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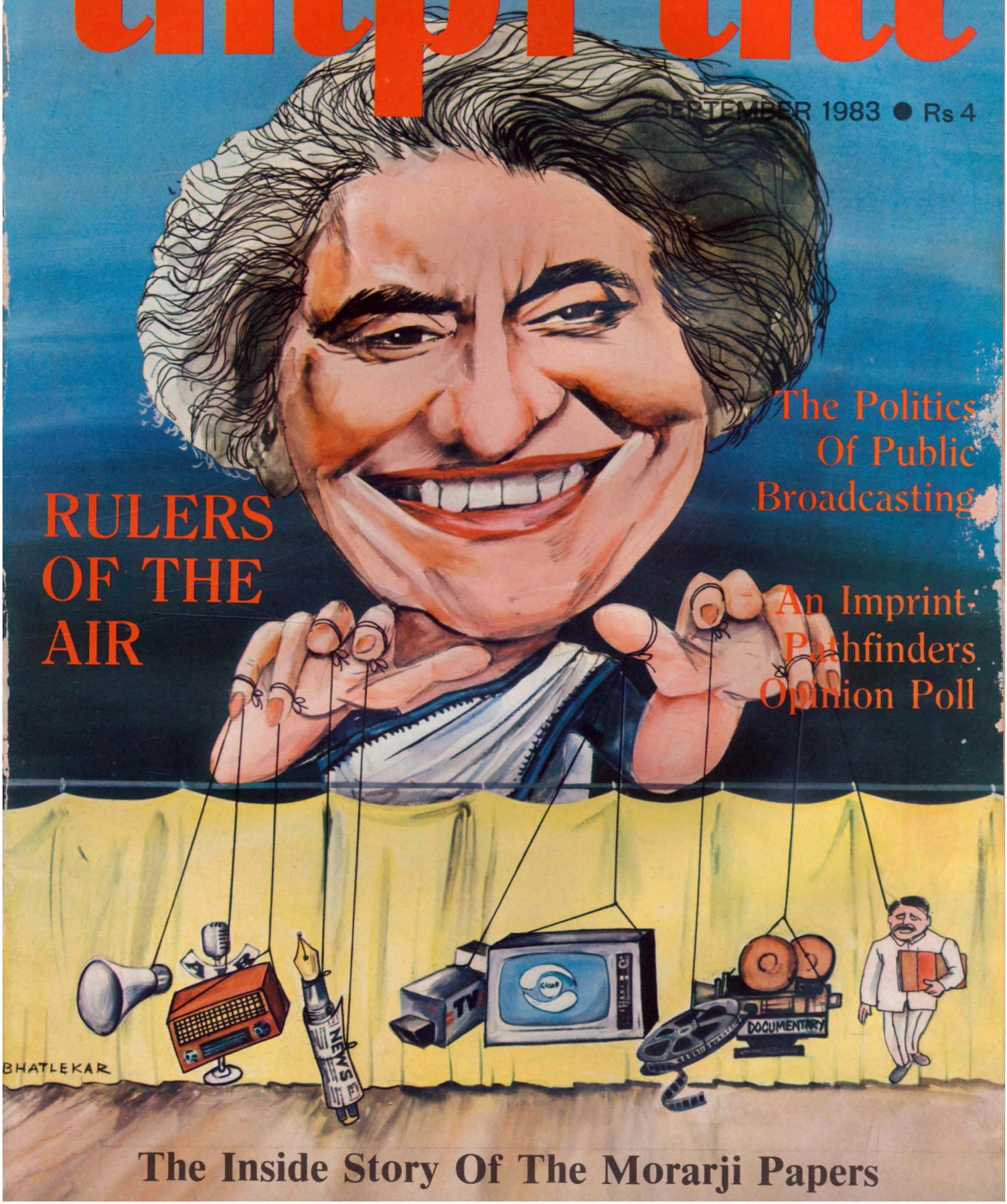

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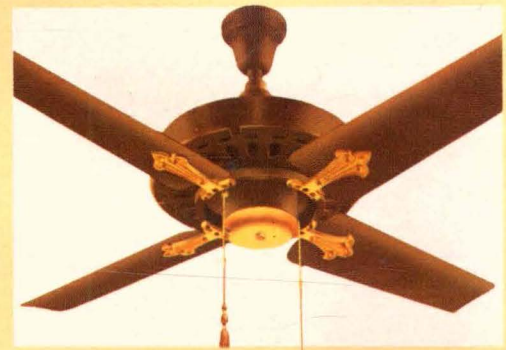

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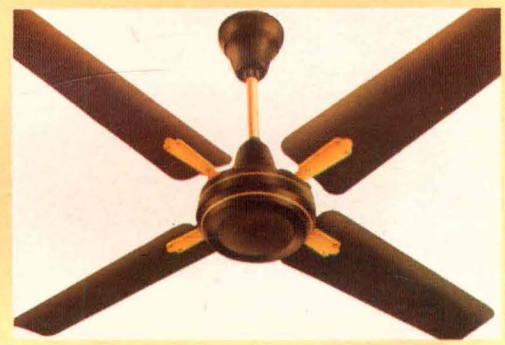

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Cuffe Parade, Bombay 400 005
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CABLE: **IMPRINTMAG** in each city

For editorial and accounts correspondence:
IMPRINT
Business Press Private Limited
Maker Tower 'E', 18th Floor
Cuffe Parade, Bombay 400 005
Tel: 212825/215350/211752

IMPRINT is a Business Press monthly publication with the publishing office located at Surya Mahal, 5 Burjorji Bharucha Marg, Bombay 400 023, India. **IMPRINT** is registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India under No. RN 6178/61.

For change of address and circulation enquiries write to: **IMPRINT**, Business Press Private Limited, Surya Mahal, 5 Burjorji Bharucha Marg, Bombay 400 023, at least 30 days before the change of address takes effect. Both the old and the new address should be given. When writing to us enclose a recent mailing label showing the subscription number. **IMPRINT** is distributed by INDIA BOOK HOUSE.

ON THE MARQUEE

". . . I believe no life is worth a lie. Things are either right or wrong and life is worth living only if one acted with some consistency. To submit, to yield and to surrender to the forces of operation is to give ourselves to despair. But to act, to resist, no matter how puny the resistance, still preserves for us a hope that we stand erect."

–Benigno S Aquino Jr*
From solitary confinement in the Philippines, 1976

Behold.

Act I. 1972:

Ferdinand S Marcos, President of the Philippines, imposes martial law on the country, suspends elections scheduled for 1973 and jails his rival for office, Benigno Aquino. Aquino languishes in jail.

Act II. 1976:

Aquino sentenced to death by a military tribunal–charged with murder, subversion and possession of firearms. Charges of murder, subversion are disapproved but Aquino still in jail, now in solitary confinement. The sentence stays.

Act III. 1980:

Aquino suffers coronary ailments. A broken man now, he is persuaded to sign a document requesting pardon so he can go to the United States for heart bypass surgery. He agrees not to agitate against Marcos while abroad.

Aquino recovers from surgery. Teaches at Harvard University and later at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Martial law is lifted in 1981. But the dictatorship continues. In the meantime, what is inevitable in a dictatorship happens in the Philippines: the economy sinks, lawlessness spreads, the majority of people suffer in silence and in poverty, the Marcoses celebrate–each one is more spectacular than the other. The President bestows on his wife a string of important offices.

Act IV. 1983:

Marcos says he will hold elections in 1984. Aquino says he is returning home. In interviews with journalists and in statements to the Press in early August 1983, Aquino says he is returning to the Philippines because 'time is running out for non-violent solutions to his country's problems' and that "I dread a revolutionary confrontation. It would be suicidal," and that he was going home to talk to Marcos. "I feel that after I go home and turn myself bodily over to Marcos, it will be the best proof that I am not really out to overthrow him," Aquino adds.

On Friday, August 19, 1983, General Fabian Ver, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, declares in Manila that Aquino will not be allowed to land in the Philippines. He was also threatened with arrest. (Aquino's Filipino passport has expired and the government has refused to renew it.) The government also says that Aquino is the target of the assassination plot. "I do not think the whole military could protect him," says Imelda, wife of Marcos.

Act V: The Manila International Airport, afternoon of Sunday, August 21, 1983:

The crowd estimated to be around 30,000 waits outside the airport. There is tight security. A China Airlines plane coming from Taiwan taxis to a halt. Armed guards go aboard and arrest Aquino. They take him to a nearby van.There is a flurry of shots.

*

The government of President Ferdinand Marcos says that Aquino was murdered by a known assassin, dressed as an aircraft maintenance worker. But he was shot dead within seconds by the armed guards. Even 48 hours after the murder, the government of Marcos has not identified the killer.

* *

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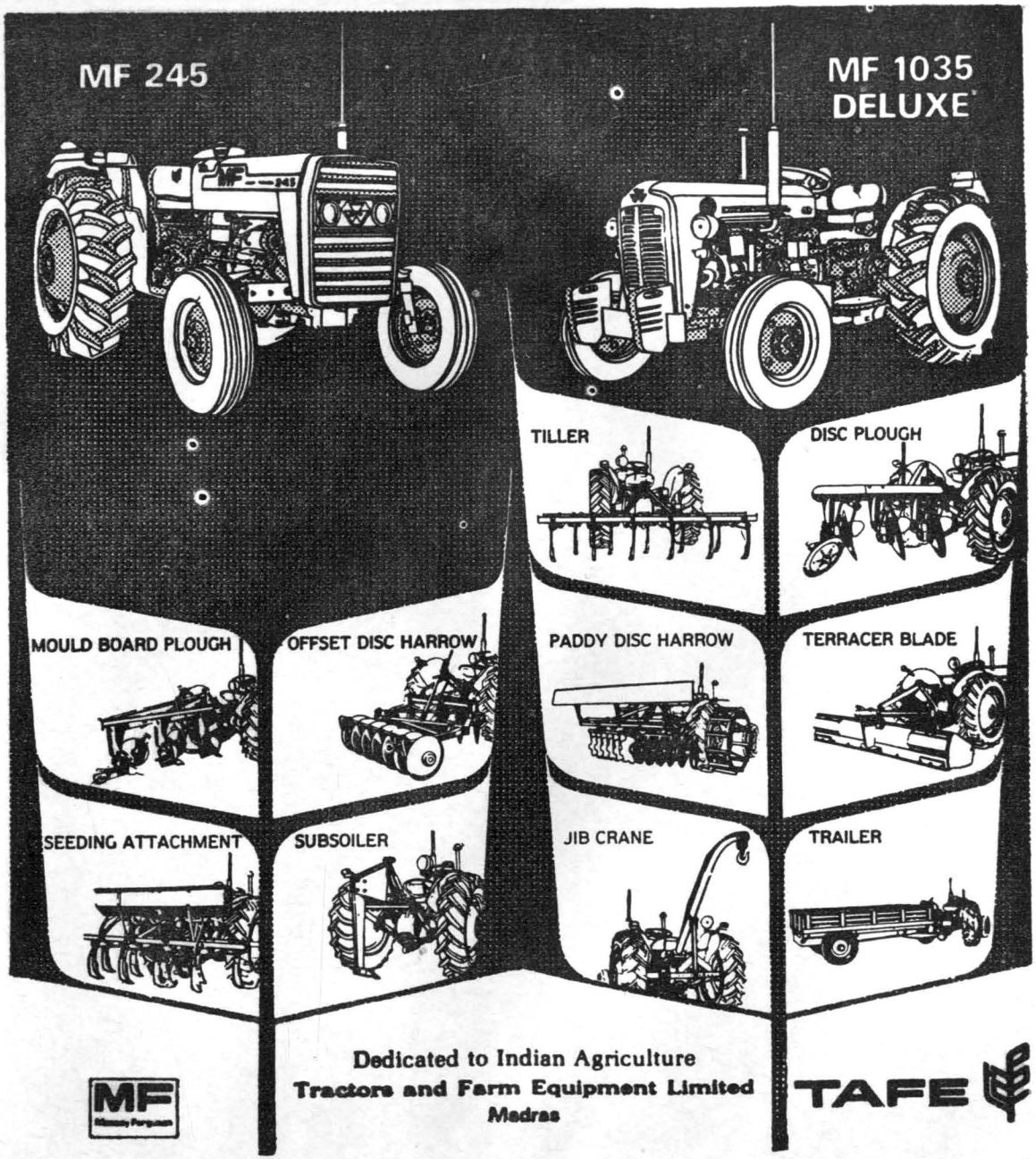

President Marcos, in a statement read on television warns 'opportunistic elements' against trying to take advantage of the situation to foment disorder, anarchy and chaos. He says the government would respond to any such attempt 'with all the legal force that may be necessary'.

* * *

The Filipinos have not risen. The ASEAN is silent, the Americans have not said much, the Pope of Rome has said nothing, President Ronald Reagan has not changed his plans to visit the Philippines in early November 1983.

* * * *

Reflect. Let us reflect on how our civilisation is marching on!

R. V. Pandit

August 23, 1983

* Forty-nine this year, Aquino was the youngest Filipino war correspondent at the age of 18. He was covering the Korean War in the very early '50s for the *Manila Times*. He went on to become the youngest mayor and the youngest governor of a province in the Philippines. Until Marcos declared martial law in 1972 and suspended the 1973 elections, Aquino was confidently expected to win that Presidential election and dislodge Marcos.

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VOLUME XXIII NO 6 SEPTEMBER 1983

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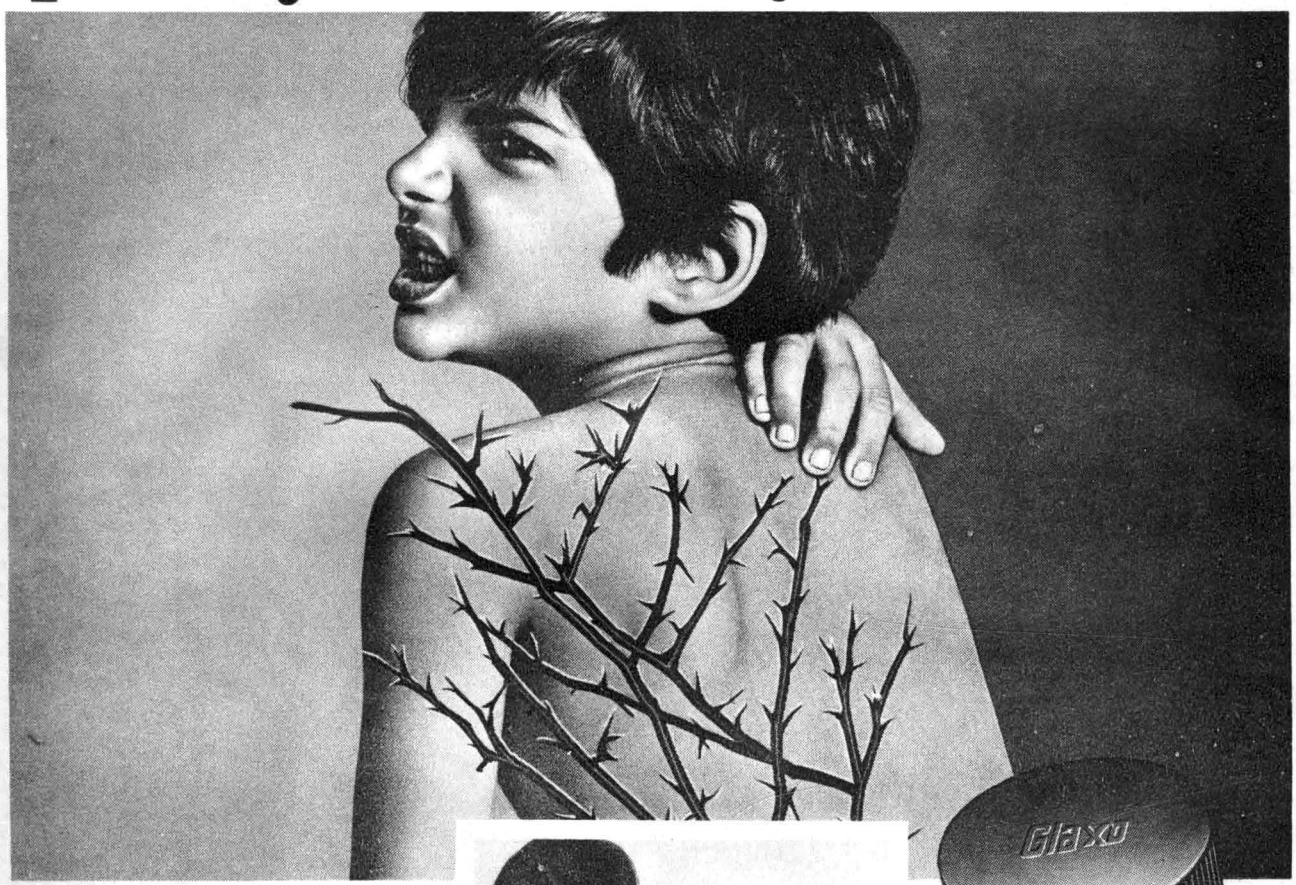
Talcum powders can't fight his prickly heat like Nycil can.



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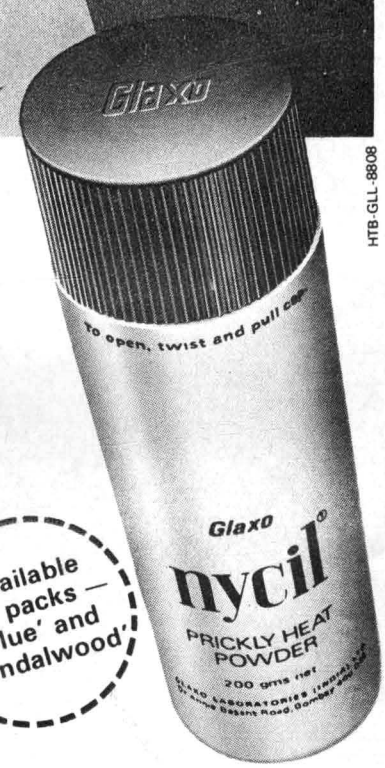

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FOLLOW-UP

BY SUSHMA SINGH

MR ANTULAY GETS AHEAD

Kissa Kursi Ka and a sense of déjà vu.

WHEN JUSTICE LENTIN delivered his famous judgement in the writ petition brought against the then Chief Minister, AR Antulay, public faith in the courts and the legal process seemed to gain a new lease of life. Yet while that judgement directly led to Antulay's ouster from office it brought no penal proceedings against him. Criminal proceedings are the only way of countering the likes of Antulay, Arun Shourie had written, shortly after his 1981 exposé of Antulay's corrupt practices.

Two years later, criminal trial of Antulay is yet to begin and last month the case suffered a major setback. Special Judge, RB Sule, passing judgement in an application made by Antulay's lawyers, ruled that since the accused is an MLA, sanction of the legislative assembly is required before he can be prosecuted under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The Sule judgement, which left the prosecution visibly stunned, was the first victory of Antulay's lawyers who have been stalling the commencement of the trial by raising several basic objections. Last year, when the case came up in the court of Special Judge, PS Bhutta, shortly after the Governor's sanction was granted, the defence lawyers had argued that a private complainant has no jurisdiction to bring criminal proceedings under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The aged but brilliantly agile Karl Khandalavala, as Antulay's principal counsel, had also argued that the law requires a particular Special Judge to be nominated by the state government to try cases under specific categories. Since no such order had been passed by the government, Khandalavala argued, no Special Judge could hear the case.

While Ram Jethmalani, counsel for the complainant Ramdas Nayak, went in appeal to the High Court, the Babasaheb Bhosale ministry passed an order specifying RB Sule as the Special Judge for cases like the one brought against Antulay. The issue of a private complainant's *locus standi* was decided in favour of the prosecution by the Bombay High Court and Antulay's appeal on that issue is still pending before the Supreme Court.

The principal issue raised before Judge Sule, by Antulay's lawyers was that as an MLA, Antulay is a public servant. Since a public servant can only be tried under the Prevention of Corruption Act with the sanction of the authority which has the power to remove him, in the case of an MLA the legislative assembly's sanction must be sought. Jethmalani cited British precedents in his argument that members of parliament, and consequently MLAs, 'are not public servants' for the purpose of such prosecutions.

The prosecution argued logically that if Antulay's claim is accepted it will become impossible for any legislator of the ruling party to be tried on charges of corruption.

Moreover, section 6 (2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act states: "Where for any reason whatsoever any doubt arises whether the previous sanction required under subsection (I) ..... such sanction shall be given by that government or authority which would have been competent to remove the public servant from his office at the time when the offence was alleged to have been committed."

Since the offences allegedly committed by Antulay were possible only in his capacity as Chief Minister, the prosecution has argued, the Governor's sanction alone is sufficient.

The Supreme Court will now primarily have to settle the issue of a private complainants *locus standi* and the validity of Sule's ruling that an MLA is a public servant.

Yet within days of the Sule judgement, Antulay was touring Konkan his native region, with the look of a major leader in power and speculation about the political re-ascent of Antulay had begun afresh. Thus all the evidence notwithstanding, Antulay and his trusts seem set to go the way of the *Kissa Kursi Ka* case–lethal weapons in the hands of opponents, rendered obsolete by rapidly changing political equations. ♦

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

BY ASHOK GOPAL

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

Our reaction to Sri Lankan events displays our double standards.

THE INDIAN REACTION to killings of 294 Tamils is a classic example of senseless mass hysteria. *Oh Hell!, Second Bloodbath In Lanka Jail, Nation Shares Anguish, Tiger, Tiger Burning Lanka!*, our papers screamed from July 23 (when the riots started) till August 1 (when the violence had abated) as both, disaster-hunting journalists and publicity-hungry politicians worked themselves into a frenzy of 'pain and anguish'. The reaction—especially the headlines (*Genocide!*)—was unjustifiably wild and out of proportion to the actual facts and figures of the tragedy. Of course, it is wrong to judge the depth of a tragedy in terms of dead bodies but nevertheless, the real extent of the Lanka riots needs to be recalled to understand the drama of 'anguish' painted by our journalists and politicians.

On July 23, 13 soldiers were killed in the northern district of Jaffna by extremists (presumably Tamil). That caused the riots and on July 24 our papers reported several people had been shot dead in Colombo and other towns of Sri Lanka. On July 26, 37 Tamil activists were slain in the Welikade jail in Colombo and as riots spread to more areas, some national papers quoted the official death toll as 71. One agency report also claimed with a veneer of authenticity: "One million Tamil refugees were *preparing* to flee to Jaffna." (italics mine). On July 27 another 17 inmates of the Welikade were killed and on July 29, 33 more. By July 31, the killings had stopped and our press shifted its attention to Narasimha Rao's pontifications.

("The most crucial point is the root cause of the present problem and how to deal with it. . .") On the first two days of the riots, several Indian newspapers claimed an 'unofficial' death figure of 2,000. By August 2, all newspapers had mysteriously agreed that it was 'above 200'.

That figure is significant in a way. If we look at records of communal and caste outrages in our own country, the Sri Lankan variety of 'genocide' has happened here several times in the last few years. Surely the tragedy in Assam, both in terms of the number of innocent people killed and systematic terror (Assam has been 'burning' for years now, unlike Sri Lanka's four days of hell) is far deeper. Yet have we ever seen Central Government sponsored *Bandhs*, nation-wide protest marches (many violent), high-sounding declarations from politicians of every hue (Indira Gandhi to Jagjivan Ram and Maneka Gandhi), or calls for United Nations peace keeping forces, after the Nellie massacre when, even by government admissions, more than 700 people were killed? Have any of the politicians who now growl that they are prepared 'to pay any price to protect our brothers in Lanka' ever shown concern for the scores of orphaned children of Nellie?

Yet, when Narasimha Rao made a 'dash' (a special journalistic cliché reserved for occasions when politicians fly to crisis areas to hog publicity) he had no compunctions about outpouring his 'grief'.

There are, of course, obvious reasons for this sort of behaviour. Expressing sympathy for any killings of innocents is undoubtedly a noble sentiment but for a politician it can be a dicey thing. When you sympathize with innocent tribals in Assam you are inviting the wrath of those who were after their blood: other Indians, potential voters. . . But when you cry about Tamils in Lanka, you are on safe ground. No Indian is going to object to that and the only people who are going to get resentful are Sri Lankans, and of course, there are no Sri Lankans in India, none who can vote anyway! We have to take note of this with shame. After all, false and motivated sympathy is certainly more disgraceful than no sympathy at all.

One of the most disturbing aspects of any politico-human tragedy is that the victims, and their supporters and leaders, inevitably come out as wounded heroes. The Indian press has sud-

Ashok Gopal, an **Imprint** *staffer, is also the author of a profile of Vasant Gangavane elsewhere in this issue.*

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

Our outcry over the Lanka killings smells of false emotions and sensationalist motives.

denly woken up to the long-standing 'Story of Tamil Persecution' (not first-hand of course; it was fed by a London-based Human Rights Organization). Consequently the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) has also come in for a lot of favourable coverage. This is rank hypocrisy. The TULF is essentially a separatist organization, like the Khalistan lobby or the '50s-style DMK. Any organization such as the TULF would at once be banned in India and hounded by the police. Even the DMK which now leads the Indian protest against Lanka, has long since quietly compromised its separatist ideals, for political advancement. (Interestingly the TULF was a recognized party in Lanka until the recent constitutional amendment and held seats in the national parliament.) The TULF also espouses violence, very much like our so-called Naxalites. Yet have Khalistanis or Naxalites ever got as much sympathy from the press or our politicians as the TULF? And don't we all know how they are treated by our police and our government?

This is not to suggest that the Lanka tragedy was a minor one and undeserving the attention of our media and our politicians or that Lanka's Tamils are not being persecuted by their government. The point is simply this: given our official and public reaction to massacres in our own country our outcry over the Lanka killings smells of false emotions and sensationalist motives.

In purely diplomatic terms our government's hullabaloo smacks of big brotherly talk. The Sri Lankan press' reaction to this is interesting. "What concern did she (Indira Gandhi) show when people of Indian origin were thrown out of Uganda and when Burma kicked them out?", asks one newspaper column.

DMK president M Karunanidhi's resignation from the Tamil Nadu Assembly in protest against what he calls, 'the Centre's inaction' on the Lanka developments adds a farcical touch. A man, whose record as Chief Minister includes scandal and violence is clearly trying to whip up public passions and blackmail MGR and Indira Gandhi. Since Mrs Gandhi is obviously not going to send Indian troops to Lanka (as the DMK demands) Karunanidhi hopes to emerge as the lone and courageous saviour of Tamils. It is certain that when the next elections come around he will play up this role against the 'indifference' of MGR and Indira Gandhi. Of all the possible political gimmicks, grandiose displays of sympathy for the suffering or the underprivileged is perhaps the hardest to beat.

Fortunately, some degree of good sense has prevailed, both in the corridors of power and the press. On August 2 the *Indian Express* editorialised, ". . . the Government of India and Indian opinion should take the greatest care not to confuse Tamil with Indian. Even indirectly to do so would imply encouragement to separatism while enhancing Sinhala fears of some kind of greater Tamil dominance." Perceptive and dispassionate observers would have also noted the striking similarity between our government's pronouncements on the Lanka killings and the Arab and Pakistani reactions to communal riots in India.

Yet the fallout of this hasty and hypocritical shouting, in terms of strained relations and an ugly big brother image is going to take a long time to dispel. Our official hypocrisy will also be noted with great interest in international forums. One example of our double-dealing suffices. Our government protested to Sri Lanka about one of its 'black' emergency laws that allows authorities to dispose of the body of a victim of violent death without an inquest; such laws exist in India as well and have often been used for similar purposes. If our protest is to be taken as a genuine grievance surely it is the most extraordinary case of loving thy neighbour more than your own family? ♦

LONDON DIARY

BY VIJAY SAHNI

FISH AND CHAPPATIS

The Brits are trendy; but the Indians are richer.

THE MARK OF a great city is that it adapts itself to each new decade while pretending to always remain the same.

In a sense, London never changes. The crowds outside Buckingham Palace still long for a glimpse of the Queen; the tabloids always scream their lurid headlines and year after year débutantes 'come out' in grand style.

But beneath the veneer of timeless elegance and less elegant action, London changes all the time. In the '60s, Cockney photographers, Yorkshire-born painters and Liverpudlian musicians partied till the city itself seemed to swing. In the '70s, the drag queens and lurex-clad monstrosities of the glitter-era were soon replaced by the safety pins, spiky hair cuts and razor blades of the punks.

In the '80s, new bright young things, poncho-wearing New Romantics and bespectacled electronics wizards have taken over.

* * *

BUT THESE ARE side-shows. Despite its fashionable exterior and its apparent hangover of Me-Decade neo-conservatism (read 'greed'), London has actually undergone a more significant metamorphosis—one that Brits, naturally, are less willing to recognise.

In the early years of the century, London was the Queen of the Empire. Native potentates prostrated themselves before the King-Emperor and Britannia made the rules. By the '50s and the '60s, the Empire had gone but the Brits still saw no reason to waive those rules. West Indians, Pakistanis and Indians arrived by the boatload. Ready to shovel shit, conduct buses and sweep floors, they contributed to the illusion that nothing had really changed. The Empire may have been lost but enough of its former subjects were still in evidence. Even the Jews—immigrants in an earlier era—still lacked entry into the right circles.

By the '70s, this was beginning to change. The Paks had stopped cleaning bogs and while enough West Indians still drove the buses, a fair number were learning to throw petrol bombs and teach the racist police force a lesson or two. And with the oil price hikes, the Arabs came streaming in, buying up everything that was on offer—and a lot that wasn't.

Now, in the '80s, London has finally come to terms with this new reality. From being Queen of the Colonies, it is now the Whore of the Empire.

The language of London is money and most of it is in foreign hands. The Kuwaitis can create havoc on the Stock Market simply by flinging about some loose change, the casinos reverberate with the singsong accents of the Sindhis and Indian-owned companies are the new darlings of the City.

Racism still exists. In London's East End or in Bradford, a brown face is often no more than a ticket to the casualty ward of some (about to close) NHS Hospital.

But in moneyed circles, in many of the right places, brown is fast becoming bountiful. Of course, the Asians are a long way away from political power. But in Britain where a Tory Home Secretary and Chancellor are both Jewish, who can deny that the rules of the ethnic game are rapidly altering.

* * *

HOW RICH ARE the UK Asians? This is not an easy question to answer. Certainly, there is a lot of money being flung about. Corniches and Silver Shadows, holiday villas on the Cote d'Azur, Hampstead mansions and pneumatic white girlfriends are much in evidence. At Tramp, at Tokyo Joe's, at Gavroche, in the lobby of the Dorchester and in the high-priced stores of New Bond Street, Indian accents stand out.

But the fact is that it is becoming extremely difficult to distinguish between a Lagos Sindhi with a net worth of US $20 million and a world class tycoon in the US $100 million bracket. After all, you can only spend *so* much money. After the first US $10 million has been conspicuously consumed, who is to know what your worth is?

The problem is compounded by the

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

Vijay Sahni is Literary Editor of Mid-Day *and a regular columnist for that paper.*

A mathematical genius, Shivdasani was one of the founders of the Eurodollar market.

traditional Indian aversion to paying tax. This means that most of the money is secured in anonymous accounts in Zurich or hidden away in the form of *benami* (where would Indian business be without that word?) assets.

I sat down with one expatriate Indian millionaire and tried to work out how rich he was. "Well," I said, "we can estimate how much your three office buildings are worth, can't we?" It turned out that yes, we could give them a cash value but were they properly his? They were all owned by companies registered in Panama and Liechtenstein.

"OK," I said. "There is your home. That must be worth a million pounds or so?" Again, we agreed that the property had a certain value, but once more, it was in the name of his son. "How can you say it's mine?" he smiled.

And so it went. There were ships. But they flew Liberian flags and were –on the books at least–owned by obscure relatives. "Factories? You must have factories?" I asked. "Oh no," he said, a little outraged. "The money comes from trade." Finally, I gave up.

* * *

A SINDHI BUSINESSMAN explained to me that because his people had lost so much during the Partition, they tried to avoid setting up industry and preferred to keep their money in cash.

There are of course, some notable exceptions.

I think everyone is agreed that the richest Indians in the world are the Shivdasanis of Inlaks. Their fortune was built up by one man: Indur Kumar Shivdasani. The son of a civil servant, Shivdasani went to Clare College, Cambridge, worked for Unilever in London and then turned up in Nigeria many years before his Sindhi brethren discovered Lagos.

Unlike most other expatriate Indians who have struck it rich, Shivdasani decided to pay more attention to concrete achievement than to profit. Because Nigeria did not grow its own food, he invested in new technology that finally led to the development of successful farms. A mathematical genius, he was one of the founders of the Eurodollar market. Virtually everything he touched turned to gold.

Perhaps because he had resisted the temptation to make a quick buck and run, Shivdasani soon made far more money than those who were in it merely for the profit. When he died in the late '70s, he had just turned 60 and was already the richest Indian in living memory.

The Shivdasanis (his wife and children) are a small, low-key family and shun the shameless self-promotion and effusive vulgarity of other expatriate Indians. About the only time the name Inlaks (for Indur and Lakshmi, his wife) hits the papers is when they advertise for applications for their generous scholarship scheme.

Though it is so understated, the Inlaks group is, at least legit. So, it is possible to realise how much it is really worth.

* * *

IN THE CASE of the others, the picture is more complicated. Taken together, the three Sethia brothers must be worth a fortune. But how much? Nobody can say for sure. The Hindujas with their Persian millions are so elusive that estimates of their wealth range from a (relatively) paltry US $200 million to a staggering US $1 billion. It is technically, possible to sit down and work out how much Caparo is worth, but how much of it is Swraj Paul alone? And is it fair to assume that Mr Paul's wealth ends with Caparo? The Chanrais, the Chellarams and the other West African Sindhis are in evidence in London but nobody is willing to put a figure to their assets.

