqvi (now of the *Indian Express*) interviewed him for *The Guardian* and reported: "In conversation, he is shy and retiring. There is an enormous fund of self confidence beneath that but he does not give the impression of a ruthless gang leader that some cocktail circuit talk would suggest. He seems an intelligent, domesticated man with a fondness for dogs and boating."

Mrs Gandhi had also hardened her stance. Says William Borders, "When I did meet her, she was aggressive, rude, attacked the American press and said a lot of things that I knew to be untrue." In fact, Borders says that meeting Mrs Gandhi during the Emergency, he would never have suspected that she could be charming or pleasant. Towards the end of the Emergency, he saw her receive a state guest and was staggered to find her all smiles and charm. "This was an aspect of her that I had never seen," he recalls wryly.

By the time the elections came round in early 1977, there was really no hope of salvaging Mrs Gandhi's foreign press relationship. With censorship restrictions removed, the correspondents flew back in. But by now, the regime was openly unpopular. In the streets, at restaurants and in trains

and of course, in the newly liberated Indian papers, Mrs Gandhi and her son were being attacked and pilloried. Obviously the foreign press picked up this sentiment and now that reporting restrictions had been removed, there was no way of stopping them.

Only one reporter was expelled. Ian Jack of the *Sunday Times* was in India to do a light piece on Indian Railways when elections were called. He stayed on to do some political stories. One of them speculated on the nature of the link between Sanjay and his mother. Attempting to retell the kind of stories floating around Delhi, he pointed out that one of them was "that Sanjay has some kind of hold over his mother—the more ludicrous suggestions include

Because of the suggestion of incest in his article, Ian Jack of *The Sunday Times* was expelled on the spot, despite the general withdrawal of reporting restrictions.

blackmail and incest." Jack was expelled on the spot, despite the general withdrawal of all restrictions.

After she had been defeated, both mother and son changed their attitudes. Sanjay became more accessible and Mrs Gandhi tried hard to recapture the spirit of the old relationship. It was, of course, too late. By then, everybody was too cynical about her and bitter about the way they had been treated during the Emergency.

Lewis Simons came back to India and was at once granted an interview with Mrs Gandhi. She was extremely friendly, very forthcoming and seemed eager for the old adulation. Finally, Simons asked her if she remembered that she'd had him thrown out. "Real-

ly," said Mrs Gandhi. She'd had nothing to do with the treatment of foreign correspondents, she insisted in her best 'over-zealous-officials-committed-excesses' voice.

Since then, it has been rough sailing all the way. Most major foreign papers left her to the mercies of the Sasthi Bratha kind of writer and rarely wrote about her doings. When she announced that she was going to stand for election from Chikmagalur, the papers' didn't even bother to seem unbiased. Wrote Richard Wigg in *The Times* (November 1978), "With typical cynicism, she has selected a constituency this time where for social and economic reasons, democracy is at its weakest." The fact that Devraj Urs' police beat up many pressmen at Chikmagalur, including Jehangir Guzder, photographer for *Time*, didn't help either.

When Mrs Gandhi went to England, Swaraj Paul's best efforts could not ensure favourable press coverage. *The Times*' star columnist, Bernard Levin, launched a vitriolic attack on her, and the rest of the press were nearly as scathing. Despite such Labour Party luminaries as Michael Foot, Eldon Griffiths and Peter Shore rushing to her defence the damage had been done.

Ever since her triumphant return to power, Mrs Gandhi has tried to pretend that the Emergency never happened. The death of Sanjay removed a major irritant from the scene. The new heir-apparent is clearly cast in a different mould from his late brother and seems to realize the value of public relations. Ian Jack of the *Sunday Times* found that he could never really communicate effectively with the abrasive Sanjay but finds Rajiv entirely different. The first time Jack went to meet Rajiv, he found him modest and polite and genuinely interested in what his interviewer had to say. The second time they met, Jack was even more impressed. "Hello, Ian," said Rajiv, "What would you like to drink?" before going to the fridge and getting him a drink himself. "All journalists are human," says Jack, "The fact that he remembered my name and took the trouble to go and get me a drink made a difference." On the whole, Rajiv has managed to keep the foreign press happy. John Schidlovsky of *The Baltimore Sun*, for example, finds him 'idealistic and modest'. Most journalists also find him humble—a refreshing change after his mother.

Despite Mrs Gandhi's overtures to

the foreign press, the irritants in her style of functioning remain. Many interviewers find her arrogant and imperious, and she likes to maintain an imperial isolation from which she rarely emerges. Says Michael T Kaufman who used to be the *New York Times*' man in Delhi, "In India, you can interview any minister with only about a day's notice. The same is not true of Mrs Gandhi."

While she is obviously far more willing to see foreign correspondents than Indian ones, she is insecure enough to try and only see those who will probably treat her gently. She is happiest being interviewed by *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, *Parade* or *Woman and Home*, where she knows that the coverage will be sympathetic. She is less keen to face more knowledgeable foreign correspondents from major news organisations. This relative inaccessibility, borne out of a deep-rooted insecurity, has always coloured the way the Western Press has looked at her. She has wanted to be liked, but has only been willing to let the world look at her from those angles that she thought were flattering. Recalls Lewis Simons: "In the days when I was in India, I made several attempts to interview Mrs Gandhi but I was always conscious of going through a screening process. This was not true of Bhutto. Any foreign correspondent could call him up and go over at once. We would ride on his plane and he would be open and accessible. I don't deny that this made a difference in our attitudes to both leaders." While Bhutto appeared to have nothing to hide, Mrs Gandhi always gave the impression that she was only displaying a small part of her true personality.

This trait has endured to the present day. However it doesn't seem to matter so much now. In many cases correspondents have found other pre-occupations and some of them are cautious about believing anything she says. The India stories that get into the foreign press these days, feature less and less of Mrs Gandhi. It is a sign of the times that Trevor Fishlock, *The Times*' award-winning India correspondent has been noted for his stories on the likes of Malkhan Singh rather than Mrs Gandhi.

Nevertheless, Mrs Gandhi's famous sensitivity remains and the government does its best to shield her. For the last two years or so, the Foreign Ministry has adopted a 'hands-off' attitude to

foreign correspondents. There have been only a few exceptions and enough of these concern Mrs Gandhi to suggest that somebody at 1, Safdarjang Road reads the British and American papers quite thoroughly. When Tyler Marshall of the *Los Angeles Times* interviewed Mrs Gandhi for his paper, the Ministry said nothing. But when the Long Island paper *Newsday* reprinted the interview with an unfavourable cartoon, a government official indicated his displeasure. Similarly, Stuart Auerbach who was the *Washington Post*'s man in Delhi till last year, found that the government rarely bothered to complain about anything he wrote. But when he filed a story about Mrs Gandhi losing her grip after Sanjay's death, an

during the Emergency.

There have also been some deliberate distortions. Perhaps the most famous Indira Gandhi quote is, "Politics is the art of acquiring, holding and wielding power." Generally, this is taken to be a revealing statement that she let slip during an unguarded moment. Actually, what Mrs Gandhi said in a speech at Kingston on April 29, 1975, was, "I myself was brought up in an atmosphere where politics denoted neither power nor riches but an urge to reduce fear, want and disparity. It meant renunciation and acceptance of hardship. But as I look round, I find that politics is taken to be the art of acquiring, holding and wielding power." Yet, on May 1, 1975, *The Observer* printed the distorted version which has been quoted around the world ever since then.

Moreover, at least some commentators feel that Mrs Gandhi is the victim of a sort of cultural colonialism. As distinguished a journalist as Philip Knightley of *The Sunday Times* believes that stories that confirm Western prejudices about India stand a better chance of being printed in the British papers. Mrs Gandhi appears to share this view as do many of her supporters abroad (including the vociferous *India Weekly* of London). An extreme version of this argument would be that some Western journalists actually resent the fact that Mrs Gandhi is so sophisticated and Western and can act superior to them. Says a foreign service official, "All right, so it is difficult to interview Mrs Gandhi or to get invited on to her plane. But, so what? Is Ronald Reagan judged on this basis? Is Mrs Thatcher's true personality gauged by her willingness to go flying with foreign correspondents? Mrs Gandhi is the Prime Minister of India. Foreign correspondents are not her equals and shouldn't expect to be treated as such."

Strong as such a defence may sound, it only has validity if Mrs Gandhi acts as though it doesn't really matter what these foreign correspondents report. After all the people of her country don't read the *New York Times*, and it does not make any difference what they think of her in Sutton Place. The point is that Mrs Gandhi does not take this attitude. It does matter what they think of her in Sutton Place, and moreover, probably it matters more than what people in Malabar Hill or Maharani Bagh think. If it hadn't mat-

The new heir apparent seems to recognize the value of public relations. Most journalists also find him humble—a refreshing change from his mother.

official called to say that this had been noticed. Not much more is said after the mention, but the point is made—stories critical of Mrs Gandhi are being noticed.

To be fair to her though, the foreign press hasn't always played fair with her. During the 1974-75 period there were continual complaints of governmental inefficiency, and endless unfavourable comparisons with China. But when Mrs Gandhi did make the trains run on time during the Emergency, the China parallels were quickly forgotten. Now, it was simply a question of civil liberties. Small wonder then that Mrs Gandhi made several rude remarks of the 'I-know-China-is-fashionable' variety to interviewers

tered, then she would never have bothered to restrain the foreign press from writing anything critical of her.

The love affair is over. Mrs Gandhi seems to have accepted that she will never win the approval of the Western Press. Ironically though, she is criticized less now, than she has been before. This is because foreign correspondents, though unresponsive to her overtures, have lowered their expectations.

For most of February 1983, the only Indian news to consistently hit the Anglo-American headlines was the Assam crisis and especially, the horrific massacres. This was terrible for India's image but significantly, few correspondents attempted to link the breakdown in law and order to the ineffectual nature of Mrs Gandhi's rule. These days, nobody seriously expects Mrs Gandhi to be able to prevent such massacres.

This point was driven home by London's *Jewish Chronicle*. In a stinging editorial, the paper complained that Mrs Gandhi had not only escaped responsibility for the Assam horrors but had presented herself as a woman of peace at the Non-Aligned Summit.

On the other hand, Menachem Begin, the Israeli Prime Minister, had been attacked throughout the world for his failure to prevent the Lebanon massacres. In both cases, extremists had done the killing. But it was the government that was to blame for failing to protect the victims. Why, the *Chronicle* asked, had nobody criticized Mrs Gandhi the way they had Begin?

Lest anyone miss the argument, unidentified Zionists paid for the editorial to be reproduced (as advertising) in all the leading British papers. The gesture had little effect. It did Begin's image no good and strangely, did not lead to any attacks on Mrs Gandhi at all.

The reasons for this can perhaps be gauged in the response of one British journalist (who asked to remain unidentified) to a question about the favourable coverage accorded to Rajiv Gandhi. The emergence of Sanjay had been widely attacked as being the antithesis of all notions of democratic succession, as a decline into a dynastic system of government. And yet, Rajiv Gandhi's rise from Avro pilot to heir-apparent had not provoked the same outraged sentiments. Why was this?

"You must understand," the

journalist said, "that around the time we wrote about Sanjay and the Emergency, we were trying to apply to India the same standards that we use for any Western democratic country.

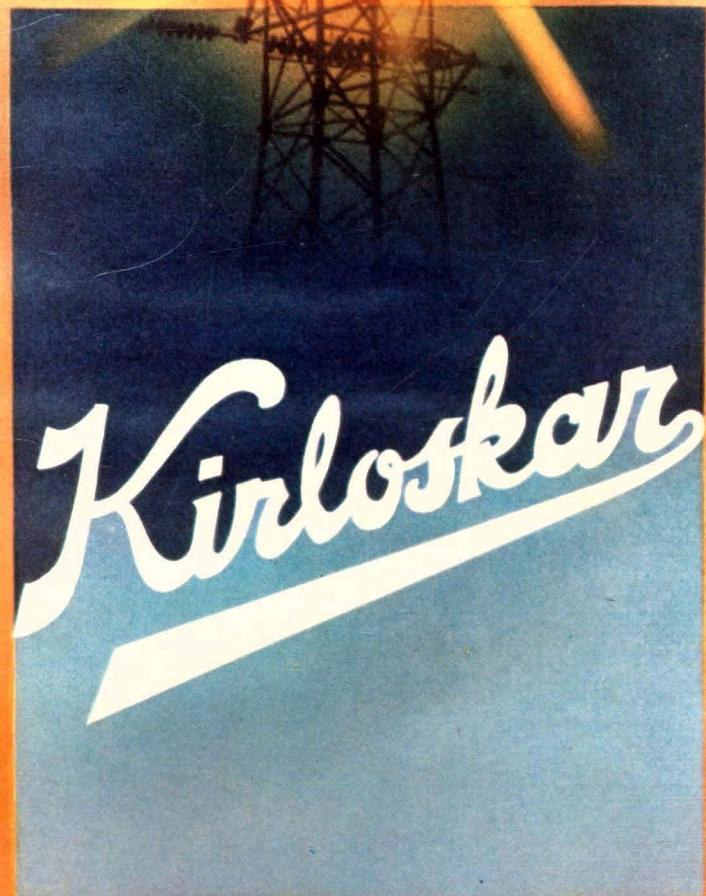
"But since those days, many of us have begun to re-assess our perceptions of India and of the Gandhis. Nobody is surprised if some South American dictator nominates his son as his second-in-command. I suspect that the same is now true of India. Harsh as it sounds, we have shifted from using the standards of Western democracy, to those of a banana republic."

And indeed, the coverage Mrs Gandhi gets these days is the sort accorded to the charismatic dictator of a banana republic. Her failure to guarantee law and order, the institutionalized corruption of the regime, the feudal structure of government and the country's inexorable decline into anarchy are more or less taken for granted.

