

MV Kamath On Padmashris • Fiction By Manoj Das

Graham Greene On Palmistry

imprint

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The Imperial Prime Ministership

Janardan Thakur On India's
Empress And Her Style

The
Pritish Nandy
Interview

24 Hours
At A Bombay
Police Station

Dr RH Dastur
On Sex
And The
Urban Indian

Will The Next Poll
Be Free And Fair?



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on the marquee

THIS COLUMN, IN JANUARY 1984, briefly compared some aspects of Mrs Indira Gandhi's style of functioning as Prime Minister with her illustrious father, Jawaharlal Nehru's. "The grand, extravagant style in which Mrs Indira Gandhi is playing her international role makes one wonder if she is converting her elective office into some kind of Imperial Prime Ministership," **Imprint** quizzed. Now, Janardan Thakur, journalist and author, has expanded on this theme — his piece *The Empress And Her Style* which we publish elsewhere in this issue leaves little doubt that Mrs Indira Gandhi has converted her office into a kind of Imperial Prime Ministership.

If such a style of functioning was producing good results for the country in terms of life enriched, and administration that worked, where law and order were upheld and the citizen was safe, where the chief functionary was moral and just; if her writ was running across the land, if her words were wise and her deeds reasonable, then there could be only a technical objection to an Imperial Prime Ministership in a democratic country. "Indira Gandhi's second phase of power is as big a blank as the first one..."* is the studied verdict of Mr Chalapathi Rau on her Prime Ministership of India which renders almost superfluous anything any other observer might have to say. And if you care to examine her in the role of the Congress (I) chieftain which she is, and consider her in the context of what her party is up to in Karnataka or more damagingly in Jammu and Kashmir then you will realise what thin claims Mrs Indira Gandhi has to wisdom or to reasonableness. In the event, the extension of this solemn office beyond democratically established norms and accountability is not a healthy development for India.

January 1984 *On The Marquee* also narrated an incident where Prime Minister Nehru reacted almost violently to ostentation. Equally harsh was he (*Yeh kya tamasha hai?* was his resolute chiding whenever he wanted an extravaganza dismantled.) to showing off. "Leader of leaders, leader of the world," is one of the new slogans which greets Mrs Indira Gandhi these days from throats and billboards. Her son Rajiv is the recipient of not much less: "Leader of today, hope of tomorrow," poster-plastered walls declare. You have to be very naive indeed to believe that these hallowed themes thrive *despite* her and/or his opposition. Incidentally, North Korea is the only other country where such slogans are raised, halo and all where the current ruler and offsprings are so projected. I am yet to fathom at what level of extravagance we are supposed to feel embarrassed!

Mrs Gandhi and son, and the people who help project them thus, must realise that this projection of the Prime Minister and Rajiv is leading to alienation of the sensitive and the intelligent, especially among the young on whose shoulders we should legitimately be hoping to build our dreams of hope and future for India. Freedom fighters who broke off from the Congress and became socialist had ideological convictions of courage, but also they were alienated from Nehru, probably for no fault of his but because of his monopolising of power. What we call dissidents in various of our political parties are often the alienated. Some of this is natural in a political process. But when Jawaharlal Nehru, albeit with some propriety projected daughter Indira, and Indira in turn projected Sanjay, and when Sanjay was gone before perpetuating the dynasty further, Mrs Gandhi brings out the other son, Rajiv — yes, I am doing away with the niceties — and makes him almost the assistant Prime Minister, then you are blocking out a million and more of our brightest from even entering the area of future political management which is even more important than building computers, splitting the atom, discovering oil or building enterprises which an increasing number of our men and women are doing with success, not only in India, but on the European and American continents. This blocking-out is the chemistry of alienation, in this particular national context, which will retard the advancement of our country and our people. If you have an intelligent and a sensitive son or a daughter in the 30s or in the early-40s or a brother or a sister or a friend in this group, ask him or her if he or she would like to get into politics — join a party. And reflect on the answer.

R.V. Pandit

*"... And the main sufferer is Nehru. He is being daily repudiated by his daughter." Mr M Chalapathi Rau was the Editor of *National Herald*, Nehru family founded and managed newspaper, for 31 years. A patriot and a nationalist, Chalapathi was a friend and associate of many of our national leaders from mid-'40s. He was personally close to Mrs Gandhi also, almost until his death last year. The anguished judgement I have quoted is from *Journalism And Politics* published by Vikas recently.

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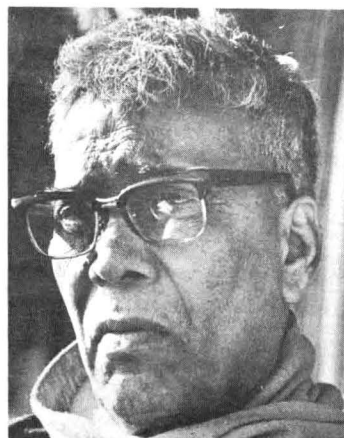
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Letters



The RSS: How Definite An Exposé?

In his article, *The RSS: The Definitive Exposé* (January 1984), Mr AG Noorani has charged the RSS with spreading communal hatred, preaching violence in the name of religion and with threatening law and order. One can only request the erudite writer of this article to go through the Holy Koran. A mere glance at it would reveal to Mr Noorani that it is full of exhortations to its followers to 'kill', 'slay', and 'torture' the 'non-believers'. What is this if not preaching violence? This cult of intolerance is nothing but Fascism in the name of Allah.

If the respected Mr Noorani cares to take even a cursory look at the history of this continent and its neighbourhood, he would know that whenever Islam became strident it practised this Fascism. In the case of the Sikhs who bore the brunt of Moghul Fascism, those who refused to change their faith were tortured. Exactly the same thing is happening in neighbouring Bangladesh. Chakmas, who are mainly Buddhists, are facing extinction because of the fanatic methods of the government. In Pakistan too, minorities have dwindled since the formation of that country. Mr Noorani perhaps does not know that Hindu women were paraded naked in the streets of Lahore during Partition. Minorities are being persecuted in Iran too, in the name of the almighty Allah.

And more recently, what happened in Srinagar during the one-day India-West Indies cricket match? Islamic fanatics waved Pakistani flags and cheered the West Indians at every stroke. They were more enamoured with Pakistan than India.

I wish that the respected

Mr Noorani would probe into the plight of minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh and make a comparative study of minorities in countries of the Indian sub-continent.

Rajat Dhir
New Delhi

AG Noorani's write-up on the RSS is a lopsided one. From his writing it appears that he has personal prejudices against the organisation. He has not understood the Sangh life in its proper perspective.

Why should the RSS keep its doors open to non-Hindus? It is beyond doubt and argument that the 'aggressors' have caused great damage to the Hindu culture. It is because of the presence of organisations like the RSS that there has not been a material change in our traditional culture.

It is a pity that a writer of Mr AG Noorani's calibre should dismiss the services rendered by the RSS in only one sentence.

It is a definitive expose of the author's misconceptions about the RSS.

Girish Bhandiwad
Belgaum

The RSS has 'discipline' and 'dedication'. The organisation has done a fine job at refugee camps, and in disaster-hit areas like Morvi and Andhra. But in spite of these virtues, it is bad, as it preaches *Hindu Rashtra* and practises *Hindu consolidation*.

On the other hand, our politicians and journalists may be immoral, unscrupulous and corrupt; they might have ditched their own parties and may be totally characterless. Still they are acceptable since they preach *secularism* or pretend to do so.

Mr Noorani did not expose the RSS. The article has revealed the jaundiced eyes of the writer and has exposed his intellectual arrogance.

In Madras, many Muslims and Christians are amply benefitted by their service activities. But it is unfortunate that the RSS does not advertise their services through the press, TV or AIR.

V Sankaranarayanan
Madras

AG Noorani's exposé of the RSS is timely. It is a chauvinistic organisation of upper caste Hindus. For all its talk of reforming Hindu Society, it has

not done anything to take the scheduled castes and tribes into its fold. It made a hue and cry when a few thousand Harijans went over to Islam as if the world had come to an end but did nothing else. It is clear that it wants to perpetuate its stranglehold on the downtrodden in Hindu Society, preventing them at the same time from going over to other religions which offer them hope for a better future.

The organisation collects enormous funds but renders accounts to none. I have met a few erstwhile RSS members but they are very reticent about their past in the RSS organisation. They appear to be suffering from a guilt complex and would be grateful for not being reminded about their past association.

Such an organisation has no place in the land of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda, whose vision and catholicity embraced the entire globe.

TK Narain
Bangalore

This is with reference to Mr Noorani's article on the RSS.

The writer through extracts and clever additions has tried to create misapprehensions about the RSS, the VHP, the BJP and the Hindu community at large.

But the people who know them, even members of the Muslim elite, such as Sikander Bakht and Arif Beg respect the ideology of the RSS.

The RSS was started by Dr Hedgewar much before Independence because he felt that the alien domination of India was due to division among the Hindus. Shivaji had posed a challenge to the Moghuls by consolidating Hindus. Hedgewar felt he could pose a similar challenge to the British through the RSS.

Alien domination is possible only if the local population is not united. During these 35 years, we have been attacked four times, but we remained united, irrespective of political, social and religious differences.

We helped to free Bangladesh from the domination of Pakistan but none of our countrymen urged that the military stay there and rule over them.

As regards the allegations that the RSS and the BJP are preaching hatred against the Muslims, it is not true. It is also not true that the RSS foments

riots inciting the Hindus against Muslims. If that were so, in this long period after Independence there would not have been only a few stray cases of riots.

LG Mankarmi
Bombay



Making Money In The '80s

Your latest issue with the cover story, *Making Money In The Eighties* (January 1984) is certainly going to increase your circulation. It will be of interest to a large section of the reading audience.

I do hope it is going to be a regular feature with some more tips and predictions otherwise it will lose some of its smack. Nusli Davar and Arvind Dalal should have a regular column every month.

Bharat Trivedi
Bombay

Operation Flood: Reality Or Myth?

Congratulations for the article *Waiting For More Anands* (January 1984) by Rajiv Tiwari.

The article accurately depicts the loopholes in the Anand Pattern. Even in Gujarat, only Kaira, Mehsana and Surat districts have somewhat benefited. The farmers in Kaira are paid Rs 2.96 per litre of milk which is much lower than what the farmers are paid in the state of Maharashtra. In fact, the Kaira farmers too are exploited under the name of co-operativisation.

Dr Kurien and his few loyalists fearing government inquiry, have enacted another drama of taking individual resignation by coercion to curb the

commencement of inquiry. Moreover as a part of the media blitz not only *Operation Flood - A Reality*, but two other booklets namely - *A Black Lie* and a compendium on recent press releases favouring NDDB, are being distributed as *prasad*! It is estimated that NDDB too, has spent over Rs 1.5 lakh in getting these three booklets printed.

It is high time that the myth surrounding the Operation Flood Project is fully exposed so that the nation's public money does not go down the drain and the rural producers as well as the consumers are fully benefitted.

NN Patel
General Secretary,
NDDB Employees Union
Ahmedabad



Media Ethics

Your December 1983 issue makes interesting reading indeed. I was particularly impressed with the feature on the media. It is a shame that there still exists a breed of journalists who write with vitriol on their paper, acid in their pen and blue murder in their eyes.

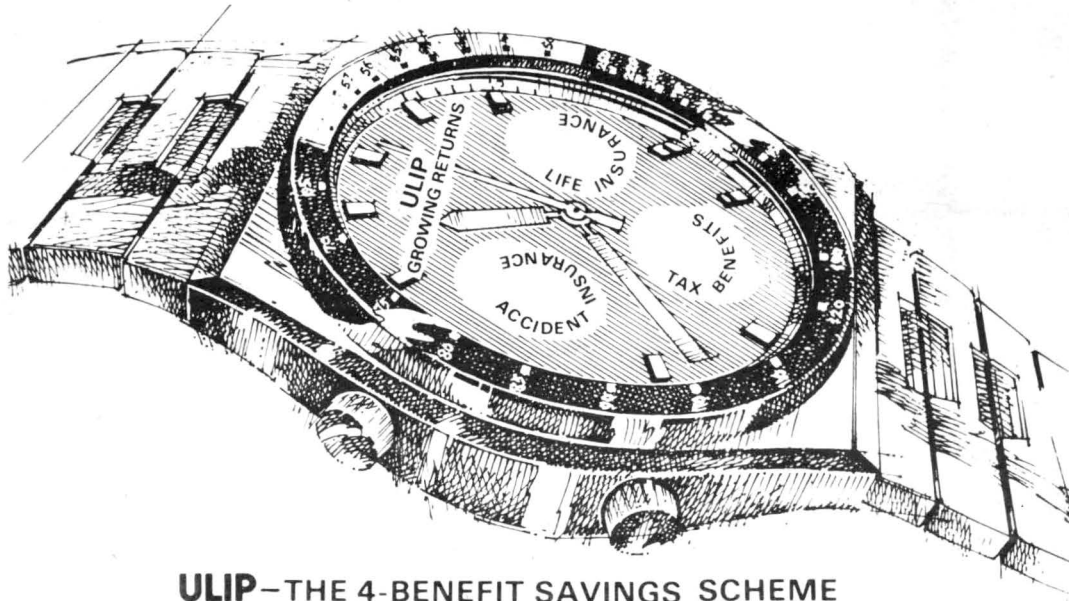
Can we not go out into the corners of the city and get coverage of people and events that are readable, educative and devoid of malicious gossip?

PK Nair
Bombay

The Rules Of The Media Game reveals the hypocrisy of journalists. RK Karanjia preaches Marxism, advocates science, publishes Bejan Darwalla and praises Satya Sai Baba all in the same issue of *Blitz*!

B Radha Krishna Rao
Bangalore

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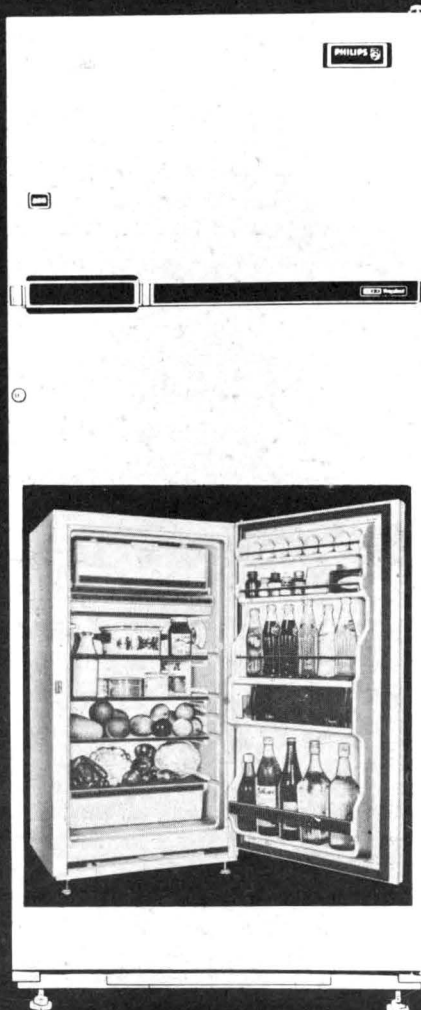
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It's not just training and 'gentlemanliness' that account for our lack of success in competitive sport — it is the absence of the 'killer' instinct.