Once you add the SE Asian millionaires–the Parshurams and the Harilelas–the picture becomes even more complicated. And what of Ravi Tikoo? How much of Globtik is Mr Tikoo's own money and how much of it belongs to the banks? ♦

UP-FRONT

BY ARUN CHACKO

VIOLENCE AND SOAP OPERAS

Stray thoughts from Colombo, Madras and Delhi.

WHAT MAKES A basically docile, friendly people turn into animals at the drop of a hat? Or for that matter capable of bitter and sustained racial discrimination.

The recent Sri Lanka slaughter of the Tamils has undoubtedly shocked the world and awoken it to one of its most serious human rights problem. But it also shows everyone needs someone to hate, and, when and if the chance comes, possibly kill.

Of course, we cannot afford to be too critical of the Sri Lankans. We too have our Muslim and Harijan pogroms, politely known as communal riots. If you can burn the woman you sleep with and the mother of your children for a little money, what are a few Mussalmans or Harijans.

But the Sri Lanka slaughter nevertheless makes very sad reading, simply because it is a beautiful country with normally peaceable, personable people.

As a regular visitor, my deepest impression is of the former capital, Anuradhapura. On Vesak, believed to be the day of Buddha's birth and also enlightenment, a massive crowd sat around the ancient temples in silent meditation. You could have heard a needle drop and mental peace was contagious. It's impossible to believe these people could kill. But they do. Obviously their attitude to the Tamils is another matter.

* * *

THE TAMILS HAVE suffered the worst kind of discrimination at the hands of all Sinhalese governments ever since independence. The Bandaranaikes institutionalised the discrimination back in 1956 and successive governments, irrespective of their political hue, made it more blatant. They are officially denied the education, jobs and business opportunities they would otherwise have got on merit.

As far back as the late '60s, talented Tamils were knocking around Europe looking for work. Asked why they didn't go home one said, "Being a Tamil makes it very difficult to get employment. Being a Christian in addition makes it impossible."

During British rule, they dominated the professions, government jobs and education. So I questioned a very eminent Sinhalese journalist on the post-independence blatant denial of opportunities and non-recognition of Tamil abilities.

A convincing talker, he went on the offensive. "You see," he said with great confidence, "then the Tamils got the jobs because they were better at Maths." It was difficult to see what good Maths was in medicine, the law and many of the other jobs they then dominated. And it's not as if the Sinhalese have since caught up in Maths or hard work for that matter.

Of course, the tragic aspect of the whole thing is that the situation cannot improve given the deep-rooted Sinhala prejudice, and the psychological and physical scars the Tamils bear. What is most likely is another Lebanon or Cyprus, a festering international sore neither here nor there.

* * *

FUNNILY ENOUGH, OR perhaps not, when the Sri Lankans think of India it's not Bombay or Delhi they have in mind but Madras. The rest of the country is possibly too remote to pose much danger. Not so the great southern metropolis.

Naturally Madras's reaction to Sri Lankan events, especially concerning the Tamils, is fast and furious. Daily airlifted copies of *The Hindu* inform Colombo of that in vivid detail. Rumours also fly through numerous travellers between the two regions.

Sri Lanka responds in kind, not making the basic distinction between sometimes frenzied, irresponsible Madras reaction governed by ethnic, emotional and geographical links and that of the Indian Government. In next to no time, premature allegations are traded. President Jayewardene's publicly expressed fears of an Indian

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ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

Nothing is improved by foreign ministers hugging and kissing especially when both are male.

invasion are a good example.

The other problem is personal. There is no love lost between Mrs Gandhi and the Sri Lankan President. The reasons range from her personal friendship with Mrs Bandaranaike, to a completely different geopolitical viewpoint from the present UNP leadership.

There were always problems with India. But in a crisis Sirimavo would always pick up the phone and have an amicable chat with her good friend, Indira. And the matter would be quickly sorted out.

Jayewardene cannot and is possibly uninterested in, doing that sort of thing. He prefers to capitalise on a shortsighted anti-Tamil, anti-Indian stance, playing to the majority Sinhalese gallery. What is good politically for the UNP in the short term is bound to be disastrous for Sri Lanka in the long run. Such are the fruits of intolerance, a lesson we should quickly learn.

* * *

TOLERATING PEOPLE IS one thing, taking them into your arms quite another. In town recently for the meeting on South Asian Regional Cooperation, we had the bizarre sight of the otherwise distinguished Mr Narasimha Rao bear-hugging Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan of Pakistan, Shamsud Doha of Bangladesh and the rest. I imagine the hair on his chest was fairly singed at the end of it.

The fact of the matter is, not only did it look outlandish, the smothered visitors looked pretty embarrassed too. More important, it was plainly hypocritical. Without exception each of these countries hate our guts and are clearly working against us. We reciprocate in kind. Nothing is improved by foreign ministers hugging and kissing at airports, especially when both happen to be male. So why do it?

If improving relations is the objective, then that is best achieved by being a little more considerate of our neighbour's sensitivities. Each of them is mortally scared of India because of its size and alleged hegemonistic tendencies. We could allay them with a little generosity. But that is not in character with our present government.

The only time our neighbours relaxed and hence were more charitably disposed towards us, was when the Janata Party was in power. But Mrs Gandhi came back to power criticising a regime which permitted our smaller neighbours to 'make eyes at us'. Better making eyes, than bogus hugging and kissing.

* * *

MEANWHILE, THE SWRAJ Paul soap opera continues. Mr Rajiv Gandhi's parliament statement virtually opposing his moves and stray coy voices from the government endorsing it, are obviously red herrings. Mrs Gandhi herself has been ominously silent.

Paul's spate of unprecedented carefully orchestrated public meetings around the country where, like a stuck record, he repeatedly belaboured industrialists for real and imaginary sins, could hardly have been conducted without approval from the powers that be. He is too tied to Mrs Gandhi's apron strings to risk that kind of independence.

Perhaps the most telling pointer that the Bharat Rams' and Nandas' jig is up is the sudden chorus of our progressive press supporting Paul. These left luminaries normally gracing journals like the *Patriot*, *Mainstream* and *Blitz*, should on past form be criticising the move as inducting another form of western imperialism. Instead they are its fiercest backers.

But strange are the ways of the 'left-wing' Indian press; most of us have long given up expecting any sort of consistency from it.

I guess we can now expect non-resident Indians in the Soviet Union to invest billions of roubles they have earned there in the Indian economy. They also won't have to bring in money by the plane-load at election time.

♦

RULERS OF THE AIR

As fears of misuse of Doordarshan in the coming General Elections increase, the issue of public broadcasting needs to be reopened.

ONE OF OUR PROUDEST boasts is that India has one of the freest presses in the Third World. But this is a hollow claim. As free as the Indian press may be, its impact and influence are severely limited. The real power is that of the broadcasting media—and those are far from free.

The combined readership of all privately-owned newspapers in India is only 19 per cent of the population. Compare this to the audience for broadcasting media. All India Radio (AIR) has a potential audience of over 70 per cent of the population and Doordarshan reaches 19 per cent of all Indians and over half of those who live in the major cities. Another government controlled organisation, the Films Division (FD) has a weekly audience of six crores!

Not only are these broadcasting and media organisations extremely powerful, but they are also widely perceived as being biased. **Imprint** commissioned PATHFINDERS: INDIA, a leading independent research organisation to poll 450 respondents in the metropolitan centres of Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta and Madras, on their attitudes to government-run media organisations. The results show how low the credibility of Doordarshan, AIR and FD has sunk.

An overwhelming majority of respondents believed that all three organisations were biased towards the ruling party. Seventy-two per cent thought that AIR was biased. Seventy per cent thought Doordarshan was biased and 59 per cent thought FD news reviews were biased. So low is AIR's credibility that 41 per cent thought that the information quality of a foreign radio service, the BBC, was 'very good', while only 12 per cent were prepared to say the same of AIR. Very few respondents thought very highly of the quality of the output of these government organisations. Only eight per cent felt that Doordarshan's programmes were of 'very good' quality and only 14 per cent believed that FD documentaries were very informative. And a staggering 90 per cent felt that there should be a second privately-owned and run TV channel.

Though the PATHFINDERS' sample was restricted to the metropolitan areas, there was a reason for this: urban India accounts for 80 per cent of all radio sets and 97 per cent of TV sets.

It is in these urban centres that the output of government-run media organisations is most noticed. And it is here that it is most discredited.

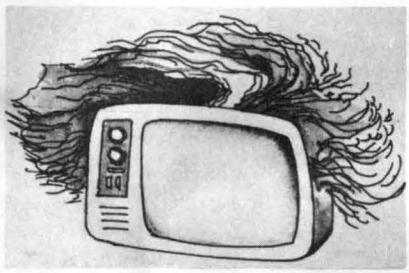
(continued on page 19)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ESKAY

IMPRINT—PATHFINDER'S POLL

PATHFINDERS contacted 450 respondents in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras to assess the credibility of the state-run media. The results also appear on pages 5 and 7.

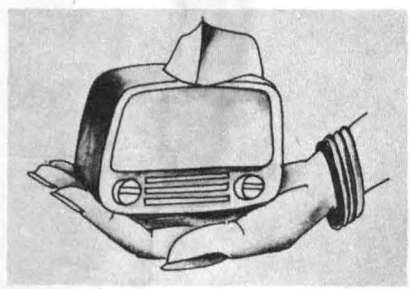
IS TV BIASED TOWARDS THE RULING PARTY?



Doordarshan was widely perceived (by 70%) as being biased.

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
YES	**70**	78	52	71	76
NO	**24**	17	38	20	22
CAN'T SAY	**6**	5	10	9	2

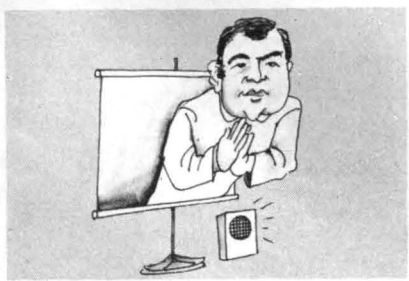
IS AIR BIASED TOWARDS THE RULING PARTY?



The vast majority (72%) of all respondents detected a bias.

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
YES	**72**	73	63	75	78
NO	**22**	20	32	20	19
CAN'T SAY	**5**	7	5	5	3

IS FD BIASED TOWARDS THE RULING PARTY?



A majority (59%) felt that FD was biased towards the Congress (I).

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
YES	**59**	70	45	49	65
NO	**35**	25	46	44	32
CAN'T SAY	**6**	5	9	7	3

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BHATLEKAR

Rajiv Gandhi is the new messiah of the airwaves.

IN A SENSE, THE RESULTS OF the poll are not surprising. Few people would bother to claim that AIR is entirely objective, that Doordarshan holds no brief for the ruling party or that FD does much more than crank out the tired old sycophantic documentaries and shorts. Our recent history abounds with instances of misuse of government media. During the Emergency, Doordarshan promoted 'youth leader' Sanjay Gandhi with a fervour that even Kim Il Sung would have found embarrassing. Mrs Gandhi's mundane utterances on the virtues of discipline and her Emergency were repeated *ad nauseum* by all government media organisations and FD treated the Twenty Point Programme as though it was a divine revelation.

Since then the style has been more low-key but the abuses have continued unchecked. Rajiv Gandhi, MP is the new messiah of the air waves, opposition politicians are shadowy figures who get brief mentions at the end of news broadcasts and each bulletin can find no more important a lead item than a recent speech by Mrs Gandhi ("The Prime Minister has called for. . .").

But because the biases of the government media and the shoddy quality of their output are taken for granted, they must not be easily forgiven. It is easy to dismiss AIR, Doordarshan and FD as typically inefficient government departments. The point is that they are not merely government departments at all. Insofar as they are supposed to provide education and entertainment, they must be judged by journalistic values. They are also repositories of public trust. (Despite the perceptions of bias, the poll shows that 34 per cent still 'fully believe' AIR news and only seven per cent 'never believe' what they hear.) No other government departments have this kind of hold over the minds of people.

AIR controls the minds of the people.

AIR's own audience research surveys also yield some frightening figures. According to a survey carried out near Bombay, as many as 47.4 per cent of respondents listened to rural programmes as against 89.1 per cent who listened to Vividh Bharati. Even allowing for AIR's self-congratulatory exaggeration, the 47.4 per cent is a significant number. The **Imprint**-PATHFINDERS poll also shows that though they realise that the government-run media are biased, people still pay them attention—often because there are no alternatives to them.

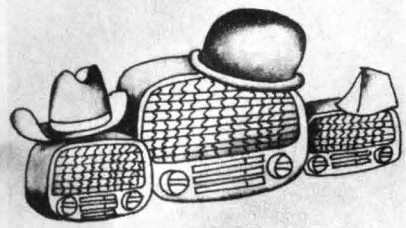
The bureaucrats listen to their master's voices.

DEBATES ON THE ROLE OF broadcasting media in India often miss out one significant point. Generally, the opposition accuses the media of favouring the ruling party and the debate takes on a party political colour. The point is that AIR, Doordarshan and FD are not really committed to any political party at all. They merely follow the bidding of their rulers—whatever party they may belong to. AIR and Doordarshan were as deferential to the Janata regime as they had been to the Congress for three decades. The 25,000 men and women who help churn out thousands of radio and TV programmes, documentaries and newsreels are not members of any one party and share no ideological alignment. They are only bureaucrats who have learned to listen to their masters' voices. It is better to bend, than to lose their jobs.

(continued on page 21)

IMPRINT—PATHFINDER'S POLL

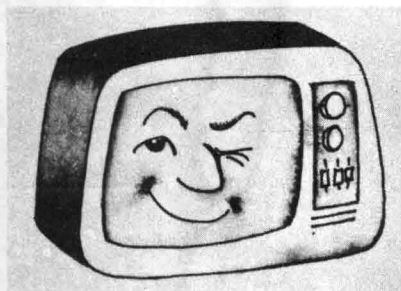
DO YOU BELIEVE THE NEWS AIRED BY AIR/VOA/BBC?



The BBC has the highest credibility of all three radio services.

	AIR	VOA	BBC
FULLY BELIEVE	34	20	57
PARTLY BELIEVE	58	42	30
DO NOT BELIEVE	7	4	1
CAN'T SAY	1	44	12

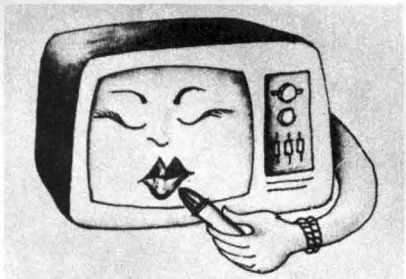
DO YOU BELIEVE THE NEWS ON TV?



The majority (56%) felt they could only partly believe TV news.

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
FULLY BELIEVE	**40**	35	35	46	45
PARTLY BELIEVE	**56**	57	63	49	54
DO NOT BELIEVE	**4**	8	2	5	1

SHOULD A SECOND PRIVATE SECTOR TV CHANNEL BE STARTED?



The overwhelming majority (90%) wanted a privately-run TV channel.

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
YES	**90**	86	88	98	88
NO	**8**	11	10	2	10
CAN'T SAY	**2**	3	2	—	2

The Constitution is strangely silent on the role of broadcasting.

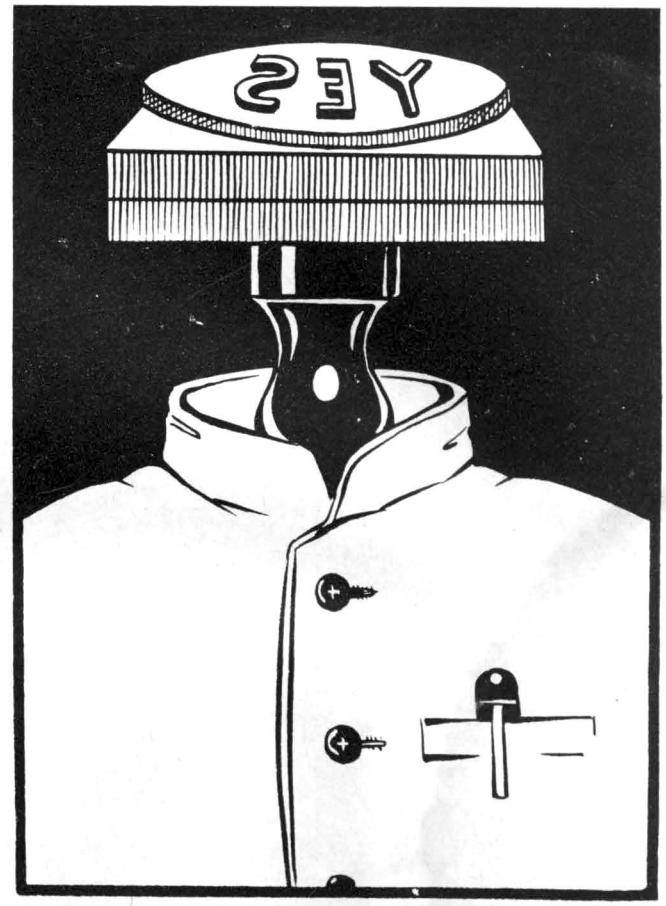
Such is the structure of broadcasting in this country that the men who run the media have no choice but to go along with the dictates of cynical politicans if they want to get along in their careers. At least part of the problem stems from the Constitutional approach to broadcasting.

The Indian Constitution, despite being the longest in the world, is strangely silent about the limits, duties, role and organisation of broadcasting, though it spends sections detailing the functions of the Election Commission, the Union Public Service Commission and the like. In fact, broadcasting gets only one mention: List I of the Seventh Schedule makes it clear that it is under the exclusive control of the Union Government.

This indifference to broadcasting is astonishing when you consider how much trouble is taken to protect broadcasting organisations from political interference in the rest of the free world. While several countries such as the United States and Brazil have privately-owned radio and TV stations, even those with government-owned broadcasting networks allow them virtually unchecked autonomy and freedom of expression. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation is independent of any government organisation and answerable only to Parliament; Swedish radio is protected by a legally enforceable act of Parliament; Japan's NHK broadcasting network has jurisdictional protection from political authority; and the British Broadcasting Corporation (whose credibility in India far outstrips AIR according to our poll), enjoys functional autonomy. During last year's Falkland War, the BBC presented a factual account of events and refused to contribute to the building up of patriotic fervour at the cost of its objectivity, despite rebukes from the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

The absence of any Constitutional safeguards for Indian broadcasting can perhaps be attributed to the then widespread assumption, that an autonomous broadcasting corporation would inevitably be founded. In 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "We should approximate as far as possible, the British model." Appointment letters issued to AIR officials in the years just after Independence, included a clause stating that they were liable to be transferred anywhere in India when a new BBC-style corporation came into being.

The BBC enjoys functional autonomy.



Thirty years later, such a corporation is nowhere on the horizon. As things stand now, the Director General of All India Radio is directly responsible to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It is the Ministry that appoints him and it can transfer him at will. He is entitled to no parliamentary protection, no special laws safeguard his autonomy or even his job and the Minister remains his boss. If the Ministry's instructions are unreasonable—during the Emergency, AIR was asked to stop playing Kishore Kumar's songs because he had not attended a Youth Congress function—he still has no alternative but to obey them.

Mrs Gandhi is determined to destroy her father's dreams.

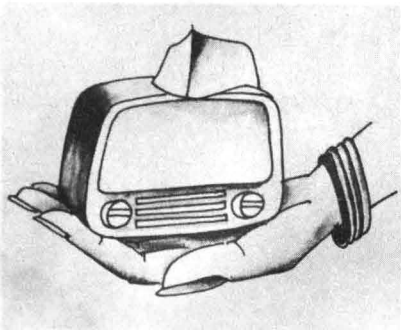
THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of an autonomous broadcasting organisation. Today his daughter seems determined to see that his dream never comes true. Mrs Gandhi's attitude to the broadcasting media is best summarised by a statement she made to AIR station directors during an Emergency meeting:

"AIR is a government organ; it is

(continued on page 23)

IMPRINT—PATHFINDER'S POLL

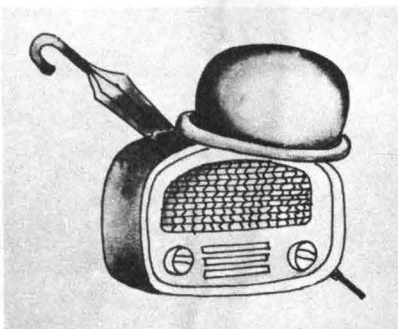
HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE QUALITY OF PROGRAMMES ON TV?



A majority (57%) were either ambivalent or critical while 43% were appreciative.

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
VERY GOOD	**8**	4	11	8	13
GOOD	**35**	25	35	31	55
FAIR	**35**	42	34	36	55
BAD/VERY BAD	**22**	29	20	25	6

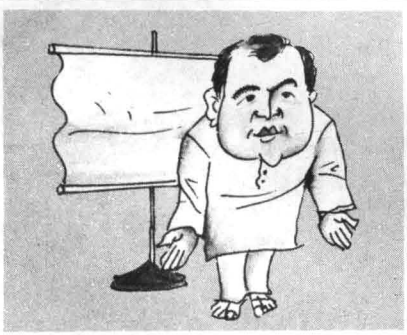
HOW WOULD YOU RATE PROGRAMMES ON AIR/VOA/BBC?



A staggering 83% praised the quality of the BBC's programming.

	AIR	VOA	BBC
VERY GOOD	12	12	41
GOOD	47	38	42
FAIR	34	29	9
BAD/VERY BAD	6	1	—

HOW INFORMATIVE DO YOU FIND FD DOCUMENTARIES?



A majority felt that documentaries were informative.

	All	Bom	Cal	Del	Mad
EXTREMELY	**14**	15	13	22	7
VERY	**50**	43	57	59	46
QUITE	**28**	33	26	9	41
NOT AT ALL	**7**	8	10	4	6

After the Emergency hard-sell, a soft-sell.

going to remain a government organ. We are proud that it is a government organ. There should be no doubt about all this."

To be fair, Mrs Gandhi no longer makes statements like these. Now, the media are still instruments of partisan politicking but the hard-sell of the Emergency has given way to a less jarring soft-sell.

There seems to have been a realisation that too much propaganda can be self-defeating. During the Emergency, the openly partisan roles of Doordarshan, Films Division and AIR caused the three media to become the most obvious and hated symbols of one-party authoritarianism. That way, they actually helped defeat the Congress in the 1977 elections.

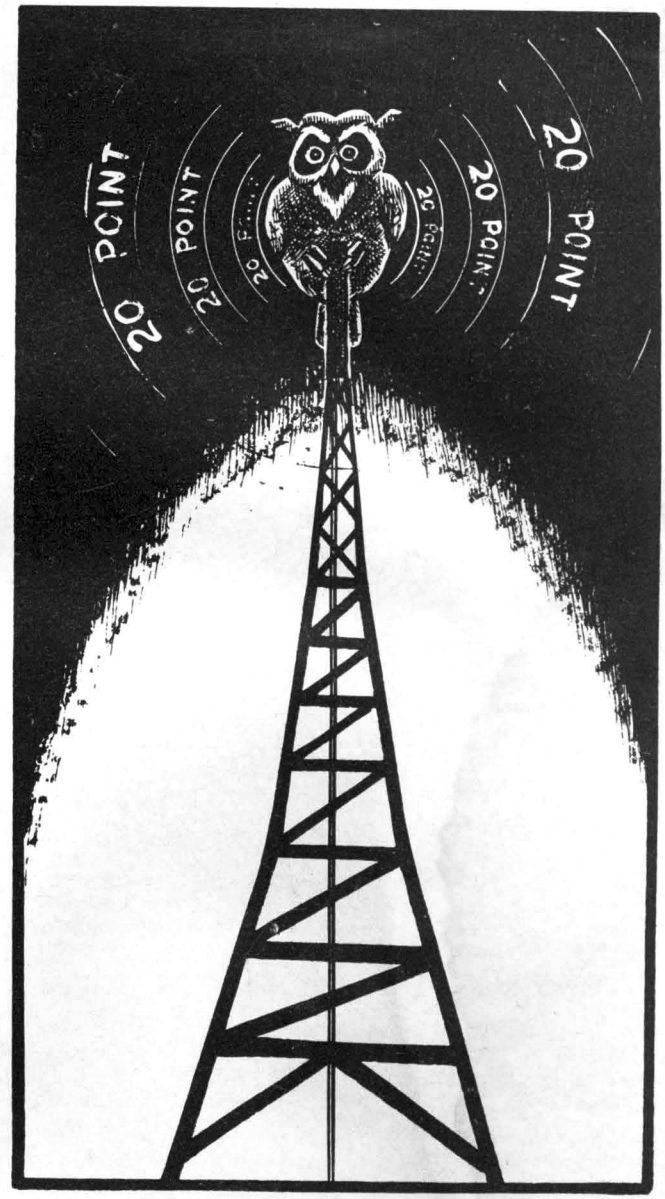
Moreover, as the privately-owned print media have become more daring, venturing into investigative journalism with exposés of the Bhagalpur blindings, the Nellie massacre and Antulay's trusts, any effort by government media to spew Emergency-style propaganda would face a serious credibility problem. So, with a degree of sophistication that its critics are not prepared to grant them, the government media have shifted gear and tried a different tack.

While Rajiv Gandhi must still be the most publicised MP today, no attempt is made to thrust him on the country in the manner in which his late brother was. The news bulletins may still lead with Mrs Gandhi's speeches but the emphasis has shifted subtly away from personal glorification to a concentration on previously unheard of 'beneficiaries' of the newly recast Twenty Point Programme.

The Bombay station of All India Radio produces anywhere from 70 to 80 programmes (in eight languages) on the Twenty Point Programme each month. But now 'human interest' is the key. The programmes all focus on how the lives of individuals have been substantially improved by the Twenty Point Programme. Says S Krishnan, Director of AIR, Bombay: "We have rarely even mentioned the phrase 'Twenty Point' in these broadcasts."

Human interest is the key to propaganda.

He is following the official line. Every AIR and Doordarshan centre in the country has received an official circular (reportedly emanating from the 'highest quarter') instructing it to project the Twenty Point Programme. A high level decision seems to have been taken to soft-sell the Programme without the personal sycophancy that gave the game away in the past.



So-called Twenty Point 'beneficiaries' are selected.

This new strategy is well coordinated. In Maharashtra, for example, officials of Doordarshan, FD, AIR and the Press Information Bureau (PIB) meet with state government publicity officials each month: their task is to select 'beneficiaries' of the Twenty Point Programme. Once they are chosen, these individuals are relentlessly projected by the government media and their 'good luck' stories are repeated *ad nauseum*.

The Bombay Doordarshan centre alone has produced an average of 15 to 20 items each month (some of which then turn up on news bulletins) on the Twenty Point Programme and its carefully selected 'beneficiaries'. Moreover, FD and state government documentaries on the same theme are also

The tax-payer pays for Congress (I) propaganda.

regularly transmitted. As the General Election approaches, the frequency of such transmissions will, it is said, increase. Station Director, AS Tatari, does not refute talk of an increase. "We may increase the programmes in the coming months," he agrees. "At any rate, there is no chance of a decrease."

While some officials such as AIR's Krishnan claim that the Twenty Point Programme is a government scheme and should not be seen in political party terms, there can be no denying that the Congress (I) will fight the next election on this supposedly non-partisan Twenty Point Programme. Thus the propaganda value of such broadcasting cannot be underestimated.

But so subtle is the soft-sell that to date, no opposition party has questioned the need for publicising a Programme, which even by government statistics, exists largely on paper. That the government publicity machine—paid for by the tax-payer—should be used to rustle up these cheerful Twenty Point 'beneficiaries', and to then project their sagas in appealing human interest terms is—by the standards of free and fair broadcasting—pretty scandalous. The fact that it has gone unnoticed is dangerous, for it suggests that the propaganda machine is acquiring a sophistication that it has hitherto lacked.

There is still naked partisanship.

OF COURSE, AS ANYBODY with experience of the ham-fisted, heavy-handed propagandising of AIR and Doordarshan knows, the sophistication has to slip up somewhere.

In recent months, there have been enough instances of naked partisanship to suggest that not that much has changed. Some examples.

- Both AIR and Doordarshan completely blacked out news of the Nellie massacre. When Parliament debated Arun Shourie's article on May 2, 3 and 4, AIR and Doordarshan broadcast only the Home Minister's statement without explaining the context.
- Doordarshan made no mention of the Punjab *Rasta Roko* campaign on April 4, but nevertheless, carried the Home Minister's statement, the next day.
- AIR, Doordarshan and FD have yet to cover the Bhagalpur blindings, the corruption charges against Antulay or the 'encounter' killings.
- During the violent Assam election campaign, AIR would regularly broadcast that 'no untoward incident has been reported' while the next day's papers would be full of bloody clashes.
- During the Andhra campaign, AIR ignored NTR and reported only Mrs Gandhi's speeches.
- According to *The Hindu*, AIR's news bulletins during the Karnataka election contained 243 references to Mrs Gandhi during the 18-day campaign. At least 133 of these dealt exclusively with her campaign speeches. On the other hand, Morarji Desai and AB Vajpayee rated seven mentions each.
- During the Jammu and Kashmir election campaign, AIR regularly quoted obscure Congress (I) leaders accusing Dr Abdullah of rigging the elections. Then it misquoted Dr Abdullah himself. Later it quoted a National Conference leader, Maulvi Farooq's comment on this misquote: "He (Abdullah) should not have said so." According to Maulvi Farooq, he had actually prefaced his comment with the important rider—"If Dr Abdullah has indeed said so. . ." Subsequently, the National Conference refused to

Mrs Gandhi rules the news bulletins.

make any poll broadcasts. Abdullah said that he was not interested in 'lending respectability to the two media (AIR and Doordarshan) and their lies'.

Some opposition politicians like former Information Minister, LK Advani, publicly criticised these instances of biased election reporting, but they did not force the Election Commission to take note. As the General Election approaches, this may prove to have been a mistake. It seems probable—given the experience of the Assembly elections—that Doordarshan and AIR will continue to be used to advance Congress (I) interests during the election campaign.

As the Election approaches, the danger increases.

TWO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS suggest that the government has recognized the power of television and plans to use Doordarshan to serve its propaganda ends.

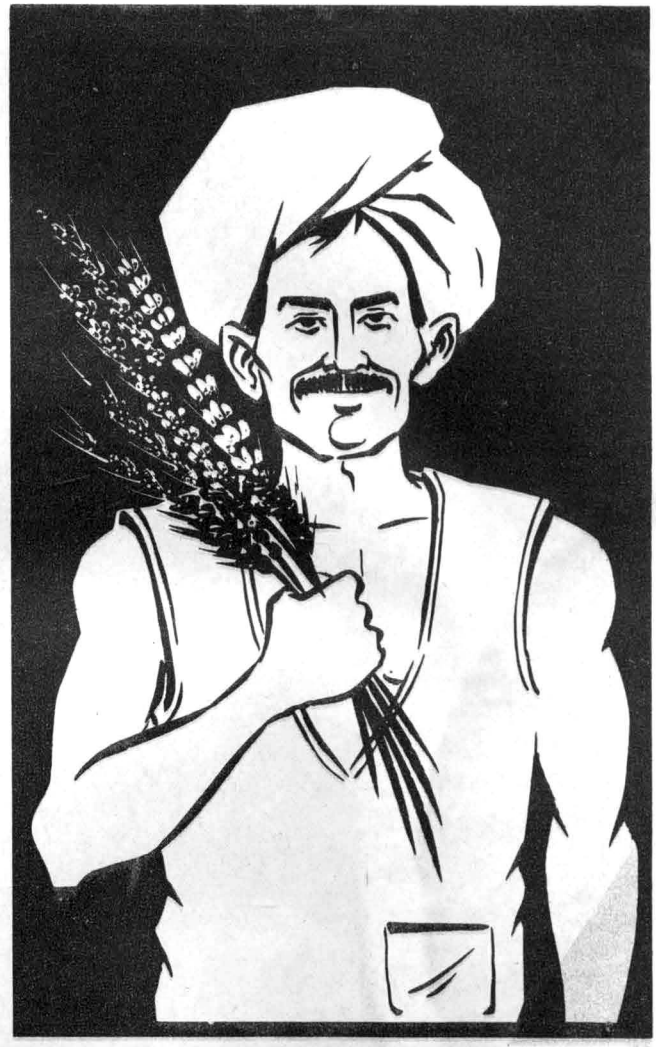
The first is the introduction of colour TV. When Vasant Sathe first announced that the government was determined to introduce colour transmissions, the scheme was criticised as being wasteful and unnecessary. Since then, the critics seem to have been appeased by the spectacle of World Cup cricket in colour and by the glamour of colour feature films; and the criticism has dried up.

This is a pity because the government has yet to produce any convincing explanation for the sudden introduction of colour TV. A working group appointed by the government itself has estimated that even in 1990, colour television sets will be so prohibitively expensive that the demand for them will be one-eighth of that for black-and-white sets. Moreover, the capital investment for colour TV production and transmission is at least 50 per cent higher than for black-and-white. To counter such figures, Sathe claimed that black-and-white TV was obsolete and hardly anybody anywhere in the world owned black-and-white sets. This is simply not true. There are 83 million colour sets in the US and 79 million black-and-white sets.

The case for colour TV is a sham.

When all this failed to appear convincing, the government fell back on the claim that it was making TV more attractive to the common man; that he would now be able to see his favourite educational programmes in colour. This claim is even more difficult to sustain.