It keeps the foreign press from criticizing Mrs Gandhi. But it does not say much for her leadership, that she inherited a great democratic experiment and ended up running a banana republic. ♦

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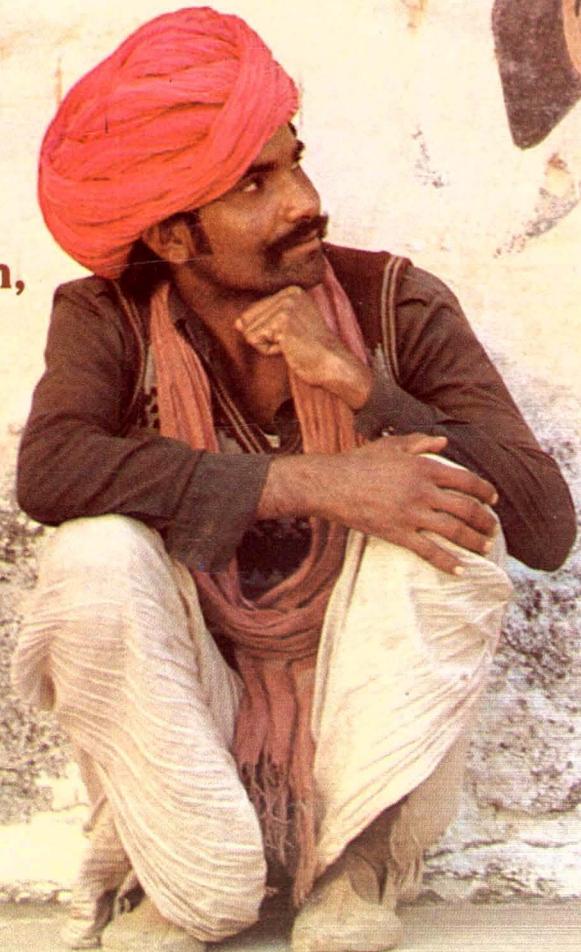
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# THE GENTLE STIRRINGS OF THEIR DISCONTENT

By Sunaina Lowe

*After years of being an elite preoccupation, feminism is finally becoming a viable movement in Delhi. The tragedy of the dowry deaths has made women conscious of the need to help each other.*

ON JUNE 29, 1979, Kanchan Chopra, a 24-year-old stenographer with the Union Public Services Commission (UPSC) in New Delhi, and the mother of a four-month-old child, did not return home. She went, instead, to her parents' house. She told her family that she felt unsafe and that her in-laws ill-treated her, harassed her and constantly demanded money from her for a scooter. By nightfall, her husband came to take her home. He forced her to return with him and beat her in the presence of her brother. Despite a complaint from Kanchan's brother, the police refused to intervene. Later that night her parents were informed

that she had been admitted to Lohia Hospital with burns. She was dead when they reached her and had been made to swallow acid so that she could not talk to the police while she lived.

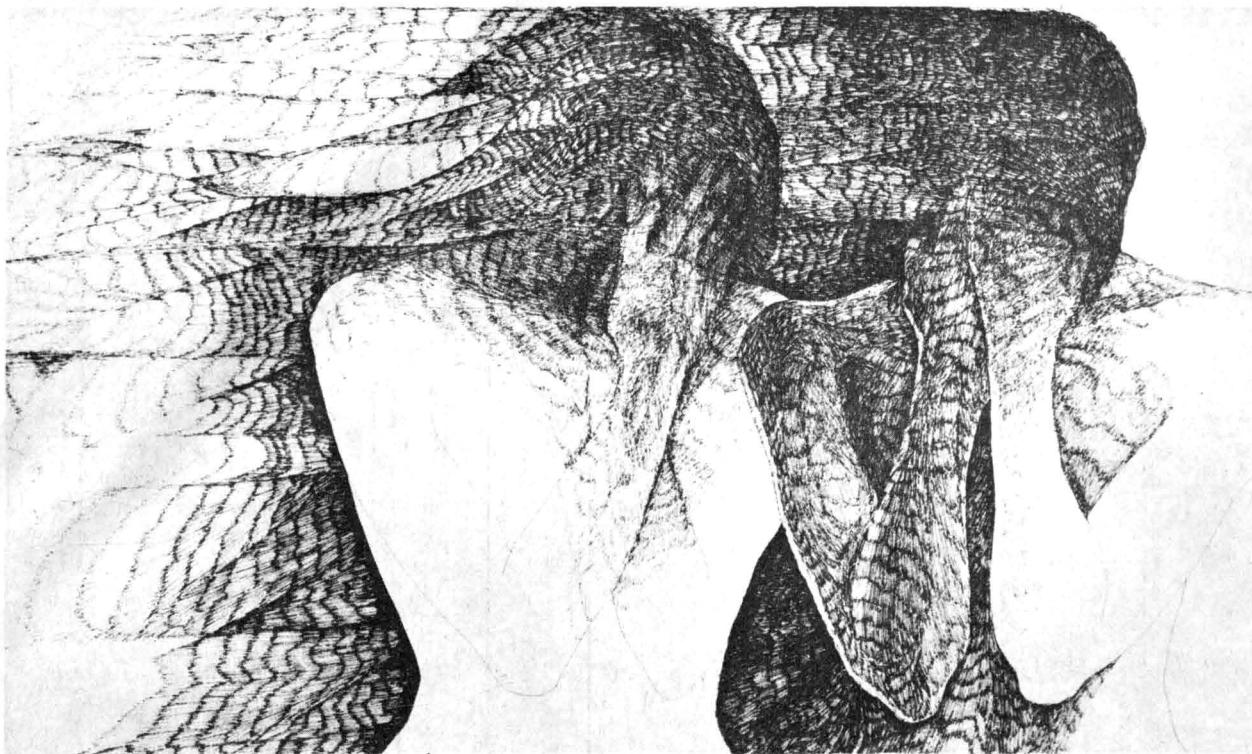
Two hundred angry demonstrators shouted slogans in front of the E-205, West Patel Nagar residence of the Chopras. They wrote on the walls with chalk that the killers would not be spared. They demonstrated outside the police station, and the police were forced by public pressure to change the case from suicide to murder.

By 1979, the strange phenomenon of the dowry deaths was sweeping the capital. April 2: Kanchan Mala Hardy, 19, was burnt to death in the bathroom of CA1/34 Tagore Gardens, New Delhi. She died, apparently, because

her parents who had given her clothes, jewellery and household articles worth Rs 20,000 could not give her a refrigerator, a TV set and Rs 10,000 more. May 17: Tarvinder Kaur died of burns in Model Town, New Delhi. Her dying statement implicated her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law. Her father later said Tarvinder had been under constant pressure to bring more dowry so that her husband could expand his motor spare-parts business.

Such incidents were reported nearly every week in the Delhi papers. The term 'dowry-death' passed into the parlance of common reportage. Newspapers and magazines examined the phenomenon, finding in its regularity, yet another example of North Indian suppression of women.

Sunaina Lowe is on the staff of Imprint. Her last article was on Nuclear Proliferation.



This time, however, there was a difference. The peculiar intensity of the dowry deaths shook nearly every woman in Delhi. Even among the ordinary lower middle class housewives who had been content to live in a male chauvinist society, there was a slight but perceptible stirring—the beginnings of a fight-back. And when 30 women's groups jointly organised a protest march on August 3, 1982, several hundred ordinary women and by-standers spontaneously joined the marchers. If the show of solidarity between the women's groups (ranging from wings of political parties to the YWCA) was unusual, even more unprecedented was the response the demonstration evoked from women who had normally shunned any form of activism.

The women's movement in Delhi was a fragmented, sporadic effort lacking in dynamism. Most of the existing women's organisations were affiliated to political parties and were being used nominally for social welfare. Unlike other cities like Bombay or Calcutta, Delhi had no history of social reformist or women's rights movements. Its middle class Punjabi majority had kept their women at home giving them little opportunity to grow as individuals. The 'macho' warrior-like culture of the North had almost totally obliterated any women's move towards personal self-sufficiency.

And then came the phenomenon of

the dowry deaths. It gave the women's movement a focus, the diverse organisations a common meeting ground. They were more than just a crime statistics. They were a manifestation of several social problems—largely the result of the economic, psychological and emotional dependence of northern women. Women were suddenly realising that if they were economically independent, they would not have to put up with such indignities. If they were psychologically independent, they would not rely so much on a marriage and a husband. This new awareness has taken diverse shapes and forms. Some women have found a method in organised activist groups, others have formed informal sisterhoods, while still others have simply made a personal effort to outgrow the mental and cultural moulds they were cast in, showing by personal example the way to a more complete life.

\* \* \*

**IN A SLEEPY** corner of a South Delhi residential colony, nestled in the curve of a broad tree-shaded road, is No.10-Nizamuddin East. A sprawling bungalow, it has a small garage squatting at its right shoulder. Outside the garage a white bamboo screen bears a hand-painted sign: SAHELI.

Set up only in August 1981, Saheli is a small-scale Women's Resource Centre. A catch-all phrase which means it is a place where you can: "Meet

other women with similar problems; Contact a doctor or lawyer; Hold meetings, discussion, show films or exhibitions; Find someone to talk to," as their pamphlet says. The office is simple, almost makeshift with the barest minimum of furniture and walls that are covered with newspaper clippings, notices, slogans, pamphlets, that give the place a cosy, used, curling-at-the-corners look. Sitting in one of the few wicker chairs, one Saheli explains earnestly, "In the past few years we have felt a great need for such a centre, a place where women could meet and discuss problems and issues. There are many women with personal problems who are unable to face them alone. Many of our volunteer workers are women who came here with their own problems and stayed on to help us with others."

A local sweeper comes to Saheli looking for financial help; she brings her friend who wants an abortion. A battered housewife with a woman-next-door background who wishes to leave her husband. The circle expands till the entire locality knows that Saheli is there to help you. Saheli is little more than a neighbourhood club where women in distress can come for some sort of help and moral support. Yet in its own way the little garage-based group has covered tremendous ground. In the two years since its inception it has encouraged a response from ordinary middle class women who would



Saheli: a neighbourhood resource centre.

otherwise have continued to suffer quietly.

Neelam Bajaj is old at 27. Her eyes still have the blankness of shock in them and she often drifts into a reverie as she talks. It has been a year since she left her husband, a worker at DCM Chemicals, but the after-effects still linger. She left under traumatic circumstances: her in-laws wanted to murder her.

For the seven years that she had been married she was taunted and harassed about the little dowry she had brought. She had grown accustomed to the abuse. Every year she begged money from her parents to keep her in-laws happy. Then her father died. "I felt very guilty to keep taking and decided not to ask for more. I told my mother-in-law. She was so angry."

And that is when the trouble really started. They beat her, never let her leave the house and threatened her with her life. "I used to think that they are only threatening," says Neelam, "They won't really kill me. Nobody has that much guts." She was wrong. One day, as she went about her household work, her in-laws grabbed her, poured kerosene over her and tried to set her on fire. She pulled herself away and ran out of the house taking her younger four-year-old son with her. "I went outside into the street where a few neighbours had collected. I told them what they had tried to do to me. They got me an autorickshaw and

advised me to go away quickly. I was in so much shock that I was shivering, I couldn't even tell him the address to my *peehar*."

Neelam recovered at her mother's house, instituted legal proceedings against her in-laws and demanded custody of her older son who was still with them. They refused and would not even consider supporting her financially. Unable to look after her ailing younger son who required expensive treatment, she was forced to let



Brinda Karat: combining human rights with left wing activism.

him go too. "I sent him back to them, what else could I do?"

Now divorced, Neelam has been living with her mother and four brothers for the past year. She had come to Saheli to ask them to find her employment. "I am going to get a job and make myself a life. I cannot depend on my family forever."

"The biggest problem in the cities is having nobody to talk to," says Dr Vina Majumdar, Director of the Centre for Women's Development Studies. The Centre is a research organisation set up in 1980 by a group of well-qualified women who felt that a women's movement could have no substance without a research back-up and base. Today the Centre and its director provide support and give direction to the movement in the city. "More than fighting on issues, what we really need is preventive action," she says, "Each neighbourhood should have an action group, a place where they can go when they are in trouble."

\* \* \*

**AROUND THE EARLY '60s**, with the economic crisis in the country, some leftist organisations primarily involved in organising labour, started taking an interest in women workers and the wives of party workers. These organisations worked at the grass-roots level, agitating against spiralling prices and other labour issues. By the late '70s, especially in Delhi, they had realised that mass agitations, although necessary, were not quite the answer. The level of women's personal awareness was so low that a more individual approach was necessary.

Brinda Karat, 30, pleasant-faced and soft-spoken, with tobacco-stained teeth, is General Secretary of one such leftist organisation: the Janwadi Mahila Samiti (JMS). She explains the objectives of her organisation: "We work towards the betterment of woman as a woman, a citizen and a worker. It is a three dimensional programme."

An offshoot of the All India Democratic Women's Association which is a wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI(M), the JMS was set up in July 1980 to deal with women's problems in and around Delhi. It can claim a membership of 3,000 in the capital and 12 lakhs nationwide, through its affiliations.

Sitting in the lawn that serves as a common compound for the Mavalankar Auditorium and the residence-cum-

office complex that houses, among Members of Parliament and party offices, the headquarters of the JMS, Karat explains why there is a need for such an organisation in Delhi, "There hasn't been any recognition of women's power in Delhi. Historically they have been ignored in the city. It is only in places where there is no history of a social movement that oppression of women is the greatest. This is especially true of Delhi and the North."

With its broad base and ability to mobilise large numbers, the JMS combines an agitational approach with individual aid. Although they have toned down their Marxist ideology and made themselves more available to middle class women, the focus of their entire campaign still remains women and employment and they continue to agitate on issues like better water connections in slums. They remain qualitatively different from the smaller organisations like Saheli and are even faintly contemptuous of their 'restricted scopes'. Yet they often work in tandem with them now, as they see their interests in women coincide. Where Saheli gives aid and moral support to individual women, the JMS plans to change a whole society.

On December 21, 1981, Rita Chadha, 25 and six months pregnant, was burnt by her husband Satish Chadha's family. Her in-laws stood as she writhed in flames and screamed for help. Two hours later, unconscious and almost dead, they left her at a local municipal hospital, presumably to die. But Rita survived and gave a statement to the police that her in-laws had attempted to murder her and had for the past year been harassing her for more dowry.

On January 9, 1982, a cold, windy day caught in the uncomfortable dampness of an incessant drizzle, Rita Chadha's family accompanied by 80 to 90 women of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, went to demonstrate outside the house of Satish Chadha to demand the return of Rita's dowry.

The group stood soaking in the rain shouting slogans for almost an hour and several neighbours came out to see what all the noise was about. A large crowd gathered, although the Chadha house (with nine policemen assigned to guard it) remained silent. After a three-hour wait and threats to shatter the glass frontage of the house, the police, wanting to avoid a riot, eventually let in three JMS volunteers. The

Chadhas, after a brief exchange, allowed the dowry items to be taken out. One by one, the TV, radio, washing machine, dunlop sofas and mattresses, gold jewellery, and other scores of items were taken out in the rain.