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Philips — the trusted Indian household name for over fifty years

BY ARUN CHACKO

ROMANIAN HOLIDAY

Fun, love and games behind the Iron Curtain.

IF EVER national airlines are truly representative of their countries, they are in Eastern Europe. There is no more appropriate introduction, though Air India and more especially its toilets, seem equally indicative.

Thus while the efficiency and service of ASEAN Airlines might perhaps erroneously lead travellers to believe they are on their way to paradise, they suffer no such illusions on Aeroflot, LOT or Taron.

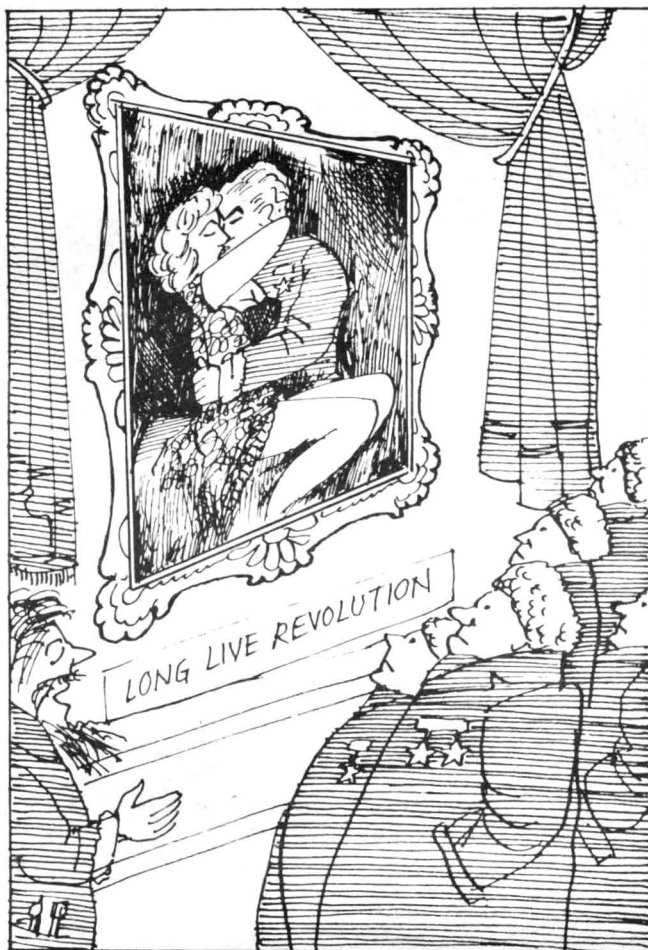
The planes are terribly maintained, polythene wrapped, cold, sandwich meals are served in cardboard containers, and the limited drink comes in plastic tumblers. Mr JRD Tata would also have a thing or two to say about the hostesses' midriffs.

Then there is the (probably unjustified) fear that a crash might go unreported, as it sometimes does for whatever reason in that part of the world. Or at least that is what the imperialist, Western dominated international media says, which is why we now have things like Namedia and the Non-Aligned News Pool.

An introduction to Romania really begins in Rome or Athens when — by Western standards — you see somewhat shabbily dressed, swarthy Balkans loaded with enormous plastic bags crammed with detergent, soap, toilet paper and other essentials.

Except that they come from a higher social strata, they look somewhat like our own Gulf-employed, who all return carrying identical National two-in-ones and furry blankets. Standing apart might be a few designer-draped relatives of high party officials not

Arun Chacko is Associate Editor of Boston's The World Paper. He is based in Delhi and writes frequently on sub-continental affairs.



carrying toilet paper and soap, since they have access to well-stocked hard currency tourist shops at home.

While the sight of returning citizens, bent double with low value common consumer goods, is a frequent sight in many places, only at immigration does one realise this is really a different world. The officer takes a long time matching face with passport picture. Then, significantly, demands a look at the traveller's profile. Finally he reluctantly stamps the passport.

* * *

AS IN ALL communist countries, getting to know the local people, or even getting into a conversation is not easy. If there isn't suspicion of outsiders, there certainly is fear of the local authorities who might object to such

fraternisation. Indeed, locals might avert their eyes on the street, much less smile, like they do to foreigners all over the world.

Obviously there is considerable resentment against President Nicolae Ceaucescu who has virtually made the country a family fiefdom, with kith and kin occupying the most influential positions in the land. There is little place for anyone else at the top, and everyone knows that.

Recounting the communist movement which first battled the Nazi occupation, and then forced the Romanian monarchy into exile, an elderly retired revolutionary seethed, "This isn't socialism that you see."

Nevertheless, the Romanians are obviously a warm, vibrant people with a tremendous zest for life, quickly evident in their overflowing pubs. While people drink gallons of excellent beer late into the night, one picturesque writers' beer hall near the Bucharest Museum serves arguably the tastiest sausage in the world.

Obviously the affluence and development of the West are an ideal, and sleepy Bucharest is more an up-country town than a great metropolis. But even in the villages people seem to have neat and well-kept houses and an adequate standard of living. No one is very poor. But there is a shortage of essential consumer goods, which is quick to bring out their scathing humour.

A story doing the rounds of Bucharest goes like this. An American stumbled upon his wife in bed with another man. "I'll sue you for a million dollars," he announced to the lovers.

A Mexican discovered the same thing. "I'll shoot you dead with my

When the curtain parted, it depicted a partially dressed Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, reclining in the arms of a handsome Russian Commissar.

gun!" he screamed.

Finally, a Romanian caught his wife and her friend in *flagrante delecto*. "You fools," he declared. "You're wasting your time. They're selling meat at the corner."

* * *

WHETHER socialist, by the standards of Marx and Lenin, or not, there is obviously little love lost with the Soviet Union. Romania has constantly been a thorn in its side and on countless occasions refused to toe the official East European line laid down by the Křemlin.

Worse, time and again it has criticised the Soviet Union for various acts of commission and omission, most recently on the deployment of nuclear arms. The Soviets have naturally replied in kind and refused to extend the economic concessions given other fraternal neighbours.

In fact, the fear of a disciplinary Soviet invasion, of the type launched in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in previous decades, is always very real. As the Romanians like to say, they have put up a huge sign on the border facing the Soviet Union. Says the legend "We want words, not deeds!"

The attitude to the Soviets and indeed to the holy cows of communism, is perhaps illustrated by this yarn. Apparently the Soviet Politburo decided they wanted a painting of Lenin in Poland. Said a leading member, "We have paintings of Comrade Lenin in Switzerland, at the Finalndia Railway Station and just about everywhere else, but we don't have a painting of him in Poland."

So an artist was duly commissioned to rectify the lapse. After a time the painting was ready and the entire Politburo called for the official unveiling. When the curtain parted before the august gathering, there was a stunned silence. It depicted a partially dressed Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, reclining in the arms of a handsome Russian commissar.

"But Comrade Artist," protested

the Party Secretary General, after he found his tongue. "We wanted a painting of Lenin in Poland."

"I know!" replied Comrade Artist. "Lenin is in Poland."

* * *

INTERESTINGLY, perhaps the most successful Romanian organisation would do credit to the most hardened capitalists. Dr Anna Aslan is an elderly physician who runs her own rejuvenation programme in Bucharest. It is conservatively estimated to earn all of 25 per cent of Romania's foreign exchange.

With four major hotels just for her foreign clients and any number regularly buying her medicines, she presides over a huge corporation. Planeloads of people from around the world, including rich Indians hoping to get back their lost youth, fork out roughly Rs 15,000 for a two-week cure.

There is the normal complement of aging, rich socialites trying to cheat Father Time, who in the evenings attract young local studs cruising the hotel lobbies and bars. But working people suffering tiredness, loss of energy and even hair, have reported remarkable results after a round of treatment. And when the effect wears out, they come back for more, which explains her phenomenal international clientele.

A large part of Dr Aslan's treatment revolves around physiotherapy and a strict, drab diet which once was accidentally served me. But the really crucial bit is the course of special patented hormonal injections which apparently work quite well.

Fortunately or unfortunately only the dietary part of the treatment came my way, that too, by accident. So it was not possible for me to personally gauge the results of the more important part of the treatment. But judging by the demand, there are obviously many who will vouch for the efficacy of Dr Aslan's treatment.

The cheapest and quickest way to Bucharest is through Athens! ♦

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I, Deepak Sule, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated February 29, 1984. Signed by the publisher, Deepak Sule.

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

BY MV KAMATH

A FEATHER IN WHOSE CAP?

The Government's attitude towards national honours is somewhat cavalier.

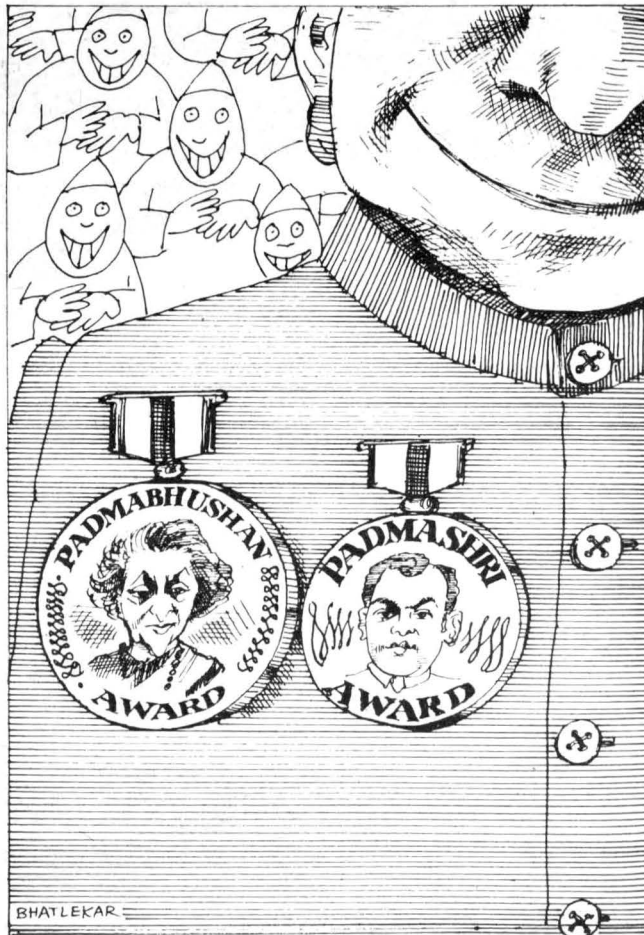
SHAKESPEARE SAID it all in *The Merchant Of Venice*, when he castigated those who sought undeserved awards:

"Let none presume
To wear an undeserved
dignity.
O! that estates, degrees
and offices
Were not derived corruptly,
and that clear honour
Were purchased by the
merit of the wearer!"

Forgotten words, these. Clear honour has not always been purchased 'by the merit of the wearer' and men of no particular merit and sometimes even of no merit have won estates, assumed degrees and have been appointed to offices, wearing, as Shakespeare pointedly noted 'an undeserved dignity'. That, it would seem, has always been and, no doubt, it will continue to be, because man has always sought recognition one way or another. If he could not get it honestly, man has sought it corruptly.

Recognition. No matter how modest an individual is, he hankers after recognition. Towards the turn of the century, say, in the early years of the first decade of the 20th century, when education was still the privilege of the rich, to be a Matriculate (Failed) was considered an honour. There were still a few in the '20s who proudly described themselves as BA (Failed). It had the merit of acknowledging that the gentleman at least had appeared for the examination, even if he did not have the honour of passing it. And such was the high standing of British degrees that it was common for young men, newly returned from England to put BA (Oxon),

MV Kamath, former editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, is currently a columnist for several newspapers.



MA (Cantab) after their names to make it clear to all and sundry that they were no ordinary mortals but were men who had studied under the dreaming spires of Oxford, or had read by the river Cam.

It would be wrong, however, to think that awards are a British invention meant to subvert Indian people. No doubt they instituted titles to humour the Rajahs, Maharajahs and Nawabs and the lesser gentry with their KCSI's, KCIE's, Khan Bahadurs, Diwan Bahadurs and Rao Bahadurs, but Indians have long been accustomed to titles — and the Estates which went with them. From time immemorial, Indians have sought titles and the *Athirathis* and *Maharathis* have always been with us in some form or other.

Their descendants are the Desais and Sardesais, the Deshpandes and Sardeshpandes, the Nawabs and their own courtiers who pre-date the British connection.

And think of all the titles which separated one scholar from another. Apart from the Vedis, Dwivedis, Trivedis and Chaturvedis which clearly distinguished one, proficient in only one Veda from others who were proficient in two, three or all four Vedas, we have Pandits and Visharads, Upadhyayas, and Mahopadhyays.

Kings and Emperors of old always rewarded talent. Tradition has attributed Nine Gems — the *navaratnas* — to the brilliant court of King Vikramaditya. Vikramaditya itself is a title, as, no doubt *Dasaratha*, the name Rama's father went by, was. In fact, the title 'Vikramaditya' (sun of valour) has been as popular in India as that of Caesar in the West. Like it, the idea of decorating the grandeur of a ruler by the addition of the halo of the ministerial gems has always been deep-rooted in the Indian imagination. The antiquity of the *navaratna* idea can be traced to verses in Kalidasa's *Jyotirvidabharana*. The *navaratnas* concept was borrowed by no less than Akbar and the tradition was maintained by Shivaji who appointed his *Ashta Pradhans*, respecting the best talents of the court. Indian monarchs have always awarded talent, whether in the field of battle or in the arts, sciences and other spheres of human activity. Old Mysore had its *Aasthanas* — court scholars — though one had really to be distinguished to get the coveted recognition. To be an *Aasthanas* meant one had attained the pinnacle of excellence.

But Maharajahs could demand

*It is unfortunate—but inevitable—that
the party in power should arrogate to
itself the right to name citizens for
appropriate titles.*

excellence from writers and artists because they did not have to bow to popular wishes. They knew that their place was secure, that they did not have to 'buy' loyalty from the vulgar crowd and so did not have to make a title a purchasable commodity. The debasement of the concept of rewarding excellence was a later phenomenon. Even the British, when they bestowed titles on Indians during the heyday of the British Empire, were careful not to distribute titles to the entirely undeserving.

Loyalty, of course, was invariably rewarded and the greater the loyalty, the higher were the rewards awaiting the loyal. To be a Rao Saheb was to put one's foot on the lowest rung of the ladder. One could always aspire for bigger and better titles. But at least there was a method in giving awards. Both the awardee and awarder were fully conscious of what it took to merit the high badge of honour.