There are only 200,000 TV sets in India and of them, less than three per cent are in the villages. The average TV owner earns Rs 750 a month and a third of all owners earn more than Rs 1,500 according to figures released by the Directorate General of Doordarshan. The statistics suggest that not too many 'common men' watch black-and-white TV. Fewer still are going to have access to colour sets.



Educational TV has yet to find an audience.

As for the claim that educational programmes will seem wonderful in colour, this too must be taken with a pinch of salt. According to a survey carried out by Ogilvy Benson and Mather, a leading advertising agency, the most popular TV programmes are film-based ones. *Chhaya Geet* has a viewership of 84 per cent while *Phool Khile Hai Gulshan Gulshan* has a viewership of 76.8 per cent. Doordarshan's own statistics show that such 'educational' and 'socially redeeming' programmes as *Hamare Kamgar, Hamare Udyog* and *Krishi Darshan* have a viewership of two to four per cent. The National Council for Educational Research and Training has found that

Colour TV will be used for propaganda.

Delhi Doordarshan's school programmes have a viewership of only 38 per cent amongst all schools and have termed them 'a failure'.

So we have a situation in which the 'common man' can't even afford a black-and-white TV set, let alone the colour TV that is being introduced for his sake. And as for the educational and 'socially redeeming' programming that colour TV will help, the statistics show that the money spent on such programmes is wasted—hardly anybody watches them anyhow.

What then is the argument for investing so much in switching the network to colour rather than offering more subsidised TV sets and spending the money on better and more watchable programmes?

Media-watchers have an explanation. They point to a Doordarshan statistic that shows that newspaper readership in TV-owning homes is as high as 90 per cent. Clearly, TV viewers are the urban elite: one section of the country that Mrs Gandhi has not been able to reach with her docile AIR network. These are the people who read articles critical of her in the press and though they own TV sets, turn them on only to view sports events or films.

As no real attempt is being made to generate the kind of software or programming that will be required to work a genuinely 'educational' or 'informative' colour TV channel, it seems clear that the only colour programming available to Doordarshan in the coming years will be sports spectaculars, feature films and imported shows. And of course, the Twenty Point propaganda that the government media regularly churn out—in colour.

Consider the two spectaculars that colour TV has brought into the homes of the urban elite—the Asiad and the Non-Aligned Summit. Both have helped advance Mrs Gandhi's image among a traditionally sceptical audience. There is still a Commonwealth Conference to come and no doubt this too will strengthen the impression that she is a great world class leader.

On that basis alone, colour TV has given this regime what it has always lacked: an easy access into the homes of the urban elite. In doing this, Mrs Gandhi has followed the example of other leaders. Colour TV in Iran began with the coronation of the Shah and Idi Amin brought it to Uganda to coincide with the 1975 meeting of the Organisation of African Unity over which he presided. (Of course, it also came handy to televise his wedding.)

There is a second reason for believing that the government plans to use the power of television for its own ends.

Subtle promotion of the regime is the key.

ON JULY 5, HKL BHAGAT, THE Minister for Information and Broadcasting announced a massive expansion of the TV network after a meeting of State Information Ministers. The agenda for this meeting had only referred to a 'special plan' and the office note said it was still 'being considered'. Yet, at the end of the meeting, without having discussed the scheme with the State Ministers, without apparently having consulted the Planning Commission, Bhagat announced a Rs 68-crore expansion of the sort that has never before been attempted by any government anywhere in the world.

Bhagat was trying something fishy.

He said that Doordarshan would build 13 more High Power Transmitters (HPT's) and as many as 112 Low Power Transmitters (LPT's) by the next year. As a result of this expansion, Doordarshan will reach a theoretical audience of 36 crores, plus another 12 crores who will receive weak signals.

Banana republics always misuse TV.

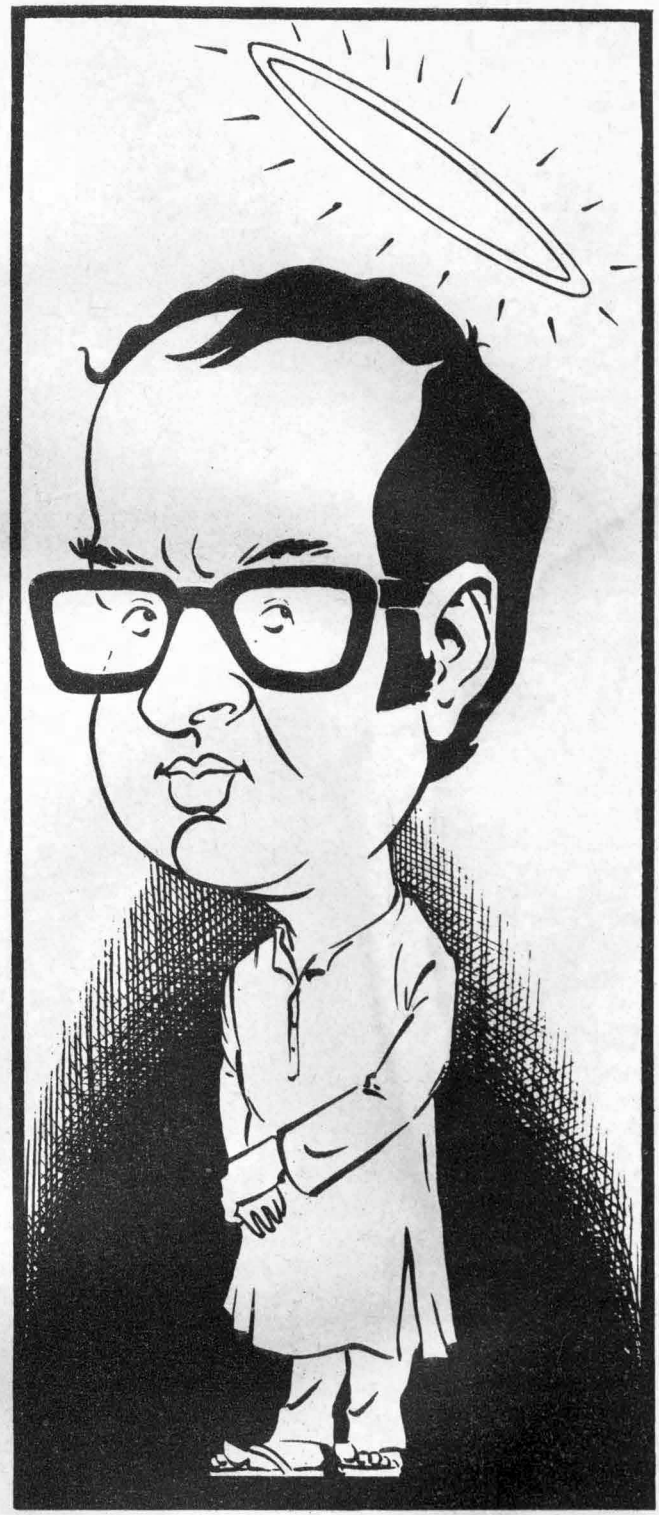
To add to the mystery surrounding the abrupt announcement of this scheme, Bhagat did not claim that free or subsidised sets would be offered to the poor people who comprise the major chunk of his hypothetical audience of 48 crores. Moreover, he did not say where exactly these new transmitters were to be installed and how; and indeed, it is widely believed that this is because he doesn't know himself. Further, no mention was made of how Doordarshan was going to provide the programmes to feed these new transmitters—and he plans to broadcast them from morning to midnight!

Given all these factors, some conclusions are irresistible. Firstly, the government doesn't really care about educational TV—this is why no attempt is being made to plan the programming. Secondly, it is quite happy if TV remains a means of getting to an urban elite. And thirdly, the new transmitters will only be used to broadcast the kind of popular light programming that is easily available and that elite audiences enjoy—so that subtle promotion of the regime and its leaders can be smuggled in.

There is also a strong suspicion that the urgency is because the expanded network is required for the next General Election. Referring to Bhagat's insistence that the expansion would go ahead at 'any cost', Iqbal Malik, a media-watcher and former Director General of AIR remarks: "There is no reason except for a political one. By the end of 1984, campaigning for the next General Election has to start and the process has to end by February or March 1985. By the end of 1984, even if 50 per cent of television coverage is achieved, the party's message can reach that much of the population—that is, if they possess television sets."

The expansion is unprecedented.

WHEN, AT THE NEXT GENeral Election, Mrs Gandhi smiles out of thousands of colour TV sets, the Opposition will make the usual noises about abuse of government media. It will claim that the party in power always has an unfair advantage. And it will be right.



The 'youth' leader was newly manufactured.

Whether it has the right to complain, of course, is another matter. When the Janata Party came to power in 1977, images of the newly manufactured 'youth leader' Sanjay Gandhi and his mother, the fountain of all wisdom, were fresh in everyone's minds. By misusing the media so shamelessly during the Emergency, the Gandhis had provided convincing evidence that there was an urgent need to de-link

AIR and Doordarshan from the government.

Sure enough, the Janata Party included a commitment to autonomous broadcasting in its election manifesto and once it was elected, appointed a Commission under George Verghese (now the Editor of the *Indian Express*; then a former Editor of the *Hindustan Times*) to devise a just and apolitical broadcasting policy and structure.

The Verghese Commission came up with a scheme for 'Akashbharati', an autonomous public broadcasting system. But like the Congress government before it (the report of the Chanda Committee in 1964 also called for an autonomous broadcasting corporation and was ignored) the Janata regime rejected this recommendation. The Prasar Bharati Bill, it introduced in Parliament following Verghese's report, envisaged a very restricted kind of 'autonomy'.

Under this scheme, the broadcasting corporation would not be as independent as the Union Public Service Commission or the Judiciary. It would be no more autonomous than any other public sector corporation. Verghese denounced the bill as a 'farce'; the Janata party was trying to avoid giving up control of the media and yet, at the same time, trying to collar the credit for making the broadcasting services autonomous. Before the bill could be voted on, the Janata government fell.

In the 1979-80 election campaign, the Janata Party only made routine references to autonomy for AIR and Doordarshan, without even spelling out what such autonomy would entail. The Lok Dal manifesto contained a similar, vague promise and the Congress (I) did not mention broadcasting at all.

Now, the only times the government media get mentioned by political parties are when some of them feel hard done by. There is still no attempt to reopen the broadcasting debate, to tackle the fundamental issues and to try and formulate a long-term solution to the crisis of Indian broadcasting.

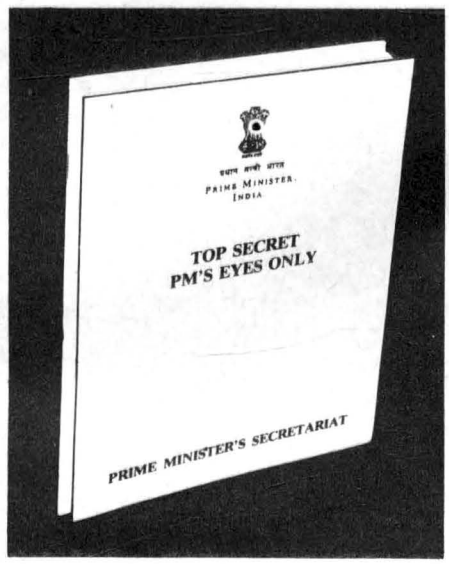
Incredible as this may sound, we have no legally enforceable broadcasting policy. This means that the Union Cabinet can interpret the role and organisation of broadcasting units any way it wants. It can open half a dozen TV centres in one state, and none in another; it can appoint or transfer programme staff with impunity; it can broadcast or withdraw any programme; and it can black out all opposition leaders and all criticism of the government.

This is a situation without parallel anywhere in the democratic world. In no free country do the people voluntarily give their rulers control of the most powerful means of communication and influence.

And yet, by not forcing a debate on the broadcasting structure, by not turning the government's stranglehold on the media into a political issue, this is exactly what we have done. Information Minister, HKL Bhagat, has promised to overcome all financial and technical constraints to push through his cynical plan for increasing the influence of government-controlled Doordarshan. Quite apart from the fact that a powerful medium of information and education is being wasted, there is also the question of how much we care for the truth—or whether we are prepared to see it perverted by a manipulated media.

Bhagat says his plans will be implemented by 1984. That year may be more significant than he realises. ♦

THE SAGA OF THE MORARJI PAPERS



How did* Imprint *get possession of the explosive correspondence between Morarji Desai and Sanjiva Reddy? Are any more shocks on the way? The full story of the behind-the-scenes drama.

WAS THERE A RUSSIAN inspired plot to bring down the Janata government? How close were George Fernandes' links with Socialist International and other West German interests? Was the raid on Mrs Gandhi's farm deliberately scuttled by officials who were still loyal to her? When Charan Singh called HN Bahuguna a KGB agent, did he have any evidence to back up this allegation?

These are questions that were repeatedly raised after the fall of the Janata government in 1979. Allegations, counter-allegations, rumour and innuendo filled the air. As politicians switched loyalties with a sadly predictable regularity and Mrs Gandhi returned to power, it began to seem that the truth would never emerge.

Late last year it seemed that there was a chance that at least some of the truth would come out. When he left the Prime Minister's office in 1979, Morarji Desai took along a sheaf of confidential files, letters and CBI reports. As Arun Gandhi explains, Morarji had originally intended to use these as source material for the last volume of his autobiography and later handed them over to Arun for a projected book on the Janata government.

At the time, Arun Gandhi was Editor of **Imprint** (he now edits *Who's Who In India* for our group) and we arranged that he could take leave for six weeks or so to work on the book. **Imprint** would retain the rights to print extracts and condensations and he could find a publisher for the hardcover and paperback editions.

As Arun began work on the book, we had an opportunity to examine some of the documents. What we saw, stunned us.

There was, first of all, a handwritten letter from Nani Palkhivala, then Ambassador to Washington. Palkhivala had just been visited by an official of the US State Department, he wrote. The official had assured him that the State Department had learned that the Russians had taken a top level decision to overthrow Morarji's government. Palkhivala was shocked; he was not sure what to do and was passing the information on in the hope that Morarji would know how to deal with this tip-off.

Such a letter, no matter how dramatic, contained what was at best, an unsubstantiated allegation. But as Arun was able to show, there was circumstantial evidence to support the claim. Bahuguna and Charan Singh had always hated each other: the files were full of the abuse they traded. But, when it came to toppling the Janata, Bahuguna forgot his past hostility and joined Charan Singh in pushing Morarji out.

George Fernandes' role was even murkier. The files were full of allegations that Socialist International had paid his wife's expenses in 1976, while she was in Europe; that his links with Siemens would not bear close scrutiny; that his tenure at the Industries Ministry had seen houses like Modis receive favours; that his loyalties were far from clear. One Intelligence report warned that he would take a large number of MP's with him and topple the government.

Among Morarji's papers was the famous Charan Singh letter abusing Bahuguna. Along with the usual allegations ('He is a Natwarlal', 'he organised a *havan* against me' etc) there was a reference to Bahuguna's so-called KGB links which, Charan Singh insisted, had been noted by Mrs Gandhi's govern-

(continued on page 31)

"THE PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW"

A personal view of the writing of the Morarji Papers.

WHEN MORARJI DESAI resigned from the Prime Ministership in July, 1979, he came to Bombay with several declassified files of his correspondence with his Janata colleagues and the President of India in the hope that someday he would be able to write the fifth volume of his biography pertaining to the 1977 period onwards. In fact he did start writing the book and stopped after a few pages when he realised he would have to sit in judgement over his colleagues and this would be embarrassing.

His friends however believed that the people of India had a right to know what really went wrong with the Janata experiment and persuaded him to make the source material available to someone else who would be impartial. It was fortuitous that around this time I met Mr Desai to interview him for a magazine article which helped to make him aware of my existence.

He asked me whether I would like to write this book and I couldn't believe my ears. Would I? Of course, I would. Thus I found myself in possession of around 200 files belonging to Mr Desai which contained explosive material about the Janata Rule.

At this stage, I was faced with a dilemma. Some of the letters were marked 'Secret and Confidential'. Would my using them constitute an infringement of the Official Secret's Act? I thought about it for many days and then consulted Nani Palkhivala who told me that there is no clear cut definition of the Act and that if I do get prosecuted it would be a test case.

I concluded that there was nothing in the letters which could be termed as 'Official Secret' and that the people of India had the right to know what went on behind the scenes in Delhi to eventually bring down a constitutionally elected government.

There was no doubt in my mind that Morarji Desai had shown exceptional courage in making this important source material available to me which has so far not been done by any other politician in India. The responsibility was tremendous. While I had to be careful not to betray Mr Desai's trust in me I had also to contend with my responsibilities to the people. In a democratic state the people not only have a right to know how the government is performing but also how their elected representatives are behaving. The correspondence brought this out very clearly.

With such interesting material at my disposal it seemed to me that I would be cheating the reader by attributing things and events to hearsay, rumours, unidentified sources or the omniscient reliable sources. Such books are written all the time and there was no point in adding one more to the plethora.

I decided the best way to deal with the subject to make it authentic was to quote the important letters, give the version of both the parties wherever possible and let the reader decide who was right and who wrong.

I believe too much of unnecessary secrecy shrouds our politics which is why we in India do not know anything about what goes on in the corridors of power. For instance, we know there was a disagreement between Dr Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister, but even after so many years, secrecy envelops the issue and people are left to arrive at their own conclusions through conjectures and rumours.

The same goes with the last chapter of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's biography. This was marked 'Secret' and placed in the shelves of the National Archives in New Delhi to be published, if I remember correctly, 15 years after Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's death. However, everyone appears to have forgotten about this, including the people of India and that important chapter of Indian history may well be lost forever. This business of secrecy, to my mind, is going a bit too far.

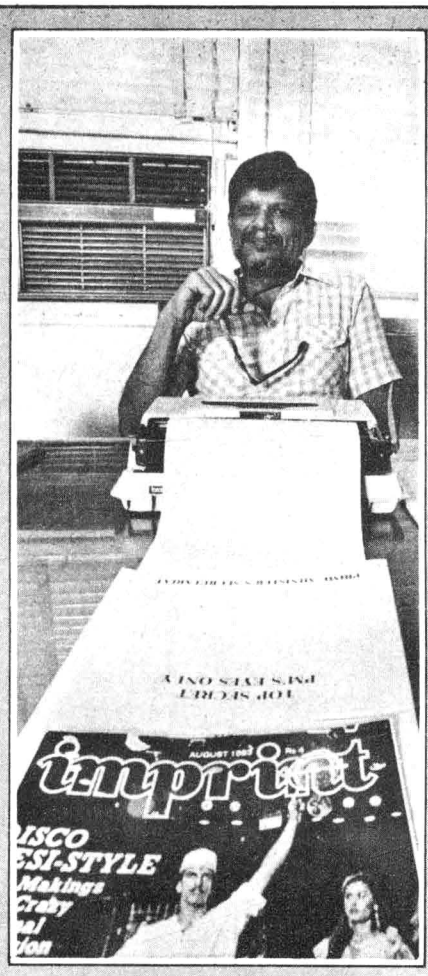
Mr Desai's serious differences with the former President Reddy too would have remained secret but for the fortitude shown by Mr Desai. We must expect people elected to high places to behave with dignity and decorum and if they don't it should be incumbent upon colleagues to expose them. Political chicanery and machinations cannot be allowed to vitiate the atmosphere. This country is ours, we are proud of it and we must have the desire to build it upon firm foundations.

During the writing of the book, Mr Desai had been very cooperative. He gave me several hours of taped interviews to provide the links and the background and since then he has scrutinised the book three times but he has not agreed with the presentation, because he apparently cannot persuade himself to believe that the use of confidential letters is not a serious infringement of the Official Secrets Act. Official secrets have often been leaked out—to wit, the Kuo Oil Deal—but the government has not taken a serious view of these infringements. But, that is another matter.

The actual writing of the book was done in the most trying circumstances which has left me with a seriously impaired right eye. The romance of congenial and comfortable seclusion in Mahabaleshwar or Matheran was a mere illusion for me. In fact, my writing stint coincided with renovations in my modest 350 sq ft apartment so that I couldn't even be in the familiar surroundings of home.

It was through Mr Vijay Merchant's magnanimity that I was permitted the use of an apartment that had not been lived in for months. It was laden with dust and cobwebs; a rickety wooden table and a hard straight-back chair were all the comforts I could enjoy.

There was literally an ocean of material scattered on the grimy floor with me on my haunches trying to



Arun Gandhi found circumstantial evidence to support the claim of a Russian plot. Bahuguna's role and George Fernandes's foreign links were all highly suspect.

determine what to use, how to use it and attempting to formulate a plan of action. It was evident that if I did not put a check on myself I would end up writing several volumes. Clearly, this was not feasible.

The publishers were anxious to keep the book within the affordable range of the common man which meant it should not exceed 300 to 350 printed pages. After classifying the material, personality-wise a picture began to emerge and my wife, Sunanda, who acted as my secretary, hastily jotted down the outline as I defined it.

What emerged was a frightening saga of intrigue and ineptitude. The most shocking was the game played by the President himself, an inkling of which was given in the excerpts printed in last month's issue of this magazine. Madhu Limaye harangued Morarji Desai with long and bitter letters almost every week on the RSS issue and Morarji patiently and painstakingly answered all the charges and misconceptions.

There were scores of letters between Morarji and Jayaprakash Narayan in which Jayaprakash was trying to exert his influence on the Prime Minister. These reveal the time when Karunanidhi went to Jayaprakash crying about the CBI harassment to which he had been subjected 'unfairly', according to him, by the Congress Government and Jayaprakash writing to Morarji to look into the matter.

Charan Singh dominated the scene with his vituperative charges against many of his colleagues especially HN Bahuguna and the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid. The Imam and Bahuguna set themselves up as the self-appointed guardians of the Muslims in the country and badgered Morarji with complaints that not enough was being done to protect them.

The inimitable Shibbanlal Saxena, the MP who according to Morarji Desai spent most of his time and energy digging into the past of cabinet members and bringing into light sordid facts including the roles played by Jagjivan Ram, Raj Narain, Kalpanath Rai and dozens of others.

Through all this, Morarji emerged quite unexpectedly, as a man with immense patience. I marvelled at his ability to keep cool and composed while all around him there was chaos and confusion. To me at least all this threw a new light on that period of Indian history and I hope I am able to convey it in good measure and convincingly to the reader.

The publication of the first extract of the first chapter of my book has created a sensation much beyond my expectations. It is good to know that the nation is alive and the people eager for the truth and I am sure Morarji Desai will be the last person to suppress it.

— Arun Gandhi

(continued from page 29)

ment. But Charan Singh provided no evidence at all and Bahuguna asked in his reply, whether Singh regarded Mrs Gandhi's 'belief' that he was a KGB agent as sufficient evidence.

It was a messy story that emerged. But there were some striking coincidences. George Fernandes had defended the government in a no-confidence motion and had then, mysteriously changed sides a day later. Bahuguna had helped topple the ministry and had then joined Mrs Gandhi. Was there a conspiracy? Were these people acting on orders from elsewhere?

When Arun later put the hypothesis to Morarji Desai, he dismissed talk of a Russian conspiracy, but the circumstantial evidence remains and is reproduced in the book.

There were also files relating to CBI investigations into the activities of Janata ministers. There were so many allegations against Nandini Satpathy that it was difficult to count them all. Also included in one file was the diary of Nandini Satpathy's son, a teenage youth who was only interested in drink and women. Nevertheless, the manner in which police officials indulged the boy and even loaned him a revolver, made startling reading.

The files relating to the raid on Mrs Gandhi's farmhouse at Mehrauli and the collection of Congress Party funds during the Emergency had already been published by Arun Shourie and formed perhaps the tamest of the disclosures. It was well-known that the Home Ministry had delayed the raid and that any incriminating evidence had long been removed by the time the raid took place. Less well-known was that CBI Director, V Nagarkar had finally written a pathetic note in Marathi begging the government to take action. The Congress funds disclosures were relatively minor. The sums involved were rarely more than a few lakhs—peanuts by the standards of election expenditure and the allegation about the Jeep-Apeejay deal had already been thrown out by the Courts.

The same was true of the charges against Kanti Desai. Hundreds of sheets of paper had been expended on detailing the younger Desai's alleged gambling losses, his sponsorship of Balasubramaniam, his role in allowing the import of synthetic fibres and the like. But then, the Vaidyalingam Commission had already investigated these charges and found that most could not

GANDHI VS. GANDHI ?

On more and more issues today, Mrs. Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi appear to be divided. Are they falling out? Or are they hand-in-glove in their clever camouflage which, by encouraging opposing views and engendering controversies, gives the Prime Minister more time and room to manoeuvre. So she can weigh several options before deciding on a course of action in resolving national issues? Judge for yourself.

The Sunday Observer discusses and debates vital issues — Sunday after Sunday. So you can take your own stand. For or against.

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Impressions-2359

The famous Sanjiva Reddy letter in which he made allegations against Kanti Desai, was in fact, unclassified. Morarji had complained that Sanjiva had failed to mark the letter secret.

be substantiated.

We were aware—as was Arun—that CBI reports, letters in the original and 'secret' papers all appear impressive to laymen and that any allegations contained in such documents acquire a new legitimacy—even though they are, in themselves, no proof of guilt.

When we read the manuscript of the book that finally emerged (Arun's account of the writing appears elsewhere) we decided to ignore the mud-slinging and personal rivalries that seemed to have dominated the Janata government. Instead, we would concentrate on one of two substantive issues: either the role played by Russia in the collapse of the government or the clash between President Sanjiva Reddy and Prime Minister Morarji Desai.

Of the two, the KGB-plot hypothesis was at worst unsubstantiated and at best, circumstantial. On the other hand, the Morarji-Sanjiva correspondence did raise several vital issues (which were later amplified by Girilal Jain in *The Times of India* on August 24, 1983) that needed to be clarified. What should the role of the President be? Was Reddy overstepping his authority? And did his personal animosity towards Desai explain his extraordinary behaviour when the government fell?

We decided that this was probably the book's most significant chapter. But there was another important issue: what about the Official Secrets Act? Even if it was Morarji who had contravened the provisions of the Act by keeping the documents, was it right for us to print secret correspondence?

Finally, the issue resolved itself quite easily. The famous Sanjiva Reddy letter, in which he made allegations against Kanti Desai, was in fact, unclassified. In his reply to Reddy, Morarji had complained that Sanjiva had failed to mark the letter 'secret'. So the question was only about the other three letters we printed—asking Morarji to submit lists of his supporters and then finally, informing him that he was no longer Prime Minister of India. The contents of all three letters were well-known. After Charan Singh formed his short-lived ministry, various Janata leaders had already presented their account of Reddy's actions, referring to his demands for lists of MP's. They were also important historical documents, dealing with the collapse of the Janata government.

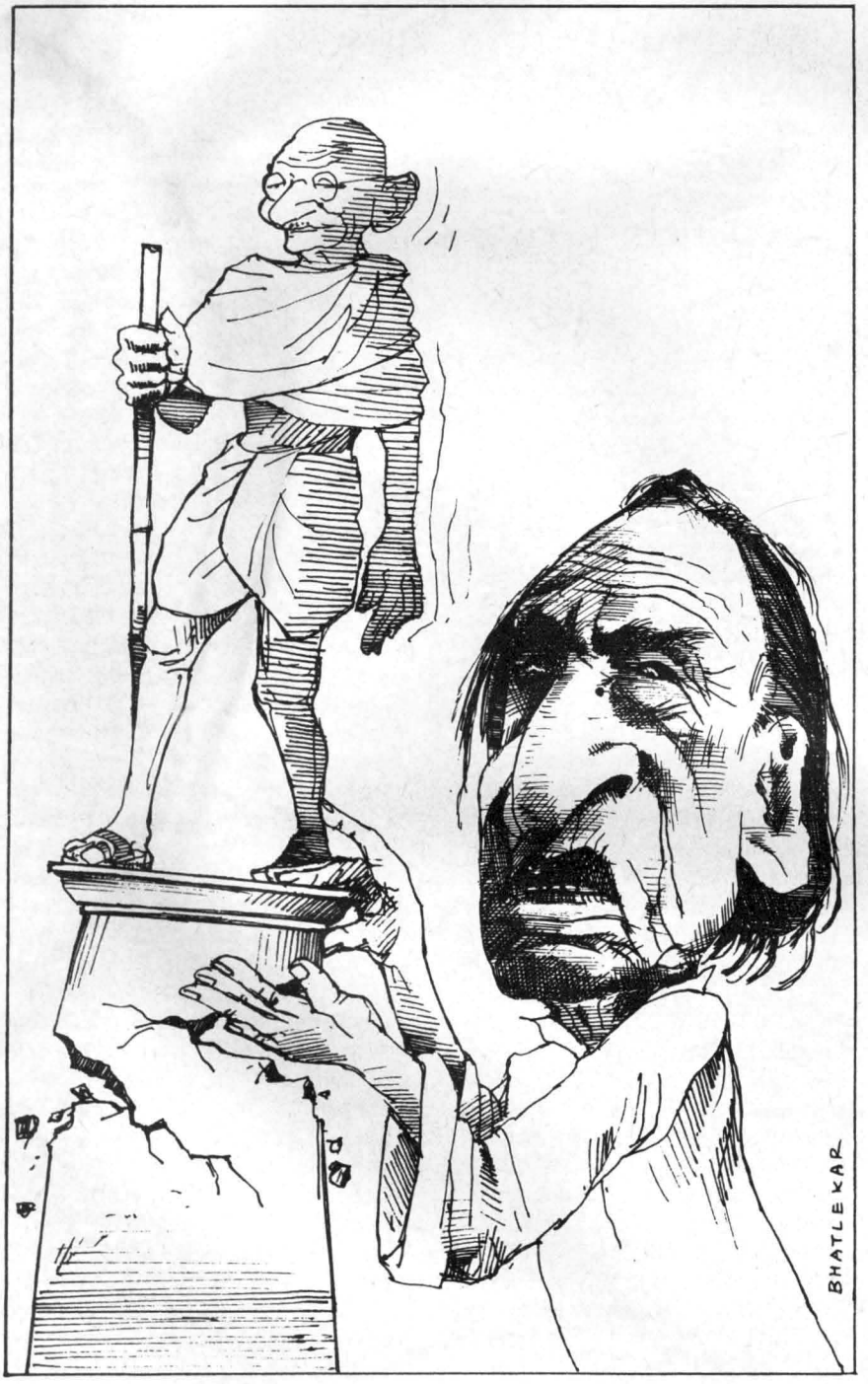
Moreover, secret correspondence has appeared in print before: Arun Shourie does this all the time. Finally we considered the spirit of the Act: were we divulging state secrets? Could any foreign power benefit from these disclosures? Nani Palkhivala had already told Arun that the Act was open to interpretation.

In the light of all this, we decided to go ahead. The interest the article has aroused, the discussions in Parliament and the wide publicity the disclosures have received, suggest that we acted in the public interest. It will be a shame if the rest of the book is prevented from appearing.

— *Vir Sanghvi*

GANDHI DEFENDED

Following our reprint of Arthur Koestler's attack on Mahatma Gandhi, we also reprint JB Kriplani's rebuttal.



I DO NOT BLAME ARTHUR Koestler for his misunderstanding of Gandhi's basic thought. There are obvious difficulties, unless one tries to understand it in its spirit and in its comprehensiveness. This becomes more difficult in the case of a person, whose knowledge of India and the conditions under which Indians lived under British imperial domination is not adequate. I am afraid Koestler believes in the benevolent character of British imperialism or at least he thinks that it was not as bad as that of other countries, capitalist, fascist or communist. This is natural for one who had to suffer under the barbaric tyranny of Hitler.

Gandhi was not a theoretician or an intellectual in the academic sense of the term. He did not work in libraries and museums to study the literature on the subject he treated. He placed the idea of home-spun and home-woven cloth before the nation to provide work for the unemployed and the semi-employed in the villages of India.

However, he did not work out all the implications of decentralised industry in economic terms of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services, etc. He did not discuss it from the point of view of the theory of value. He merely kept before the nation what he thought would be a suitable occupation for the agriculturist in India, who had leisure at least for three months in the year, when agricultural operations were not possible. He had to be provided work for these months. It had to be provided in his home or village. It had to be whole-time work which would give him the customary wages in the village or part-time work which would enable him to supplement his meagre income from agriculture.

Gandhi knew that the Swadeshi

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

movement of using cloth manufactured in India, consequent to the Bengal partition agitation had failed, because the politicians relied on Indian mill-agents for its supply. No effort was made to increase the production. He, therefore, did not rely upon the textile mill-agents but wanted the villagers to produce their own cloth for use or for the market.

There is yet another difficulty in understanding Gandhi, created by the language he used. It was not the language of the learned or the sophisticated, but that of the market place and of the common people. For instance, he called the Supreme Deity by the name of Ram, a semi-mythical and semi-historical person, considered by the Hindus as the incarnation of God. This was the name used for him by millions of his countrymen. Gandhi, like other reformers of old, did not want to shake the faith by which the common people lived. He, however, took care to state that the Ram of his conception was not the husband of Sita or the son of Dashrath, but 'the One who resides in every human heart and pervades the universe!' Again, he called as 'sin' every activity that he considered as harmful to the nation. The practise of untouchability was a sin; wearing foreign cloth was a sin; going to the foreign educational institutions was a sin, etc. It was fortunate that in his view these sins were not mortal but venial, they altered with circumstances, and they became innocent or inevitable activities.

But this was not so in the eyes of his orthodox followers. I was living near Gandhi's *ashram* at Sabarmati. A saintly brother of mine was living with me. He did not wear khadi, the hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. I asked a senior member of the *ashram*. "Am I to take him to be a sinner because he does not wear hand-made cloth? His character in every way is superior to mine." The reply was, "We have to create this as a new sin." I said, "We have sins enough, why add to them?"