It was a small victory, but as Vina Majumdar says, they were fighting the symptoms, and not the sickness. "The dowry deaths are only a manifestation of a certain malady inherent in society. So are most of the other crimes against women. The main reason is lack of economic independence and hence lack of personal strength and courage. If you are not in a position to walk away from a beating, then you will continue to suffer."

\* \* \* \*

**"ALTHOUGH ALL THE** work that women activists are doing is necessary in its own way, everybody forgets the psychological angle. It is easy to tell somebody what to do, but what happens to that woman after the decision is taken? Who looks after her mind and the mental turmoil she is going through?"

Kiran Sharma Bhatia, the 29-year-old Director of Sanjivini, a mental health clinic, is firm on the need for social counselling. Fighting for women's rights, she feels, must go hand-in-hand with a more personal and mental fight against social taboos. Sanjivini, a walk-in centre for anybody with emotional problems, is helping in this fight in some small way.

The distinctive blue logo of Sanjivini directs you from the road to under the

Defence Colony flyover and into a small, neat office curtained with *chiks* and carpeted with coir matting. A little tintinambulation over the door tinkles your arrival. The room is divided into small cubicles with two chairs in each. No clutter here, no posters, no air of hurry. An aura of quiet achievement pervades the office and the staff cannot help their smiles. Sanjivini has just been awarded the 1982 Sanskriti Award for Outstanding Social Achievement.

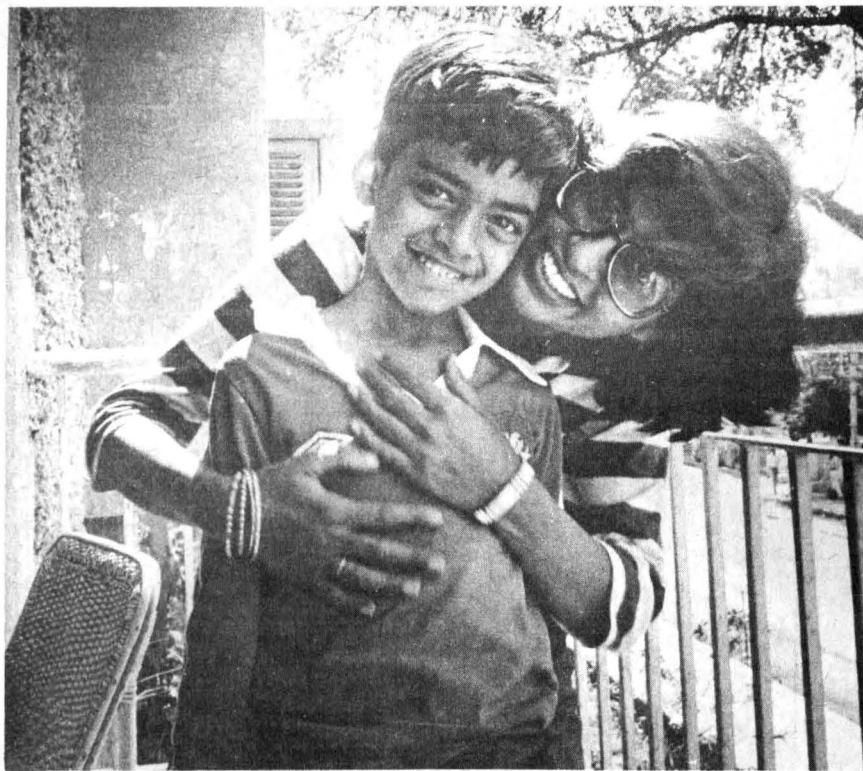
Set up almost six years ago, it is staffed with a carefully selected lay staff with a concerned sympathetic approach. At first their clientele was predominantly male. Now many women come to them with problems ranging from identity crisis and marital counselling to fears of harassment and rape.

Bhatia recalls a young girl who came to them for help. She was frightened of her in-laws, they taunted and harassed her about the little dowry she had brought. Her husband beat her. She was frightened that they may do something drastic but yet she kept insisting: "I don't care what they do, they can kill me if they want, but I have to go back. It is my home."

"It would be easy to tell her 'Leave them, go away, go back to your parents, find a job.' But it is not that simple. The social pressures against her are tremendous. Her parents do not want her back, what will they do with her? She has never thought about working. What are her alternatives?



Kiran Bhatia offers advice.



Meera Dewan with son Ashish: a painful personal metamorphosis.

What we try and do is explain to her the options and possible repercussions of any decision that she takes and let her make up her own mind. If she wants to return to her in-laws, that is fine by us. It is her decision. You will be putting her through more mental torture if you advised her on a course that she is not capable of handling."

Sanjivini is not an activist group (the staff wouldn't join any morchas) but it provides a necessary auxiliary service to the many women who are only now aware of the alternatives but as yet unsure of how to handle them.

\* \* \*

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT in post-independence India was considered little more than a social welfare activity. The Constitution incorporated the equal status of women pre-empting the thunder of any movement based on legal inequality as in the West. Legally Indian women were far ahead of their western counterparts but their conception of their role in society had changed little from the days of the *Manusmriti*. They made no move to take advantage of the rights that existed.

"Feminism in India is more a social problem than a legal one," says Rani Jethmalani, a prominent lawyer and the one who initiated the first dowry death case in the Supreme Court. "The

law is there but the problem is to make it effective. If women are aware, only then will the judiciary be aware too."

Jethmalani, who is an active member of the Janata Party's Mahila Dakshata Samiti feels that politics and politicians are the chief cause of women's oppression. Political insensitivity to the problems of women has contributed much to the general apathy on the issue.

"The chief cause of the increasing harassment of women is the deteriorating law and order situation," she declares, "We have a PM who declares that 'I am not a feminist.' Such statements are not only damaging to the cause, but coming from her, totally irresponsible."

\* \* \*

IN EARLY 1982, a young, relatively unknown film-maker called Meera Dewan organised the first forum for women's cinema, 'Cine Woman', in the four major cities of India. The symposium focussed on the theme of women in film and generated considerable interest in Delhi. It also reflected a long standing obsession of its organiser.

"We have nothing that you can call feminist cinema in India. In fact you can't even find a decent film that deals with the problems of women sensibly," says Dewan, one of the very few feminist film-makers in the country.

Dewan herself came into the feminine consciousness through a painful personal metamorphosis. Divorced from her husband, an eminent film-maker in Bombay, she was forced to return to Delhi and its parochial attitudes with her young son. Being a single parent in the rigid social norms of the capital was far from easy. She started off doing short films for Films Division and TV. Her first film was on single parents and reflected all the traumas she had herself suffered.

In 1982, Meera Dewan made an astonishing film on dowry victims, including Rita Chadha who suffered almost 75 per cent burn injuries yet survived to tell her harrowing tale of torture and maltreatment. What it lacked in technique it made up in stark reality. The film *Paraya Dhan* won a Silver Peacock at the Ninth International Film Festival in Delhi. It was a fierce indictment of the kind of society that fostered such an incident and the hopelessness of the woman, whose father, inspite of being aware of her ill-treatment often told her: "Ke beti jo hai sasural walon ki cheez hai aur sasural walon ke yahaan hi usko rahna hai." (A daughter is a thing that belongs to the in-laws and she must stay only with them.)

"The dependence and total lack of confidence is so severe that it gets into the psyche. We think we are incapable of doing anything on our own," she says with feeling, her short, blue-black hair swinging violently in emphasis and the earnestness in her eyes magnified by her glasses. In her faded denims and off-white turtle neck she looks more of a college senior than the mother of an energetic seven-year-old.

The making of *Paraya Dhan* was also quite an achievement. It was the first time a government agency, like the Films Division, had allowed a feminist to make a documentary on an issue that concerned women exclusively. Says Dewan, "In the government there is no policy on women. Nobody has even thought about it!"

The fact that such a film could be made shows an awakening and an acknowledgement of the status of women and admits that they need attention. Dewan feels that government apathy merely reflects women's own apathy to their condition and says that if women pushed for a change it would definitely come about. She is now making a film on women construction workers in Delhi for the Ministry of



A still from *Paraya Dhan*: a fierce indictment.

#### Social Welfare.

"There will be hostility to this movement and the middle class women will have to make a lot of sacrifices, but that is the only way we will progress at all."

\* \* \*

**IN EARLY 1978** an informal workshop of feminists, organised in Bombay, felt the need for a publication that would discuss and highlight women's issues. In January 1979 a magazine called *Manushi* was published for the first time from Delhi. It was a bimonthly in English and Hindi. The back cover announced that the magazine would survive only on individual donations and subscriptions. As a policy, grants from any agency, governmental or otherwise, would not be accepted. No advertisements either, because 'most ads make a degrading display of women'. With such a rigid, uncompromising stand it was expected to sink without a trace. But survive it has, and indeed gone from strength to strength, inspite of makeshift finance.

Naturally *Manushi* functions like no other publication. A cramped *barsati* in Lajpat Nagar, houses the editorial office. Two flights of a narrow staircase, at the foot of which are stacks of the latest issue, lead to the office. Writers send in gratuitous contributions. Little notices in the magazine ask for donations of a spare table or chair from helpful readers. The office is a one-room affair with desks along the walls and its notice-board plastered with feminist and *Manushi* posters. An

intriguing photograph shows a large signboard advertising a car. The copy reads: 'If This Car Was A Lady It Would Get Its Bottom Pinched...' Someone has painted underneath it, in equally large letters, 'If This Lady Was A Car, She Would Run You Down.' It sets the tone for the entire office. But Madhu Kishwar, the small, volatile editor, declared emphatically, "We are not feminists. We do not like to be called by any label. They mislead more often than not."

But beyond her protestations and the technicalities among the activist groups, *Manushi*, and Kishwar herself, definitely stand for the new awareness in the capital. And inspite of the magazine's rigid financial policy and its primitive distribution network, *Manushi*'s office is always inundated with mail, reports, personal stories and articles from women all over India



Madhu Kishwar in the *Manushi* office: strong and uncompromising.

who think that it is doing a great job.

Kishwar is optimistic about the long run success of *Manushi* and feels that inspite of the constraints it is doing remarkably well.

"And even if we were to die, I am sure that ten *Manushis* would rise from our ashes."

\* \* \*

**THE NEW AWARENESS** among the women of the North is still too disparate a reaction to be called a movement. Patchy and unsure, it could still simply peter away to a full stop as the feeling of outrage against the dowry deaths subsides, or fragments further into ineffectuality. Yet, its greatest strength lies in the fact that unlike the earlier sporadic outbursts that were reflections of Western ideology, the new awareness is entirely indigenous. It has arisen from causes that are peculiarly Indian, even regional, and the reactions encompass everything from a lower middle class to an upper class mentality. As more and more women relate to the things they see happening around them the more willing they will be to push for a social change. Even now the tenor of the speeches have changed from being aggressive and strident, to being reasonable and humane.

"It is not some strange, feminist-activist movement," says Rani Jethmalani, "it is a human rights movement that is fighting for decency, sensitivity and equality."

"It isn't even a fight really, and definitely not an anti-male stance," says another, "It is just a feeling of awareness that changes the way you look at yourself, at your relationships with your husband and parents and children. It is a new way of thinking."

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# ADVENTURES IN FILM JOURNALISM

## By Rauf Ahmed

*What happens when a 'serious' journalist takes a plunge into the frenetic world of film journalism? Rauf Ahmed (Editor, Movie) tells his tale of high-strung stars and their crazy ways.*

ON THE THRESHOLD of sleep I still hear the clatter of teleprinters and live, once again, the frenzy of putting a daily newspaper to bed. The discomfort of sleeping on two Godrej tables joined together, of snatching a couple of hours sleep amid the deafening din, the anxious dawns, the tension of comparing the front page with the competitors. It seems so long ago and reminds me of an era when I wasn't a film journalist.

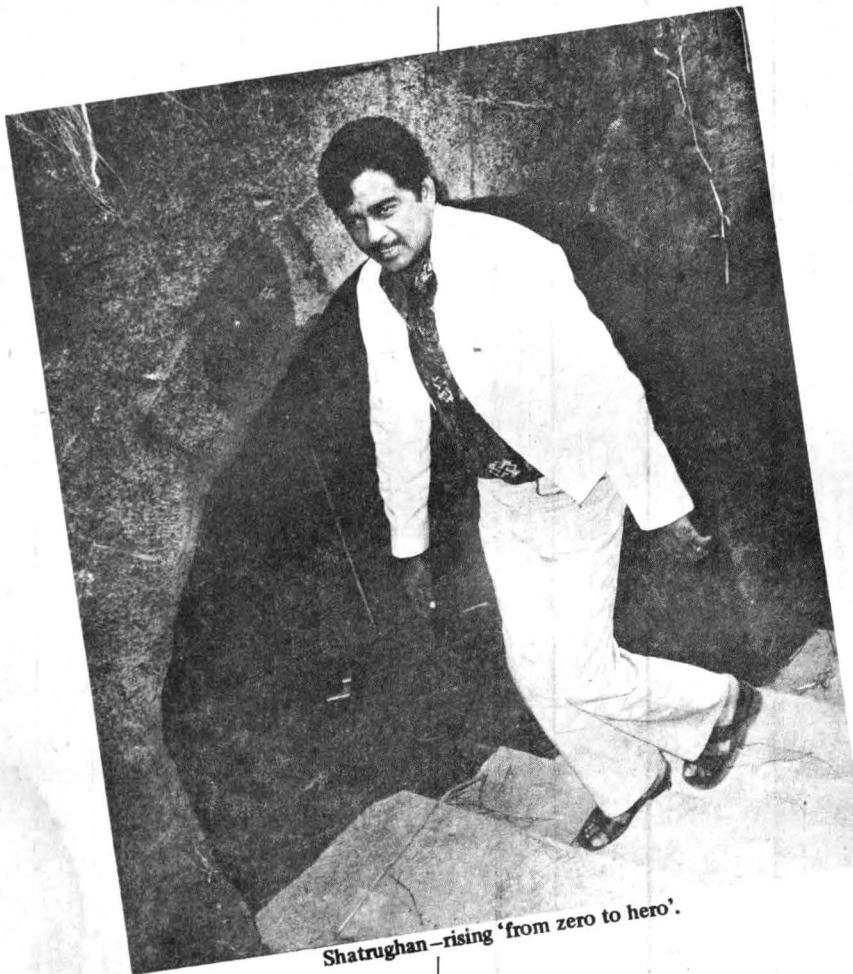
It took Shatrughan Sinha just ten minutes to make me realise how far I had come from the kind of journalism I had started out in. There I was, notepad in hand, interviewing Mr Sinha about matters of general interest. Like the good journalist I had been trained to be, I phrased my questions with care. What did Mr Sinha think of his recent performances? About his shift from 'villain' to 'hero'? Had he been typecast?