There was meaning both in receiving awards as in relinquishing them. When Rabindranath Tagore relinquished his knighthood following the Jalianwalla massacre, its significance was not lost on the Imperial Government. It was as if a pillar of the Empire had been rudely shaken. When M Chalapathi Rao first accepted and then, in a moment of remorse rejected a Padma Bhushan given him by Mrs Indira Gandhi, not even the press, of which he was a respected and honoured member, considered it of any great import. That was the measure of the disrepute the titles bestowed under the Indira Gandhi regime had acquired.

Titles and awards have a place in any society, even a democratic one. The French, considered one of the most democratic of nations, (they claim to be one better than the British who still have a monarch) nevertheless have their own awards which, one understands, are given somewhat parsimoniously. But there doesn't exist a Frenchman who does not feel proud to belong to that select *Legion d'Hon-*

neur. As for the Americans, those other paragons of democratic virtue, while they talk eloquently of their disdain towards the titled, it was John F Kennedy who formally sought to gather American *navaratnas* around him by instituting a national honour. Not even Americans can resist the lure of recognition, howsoever circumspectly it is bestowed.

An honour bestowed must not only be right, but must *seem* to be right. Further, it makes little sense for an award given to be placed in limbo as if it never was conferred. Today's awardees seem embarrassed by the riches showered upon them by a perplexed government. In the times of the British, Khan Bahadurs flaunted their titles as their womenfolk might their diamonds. It was almost mandatory to do so. No knight would consider it below his dignity to add 'Sir' to his name and those duly knighted were most reluctant to give up their prefixes. Today, the recipients of state honours seem well content to remain *Shris* and *Shrimatis*. It is as if they are well content with the fact of being honoured, and not in the honour itself. It is a sad commentary on the system.

The Janata Party abolished the system of awards and surely, there must have been a good deal of hand-wringing in many circles. The Janata might just as well have abolished the sky with a wave of its hand for all it did to wipe out man's innermost desire to be recognised. The craving for titles remains and will always remain—Janata or no Janata. Not even the Janata could disown the many state awards given for excellence in sports, literature, etc and its abolition of national awards must be put down more as a reflex to what the Congress Party did with the titles than as an indication of its antipathy to the titles themselves. Had the Janata come to power in the normal course and not as a by-product of the Emergency, it is conceivable that it, too, would have kept up the old tradition.

It is unfortunate—but inevitable—

that the party in power should arrogate to itself the right to name citizens for appropriate titles. But the people have their own way of recognising merit—and greatness. The title of *Lokmanya* bestowed on Bal Gangadhar Tilak was greater than anything the British could have given the Father of the Indian Revolution. And it was given by the people. Gandhi became Mahatma, not by courtesy of the Viceroy but by popular acclaim. And he became one almost unobtrusively. Jayaprakash was belatedly dubbed *Loknayak*, not because he wished to, but because the public wanted him to be. And, in the end, that is all that matters.

The roll-call of honour is littered with titles given to citizens by grateful fellow-citizens. The titles must be deserved, as often they are. It is only when the State gets into the act that problems arise, and a Mike Ferreira can petulantly refuse a Padma Shri and ask, instead, for a Padma Bhushan. The Government of India messed that one up which only shows the administration's somewhat cavalier attitude towards all honours in general. The fault lies not in our merit but in the government's assessment of it, which is plainly jaundiced.

The desire for recognition is universal, though different people express it in different ways. The Frenchman wears his rosette on his coat lapel with as much pride as the Englishman who wears his title and the Russian his Order of Lenin. To watch two Japanese bow to each other is to know their pecking order. There are Barons in Germany and subtle titles indicating one's social position that the Germans are fully aware of. This is most pronounced in the academic world where to be a *herr* doctor doctor is considered a great achievement.

So let us salute Padma Shris and the Vir Chakras. They may not all deserve their awards, but to respect whatever little merit is in them is to elevate ourselves from the rest of the herd. ♦

BY AMRITA SHAH

PUNDITS OF FOLLYWOOD

Unknown outside the film industry, within it, trade journals wield enormous clout.

EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT, while the rest of Bombay sleeps, the lights blaze, telephones ring and telex machines click busily in a dilapidated building on Lamington Road. In that building are the offices of two film trade journals: *Film Information* and *Trade Guide*. Despite being virtually unknown outside of the film industry, within it they reign supreme as oracles and soothsayers.

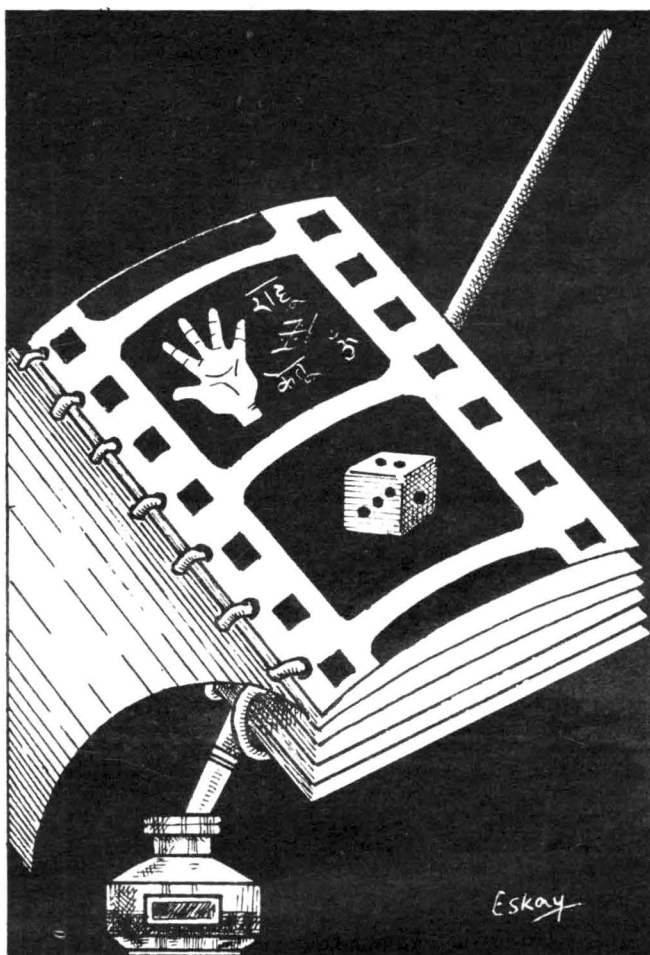
Trade Guide was started 30 years ago by BK Adarsh and his brother, Ramraj Nahta. Fifteen years later, they fell out and Nahta left to start his own trade journal, *Film Information*. Almost identical, the content of both magazines consists of trade information, box-office collection figures and reviews of the commercial potential of new releases.

Sold only by subscription, the magazines are read avidly by everyone connected with films. Movie people based outside Bombay, rely heavily on them because they provide the only access to trade information. As a result of their virtual monopoly, these two trade papers carry enough weight to make or mar the success of a film.

On Fridays, reporters are sent to the cinemas to observe public reaction to films released that day. Audience response, collection figures and editorial opinion are combined into a review-cum-prediction for every new release, written in a characteristic style.

A typical example is *Film Information's* review of Subhash Ghai's recent venture, *Hero*. The reviewer writes, "The real hero of his *Hero* is the music. . . . Action scenes have been

Amrita Shah is on the staff of Imprint. Her article Keeping Vigil At DN Nagar appears elsewhere in the issue.



well composed and they turn out to be exciting. . . . Motor bike race is well executed. . . . *Hero* gets the status of a medium hero." The focus is obviously on the box-office ingredients in the film.

The *Film Information* office is always crowded with visitors. A rumour that the tickets for *Coolie* are being distributed free of charge to fill up the halls is being discussed as glasses of tea are served to all. "You see," observes Nahta, "this kind of talk goes on here all the time. We don't even need to go out for information." He hurries to add, "But we don't rely on rumours alone."

Saturday afternoon, copies are delivered to subscribers in Bombay and by Sunday they reach subscribers

all over India. The response is instantaneous. If a film has been rated as bad or average by either of the two journals, then distributors for territories where the film is yet to be released, refuse to pick up deliveries of the film. Exhibitors who were willing to advance a large amount to the distributor start bargaining.

"If negotiations are going on between the producer and the distributor, the distributor often seeks our opinion," boasts Ramraj Nahta. "If it is adverse, the negotiations go *phut*." Another example of the impact of their reviews, is offered by Uday Row Kavi of *Trade Guide*: "If the film was to get an advance of Rs 50,000 from the exhibitor, after a bad review the exhibitor will halve his price."

Due to films being released at different times all over India, distributors and exhibitors can wait for the predictions before committing themselves.

Very often films are assessed prior to their release. Commenting on the recently-completed *Sharara*, *Trade Guide* says, "Those who have seen it are still jumping from their chairs. Surely Rajendra Singh, the director, has his own style for box-office."

In *My Column*, a regular feature in *Trade Guide*, BK Adarsh discusses various topical issues. His preferences are clearly indicated in his comments on the competition between the Rajesh Khanna starrer, *Aaj Ka MLA* and *Inquilaab* which had Amitabh Bachchan in the lead role. Writes Adarsh, "Even if *Aaj Ka MLA* is ready earlier, it can certainly be held up at Censor level, by Mr Inquilaab, is it not?"

Contrary to this, a later issue of *Trade Guide* maintained that *Inquilaab*

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*A criticism constantly levelled against
both magazines is that they change their
predictions after being proved wrong.
But they remain popular.*

was held up by the censors while *Aaj Ka MLA* was released on schedule. Informed sources allege that the latter story was a hoax planted by Bachchan's arch rival, Rajesh Khanna.

Ultimately, however, it is the film-viewing public that determines a film's success or failure at the box-office. Very often, the trade journals have been wrong in their predictions.

Their biggest blunder so far was their assessment of GP Sippy's blockbuster, *Sholay*. *Film Information* awarded it an 'A', and gradually increased it, while *Trade Guide* gave it a lukewarm reception. The film went on to become the greatest hit ever.

Admitting their mistake, Uday Row Kavi explains, "The calculations for that film went haywire, because it was the costliest film made in those times. We felt it would never be able to recover the cost."

Their assessment caused widespread panic. Overseas the film was sold at a distress sale. Though the box-office collections proved the assessment false, the loss the producers suffered was tremendous. "We felt quite sorry, and we've been very careful since then," says Row Kavi apologetically.

There have been mistakes thereafter. Chhottu Bihari's *Professor Pyarelal* was hailed as a sure-fire hit but proved a miserable failure at the box-office. Both *Film Information* and *Trade Guide* expected the recent *Coolie* to do average business. Both have been proved wrong by the film's spectacular success. Both Nahta and Row Kavi agree that they have made mistakes but insist that such slips have been very rare.

The reaction of the producers to the assessments made by these trade journals is, not surprisingly, hostile. Many express doubts about their reliability.

"It is all guesswork," says Shriram Bohra, President of the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association. According to him, as 90 per cent of Hindi films made, always do average business,

anyone can rate 90 per cent as average and will be proved correct.

Out of the remaining ten films, five may be good and they can claim 95 per cent accuracy. "But we have to pick the ten per cent," counters Row Kavi, "and it is not easy."

Gulshan Rai, Bombay's most successful producer and distributor, finds that the predictions are accurate 60 times out of 100. "But I am not depending upon all this," he says smugly. "I have my own way of finding things."

Lyricist and producer, Amit Khanna, feels that the journals are taken too seriously. "It is virtually two brothers holding a lot of people at a very loose end."

Several people argue that the people connected with *Film Information* and *Trade Guide* have little knowledge of the industry and that their predictions have no basis.

Both Nahta and Row Kavi contest this view. "I have 40 reporters waiting at theatres on Fridays. We take every angle into account and then give our predictions," argues Nahta.

A criticism constantly levelled against both magazines is that they change their predictions after being proved wrong. Kamal Amrohi in an interview with *Stardust* lashed out at the trade journals. "*Pakeezah* was initially stamped C Class. Then slowly they turned it to B... then B+. Quietly it became A, and finally they had to acknowledge it was A+. I would like to know which of their assessments one is to go by. The first or the last?"

Yet their popularity cannot be denied. They are the only channel of communication within the industry, besides being extremely informative. "The news is capsuled," says Amit Khanna. "One doesn't need to go ferreting around for information."

By all accounts it is an extremely profitable enterprise. An issue of *Film Information* or *Trade Guide* costs Rs ten and most people read both. All photographs that appear in the issues

are paid for by the people who wish to put them in. *Film Information* claims to have a circulation of 5,000 and *Trade Guide*, 7,000. Moreover, they are packed with advertising.

The editors of both journals are also producers themselves. Ramraj Nahta has produced *Sant Gyaneshwar* and *Mera Munna* and a few regional films which he claims were very successful. BK Adarsh is the producer of the controversial *Private Lives*.

It seems obvious that bringing out a film trade journal requires a certain knack. Others have tried and failed. Shriram Bohra brought out a magazine called *Film Blaze* which did not last long. Another trade journal, *KT Reports*, brought out by KT Mirchandani, is seen no longer. Amit Khanna's *Take 2*, a slick, glossy newspaper was abandoned due to internal squabbling.

The only other newspaper that partly performs the informative function of a trade journal for the film industry is *Screen*. Held in high esteem by the industry it still does not carry detailed information, as *Film Information* and *Trade Guide* do.

"We wanted to start giving box-office collection figures, but found that people were reluctant to give us the correct figures," says BK Karanjia, Editor of *Screen*. "If I were to carry figures I would first ensure that they were correct."

The only solution that remains is a magazine run by the producers' council which is the only organised body in the film industry. Eschewing predictions, this magazine could provide extensive information and serve as the voice of the film trade against any kind of external pressure.

The reaction to such a suggestion is unanimously negative. The general feeling is that running a trade journal is a specialised job and requires experienced people. Secondly, with the infighting amongst producers, a trade journal that is objective and fair is a remote possibility.



THE EMPRESS

*Mrs Gandhi has
the Prime Minister*



IN ONE of the State Bhawans in Chanakyapuri, the capital's diplomatic enclave, the Liaison Commissioner sits glued to the telephones, now picking up one, now the other. "Not now, not now, I'm expecting an urgent call . . . please disconnect," he says impatiently and bangs the phone. It is well beyond the office hours, but he cannot leave until the awaited call comes.

"I am waiting for a reply from the Palace," explains the harried officer in a whisper. "The Boss (his Chief Minister) is all worked up. Two days have passed since he made a request for an audience with the PM and still no response. I have been at it all day . . . this, you see, is my real liaison work!"