Like every reformer or inventor of a new idea, who wants to convert people, Gandhi often overstated its value. He sometimes stated it as constituting the core of his reform. He would say that in the *charkha*, the spinning wheel, lay *Swaraj*, independence of India. But on that account, he did not abandon his movement of resistance to foreign role or work for the removal of untouchability, or for communal unity etc. I once had a talk with him about an eminent personality in the freedom fight. Gandhi was praising him beyond measure. I asked him, "Bapu, does exaggeration not amount to untruth?" Quick came the reply, "But I believe in what I have said." I was taken aback. How could a man of his intelligence be unaware of the shortcomings of his co-workers. But this self-deception, *maya*, as the Hindus call it, often blinds the reformer to reality.

Gandhi in his last days recognised this fact when he said that he had been living in the illusion, that his countrymen had really accepted his concept of non-violence! Every prophet, reformer or revolutionary suffers from this illusion or *maya*, or else he would not be able to convert people and fulfil his mission.

To begin with, the author quotes what Sarojini said of Gandhi's poverty: "It takes a good deal of money to keep Bapu in poverty." The poetess had the freedom to make such a flippant remark as the writer himself says. But I have seen Gandhi living for years on food which would not cost more than a couple of pence per meal. After years, due to the condition of his health, the doctors prevailed upon him to take milk, as he would not take meat or eggs. He then took goat's milk. Goat is the least costly milch animal available in India. It could easily be procured wherever he went in India. He took a litre and a half of milk daily, with boiled vegetables and a couple of wafer-thin *chapatis*.

Gandhi only objected to the craze for 'labour saving' machinery.

None of his companions and followers took this kind of tasteless food. It is true that, as years passed by, and he came to be known as a Mahatma (the writer may not know) to his annoyance and great inconvenience, he had to travel constantly. He was accompanied by half a dozen or more persons needed for his work. Some of them had fanciful fads in diet which would be irksome to the host. But the ladies who served them did not mind the inconvenience. For them it was a loving service. By the way, it may interest Koestler to know that I never called Gandhi 'Mahatma', but Bapu or Gandhiji. Sarojini was perhaps referring to the expenditure of the party and not personally on Gandhi.

The writer has also talked of the special third class compartment the railway authorities reserved for him and his party, late in Gandhi's life. This was done not for his comfort or convenience but that of other passengers in the train. Large crowds collected at every station at all hours of the day and night. The ordinary passengers found it difficult to get in and out of the compartment, with their baggage. Trains could not keep to time. If the writer had any knowledge of India and the crowds that gathered to have the *darshan*, a look at this strange man, their leader, he would not have mentioned the special compartment reserved for him and his party. The compartment was attached to the end of the train.

Let us first take the question of Gandhi's advocacy of hand-made cloth and other cottage and village industries. The question should not be confused with whether such industrial production is modern, that is, whether it is produced through big machines, mills and factories. The question here is whether it provided remunerative work to our agriculturists and increased national production and wealth. The agriculturist had leisure hanging on his hands. He was consuming food. Whatever little he produced in his leisure time, would be so much wealth produced that would be useful to him and the nation. Thus Gandhi was merely trying to utilise the waste of the nation. He did not want people having whole-time remunerative jobs to leave these and to take to the spinning wheel or the loom.

When an Indian socialist asked him whether he was against the use of machinery and large-scale production, he said, "I never said that. The belief is one of the many superstitions about me .... Your question is based upon loose newspaper reports. What I am against is large-scale production of

things villagers can produce without difficulty." Again, he says, "How can I be against machinery when I know that even this body is the most delicate machine .... What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is .... for 'labour saving' machinery. Men go on saving labour till thousands are without work and thrown on open streets to die of starvation." Further, he says, "The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not make atrophied the limbs of man."

Also, he says, "I do visualise electricity, ship-building, iron-works, machine-making and the like existing side by side with village crafts. But the order of precedence will be reversed. Hitherto, industrialisation has been so planned as to destroy the villages and the village handicrafts. In the state of the future it will subserve the villages and their crafts. I do not believe as the socialists believe that the centralisation of the necessities of life will conduce to the common welfare, when centralised industries are planned and owned by the state."

Twenty-two years after Independence, when India has put up huge steel plants at enormous expense and suffered heavy losses, it has not been able to tackle the problem of unemployment. After the completion of every five-year plan, the backlog of unemployment has been on the increase. The real wages in the villages and work have diminished, according to official estimates. It is only now that the authorities have begun to talk of small-scale industries and agriculture. Even at this time, India will gain and not lose, by having an economy that is job-oriented.

Koestler criticises Gandhi for the burning of foreign cloth and quotes poet Rabindranath Tagore in this respect. He dismisses Gandhi's reply to the poet as irrelevant. There can be, of course, two opinions about the burning of foreign cloth. But supposing a person gives up the drink habit, what is he to do with a few bottles in his cellar? Is he to pass on what he considers bad for himself, to his neighbour who drinks? Nobody would doubt the answer to this question. Also, Gandhi did not want to pass on to the poor what had been rejected by the rich. It was the latter who were burning their costly clothes. They could well afford to give to the poor cheap new clothes if they so wished.

The writer has pointed out that the poet Rabindranath Tagore protested against the reason given by Gandhi for the great sufferings of the people of Bihar due to the terrible earthquake of 1934. Gandhi had said that the Biharis suffered this calamity for the sin of untouchability. This was interpreted as if Gandhi had said that the earthquake was caused by the sin of Biharis and not by geological causes. This was obviously not his meaning. A physical phenomena results in physical changes. But when it causes human suffering, it is not uncommon for men to seek some psychological reason. The physical happening may only be the occasion of suffering. It could not be its efficient and real cause. Supposing one brick falls on another, one or both may break; but there is no suffering involved. Gandhi was, of course, wrong in assigning a particular psychological reason, the practice of untouchability, for the pain suffered by the Biharis occasioned by the earthquake.

Gandhi's ideas about disease and cure are stated in extreme terms.

Gandhi's ideas about disease and cure are stated in extreme terms which may appear absurd. But more and more are the practitioners of modern medicine accepting the idea that 'Prevention is better than cure'. How can this prevention be brought about except through regulation in food, drink, mode of acting and living, etc. It is also a fact that often people indulge in excess and then to avoid their evil consequences, they use countervailing drugs. Thus drugs become a kind of escape from the result of excesses.

The writer cannot understand how Gandhi made Jawaharlal his political heir in spite of differences in their outlook. Gandhi usually exaggerated the virtues of his co-workers and minimised the faults of his opponents (enemy he had none). He once called Rajagopalachari his 'political conscience', but nobody mentions that today. He gave the title of *Dinabandhu* (friend of the poor) to Andrews.

Gandhi knew that Jawaharlal did not agree with him on many matters, but he also knew that he, Jawaharlal, was a brave and fearless fighter. It was this fight that Jawaharlal was to carry on. Only in that sense Jawaharlal was to be his heir.

Moreover, Gandhi was not the Prime Minister of India to nominate Jawaharlal as his successor. Even if he were, he was too good a democrat to appoint a successor. Gandhi also said that though Jawaharlal disagreed with him in life, he would speak his language after his death. Whether Jawaharlal spoke Gandhi's language after his death, I leave it to others to judge.

The writer criticises Gandhi for the neglect of the education of his sons. He admitted the charge. But, considering the condition of India, Gandhi's sons, through their home education and their participation in the political struggle in South Africa and then in India had a much better education than they could have had under the lifeless and aimless system of education imposed on the country by the foreigners.

After all, with whatever education they had, did not one of the sons of Gandhi, Devadas, become the Managing Editor of the noted English daily, *The Hindustan Times*? Another edited a weekly in South Africa. I have never heard that Manilal was forced to live in South Africa as the writer says. He often came to India and could have remained here if he wanted. These two could not have edited papers in a foreign language without a good deal of education. Maybe they did not attend educational institutions. But, is education acquired only through schools, colleges and universities? Some of the greatest men in the world had no such education!

The eldest son wanted to be a barrister like Gandhi, whose earnings were used mostly for the service of the poor. If he did not consent to give his son an expensive education he can hardly be blamed. However, Harilal, after coming to India engaged himself in commerce and was doing well enough. But he ruined his business and his life by excessive drink. When out of his cups, like others addicted to drink, he was a likable person. Gandhi issued a

statement declaring that he had nothing to do with his son. This was done as he was exploiting his name. Even so, Gandhi's friends did try to help him, whenever he was in trouble. The children of the great have many advantages. They also have to suffer from some handicaps.

In the opinion of the writer, Gandhi's success was due to the fact that the British methods of repressing their opponents were less cruel than, those of the nazis, fascists and the communists. It is true that the British had not invented 'death chambers'.

Nevertheless, the violent revolutionaries in the Indian national movement for freedom were put down by the British authorities here with all the cruelty that was in vogue then. Those accused of political crimes were tortured to confess to crimes they had not committed. They were also through torture made to incriminate those whom the police wanted them to. Not only those convicted, but those who had committed no overt act but were merely suspects were severely punished.

Some people were convicted to seven years rigorous imprisonment for merely shouting *Bande Mataram* – salutation to Mother. Some prisoners accused of political crimes or even suspects were sent to Andamans, an island in the Indian ocean more than a thousand miles from the mainland. There they had to live a life no better than that described by Mr Koestler himself in his book *Darkness at Noon*. Many of them never returned.

It would appear that Koestler had never heard of the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in Amritsar.

Koestler's views in respect of the tyranny of British rule in India are coloured by the assumption that the freedom-loving British, with democratic traditions, were ruling India. This is not a fact. India was being governed by British bureaucrats, 'the men on the spot'. They came for a few years and went back. When not amassing wealth, they covered themselves with the glory of having laboured to save the Empire at great personal sacrifice. They were not allowed to settle in India. They were conditioned to consider the Indian people as an inferior and degenerate race.

Indian food, dress, manners, etc were inferior to those of the British. The Englishman would on the hottest day wear a suit of warm clothes, stiff collar and woollen socks! He would not come in contact with the Indians lest his strong character be adversely affected in association with a decadent people. No Englishman could marry an Indian woman. He despised the Indian way of life. He had contempt for those who stuck to the old Indian ways. He ridiculed those who slavishly copied his ways. No Englishman could commit a crime against an Indian. If he was found troublesome he was given a free passage home. If an Englishman murdered an Indian it was all accidental. Indians had such enlarged livers and spleens that a kick from an Englishman killed them.

The best of Indians were considered inferior to the Englishmen of doubtful character. British imperialism had degraded a whole race of men. They lived in constant fear in their own land. Fear is the greatest enemy of mankind.

To say that Gandhi was using Manu as a 'guinea pig' is absurd.

We have said earlier that the Indian nation suffered from fear. Gandhi, by his non-violent movement, took away this fear from the hearts of Indians. They were no more afraid, because they had nothing to conceal in a non-violent, open, rebellion. When charged with sedition they did not deny the charge and cheerfully marched to jail. Even urchins in the streets could shout at the Englishman's face that his government was 'satanic' and that it was their national *dharma*, duty, to resist and destroy it. May I submit to the writer that if Gandhi's movement did nothing else for India but only made Indians fearless, he would have worked a miracle in the life of the nation for which his countrymen would feel ever great friends.

The learned writer has touched on various other aspects of Gandhiji's life and teachings for his criticism. I cannot correct his misconceptions on all these. But I cannot leave untouched a topic which has confused not only the Westerners but many people in India, including some of Gandhi's close associates.

This is about his sex experiments in the last year of his life, carried on in Noakhali (Bengal). What Gandhi did is not something unknown in India. The perfect *Yogi*, the man of realisation, is one who even when 'his senses are moving in the objects of the senses' remains untouched and unaffected by them. In that attitude of mind was Arjuna asked by Sri Krishna in the *Geeta* to do his duty as a soldier without incurring sin.

The sex urge in man is the most primitive and the most powerful to subdue. It has come to us from the vegetable kingdom. This demand of the flesh is to be conquered by the aspiring soul. Hindu mythology tells of great *rishis* and saints falling prey to this primitive urge. Gandhi wanted to see if he was free from it.

To say that he was using a young lady as a 'guinea pig' is, I think, absurd.

Young Manu was old enough to refuse compliance. I don't think she ever felt sorry or ashamed of it in the years that followed. Koestler's pity for this 'guinea pig' is misplaced.

According to present-day psychology, as far as I know, absolute control of the sex urge, leads to pathological and psychological imbalance. This is perhaps natural. Those who in modern times try to suppress the sex urge generally do it in isolation. The Hindus believe that one cannot control this urge if one eats stimulating foods, reads sex literature, visits theatres and dramas where sex is the predominant note. Doing all these things, one can remain a bachelor but not a *brahmachari*. Also one may find it psychologically harmful.

However, I do not expect Koestler to appreciate the Hindu view of *Brahmacharya*. All that I would submit is that neither Western physiology, medicine, nor psychology has fathomed the depth and the ramifications of the sex urge and the means of its control as did the ancient seers, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Christian. Only, they did not systematise their knowledge.

I must, however, agree with Koestler that there is a great deal more of hypocrisy among the Hindus than is good for them. ♦

International Intelligence

A Monthly Look at the Events and Personalities Behind the News

BRIEFINGATE

Reagan And The Stolen Papers

Former US President Jimmy Carter.

NOBODY IN WASHINGTON is quite sure whether the row over the purloined Carter briefing papers is going to fade away. Current speculation has it that Reagan has finally curtailed the fall-out from the disclosure that during the 1980 campaign, his aides stole Jimmy Carter's briefing papers. But then, that is what they said about Watergate in 1972 when Richard Nixon defeated George McGovern despite the initial bugging revelations.

Strangely enough, the story first 'broke' in 1980 itself. Its source was David Stockman, now Budget Director in the Reagan Cabinet—the Subramaniam Swamy of American politics; a man who cannot keep his mouth shut. Addressing an obscure club in the small Michigan town of Cassopolis he recounted how during rehearsals for the debate with Carter, he (Stockman) had played the part of Carter. He knew what Carter was going to say, he explained, because he had been shown a copy of a 'pilfered' Carter campaign document (a briefing book!). Stockman's stoutly Middle American audience loved the anecdote and a reporter from the local paper (*The Elkhart Truth*) printed it. Another local paper, *The Dowagiac News* reprinted the story but as its circulation is 3,700 nobody noticed it.

In 1981, Laurence Barrett, White House Correspondent for *Time* heard of the stolen briefing book and wrote about it. His editor spiked the story. Barrett tried again and the story was spiked a second time. Finally Barrett gave up, only referring to the pilferage in passing in his book on the first year of the Reagan administration.

POLITICAL ESPIONAGE

It was after the book appeared earlier this year, that the story began to take off. Disgruntled members of the Carter White House (including pollster Pat Cadell and former Press Secretary Jody Powell) drew attention to it and both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* prominently featured the 'disclosure'. An obscure Congressman Don Albosta began drawing parallels with Watergate and an unnamed collector of political memorabilia came forward to give *The Washington Post* some documents he had found in a dustbin outside the Reagan campaign headquarters in 1980. Among them was one that referred to a Reagan 'mole' in the Carter White House.

How serious is the 'revelation'? Many political observers believe that the purloining was no more than 'routine political espionage'. But there is a contrary view. The Carter-Reagan debate was crucial to the campaign. Carter came across as tense and asinine ("I asked my daughter Amy what the world's problems were. . .") while Reagan was cheerful and relaxed. Everytime Carter launched into an attack on a Reagan policy, the older man would chuckle, "Oh, there you go again!" *almost as though he knew in advance what Carter was going to say.*

If Reagan had prior knowledge of Carter's debating strategy, then the result of the debate was indeed, a foregone conclusion. And, considering how crucial the debate was to the campaign, the theft of the briefing book was no minor matter.

NEW DISCLOSURES

As the disclosures continue to emerge, more mud has stuck to the Reagan image. Was there really a mole in the Carter White House? Did Reagan always have advance knowledge of what the Carter camp was going to do? If this turns

James Baker.

out to have been the case, then there are troubling parallels with Watergate.

Also under fire is the role of Conservative columnist George Will, well-known to

David Stockman : playing at being Carter.

Indian readers of the international edition of *Newsweek*. Will, it transpires, took part in the now notorious rehearsal for the debate (in which Stockman played Carter). He helped the former actor learn his lines and polished his performance for him. Yet, after the debate he appeared on a TV talk show where he made no mention of his role in Reagan's preparation and presumed to offer an 'objective commentary' on the debate. Predictably, Will thought that Reagan had been far superior to Carter.

Will has been criticized on two scores. If Will had participated in an exercise based on stolen documents, then his behaviour seems morally unsound. Moreover, was it not hypocritical of him to have played enthusiastic Reagan aide before the debate, and then switched to playing objective journalist afterwards?

Casey : embarrassed by the controversy.

EMBARRASSING CONTROVERSY

Among the others embarrassed by this Briefingate controversy is William Casey, the CIA Director. The documents referring to a mole in the Carter White House are addressed to Casey (who was then Reagan's campaign manager); and James Baker, the present White House Chief of Staff, who now admits to having seen purloined Carter papers, claims that Casey showed them to him. For his part, Casey denies all wrongdoing. So does former National Security Adviser, Richard Allen, who while admitting to having handled some Carter documents says that they were mailed to him by 'an anonymous well-wisher'. David Gergen, Communications Director in the White House who had earlier denied having seen any stolen papers has also changed his story. Rendering his earlier denial inoperative, in a manner worthy of Ronald Ziegler, Gergen now says that while searching through his files he has indeed turned up some Carter campaign material that must have been originally filched.

Ronald Reagan.

Allen : denies wrongdoing.

As the non-denial denials mount up, it seems clear (at this point in time) that Carter documents were stolen and that the Reagan campaign team had a pretty good idea what Carter was up to. But the central questions remain: did the thieving make any difference? Would Carter have won if Reagan had played by the book (rather than a lot of stolen books, of course)?

It is difficult to sustain the claim that the stolen documents turned the tide. Judging by Reagan's landslide victory, he would have won anyhow. But then, how much difference did Watergate make? Wouldn't Nixon have won anyhow? Is an immoral act any more defensible becuse it was unnecessary? ◆

TENNIS CORRUPTION

Payoffs And Ripoffs

IN A BOOK just published [Short Circuit by Michael Mewshaw is published by Collins at £10.95 (hardback) and £5.95 (paperback)] an American author who spent six months following the men's professional circuit, claims to have uncovered cases of illegal guarantees, the splitting of prize money and arranging of exhibition matches, betting on results among the players, accusations of drug abuse, preferential treatment for the stars, business deals between tournament directors and umpires and 'tanking'–the deliberate throwing of a match.

For his painstaking research and his pains, Mewshaw was punched in the mouth by an irate tournament director at this year's Italian Open.

In Antibes, Mewshaw turned up an umpire willing to talk about what went on behind the scenes ('He stressed he wouldn't talk unless I guaranteed him anonymity').

"He told me of umpires who routinely accepted gifts and entertainment and who let tournament directors set them up with women. 'This is a business, a multi-million dollar international business. People don't give things away free. . .the guy that gives it expects something in return.

" 'Some umpires get so friendly with the tournament directors, maybe they're not even aware of what they're doing. Maybe it's unconscious but it looks bad. For all I know it could be collusion because umpires have so many side deals going. Some of them are buying cars–expensive automobiles–at terrific discounts through tournament directors. After that, how can they be independent?' "

QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES

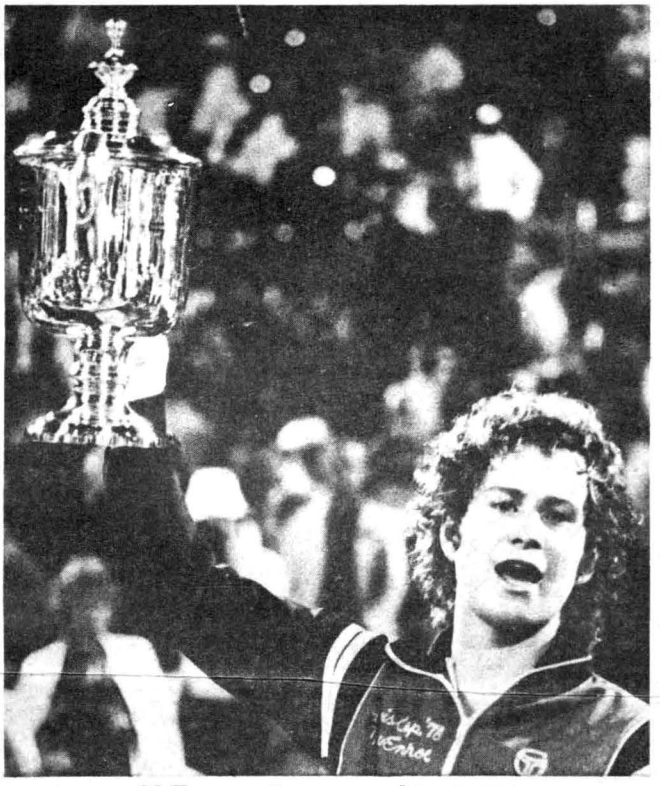
Mewshaw then asked the umpire about other questionable practices in the sport, particularly about 'splits' where players agree to divide the first and second place prize money *before* they play the final.

After confirming that this happened, mostly in exhibition matches the umpire revealed that players would split sets as well.

" 'They split sets in exhibitions too! The promoter wants a longer match, more excitement. And if it's on TV he has a time-slot to fill. He'll ask the players to split the first two sets and play an honest third set.'

"He cited an example from direct experience. Several years ago, he had been scheduled to officiate at the finals of an eight-man round robin. Beforehand, in the locker room, he said he had listened, dumbfounded, as two of the game's biggest names discussed how they would orchestrate the match. One would win the first set, the other would take the second, then they'd fight out the third set.

"The final had followed the scenario down to the last detail. 'I sat up in the chair,' said the umpire, 'feeling sick. But what could I say? I just happened to overhear what I shouldn't have heard. Thank God it was only an exhibition.'



McEnroe : given unequal treatment.

OTHER ABUSES

"This was one of those distinctions which tennis people always insist upon, but which eludes me," writes Mewshaw. "Exhibitions are frequently televised and reported in the newspapers as if they were legitimate matches. What's more, they are often hyped as Challenge Cups, Shoot-Outs, Grudge Duels, decisive encounters between players determined to prove they're number one."

Other abuses on the circuit are less easy to pin down, though Yannick Noah admitted drug involvement in an interview with a French magazine and Mewshaw produced the fascinating theory that some players sniff cocaine from their wristbands during matches.

The thing which is currently annoying other players on the circuit more than any other is the preferential treatment accorded the top names. Typical was the comment of Vince Van Patten, a likeable American who currently stands 65th in the world ranking. "When there are close calls, the top players are always going to get the benefit of the doubt," said Van Patten.

"Until people are interested in seeing good tennis, not just stars, you know they're never going to default a guy like McEnroe because if they do, then they don't have a tournament. It's not like football or some other team sport where even if you kick out a star player people still want to watch."

UNEQUAL TREATMENT

The same complaint was levelled against McEnroe in Dallas recently by the Czech, Tomas Smid, after an acrimonious match in which he was warned about his behaviour and McEnroe was not.

Interest–and money available–has mushroomed since tennis went out in 1968 and too many tournaments are now chasing too few stars. Hence guarantees.

"Appearance money is a response to the laws of sup-

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Deep fawn, sand beige, black coffee, tawny brown... suiting colours this season have a natural appeal. A subtle fawn suiting with a nifty twill stripe is perfect for this single-breasted, 2-piece suit with two buttons. The jacket has a centre slit and 9 cm. wide lapels.

A pale beige shirt is teamed with a red kerchief, set off with brown shoes and socks. The fabric? Raymond's. Perfectly fashioned for the occasion.

FASHION GUIDE

EARTHY COLOURS

FIT FOR THE OCCASION

Suits always look better on a slimmer figure. A simple way to shape up: eat smaller portions and refuse second helpings. Try to walk briskly every day for at least 30 minutes. Avoid loud colours, clingy fabrics, flashy styles.

ALL TIED UP

Ties are slimmer — never wider than 9 cms. at the blade. A tiny insignia may make a reserved statement. While a dashing yet well-behaved stripe adds a new dimension to corporate dressing.

OFF THE CUFF

Cufflinks are back, adding a personal signature to your individual style. Especially in vogue is real jewellery: gold with a spark of diamond, solid silver. In classic, neat shapes and designs: slim rectangles, perfect squares.

COME CLEAN

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ply and demand," Mewshaw was told by Arthur Ashe, the 1975 Wimbledon champion, Pro Council member and one of the most respected voices in tennis. "Tournaments know the top players are worth more than the prize money they're offered.

"Top players get better treatment, unequal treatment. It was that way in my day. It's worse now. The stars are protected and all the players know it. There's collusion between some tournament directors and some umpires. Umpires are ordered not to discipline stars."

The recent history of tennis is littered with examples of umpires who have paid the price for firmness. At the 1976 Master finals in Houston Jack Stahr disqualified Raul Ramirez for persistent misconduct. Stahr was overruled by the tournament organisers and Ramirez was reinstated. At the US Open in 1979 Frank Hammond defaulted Ilie Nastase in a match against John McEnroe. Hammond was removed from the chair and Nastase allowed to finish the match.

TIMELY CHANGE

Mewshaw concludes his timely book: "Of course, if tennis were merely burlesque and no more, it wouldn't be worth saving; it could be allowed to decay and die. But it has the new vitality and the ancient traditions, the attractive personnel, the sheer excitement and symmetrical beauty to be much more than vaudeville. And its reform would not take years of study. . .Nor would it cost millions of dollars. Professional tennis could be completely changed in a matter of weeks if it had the courage and decency to enforce the rules it has already written for itself."

Since those words were written tennis has bestirred itself. Before imposing total fines of £3,350 on McEnroe for misconduct at the French Open, Marshall Happer, the man in charge of administering the Pro Council's new Code of Conduct, promised, "We are about to see a change. The boat is going to have to be rocked."

Within two weeks came the year's suspension of Guillermo Vilas. It will be fascinating to see whether the Pro Council can make it stick and if tennis can once more wear white without a blush. ♦

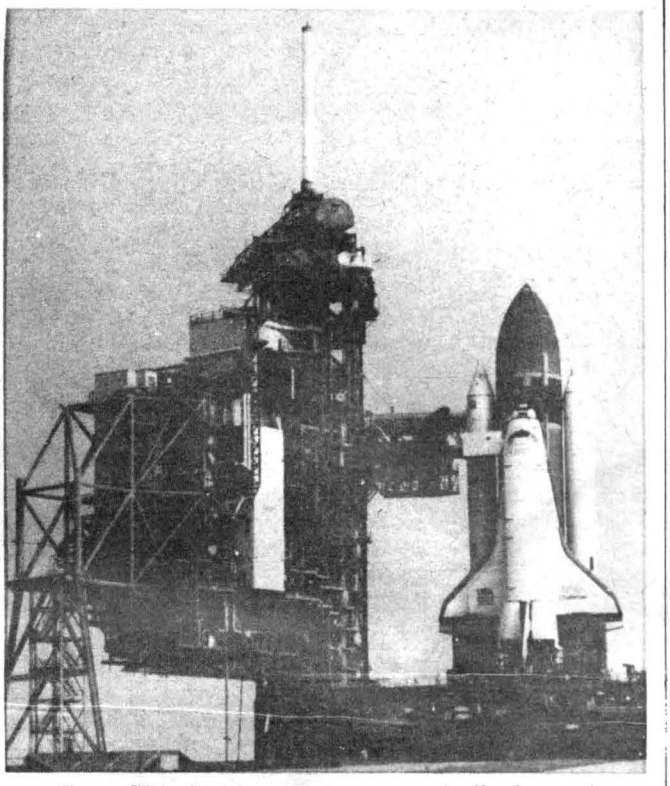
WASHINGTON LETTER

Sally Rides The Space Shuttle

THE NEXT SPACE Shuttle carries a black astronaut in place of the gimmick in the last shuttle—Dr Sally Ride. Thus Reagan will have gone out of his way—indeed out of the earth's atmosphere—to genuflect towards the two big groups from whom he is most estranged.

These newsworthy events might have tended to obscure a more interesting story about the Space Shuttle programme. In one important respect it is a shambles.

When it was first mooted, the idea was this: a rocket would carry the shuttle-craft into space from the Kennedy Space Centre at Cape Canaveral. When its mission was completed the gliding craft would then re-enter the earth's atmosphere and land at a specially constructed runway at the Cape.



Space Shuttle programme : economically doomed.

The alternative—landing it at Edwards Air Force Base in the California desert—is time wasting and expensive. The Edwards AFB, with its vast dry lake-bed surface, was to be used initially to test the craft's landing capabilities. These have now been proved.

Last month's mission, the seventh, was meant to return to the Cape. But poor weather forced a return to Edwards. Which means that future Shuttle flights will again be delayed by the time that it takes to prepare and transport the craft 3,000 miles across the country on the back of a special NASA Boeing 747.

NASA officials pretend publicly that this is a minor setback. In fact, it was the subject of a furious and unreported row between the shuttle director, General James Abrahamson and controllers at the Johnson Space Centre, in Houston.

Abrahamson, with a party of VIPs that was to have included Reagan and Nancy before they cancelled out, was at the Cape. He wanted Shuttle number seven to land there. Houston controllers argued for Edwards after adverse weather conditions were reported in Florida and they won.

The question which has not been raised in the Press here, force-fed as it is on NASA hand outs, is this: can the Shuttle ever rely on a landing at the Cape, with its one-runway facilities and dodgy weather ? If it can't, the whole multibillion dollar programme is economically doomed.

America's production of space centres—in Florida, Texas, California, Alabama and New Mexico—symbolise an ancient discipline which lies at the heart of politics here: pork-barrelling.

As soon as any major public project is mooted, American politicians use

their votes to vie for a slice of the cake in their own state. The space programme still pays out millions of bucks to the area lucky enough to have been chosen for one of the NASA facilities.

Florida and the Cape are great for launching rockets. The sub-equatorial location ensures an extra 700 mph boost from the earth's own rotation and a huge ocean down range in case of post launch accidents. But it is becoming clear that, for much of the year, its freakish weather makes it unsuitable for landings. One Florida shower of rain on landing approach would, it is calculated, strip every heat tile off the Shuttle.

NASA continues to baffle American newsmen with high tech and showbiz, especially the latter. Meanwhile, realists here are pointing out that the hated French, with their simple, unmanned satellite-carrying Arianne rocket—no blacks, no women, no gays—might end up wiping out America in the race to fill space with peeping-tom devices and other junk. ♦

EXPOSING THE M15
A Matter Of Trust

LAST OCTOBER IN London, legal lightning struck 31-year-old Rupert Allason. Under the pseudonym Nigel West, Allason had written but not yet published a book called *A Matter of Trust*, a history of M15, the British counterintelligence agency from 1945-72. A copy of the manuscript found its way to M15. Britain's attorney general quickly persuaded the High Court of Justice to enjoin publication. A government affidavit asserted the story told by Allason (West) could only have come from M15 officers and dealt with 'incidents, operations, investigations and other matters which have not previously been made public.'

RING OF FIVE

A few months later, after Allason agreed to deletion of a few names and specifics dealings with Soviet spies roosting at the 'top of the intelligence tree' in Britain, the book was published. The intervention of Her Majesty's government had struck Allason with literary as well as legal lightning. Thanks to the publicity, the book has become a bestseller in Britain. Now, as *The Circus*, the exposé has just appeared in a less censored American edition. Allason has been travelling about the States promoting it.

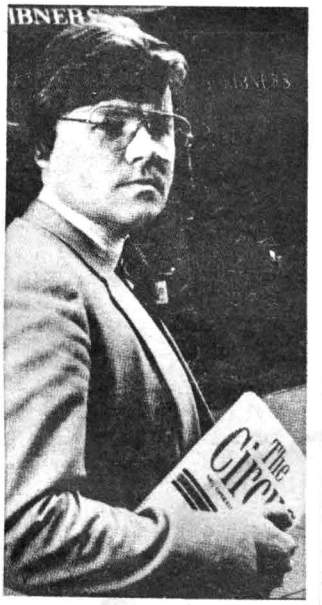
Says Allason, "The diligent reader can ascertain that a former director-general and deputy director-general of M15 were the subjects of investigation as possible Soviet 'moles'. Since the end of World War II—in which, incidentally, M15 performed superbly—the agency appears to have protected far more Soviet agents than it ever caught. It did, in fact, according to Allason, uncover on its own only one small-fry spy during the entire postwar period. Meanwhile it failed to uncover and quite possibly even warned those high-placed British Foreign Service officers and others who constituted the most intellectually distinguished ring of traitors in history: Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Harold (Kim) Philby and John Cairncross.

Four members of what the KGB calls the 'Ring of Five'. And who was number five? There are many candidates: British governmental and business institutions seem to possess a real genius for turning out spear-carriers vulnerable to the promise of a KGB commission, a few pounds or the intimacy of one sex or another in 'honeytrap' stings routinely arranged by the KGB. Once compromised, most of the KGB's British subjects more or less promptly and patriotically reported in to M15, which assigned them professional case officers to control their spying for the Soviets. That, as it turns out, is precisely what the KGB expected all along. Once having learned the identities of the case officers, the KGB then made overtures to them—the true targets. Belatedly, M15 learned that at least five of its case officers had been approached by the KGB. But not one—for fear of revealing that his cover had been blown—ever reported the matter to a superior. How many British intelligence agents the KGB actually 'turned' is guesswork, but Allason believes that there were many more than five.

ABYSMAL RECORD

Allason readily concedes that all the world's intelligence agencies occasionally get penetrated by their opponents. William Hood, former CIA counterintelligence officer, once said, "Any intelligence officer who assumes his service is penetration-proof is ignorant of intelligence history."