I may as well have been addressing the tone arm of a faulty record player, stuck forever in the same groove. If Mr Sinha heard my questions, he gave no indication of having done so. Each time, it would be the same response. He would fix me squarely in the sights of that famous bloodshot gaze, and then, solemnly intone, "I have risen from zero to hero on my own steam." Well, yes, of course, I would improvise hastily, but coming back to the question . . . Nothing worked.

"Take down," he said, looking at my notepad, "Shatrughan Sinha's story is the story of a 'zero' and a 'hero'." He followed the tip of my ball pen. When I'd finished the sentence, he asked, "May I get you a drink?" And added quickly, "But then we'll have to sit in the garden. I don't serve drinks in-

From top: Rekha, Rajesh Khanna,  
Rauf Ahmed and Shatrughan Sinha. ▶





Shatrughan—rising 'from zero to hero'.

side my house... this is a holy place, you know... this is *Ramayan*." I said, "No thanks."

"Okay... write down," he continued. "I have a heading ready for you... 'Shatrughan Sinha—from zero to hero!'"

All around us, carpenters bustled about, busy making further improvements to the Sinha mansion. And as the tapping of the hammers began to leave its imprint on my brain so did Mr Sinha's grand (if somewhat limited) rhetoric, "Shatrughan Sinha—from zero to hero."

Even though I never really got a chance to speak during the two-hour session, I enjoyed the interview. I went back and wrote it out pretty much as it happened, with the 'zero-hero' refrain recurring in almost every para. I thought it was a fairly amusing piece. But Shatru didn't think so. He hated my heading: *The Brag Is Back*. He thought I had no headline sense. And as for my humour, "You are vicious," he pronounced.

I HAD STARTED at the *Times of India* as a 'cub' reporter and later moved

to the Free Press Group, from reporting, to the news desk, to magazine editing, to editing an evening newspaper.

And then the Emergency. Nobody knew how long it would last, and newspapers had become dull and boring. It made sense for my employers at the Free Press Group to venture into the relatively 'safe' and more exciting magazine field. The first in their scheme was a film weekly. They were looking for the staff to put it together—and an editor.

One afternoon there was tension in the office, an hour after the *Free Press Bulletin* hit the stands. I had published an article critical of the policemen who had assaulted some students on the Bombay University campus. "Do you want to close down the paper?" my editor yelled at me. And I was told not to publish a line without his approval. It was a severe indictment. I was crestfallen.

The same evening, I ran into my friend Sebastian Karingada, who is still at the *Free Press*. He asked me if I would work out a format for a film weekly. "I like your sense of

graphics... how about working out a dummy?" Something challenging, I thought, something to keep my mind away from the humiliation of the afternoon.

I sat up till the wee hours of the morning and worked out a tabloid dummy for a black-and-white film weekly.

Two days later, Sebastian took me to the Samovar cafe for lunch, and over a glass of beer dropped a bombshell. "Sethji says he'll launch this magazine only if you agree to edit it, at least to start with..." *Sethji* was JK Karnani, Managing Director, Free Press Group of Newspapers. "Me? Edit a film magazine?" I dismissed the idea. Sebastian, cleverly fed my ego. "Nobody else can execute your idea of the magazine. You know, the others are as modern as the museum. You just launch it, then I'll take care of things. In six months, *Sethji* has promised to make you editor of *Onlooker*."

"But only for six months." I made that clear to Sebastian over my third mug of beer. And I was editor of *Cinema Journal*....

My reluctance to edit a film magazine was not influenced by pseudo-intellectual disdain. I had been a film buff of sorts, and had enjoyed doing an occasional Sunday piece on films for the *Free Press*. And when they'd offered me the foreign film critic's job, I had gladly accepted. Next on the list was a spell as a second-string Hindi film reviewer. This stint lasted only a few months, because I was given a holiday from Hindi films reviews after I had slashed *Bobby* to bits and the film's publicist had threatened to withdraw all film ads! Two days later, a revised review of the film appeared in the *Free Press* written by one of the writers of the film, himself!

But being a full-time film journalist was different. I was afraid of being pushed out of the mainstream of journalism, mainly because of my love of art and music. A column I wrote in the *Free Press* had given me easy access to all the leading artists, dancers and singers and that's where I began to grasp classical Indian music (Kishori Amonkar is a great passion in my life). But then, there was that well-emphasized promise of being brought back, as editor of *Onlooker*. However, it didn't happen. *Cinema Journal* was an instant success, and they wouldn't disturb a successful venture!

Then, I met Rajiv and Namita

Gokhale. The Gokhales were going to start a film magazine called *Super*. Did I want to be editor? Somewhere inside my head a little alarm went off. Accepting the editorship of that kind of film magazine would probably be the point of no return. Did I really want to change careers? Not to worry, the Gokhales assured me. They had a men's magazine called *Magnum* coming. And then there was to be a business magazine called *Billion*. All I had to do was make *Super* a success, and then I could return to regular journalism. But, again, things didn't work that way. And when I finally left *Super* in 1981, I ended up bringing out another film magazine called *Movie*, as probably, the last step to a non-filmi magazine.

**IT HAS BEEN** a crazy, exhilarating experience. When I made the shift to film journalism, I was a terrible snob. Those silly, pampered stars and their decadent lives had no relevance to the very real world outside, I thought. Now I am not so sure. I have lost the superior air I once prided myself on. There is more to film journalism than meets the eye. It is far more difficult than it seems. And some of these pampered people are actually quite intelligent. But, if I am to be honest, then I must concede that a large proportion of them would be regarded as very strange in any other walk of life. Nothing that I had seen in the real world had prepared me for this kind of life.

My first encounter was with Sharmila Tagore. She had no time to sit down and she didn't ask me to sit either. We had a quick dialogue at the entrance to the sets of Asit Sen's *Anadi*. "So you want to interview me?" she asked. "Have you seen all

my films?"

"Is it important?" I asked.

"Of course, how else will you discuss my work?"

"I've seen three films of yours. I thought that'd do."

"Have you seen *Aavishkar*?"

"Yes," I said. "It's a pretentious film." The comment was, I realised, uncalled for.

"What do you mean?" she screamed. "Do you know anything about cinema?"

"Yes, enough to interview you," I snapped back.

"You are being arrogant," she yelled.

"No, I only said *Aavishkar* is a bad film..."

"But why?"

I told her why. Because it had failed to prove what it set out to. The protagonist Mansi (played by Sharmila) broke away from her husband because her marriage to him had taken away her identity. But she *had* no identity. Then how could she lose it?

With a frown she asked, "What's your name?" I told her. "I'd like to meet you again."

We met. It made me regret my rashness at our first meeting. My arrogance was born out of a feigned (yes, I must admit) air of superiority. Because in the world I belonged to, it was *fashionable* to be condescending about film stars. To say the least, the attitude was preposterous. I've got along very well with Sharmila ever since.

**THE ONE ACTOR** I have always enjoyed talking to is Amitabh Bachchan. He has never been like the other stars—he never kept looking at himself in the mirror, he had no *chamchas* around him, never said one sentence

against a co-star, and more shocking, never started all his sentences with 'T'. We never discussed films. Instead, we would chat about books, photography, the world, whatever. And he has a great sense of humour. His wife Jaya has been my favourite actress—the only favourite I ever had, in the real sense—from the time I saw a short film produced by the Poona Film Institute called *Suman*.

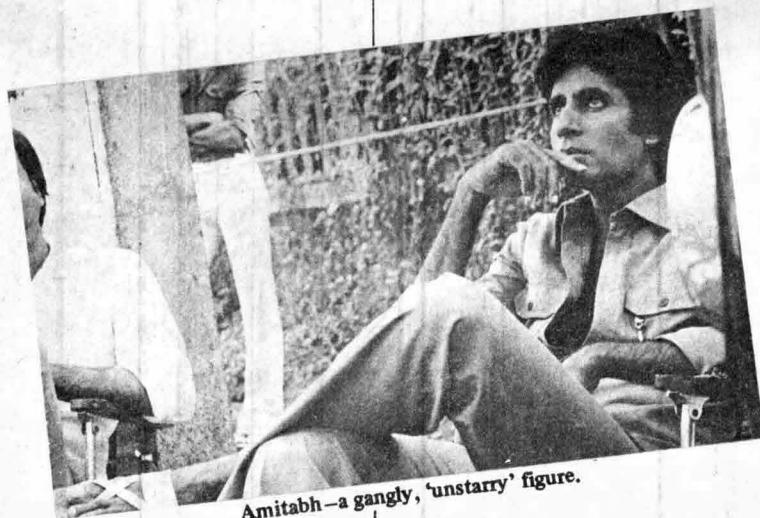
Way before Bachchan became the mega-star he is today, I had run a story in the Sunday *Free Press* predicting that he would one day topple the reigning box office demi-god—Rajesh Khanna. Bachchan thanked me for the article. I remember him, wearing a polka-dot shirt and coming up to me at a party and saying, "That was a very kind piece." "I wasn't being kind," I retorted. "It's what I feel." At later meetings however, it became clear that Bachchan did not share my confidence. "How can I be a superstar?" he would ask, "Look at my limbs." And he kept repeating this even after the success of *Deewaar* when he toppled every other star in sight. Even now, he says it!

The friendship endured after Amitabh had become successful and 'banned' the press. *Super* was the only magazine that got to see him whenever it asked for an interview. Today, I'd like to think that we are still friends, but I am no longer in touch with him.

Time came in the way. Communication became difficult as his shifts increased in number. Also, my profession created a few barriers. Amit hated the word 'journalist'. Everytime I got an interview with him (like the one in 1977—*Did Amitabh Exploit the Emergency?*—which appeared in *Super*), other journalists would rush to him and say nasty things. It was sickening.

I don't blame him for not trusting most film journalists. They had been grossly unfair to him. First, they ridiculed him for trying to make it in films because they were convinced that he had no business being in films with his kind of looks. Later, they attacked him with a vengeance. When he retaliated, they banned him. It was a short-sighted decision. The myopia only served to expose the impotence of scandal rags. For, with the ban, began Amitabh Bachchan's incredible rise to stardom.

About the same time, script-writers Salim and Javed were trying to promote Shatrughan Sinha. *Super* carried an



Amitabh—a gangly, 'unstarry' figure.



interview with Mr Sinha in which the star claimed that Amitabh was nervous when they acted together. (Mr Sinha was more articulate on this occasion). After the interview Shatru defied me, "You won't be able to print what I said, because Amit is your friend." I quoted Shatru verbatim ("Amitabh was tense while acting with me"). Months later, when we approached Amit for an interview, he remarked, "What is the point of talking to me when you already have lots of other people willing to talk about me?" After that, communication came to a halt! Nevertheless, one rival magazine kept suggesting that Amitabh Bachchan owned *Super*.

**AN UNPLEASANT COROLLARY** of my friendship with the Bachchans was that Rajesh Khanna became convinced that I had it in for him. Rajesh found this particularly galling because he had half the film press eating out of the palm of his hand. And yet, here I was, singing the praises of this Amitabh Bachchan character.

Rajesh Khanna wanted to see me. The summons took the form of a dinner invitation conveyed to me by his then publicity man, Sandeep. "Don't go," my friends warned me. "He will be rude, unpleasant and nasty. He will humiliate you." But I was determined, and nothing would deter me. All along the way, I planned out what I would say. By the time I got to *Aashirwad* Rajesh's sprawling bungalow on Bombay's Carter Road, I was sure I'd tackle the

unpredictable Mr Khanna.

In the event, Rajesh turned out to be even more unpredictable than I had anticipated. "Sahib ghar pe nahin hain," a flunkey informed me. But didn't he know I was coming, I asked. Yes, yes, he did. He said you should wait . . . he'll be here by 9.30. That meant I was to wait one and a half hours for him to turn up. I walked out.

In the sort of world I came from, if people were one and a half hours late, you were not expected to wait for them. And as far as Rajesh was concerned, film journalists could wait forever.

I met him, much later at a party. His Man Friday, Dhiren Kishen, pointed me out to him. "He's the guy," I could hear him say. After we had met, I told him I'd like to interview him. "Anytime," he said. The interview was spread over a week. It was excellent copy. Rajesh liked the quote I had used as the headline: "Only Refugees Go To Camps" and the article. And he let Dimple pose for the cover of *Super*'s inaugural issue. Rajesh is a suspicious person by nature. But, once you win his confidence over, he's fine.

**THANKS TO THE** atmosphere of suspicion perpetuated by the profession, friendship among film people has acquired a distorted connotation. As one of them put it, friendship in the film industry is governed by professional expediency. And it changes with each hit, and with each flop. Friendship between a star and a

journalist is a near impossibility. The general feeling is that a journalist can never be friends with a star and still be professional. I don't agree with this. It is possible to be a star's friend, unless you are a scoundrel. I have been friendly with quite a few people in the industry: Smita Patil, Raakhee, Amitabh, Jaya, Ramesh Sippy, Javed, Manoj, Dilip and Saira. But it has never impinged upon my professional decisions. My criticism of Dilip Kumar's second marriage did not affect my relationship with Saira and him. Fortunately, nobody has ever made an issue of anything appearing in the magazines I've edited. Of course, there have been the initial outbursts. But eventually, they have all taken it in their stride. Jaya did question me when I wrote a cover story on her in *Super*, titled *The Portrait of a Martyr*, focussing on her tendency to go about with a drawn face and burst into tears at previews. She wasn't pleased, and she conveyed her displeasure. "I thought you were a friend," she complained. "I saw nothing wrong in what I wrote," I told her. People were interested in knowing the 'mystery' behind the woman called Jaya Bachchan. I had tried to analyse her state of mind at a time when film magazines were trying desperately to project her as a 'suffering wife'!

An innocuous story about Jaya's



influence on a new generation of heroines also earned me the displeasure of another actress. It was enough to turn Rekha against me for life. "How dare you say that I copy Jaya?" she screamed. "I have no respect for her, neither as an actress nor as a person."