One of the phones rings again and the Commissioner springs out of his chair to pick it up. Again a 'useless' call. He buzzes his secretary in the next room and instructs, "Ensure that no outward calls are made from these phones. Keep the lines free." Finally there is a call which brings a sparkle to his eyes. With his palm cupped over the mouthpiece he whispers: "From the Palace . . . Fotedar Saheb!" And then, his BP level ris-

Janardan Thakur is a noted columnist. He is the author of All The Prime Minister's Men and All The Janata Men

AND HER STYLE

over the years, invested the office of Minister with an aura of imperialism.

By Janardan Thakur

ing, he speaks into the phone: "Ji Sir. . . ji Sir. . . ji Sir. . . Very well, Sir!" and hangs up.

Next he buzzes the intercom and the Boss comes huffing and puffing down the stairs, straightening the crease of his kurta and waistcoat. "Aa gaya phone? . . . Fotedar Saheb ka?" he asks excitedly. The Prime Minister, he is told, is too busy, but he has been told to go and meet Rajivji. The Chief Minister rushes to his car. He has barely a minute or two to reach No 2A, Motilal Nehru Road, a good five minutes drive.

Not an isolated incident at all. It happens all the time. The moment any Congress (I) Chief Minister arrives in Delhi, about the first thing he does is to put in a request for an audience with the Prime Minister and Rajiv Gandhi. And then begins his wait for a 'call' from the Palace!

'The Palace' is the term increasingly used in common parlance for the Prime Minister's house, No 1 Safdarjung Road. Some even call it the 'Delhi Durbar'. No 2A, Motilal Nehru Road, where Rajiv Gandhi has his office, has come to be known as 'Durbar No 2'. Think of any attribute of a medieval court and you have it in the Delhi Durbar — a reigning monarch, a Crown prince, hordes of fawning courtiers, obsequious

subedars lining up to pay tributes, the *praja* flocking for a *darshan* day after day, some with petitions for justice in the 'Rani's Durbar', others just to have a glimpse of the great ruler in person!

The imperial posture has been cultivated over the years and has almost become part and parcel of Mrs Gandhi, whether she is the Prime Minister or not. One remembers her elephant ride to Belhi in Bihar and the regal aura she carried with her, even though she was out of office. Her cheer-leaders were still hailing her as *Desh ki Neta*, the 'only saviour of the downtrodden'. When she reached the village, the elephant was made to kneel down but she kept sitting atop, listening to the tearful tales of the villagers, the crying women addressing her as *Desh ki Rani*. One could see that she liked it. The visit must have reinforced her belief in her imperial destiny!

Ask Mrs Gandhi's admirers, be they bureaucrats, diplomats or politicians, and they would tell you that it is she who has given an imperial aura to the Prime Ministership, that there was nothing imperial about the post *per se* — "You put Charan Singh on the *gaddi* and it becomes a rustic Prime Ministership!"

What you are being told to believe is that the office of the Prime Minister

has risen from the level of primacy to that of supremacy in order to become worthy of the imperial personality of Mrs Gandhi!

Not that Mrs Gandhi has not maintained all the trappings of a democratic Prime Ministership. Even her party which bears her name claims to be a democratic organisation. But then, Mrs Gandhi has her own unique concept of democracy — neither the Western nor the Soviet model, but a model which is uniquely her own. While in the West, conflict is considered the guarantee of freedom, and the American constitution has institutionalised conflict in the very heart of the polity, Mrs Gandhi simply frowns upon any conflict or dissent in her presence. All institutions must either serve her purpose or be declared 'enemies'.

MRS GANDHI TOO has a Cabinet, but it is nowhere near being a responsible unit in the British sense. What a sea change the Indian Cabinet has suffered since the days of Nehru and Shastri. Cabinets in those days used to be notable for having men with independent views, reputations and constituencies. Even in his peak days, Nehru had often to come to terms with his colleagues in the Cabinet. Mrs Gandhi, on the other hand,



THE PRAJA FLOCKS FOR A DARSHAN:

*Mrs Gandhi meets
people at 1, Akbar
Road.*

INCREASING THE PERSONAL POWER OF THE PM:

*M L Fotedar, Special
PA to the Prime
Minister.*



believes in anonymous Cabinets which do not deserve to be consulted, even on issues like the declaration of Emergency in the country. She likes having a Cabinet, with one or two exceptions, of clerks or compliant and faceless men who stand for nothing, have no national identity of their own and are certified not to defy her or her son's diktat.

What pathetic figures even her top ministers are! Take the plight of Home Minister, PC Sethi, during the last tripartite talks on Punjab. He was told that before going to the meeting he should go and discuss the matter with Rajiv Gandhi — he was the new 'expert' on that strife-torn state, or so thought Mrs Gandhi. Sethi had just finished taking his 'brief' from Rajiv Gandhi, when he was given the message — from the Palace — that he must go and meet PC Alexander, the Principal Secretary to the PM, before going to the tripartite talks. And so Sethi rushed to Alexander's office for another briefing, and this one seemed to run so counter to the earlier one that poor Sethi was quite befuddled by the time he arrived for the talks. He didn't seem to know what the official line had to be! "We can only sympathise with Sethi's plight," remarked one Akali leader who had got wise to the Home Minister's predicament.

Mrs Gandhi likes having a Cabinet of clerks, of compliant, faceless men who would not dare to defy her or her son's diktat.

But then that is the sort of situation Mrs Gandhi seems to enjoy. She simply does not believe in delegating her authority to her ministers for anything. Some of the most important files, especially on economic matters, don't even go to them except at the last moment, for them to sign on the dotted line. Nor does Mrs Gandhi believe in giving clear-cut briefs to her ministers. Everything is left vague and ambiguous, so that if the ministers fail, it is their funeral; if they succeed, it is her triumph.

The ministers know they are mere 'front men' — or worse. For years now, the real powers of the government have been concentrated in the Prime Minister's secretariat, which has grown to enormous proportions since Mrs Gandhi's return to power. All through Jawaharlal Nehru's and Shastri's time, the PM's secretariat was merely the personal extension of the Prime Minister; just a few officials and clerks, who operated more as channels between the Prime Minister and the operating ministries and agencies.

The crucial change towards centralisation of all operations under the Prime Minister's secretariat actually started with Mrs Gandhi's first Principal Secretary, PN Haksar, the man who was virtually the *de facto* Prime Minister for several years, before Sanjay bulldozed him out. It was this Kashmiri pundit, Haksar, who laid the foundations of the present-day imperial Prime Ministership. He could see that the personal powers of the PM could only be enhanced through a direct control over the increasingly uncontrollable bureaucracy. And for this a much larger staff, directly under the Prime Minister and with the widest powers over the proliferated government machine, was imperative.

Haksar changed the entire scenario



**FOLLOWING THE
OFFICIAL LINE:**

*P C Sethi with the
Prime Minister.*



and began the ascendancy of the PM's secretariat. He and the professionals, whose services he requisitioned, provided Mrs Gandhi with the prop against which she grew taller and taller. He not only concentrated in the PM's secretariat the power over all the economic ministries but also brought under himself the political aspects of her functions.

IT WAS THE BEGINNING of the unabashed use of government power and machinery for all sorts of political purposes.

And therein lay the seeds of today's imperial tenor—the recurrent invocation of national security, the insistence on executive secrecy, the withholding of information from Parliament on the plea that it would not be in the 'national interest' to give it out, the use of espionage and sabotage directed against the political opposition.

It was in those days that the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was established, more as a personal espionage set-up under the direct control of the Prime Minister. RN Kao, another Kashmiri, was chosen to head the RAW, and it was this favourite sleuth of hers who master-minded most of the surveillance and other operations through which Mrs Gandhi achieved

**Haksar and others
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her ascendancy.

The 'usurpers' of the Janata Government not only 'shattered' the economy which Mrs Gandhi had built up, but also 'polluted' all her intelligence organisations. The 'Restoration' saw these organisations in a shambles and Mrs Gandhi set out to rebuild her spy system. One of the first decisions she took on her return to power was to recall Ram Nath Kao from his retirement and put him at the head of all the intelligence agencies. But it took her quite a while to do this, for the power-

ful T Rajeswar was awaiting his own reward for the good turn he had done to the 'royal family' in its dark days. She had little choice but to make him the Chief of the Intelligence Bureau. And with him there, the creation of a Super Intelligence Organisation seemed a near impossible task. T Rajeswar fancied himself as another Edgar Hoover, the supremely powerful FBI chief in the '60s, and like Hoover he boasted of having the powers that be in his pockets. Information is Power!

In his unabashed bid for more power and control, specially *vis-à-vis* his rival RN Kao — who had been designated as the Chief Security Adviser to the Prime Minister — Rajeswar added a new dimension to the imperial nature of the Prime Ministership. He formed a separate 'security district' for the PM, turned the entire area around No 1 Safdarjang Road into a virtual fortress with armed sepoy's bristling all over the place — 'behind every bush' as one rather indiscreet courtier of the Durbar put it.

Never before had the PM's security apparatus swollen to such imperial proportions. Partly it was the result of Mrs Gandhi's own growing sense of insecurity, her belief that the whole country was swarming with personal enemies. The clever ones with their



**GLORIFYING
MOTHER AND SON:**

*Mrs Gandhi with Rajiv
at the AICC conference
in Bombay.*

**SHADES OF A
HAPSBURG
EMPRESS:**

*Mrs Gandhi in a
familiar mood.*



own axes to grind found it easy to play upon her fears. A phony knife attack by one nut or another was not too difficult to arrange. Such was the scare they built up that even when Mrs Gandhi was only going to the Red Fort to deliver her speech, all the roof-tops along her route were scoured for possible assassins. Shades of a banana republic!

What took the cake was the frenetic security operations on the eve of Republic Day 1982, when the guns and rifles of participating troops were thoroughly searched for ammunition. The gunning down of Sadat at an army parade just a few months before was the obvious explanation for the unprecedented operation. The despatching of a bullet-proof car by air, to run Mrs Gandhi around in the disturbed areas of Assam, was but a natural sequel. So also the great security hullabaloo during the spate of imperial extravaganzas beginning with the Asiad and ending (?) with the CHOGM.

ALL THESE GLITTERING shows were obviously part of the great imperial build up for Mrs Gandhi and her heir apparent. She had gone out of her way to assure a visiting American Editor of the *Reader's Digest* that the real credit for the grand suc-

**Starting with the
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cess of the Asiad must go to the great organisational abilities of Rajiv Gandhi. The expenditure of hundreds of crores of rupees, on the beautification of New Delhi, was also for the greater glory of the mother and son. How can a great ruler shine without a 'Proud Capital'?

For days on end during the Non Aligned Meet, Doordarshan made it a point to telecast at prime time the 'great saga' — *From Indus Valley To Indira Gandhi* — the high-water mark in the story of *Eternal India*! The great burden of all the media pro-

grammes during the NAM and the Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meet (CHOGM) was the same: how the great daughter Indira was not only keeping up the traditions of father Nehru but taking them to new heights of glory.

One of the recent expressions of the imperial Prime Ministership was surely the Rs 40-crore retreat in Goa where Mrs Gandhi shone amid the high and mighty of the world — even outshining the kings and queens in imperial style.

Mrs Gandhi's entourage when she travels abroad from continent to continent, is no less impressive than Queen Elizabeth's or of the oil kings of Arabia. The aircraft swarms with security men, bureaucrats of the charmed circle, and of course there are always some members of the 'royal' family. And always the royal grandeur of her odysseys is brought back live to the dumb masses wallowing in poverty in the benighted villages across the country. The great Rs 60-crore expansion plans for Doordarshan are primarily meant to spread the glory of Mrs Gandhi and her son.

At the end of her trips, the royal entourage returns laden with all the goodies of the West, expecting to be driven straight from the tarmac to their homes. When some foolhardy customs



TRAILING CLOUDS OF GLORY:

*Mrs Gandhi surveys
the arrangements for
NAM.*



men dare stop some of them, as they did some time back, they only run into trouble themselves. And if a press reporter has the audacity to print the news, he runs the risk of being branded an 'IB Agent'!

It is at her press conferences, studiously few and far between (to keep the Indira mystique high) that the Prime Minister is at her regal best. From the time that she breezes into the packed auditorium — resplendent with arc lamps — to the time she departs, (nodding majestically, dropping a word here and a remark there) it is one long series of imperial vistas. Newsmen are forbidden to ask follow-up questions and it is impossible to pursue any single topic. For every single critical question there are at least three eulogistic queries, clearly planted by the media advisers well in advance. At every turn, her disdain for the free press comes through. But then she is at her queenly best when she likes a question, or a questioner.

So organised are her press conferences that she cannot but emerge the victor, leaving the dissident press stewing in its own juice. At least one Delhi journalist who has come to realise the futility of it all tells me he will never again attend Mrs Gandhi's press conferences. He would leave them to the

For every single critical question at a press conference there are three eulogistic queries, clearly planted in advance by the media advisors.

'fawning national press and the admiring ladies and gentlemen of the foreign press'.

NO LESS IMPERIOUS is Mrs Gandhi towards the Opposition — at times treating them with disdain, at other times so condescendingly that it would hurt any self-respecting gentleman. She was the very picture of screaming royalty when she once shrieked in the Lok Sabha during a no confidence debate: "You (the Opposition) have the temerity to

say this to Indira Gandhi?"

The imperial 'we' comes to her so naturally, specially when she is in a rage. "We (the Nehrus) fight back when we are pushed to the wall" is an Indira quote hard to forget. But then the streak runs in the family. *We Nehrus* was the title given by Auntie Krishna Hutheesingh to a book on the family. And even cousin BK Nehru, now the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, seemed to believe that the Nehrus were the rightful inheritors of the white man's burden. He once explained to a *Washington Times* correspondent the Nehru family's view of those over whom they ruled. "Nehru, then Governor of Assam," wrote the correspondent, "was having trouble with the Mizos. Sipping tea in the comfortable Governor's Palace, B K said, 'You can't run a government along Gandhian lines. I agree with Mao: power comes out of the end of a gun. There are times when you have to face things, kill and be killed. We (the Nehrus) came along, moralists that we are, and said we must administer to these savages. . .'"

Foreign writers, journalists and diplomats have contributed a great deal to the building of the imperial aura of Mrs Gandhi. One American writer who interviewed her was 'somehow reminded of a Hapsburg empress' when he saw



DESH KI RANI:
Crowds rush to
garland the
Prime Minister.

her 'slender, sari-draped figure sweeping through the carpeted halls of the Prime Minister's residence'.

The fault perhaps lies with the incorrigible critics and dissenters who refuse to be impressed by her glamour, grace and imperial aura. They go on trying to impose on her their own standards which are quite alien to her. They try to measure her against yardsticks which she doesn't recognise. Witness the never ending commentaries and forecasts by pundits of the press about what Mrs Gandhi was going to do next with the government or her party. Most of these commentaries turn out to be rather thin on facts and fat on imagination. This is because they are based more on what the pundits think ought to be done than on what Mrs Gandhi herself thinks.