But the British record, Allason says, is simply abysmal. Why? Allason, Rebecca West, John le Carré (himself, as David John Moore Cornwell, of M15) and other British writers and intellectuals have grappled with the question over the years. 'Peacetime' espionage in Britain is far from a capital offence; when one spy was sentenced



Rupert Allason.

to 42 years (most get off with single-digit terms) his punishment generally was thought excessive. That leniency, however, merely reflects values of the British elite. One theory has it that such elitists as Burgess, Maclean and Philby, mourning the decline of the Empire of their youth, found in the Soviet Union their new Empire and their rightful place in it. Another theory traces the treason virus to the contempt, among certain Britishers, of all things American, particularly America's relatively classless egalitarianism; in the Soviet Union, by contrast, workers have their place, elitists have theirs and the mannered, disguised British contempt of one class for another does not exist. Russians may be cynical about their rulers but hardly hate them.

And as cynical as the Soviets are toward their own burdened and belaboured system, they are surely not stupid. The sheer ease with which they have manipulated the wealthy and privileged in British society provides evidence enough of that. Allason is giving us a lesson and it is very simple: Never understimate the other guy. ♦

The Expatriates

MAHMUD SIPRA:

A New Asian Millionaire

THIS HAS BEEN THE YEAR OF MAHMUD Sipra. In 1982 only a handful of people in India had heard of Sipra. But by early 1983 that had begun to change. *Asian Post*, a glossy newsmagazine for overseas Asians published from London, put him on its cover in March. 'Sipra: Shipping's Whiz Kid', the blurb screamed. The story dubbed him the new 'Ravi Tikoo' and went on to rave about his immense wealth, his business acumen, his homes in three continents, his racehorses, his suits, his butler and even his aftershave ('*Arrogance* made specially for him in New York from a Swiss formula').

Copies of that issue found their way to India and some curiosity was aroused. Everyone had heard of Tikoo, but who was Sipra? Three months later, he was back in the news. He was producing an English language film called *Pawn To King Three* and had cast, in addition to Omar Sharif, Peter Ustinov and Nastassia Kinski, Shashi Kapoor and Salma Agha.

The following month, Sipra returned to the film magazines, this time as Salma Agha's constant escort and fiance. Not only was he rich and successful, but if photographs of the couple were to be believed, he was young, presentable and debonair.

By now, he had set the press buzzing. Who was Mahmud Sipra? Is Salma leading him on? *Cine Blitz* breathlessly demanded. Wasn't he just like (another expatriate millionaire) Nirmal Sethia? *Gentleman* asked. What will he do next? *Movie* wondered. And the *Sunday Observer* simply reproduced the *Asian Post*'s Ravi Tikoo analogy. Despite the gossip and the speculation, the central questions remained. Was Sipra really as rich as was made out? What conceivable interest could a shipping magnate have in films? Did he, in fact, own the *Post*, whose story had set the ball rolling? What it boiled down to really was: who is Mahmud Sipra?

Lounging easily in an over-stuffed sofa in a two-bedroom suite at Bombay's Sea Rock Hotel, Sipra seems a little taken aback by all the speculation and gossip. Dressed simply in a Pathan-style outfit, he seems the antithesis of his own pre-publicity. He is young (40), but an air of youthfulness makes him seem even younger. Slim and of medium height, he bears an uncanny resemblance to journalist Dilip Thakore (who edits *Business World*) and plays down his

This is the first part of a new, regular series on expatriate Asians. It will focus mainly on those who have attained success in Europe and America.

affluence. The jetsetting playboy of the *Post*'s story is nowhere in view and in this context, it is difficult to see him in his Moorish castle or imagine his 'gentleman's gentleman' (as the *Post* approvingly dubbed his butler) helping him into his Dior suit.

Sipra is in India to finalise the details of the casting of *Pawn To King Three*, and now that he is here, he seems to be considering making two Hindi films (with Salma) as well. He is not really aware of what the film magazines have written about him and after a relatively low-key existence ('my PR agency was paid to keep my name out of the papers') is a little apprehensive about the media attention.

He is clearly rich. How rich he will not say, but estimates of his personal wealth put him in the $20-25 million bracket. What is most astonishing about the fortune is that the money has all been made after 1974 and that in 1977, he nearly lost it all, teetered on the edge of bankruptcy and then, bounced back. Even by the standards of the expatriate Asians, the Murjanis, the Harilelas and the others, his is an amazing story.

It has its beginnings in Ranchi, where he was the only male offspring of an army officer. In 1946, the family shifted to Lahore and Sipra's earliest memories are of the trains full of refugees pulling into the Lahore Cantonment station during the bloodbaths of 1947. He grew up in Lahore and Karachi, rising to be some kind of school *dada*—the sort of chap who could fix anything but always came bottom of the class.

He dropped out of school before his Senior Cambridge examination and started out in advertising in Karachi when he was seventeen and a half. He made a good copy-writer and soon became Creative Director of SASA, one of the city's larger agencies. For two years, he also ran his own operation, Sipravon Advertising, (the appendage von is a private Punjabi joke) till financial difficulties closed it down.

Fortunately for Sipra, Pakistani television began to expand in 1967 and the ad agencies hunted around for film directors. "I took pains to learn how to make commercials and documentaries," he recalls, and by the end of it, he was one of the most sought after directors of commercials. This phase came to an end in late 1971 after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to power. As Sipra sees it, 'Bhutto opened the floodgates to hell' by dismantling a free enterprise system that was working reasonably well and resorting to persecuting individuals to advance his populist image.

Sipra's image was that of a jet setting playboy, with limitless resources. The whirlwind romance with Salma added to that image.

By 1972, Sipra had shifted to London. He had hoped to make commercials for British TV but found that without union membership, assignments were hard to come by. Finally, he began moonlighting. British directors would accept assignments and then, off the record, pass them on to him. It was an unsatisfactory way of doing things and finally, Sipra decided that he couldn't live on the earnings of one commercial every month and a half or so.

In March 1973, he crossed the Atlantic and landed in New York. It was, he remembers, a frightening place. Work was hard to come by and only the fear of going back to Pakistan as a failure prevented him from throwing in the towel: "I lived on ambition and adrenalin." Then, he had a stroke of luck. A division of the Interpublic advertising agency hired him to look after its Far Eastern interests and a few weeks later, the Simmons and Eden agency appointed him Vice President of its operations in the Far East. He shifted into a good flat, earned an annual salary of $40,000 and began to take the long leisurely lunches so beloved of advertising people.

It was after one such lunch that his job fell apart. He returned to his office (444, Madison Avenue) and was told that the Treasurer wanted to see him. He sensed at once, that something had gone wrong. The Treasurer was polite but business-like. Had Sipra noticed a form on his desk? Well, it was an appli-

cation form. Would he be good enough to fill it up there and then? And so he did, scribbling his name, date of birth, address and the like, till he came to the sections that asked for his alien registration number and his social security number. Did he know his numbers, enquired the Treasurer? Well, no said Sipra. He hadn't actually been allocated any such numbers.

"You son of a bitch! Are you crazy?" the Treasurer was shouting now. "Do you know that you could be deported? We could get into trouble for hiring an illegal immigrant!" He was, of course fired, and by the time he returned to his own office, it was almost as though he had never existed. His papers had been packed up and sent to his apartment, his name was no longer on the door and his secretary had been returned to the typing pool.

There was no question of finding another job and Sipra spent his days wandering the streets, depressed and dejected. On one such afternoon, he strolled into the 21 Club (his expensive tastes had not deserted him) and slumped into a seat by the bar. An old man in an advanced state of inebriation struck up a conversation. "Are you an Ay-rab?" he demanded loudly.

"No I'm not."

"Well are you from Argentine?" The old man ran through his high school geography before coming up with Pakistan. "Yeah? Well, may be this will interest you," he said and showed him a newspaper. The Yom Kippur War had begun that day.

Sipra forgot about the encounter till one day, quite desperate, he came across the old man's card and called his number in Wilmington, Delaware. His new friend did not seem surprised to hear from him. "Give me your address and I'll have you picked up," he said. Half an hour later, a limousine whisked Sipra to a helicopter and in 45 minutes, he landed in a golf course where the old man and another man were playing.

They offered him lunch (oysters) and asked if he knew any 'Ay-rab princes'. No, said Sipra, he didn't. Well, said the old man, there's a shortage of oil these days. Do you know of any tankers with unsold crude in them? Naturally, Sipra did not know what he was talking about, and after lunch, the helicopter took him back to New York.

As it turned out, his neighbour was a Jewish lawyer who he hoped would help with his immigration problems.

By mid-1974, Sipra had risen from virtual bankruptcy to immense affluence. He bought himself a house on Fifth Avenue and a Lear jet.

"Sorry," said the neighbour. "I'm a shipping lawyer." A bell went off inside Sipra's head. "Do you know how I can get a list of tankers with unsold oil in them?" he asked. The lawyer suggested that he call Lloyds. Sipra did but found, to his horror, that Lloyds gave him a huge computer print-out of over a hundred tankers. Fortunately, his neighbour came to his assistance. He made Sipra call up Rotterdam and various other ports and check if any of the tankers had unsold oil. He did and finally came up with a list of 11 ships. He called his friend from the 21 Club, went to see him and handed him the list. The old man was pleased. He summoned two executives and told them: "You've been working on this for weeks. This kid got me the information in two days!"

Sipra had hoped for some kind of reward and was not surprised when the old man called him for lunch some days later. Half-way through the meal, he pulled out an envelope and handed it to the Pakistani. Says Sipra: "I knew there was money in that envelope—money, I needed desperately—and I wanted to forget about lunch and just run out and open it." But the old man droned on for another hour. When he finally left, he rushed to the curb and opened it. "It was, sure enough, a cheque but when I saw the amount, my legs went weak."

It was for $746,000 and came with a note that said it was by way of commission for the oil deal—and that it was the first installment. Sipra was to receive three more cheques until finally he made $3.5 million. "It was incredible. At that stage I didn't understand shipping. I didn't realize that this was how things worked. That commissions were always paid and paid honestly."

At 30, Mahmud Sipra was a millionaire, almost by accident.

After that though, he left nothing to chance. He returned in triumph to 444 Madison Avenue, bought a suite of offices on the penthouse floor and went into trading. "I was like an animal who had tasted blood," he remembers. The oil crisis was still on, and Sipra began trading in oil. ("I grasp techniques easily and quickly—that's what comes of being an advertising man!") He hired a team of young people and wrote letters all over the world announcing that his company would supply commodities on request. One of the first enquiries was for synthetic fibre and he returned to his friend the old man, who was, it transpired, in the synthetics business. He sold Sipra three thousand tonnes at the domestic rate, which the young Pakistani then sold around the world at the prevailing price (which was $1.20 per pound over the domestic rate).

By mid-1974, even Sipra could not believe the change in his fortunes. He had risen literally, from virtual bankruptcy to immense affluence. He bought himself a house on Fifth Avenue and his first Lear jet. His lifestyle changed overnight and his company continued to grow.

In 1974, he sold scrap iron to Pakistan but found no vessel to carry it. He heard that Gipsum Transportation had a fleet of obsolete ships, one of which was docked at Statten Island and decided to buy it. The ship had been built in 1946 and was a 10,000 tonner and he named it, on the spur of the moment, the *El-Sipra*. When it got to Karachi with its load of scrap, Sipra

sold the ship itself for scrap (for $1 million) and made much more than the $325,000 it had cost him to buy it. Later he repeated this technique all over the world till others got wise to it.

Flushed with his success, he bought a food processing plant and opened a chain of men's stores in New York called *Lord Sipra*. He also drew up plans for marketing *Arrogance Cologne*.

It was great while it lasted but by 1977, Sipra was in deep financial trouble. "I was doing well and the big ship owners were out to destroy me," he claims. His company had an annual turnover of $150 million but nothing had prepared him for the spate of lawsuits. On one day, 37 lawsuits, naming him personally, were filed and soon his ships began to be arrested and his bank accounts frozen. It was a bad time, made worse by Sipra's unnecessary diversifications (such as the food processing plants) and his tendency to spread himself too thin.

As bankruptcy loomed, he began selling his ships, his jet, his property and his cars. He shut down offices and laid off employees till finally he had only four people left working for him. There seemed no doubt that Sipra was finished. The fairy tale was over.

Not quite. By 1978, Sipra was ready to try again. He got back into trading and made a substantial profit on an Arabian deal. He found a benevolent banker who believed in him and went back into shipping. Because there was a shipping recession, he was able to pick up vessels at low prices.

This time he did not let the sudden success go to his head. There were no more *Lord Sipra* stores and the food processing plant was quietly disposed of. He avoided projecting himself, after the personal attacks and the lawsuits and professionalised his organisation. He decided not to restrict himself to New York and opened a London office (on Brook Street) and let both offices compete against each other.

He worked 18-hour days (till he finally collapsed at a board meeting from exhaustion) and rebuilt his empire. Much to everyone's surprise, he pulled it off. His company teetered at the edge of bankruptcy, then pulled back and eventually, soared even higher. As he says, "In America if you are bankrupt, you are finished. Nobody will ever talk to you again. But if you turn around and make a comeback, then the US corporate entity is so impressed that it never forgets you."

Sipra signed up Nastassia Kinski, Omar Sharif, Christopher Lee and others for his film. The budget was $ 15 million.

Assisted by this goodwill, Sipra turned 1979 and 1980 into years of great growth.

By 1981, he had become a force on the commodity markets. He took on the bigwigs who control major commodities by operating cartels. As he says proudly, "I started trading in wheat and made money on it. And then I broke the fertilizer cartel."

He changed the direction of his life as well. "I was fortunate in having a good staff of executives who could run the show without me," he says. Much to everyone's surprise, Sipra turned to writing. "I had always wanted to write –after all, I had started out as a copywriter." So he began work on a semi-autobiographical novel about a young Pakistani who made it big in international shipping. "I started to write *Pawn To King Three* in August 1981," he remembers. "The first page was written on a paper napkin but the rest of it flowed quite smoothly and took four and a half months. On Christmas Eve, 1981, the last page was ready." Sipra claims that he hadn't intended to publish the book but that his lawyer sent it to a publisher who liked it and accepted it. The novel will be out this autumn in hardcover.

A move into film-making came next. "The book was written visually. I could almost see the scenes as I wrote it," he explains. "Moreover, I had the ships that would be needed for the filming. So I thought: why not turn it into a film?"

Before this could happen though, Sipra got a call from Ben Fisz, an old-style producer who had been responsible for such war movies as *The Heroes of Telemark* and *The Battle of Britain*. Fisz and director Terrence Young (who made the early James Bond films) had been making a spy thriller called *The Jigsaw Man* with Laurence Olivier, Michael Caine and Susan George. Unfortunately, they had run out of money. Would Sipra be willing to help?

Says Sipra, "We had set up Nitemeg Productions to invest in films when this offer came along. We decided to advance our entry into the film world and took over the production of *Jigsaw Man*." After a fresh injection of funds, filming resumed and Sipra began to be written about in such film trade journals as *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*. After the film went into post-production, Young was fired and a taut 97-minute thriller emerged. There will be a Royal Premiere later this month, and Sipra has already begun to recover his money. US cable rights were sold to Home Box Office for $3.5 million earlier this year.

Pawn To King Three was next. Sipra had a professional script-writer shape his novel into a screenplay and hired Peter Hunt (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *Gold* and *Pompeii*) to direct. The film was budgeted at $15 million and he is proud of the fact that he sold it to the City of London as a simple commodity deal. "You acquire a commodity–in this case, a film–at a certain price and a year later, you resell it at a higher price. That's how the banks in the City saw the project and advanced me the necessary finance. Of course, it helped that I had other assets and could cross-collateralise it."

As they began signing up actors, various big names were put under contract: Omar Sharif, Christopher Lee, Nastassia Kinski, Joseph Cotton and Shashi Kapoor. The script called for a

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Sipra insists that Salma's role came first and their personal involvement later. He is now engaged to her.

young girl of Indo-Pak origin and Sipra was considering Rekha when his film executives suggested Salma Agha. She was screen-tested, found suitable and signed up.

During the testing and negotiating, Sipra and Agha appear to have fallen in love—though Sipra insists that the role came first and their personal involvement later. The relationship presented problems because Sipra was already married—to Sameena, the daughter of a wealthy Pakistani shipping family. The marriage is now on the rocks and there may be a messy divorce suit.

Sipra is now engaged to Salma and the couple plan on getting married once he is legally able to do so. Meanwhile, Agha has pulled out of three Hindi films to concentrate on *Pawn To King Three*. Sipra is planning two Hindi films himself—one a 'Muslim subject' and the other a sort of *Electric-Horseman*-meets-the-*Champ*, movie. He will direct at least one of them himself; and both films are budgeted at under Rs 20 lakhs each, almost as if they are a rich man's home movies.

Why is a successful shipping tycoon getting so embroiled in the world of Hindi films? Sipra's answer is that he was getting bored with shipping and commodity broking. "In the morning I would send off ships, in the afternoon I would buy wheat and in the evening I would make a fertilizer deal. I began hating myself and my life." He has always thought of himself as a director after those early years in Pakistan and now that he has the money, he intends to get back into the business.

Meanwhile, he has other ambitious plans. One scheme involves buying a luxury liner (at around $4.5 million), refitting it and bringing it to Bombay. The ship will then be firmly anchored off the shoreline and turned into a five star hotel. He would ask a foreign group like Hyatt to manage it for him and would then have his own five star hotel in Bombay at a cost of under Rs 8 crores—primarily because he will have eliminated the need to purchase expensive real estate. Of course, the scheme will require government approval and there is the problem of location: where in Bombay can it be anchored?

Whatever happens to this project and to his films, one thing seems clear: South Asia is going to see quite a lot of Sipra in the months ahead. Indeed some people say that he is determined to project himself in India and Pakistan because he has political ambitions in Pakistan.

After the *Asian Post* put him on its cover, Sipra acquired the magazine and now has a perfect vehicle for his ideas. The films will make him well-known here. And the biggest surprise is still to come. While Al Pacino and other Hollywood stars were being considered for the lead in *Pawn To King Three*, it was decided that Sipra himself would play the lead. Any Indian or Pakistani starring in a major English-language motion picture is certain to become famous in his own country.

For his part, Sipra plays down all such speculation. Unlike most New York and London-based Pakistanis of his generation, his style is deceptively low-key. He does not drink, is distinctly unflashy and lacks the characteristic swagger of his compatriots. As far as he is concerned he has been incredibly lucky; his life is almost a fairy tale. And now that he has made his money, he can afford to indulge his hobbies and fantasies. ♦

Partap Sharma

Interviewed By Shirin Mehta
Photographed By Ashok Gupta

THE ROOM IS cosy, filled with books and piled, normally, with untidy reams of paper that include his first drafts, his rewrites and his pure fantasies. Included in the decor are a large mirror ('It's not here for show but for the times I practise my karate') two cane chairs, a comfortable bed and a straw carpet.

Partap Sharma, perhaps the country's most recognisable 'voice', in documentaries and commercials and the author of several plays and books (among them *Dog Detective Ranjha*, modelled on his own alsatian) is evidently at home here. In this flat on Bombay's Warden Road, he lives while he works—making coffee from his tiny kitchen with a rest-corner where he can lie down.

"This is the spot where I cut myself off from the world at large when I write. My normal schedules are then disrupted. Sometimes I work 18 hours a day and frankly when I am in the mood to write, I get very irritable. I have two sides to me, the gregarious and the introverted one. This is the side I fall back on when I am writing. My imagination takes over to such an extent that very often I am not aware if the sounds I have heard are real or imagined."

This is where *The Surangini Tales* took shape, *The Dog Detective* book was written and the play *A Touch Of Brightness*, which earned Partap so much fame and notoriety, was conceived. Naturally, Ranjha is very much a part of the environment and spends his time sleeping or woofing in the room with an occasional pat from his master.

The room has been Partap's for years. Long ago, in 1960 or so he found employment with ESSO after a great deal of trouble. "I quit after just 13 days (though I was earning Rs 900 a month) and continued with my regular commentaries. At that time AIR used to pay just Rs 15 per programme and my monthly income from such recordings was Rs 75. But within three months I managed to make both ends meet." This was when he got the room.

Today, crowded with books; his own reference volumes and a few oddments which Partap finds interesting, it is a home away from home (another flat in Breach Candy just a 100 yards away).

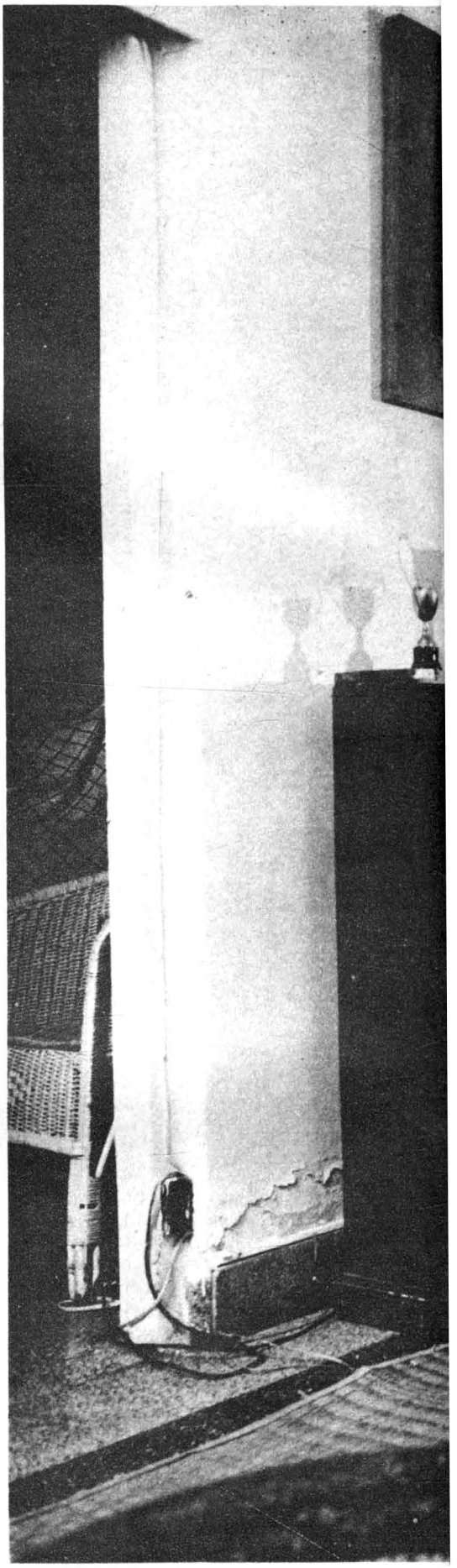
"It is, of course, much more untidy when I'm half-way through a book. There is usually my first draft in the first pile, a bit of the corrected, edited version in the second, my additions and inserts in the third and so on. Nobody understands the order in the chaos and even my secretary is instructed to leave it all well alone."

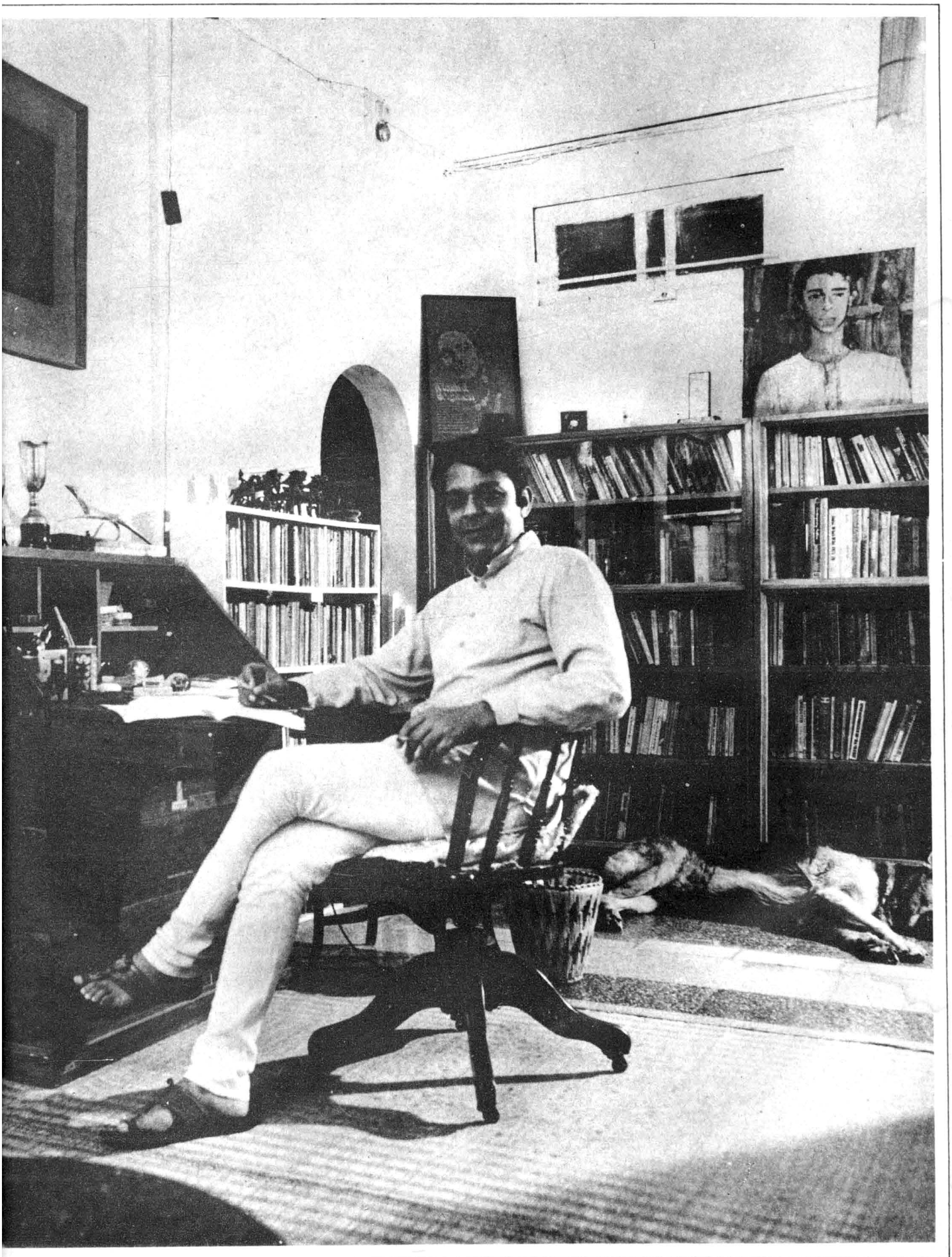
Ranged out where the eye can see them and Partap can gloat over them are Ranjha's trophies. "He used to get first prize in the Obedience and Police Dog trials. Later I didn't enter him—there didn't seem to be much point when the prize was practically always his."

His busy schedule includes three to four hours of recording per day and the normal activities of a writer. His voice was developed through the theatre and the constant interest of a school teacher who used to let Partap stand at one end of a valley and throw his voice across. "I often used to read plays aloud in dormitories and when I started winning debates and elocution competitions I learned to enunciate."

A short stint with theatre and film acting helped him for his play *A Touch Of Brightness.* But the trouble they had producing it put Partap off writing adult novels for some time. "I started writing parables in the form of fables and the *Surangini Tales* were born.

"My aim is, of course, to make my writing support me so that I can write even out of Bombay. Right now, of course, my commentaries are my bread and butter. The royalties from my books have begun to give me hope that this will someday be possible." Even if this does come through he will probably keep this room which is so specially his, as a base—to return to from time to time. ♦

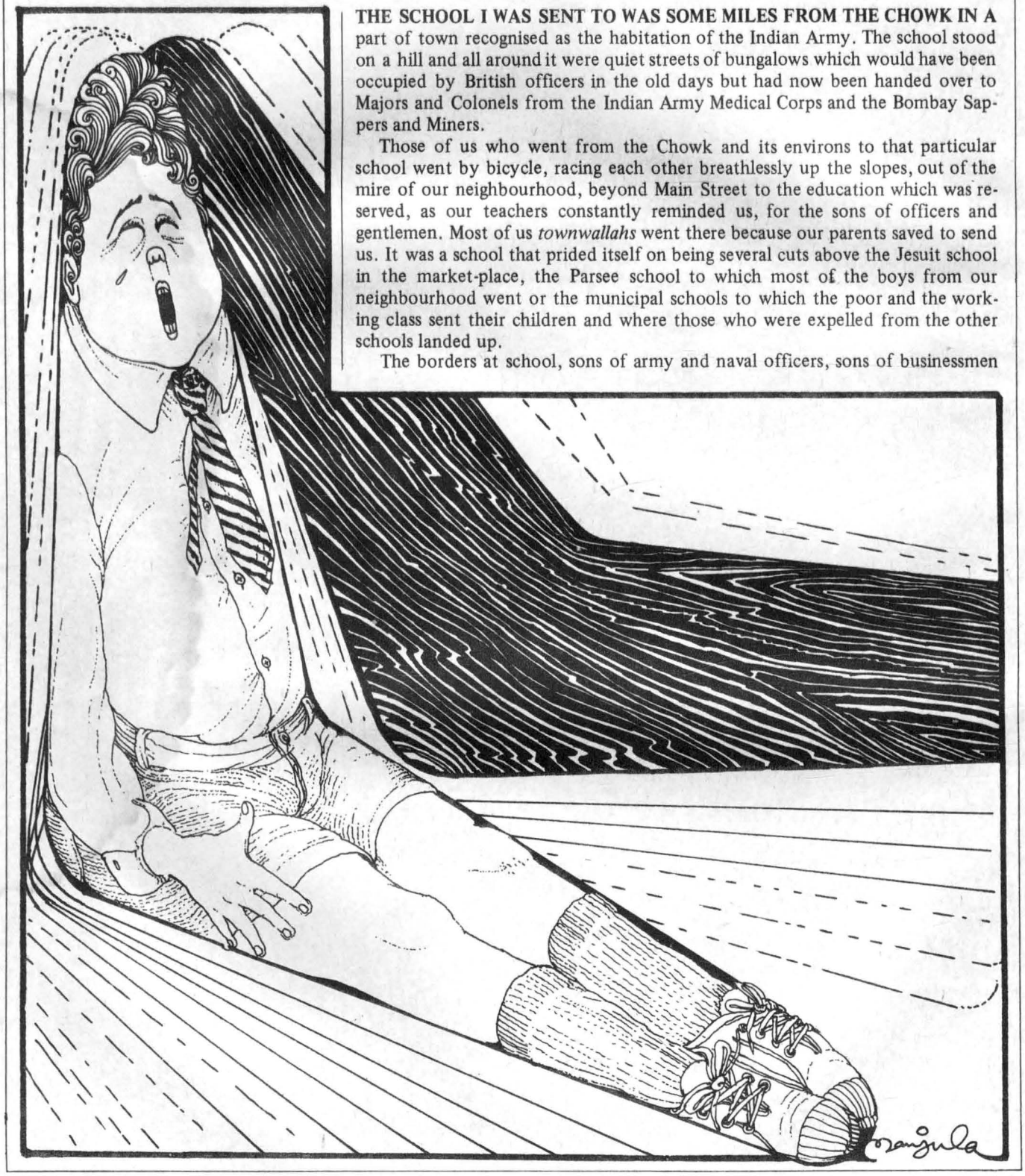




Fiction in imprint

BOOMERANG

By Farrukh Dhondy



THE SCHOOL I WAS SENT TO WAS SOME MILES FROM THE CHOWK IN A part of town recognised as the habitation of the Indian Army. The school stood on a hill and all around it were quiet streets of bungalows which would have been occupied by British officers in the old days but had now been handed over to Majors and Colonels from the Indian Army Medical Corps and the Bombay Sappers and Miners.

Those of us who went from the Chowk and its environs to that particular school went by bicycle, racing each other breathlessly up the slopes, out of the mire of our neighbourhood, beyond Main Street to the education which was reserved, as our teachers constantly reminded us, for the sons of officers and gentlemen. Most of us *townwallahs* went there because our parents saved to send us. It was a school that prided itself on being several cuts above the Jesuit school in the market-place, the Parsee school to which most of the boys from our neighbourhood went or the municipal schools to which the poor and the working class sent their children and where those who were expelled from the other schools landed up.

The borders at school, sons of army and naval officers, sons of businessmen

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MANJULA PADMANABHAN

from Bombay and civil servants from all over India, accepted that the bad food, the whippings, the unflagging concentration on running from one place to the next to build stamina, the dormitories which were old converted barracks and leaked in the monsoon, the ex-army British sergeants who had stayed behind in India to train us, were all parts of this character-building process.

The Headmaster didn't like the day scholars. We were tolerated because we brought in a certain amount of money, because we helped swell the numbers and mainly, I think, because some government regulation stipulated that a Poona school couldn't function without boys from Poona. He used to refer to us as 'the natives'. In his estimation we were just one rung above the people he referred to as 'bazaar urchins' and the 'blighted, benighted of India'. His knowledge, such as it was, was respected; his cane was feared. He was a sentimentalist who tried to inspire 'his boys' with a softness for silly traditions. Several times at assembly he would display a glass phial attached to his key chain and tell the school that it contained the mud of his 'alma mater', the school he had attended as a boy. He had gathered this memento from the path where his school mates had walked.

He was an enthusiast for religion and made us pray with our eyes shut and drilled us to sing hymns, the meanings of which were a greater puzzle to me than the prayers I said at home in the dead language of the Parsee scriptures. "*As pants the hart for cooling streams, When heated in the chase*," was to me like those funny cut-out transfers in which the head doesn't match the body, because the words didn't seem to fit together. I thought, till I was much older, that the lines had something ungrammatical to do with trousers and chests and fire and 'chase' suggested to me some kind of old stove.