Even allowing for Rekha's level of maturity, I thought the whole thing would blow over. No such luck. A while later, I was visiting Dr Snehata Pande, when Rekha (who is a friend of the doctor's) walked in. "Here, in here — quick," yelled a flustered Dr Pande, as she attempted to hide me in an inside room. "Why are you hiding me?" I asked, quite bemused. "Rekha, Rekha's here," she explained. More than a little amused, I neglected the offer of concealment, and sauntered into the living room. "Hello Rekha," I said. She pretended not to have heard. "Hello Rekha," I repeated loudly. "I don't know you," she hissed through painted lips. "I think I've seen you somewhere," I said, and walked away.

The film world is, as I soon discovered, a little larger than life. Nobody dislikes anything, they hate it. And nobody thinks a performance is good, it is always sensational or extraordinary. I have no objection to hyperbole, but in this part of the world, it is the sword people live and die by.

**IT IS COMMONLY** believed that film journalists are 'on the take'. I don't know. Except on a couple of occasions, when they wanted a favourable review, nobody has ever tried to interfere in my work.

On one occasion, the public relations man for *Sholay* invited me to lunch at Nanking, a Chinese restaurant in South Bombay. I was a little surprised but went because he assured me that there was an 'urgent, personal matter', that he simply had to discuss. When I got there, I soon discovered that there was nothing urgent or personal about the meeting. All my host wished to talk about was one of his clients, a 'toughie' hero, whose career was floundering in the wake of Amitabh's sudden rise to stardom. "He wants a small favour from you," the publicist mumbled.

I didn't understand what he was on about, and he wouldn't come to the point either. Then he started talking about the review of *Sholay* that I was scheduled to write. "After all, a review is only an opinion," he kept saying. "You can always change your

mind." When I appeared confused by this truism, he finally said his piece. Would I be willing to say in my review that his client had outclassed Amitabh in *Sholay*?

I was outraged. Of course not, I said. First of all, Amit was far better and secondly, my opinions were not for sale. My host got very nervous, apologised profusely for the suggestion and insisted on driving me back to the *Free Press*. As I was getting out of the car, he tried once more. "This is a little present for you," he said, handing me an envelope bulging with currency notes. I was livid. I flung the envelope back at him unopened, slammed the door and walked out.

It is only now when friends ask me how much money there was in the envelope that I wish I'd taken a peek before throwing it back at him. It would have been interesting to know how much he thought I was worth!

**PERHAPS THE MOST** important effect of my journalistic training has been that I have never been able to bring myself to print unsubstantiated gossip, innuendo or scandal. At times this attitude does land you in a spot. Either you miss a 'scoop' (like the Zeenat-Sanjay marriage) or you support a lie (unwittingly, though) as in the case of the Dilip-Asma marriage. Around the time that unconfirmed stories about the *nikaah* were floating around, *Movie* interviewed Dilip and Saira.

Was the story true? we asked. Of course not, said Dilip. Then, Saira and

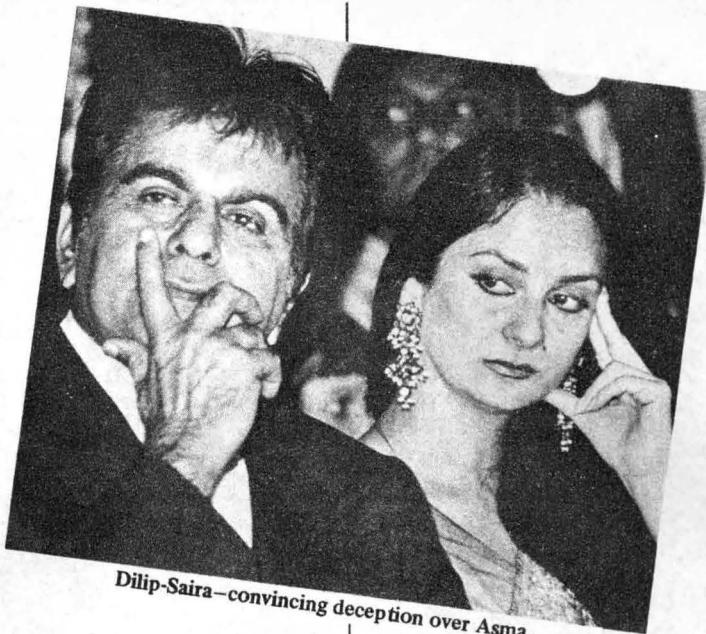
he posed for pictures tearing up copies of the paper that had printed the report. It was an impressive performance and it never crossed my mind that a man of the stature of Dilip Kumar might be lying so blatantly.

As it happened, Asma was horrified by her husband's casual lies and released the *nikaahnamah* to the press. So much for believing in Dilip's stature!

After seven years in the profession however, one learns to make allowances for this sort of thing. I have had most of my condescension and disdain knocked out of me by circumstances. And while I am always conscious of having distanced myself from many of the things I enjoyed (art, music, philosophy and the like), I no longer make any apologies for film journalism.

When I entered the profession, it was regarded as the preserve of scandalmongers who catered to largely imbecilic readers. It used to be said that film journalism is people who can't write, interviewing people who can't talk, for people who can't read. This is simply not true. Film magazines are read by fairly intelligent people, the stars are more articulate than is suspected (even Shatrughan now actually listens to what you have to say before replying), and the techniques of film journalism have been adopted by most of the new crop of general interest magazines.

Later this year, I'll probably come back to regular journalism. But it won't be because I got fed up of films. Once I learned to live in this crazy, frenetic, world, I loved every minute of it. ♦



Dilip-Saira—convincing deception over Asma.

## Swadeshi Chic

Photographed By Jayesh Sheth  
Coordinated By Devika Bhojwani

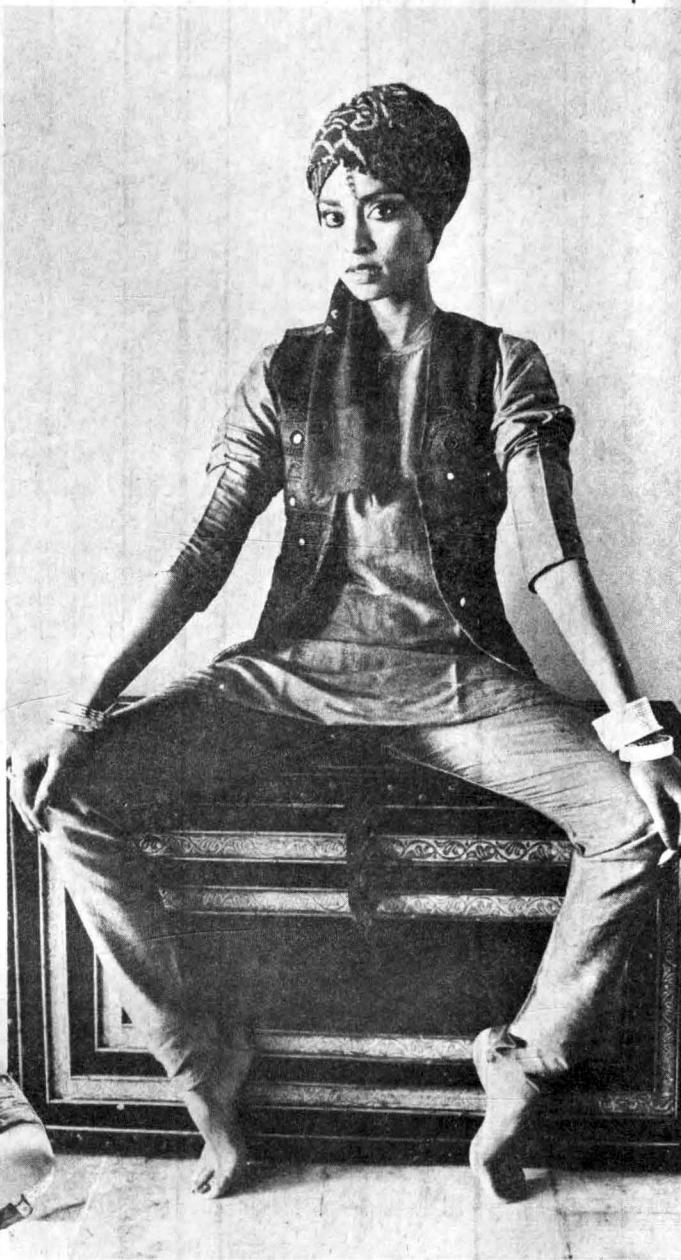
Titillate them with turbans, dazzle them with dhotis and charm them with chooridars. From the boutiques of Chelsea to the fashion houses of Seventh Avenue, the Indian look is making the scene.

And with the *Gandhi* wave, swadeshi has never had it so good! Jodhpurs, jackets, brocades, beads, dhotis and sarees have left the shores of Hindoostan for the catwalks of London, Paris and New York.

Modelling the new look is Sneh Gupta, 25, star of *The Far Pavilions* and a well-known TV actress in Britain. Sneh took to the look like a hanger to a coat. "I've never felt so much at home," she pouted prettily in her luxurious suite at The Searock Hotel. It was her first trip to India but now, she promised, "I'm going to blow everyone's minds in London with this look."



Titillate them with turbans



Left: A sequined chiffon *dupatta*, fashioned into a cape, worn over a tight tee-shirt and Jodhpur-style pants. A black cummerbund enhances the Indian look. Above: The Thakur-style turban is *bandhani*, the jacket is Rajasthani mirror-work and the kurta and straight-cut pants are red raw silk. A dangling, red *tikka* completes the *daku* look!

# OPTIONS

*Charm them with chooridars*



The pachydermal ivory bangles complement the reds, greens and yellows of the embroidered skirt from Kutch. A simple black shirt sets off the glow of a golden calf-leather belt and Sneh's expression says the rest!



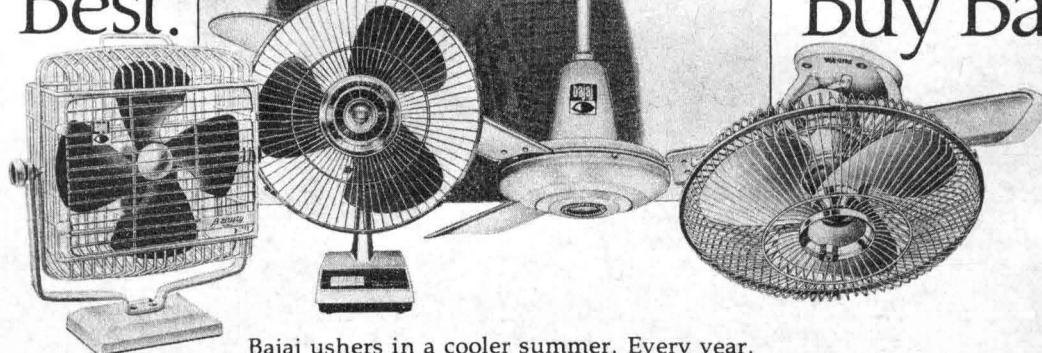
The Raj was never like this. Jodhpur-style breeches with a matching shoulder-padded brocade jacket! Chunky jewellery, an equestrian cummerbund and the lady is set for her ride!

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## Comment

### A Woman Of Substance BY DOLLY THAKORE



*"A twelve-year relationship has ended," writes Dolly Thakore, TV newsreader, social worker, mother and a woman with an unconventional celebrated lifestyle. For the first time Dolly has written honestly about a recent, major break-up. Her thoughts, penned immediately after an accident, tumbled out haphazardly but evocatively, touching on the various facets of her relationship. "It is sad that whatever one has stood for should be undone by fellow-women," she says.*

**Comment** is a regular feature to be carried monthly, featuring views and opinions by persons both well-known and lesser known.

*Alas! the love of women! it is known  
To be a lovely and fearful thing;  
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,  
And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring  
To them but mockeries of the past alone.*

THESE WERE THE first words I'd read in Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* in 1975, a book that strangely affected me. I was depressed for weeks afterwards. How true that is of sensitive, intelligent, questioning minds! Nothing matters but the sharing, the togetherness. And the courage of two heads and shoulders seems sturdier. One

begins to believe in one's strength and tries to offer comfort and solace to unhappy, less fortunate beings. One preaches practicality and objectiveness.

It can be a heady experience.

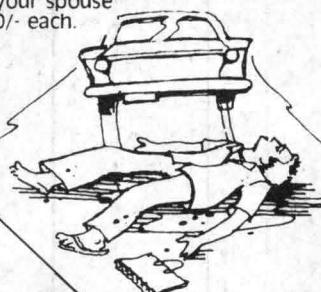
Speaking for myself, ups and downs in professional, financial, social life have helped mould a stronger me. Every experience could, I thought, be

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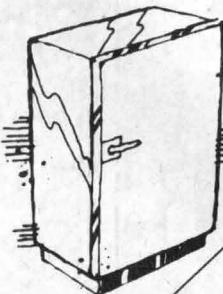
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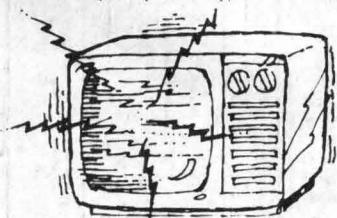
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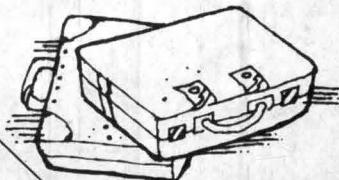
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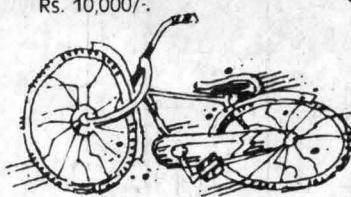
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# OPTIONS

shared. Disappointments were not permanent or lasting. The complete trust in my relationship gave me so much confidence and emotional security. And now the one area that was the most vulnerable, because it was the source of so much strength, has been attacked and destroyed, for some personal gratification. Cynical and sceptical, I am now reduced to conceding the influence of astrology, the stars, and the Gods!

A twelve-year relationship has ended—a relationship fraught with tension due to its unconventionality. With impatience, short tempers, honesty, companionability and one that was rich in sharing every fantasy, phobia, inhibition, ambition, and dream. I sit here, some months later, emotionally shattered. I seemed to have the courage to defy norms and conventions, traditions and society. I always stood for the dignity of women, the self-respect of women. And I was not prepared to be made a doormat or a chattel or to be tied to the kitchen stool. Together, we could take on the world. Alone, I lack the courage for the moment.