The reason why the pundits often go wrong is that they usually begin with the wrong premiss. For instance it is often assumed that the Congress (I) is a political party like any other in a democracy which ought to have a valid roll of members, an elected organisation, and that it ought to have regular meetings of the working committee or the parliamentary board. What is forgotten is the basic fact: that the Congress (I) is more like a private limited company which buys and sells power.

Mrs Gandhi has no need for the obligation of accountability. She lives in a house of mirrors where all views reflect and reinforce her own.

Of course it has all the trappings of a political party, but Mrs Gandhi cares as little for them as for the trappings of a democratic system of government. Certainly the working committee of the parliamentary board meets when Mrs Gandhi so pleases but even the participants know it is all just an empty ritual. Their leader has only cosmetic use for such bodies. She would come to the meeting trailing clouds of glory, ignore (or seem to ignore) the fawnings and crawlings of the party minions, and just sit doodling while they bathe

her with rhetoric, projecting her not simply as a political leader but as the personification of the nation. And at the end of it would come her diktat, which she could well have sent out in a circular!

Whether in the party or in the government, Mrs Gandhi has no need for the obligation of accountability, nor for the discipline of consent. The more she sits surrounded by her own views and those of her favourite advisers, the more she lives in a house of mirrors where all views reflect and reinforce her own.

The hazard is obvious. "The first impression that one gets of a ruler and his brains," said Machiavelli in *The Prince*, "is from seeing the men that he has about him. A prudent prince chooses wise men for his council and gives them alone full liberty to speak truth to him."

Wise rulers down the ages knew that if they confined themselves to a single information system, they became the prisoner of that system. More so if that system comprised only sycophants and time-servers. Those who shield themselves from reality are only asking for the obvious result: enthronement of unreality.

That is the hazard that an imperial Prime Ministership faces. ♦

FASHION SCENE
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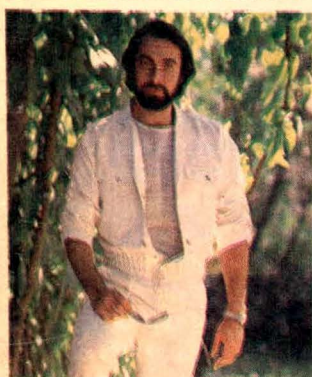


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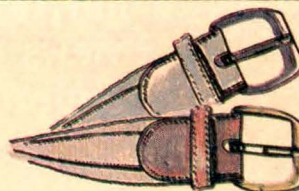
Shoes

Avoid dark colours, particularly Black. Olive, Tan, Khaki, Fawn are ideal. Genuine soft NAPPA leather shoes are the best. High heels are out. Wear shoes with heels not more than 1.9 to 2.5 cms. Leather shoes with uppers made from canvas or jute are also suitable. Sandals with back straps, sturdy heels and open weaves will help you take summer in your cool stride.



Socks

Pure cotton socks with perforated designs are the best. Colours: Shades that are somewhere in between the colours of your shoes and trousers.



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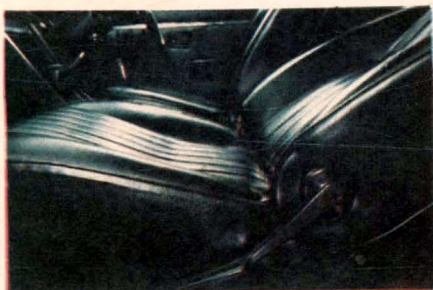
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Front Seat — Reclining

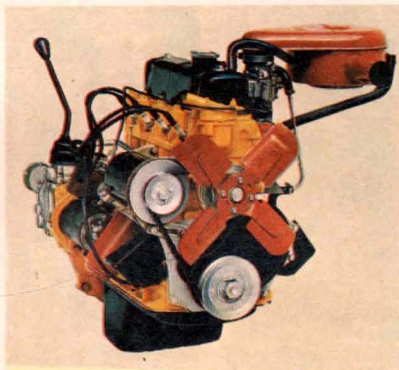
excellent visibility. A cavernous illuminated boot which can swallow 0.6 cubic metres of luggage ...

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Rides like a dream too

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directly onto the grille ... which aids efficiency even further. Larger radiator and radiator cowl improve engine cooling. A new carburettor boosts economy and performance.



Engine

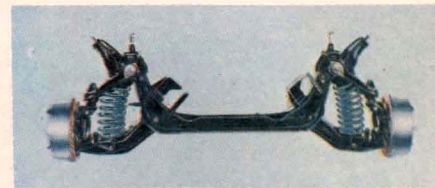
Shift into gear and the car surges ahead. Gear changes are smooth and acceleration is peppy. With the windows up, the Contessa rides clean and dry, even on wet or dusty trips.

Faultless handling

Throw the car into a high-speed turn and it corners virtually flat. Storm your way through a bumpy, uneven track and the Contessa carries on straight as an arrow, soaking up shocks serenely. This impeccable behaviour results largely from a remarkable steering and suspension system.

The Contessa's new generation rack and pinion steering offers unswerving directional stability — thanks to a special flexible linkage.

The suspension features coil springs on all four wheels with hydraulic damping. Anti-roll bars, front and rear, prevent 'wheel-lift' and assure rock-steady high-speed stability. Anti-dive suspension geometry helps keep the Contessa on the level even under hard braking.



Front Suspension



Rear Suspension

The rear suspension is a sophisticated 5-link unit equipped with trailing arms. A rigid 'Panhard rod' prevents the rear axle from deflecting sideways. Large metal bonded bushes help isolate passengers from the realities of a bumpy road. And a generous wheelbase and wide track improve the Contessa's dignified road manners even further.

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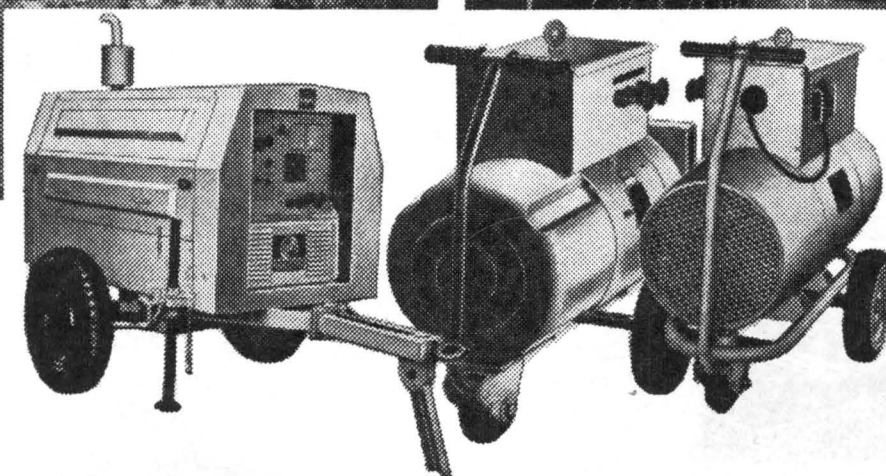
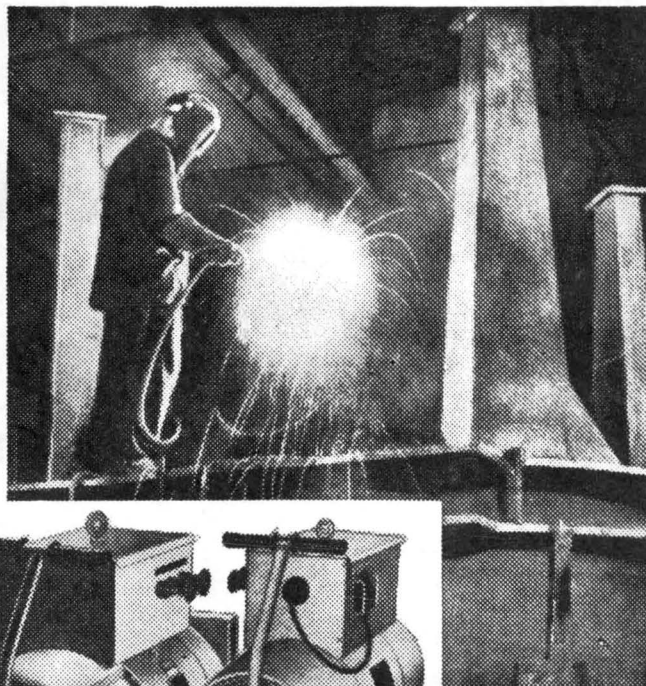
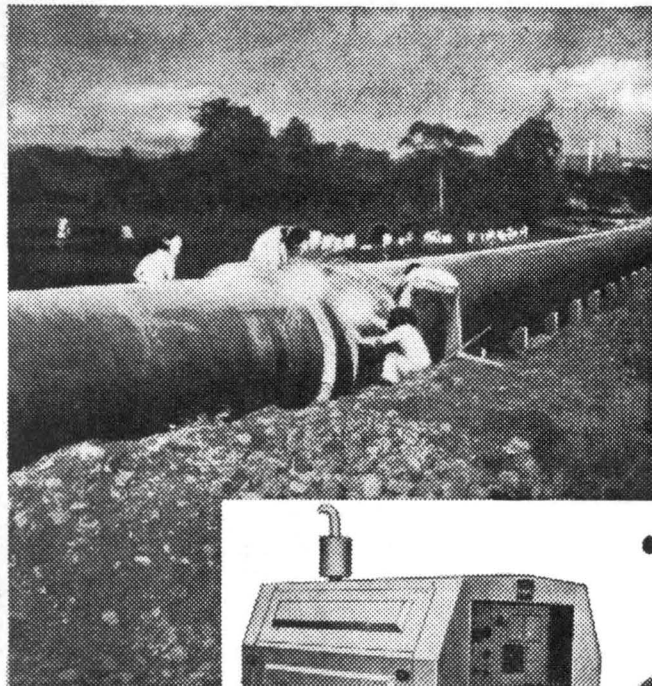


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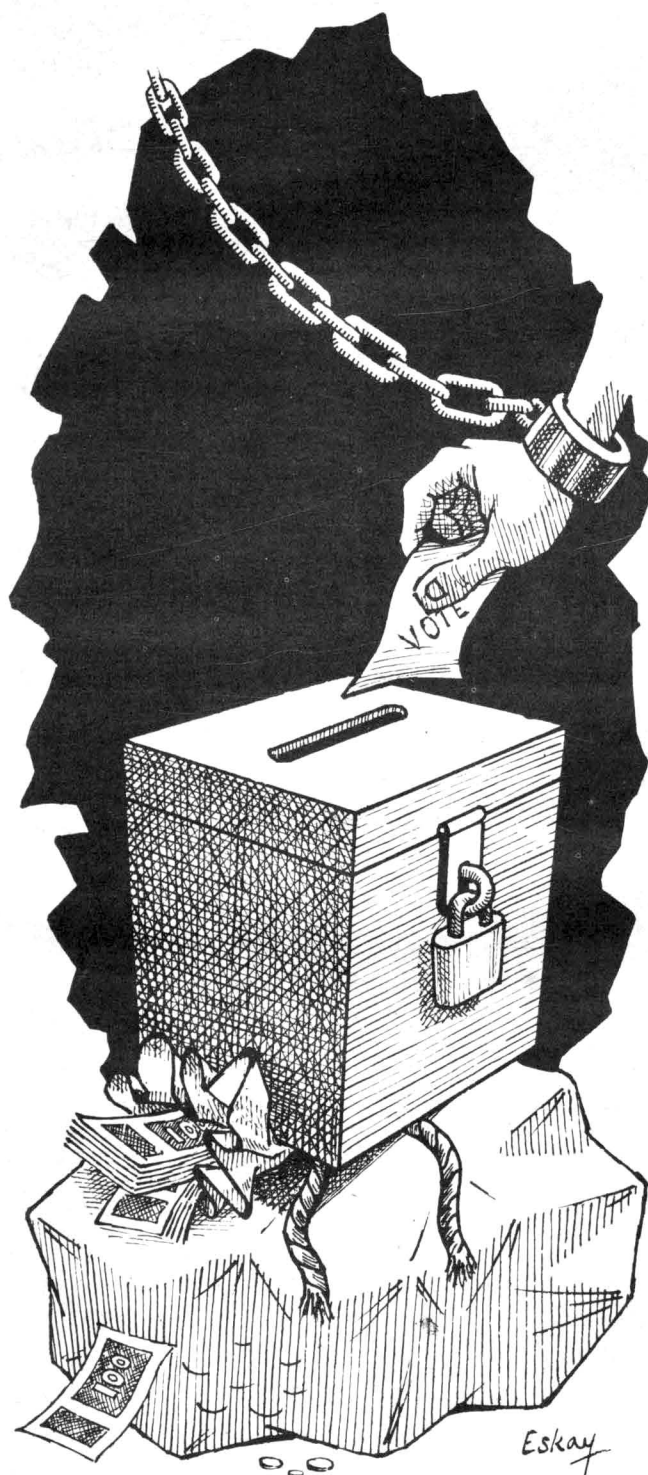
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WILL THE NEXT POLL BE FREE AND FAIR?

By AG NOORANI



IT WOULD BE criminally complacent to take for granted that the next general elections to the Lok Sabha will be free and fair. They might well be. But, it all depends on the vigilance and assertion of public opinion. The electoral process itself is perilously close to breaking point. The impartiality and credibility of the Election Commission are in justified doubt. The role of money power, and particularly of black money power, has increased enormously and so has the misuse of state machinery. In some parts of the country booth-capturing is the norm. On one pretext or another, long-overdue reform of the election law has been put off by the Government of India despite repeated promises. To cap it all, the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, has repeatedly served notice—in Garhwal (1981), Karnataka (1983) and Kashmir (1983)—that she means to fight rough.