Amongst those of us who came from the Chowk and the lowly neighbourhoods of the town, there was a tacit understanding, a rejection of 'character', 'tradition', 'discipline' and gentlemanliness. We had as much use for these as we had for test tubes of mud from the school drive. We lived a sort of double life, hanging about the Chowk in the evenings drinking single *char*, shedding our maroon ties and white shirts, wandering about in gangs,

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shooting pigeons with deadly catapults or with .177 airguns, organising kite-flying tournaments, bicycling to the filthy river for a nocturnal swim. School seemed to prove that work was one thing and living another.

The boarders lived a dreary life with a pitiable routine. They were paraded for breakfast, paraded for lunch and dinner, paraded for baths and study and paraded to be inspected before they left school once a fortnight for a few hours to visit bounded precincts of the town. The Chowk was out of bounds for them. They could only descend as far as Main Street and could only go to the two English picture houses. Doom would follow if they ventured into the 'native' enclaves. Imposed by some Englishman who had headed the school, the rules were a sorry imitation of the law the Tommies lived by and defied when they were garrisoned in Poona.

Between the boarders and the day scholars there was constant rivalry. Each side had its own strengths. We had bicycles which they yearned to borrow. They had access to the scandal and dirty stories about the masters' wives. They were good at running and boxing and football and the best of them could probably beat the hell out of the best of us in hand to hand combat. But we had the knife men, the gang men, the boys who treated self-defence as a necessity of life rather than a sport. We also had access to new clothes and, most important of all, to food cooked at home.

TERRY SOAKUM WAS a boarder. He was a white boy and came to our class for the first time, ushered by an Anglo-Indian matron, in tears. His arrival caused a quickly quelled stir in the class. There was one other white boy at the school and there had been a third. This third was a Danish boy who spoke no English. He was the son, it was said, of a great Danish engineer who had come to Poona to set up the first penicillin factory in the suburb called Pimpri. This boy constantly smiled, was left alone by most others and came to school in a large chauffeur-driven car. He stayed a year, was of little account and disappeared when his father's expertise was no longer needed in the penicillin plant.

The other white boy was Kimber. He was the son of missionaries and had lived all his life in Poona. He behaved like the rest of us; he spoke English with our accent, he played and prayed and lied and scrapped. His only distinction was being called 'white-spunk' and wearing woollen hose, come hot summer, come monsoon, because his dad had picked up, through acquaintance with the jungle regions of India, the belief that they kept leeches off.

We gathered round the new arrival at break time. He sobbed silently as he was shown how to lock his desk and make up his time-table. Through his sobs and his wet eyes which stared at one spot, he made it known that he was from Australia, from Perth. He had cried all the way on the plane. We never thought of asking him how he'd landed up in Poona.

He was a curiosity to the rest of the school and crowds gathered to see him, as though a strange animal had been imported to the old zoo. He wasn't wearing school uniform and continued for the next few days in his blue velvet shorts and frilled silk shirt. He carried a painted boomerang with him and clutched on to it as though it was the one spar from a broken ship in the enveloping sea of the present.

The boomerang became the centre of attention after Soakum's strange accent and clothes and manners lost their initial charm. It never performed in my sight, but word reached the gang I used to circulate with that Terry Soakum could ring the school bell with it.

Our school bell consisted of a piece of railway track about a yard in length, suspended from the rafters of the dinner hall verandah. Each year the tallest boarder in the eleventh standard was entrusted with the bell-ringer's job and given a large iron bolt as a sign and instrument of office. The bolt was rattled in the groove of the rail, producing a clang that reached the most remote classroom and games group. We heard now that Soakum could ring this bell from a distance of 30 yards and catch the wooden bird as it homed back to him.

On the fourth day that Soakum was there he was summoned to the presence of our gang. Its leader was Farokh Habibulla. He was the only boy who was 17 and was growing a moustache amongst the day scholars. The rest of us were 14 and 15. He was a veteran. He had spent three years in the tenth standard because he hadn't passed his exams. He was a weight-lifter. His muscles bulged out of rolled-up sleeves. He gave demonstrations of his strength by shaking the trunks of well-established trees and he always managed to speak, to teachers and to the rest of us, in a growl which seemed to come from way down in his guts.

"Send for the Australian," he said.

A couple of the gang went to seek out the Soakum circus, the jeering bunch of third and fourth standard tykes who followed Soakum around wherever he went. In a few minutes, Soakum was brought to us.

"I hope you like India," Farokh Habibulla said.

"I don't like the boys, they're not nice boys. In Australia. . ."

"In Australia people smell like sheep," Haby said.

"Tell him please, to let go of my arm. It hurts," Soakum shrieked. The gathering laughed.

Haby gave a vague signal with his eyebrows and Terry Soakum was released.

"All right, now give me that crooked stick."

"It's a boomerang."

"How much does it cost."

"You can't buy it in rupees. It costs pounds, shillings and pence."

"That's all right then. If I can't buy it I'll take it."

Haby stretched his hand out. Soakum quickly held the boomerang behind his back. Haby wiggled his fingers. Two boys detached themselves from our gang and prised the boomerang out of Soakum's fingers.

"My dad gave it to me," Soakum said. Haby was examining the shaft. It was varnished and the grain of the wood ran in a curved pattern around its angle. The boomerang had blue and yellow patterns painted on it.

"Can you make it come back if you throw it? I hear you're gassing too much about its comings and goings."

"He can't," some little boys shouted. "He can only polish it on his pants."

"I can make it come back," Haby said.

"You?" Soakum said with unconcealed contempt. "Only abos and bushrangers can use it properly."

"If I can, I'll keep it," Haby said.

He stepped out of the ring of boys and walked authoritatively to clear ground.

"You don't hold it like that," Soakum said.

Haby was holding the boomerang by its middle. He knew everyone was staring at him. He weighed the instrument like a man putting the shot. Then he held it at knee height.

"If it comes back, I'll keep it," Haby said.

"It won't come back for you," Soakum said.

Haby laughed and threw the boomerang vertically in the air. It hung for a moment like a seagull taking the current, and swooped back downward. Haby ran a few steps and caught it.

Everyone except Soakum laughed.

"It's mine now," Haby said. "I've proved the laws of nature."

"Give it back," Soakum said stepping forward to grapple with Farokh.

"Getting nasty, eh?" Haby said and holding the boomerang with both hands now he raised his knee and cracked it in two. He handed the pieces back to Soakum.

"Australians are all daft," he said.

Then for the first time we heard the cry that was to become famous in school. Soakum began howling. "Ooooooooooo," he sang out. His face turned red and rich tears dropped from his wide eyes.

Some people laughed and the smaller boys, feeling bold, kicked him from behind and ran away. I felt sorry for Soakum, but feeling sorry for people wasn't done in our school.

In the months that followed, the velvet-clad boy disappeared. Soakum's two sets of uniform cottons were issued to him and became tatty and ragged. His neat hair grew in tangled blond locks which the masters delighted in pulling when he gave the wrong answers, as he invariably did in class. The matron ordered that he have a crew cut. His shoes gave way to a pair of canvas sneakers from which his toes soon sprouted. He picked up the ways of the filthiest boarders and stuffed buttered buns from breakfast into his shirt when he could steal them. The butterfly had turned caterpillar.

The school got to know, when Soakum didn't pack his trunks as the rest of the boarders did the day before the holidays, that Australia was far away and worse, that Soakum's father had stopped sending money or fees to the school. Terry Soakum had been abandoned in India. After several unanswered letters, the Headmaster had

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sent Soakum to be interviewed by the Anglican mission which paid the school fees and pocket money of the very poor Christians.

At first Soakum cried and tried to hide the shame of being abandoned, but in a term's time he acquired the shamelessness of the very poor. He was flogged publicly at assembly three times for stealing the belongings of other boys in his dormitory. He began to be known as a '*chokrá* boy,' a street urchin, and lived up to the role by learning all the taunts and abuse that street urchins used. Soakum became the closest thing to an Indian derelict that a white boy could be.

He got a reputation for being a howler. At the end of each month the boys in all classes were given tests in each subject. The marks were added up and the sum divided to give each boy an average on his report card and a place and rank in class. At the end of the month the Headmaster visited each class in turn. His entry would be signalled by a flurry of activity and then complete silence. The black-gowned, cane-carrying figure would carefully pick up the register. The report cards would be handed round and then the names of those who had failed in the monthly tests would be read out.

The reward for each subject that a boy failed was one cut of the cane on the bum. In the junior classes the beating was handed out in front of the class. After the ninth standard, when most of the boys were 14, the failures were invited by the Headmaster to form a queue outside the classroom on the verandah. He would step outside and call the names one by one and the thrashings would follow. The boys who had passed would sit tight and silent and listen and thank God for brains or concentration or whatever it was that caused them to know the date of the second battle of Panipat or the real name of Gautam the Buddha.

Soakum was always left till last, because the Headmaster knew that beating him would disrupt the sequence. He would start screaming before the cane hit him, his dread mounting as the queue in front got shorter. He used to fail ten subjects at a time, bettering Habibulla who usualiy managed to fail six or seven.

Haby would be second to last in the queue.

He would bend down, take his strokes motionless and raise his head to ask the Head if he was finished.

He'd get two more for insolence.

Haby would stroll back into class, pretending to clean his teeth with his tongue, a device which allowed him to disguise the fact that his mouth was contorted with pain and determination not to show it. Then Soakum would begin howling in earnest, "Ooooooooooo", shrill and unashamed.

"You mustn't show the bastard you're scared of his stick," Haby would advise us. "Day scholars must show they are as tough as these leather-eating boarders."

It was difficult to follow his advice. The pain was compelling. On the occasions when I got three cuts for bringing raw mangoes to school, or for being seen with a mob of my friends, barefoot in Sachapir Street, I had to fight myself to keep the tears back. Blinking fast always helped, though it betrayed the straight face you were trying to keep, and rubbing your mouth so that the rest couldn't see the corners curling downwards. Whenever I got beaten, I reminded myself that I mustn't be like Soakum. He was the symbol of cowardice in the school.

The one thing that took some of the pain away was the interest that the others showed in your bottom after a severe beating.

The one thing that took some of the pain away was the interest that the others showed in your bottom after a severe beating.

"Give us a look, let's have a look."

You'd take your trousers down and bend for all to see. They'd pass their fingers along the ridged cuts.

"It's gone yellow, yar. Ooophh. Look at this men, purple."

No one wanted to see Soakum's bum. After a beating he ran around the school grounds clutching it, howling and running in circles like a rabid dog. The teachers were used to it. They gave up demanding that he came back and sat down like the rest of the disgraced rascals. Yet it was a game to remind Soakum of the beating the next day and make him crane his neck to look over his shoulder, standing on tip-toe to examine his own backside. Sometimes the memory of it would revive his howl.

Through being a coward, Soakum turned into a bully. The frightened long to inspire fear and feed off the inspiration. Two years at our school had taught him that the best way to acquire the possessions he wanted was not to steal them from his fellow seniors, but to take them from smaller and younger boys. He used to force third standard boys to go to secluded parts of the playground with him and exchange their socks for his torn ones. He extracted shares of melon slice and coconut toffee from them. He borrowed hockey sticks by beating their owners with them. It was known that he picked on the weak and the weedy and the defenceless.

I didn't think of myself as either of these and was mortified when he picked on me. I was the second smallest boy in the class. The smallest had a younger brother who was one year behind but already five foot six inches tall. They were both boarders and lived in the same dormitory and no one harassed them. I was conscious from the day I joined that class that I wore the thickest spectacles, and had the knobbliest knees which the rest laughed at when I was asked to climb ropes in PT classes. In the early years I was used to being called 'four-eyes' but now when the boys of Sarbatwalla Chowk began to gang together, I felt a certain amount of security from membership of Haby's gang.

SOAKUM WAS AFTER my swimming trunks. On the mornings when we had swimming, we wore our trunks under our trousers or shorts and sat in them through the lessons till it was time to go. The class would be dismissed and told to get to the baths as fast as possible. The day scholars would get on their bicycles and race each other to the pool which was a quarter of a mile away and the boarders would begin their run to be the first there. There was constant competition to be the first in the pool, so as you cycled along or ran, you began stripping yourself of your shirt and, if you could manage it, your trousers.

As the race for the pool began that day, I was the last to get my bike out of the shed and get started. As I was going through the school gate I passed Soakum. He got hold of the book carrier of my bike.

"Give us a double seat, man."

"No, no. Why can't you run like all the other boarders?"

"Don't be such a skunk. Give us a *cha-nus*."

Soakum jumped on to the back carrier. I heard his breath and felt his weight pull the bicycle to a halt.

"Come on, Dhondy. What's the matter with you, are you a TB patient?"

"I'm no good at double seat, yar. Police will catch us, then who'll pay the fine?"

The bike had moved a few yards and it began to veer from side to side through loss of momentum.

"Soakum get off, or I'll kick you."

"Don't fart in my face," he said. "If you've got lung trouble, I'll take you doubles."

"No, it's my bike."

Soakum got off the bike and grabbed the back of the seat with both hands. It was no good trying to get away. The others were out of sight now. I decided to let him try to carry me.

Soakum got on to the seat and I got on the carrier. He puffed and panted, standing on the pedals to force them down.

"Is this an Indian-make bike?"

"I'll give you a little *dhhukka*," I said, pushing the ground with my feet.

We moved off slowly. We were going to be the last in the pool and the rest of the class would jeer. I unrolled my towel and hung it round my neck and began to get my shirt off. At least I would be in the pool before Soakum. He was panting and struggling up the hill now. I unbuttoned my shorts and was going through the gymnastics of taking them off by sliding them under me, when Soakum swerved.

If the teacher hadn't been there I would have got him by the neck. I was mad. The stone hadn't hit me hard but I was smarting from the insult.

"What are you doing, yar, you're making me lose balance."

The bike careened sideways and we both landed in the gutter.

"Look what you've done to the bike," I said, and stood up, my shorts almost falling off. The handle-bars of the bike were twisted. Soakum wasn't paying any attention. He was staring at my new trunks.

"I say, can I have those? I'll give you my trunks."

"You off your head or what? My uncle got them from Hong Kong."

"I think you'd better take them off and give them to me," Soakum said, rising from the ditch and standing over me as I got the front wheel of the bike and tried to pull the handle-bars straight.

"I'll give you my new catty."

"I don't want your catty," I said.

He took the catapult out of his shirt.

"Look at this leather on it, it's special leather, made from rhinoceros balls."

"Don't talk bunk, yar. I told you I don't want your catty."

"All right then, I'll break your teeth," he said and grabbed me by the shirt. "Take off those swimmies."

"Get off," I shouted and pushed him away.

Soakum picked up a stone from the side of the road.

"You want your specs bashed into your skull? Filthy four-eyes."

"I'm not scared of you," I replied, trying to get my bicycle between him and me.

I bent down and picked up a stone too.

"OK, no stones, man," he said and dropped the one he was holding. He scowled and came right up to me. He gritted his teeth and made an ugly face and as I stared at it he pinched me on the thigh.

I pushed my elbow in his neck and he released his hold. Then he grabbed the towel from round my neck and began to run up the road.

I got on the bike and chased him. As he got to the gate of the swimming pool he picked up a stone and hurled it at me. It hit me in the chest. I was furious. I threw my bike down and chased him to the side of the pool. Then he threw my towel into the water.

"Now you can't swim either," he said.

If the teacher hadn't been there I would have got him by the neck. I was mad. The stone hadn't hit me hard, but I was smarting from the insult. Very few boys had ever had cause to challenge me to fight. I had fought once or twice in the junior classes and emerged with my clothes torn. But this was Soakum, the biggest cry-baby in the school. The rest of them had seen him throw my towel in the pool. He would go around telling the boarders that he had beaten me up. Hadn't he the sense to know that I was part of a tough gang? Of course I didn't want the protection of the gang. I had to fight this out myself. But how could I tell Haby and the rest of my friends that I wanted to fight Soakum? They'd laugh. Soakum was someone you rapped on the head, not challenged to a fight.

When we queued up after swimming I made my way next to him.

"I'll give you a kicking," I said in a whisper.

"Come to the lowers after school,"

he said. "And bring your knife. I don't fight day scholars without a knife."

On the way back to school I stuck with the Sarbatwalla Chowk crowd.

"Why didn't you swim?" Haby asked me.

"That bugger Soakum, he threw my towel in the pool."

"Soakum? You let him touch your towel? You'll get a disease."

"I'm going to fight him."

"I'll give him one backhander and he'll go flying," Haby said.

"I'm going to kill him myself," I said.

"When?"

"After school today. On the lowers. He said to bring a knife. I don't have a knife."

"Look, have this one," one of the others said and he pulled a switchblade from his pocket. I couldn't refuse it now. I weighed it in my palm.

This thing was getting out of hand. I had never used a knife before, though I had heard fights discussed a hundred times on the Chowk. Kolmi used to tell the story of how Thomas the Boxer was knifed one procession night and how his guts lay in the street from the gash which had gone in and up and how you could see that he had eaten rice and yoghurt for dinner.

I looked at the switchblade and turned it in my hand and tried it once or twice. I was wishing the fight wasn't anything to do with knives. I knew that if I struck out blindly with my elbow or my fist, Soakum would start howling even before I touched him. If he started that, fighting him would bring disgrace, but less disgrace than backing away from a quarrel with him would. I had to go through with it.

"Boarders never use knives," Haby said. He looked meditative. "Why didn't you just ask him to punch for punch?"

"Whatever he wants," I said.

I wasn't concentrating on my afternoon lessons. Soakum sat six desks behind me. I could sense his gaze on my neck. Knife fights needed skill, not strength. Anyone could win. I wasn't going to admit to myself that I was scared, but a rush of blood under my ears and a looseness about my wrists told me I was certainly *something*. At the change of lessons an unusual silence came over the class. The maths teacher came in.

He was a middle-aged Anglo-Indian man. Like the other teachers he carried a cane in his armpit. He began each lesson by going through the drill of times tables with the class. "Shix shix-teens," he would say with his peculiar lisp and point his cane at a boy who would have to answer. If the answer was correct, he'd move to the next boy.

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"Shoakum. Nine shevens?" he asked.

Soakum was also in a daze.

"What?"

"I'll give you what! Nine shevens?"

"Uh, fifty-six."

It was the sort of opportunity the maths teacher was always waiting for. He tucked his cane back in his armpit, and as if inviting the class to relish this absurdity with him, he began to pace up and down.

"Shoakum sheems to shay that nine shevens are fifty-shix. *Fif*ty-shix. *Fif-tee* shix."

"Seventy-nine," Soakum said.

It was too late to change his mind. The maths teacher was revelling in it.

"Fifty-shix."

"Eighty-five."

"*Fifty*-shix."

"Seventy-seven. Thirty-nine. Forty-eight." Soakum was getting frantic. "What is it? What is it?" he asked in an audible whisper.

"Say a hundred and five," Haby growled.

"A hundred and five," Soakum shouted.

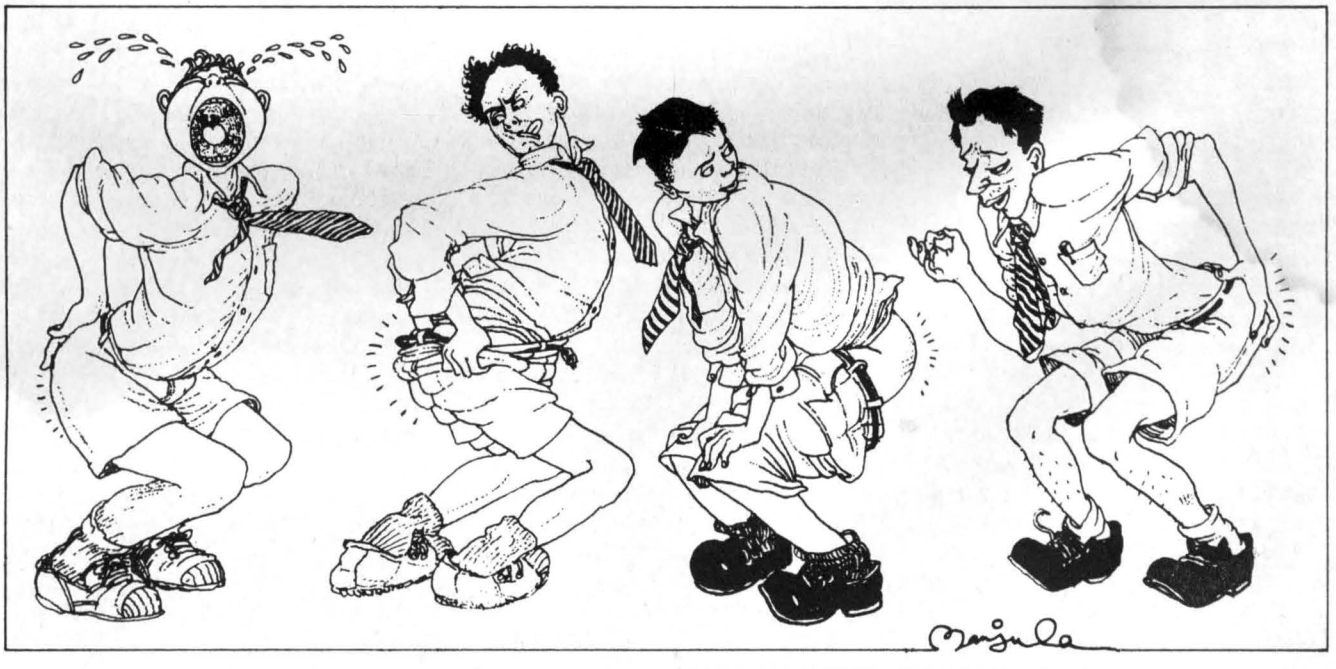
"Say a hundred and one," someone said.

"Shoakum shays, nine shevens are *fif-ty*-six." The master's pace picked up momentum. It was still deliberate, sadistic.

"Forty-nine. A hundred and forty-four. Sixty-eight," Soakum screamed.

"Fifty-shix."

The cane came out of the armpit and down on to Soakum's shoulder then across his face and down on the



arms he held up to protect himself.

"Twenty too. . .ooooooooooooo," came Soakum's full-throated siren wail. "They told me, sir, they gave me the wrong answers."

"I'll give you fifty-shix. I'll shee to your wrong anshers, you dishgrashe to Aushtralian manhood, you shquirming *chokrawallah*."

Soakum ran out of the class as soon as the stick permitted him to. The master ignored his flight and went on with fractions on the board. When the bell rang for the end of school, Farokh Habibulla came up to my desk.

"Are you going to the lowers Farrukh?"

"I'm going," I said. "Will you come and hold my specs?"

As I had expected a crowd gathered. Word had got round school that there was to be a fight to the death.

I was sweating. Soakum wasn't there. Then the cry went up, "Soakum's coming."

Sure enough, he was coming, but he was coming in the company of the Headmaster. There was a general scurry. Boys began to run to left and right. Fighting on the lowers was prohibited and spectators if caught were thrashed before participants were, for encouraging fights.

The crowd broke and ran and I stood there like an idiot for a moment or two looking at the knife in my hand. Then I ran too.

"Dhondy," the Head's voice boomed out from behind me. I stopped. The game was up. Soakum stood next to the Head wiping his nose on his sleeve.

"What were you here for?"

"Fight, sir."

"You were going to fight Soakum?"

"Yes sir."

"You were going to settle your differences like gentlemen through a duel?"

"Yes sir."

"Where are the gloves? Have your seconds run off with them?"

I didn't answer.

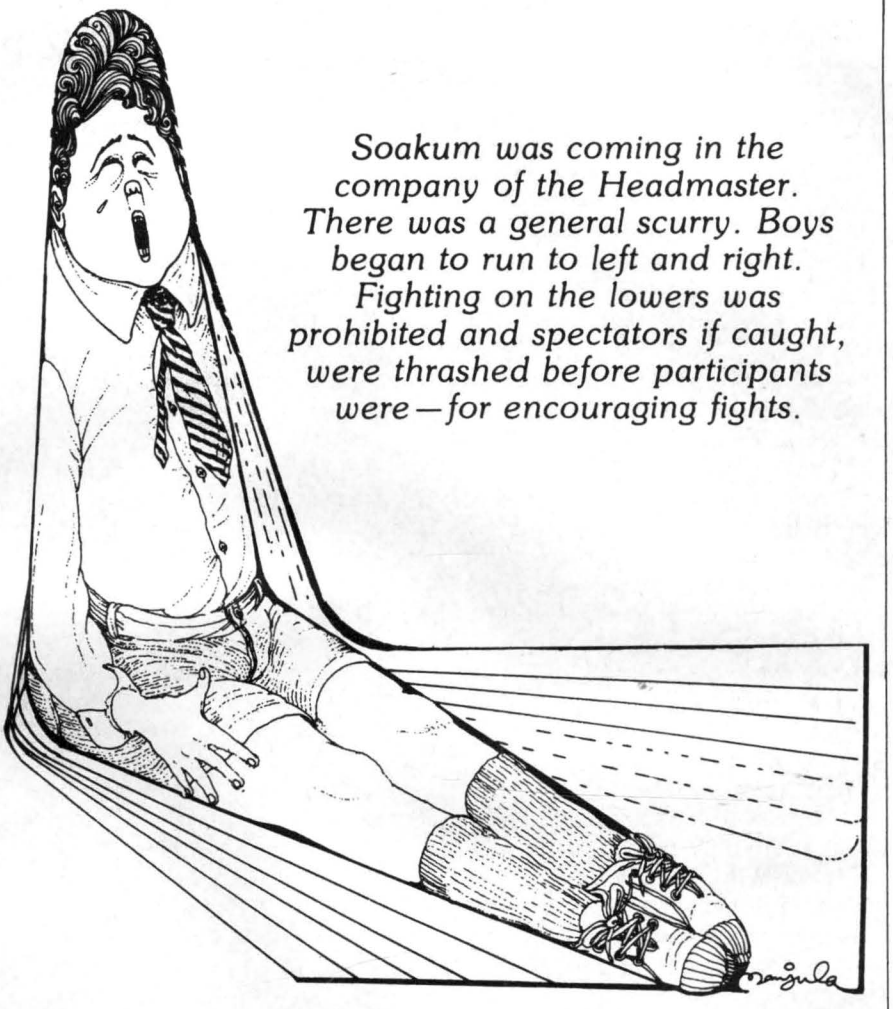
"Bare fists? Like hooligans, eh?"

Again I said nothing.

"Turn out your pockets, lad. I've heard some very serious allegations."

I did as I was told. Out came my keys, two pencils, a pack of chewing gum, a couple of marbles, a piece of plastic carving and the switchknife.

"You day scholars can't fight like gentlemen can you? Soakum told me he suspected you would bring a knife. He was prepared to have it out like a man, but you had to bring your dirty bazaar tricks into it, didn't you Dhondy?"



Soakum was coming in the company of the Headmaster. There was a general scurry. Boys began to run to left and right. Fighting on the lowers was prohibited and spectators if caught, were thrashed before participants were—for encouraging fights.

Soakum stood behind the Head, a faint grin on his face.

"But he. . ." I couldn't go any further.

Both Soakum and I were presented on stage to the school the next day at assembly, standing at ease, our hands clutched behind our backs.

"These boys chose to fight yesterday. One is a day scholar, one is a boarder. Both of them get the stick. One of them is a coward and the other is a sneak. Neither of these weaknesses is going to be tolerated in this school. They're not *pukka* . . ."

I held my knees as the cane came down and my knuckles turned white. I clutched tight and thought 'As pants the hart for cooling streams' and tried to distract my mind with figuring it out. I caught the eyes of the eleventh standard at the back of the assembly as I rubbed my backside and took my position next to Soakum. Farokh Habibullah nodded at me and smiled.

Soakum howled but this time no one so much as smirked.

The incident wasn't mentioned again.

Soakum acquired a new pair of swimming trunks from no one knew where. He never bothered me again and in a few weeks we were on trading if not talking terms again.

When I returned to India after being in another country, having finished school and done with college and worked abroad for several years, I met Farokh Habibulla on the Chowk again. We talked of old times. He was in business. I was a schoolteacher. We laughed together.

"And what happened to Soakum, he didn't pass his exams did he?"

"Oh God, you won't believe this," Farokh said. "It was in the newspapers. He went back to Australia after school and you know what job he got?"

"Repairing boomerangs?"

"No, Farrukh. He became a professional boxer. He was fighting for the lightweight title in Melbourne last month." ♦

YETIS, BEARS AND MORE

Strange tales from the hills.

STORIES ABOUT THE Yeti, or Abominable Snowman, always make good copy for newspapers and from time to time we are treated to photographs of giant footprints—the owners of these footprints never staying around long enough to be photographed in their entirety! Fully equipped expeditions have gone out in search of this creature, while so-called Yeti scalps have been taken abroad for scientific examination and famous personalities have clashed over the question of whether the Snowman is myth or reality.

All this fuss about a Snowman would seem to have obscured the fact that there is also an Abominable Snow-*woman*, as well-known to the Nepalese (who call her the Lidini) as the Yeti is to the Tibetans.

The Lidini, like the Yeti, is said to be heavy and long-haired. She differs in that her feet are turned in the usual direction and not inward like the Yeti's. She has been known to attack on sight and one can only escape from her by running downhill, because the Lidini's progress is slowed down by her huge body and the long hair that covers her eyes. This should be remembered by anyone setting out in search of a Snowwoman. If you meet her and try running uphill, she will soon overtake you (she is very fast going uphill) and then you will be at the mercy of her long nails and sharp teeth.

The husband of the Lidini, known as the Banjakhiri, is said to be gifted with supernatural powers. Waking at dawn, he leaves his forest lair for a large cave in the mountains which he has converted into a shrine. Unlike his wife he does not attack humans with intent to kill, but is said to entirely ignore grown-ups, preferring to capture children, whom he hides in his long hair. He takes the children to his cave-shrine, where he looks after them very carefully, feeding them on fruit, rice and earthworms.

The Banjakhiri has a great school where he teaches children black magic. So careful is he in choosing his disciples that only children of the highest intelligence are captured by him. When the youngsters are fully versed in magic, they are taken back to where they were captured and then sent out into the world to practise their magic on humanity. Our modern godmen could possibly learn a few things from the Banjakhiri's methods.

There is another couple said to live in the forests of the higher Himalayas: the Sagpa and Sagpani.

In appearance they resemble the Banjakhiri and Lindini, but they are much smaller. They too are said to attack on sight; but beyond the desire to capture people and eat them, their greatest ambition is to sleep as much as possible. You are therefore quite safe if you allow them to sleep undisturbed; but, if you wake them, they become very ferocious and do not give you much time in which to start running uphill or downhill. But as a rule the Sagpanis avoid human habitation and are only to be found in the very heart of the great oak and rhododendron forests.

Then there are the Kasundas—wild, curly-headed creatures, usually seen at great heights above the snow-line. Nobody has got close to a Kasunda. There is a story that one of Genghis Khan's soldiers caught one in Tibet. Finding it to be of an imitative disposition, the soldier gave it a tin containing kerosene oil (yes, Genghis Khan was into oil exploration too!) while he himself filled a similar tin with water. The soldier poured the water over his own head, and the Kasunda immediately imitated his action, pouring the oil over itself. The soldier then took a box of matches and giving a match to the Kasunda, lit one himself and pretended to set fire to his clothes. The Kasunda immediately did the same, set his curly hair on fire and went up in smoke.

Since then, the Kasundas have kept well away from the haunts of men. And who can blame them?

* * *

Ruskin Bond is a former Managing Editor of **Imprint**. *This is a regular column.*

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

Options-Nature

I HAVE NEVER had the pleasure of fleeing from an Abominable Snowwoman, but I have fled from the next best thing, a Himalayan bear and I ran away from it on the same principle, that bears run faster uphill than downhill. Naturally I ran downhill. It is quite possible that bears run equally fast in all directions, but I have never stopped to find out, nor do I know of any shikari or zoologist who has taken out his stop-watch while being chased by a bear.

Himalayan bears like pumpkins, maize, plums and apricots, a diet that obviously does their figures a world of good. And of course they are very fond of honey. Once, while I was sitting in an oak tree near Lansdowne (in Pauri-Garhwal), hoping to see a pair of pine-martens living nearby, I heard the whining 'grumble' of a bear, and presently saw a young bear amble into the clearing near the tree. As he was quite young and had no malicious intent, I did not panic and run, but remained in my oak tree.

At first the bear put his nose to the ground and sniffed his way along until he came to a large anthill. Here he began huffing and puffing, blowing rapidly in and out of his nostrils, so that the dust from the anthill flew in all directions. But he was a disappointed bear, because the anthill had been deserted long before. And so, grumbling, he made his way to a wild plum tree. Shinning rapidly up the smooth trunk, he was soon perched in the topmost branches. It was only then that he saw me.

He at once scrambled several feet higher up the tree and laid himself out flat on a branch. It wasn't a very thick branch and left a large expanse of bear showing on either side. He tucked his head away behind another branch and, so long as he could not see me, was satisfied that he was well hidden, though he couldn't help grumbling with anxiety.

But, like all bears, he was full of curiosity. And slowly, inch by inch, his black snout appeared over the edge of the branch. As soon as his eyes came into view and met mine, he drew his head back with a jerk and hid his face.

He did this several times. I waited until he wasn't looking, then moved some way down the tree. When he looked up again and saw that I was missing, he was so pleased that he stretched right across to another branch and helped himself to a plum. I couldn't help bursting into laughter and this so startled him that he tumbled out of the tree, dropped through the branches for some 15 feet and landed with a thud in a heap of dry leaves. He was quite unhurt but ran squealing with fright.

I have yet to see an Abominable Snowman or Snowwoman, Sagpa or Sagpani, Lidini or Banjakhiri but if I ever come across one of the lot, I suppose they will treat me with the same humble curiosity and deference.

— ***Ruskin Bond***

THE BODY PRIMER—PART II

Is exercise the only way to lose weight?