It is sad that whatever one has stood for should be undone by fellow-women. I too am guilty of having caus-

ed pain to my fellow-women. But it was not deliberate or contrived. In retrospect, I wish that we women had the courage to confront each other rather than perpetuate so much pain and suffering. I am guilty of capitulating to the pursuits of the pursuer—who by now has perfected the art of 'divide and rule' among women!

I maintained my independence and modelled myself in contrast to his more giving, demanding, possessive, earlier bond of 22 years. But somewhere along the line he began to feel neglected and insecure.

Frankly, I don't think man is quite ready for a truly independent woman yet. They feel threatened. Too much 'mothering' drives them away and too much 'equality' unnerves them. Emotional dependence, they think, should be displayed by your 'untying their shoe laces'. Inspite of drawing room liberalism, inspite of criticising the *sati-savitri* image of women in the Hindi cinema, couples do draw up their own lists of do's and don'ts. The betrayal comes when only lip service is being paid for the acceptance of society's elite, the reality is forgotten.

A woman matures earlier and faster than a man. Perhaps she has less in

common with people twenty years younger than her than men do. For them it is a constant chase and charge to their libido. For someone like me, the energy expended at work made me quite content to spend quieter evenings with tested friends and family. I wasn't looking for constant attention or reassurance and perhaps a ready sycophancy to my 'God' image.

There was, it seems now, no place for expression of independent thought and action, for maturity and consolidation, in his scheme of things. But, I was so wrapped up in the security of making it last that I couldn't see this. We had both been through the pain, agony and adjustment of previous relationships. I believed we weren't a young couple anymore; it never occurred to me that as mature human beings, we couldn't work things out. And perhaps that's where the problem lay.

Together we were examples of progressive society. Apart, we sound hypocritical.

Today I saw a silver-grey couple helping each other down the corridors of Jaslok Hospital and a tear clouded my eye. And I took courage in what my four-year-old son says, "Mama, we've got to be brave." ♦



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## Food and Wine

### London's Trendy Brasserie

THE IDEA WAS so outrageous that nobody thought it would work. Nobody except for Camellia Panjabi, Executive Director of the Taj group, that is. Panjabi was convinced that London needed a different kind of Indian restaurant. It had to be informal but trendy, up-market but not over-priced, and fancy but not stuffy. So far, so good. But Panjabi also wanted to call it 'The Bombay Brasserie', introduce plated meals so that guests couldn't share dishes and give it a open neo-colonial ambience. Moreover, she was not going to serve the *tandoori* and *vindaloo* style cuisine favoured by most London restaurants—even the better ones. Instead she was going to serve Bombay fare, whatever that meant.

First of all, said the doubters, how can an Indian restaurant be called a Brasserie? Secondly, people expect to share dishes at an Indian restaurant—they don't want plated service. And finally what in the name of Mumba-devi, is Bombay-style cuisine? It was, said some sceptics, a hare-brained idea that deserved to fail.

To everyone's surprise (except perhaps Panjabi's), the Bombay Brasserie has worked. It is no exaggeration to call it the city's trendiest Indian restaurant and along with a few select places like Langan's Brasserie, it is one of the 'in' places to be seen in London. Almost from the day it opened (December 9, 1983), it has been crowded with celebrities (stage, screen, TV, the Royal Family—like Lord Snowdon), and each evening, there is a line of Rolls Royces, BMWs and Mercedes-Benzes outside its door.

In retrospect it now seems clear that Panjabi's concept was the only one that would have worked. Had the Taj come up with another 'raga' style restaurant, trendy London would have turned its collective nose up at the 'Tandoori Lobster'. In a city so full of Indian restaurants (many of them very expensive), what was needed was something different. The Brasserie

concept (the term has come to mean a restaurant with 'plated' service) had worked for Peter Langan's chic Piccadilly eatery and was ripe for adaptation.

Panjabi went a step further, though. "In most Indian homes," she says, "we have a meat dish, a vegetable and a *dhal*. We do not have four meat dishes." So, the Brasserie's menu has been built around this. Guests order a main course, and then, automatically, get the *subzi* and the *dhal* served along with it.

As for the food itself, Panjabi wanted to give it a Bombay flavour because many different kinds of cuisine are represented in the city—Punjabi, Gujarati, Muslim, Parsi, Goan, and *chaat* for instance. So the Brasserie offers an unusual combination of starters including Bombay style *sev puri*, tangy masala mussels and crab, Goan style. The rest of the menu is divided into sections with such Bombay perennials as *dhansak*, Goa fish curry and *kababs* featuring. It is all quite different from the kind of food found at the average London Indian restaurant and it has been appreciated. Particularly because the Brasserie's menu is short on oil and

fatty foods, low on salt and full of delicate flavours that have nothing to do with chilli.

The quality is also quite superb. But this is not surprising when you consider that Panjabi picked five of the Taj's best Indian chefs and then gave them a rigorous re-training course. They went to the Oriental Club to learn about Gujarati food and Adi Dubash loaned the Taj his chef so that the Brasserie's chefs could make a perfect *dhansak*.

The Brasserie has clearly arrived. It has marked the entry of the Taj group into Britain. While both of the group's London hotels are far from fashionable, the restaurant (located next to Bailey's) has gained for the group the kind of high profile it needs. The Taj's timing has been superb. Britain is currently in the grip of a Raj revival—*Gandhi*, *Heat and Dust*, *The Far Pavilions* and Paul Scott have all contributed to this phenomenon. As Peter York said in *Harpers and Queen*, the Brasserie marks the return of 'reactionary-chic'. Fortunately, it is not just trendy, but also represents the best in Indian cuisine.

— *Vikram Sinha*



The Bombay Brasserie: new 'in' place in London.



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CHAITRA-NOC

## Vanraj Bhatia

Interviewed By Shirin Mehta  
Photographed By Nitin Jhaveri

**FOR VANRAJ BHATIA**, musician and composer, life has been an easy succession of awards and recognition. His love affair with music began at an impressionable age, and, fortunately for him, he has been able to prosper in his career without any insurmountable obstacles. One of the few composers in India, who has studied both Indian and Western classical music, he is in great demand with art film-makers. The music of several noteworthy films—*Kalyug*, *36 Chowringhee Lane* and *Manthan* among them—has been composed by him.

Seeing him in his room however, one would never guess his vocation. Only a piano, tucked into a corner, and a smattering of music sheets give the game away. According to Vanraj, this is the room in which he does all his living. A curious amalgamation of sitting-room, composing-room, tea-room (the settee on the left) and bedroom (a part of the bed is in the foreground), it is where Vanraj spends most of his time—working or otherwise. Practically all his music has been written here. His routine is fixed and he never composes in the night, “unless I am under great pressure.”

The browns and beiges in the room suggest a quiet unimaginativeness. Kept compulsively neat, the room is filled with glass. Huge, bulky vases—eighteenth century, Ming, some ‘distinctly Edwardian’—compete for attention with exquisitely-made opalines. Dressed in light green slacks and shirt, a cigarette always burning, Vanraj picks up his vases reverently, and talks of them excitedly.

“For me, you see,” says Vanraj in his slightly high, sing-song voice, “they’re almost like human beings. All my friends thought I was crazy when I went around buying so much glass, but now they assure me it looks nice. If you like a thing hard enough, people always end up liking it.”

Old furniture is also a passion with him. The small, oval table he writes his music on, has black polish, a slightly

unstable balance and a gold-etched painting of morning glories. Picked up from Noah’s Ark, an antique shop in Bombay, it is one of the period pieces in the room that Vanraj dotes on. The Belgian chandelier, acquired from the Readymoneys, who are friends of his, was rehabilitated with great care. “Nobody thought it would fit in with the room. Everybody said that it was too large. Of course, I’ve proved them all wrong.”

The low-slung ‘feeding’ chair, next to the piano, done up in green velvet, and the green-and-beige flowered vase in the foreground, belong to his grandfather. “I took over a lot of his stuff from his Pune bungalow after his death. Nobody else seemed to want it.”

Vanraj loves cats. “Formerly, I used to breed them in Delhi. All Siamese.” A large, fat tabby draped over the window sill is, however, the last reminder. He spends his time talking to her, and she, in the classic tradition of all cats, ignores him. “She has no name really,” says Vanraj as he strokes and fusses over her already-gleaming coat. “I call her *mamma, beta, utsah* and she responds to all of them.”

A book-case opposite the piano offers clues to Vanraj’s personality. Yoga books sit alongside those on Western classical music; *Harmony* and *The Encyclopaedia of Glass* rub shoulders while here and there, is evidence of how Vanraj spends his leisure time—with Paul Scott, MM Kaye and Salman Rushdie.

Prominently displayed in the room are his opalines—pale, transparent, greenish-white in colour, though a few rare pieces are coffee-coloured or green. An excellent example is a corrugated-rimmed bowl in the middle of the centre table—etched with mauve, enamel flowers and finished off at the edges with Belgian glass.

In a strange way this obsession with glass links up with his music. As Vanraj himself says, “My only hope is, that some day my music will be as pure as my opalines.” ♦





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THOMAS/C/2/ENG

# In Search Of Saleem Sinai

By Malavika Rajbans Sanghvi

IT WAS 2.30, long after midnight, when Salman Rushdie picked his way through Nariman Point. "It's a new city to me," he said, referring to the ghost-like buildings in the dark. "This finally brings home the fact that I could never write about Bombay again—I don't know it!"

Rushdie had had a hard day. It had been the first day of a sponsored trip to Bombay. Of course, he'd been in and out of the city that month—but that was with his wife and son on holiday and he had used Bombay to transit in and out of the city to Goa and to Kerala.

But now, with his wife and son both in London, it was work. Rushdie was here at the invitation of the British Council—and a busy schedule had been fixed many months earlier by Council officials. In the event, that morning, he had been interviewed by a journal, addressed a Rotary

Club lunch meeting at the Taj, delivered a lecture on New English Writers to a packed hall at the British Council office and was chief guest at an official dinner at the elegant home of Peter Cromwell, a Denis Thatcher look-alike who is the British Council representative. At 10 o'clock Salman, the muscles of his jaw aching, had, using his exhaustion as an excuse, begged off, and wandered into the night.

There was a city lurking outside and he wanted to discover it. So he went where it was newly built, and alien. First, to that tip that juts out into the Arabian Sea—Nariman Point a two-square mile jungle of cement which was only on the drawing boards of speculators when Saleem Sinai and Salman Rushdie had left Bombay in 1961.

Saleem, of course, was not Salman. The weary writer had explained this



Outside Saleem's villa.

repeatedly earlier that day, to wild-eyed old ladies, who took notes during his lectures, and to blushing students of English literature, but of course, nobody believed him.

Originally, Rushdie had intended to write a novel about the Bombay of his childhood. The Bangladesh War, the Emergency and the concept of the children of midnight all came later. And so, the Bombay section of the book is, in many ways, autobiographical. Saleem Sinai, the central character of *Midnight's Children*, lives in a Warden Road villa that is clearly patterned on Rushdie's own home. He buys toys from the same shop as Rushdie and goes to the same school. Both Saleem and Salman had maternal uncles who made films and died young. And both had grandfathers who studied medicine in Germany. Many of Saleem's friends are thinly disguised

versions of Rushdie's own childhood friends, and other major characters have real-life counterparts in the Bombay of the late '50s. Despite these parallels, Salman had spent the day emphasizing that he was not Saleem and naturally, as far as the Bombay section was concerned, he had a credibility problem.

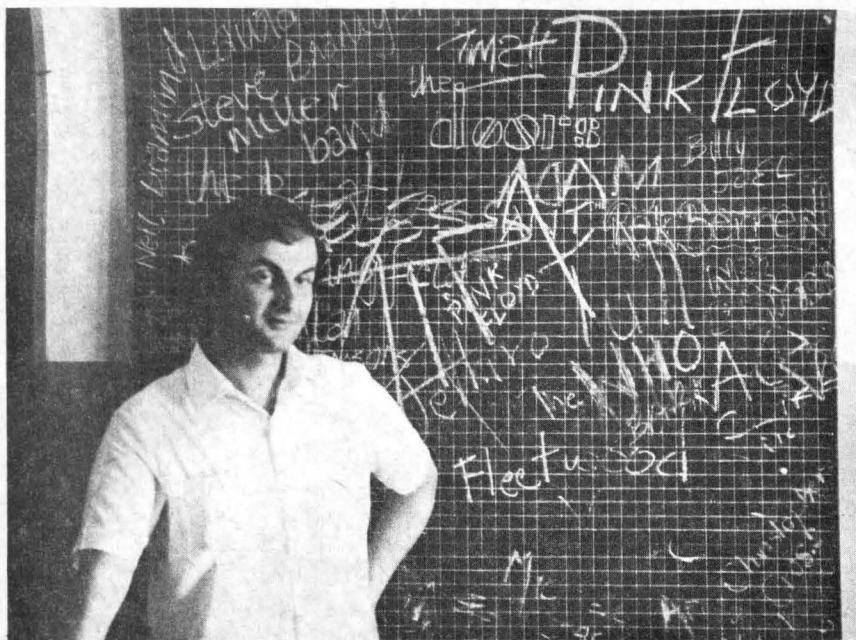
So Salman, as he walked late that night on Nariman Point, was on unsure territory. "Tetrapods," he said, tapping the pavement with the heel of his shoe, "millions of them under this concrete, don't ever think you're on solid ground."

The ground seemed to have been slipping away under Salman Rushdie. Bombay was playing tricks on him. That evening Salman had been accosted by a character from the book. "Hi," Darab Talyarkhan had said, "do you remember me?" Salman had recovered quickly and said that, of course, he remembered

him. But now he wondered, "What irony! In my book he was Hair-oil, one of Saleem's cronies. I had named him so because of his shiny, well-oiled locks. And today when I saw him after all those years, I noticed that he was almost bald. It was almost as though I had put *nazar* on him with that name."

Irony and baldness continued to haunt Rushdie's visit. And of baldness, there was plenty. First, there was advertising executive Keith Stevenson (Gandy Keith Colaco in the book) who was now balding. And then there were Rushdie's own fast-disappearing locks and newly-emerging temples. "Mine is plain and simple male pattern baldness," said Salman. "No, nobody ever pulled my hair out the way Zagallo, the geography teacher pulled out Saleem's. That was just a story I had heard and incorporated."