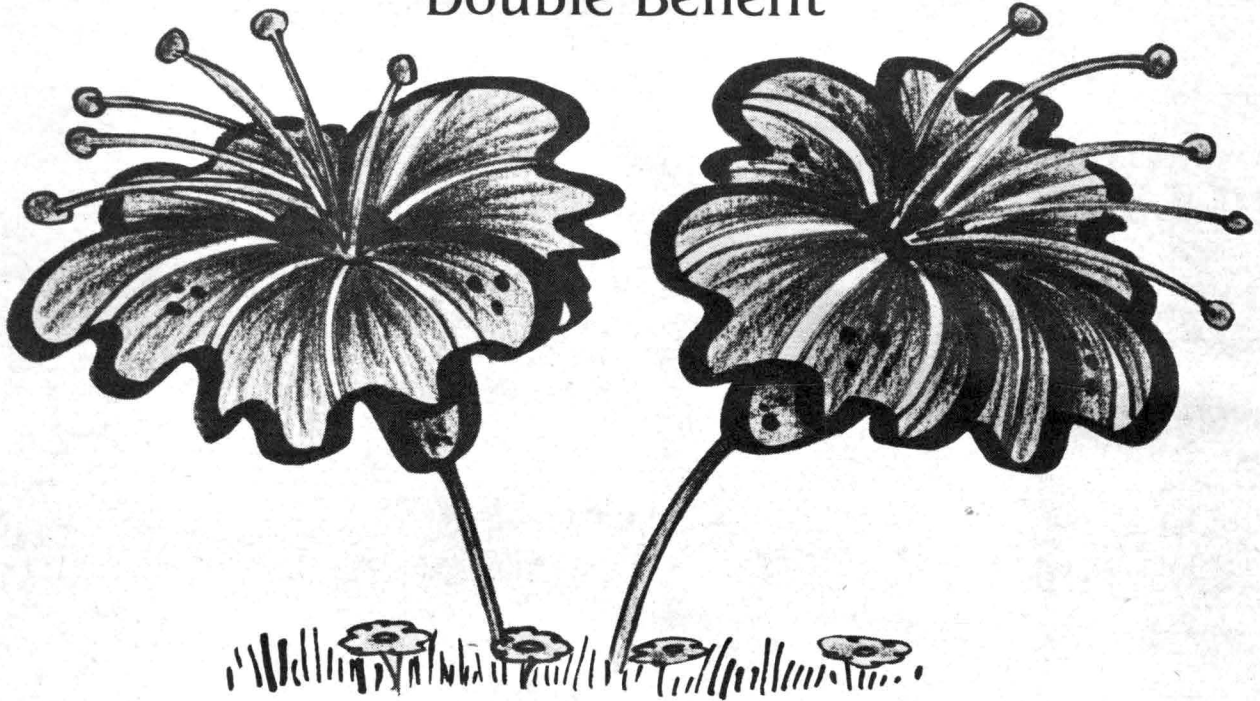
The country has enjoyed a well earned reputation for the fairness of its electoral process. That precious heritage can be lost irretrievably if we do not watch out. Destroy public confidence in the fairness of elections and the democratic system, already under strain, will collapse. That the election laws cry for reform is conceded by all including the Government of India. But precious little is being done to fill in the lacunae and check possibilities of abuse. One might suspect that the Establishment would rather live with the present election machinery and procedures simply because they are of no avail against systematic misuse of state power for electoral ends.

If you think this is an overdrawn picture and the likelihood of abuse is exaggerated, recall the famous Garhwal by-election to the Lok Sabha. In a microcosm, it reflected all the categories of abuse listed earlier—the Election Commission's bias, the misuse of state machinery, booth-capturing and Mrs Gandhi's foul play. She lied. If this is what she and her Government can do to keep a solitary, hated political opponent, HN Bahuguna, out of the Lok Sabha, what will these people not do when the stake is supreme power?

Fortunately, we have an impartial and objective report on that affair which exposes, meticulously, the tactics used in Garhwal. Bahuguna's was a rare case of an MP resigning his seat on his change of party affiliation—in his case, resignation from the Congress (I). It took the Chief Election Commissioner, SL Shakhedher, an unbelievable 13 months to hold the by-election on June 14, 1981. On June 20, however, he declared the poll to be void because 'induction of the police forces from outside the State' had interfered with the conduct of a free and fair poll. There were also allegations on both sides of booth-capturing.

AG Noorani is an authority on constitutional matters. He is a regular contributor to Imprint.

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Citizens For Democracy, an independent organisation set up by Jayaprakash Narayan, appointed a fact-finding committee consisting of Professor Bashiruddin Ahmed, Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, Ajit Bhattacharjee, journalist and BG Verghese, President of the CFD's Delhi unit. They toured the constituency, interviewed people and submitted an elaborate Report on October 22, 1981.

TO BEGIN WITH, two days before the poll the District Magistrate of Muzaffarnagar had issued an order to arms dealers to give 15 cartridges to each gun licence holder in these preemptory terms: "There should be no complaint whatsoever of failure to supply the cartridges. These orders are being issued under special circumstances and are valid only for today." The law forbids carrying of arms in a constituency during the poll period. Nearby Muzaffarnagar was convenient for evading the ban on purchase of cartridges in Garhwal.

The Prime Minister broke tradition and campaigned in the by-election. So did Union Ministers and five Chief Ministers. On July 10, 1981, Mrs Gandhi said at a press conference in New Delhi that even some officials who she had taken with herself to Garhwal were attacked. The Committee in-

As for booth-capturing, Bahuguna did exaggerate. Only six were captured in Dehra Dun.

quired into this charge. Her office 'was unable to respond to our written and oral queries' over a period of three months. The Congress (I) candidate, CM Negi, was also silent. No official, Congress (I) worker or citizen 'had the slightest knowledge of any incident including' the PM or her entourage. "We must therefore conclude that the Prime Minister's statement was totally unfounded and grossly unfair. . . electoral norms can have little meaning if they are violated at the highest levels."

As for booth-capturing, Bahuguna did exaggerate. No more than six were captured in Dehra Dun. Police contingents from Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh were deployed without the knowledge and approval of the Election Commission. Ministers organised official visits to Garhwal during the election period. Section 144 was imposed, banning public meetings and applied to coincide with Bahuguna's tour programme for the repoll. An officer who permitted him to hold a meeting at the Doon parade ground was transferred within a week of the poll.

Conversely, an official resigned two days before the poll and, in the manner of Yashpal Kapoor of the Allahabad election fame, began working 'for the same Minister in another capacity in the same locality' in the election campaign.

'Much money was spent in Garhwal' and the ceiling on poll expenditure (Rs one lakh for a parliamentary candidate) was reduced to a farce by the freedom given by law to parties

to spend as they liked. Helicopters were freely used. Bahuguna reckoned 13 of them.

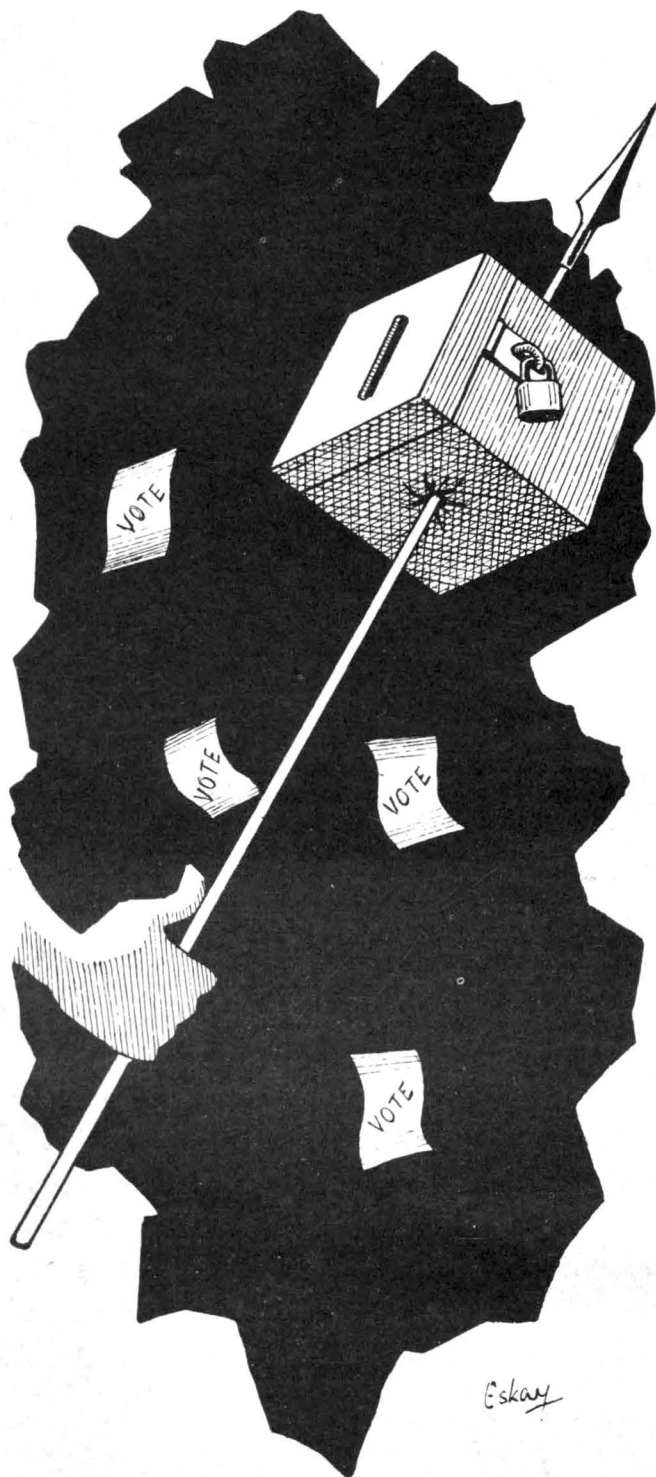
The repoll was fixed for November 22, 1981 when it could well have been held earlier. Bahuguna regained his seat, but the constituency was unrepresented in the Lok Sabha for a year and a half.

A YEAR LATER, Karnataka provided one more warning. The Deputy General of Police, KCK Raja, sent a telex message to all police stations directing Sub-Inspectors to ensure that only official Congress (I) candidates filed their nominations so that the rebels were kept out. The Deputy Inspector General (Intelligence), DR Karthikeyan, sat by Gundu Rao's side at the Karnataka Bhavan in New Delhi to help him screen the aspiring candidates. The Congress (I)'s antics in Kashmir and the poisonous communal propaganda let loose are of recent memory. One should not ignore, though, the instances of irregularities in regard to the printing of ballot papers which were detected in Kashmir.

How have we come to such a state of affairs? The First General Election in 1952 was conducted by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sukumar Sen. None of his successors came up to the standards he set. It went off smoothly. The Fourth General Election in 1967 registered a distinct change in the atmosphere. Bihar took the lead in booth-capturing and has retained it since. The Congress split in 1969 and political warfare was intensified. The election law had last been revised comprehensively in 1956. For the most part it has remained static. In 1972 a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament on amendments to Election Law made very sensible and fairly comprehensive recommendations. Significantly, implementation of these recommendations was one of the planks of JP's movement a decade ago.

There has been a steady and steep deterioration since. As the present CEC, RK Trivedi, testified on March 27, 1983, the play of money power in elections 'has assumed alarming proportions'. Apparently, most legislators begin their term with a falsehood—the return of election expenses. For, he added, "The huge expenditure incurred by candidates and political parties have no relationship to the ceiling prescribed under the law. The candidates and political parties look to big money-bags for their funds to contest elections, thereby adopting a formula which establishes the chances of winning in direct proportion to the money spent. That in course of time this triggers a chain reaction leading to corruption at various decision-making levels, does not seem to bother. Political corruption would continue to grow in geometric progression, unless Draconian steps are taken to eliminate chances of indiscriminate spending of huge amounts at elections . . ."

IN OCTOBER 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in the famous case of Kanwar Lal Gupta that expenditure incurred by a political party in connection with the election of a candidate must be included in his election expenses as being impliedly authorised by him. Law Minister HR Gokhale, denounced the ruling as 'political'. An



The device of ads in party souvenirs was devised to evade the ban. But then, who cares in a black money economy?

ordinance was issued nullifying the ruling with retrospective effect and was re-enacted by Parliament. It is still the law.

"I do not think the funds of any political party bear scrutiny," said Rajni Patel on September 9, 1977. He knew well. When the Congress Working Committee met on August 24, 1977, the AICC was in debt though crores had been collected earlier in the year for the March elections which the Party lost. Neither the Party's President nor its Treasurer knew where the money had gone or how much had been raised. Mrs Gandhi was present but did not speak on this issue. On September 5, 1977, Law Minister Shanti Bhushan, revealed that Rs eight crore had been received by the Congress from 180-odd companies which had given advertisements to souvenirs in violation of the Companies Act. These were only the open receipts. The rest can be guessed.

On April 4, 1975, JRD Tata asked: "Has not the ruling party condoned economic misdeeds and corruption by openly collecting illegal contributions, mostly in black money, for its election funds?"

The changes in the Companies Act on donations to political parties reflect sheer cynicism. On the eve of the 1957 General Elections, one of the companies moved the Bombay High Court for altering the objects clause of its memorandum of association in order to acquire the power to contribute to the funds of political parties. HR Gokhale appeared for one of its shareholders, unsuccessfully, to oppose the application. Chief Justice Chagla allowed the amendment, since there was no legal impediment but he uttered strong warnings of the danger such contributions entailed.

But the Companies Act was amended in 1960 explicitly to permit such donations upto Rs 25,000 or five per cent of the average net profits of the three preceding years, whichever was greater. In 1969, fearing that the Opposition might also reap the benefit, a total ban was imposed. "Experience has shown that the said ban has not produced the desired result," said the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the 1976 Bill which sought to lift the ban. It lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha in 1977. The ban remains. The device of ads in Party souvenirs was devised to evade the ban. But then, who cares in a black money economy?

TRIVEDI SUGGESTS that 'misuse of official machinery should also be treated as corrupt practices attracting the legal provision'. It is unlikely that the Government will so amend the law before the next election. Certainly not a Government headed by a PM who imposed a fraudulent Emergency, amended the Constitution and retrospectively altered the election law to nullify an adverse judgement of the Allahabad High Court unseating her.

Of all the inanities uttered on that sordid episode the worst is that Mrs Gandhi was guilty only of 'technical' offences. Yashpal Kapoor, a gazetted officer on the Government's pay-roll, resigned to campaign for her. If this lapse were a technicality why did Kapoor and PN Haksar make statements on oath which Justice JML Sinha had to reject as unworthy of credence? And why did not Mrs Gandhi dare to have her appeal heard by the Supreme Court, like any other litigant on the basis of the existing law and on the evidence on record?

Mrs Gandhi's evidence was also disbelieved on more than

one crucial point. The Judge said that since her tour programme was sent from her office 'with her approval and contained an implied direction that the State Government may, *inter alia*, arrange for the construction of rostrums and for loudspeakers for her meetings, the needed initiative emanated from her'.

Mrs Gandhi had the law amended retrospectively to the effect that if a government official does all this and more in the discharge, or even 'purported discharge', of his duty, the candidate will not be deemed guilty of a corrupt practice. It leaves the door wide open to all manner of corrupt practices. The language is sweeping—the official 'makes any arrangements or provides any facilities or does any other act or thing' for the candidate 'whether by reason of the office held by the candidate or for any other reason'. Nonetheless, it will not be deemed (in law though it is in fact) official 'assistance' to the candidate so long as it is even in the 'purported discharge' of the official's duty. Do you realise the implications of these catch-all phrases? An official who *thinks* it his duty to protect Rajiv Gandhi can render him any help in the election and Rajiv will not be disqualified. The language is so sweeping. The courts should read it down.