IN THE MAJOR new book published earlier this year, British journalist Geoffrey Cannon tells of his attempts to lose weight. He tried every diet there was and sure enough, every one of them, worked. Each time, he embarked on a diet, his waistline would shrink, his trousers sag and his figure take on a new, slender look.

The point, of course, was that the weight loss would never last. After a few weeks of starvation, Cannon's body would resemble a sylph's, but once he returned to his normal eating pattern, the weight would miraculously re-appear. Last month, *The Body Primer* considered the mechanics of weight loss and explained why this should be so.

Cannon says that he finally found a solution: he began to jog. Anybody familiar with the standard calorie-counting methods of losing weight will find this mystifying. As is well-known, if after four rounds of your cricket field, you return to a well-deserved feast of a few toasts with butter and jam, you'll have made up in calories for those you lost while running round the field. So how can exercise be the solution?

Cannon has an answer. According to him, exercise works in two ways. First of all, it speeds up your metabolic rate. A faster metabolic rate means that the body uses up energy quicker. Moreover, argues Cannon, if you exercise regularly, your metabolic rate will quicken for all time, not just for the half hour or so of exercise.

Secondly, Cannon claims, the body reacts to a diet as it would to a famine situation. It slows down its metabolic rate, becomes less active and when no nourishment is forthcoming begins burning up precious tissue, not fat, which it regards as an energy source for the rest of the famine.

Now, says Cannon, were you to exercise, this would not happen. Your metabolic rate would go up and not down, the body wouldn't be allowed to become less active and when it did

have to find alternative energy sources, it would burn up fat, not lean tissue which it needs to maintain its active lifestyle.

Cannon's conclusion is that dieting makes you fat and that exercise makes you thin for all of the above reasons.

While the book has acquired popularity in the UK (*The Sunday Times* carried excerpts), the medical establishment has reacted with a certain amount of scorn and disbelief. Many doctors dispute the claim that exercise can make your metabolic rate go up even when you are not actually engaging in some form of strenuous physical activity. And others claim that the famine situation scenario that Cannon envisages is far from established. Some sceptics have even suggested that the whole thing is a plant on the part of the exercise industry!

Whether one accepts the entire Cannon hypothesis, there can be no denying the value of exercise as a means of losing weight. Obviously, if you follow a game of squash with several plates of *biryani*, the squash will have been of little use as a means of weight loss. But it now seems clear that any weight lost as a result of a diet will soon return unless the diet is accompanied by exercise.

What kind of exercise? Doctors usually speak of strenuous physical activity, secure in the knowledge that the average, middle-aged city dweller with a paunch, will not find the time to run six miles a day. When no weight loss results, they at once point out that their patients haven't run as much as they were supposed to.

The advantage of Cannon's prescription is that the amount of exercise does not really matter. If you jog for about ten minutes a day, or even run on the same spot for about a quarter of an hour each morning, this should be enough to speed your metabolism up and keep the body burning excess fat.

There are those who believe that even this prescription holds out no guarantee of success. Recent research in Britain suggests that some of the reasons for putting on weight may be genetic. In which case, the value of dieting and exercise is limited.

Another explanation suggests that the reasons are bio-chemical and that to achieve a lasting weight-loss, one must forget about the fad diets.

And a third has it that the only way to stay slim is to change your diet habits for all time.

It is the third explanation that probably holds out the best hope of a lasting weight loss for all time.

British researchers feel that the healthiest diet in the world is that consumed by a Japanese peasant—a little fish and rice. They believe that were the rest of the world to switch to this kind of diet, obesity and other weight-related ailments might well disappear from the face of the earth. ♦

NEXT MONTH:
STAYING SLIM AND HEALTHY.

ON BEING A MADRASSI

MV Kamath takes North Indians to task.

THERE ARE TWO things that have never ceased to fascinate me about my fellow countrymen. One is their abysmal ignorance of geography and people; the other is the feeling of superiority each caste or religious group has over the rest.

I have a friend who constantly speaks of *bhuka* brahmins–brahmins who are perpetually hungry and beg for food. In my friend's rather open-hearted thinking, all brahmins are beggars. The explanation is given that in Punjab, brahmins are second class citizens, barely tolerated by the high-class *khatris*.

Happily, my friend has never lived in the South where brahmins have their own sense of superiority and would probably have some unkind things to say about *khatris* or whosoever. All of us seem to be in need of some prop to keep our clan egos in good order.

But the inter-caste tensions are nothing when compared to the collective contempt the people speaking the so-called Indo-Aryan languages have for those speaking the languages of the South. These are dubbed as *Madrassis* or people from Madras which, to the best of my knowledge, is a medium-sized city on the east coast and whose people are probably one of the most civilised in the country.

The *Madrassi* in Bombay is anyone who does not speak either Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali or Oriya. This constantly amuses my Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and Tulu-speaking friends most of whom have never been to Madras.

There was a time when my *Madrassi* friends would get very hot under the collar when addressed as such. Today they are not bothered. They look down with bemused wonder at the colossal ignorance of their fellow countrymen. That ignorance is not just among the uneducated lower middle classes. It extends to the upper echelons of non-*Madrassi* society. I have heard a distinguished Public Prosecutor in the city refer to a very well-known Ayyangar brahmin as 'that *Madrassi*'.

Most of the non-*Madrassis*–if I am permitted to coin a word–are not dim-witted though they often behave like them. They are reasonably educated

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ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

people, some of whom have had their 'education' abroad and can speak with reasonable assurance about the prostitutes in Paris and the masseurs of Bangkok. It is just that they are culturally maladjusted people who find themselves uncomfortable except among others who belong to their own milieu.

They are apparently people who suffer from a colossal inferiority complex, for only those who feel emotionally or intellectually insecure want the comfort of looking down on others.

Around the turn of the century, as Bombay got on to the first rungs of being a commercial metropolis the need was felt by a burgeoning trading class for young people with a clear knowledge of English. The lacuna was filled by a growing petit bourgeois that came from what was then the Presidency of Madras and which had had the advantage of a liberal English education. The then Presidency of Madras was a sprawling state that included some Telugu-speaking districts, many Tamil-speaking districts, the district of Malabar which had Malayalam as its court language and the district of South Kanara where people spoke a multitude of languages (Konkani, Tulu) but whose court language was Kannada. Since they all were part of the Presidency of Madras, they were dubbed *Madrassis*, for want of a better definition.

The *Madrassi* clerk was efficient, loyal, respectful and frugal and above all hard-working and soon no office in Bombay was without its quota of the *Madrassi* stenographer, clerk, accountant and manager. It did not matter that one spoke Telugu and was very proud of his Andhra heritage, that another spoke Tamil and had a tradition of literature, music, dance and sculpture or a third spoke Kannada with as rich a cultural background as any—if not, probably richer. It seemed, for a while, that the *Madrassi* enjoyed a monopoly of jobs which, in turn, was to first arouse envy, then jealousy, then hatred and finally contempt, among non-*Madrassis*.

The *Madrassi*, again, brought with him his culinary talents and soon Bombay city was being freely dotted by *Madrassi* restaurants, otherwise known as Udipi restaurants, a generic title bestowed on almost any restaurant that provides *idli* and *sambhar* and *masala dosai* as the staple on the menu card. Even the success of the entrepreneurs was once the cause of much heartburn against the so-called *Madrassis*.

Unable to meet the competition offered by the *Madrassi*, the non-*Madrassi* could only express his frustration by making derogatory remarks about those whose language was of 'Dravidian' origin. "What is it they talk, *randu mundu*?" would be the way Telugu, Kannada, Tamil or Malayalam would be referred to.

The 'Dravidians' being a civilised people knew better than to speak derogatorily or condescendingly about others. Their sense of culture gave them a feeling for other languages they cherished. I have never heard any *Madrassi* make any derogatory reference to any other linguistic or cultural group, neither in Bombay, nor in Madras, Bangalore, Cochin or Vijayawada. More Tamilians and Malayalis and Kannadigas are probably conversant with Marathi and Hindi than Maharashtrians and certainly Hindi-speaking people with Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. Tamilians, Malayalis and Kannadigas, it seems to me are aware of their intrinsic worth and have no hang-ups. A people with the kind of past such as they have are in no need of props to sustain their ego.

My friends, especially in Bombay, find themselves at sea in trying to place me in their scale of values. My mother tongue is Konkani which is spoken in its many musical accents from Malabar in the south to Thane in the north. It is the major language of Goa. It is the mother tongue of a large number of people including PL Deshpande and AR Antulay. Many of these gentlemen are ashamed to admit the fact that their mother tongue is Konkani.

At a friend's house I was once counting aloud in Konkani and my friend's daughter asked: "Uncle, in what language are you counting?"

"Konkani," I replied.

"It sounds funny," she said. Ah, the honesty of the young. I should have said: "*Madrassi*."

Whenever I am asked what I am, I say that I am a *Madrassi*. But you don't speak *randu mundu*? "Ah," I tell my friends, "but you haven't heard me yet!"

The more charitable among my friends, anxious to absolve me of being among the more despicable, would say: "But you *really* aren't a *Madrassi*, are you? You don't sound like one!" I assure them: "I am *really* and truly a *Madrassi*. My father was one. So to the best of my knowledge, was my grandfather and great grandfather. . ." They nod their heads sadly. My father was one of the first graduates from the Madras Christian College and a great favourite of Principal Miller. As a Fellow of the Madras University in his time, I think of him as a very proper *Madrassi*. But how can I convince my very superior friends that I am not lying? I can see them feeling very sorry for me. "Fancy Kamath being a *Madrassi*? Poor fellow."

I don't know which is worse: being a '*bhuka* brahmin' in the eyes of my Punjabi friends or a *Madrassi* in the eyes of my Maharashtrian, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali and other North Indian friends. Rather than bear the thought of having inadvertently made friends with me, one friend has decided to call me an American brahmin, a nondescript status meant to elevate me, if only slightly, above the sad ranks of *bhuka* brahmins and *Madrassis*. My insistence that I am content with my lowly status and am not in need of elevation falls on deaf ears. After all, they have *their* self-respect to defend, even if I have none. How can they ever be seen in the company of a *Madrassi*? I see their point. And it is a very valid point, too. In fact, I have great sympathy for my Punjabi and other friends who have to put up with me. I am a major cross for them to bear. They seem to say: "If only he weren't a cussed *Madrassi*, it would be so much easier for us all." I know, I know. My Maharashtrian friends are equally anxious to raise my status in their eyes and are willing to forgive me for having Konkani-speaking Brahmin parents, if only I'll recant. But I cannot. I am arrogant, too. And what can be lower in the ranks of animal and vegetable kingdoms than an arrogant *Madrassi bhuka* brahmin? ♦

Vasant Gangavane: The Prodigal Returns

By Ashok Gopal

Ten years ago he was the bright hope of the Wharton's Operations Research Group. Today, Vasant Gangavane is living out his theories in his sleepy Konkan village.

VASANT GANGAVANE IS NOT IN A VERY GOOD mood. He has just returned from the District Collectorate in Ratnagiri and his limbs ache from the rattling four-hour bus journey. His blue jeans are dirty and his long straggly beard and shoulder length hair are covered with dust. It is late evening but his ebony skin glistens with sweat.

A few young villagers, dressed in plain white cotton shirts and trousers are sitting before him. "We have not been able to do much *Anna*," says one of them shifting uneasily. "We have to walk long distances in the sun and our feet get blisters."

"We have to go hungry," says another. "Most of the villages don't have hotels and since we are strangers we feel shy of asking for food."

Vasant runs his hand through his beard feverishly. His tired eyes burn through his thick lenses with irritation. "Don't just think about your problems. Think only of the task before you then all your personal problems will vanish. As for food, just take some rice along with you, ask for a pot in the village, boil the rice and eat it with salt. Simple."

They are sitting in a small dusty shed in a village called Pinguli (off the national highway to Goa, about 460 kilometres from Bombay) alongside the low rolling hills of the Konkan. Here live the Thakars, a tribe of performing artistes now driven to poverty. Vasant Gangavane is a Thakar himself. But he is a maverick in this dusty, backward village.

Ten years ago he was a student of Operations Research—

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"Now after my ten years of my work here I am sure I have defined the problem, that the root cause of backwardness in the Konkan. . . . is not so much incompetent politicians and bureaucrats as fundamentally wrong planning."

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

Vasant Gangavane outside his 'office' at Pinguli.

the specialised field of management concerned with mathematical analysis of problems—at the prestigious Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania. As part of the institute's Operations Research Consulting Group he was adviser to such mega-corporations as Standard Oil and Anhauser Busch.

Vasant could easily have got a top-ranking job in India or America. But he turned his back on these options and returned to his village in 1972 to work on problems he thought he would best love to solve: developing the Konkan, his homeland, one of the most backward regions of Maharashtra and reviving his tribe's dying folk arts of puppeteering and *chitrakathi* (the art of narrating Puranic stories with pictures).

Since he came back from America, Vasant has now revived interest in the Thakars' arts amongst scholars and government agencies and preserved many of their age-old deteriorating artifacts: *chamdyacha bahulya* (leather shadow puppets), *kalsutri bahulya* (wooden string puppets) and *chitrakathi* paintings. He is now concentrating on adult education programmes and the Maharashtra State Government's Comprehensive Water Schedule Development Programme (COWDEP). Under this scheme the government pays for *nallahs, bunds* and other constructions planned by villagers themselves to save rain water. The conserved water can then be used to bring fallow land under cultivation. The Konkan has large tracts of fallow land and receives a lot of rainfall, most of which now drains uselessly to the sea. Thus COWDEP, Vasant feels, is ideally suited to developing the Konkan.

He operates from this shed, the office of the Gokul Prakalp Pratisthan, a rural development trust founded by him in 1977. The young villagers sitting before him are volunteers whose job is to prepare the people of specific areas for adult education programmes and COWDEP. But they face several problems and by the time these are discussed and the volunteers leave, it is dark.

Vasant picks up his small suitcase and walks back to his house, a short distance behind his office. A tiled cottage surrounded by jackfruit trees, it was built by his father years ago, when this area was believed to be infested with ghosts. His father was a trendsetter in other ways also. He was among the first of the Thakars to declare (sometime in the '20s) that he was no longer interested in making a miserable living holding shows of puppets and *chitrakathi* that no one wanted to see or pay for (everybody wanted the *tamasha* or the cinema). The craziest thing he did was to send Vasant to school when all his boyhood friends helped their parents in the fields or in catching fish. Thus, Vasant Gangavane became the first matriculate among Thakars and later the only one in this entire region to have studied in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM) and later, Wharton.

PEOPLE ALL OVER THE SOUTHERN KONKAN ADORE HIM AS *ANNA*, THE ELDER BROTHER, THE LEARNED ONE WHO CAME BACK FROM AMERICA.

VASANT GANGAVANE SPENDS most of his waking hours travelling in rickety State Transport buses to distant villages, the District Collectorate in Ratnagiri and the State Secretariat in Bombay. People in hundreds of villages all over the southern Konkan districts of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg adore him as *Anna*, the elder brother (he is only 41), the learned one who came back from America to work for their welfare. Very few know of, or understand, his management and operations research background. Vasant does not mention it either—that way he feels he is on par with the people. Besides, he himself considers his American experience a part of a distant past, almost of another lifetime. One American name, however, is forever imprinted in his memory: Dr Jonathan Rhodes, the University of Pennsylvania Medical School's internationally reputed surgeon who came up with the wild idea of building an ultra-modern hospital for the university's centenary.

Until then, Vasant's life had been an ordered succession of academic glories. But he had no clear-cut motives and a nagging feeling of inferiority remained (after all he came from a backward tribe, had studied in a village school and spoke halting English). After school, Vasant had gone on to Bombay's Elphinstone College and then to IIT, Powai. Here he got a BE Honours degree and landed himself with a job in Crompton Greaves, the engineering company. One year on the

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ASHOK GOPAL

shop floor however left him with sinus trouble and a conviction that he was meant for better things. So he joined the IIM, Calcutta with vague ambitions of becoming an economist and joining the Planning Commission. He stood first in his MBA class and at the end of the second year he was offered a Fullbright Fellowship to do a doctorate in Operations Research in the Wharton School.

When he left for America, somewhere at the back of his mind he harboured ambitions of going back to his village with fresh solutions for his backward people. But in Wharton he soon became a part of the jet set management clique. As a member of the Operations Research Consulting Group he was constantly flying all over the country as consultant to top American corporations, simultaneously collecting credit points with breathtaking ease.

It was Rhodes' plan for a *sheesh mahal* (as Vasant called it) that put an end to this. The University administration did not want the hospital–it would be too expensive and was quite unnecessary–but since they were wary of standing up to an international heavyweight, they asked Wharton's Operations Research Consulting Group to do the hatchet job. Even before they started on the job Vasant knew it was going to be a dirty affair: Rhodes' project could be shot down only if it was made to look utterly ludicrous. Yet after three months they had enough material to prove just that but Vasant was already getting queasy about this kind of work. Soon after Whartons' major ego-boosting victory over Rhodes, one of Vasant's aides, driven by the sheer anxiety and euphoria, lost his head. That was the turning point. Vasant sat back and began to wonder where his life was heading.

"I realized then that I had come to America to enrich my awareness, to build up my confidence, not to rack my brains solving their corporate problems," he now recalls. "America is known as a land of opportunity. Now I wanted to test that out, to prove myself." For the next two years he went on a business binge. He started a travel agency (its working capital came from friends and Indian families in Pennsylvania), bought an old house and converted it into a student's hostel, then a hotel from a Pakistani and turned it into the Maharajah, the first Indian restaurant on the campus, a Marathi periodical, *Vaarta* and finally a door-to-door grocery delivery system for Indian families living nearby. By now Vasant was brimming with confidence. Though none of these ventures had really made big money, America taught him that he could survive. "I began to wonder, that if I, an alien, could do so much in this country, surely I would be able to do something for my people too."

> "OPERATIONS RESEARCH IS CONCERNED WITH FINDING THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS TO THE *RIGHT* PROBLEMS. WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS, IS THAT THE PROBLEM IS UNDEFINED."

In October 1972 Vasant returned to Pinguli, leaving his doctorate unfinished (he refused to write a report on the Jonathan Rhodes project), with a large suitcase crammed with books.

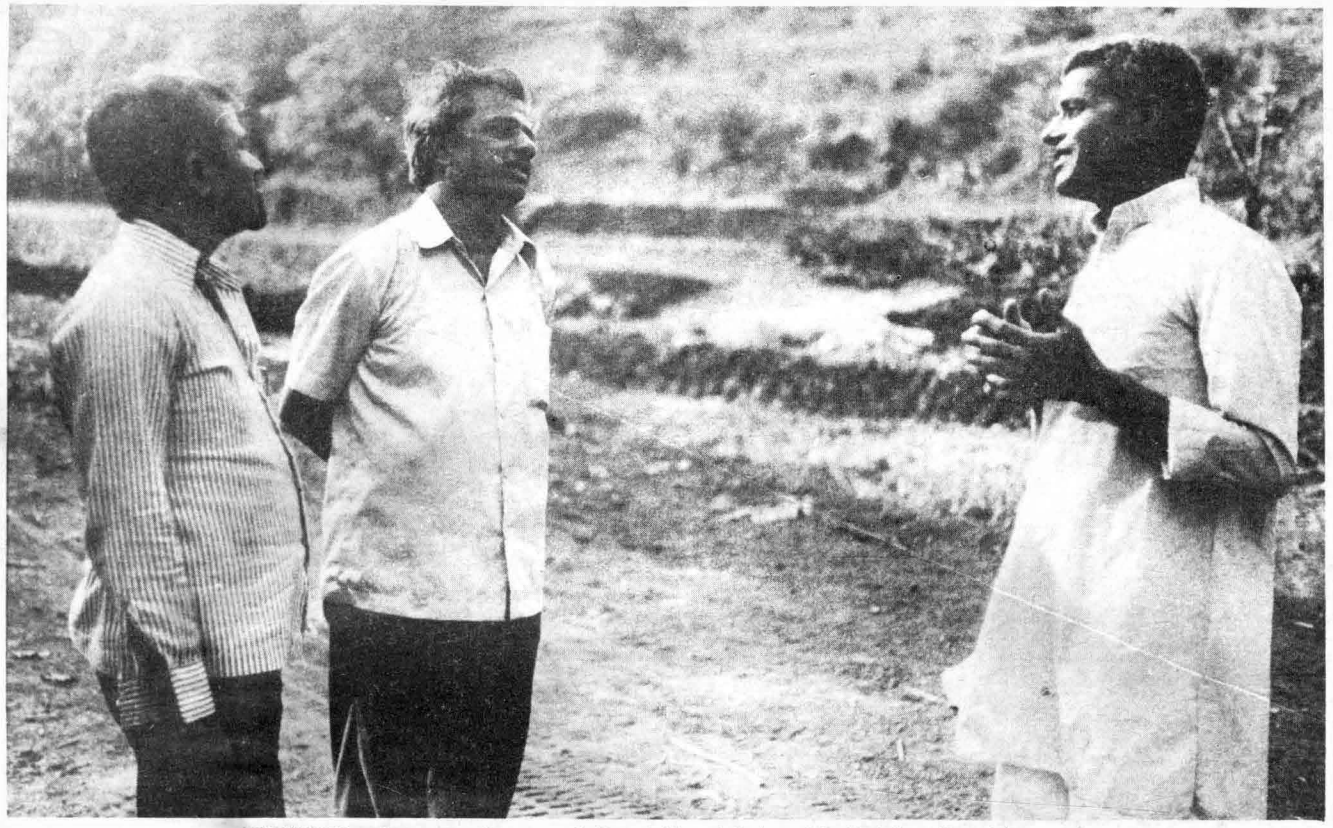
The first few years after his return were spent in trying to introduce radical farming techniques around Pinguli. Several of his projects, however, flopped: a citronella grass (used in aromatic industries) plantation had to be abandoned because the bank that was supposed to sponsor it, backed out; a cattle crossbreeding scheme never took off because of poor quality semen supplied by the government. These failures convinced Vasant that he needed an independent organisation, so he founded the Gokul Prakalp Pratisthan in 1977.

Vasant now regards his earlier failures as useful experiences. One of the important lessons he learnt, he says, is that government rural development programmes rarely work because of skewed thinking in the planning process itself. "Our planners first decide to build a dam or a steel plant and then try to find a place to fit it. I think, logically, they should work exactly the other way round. When you sit down to draw out a plan to develop a region you first study the potential of its land and manpower, then think of irrigation projects, industries etc to realise this potential. You pool in the plans of different regions and you have a national plan." Regional plans, he says, can be drawn up by the villagers themselves with the help of experts. When people plan for themselves there will be a greater check on local bureaucrats and politicians. He calls this the 'Land-Man' model of planning. COWDEP, he feels, conforms to this model.

"VASANT GANGAVANE IS AN articulate and big talker. In fact, that is all he does–talk big," says one high-ranking official in the District Collectorate, Ratnagiri. Other bureaucrats point out that for his ten years of work, *Anna* has few concrete achievements.

Vasant's reply to such criticism is that he is not interested in 'distributing goodies or building monuments'. "I

Vasant working at home: "I am here only to make the people aware."



COWDEP volunteers, Jagannath Desai (far right) and Balkrishna Desai (centre).

am here only to make the people aware. Ultimately every one has to work for his own benefit."

Nevertheless, he has several substantial, though not obvious 'achievements'. He got the government to declare the Thakars a 'scheduled tribe' so that they could enjoy the constitutional privileges. He also prodded the local MLA to have the government declare an industrial estate around the nearby town of Kudal (about two kms from Pinguli) and the first factory in this now booming area was built on Vasant's land. Pinguli itself will soon have low cost houses designed by a young Goan architect, Gerry da Cunha. Apart from helping start several *ashramshalas* (tribal schools) and adult education classes Vasant's biggest achievement to date is his COWDEP effort.

Though it is a government programme, local bureaucrats have had little success in pushing it through– COWDEP can be implemented only if two-thirds of the landowners in a village give their written consent to a common plan. Convincing illiterate, tradition and caste-bound villagers to sit together and thrash out such a plan obviously requires tremendous patience and familiarity with the people. But the people do not trust the bureaucrats and it is anyway difficult to get them interested in things they have never heard of before.

Vasant's technique is to build up crowds and suspense. "You *don't* just land up in a village and start lecturing," he tells his volunteers. "You first pick out the prominent elders and tell them that there is going to be a meeting the next week, addressed by a big *saheb*. Then you make a big fuss about arrangements so that everyone senses that something big is happening. When the great day arrives you take another volunteer (whom the villagers have never seen before) as the *saheb* in a jeep and the meeting is a sure hit. After several such 'official' meetings you finally break in COWDEP: what it means, how it will help the people, what they have to do." After several rounds of such meetings Vasant and his aides managed to get Ville, a village 120 miles north of Pinguli under the plan in 1981. Now more than 25 villages will soon come under the programme and every other day villagers from far flung areas come to Vasant and ask him to get their villages under COWDEP.

"OUR PLANNERS FIRST DECIDE TO BUILD A DAM, THEN FIND A PLACE TO FIT IT. I THINK THEY SHOULD WORK EXACTLY THE OTHER WAY ROUND."

Yet, much remains to be done. There are nearly 1,500 villages in the two districts of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg alone and the biggest problems before Vasant are finance and volunteers. The Gokul Prakalp Pratisthan receives funds from different government departments but this barely helps to pay for the travelling expenses of Vasant and ten volunteers. Fortunately, Vasant has the assistance of several equally dedicated men: Balkrishna Desai, 45, a spare parts dealer and small contractor met Vasant in Pune three years back and decided to return to his native village, Ville; he now works as Vasant's unofficial aide and right hand man. Jagannath Desai, 57, his brother, was a Jana Sangh and Bharatiya Janata Party activist in the Konkan. Now he has quit party politics and joined the COWDEP effort. Shivajirao Sawant, a veteran socialist and freedom fighter, now a local Congress (I) bigwig, is another great help as the Chairman of the Land Development Bank, Ratna-

giri. Many of the Bank's officials, including several post-graduates of Agriculture are also active COWDEP volunteers. Together they make a compact team, bound more by friendship and dreams of developing their homeland than ideology or organisation. They are confident that once new cashew and mango plantations planned under COWDEP start bearing fruit the programme will spread by itself. "The idea of villagers planning their own future themselves has an inner dynamism," says Shivajirao Sawant.

COWDEP however, is not Vasant's lasting obsession. Even if the government abandons the programme in the future he is sure its objectives could be achieved by combining several other existing programmes. His ultimate dream is to work out a practical model for planning that could be applied for the rest of the country. The complete Operations Research expert, Vasant does not consider COWDEP the ultimate solution to all rural problems—"It is only the first step in the right direction."

"Operations Research is basically concerned with finding the right solutions to the *right* problems. What usually happens, especially in India, is that the problem is undefined so we waste a lot of time trying to find the solution and often come up with the wrong one. So defining the problem is the first and most important step. Now after my ten years of work here I am sure that I have defined the problem, that the root cause of backwardness in the Konkan (and probably other regions in the rest of the country) is not so much incompetent politicians and bureaucrats as fundamentally wrong planning. Our planners have completely ignored the potential of our land and our manpower. Rather, they have concentrated in randomly building steel plants, dams and compiling statistics."

VASANT SAYS THAT HE IS NOT INTERESTED IN DISTRIBUTING GOODIES OR BUILDING MONUMENTS. "I AM HERE ONLY TO MAKE THE PEOPLE AWARE...."

HE IS SITTING OUTSIDE THE TEA shack on the highway. Luxury buses from Panaji whizz past him towards Bombay. In the distance he can see Sakharam Mhasge, one of the last surviving Thakar artistes walking jauntily towards a stream about five kilometres away to catch fish. The Thakars have a quaint way of catching fish (since they were traditionally nomadic performing artistes they know little about farming or fishing). They spread a net across the stream, then *dive* down, drive the fish to a corner and grab them with their bare hands when they get entangled in the net.

Then they pierce a reed through the eyes of the dead fish, tie a loop, sling it around their shoulders and walk to the market in Kudal to sell them. Usually they make Rs 10 or Rs 15 and return home with a few essentials and very often, liquor. Sometimes when the catch is good, they have 10 to 20 rupees to spare. How long will the Thakars continue to make a living like this? And what happens to the arts after the few surviving artistes pass away? Vasant has made plans for an art village that can become a tourist attraction, a crafts centre where youngsters can be trained. All the applications and papers are lying with the government but nothing has happened so far.

Everything in a village moves so slowly. The people don't take to new ideas (it took 15 meetings spread over a year to get Ville under COWDEP), even radical government plans inch forward (it took a year for the government machinery to start moving here). It can be very frustrating for an outsider. Several young men who joined Vasant in a fit of inspiration quit just as quickly, sickened by the lethargy of the bureaucracy, the ignorance of the people and the inevitable difficulties of village life. At least one young man left because he couldn't quite digest the idea of bathing in the open and using a pit lavatory.

Vasant is unmarried and says he felt a terrible need to 'talk to someone on your own wavelength' the first few years after coming back from America. "Now I have learnt to be sympathetic, to come down to the level of the common people."

Though he has had several 'alliances' marriage has not worked out and now when he is occasionally driven to bouts of loneliness he sings—to himself. Or he goes back to his treasured books, especially Vinoba Bhave's commentary on the *Bhagvad Gita*, the *Geeta Pravachan*. It is this book that brought him *jagruti* (enlightenment), he says and it remains a constant source of encouragement. But he cannot elucidate. Vasant Gangavane is a poor philosopher. He says he believes in the *Gita*'s ideal of doing your duty without hope of reward or pleasure. But he is reluctant to say more. He would rather talk about COWDEP and the basics of developmental planning. ♦

Vasant with volunteers: build up crowds and suspense.

Salman Rushdie: Learning To Live With Fame And Shame

By Vir Sanghvi

WHEN SALMAN RUSHDIE came to India last April, the rapturous reception he received took him completely by surprise. Magazines vied to interview him, his lectures were packed out, strangers shook his hand in the street and at least one university invited him to join the faculty.

"It was quite an important event in my life," recalls the author in his North London home. "It made me want to spend quite a lot of time there." While the celebrity status was probably quite attractive, Rushdie was more impressed by the fact that many people he met had read *Midnight's Children* and had liked it. "The greatest compliment I received was when people came up to me and said, 'You shouldn't have written this book—I should have!' In a sense, that showed how much the content of *Midnight's Children* was a part of everybody's experience."

It is unlikely that he will be received with quite the same enthusiasm in Pakistan, where his new novel (*Shame*: Rupa: Rs 30) is set. "I knew there would be problems with the book," he says. "I was very careful to say nothing about *Shame* while I was in India. I was supposed to go to Pakistan next and I knew what the reaction there would be. So, I either refused to answer any questions about it or I lied! I told some people that it was about racism in Britain, others that it was about an unnamed country and sometimes I said it was a love story!"

Shame is in fact very clearly about Pakistan. Its two protagonists Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa are quite plainly inspired by Zia and Bhutto and in some ways, the novel does for Pakistan what *Midnight's Children* did for India, by providing an alternative approach to its recent history. The Ayub years, the Yahya period, the Bangladesh crisis, the wars with India, Zia's coup and Bhutto's execution all find a place in *Shame*.

"I think *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are complementary," says Rushdie, "But I don't want *Shame* to be seen simply as a novel about Pakistan. It is about the nature of evil and about the connection between shame and violence. If you shame people long enough, they turn to violence." He is keen to emphasize the distinction between the novel's historical bits and its fictional aspect.

"Originally, I wanted to write a high tragedy about Pakistan. But was the Zia-Bhutto relationship the stuff of tragedy? It was really a tragic situation played out by people of low calibre. The people involved didn't deserve high tragedy." Rushdie's solution has been to write a high tragedy, based on the Zia-Bhutto clash but because history did not provide the tragic figures, he has created his own. "There are elements of Zia and Bhutto in Hyder and Harappa, but they are not meant to be exact literary representations of historical characters."

Whether readers will perceive this distinction is another matter. In one of the first Indian reviews of the book Iqbal Masud (in the *Sunday Observer*) missed it completely and attacked the novel precisely on the grounds that Zia and Bhutto were not worthy of high tragedy! More worrying is the character of Sufiya Zenobia, Hyder's retarded daughter.

"When I started the book, she was not so important. But after I began writing it she soon became the centre of the novel." Sufiya Zenobia is retarded and co-incidentally, so is the real General Zia's daughter. Insists Rushdie, "I know it seems impossible but I just didn't know. And when I did find out, Sufiya Zenobia was just too important to be deleted. I know this will be seen as a cheap shot. But anyone who reads the book will see that there is no attempt to get at him through his daughter. I can't really help the co-incidence. You make something up and it turns out to be so!"

Rushdie is reconciled to *Shame* being banned in Pakistan. No Pakistani publisher is likely to defy the ban because, under Pakistani law, every bookseller who stocks the novel is criminally liable and as Rushdie explains, "you can't really ask people to take that sort of risk." He knows that the book will be savaged in Pakistan and expects that the process will be painful for his family. But he is not seriously concerned. "I don't think any harm will come to them. There are Pakistanis in London who've done much worse things and nobody has taken revenge on their families."

He does however deny that the book is anti-Pakistan, though this is a conclusion that many Indian readers are bound to come to. The tone is savage and there is some unconcealed bitterness. The affection and nostalgia with which he treated Bombay in *Midnight's Children* are clearly missing.

***SHAME* WILL BE PUBLISHED ALL** over the world this month (though an Indian edition came out at the end of July) and Rushdie is clearly apprehensive about the reception it will receive. Technically, it is a different sort of writing from *Midnight's Children*. "This is a more controlled book," he says.