There was no Zagallo to poke fun



With the up-beat slogans of a new generation of Cathedralites.

at him when *Imprint* took Salman back to re-visit the Cathedral and John Connon School after 19 years (this time, the Headmaster, Col. Simeon, had ordered tea and ginger biscuits to welcome back the famous ex-student). Even so, Rushdie approached Cathedral warily. Stopping at the bottom of the stairs, as he entered, he pointed to the tiles. "They've redone them, after I'd left," he said. "In my time there was a red cross at the foot of the stairs. And the story went that a boy had fallen off the staircase and hit that spot. And the cross was there to mark it." Besides the cross disappearing, there was little

else, according to Salman, that had changed. "I thought things would seem much smaller, when I revisited this place. After 19 years, I would have thought I'd grown larger, but that doesn't seem so. Things are practically the way I left them."

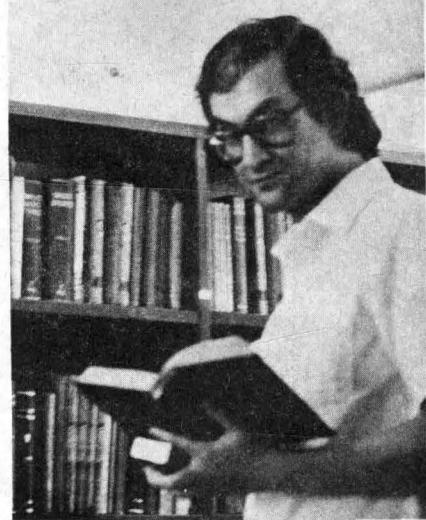
Except for the graffiti. In a classroom, the black-board carried the updated, up-beat messages marking the vacations: "Shake your pelvis—We love Elvis," said one hastily-written message. "Pink Floyd," said another. "The desks, though, are exactly the same. See, that was where we put our ink-pots," recalled Rushdie. Walking faster,



With Cathedral's current Headmaster, Col. Simeon.

his pace increasing, as memories assaulted him, he stumbled on the school hall where he had danced many a box dance and waltz. "And that door," he said, "is where Saleem escaped from, after being taunted by Glandy Keith and Fat Perce Fishwalla. That's the corridor he ran down, and there, do you see it—that's the door to which he lost his finger."

Salman too, lost his finger as a child, though not under the dramatic circumstances of the book. "Mine was cut off at home by the large glass doors that led to the verandah on the first floor. I remember that there was no pain at all—in fact, everyone else screamed—I just sat looking at it, fascinated by the surging blood. The late Dr AV Baliga stitched it back for me. I've often regretted," said the author, "not having worked Dr Baliga into the book—

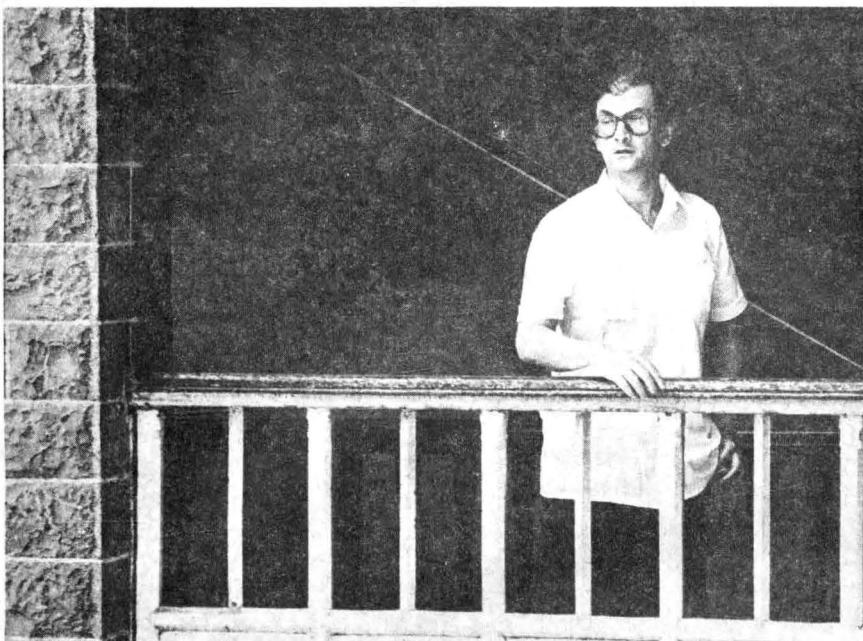


Back in the school library.

he was such an integral part of Bombay."

But the late Dr VN Shirodkar, that internationally renowned gynaecologist, is in the book—vastly altered, transliterated almost, a composite of many characters, but there, all the same, in the form of Dr Narlikar. "Well, Dr Shirodkar was our family doctor and a close friend—yes, there are parallels, though they are very faint ones." In the book Dr Narlikar is a bachelor, whereas Dr Shirodkar was married and his daughter, Sunita Pitambar, now lives in Rushdie's old house: Windsor Villa!

Coincidences, ironies, Salman had to contend with them all. Arriving at his childhood home after 19 years, having obtained permission to explore it from Ms Pitambar, Sunita's white-uniformed bearer approached him.



On the legendary Cathedral staircase.

"Sahab," he said, handing Salman a letter, "This came for you, this very morning." Salman's face turned pale as he read the envelope. "It is for my father," he said, "It's from Tata shares—but we emigrated from India 19 years ago. Everybody knows that." His voice grew shriller. "How did it reach today, and how did I come back to re-visit this house after 19 years, just today?"

Salman wandered lovingly around his old home—pointing to walls that had been pulled down, and staircases that had been newly constructed. "This was my father's office," he said, pointing to what now looked like an exquisite study. "And this, well this, is the watch-tower."

The watch-tower still stands, but is a disappointment. In the book it assumed legendary proportions. Rushdie fans have been known to walk down Warden Road, with their heads turned skywards, expecting to see it rising like a rocket or Jack's beanstalk. In actual fact, the watch-tower is stunted, pale, like a shrivelled adult. The two fir-trees that flanked the entrance to his old home, however, stood tall and proud, almost touching the clouds. "That's me," said Salman, "And that's my sister. My father planted these to mark the dates when we were born—and that is the circus-ring where Saleem's friends played." Saleem's friends: Cyrus the great, in life the affable owner of Air Freight, the travel agency, Cyrus Guzdar; Eyeslice, the brother of Hair-oil, revealed to be

Fuddly Talyarkhan ("Is he still as scruffy as he was as a child?"). In the book they are made children of the Sabarmatis, who of course, are a thinly-veiled transliteration of the Nanavatis of the notorious Nanavati case.

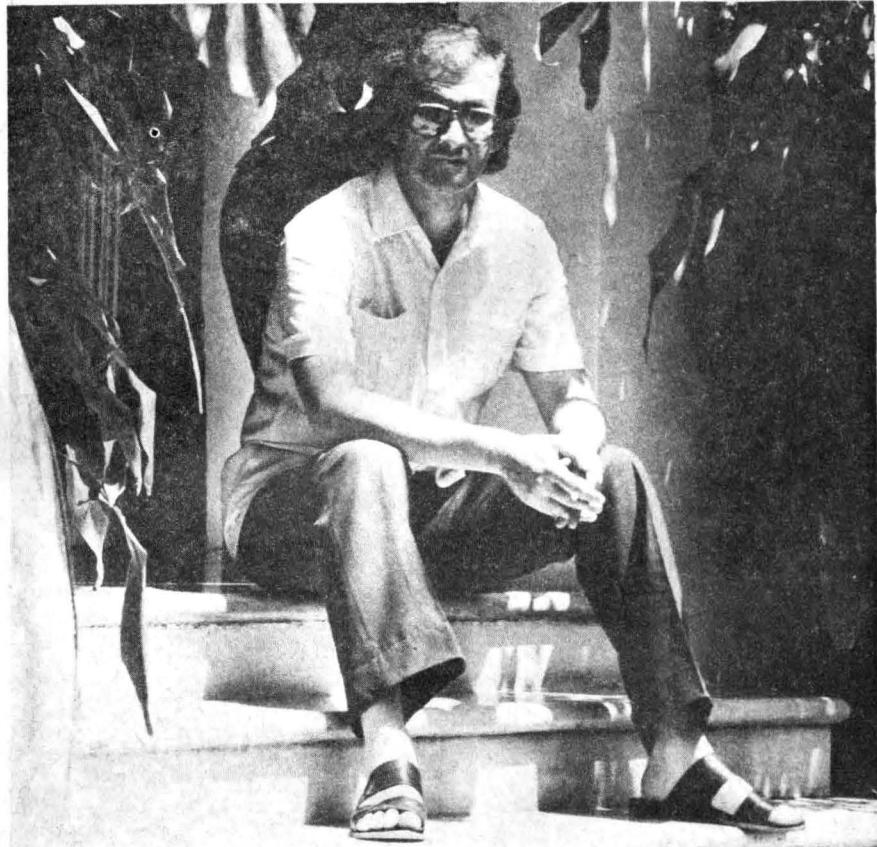
"The Nanavati case was alarmingly important to anybody growing up in my generation. I couldn't avoid it—we'd follow each new move of that

case, with rapt attention."

As children, Salman and his friends had their hair cut at Gowalia Tank, where the barber shop still is, borrowed books from Warden book stall, the circulating library, which is still there, and ate the one-yard-long chocolates, from Bombellis, which alas, is gone.

For Rushdie, it seemed, Bombay had taken a little, given some more, altered things by quirks and bounds. It had been almost as though Rushdie had returned to the strange, mysterious city of his book and found not just the steel and concrete jungle that it had become, but something more. For, during his stay, enough was revealed of the Bombay of *Midnight's Children* for the memory to endure. Irony, coincidence, mystery and revelation pile up on each other, till finally, like the ghost-like Saleem of his book, Salman became drained, and yet strangely excited.

And so it came about that, excited and drained, Rushdie stood that time of the night at Nariman Point, on the second day of his trip to Bombay. And amidst the sleeping camels, the empty van of Chinese fast food, ('Hungry Eyes' it said on the outside) and the rising stench of dead fish, he turned towards the Arabian Sea. "London," he said, "seems so far away." ♦



At the villa where it all happened.

# Reunion At Central Park

By Stephen Holden

"AFTER CHANGES UPON changes, we are more or less the same," Paul Simon philosophises in a slightly revised version of *The Boxer*, a number about eternal human struggle that's perhaps the finest song he wrote while he and Art Garfunkel were still a team. When Simon and Garfunkel sang *The Boxer* over an unexpectedly delicate arrangement at their reunion in Central Park, September 19, 1981, those words could have applied to the chemistry between the two men. Even though a decade of solo projects had separated them, their musical relationship seemed essentially unchanged. Garfunkel's pristine, quivering folk-pop tenor filtered Simon's wry, *angst*-ridden musings into a romantic soft focus and the duo's close harmonies transformed dark compositions of doubt into warm exchanges of feeling.

That chemistry is recaptured on *The Concert in Central Park*: nineteen tunes, minus, alas, Simon's *The Late Great Johnny Ace*, which traces rock fatality from doo-wop to the Dakota.

Still, the new album has magic to spare, some of it rough. Though laboured over in the studio after the event, the tracks are far from 100 per cent polished. Simon's voice sounds thin and quavery, especially in solo ballads like *Still Crazy After All These Years* and the playing suggests the thud and fuzziness of rock music recorded from speakers, instead of plugged into a board. It's actually refreshing.

Paul Simon and David Matthews' scrupulous arrangements for an eleven-man band significantly improve several of Simon's major songs over their studio versions. *Kodachrome* has been retooled from a sprightly folk-rock novelty into a tough, galloping rocker that jumps directly into a wonderful rendition of *Maybellene*. This double bill is the LP's cleverest aesthetic coup, since the number that looks back at a *Happy Days* high-school dream with such a jaundiced eye segues into a flashback of pure rock-and-roll joy.

Simon's fascination with Latin American music, which surfaced with

*El Condor Pasa* and *Cecilia*, has ripened into something truly exciting. The strong Latin folk inflections of the original *Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard* are accentuated and drawn out in the concert version, which is highlighted by a red-hot salsa break. *Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover* has been taken off its military pedestal and turned into a swinging Latinate dance tune with horns. The live rendition of *Late in the Evening* is even headier than the original from *One Trick Pony*. A lilting, surreal memory song, *Late in the Evening* may be Paul Simon's masterpiece because of the way it fuses salsa and rock into a transcendently cosmopolitan sound.

One reason the Central Park concert was so memorable is Simon and Garfunkel's special relationship to New York City. Unlike many of the Gotham-bred pop stars of their generation who made it big, these nice Jewish boys from Queens didn't run off to Malibu to live happily ever after, once they were millionaires. They stayed



A section of the crowd at the Central Park Concert.

around the city, continuing to assimilate its cultural resources, recycle them and give them back. The sense of a life-long romance with New York permeates the record.

More clearly than any of his solo albums, *The Concert in Central Park* shows how Paul Simon's work has accumulated its richness from his absorption of New York street music. Beginning as a cocky folk-pop songwriter dazzled by Bob Dylan, Simon matured artistically as the sounds of the city affected him. With the falling away of early influences, a vestigial Semitic quality crept into his compositions and has remained a significant thread, along with gospel, rock-and-roll and salsa. The melodic voice that Simon has refined in numbers like *Still Crazy After All These Years* is an absolute distillation of all the New York sounds into a single music strand—easy-going yet melancholy, and deceptively simple.

Lyrically, Simon, like other Beat Generation-inspired romantics, began by seeing the city as an intoxicating phantasmagoria. Then, in the late '60s, as he started to feel the tug of his immigrant roots and simultaneously discovered America in relation to them, he also discovered his own alienation. After that, the New York melting pot became an adopted spiritual home, as well as a physical one. Nowadays, Paul Simon mocks his alienation with bleak metaphysical jokes. *Slip Slidin' Away*, one of *The Concert in Central Park*'s high points, has a stealthy gallows humour that would please Joseph Heller:

*The more you reach your destination  
The more you're slip slidin' away.*

*The more you're slip slidin' away.*

Art Garfunkel gives even Simon's gloomiest ruminations an inspirational tone. His directness and sincerity make *April Come She Will* seem less like a mournful sigh than a promise of spring. Garfunkel's animated sweetness in the duet *Old Friends* breathes consolation into an atmosphere of morbidity. And his soaring renditions of *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and Benny Gallagher and Graham Lyle's *A Heart in New York* ring with hope.