BOOOTH-CAPTURING was fairly extensive in Bihar by 1971. Far worse things happened in West Bengal and they are documented in a 'Statement of Left Parties of West Bengal on West Bengal Election, 1972' signed by Jyoti Basu and others. JP intended to set up a fact-finding committee but gave up in view of the difficulties. In the 1971 elections the Congress (R) won 29.8 per cent of the votes and 105 seats; in 1972 it won 49.1 per cent of the votes and 216 seats. The CPM secured in these years 33.8 per cent of votes and 113 seats and 27.5 per cent of votes and 14 seats, respectively. The document lists many grave irregularities — such as booth-capturing, use of violence and even fraud — in the counting of votes.

A new form of booth-capture emerged—silent booth-capturing. It was done with the connivance of the officials and went unreported. The Election Commission's Report for the 1980 Bihar Assembly Election records: "It must be mentioned here that at one polling booth viz No 152-Bilauna of 75, Harlakhi Assembly Constituency in the State of Bihar, poll had to be taken thrice. After the first poll had taken place the Commission was informed by the Returning Officer that certain irregularities had been committed vitiating the poll. The second poll was accordingly taken on June 6, 1980. However, the Commission received serious allegations against the officers concerned with the conduct of the poll, alleging that some of the officers had themselves captured the booth and that the genuine voters were driven away from the polling station."

In an excellent expose, entitled *Elections As They Really Are* based on thorough investigation (*Economic & Political Weekly*, May 24, 1980), Nalini Singh described how electoral rolls were 'fixed' and booths captured. The pattern prevails in north and north-west UP and north and central Bihar, covering no less than 75 parliamentary constituencies — enough to make and unmake a government.

A presiding officer described how the capturing is done. "I conducted the poll peacefully from 8 am to 10 am and

a total of 80 votes were polled, a bit slow due to the chilly morning. Just as the fog was lifting and voters began to come out in numbers, a gang of 50 armed men surrounded the booth. Their weapons were shining in the sun. Ten of them advanced towards the tables where we people of the polling party were seated and the rest of the gang started beating the voters waiting in the booth area. They exploded two bombs which injured five people, including two children whose arms were blown off. Meanwhile, the others closed in on us and forced me at pistolpoint to sign the ballots. I didn't resist but I saved my honour. I didn't sign fully, only initialled the ballots. Those people did not realise this. So now I say that the ballots should be examined and everybody can see that only 80 votes are genuine. When they had finished stamping and inserting the ballots, they asked me to fill in the presiding officer's diary. I delayed doing this as much as possible, waiting for the patrolling magistrate and his force to come and rescue us. But when the patrolling magistrate came, he ordered me to fill in the diary or he would not issue me a receipt for the boxes. You see, he had been purchased too. I did that too and I hang my head in shame."

MS Singh reports: "On the average there are eight to ten murders on election day in the north Bihar parliamentary constituencies."

Deterioration of the norms has gone hand in hand with independence and impartiality of successive Chief Election Commissioners. In 1967, elections to the Jammu and

In 1967, elections to the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly were shamelessly rigged.

Kashmir Assembly were shamelessly rigged with the connivance of the CEC, Sundaram. Sen Varma shut his eyes to the irregularities in the West Bengal poll. His Report on the 1971 Parliamentary Elections reeks of bias. Shakhidher conveniently delayed by-elections to suit the Congress (I)'s convenience. PK Trivedi beat them all by his double standards in Assam and Kashmir and his suggestion of Central rule in the States for the duration of the poll.

In the 1980 elections, repoll had to be ordered in as many as 16 parliamentary constituencies because of booth-capturing. The reasons assigned in the EC's Report are uniformly depressing: "Forcible voting by intimidating polling personnel. Looting and snatching of ballot papers and ballot boxes. Forcible insertion of ballot papers into ballot boxes." What can one expect in 1984-85?

It is a grim situation but not a hopeless one. It is vain to expect statutory reform from the present regime.

The meeting of 32 recognised parties with the CEC on December 3, 1983, was a colossal failure. There was, for instance, consensus on raising the ceiling for a Lok Sabha election from Rs one lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh and for an assembly seat from Rs 35,000 to Rs 45,000, but not on including the parties' expenditure in that of the candidates.

However, public opinion can be mobilised to ensure a free and fair poll. In this, the printed media, which has made impressive strides in investigative reporting in recent years, can help greatly. ♦

“IS THERE A REAL

Prithish Nandy on his life and times in a

IN LATE 1982, *The Times Of India* announced that it was hiring a Publishing Director. The announcement caused a small stir. Ever since the magazine boom got under way in 1975, the staid Old Lady of Bori Bunder had continued to pretend that this made no difference to her operations. While the *Times* management kept up this charade, its magazines slid into a sort of full time second-ratedness. Journalists left in droves, circulations slid and advertising revenues suffered.

The magazines were not unprofitable; at least, not yet. But the message was clear: unless the *Times* launched some kind of salvage operation, it was in trouble. Nevertheless, few people seriously expected the organisation to actually go out and hire a Publishing Director — till then, it had been assumed that the management was too bored and lazy to bother.

When the announcement did come, there was some consternation about the man the *Times* did find for the job. Prithish Nandy, 36, was admittedly, well-known, but he had been a journalist for only four or five years.

It was as a poet that Nandy was best known. He had burst onto the scene in the '60s, publishing several books of bestselling verse. The poetry establishment had reacted to his success with derision and scorn. In part his Bohemian image had aroused the ire of some of his contemporaries. Born into a middle class Bengali family, he had run away from home, dropped out of college and earned his living doing a variety of odd jobs.

But Nandy had refused to let the critics faze him. Public recognition, of a sort, came quite early. He was awarded a

Padma Shri at 27 and soon became a national figure. A series of love affairs with famous women followed.

What was perhaps not widely perceived by those who were leery of Nandy's appointment as the *Times*' Publishing Director was that beneath the Bohemian exterior, there lay a sharp, shrewd commercial brain. Nandy's strengths have always included his ability to understand the market (whether for poetry or magazines) and a powerful visual sense (he is a good designer himself). Add to this an ability to engineer controversies and to provoke and you have the makings of a successful magazine.

It should therefore, have come as no surprise that his revamped *Illustrated Weekly* took all of three months to become accepted as India's best magazine, while circulation climbed. The ageing hipster (as his 'good friend' Shobha Kilachand dubbed him) had delivered the goods.

Naturally, controversy has followed Nandy's *Weekly*, just as it followed his poetry. A celebrated attack on Verghese Kurien of Amul set off a storm in Parliament and changed public perceptions of Operation Flood. Another attack on the Syedna of the Bohra community caused his supporters to burn copies of the *Weekly*.

Despite the public controversy, Nandy has been following a low profile strategy in Bombay. He agreed to this free-wheeling interview about his life and times only after a great deal of persuasion and on the clear understanding that he will not talk of his assignment in the *Times*. But once he agreed to talk, he was quite forthright as the transcript shows.

Imprint: Where were you born?

Nandy: My parents stay in Bhagalpur, where the blindings took place. Apparently, there is a large Bengali population there and my mother's family had lived out there for some generations. But as far back as I can remember, it was Calcutta, Calcutta and Calcutta. The damned city is strapped on my back, like the old man in the Sinbad tale. So, as far as I am concerned, I was born in Calcutta. I grew up there. All my loves, all my memories are inexorably tied up with the city. Wherever I may be.

What did your father do?

Both my parents were schoolteachers. And ours was a typically insecure, middle class home: the kind you hate when you are young and look back upon with fondness as you grow older. It was a strange, Kafkaesque childhood. I remember very little in terms of actual incidents. What I remember vividly are certain visuals: the dark strip of a lane outside the grilled window; those lonely afternoons when it rained and rained. People. A few friends. Books. Streets within streets within streets. My father: a tall, upright man who spoke gently. But his language was different from mine. So was his world.

In what sense?

His way of looking at life was different from mine. And yet he gave me the space to grow, to be myself. It was tough and lonely, but now when I look back upon it, it was certainly worth it all.

Were you educated in Calcutta?

I was never really educated. I went to school, true. But that was all. I colleged very briefly, and then dropped out because it meant nothing to me. I wanted to write. It was a kind

ME?"

rare interview.

of desperate need in those days.

Is it true that you ran away from home?

Well, yes. In the sense that I dropped out of college, fell in love for the umpteenth time and got married. I

picked up many jobs, one after the other, and spent most of my time writing. Writing all kinds of things. Much of it, poetry. But that was not all. Naturally, I lived away from home. It was only inevitable. They thought I was taking too many risks with my life. Perhaps I was. And I enjoyed it that way. It gave me the sense of freedom that I coveted and yet this obsession to write, to create, forced me into a kind of discipline that I equally enjoyed. I *had* to be on my own. There was no choice.

How old were you and how did you support yourself?

I did a variety of odd jobs. Office help, travelling salesman, fee-e-lance copy-writer. Survivor at large. Those were very difficult years. But once you have known and experienced that kind of humbling poverty, nothing ever scares you. I must have been around 18 then. Or thereabouts. Precisely the right kind of age to face difficult days.

You've always seemed to be very influenced by the '60s. Is this true?

The '60s was one of the most exciting decades and I was lucky to be



growing up then. There was so much happening everywhere. In music, in poetry, in politics. Mores were changing. Wars were being stopped by young men with long hair. There was Timothy Leary opening up the doors of perception. LSD had just come in. So had the Beatles. Dylan was singing of Desolation Row. There was Che fighting an impossible war in Bolivia. The Vietnamese were holding out against the most powerful war machine in the world. Marcuse was the new campus god. Ginsberg was drifting through India. The Paris Uprising. The Czech spring. Everything came together, in a glorious celebration of being young and defiant. Audacity, audacity and more audacity. Who said that? Danton?

How politically active were you in those days? Were you ever arrested, for instance?

Every young man in Calcutta is politically active at some time of his life or the other. I was too. But I belonged to no party. I never felt the need to conform to any specific ideology as such, if that's what you want to know. Freedom was something I valued. I still do. Desperately.

So, were you involved with the Naxalite movement?

Of course. It all began then. Many of my friends joined the movement. Most of them supported it, in some way or the other. It was the great yellow hope. China. The Left, actually. You either joined it or you were intellectually outcast. No one could dare be a conservative in those days without being labelled a fascist. Cops were pigs. You dreamt of lobbing grenades at them, and got arrested at the slightest pretext. It was all very romantic. It was all fiercely symbolic, and we dreamt of a new world that was just round the corner. Quite naturally, it all ended very quickly. The rot, the disillusionment set in very fast. The slogans began to sound very empty. The gestures tired. The politics of revolt began to seem very naive, very theatrical. The sell out came far too easily. The masks fell off, one by one. We soon discovered, I guess, that we were a lost generation. The myths had crumbled. All that we were left with was a strange, inexplicable loneliness. We could either wallow in self-pity or we could celebrate



“Only fools, crooks and professional poets can believe that poetry can change the world. I pity them.”

that loneliness.

Have you kept up with the friends you made in those days?

Some. Not many. Most of them have made good. In politics, media, films. Some have drifted away. Others have been lost to business or the corporate sector. We come across each other sometimes. We try and recognise each other's universe. We speak and we try and understand. It's all very fascinating. Particularly because I find that those among us who have succeeded are the ones who were always the loners. They were the ones who were unsure, uncommitted and fiercely independent.

The others are all right. Bankers. High-flying executives. Successful businessmen with pretty wives. All comfortably ensconced in their own worlds. My friends are like me. Still rather lost, still very unsure, still in search of something that keeps eluding them. It is no use asking *what* that something is. None of us know and yet we keep searching for it. Some kind of stupid metaphysical truth, I guess.

Quite frankly, I have no clue. But the search goes on.

How would you describe your political views, now?

I have my own political views, but I keep them to myself. If you keep reading *The Illustrated Weekly* for some time, I am sure you will get a feel of what I hold important and valuable. My own point of view will emerge. Why do you want to pre-empt it?

Why did you start writing poetry?

There were things I wanted to say, understand, discover, explore. And poetry happened to be just one of the ways I found of doing so. It all began with the need to speak to myself, to try and understand myself. Sounds very adolescent I know. But that was precisely the age when I began to write poetry. I must have been 16 or so when my first poems started appearing. My first book must have come out when I was 18 or 19.

It is difficult to recall the compulsions of that age. All I remember is that I wrote one hell of a lot and published a great deal. And it was largely a very experimental kind of writing. I *never* go back to it, so I can't be very specific. I don't even have copies of those books, those poems. They mean nothing to me any more.

Did it come easily to you?

It must have. Because I wrote a great deal. In fact, every year I published one or two books of poems. Pretty awful stuff, it must have been. Or so it seems now.

Were you influenced by any particular poet?

Quite a few actually. The Europeans, for instance. The Latin Americans. I even learnt Spanish to read Lorca in original. Jimenez. Cesar Vallejo. Rafael Alberti. Neruda. Octavio Paz was another favourite: he was in India in those days as the Mexican Ambassador, before he wrote that famous poem on police firing on the young students in the stadium. That cost him his job.

Yes, I read a lot of poetry in translation in those days. From French, German, Russian, Greek, Italian. Yevtushenko and Voznesensky; Pasolini and Cesare Pavese; Seferis and Yannis Ritsos; Enzensberger and Günter Grass;

Jacques Prevert and Apollinaire, Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard. My reading was very eclectic, true. But I read quite a bit. The Americans too. The new ones particularly. The young, experimental ones. The beats; the rough-riders; the frontiersmen of verse, who were trying to break away from the stupid, academic regimen of poetry and discover new worlds of experience, new literary truths, new ideas. What I hated was the dull, formalistic kind of stuff the British poets were writing. Which was, rather predictably, the model for most of us out here. Which was a stupid thing to happen, particularly because the language poets in India were doing great things on their own: very original, daring, unusual. And we who were writing in English (and those before us who did) were deliberately shutting our eyes to this and trying to model ourselves after the idiots we read in school and college. No one looked beyond the groves of Academe in those days. And that is why we produced such unquestionable shit.

Were you influenced by song-writers at all?

Of course. Lines and images, characters from Dylan songs, Cohen and the Beatles: they all wander through my poems. If you search hard enough, you will find familiar lines, familiar characters like Eleanor Rigby or Suzanne, snatches of old songs scattered all over: for my poems evoke the spirit of the '60s, the dreams, the fantasies, the sense of loss and achievement, the loneliness of my generation. Words, images, dreams: exactly as we heard them, saw them. In fact, you will also find snatches of old Hindi film songs — Sahir and Majrooh, Kaifi — also woven into some of my lines, stray images drifting in and out. It was all part of a conscious attempt to work into the poems the ambience of a particular period, describe the visual metaphors of a generation that had seen a lot, felt a lot, fought for a lot. And lost out, quietly.

How do you rate your own poetry?

Very poorly. For my time and money, I wouldn't touch the stuff.