Vir Sanghvi is the Executive Editor of **Imprint**. *This interview was conducted in London last month.*

"The point about *Midnight's Children* is the loose ends. It is a world of a multitude of stories. I needed the form to create the atmosphere. The plot in *Shame* is supposed to be a trap. It is a closed society with very few doors out—so *Shame* is almost the opposite of *Midnight's Children*. There are no stray threads and there is a feeling of claustrophobia."

The structure too is very different. Whereas *Midnight's Children* traced the life of Saleem Sinai, *Shame* has no single central character. "That was deliberate," according to Rushdie. "I wanted a book without a centre. I wanted eight or nine characters to share the limelight. Each one would come to the front of the stage at different times and so the reader would see the same story from different angles, almost as though there was a 3-D effect."

Less successful perhaps is Rushdie's device of having himself as a narrator. At various points in the story, he intrudes and provides his own views on events. Thus, we are told how his family left Bombay for Pakistan against his wishes and what he thinks of racism in Britain. It is a device that owes much to Rushdie's own heroes like Milan Kundera but one that some readers may find jarring in the context of *Shame*. Rushdie feels that the device was necessary: "I wanted to discuss the position from which the book was written. I wanted to establish where I stood in relation to the events that I was writing about." He also feels that the narrator's intrusions allow the reader to draw back a little from the plot and to see it in more general terms, as a novel about evil, repression and shame and not just about Pakistan.

"The plot in *Shame* is supposed to be a trap: There are very few doors out—so *Shame* is almost the opposite of *Midnight's Children*. There are no stray threads and there is a feeling of claustrophobia."

The prose this time is clearer than *Midnight's Children*. Brilliantly written as that book was, there were passages that nevertheless came across as self-congratulatory or 'too clever by half.' *Shame* is more tightly controlled. "It is a different style of prose. For one thing, the book demands a different style and I was also much more experienced," he agrees.

Many of Rushdie's Indian readers loved *Midnight's Children* because it was—in a sense—about them. *Shame* is probably their first chance to judge Rushdie as a novelist who writes about a different world. He is curious to see what the reaction will be. "One of the things a novel must do is make its own world—without footnotes. That is what fiction is about. The book should be accessible to people who know nothing about its world. And yet, people who do, should find that it is true." He has very little time for the India-as-exotica criticism of *Midnight's Children*, and finds it odd that people should have wanted him to write a book that was inaccessible to the general reader.

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

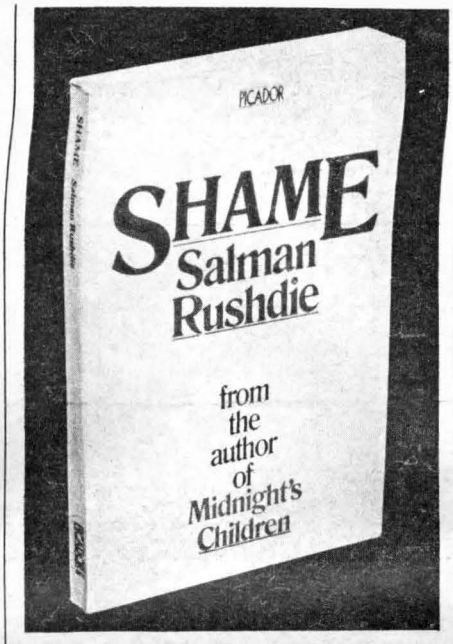
WHAT NOW? OBVIOUSLY, THE kind of reception that *Shame* gets will determine Rushdie's future plans, but he seems pretty certain that he will remain a full-time writer. He did not expect *Midnight's Children* to become a bestseller, and even underestimated the Booker Prize. "I thought that it would mean £10,000 tax free and give me a chance to sit at home and write for a year. I had no idea that it would generate so much interest." He had been pleased by the reviews but *Midnight's Children* did not really begin selling till after the Booker. And then, it took off in America. Now, translations of *Midnight's Children* are hitting European bestseller lists. The novel is selling well in France, it is a bestseller in Finland and a German translation should be out soon. Rushdie is a little bemused by his commercial success in countries whose people have no experience of India. But then, as he says, "Why should that matter? I have never been to South America and I enjoy reading Marquez."

Shame will probably get mixed reviews. For a start, there will be the inevitable backlash. When *Midnight's Children* was hailed as a classic, its author was unknown and reviewers approached the novel with no preconceptions. Now, Rushdie has a formidable reputation to support and some people feel that *any* book would be a let-down after *Midnight's Children*.

Moreover he has antagonised sections of the British press. He used TV's trendy new Channel Four to launch into a diatribe about racism in Britain; and when the Falklands fever was at its height, he condemned the British expedition, terming the war a battle over 'Maggie's Face'. Inevitably, some people will be gunning for him this time.

Rushdie seems to have accepted all this: "The only reason I got a platform to make political statements was because of my literature. So, to discredit my political views, they will have to be critical of the literature." Nevertheless, he is confident that now that he is so well-known, the book will be widely read, whatever the critics say.

And he is glad that he finished the first draft of *Shame* five days before he won the Booker: "At that stage, *Midnight's Children* hadn't really taken off and so I wasn't under the sort of pressure that I would have been, had I



waited a little longer." Of course, that first draft underwent several revisions. "My first drafts are always bad," he says. "At that stage I just sit and write. I try and put down everything so that at the end of it, I know what the book is about." In the course of rewriting, the book underwent some major changes: "Originally, it was to be a book about macho men, revolutions, coups and assassinations. But then, the female characters took over. The events were seen through the eyes of women and the book became much more than just a political tract. I came to see the parallels between two kinds of repression—political and sexual."

His bitterness about the repression of women in Pakistan does, in fact, come through quite strongly. And it will not make him popular in official Pakistani circles. But then, Rushdie is used to espousing unpopular views. After the uproar over his Falklands and racism outbursts had died down, he was at the centre of another storm. In an article in *The Times*, he committed the near-sacrilege of attacking the *Gandhi* film, provoking a furious retort from a thoroughly indignant Attenborough.

He planned last month to reply to a series of half-baked articles on India by John Cunningham in *The Guardian*, but then decided against it. Apart from the fact that the articles were not worth the trouble, he simply does not have the time. With the promotion for *Shame* well underway, he is constantly being interviewed.

When things do quieten down though, he has some ideas for the future. He is considering writing a big book ('over 500 pages') set in the West because as he says, 'that is one part of my experience that I want to use'. He remains hesitant however about approaching a completely different culture. "I want to make Western characters, but I think I'll have some Indian ones too. . . like VS Naipaul. Every book of his contains Indian characters at the centre."

Before taking that plunge, Rushdie has something else lined up. During his trip to India he kept a detailed journal about the pople he met and the things he did. At the time he wasn't sure if that material would end up as fiction or journalism. Now, he seems certain that it will be fiction. "I don't know if there is a novel in it, but perhaps it could come out as short stories. I think that is going to be the next project."

Will he still write about India with the affection that distinguishes *Midnight's Children*? "Oh yes. I think that trip made me want to spend quite a lot of time there," he repeats. He denies again though that his attitude to Pakistan is far more negative. "I think there is a kind of intellectual totalitarianism there. And there are things that are appalling and any writer should have the right to attack them. My views on Pakistani politics in no way lessen my feeling for the country."

And as a parting shot: "But a writer must be honest. If you don't write honestly, then you can't write at all." ♦

"I think there is a kind of intellectual totalitarianism in Pakistan. There are things that are appalling and any writer should attack them. My views on Pakistani politics in no way lessen my feeling for the country."

John Oliver Perry And The Voices Of Emergency

By Dhiren Bhagat

THIS IS GOING TO BE A difficult interview to report. After all, it's not every day that I'm thrown out of a hotel room. So I suppose I had better do the conventional thing and begin at the beginning.

Soon after Chandrashekhar completed his protracted walk across the country on the eighth anniversary of the declaration of the Emergency he released an anthology of poems, *Voices Of Emergency*, which was edited by one John Oliver Perry, a professor, we were told, at something called Tufts, somewhere in America.

When the book came up to me for review I was surprised to find in it an old poem of mine written long before I had attained majority. I had not written it with the Emergency in mind. Further, it is not a poem of which I am particularly proud so I cannot say I was entirely happy to see it republished. To make matters worse, not only had my permission not been sought for its inclusion, a central image of the poem had been crucially mauled owing to a small but significant typographical inversion: the *dog* of my original had been elevated to *god* in Perry's anthology.

Having worked on the other side of book and magazine production I am aware how difficult it often is to get everything right. So I decided not to make a fuss about these slips, to hold my ego in check and to proceed with perusing the volume.

Soon after, Professor Perry came to Bombay. I was asked if I would interview him for this magazine. I accepted the assignment. I was curious. Who *was* this Professor Perry? Where did he come from? Tufts, as far as I knew, were clumps of hair strewn on the floors of seedy barbershops.

Dhiren Bhagat is a columnist for several newspapers. He also writes poems and was an Associate Editor of Poetry-London.

I WENT TO SEE PROFESSOR Perry at the Rosewood Hotel in Tulsiwadi, a lane as wholesome as any in Tardeo, at a little past five in the evening, on Friday, August 5. My appointment was for five, I was late: the rain had interfered with the traffic and spattered the white of my pyjama.

Professor Perry beamed at me from behind the orange fuzz of his beard. His collaborator PT Sanghvi rose from the chair he had occupied and sat with the Professor on the bed. I had read of Prabhubhai Sanghvi in Perry's preface to the anthology; beyond that I knew nothing of him. Half an hour later, I was to be glad of his honest presence in the room but I shouldn't anticipate the end.

I decided to get into the deep end straightaway. "Most of the poems are no good," I said. "What do you have to say about this?"

"I'm a relativist," said Professor Perry routinely. It was a mumbo-jumbo line he'd obviously been spouting to journalists and other groupies all over the country. "I don't accept the aesthetic experience as defined by *this* philosophy or *other*. What's a *good* poem depends on what affects you."

"Well, that's why I said I found most of them bad. Now what I'm asking you is whether *you* found them bad as well. I want to know what sort of standards you have."

"What *is* a good poem? Can you define a Good Poem?"

"Yes."

"How do you define it?"

"Denotatively, not connotatively."

Perry looked cheated. "OK OK. No, I don't make any special aesthetic claims for the poems in this volume. I don't think you've read the preface."

"Well actually I have and I found it pretty turgid. I was just trying to check if I had understood the claim and the disclaimer on page 29 correctly."

For those readers who don't have a copy of this enormously important document before them, what I'm referring to is a pompous passage that goes like this: "What the poetry records, therefore is a national impulse which we can hope will be equally well and widely served should ever another such situation occur. The poetic record stands as exemplary for other nations and peoples faced with similar threats to their democratic governments. It is in substantiation of these generalizations, rather than to claim a special cultural value, wisdom, power or prestige for any group or party or any individual poets or poetics, that this anthology can best be understood."

"Yes," said the professor, "I'm not making any special aesthetic claims for these poems, they represent a social record."

"So you admit that most of these poems are no good."

But the professor could not be easily persuaded of the value of plain speaking: a lifetime spent in America had caused his mind to be hopelessly addicted to polysyllable euphemism.

"No," he said, "They appear to me to be poems worthy of inclusion in this volume."

I wasn't going to be fobbed off by obtuseness. "Surely you don't accept everything that claims to be a poem as

worthy of inclusion. What were the principles of selection you used? Did they have anything to do with quality or competence?"

"You don't seem to be aware of the nature of project," he said smugly. "I didn't select the poems," he said as if proud of the fact. "In each area there were coordinators, selectors and translators. Prabhubhai here was the coordinator for Maharashtra."

"In that case I'm probably talking to the wrong person. Your function seems to have been merely decorative."

"Yes," said the professor, "It's pretty decorative. I'm the organiser more than anything else."

Such honesty would have been endearing had it not given the lie to the publisher's blurb on the dust cover: 'Selected and edited by JOHN OLIVER PERRY . . .' If only we had a Trade Descriptions Act in India . . . .

WE MOVED ON TO THE SUBJECT of translation. With one notable exception (Lila Ray, translating from the Bengali) the translation seemed to me to be of poor quality. (Of course some poets have translated their own poems well—Jyotirmoy Dutta for instance—but I was talking of the principal translators.) I qualified my observation by adding that what I meant was that while it was possible the translations were accurate, most of the englished versions did not read well. Couldn't Perry have got decent poets to do the translating for him? It wasn't as if we didn't have any good translators—Ramanujan, Chitre, Mehrotra, Ezekiel, Parthasarathy... To get Dyaneshwar Nadkarni to translate from the Marathi was a sure strategy for failure. After beating about the bush a bit he came to the point. "I don't think we could have asked better translators to deal with these poems. For example Dilip Chitre, I am in touch with him. I have just spent the morning seeing his film. The poems aren't worth his time."

"You don't seem to be aware of the nature of the project," he said smugly. "I didn't select the poems," he said as if proud of the fact.

Wasn't that an admission that most of the poems weren't any good?

Double think came naturally to the political radical. "Of course not. But *individually* it is hard to justify a top ranking poet using his energy on these poems."

BACK IN 1978 UR ANANTHAmurthy suggested to Perry who describes himself as 'a long time civil rights and peace activist in America' that the latter could use his sabbatical in India researching into Emergency literature. Perry liked the idea (translated into Perry's polysyllables: "We had discovered our many common cultural ideas, both literary and broadly political and the research project was designed to engage those interests") and promptly came to India. But the project wasn't as easy as that.

"From the start of this project in 1978," writes Perry in the preface, "I have had to confront both in myself and in the hundreds of persons I have consulted a profound and many-sided doubt not only about the general significance, but indeed the very existence, of authentic Emergency protest poetry."

Later in the preface Perry outlines what he calls the two 'dubious hypotheses' commonly advanced about Emergency poetry. It is worth quoting them at some length as they seem to me pretty sound. "Most strenuous was the point made by almost every literary academician, journalist, poet or editor that I met, or later corresponded with, right up to 1982. They said that not only was almost no good poetry written to protest the Emergency, but also a lot of bad poetry had been brought out after the Emergency was lifted, probably falsely in order to attest to a social conscience, if not to

ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

incautious political or literary valour. It was also averred that in discussing the Emergency the intellectual élite, the hyper-educated literati, created for themselves exciting experiences out of paranoid delusions of officially inspired injuries and insults in order to exaggerate their own social importance, publishing these claims particularly after the Emergency was lifted. Noting that opportunism and cliquishness characterize literary artists generally, many Indians have told me that writers, like most people, shifted with social tides and have little genuine political concern or sophistication. Less cynically, it has been proposed that genuine social and cultural confusion more than political fear and oppression accounts for the relative silence of literary comment during the Emergency."

Despite this abundant caution he received, Perry, who confesses he is raw when it comes to Indian writing ('. . . Indian literature, where I am totally untutored. . .') went ahead and produced a 299-page anthology with 280 poems from 250 poets. So I had looked hard in the 44-page preface for an adequate rebuttal of the 'dubious hypotheses', for a *reason* to go ahead with this (quite possibly worthless) anthology.

All I had found was this: "Fortunately in 1977-78 at least four regional anthologies had already been collected . . ." And later a single sentence which didn't strike me as being a particularly good rebuttal: "It was all this (publishing) activity during the early Janata period which had aroused the suspicions I have recounted, but, of course, after 1980 most ulterior political motives had evaporated." That's all.

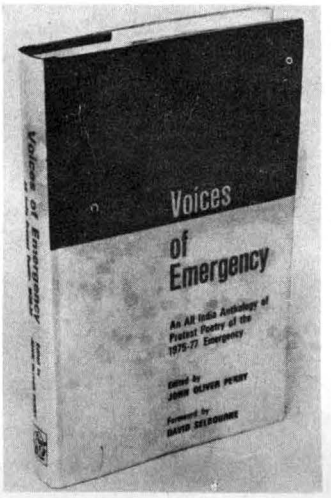
Not surprisingly I decided to concentrate on the 'dubious hypotheses' and their hopeless rebuttal for the rest of the interview.

"That's not the only place in the preface where I rebut the hypotheses," he said growing increasingly uncomfortable.

"Here is a copy of the book," I said. "Please point to me where exactly this rebuttal can be found."

He grew shifty. "I'm not sure I want to engage in this kind of discussion," accusing me, as it were, of impropriety.

"Why not Professor Perry?" I continued. "It's a perfectly respectable point I have raised, in fact it's absolutely central to your entire enterprise. For if there is no adequate rebuttal, the project is, as the hypotheses suggest, useless, even as a social record, let alone as a readable anthology of *poems.*"



John Oliver Perry's vulgar voice of emergency is but the hurrahing of such a tourist. Thank you, Professor. We can do without your loud hurrahs.

He raised his voice and spoke clearly, articulating every word, as if I were an imbecile. "I am not going to engage in this kind of discussion."

"Put plainly, you are not going to answer my question?"

"I suppose you could say that."

"I'm sorry," I said, "I am going to insist that you answer it."

"No."

"Well then I am going to conclude that you have no answer as I can see no other reason why you refuse."

Sprawled as he was on his bed, he grew vicious. He shouted. "YOU'RE DOING A POLITICAL NUMBER ON ME, BUDDY."

I scribbled that rapidly. He was still vicious. "Are you going to quote me?" he demanded.

"Yes, perhaps."

"You can't quote me saying that."

"Why not?"

"Because if you quote me saying that I'll say you're a liar."

"You can't do that," I said. "Prabhubhai heard you say it." I read from my notes. "Prabhubhai, didn't you hear Professor Perry say a minute ago, 'You're doing a political number on me buddy'?"

Prabhubhai nodded assent.

Beaten yet again, Perry started abusing me. "I know what sort of person you are and the sort of relationships. . ."

I was eager to get on with the interview. Shaking my head in despair I said to both Prabhubhai and Perry, "Please, please, please, let's come back to the interview, let's behave like adults. I'm not interested in the cheap sensation of a sharp quote. If you answer my questions Professor Perry and cooperate with me, I won't publish that stuff about my doing a political number. . ."

Perry was crazy by now. "That's a THREAT." I was about to explain to him that in fact he was the one who had threatened me ("If you quote me saying that, I'll say you're a liar") when I saw an arm shoot out towards me. "OUT, OUT," he yelled and flung open the door. I scrambled out with as many things of mine as I could collect.

I HAVE DEALT WITH *VOICES OF Emergency* elsewhere, reviewing it for *The Sunday Observer*. So I shall not go into any details here. But I hope this account of my interview with the unsound professor gives a glimpse of one sort of person who by importing into India his crassness, ignorance and 'relativism' perpetuates intellectual and aesthetic confusion here.

I have always been wary of imported 'peace activists' with dessicated minds who come to Asia to roost. Naipaul once called them revolutionaries with return tickets. And now at last, the truth about them is being recognised, even in the popular papers.

Speaking of Peter Burger's paper *The Third World Or A Religious Idea*, Iqbal Masud recently wrote in the *Indian Express*: "The Third World is now becoming an intellectual escape or a holiday from the complex, individualistic, demanding, exhausted, emotional life of the West." John Oliver Perry's vulgar voice of emergency is but the hurrahing of such a tourist. Thank you, Professor Perry. We can do without your loud hurrahs. ♦

Life At The 'Industrial'

By Sooni Taraporevala

WHAT MOST BOMBAY-ites know as RTI used to be called The Sir Ratan Tata Industrial Home For Parsi Women. This was abbreviated by the Parsi community to just one word 'Industrial'. You bought your *Tarapori patio* and *patrel* from Industrial and received your daily *bhonas* (meals) from the Industrial's catering services. Well-to-do Parsis and non-Parsis have different and more expensive reference points. RTI is where you can buy the most scrumptious chocolate cakes; RTI is where you had that gorgeous saree embroidered. The Institute has been many things to many people. For most of the women who work there, it has been their whole life.

Begun exclusively for Parsi women by Naoroji Patuck in 1899, the RTI (originally called the Stri Zarthosti Mandal) today employs 350 women in its various departments including cookery, hand embroidery, tailoring, laundry, and weaving. The RTI was, and still considers itself a welfare institution 'where poor women could come out of their distressing surroundings to work and earn in a cheerful atmosphere'.

The 'Industrial' no longer employs only Parsis and its low wages are compensated for by a sense of security. You can enter the doors of RTI at 18, poor and unskilled and stay there all your life until you choose to retire—there is no compulsory retirement age. Many of the women there are over 60. And when you do retire you have at your command considerable skills and many friends—your co-workers who have shared most of your life with you in an atmosphere not unlike a benevolent yet strict Parsi School.

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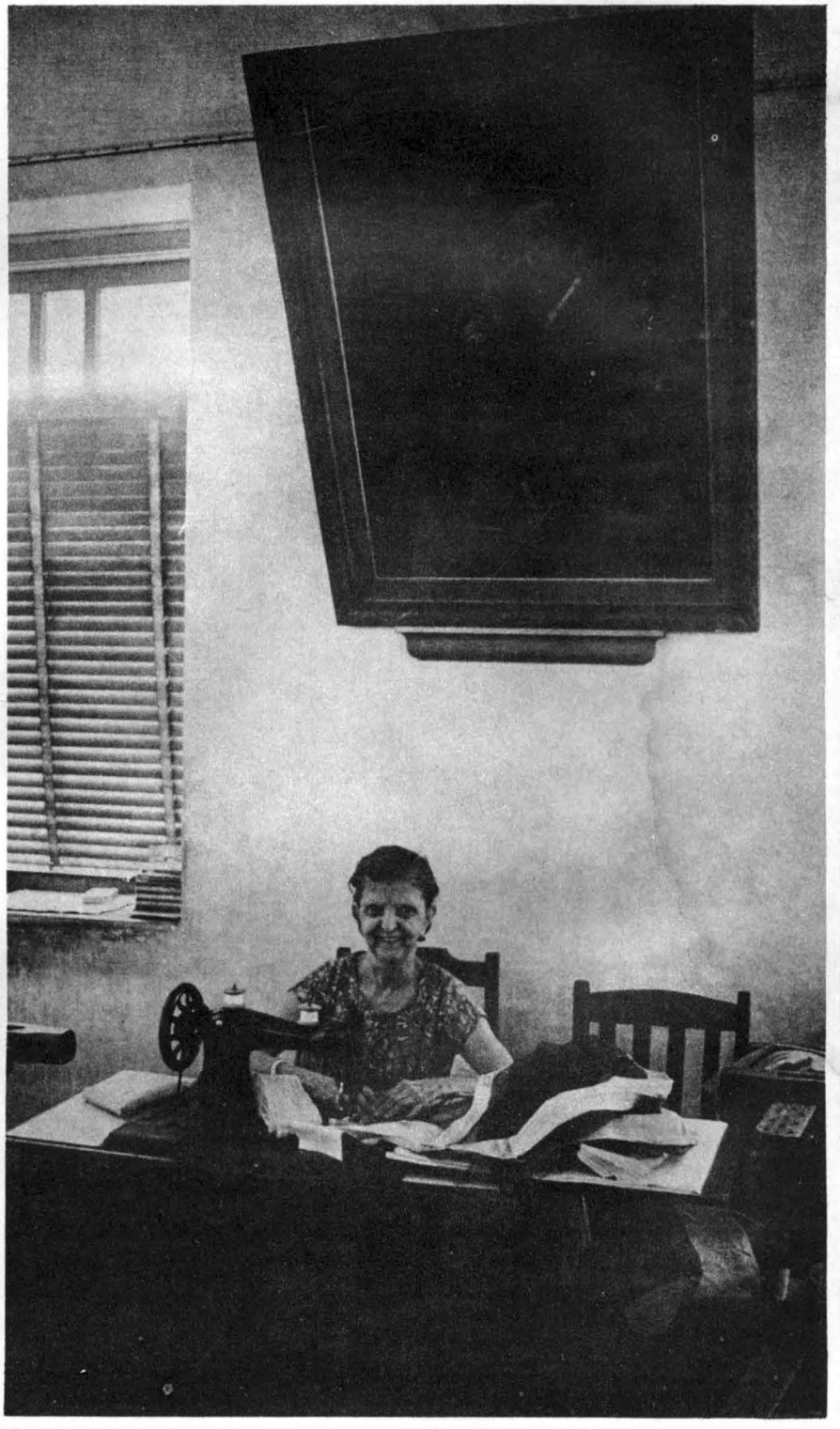

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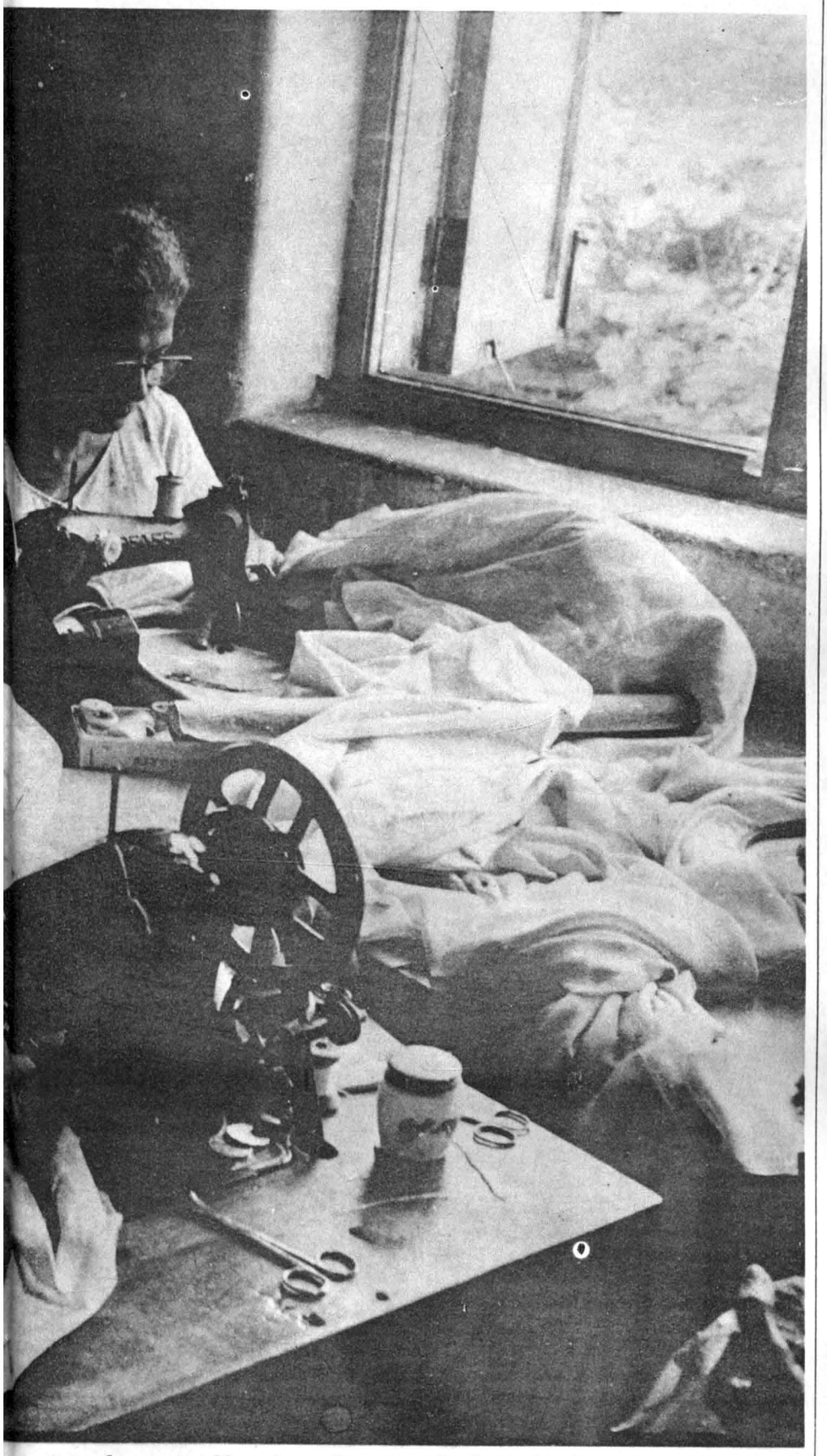

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These pictures were taken by Bombay-based photographer, Sooni Taraporevala, 26, and constitute a part of her series on the Parsi community to be published in a forthcoming book.

"I think it's important to make invisible people visible," says Ms Taraporevala of her work. "I think photographing the RTI women for instance, gave them some importance and a feeling of dignity. I talked to some of them; knew some of them. I have a relative who has been with the Institute for 38 years and who feels so much a part of the organisation. It was through her I got my first personal insights into the RTI."

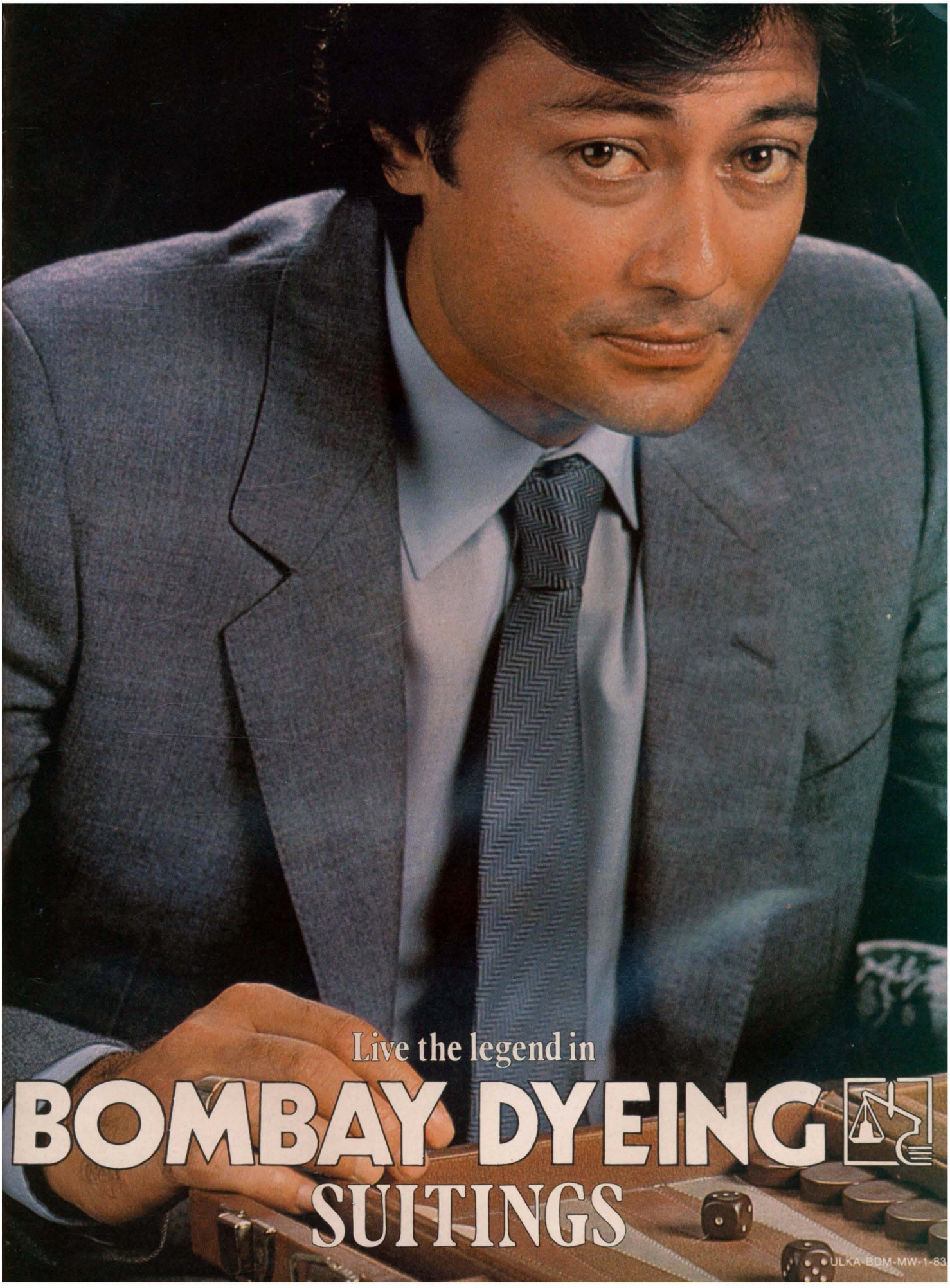
Most of Ms Taraporevala's subjects include lower and middle class Parsis in their traditional environments 'in whose hands the Parsi culture really lives'. "While charity and generosity has always been an integral part of well-to-do Parsis, what also existed was a strong spirit of camaraderie and a feeling of familiarity. Today, charity is more institutionalised, bureaucratic and unfeeling. The personal touch is missing."

In documenting and capturing lifestyles, customs, rituals and habits of the community, Sooni Taraporevala has been travelling extensively in the Parsi pockets of Western India over the past four years. However, her portfolio has not been restricted to the community that she herself belongs to but include lifestyles of people in rural India, France, Spain and the United States where she completed her higher education. She started out by using a Nikkormat but has recently switched to the Leica "because it's much quieter, quicker and its compactness makes it less obtrusive which is ideally suited to my kind of photography."

Educated in Cinema Studies at Harvard and New York Universities, Ms Taraporevala has exhibited her works at two solo shows at Harvard and Princeton and has participated in a group show at the New York University photo gallery. She plans to exhibit her work in Bombay.

When you do retire, you have at your command considerable skills. . .

Edited by Vir Sanghvi; published for Business Press Private Limited, Surya Mahal, 5 Burjorji Bharucha Marg, Bombay 400 023, by Deepak Sule and printed by him at Business Press Private Limited, care Usha Offset Printers Private Limited, Udyog Mandir Industrial Estate, 7c Pitamber Lane, Bombay 400 016, by photo-offset. Covers and 4-colour inserts printed at KL Bhargava & Co, Impression House, GD Ambekar Marg, Bombay 400 031.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