If *The Concert in Central Park* is Paul Simons's valentine to the Big Apple, it's Art Garfunkel's voice that really tugs at the heartstrings and sends the message home. ♦

By arrangement with *Rolling Stone*

## OLD FRIENDS ONCE MORE

OLD FRIENDS, THEY may be, but Simon and Garfunkel did not spend the decade after The Split sitting on a park bench like bookends. Simon produced six albums (four studio sets, one live LP and one compilation) that, while not maintaining the commercial success of the S & G stuff, won him critical plaudits. And Garfunkel made five albums of syrupy sweet ballads, only one of which was a commercial success.

Despite the activity, both seem to have missed the heady success of the days when they ruled the charts. A solitary collaboration (one song, in 1975) aroused some interest, but failed to set the cash registers ringing. So, the great reunion, may well have had a commercial motive underlying the 'good times' bonhomie.

The way Simon tells it, he had

agreed to do a solo concert in Central Park. Later he considered asking Garfunkel to join him for a few songs. But this posed problems. If Simon played a solo set first, then he would seem like the support act for S & G, something his ego would not tolerate. On the other hand, he had no desire to go on after S & G, a hard act to follow at the best of times.

So, a complete re-union seemed the only solution. And once they were re-uniting, it seemed a shame to do it all for free. A live album, a TV special and a follow-up tour seemed only natural.

Now a year, and several million dollars later, it is still not clear if the duo will continue to record together. Garfunkel says he'd love to, but Simon isn't too sure.

— Travesh Sinha



# Patches Of Form And Light

By Ashok Gopal

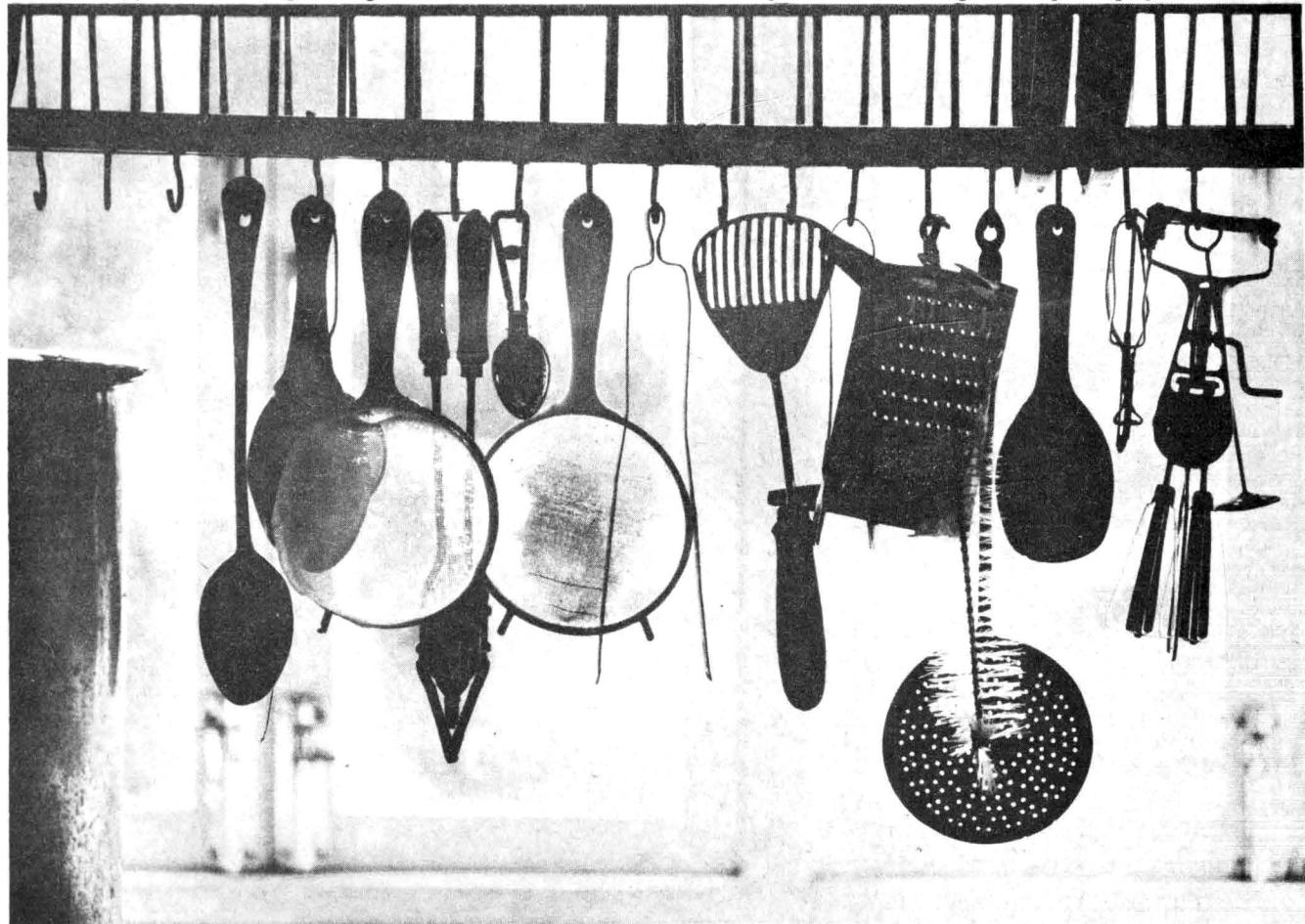
**JAGDISH AGARWAL**, 34, a businessman, is one of the India's most successful amateur photographers. His photographs have been exhibited in the biggest international photo-fair, Photokina (held annually in Cologne, West Germany) and at the Indian pavilion of Expo '70. He has been published in the *Asia Magazine*, the *UNESCO Journal*, and in almost every Indian magazine. For over ten years now, Agarwal has been taking time off his business commitments—his family runs a fabric industry in Bombay—to travel all over India and take photographs. He has built up an impressive photo-library of over 10,000 black-and-white prints and an equal number of colour transparencies.

Presently, he is busy planning an

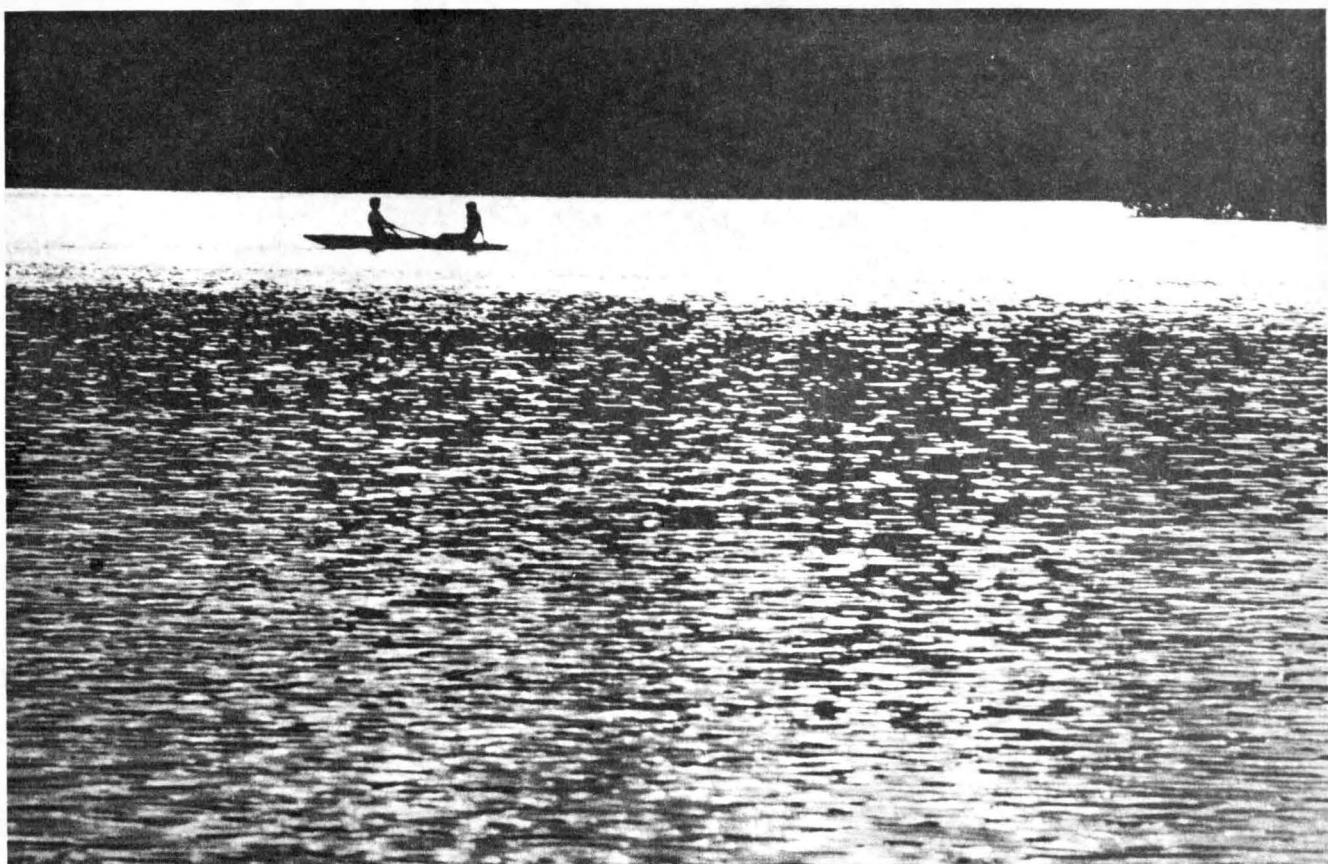
exhibition of his prints and is hoping to sell his photographs as 'part of interior decor'. Agarwal explains, "I price my prints from Rs 100 upwards so that people will come forward and buy them not as 'art', but as something to liven up their homes." His style seems to veer largely towards enigmatic abstract motifs. One remarkably mysterious photograph was shot in a Mysore hotel bar. "I was first attracted by the patterns of the glass panes," he recalls, "I told another guest at the bar to stand at the counter to add some life to the picture, then deliberately under-exposed to throw the interior into a silhouette." The final print shows no reference to place or time; the empty bottles on the window sill and the out-of-focus plants in

the foreground adding to the enigmatic atmosphere.

Even Agarwal's landscapes are reduced to stark patches of form and light. In his photograph of the Mahabaleshwar lake, only the water in the foreground looks real. The lit expanse in the middle, is almost an unbroken sheen of white, the mountain in shadow, an amorphous mass of black. "I had to climb up a boulder to get to a position from which my camera could differentiate the figures on the boat from the background," Agarwal remembers. The result is a good example of depth within a two-dimensional frame. Through a selective eye, aided by intentional under-exposure even kitchen utensils look vaguely disturbing. "The photograph hit me one



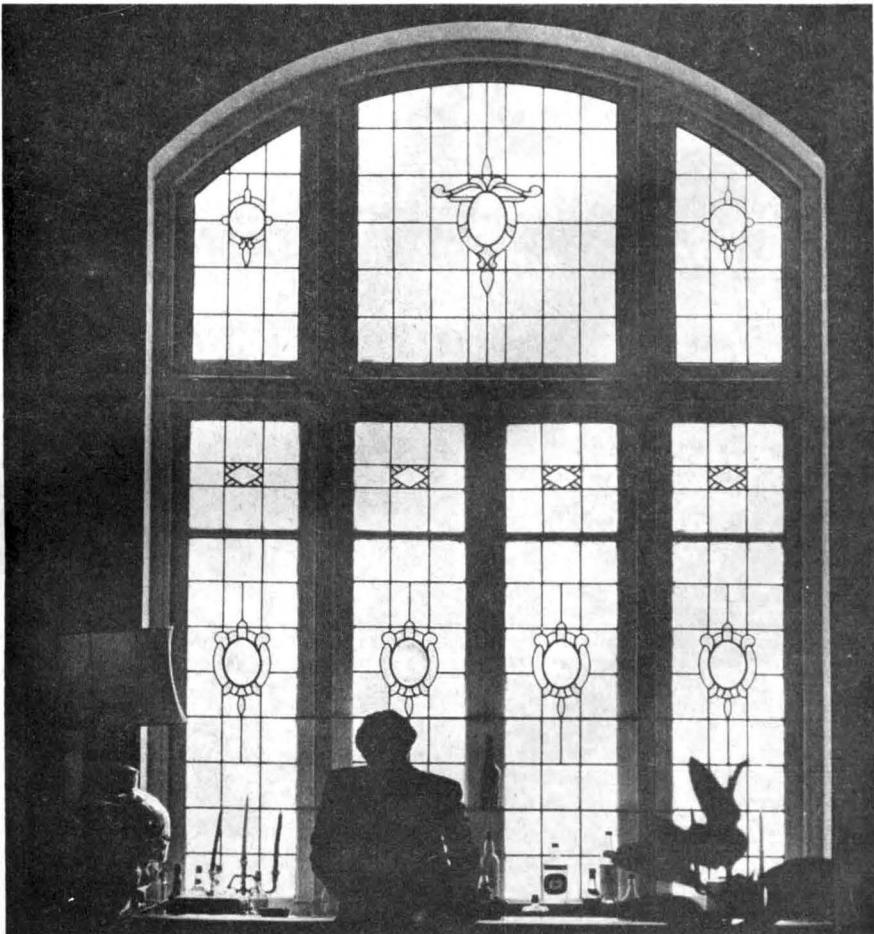
Agarwal's kitchen: even utensils can look disturbing.



Mahableshwar Lake: depth within a two-dimensional frame.

afternoon when I was washing my hands at the kitchen sink," Agarwal explains, "The glare outside brought out the powerful forms of the utensils and made the picture. All I did was to grab the camera and shoot. Ever since, my kitchen has never been the same old place."

One significant feature of Agarwal's method is that unlike most serious amateur photographers, he does not print his own pictures. "I find it too time-consuming. I give my negatives to experienced printers and tell them exactly what I want." Today Agarwal owns two Nikon bodies and a wide array of equipment. He prefers the 35 mm format as he feels, "it lends itself better to composition than the larger (120) square format." But not all his photographic decisions are based on such aesthetic considerations. For example, he prefers shooting with the 28 mm wide angle or the 135 mm telephoto lens rather than the normal 50 mm lens, merely because "they give an unconventional perspective. There is so much competition in photography today that it is very important for your pictures to look different." Businessman that he is, Jagdish Agarwal clearly knows the rules of the game. ♦



Mysore Hotel Bar: enigmatic motifs.

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