There was a lot of critical hostility to your work. What do you attribute this to?

Of course there was. There still is. But



I rate my own poetry very poorly. For my time and money, I wouldn't touch it myself. . .

that's because I was writing the kind of poetry that people *actually* read and understood. It may have been bad poetry (at least, that's what I think it was) but it somehow reached out and touched my readers. That's why I always had a large readership. My poetry readings always drew large crowds. My record albums sold out. There was an audience committed to me. That's what bugged my detractors who *always* complained that Indo-English poetry had no promoters, no readers, no publishers. I never found any shortage of readers, publishers, or promoters. I never found any need for self-pity, as many of my contemporaries did. In fact, I always marvelled at the fact, that so many people *did* turn to poetry, considering the kind of rubbish that we wrote.

Did you stop writing poetry because some of the criticism was justified?

There is a limit to the kind of rubbish one can write. So I stopped. Criticism didn't stop me, a sense of fair play did. You can't sell this kind of nonsense to

an unsuspecting audience forever. In a country where more and more people are being dragged below the breadline year after year, where human suffering has plumbed the most incredible depths and, despite the most pious platitudes, nothing ever happens to improve the lot of millions of men and women, what the fuck do you want me to do? Write poems in English? Talk of sunsets and bleeding skylarks? Talk of human suffering in iambics? Chase the faltering rhyme?

You reacted to the criticism by abusing many of the other poets? Do you regret some of that abuse?

I regret nothing. Except that I wasted time chasing the muse. On second thoughts, perhaps I don't even regret that. Everything that one has done has meant something to oneself, to others around you. Why pretend to regret it now? Kersy Katrak, my fiercest critic, told me the other day that he has decided to knock nothing no more, his iconoclastic days are over. He wants to concentrate on writing only that which *means something to him*. If there is anyone to be attacked, he'll attack only Mrs Gandhi. Nothing else matters. There's wisdom in that. Indo-English poetry, I must confess, does not demand serious attention. Or so I feel today.

Who do you think is the best poet in India today?

There are some outstanding poets in Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, Malayalam. Poets like Shakti Chattopadhyay and Sunil Gangopadhyay, for instance. Shrikant Verma. Kaifi Azmi. Shanmuga Subbiah in Tamil. Rajiv Patel. Adiga. There are great poets like Jibanananda Das, who would rank among the best of all time. There are poets like Dom Moraes. He's not an Indo-English poet. He is an outstanding poet. There's Kamala Das. She writes very little these days but she's good. Sometimes, *very* good. What I suspect is that it is no longer possible to *just* be a great poet. To say that I am a poet, I bleed; come, suffer with me. Or to sit like a king in the classroom and pass judgement on time and history, with metrical disdain for what is happening around you. Or even to comment on life around you, and believe that poetry can change the world. It can't. Only fools, crooks and professional poets believe it can. And I pity them.

And who is the worst poet?

That's not an easy question. There are so many of them. It's difficult to find good poets. Not bad ones. They are there by the millions. In every literature, in every tongue. But I can tell you *where* to find the worst ones. Look in the groves of Academe. Search among the teachers. You are bound to find the worst ones there. They are the ones who have corrupted the scene, by trying to teach people *how* to write, *what* to write, by destroying the original voice.

Do you still write any poetry?

You must be mad. I fool around sometimes. That's all.

You're unusual in that you are a creative person who went into management. How did that happen?

Well, I had to make a living. I wanted to write, and that's why I dropped out from conventional education. To find the time to write. To afford to survive and write, I needed to work. That's why I turned to jobs that allowed me the opportunity to write, to create and to use my limited skills as a communicator. Call it management; call it what you will. I have tried to work with some degree of commitment. I have tried to learn at every stage. I know all this sounds frightfully pretentious and that is why I hate talking about it. I hate interviews. Whatever you say tends to sound phoney. One must be judged by one's work. Not by what one says. That always sounds too glib, too facile.

What exactly did you do at Guest Keen And Williams?

Learn the basics of communication while doing what was essentially a management job.

What was the job?

I looked after the company's internal and external communication programmes. Things like advertising, public affairs.

How did you take to photography?

It all begins when you are in a desperate rush and someone lets you down. So you are determined to learn the damned thing yourself. That's how I began. After that, it became another means of earning a livelihood. It doesn't mean that I did not enjoy doing photography. I have always loved it. And the fact that I was a



“A city is like a woman: after a point you find it difficult to just walk away.”

professional designer coincided with the need to chase visuals. You see, I never saw myself as a poet or a wordsmith. Whenever I felt I wanted to say something, I chose the form most appropriate to say it. Or what I thought was the most appropriate. So I turned to photography, wrote the odd film script, fooled around with music and poetry and finally turned to journalism. It was never a carefully worked-out life plan. It never is. I somehow drifted towards journalism.

Why did you become a journalist?

It was Akbar who persuaded me to write for *Sunday*, seriously. He coaxed me and generally kept insisting that instead of wasting my time (and what he thought were my skills) chasing rhymes and visuals, I should write for him. I did. The feedback was so spontaneous that I got hooked.

Is it true that your Sai Baba story for Sunday caused the magazine to receive thousands of letters?

Yes, that was the first major story I did for MJ. It was actually a long book

review but Akbar put it on the cover and that drew such a phenomenal response that I was quite bowled over. If this is what journalism is, I thought, it's not such a bad scene to be in. It was the quality of instant response that seemed magical. Like in a poetry reading. You don't have to wait for people to wade through a book and make polite noises. The bouquets and the flak start coming in immediately and you can't afford to be sensitive.

How did the Sai Baba supporters react?

Badly. But I have got used to that by now. I mean people reacting badly to stories that I write or carry. You can't please everyone ever, and the ones that you anger are always more vociferous, more vicious than the ones that you please. It's one of the simplest laws of journalism.

Was this the most popular story you did for Sunday?

The most popular story I ever did for *Sunday* was the one on loneliness. It was an unusual story for them to try and sell so prominently. But it worked. It worked rather well in fact. Particularly because of Raghu Rai's pictures on the theme. They were absolutely magnificent.

Were you reluctant to take The Times Of India job?

Not really. I was only somewhat unsure about leaving Calcutta. A city is like a woman: after a point, you find it very difficult to just walk away from her, even though you may have found someone or something far more exciting.

Calcutta is a city peopled by survivors. Your city is that of achievers. It was not Bombay but the assignment that drew me.

What really do you do at the Times?

Well, I am the Publishing Director. So my responsibilities extend well beyond *The Illustrated Weekly*. But being the Editor of the *Weekly* and because it is now on an upswing, I guess more people know me as the person who looks after it. The *Weekly*, I am afraid, does not even take up half my time in office. There are many other things to do.

What do you attribute the spectacular success of the new revamped Weekly to?



“Time is the most precious commodity I have. Between my work and my women, it is taken away.”

I honestly don't know what you mean by spectacular success. The *Weekly* is now doing better only because I did my homework right. Nothing more. I knew where the market slot existed. And I knew what I wanted to do with the magazine, in terms of contents, design, visual quality and public stance. So I went about it carefully and systematically. There was no magic vision. It was sheer slog and an obsession for doing things right. We are nowhere near where I want us to be. But I am going to do my damndest to realise my own goals. Not just in terms of circulation but in terms of product excellence. Whether or not I succeed is another matter. There is a luck factor. There are many other factors. But my job was to revive the magazine. And I think I have done it. The rest are private goals of excellence: whether I will realise them or not is not so easy to predict at this stage.

Do you want to comment on the now infamous Shobha Kilachand column

that caused so many of Bombay's other editors to send a petition against your decision to publish it?

I trust my writers. I stand by them. And Shobha is not just one of my writers; she is a friend. A good friend.

Do you think the Weekly will ever reach the circulation it had in the Khushwant Singh era?

Nothing is impossible. But one has to work much harder because the market-place is far more competitive, and there are many excellent magazines around.

Why has your style in Bombay been so low-key? You came from Calcutta with a reputation for hard drinking and loud talking.

I don't know how I acquire such reputations. Hard drinking is the last thing I would like to be known for. Yes, I am a private person. A very private person. That's why I don't give interviews, I don't meet too many people — except in the course of work. That gives me a bit of a reputation for being difficult, I know. But what the hell can one do when one has so much to do? Time is the most precious commodity I have. Between my work and my women, they take it all away.

Well, your image is certainly that of a much married Bohemian sort of chap.

Yes, I have been married more than once. And I have had some very beautiful, meaningful relationships outside of marriage. All these have meant something very special to me and I would hate to discuss them. Love is a private matter between two people: something that you remember even after everything is over and time begins to blur the edges of photographs. I have always believed in transience, that nothing stays forever. And it is precisely this quality of transience that lends so much beauty to our lives, our loves. Why should one try to hold on to anything? Why should one discuss one's past? It is over.

So, which one of your avatars is the real Prithvi Nandi? The hipster poet, the publishing executive, the hot-shot editor, the great romancer or even, the photographer and designer?

Is there a real me? I don't know. Ask those who know me, those who love or loved me. They might be able to tell you.



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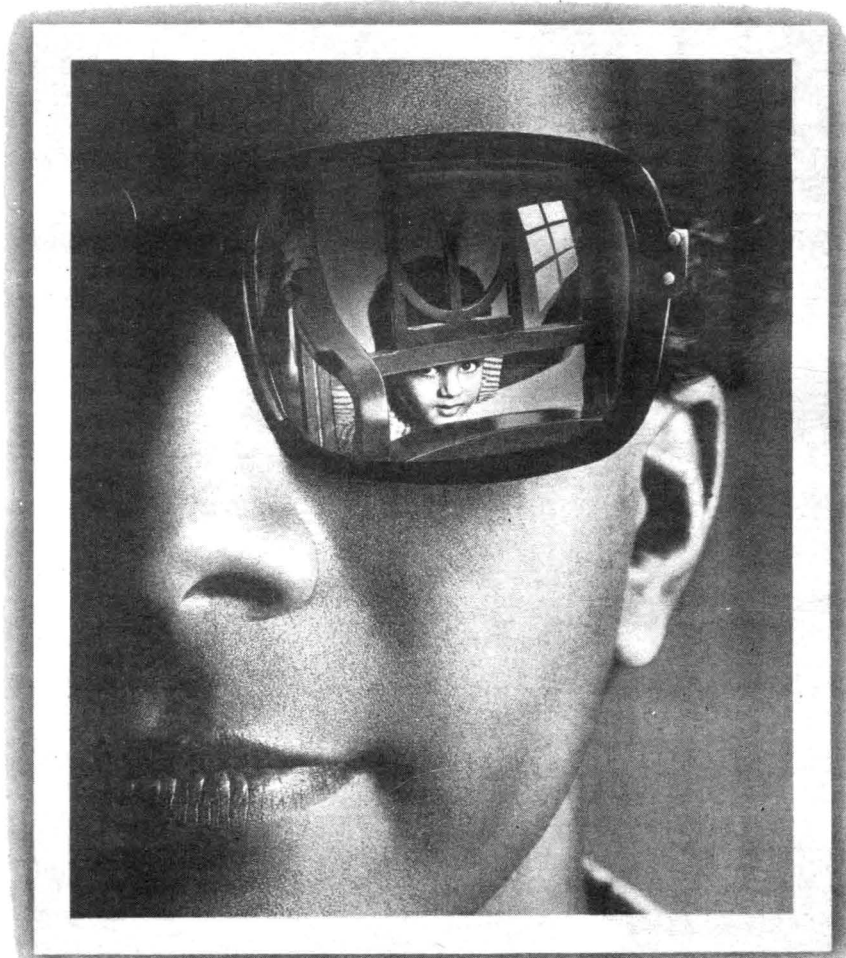
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**LIVE
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KEEPING VIGIL AT DN NAGAR

Life at a police station swings from the mundane to the exciting.

Amrita Shah visits one in Bombay and recounts the experience.

SUB-INSPECTOR MD SURWASI was curious. Where had he seen this man before? Certainly, Salim did not look like the kind of man you would forget in a hurry. Short, stocky and curly-haired, he wore only tight, blue trousers. Naked from the waist up, his muscles bulged menacingly while blood trickled from a deep cut on his forehead.

Salim's demeanour could only be described as desperate. As his escorts brought him into the Charge Room of the DN Nagar police station, his eyes took on a wild dimension. "*Saab, saab,*" he started. "*Maine nahin kiya hai! Nahin saab! Kasam se!*" His stocky body shivered with anger and outrage and as his head bobbed alarmingly, more blood oozed from his cut. "*Saab, maine nahin kiya!*" he yelled again, preparing to launch into another speech. This time, Salim did not get very far. Hardly had the second '*saab*' left his lips when a constable kicked him from behind. As he cowered, three more boots planted their imprints on his torso. Another constable grabbed his neck and began to rummage through his pockets, while Sub-Inspector Surwasi stared at him, appraisingly.

Yes, he had seen him before, he decided. "I know who he is," a constable volunteered. "I arrested him last year." Nobody heard him, but it was all the warning Salim needed: "*Maine nahin kiya...*" he began. This time, nobody was interested. "Take him to the hospital and get his cut bandaged," Surwasi ordered.

As Salim, still muttering oaths and curses, was marched off, the Sub-Inspector turned his attention to the clean-cut young businessman whose complaint had led to Salim's arrest. Under his prolonged interrogation, the full story emerged. The businessman was travelling by bus when he felt his wallet being lifted. Realising that Salim, who was standing next to him was probably the culprit, he accused him at once. Salim, who it turned out had long experience of such situations, did not even bother to protest his innocence. Turning on the other passengers, he threatened them with dire consequences if they so much as laid a finger on him and then, in true Butch Cassidy-style leaped to his freedom from the running bus. He landed in an ungainly heap by the side of the road and the bus pulled up beside him. The passengers, always in the mood for a good lynching, then took over and all but beat the life out of the unfortunate Salim.

By the time the Sub-Inspector had extracted the full story, Salim had returned from the doctor. Now he did not look quite so alarming. "*Saab, shirt wapas de do,*" he whimpered. A constable held up his shirt and looked at Surwasi. The Sub-Inspector shook his head. The shirt was thrown away and a clenched fist planted in Salim's solar plexus instead. As he screamed, others joined the beating. For a full hour, they thrust boots and fists in his direction, their interrogation barely audible over the sounds of screaming and of shoe leather meeting flesh.

Finally, Salim confessed. Yes, he had helped in stealing the wallet. No, he did not have it on him—it was with an accomplice. And, most damaging,

his name wasn't really Salim anyway. It was Kasim.

"So, that's who he is," thought Surwasi with satisfaction. Of course, Kasim was probably another alias and it was doubtful if the police would even discover his true name. But at least Surwasi had placed him in his own mind. As the constable who had arrested Salim/Kasim a year ago, explained, "This is the man we have a non-bailable warrant for."

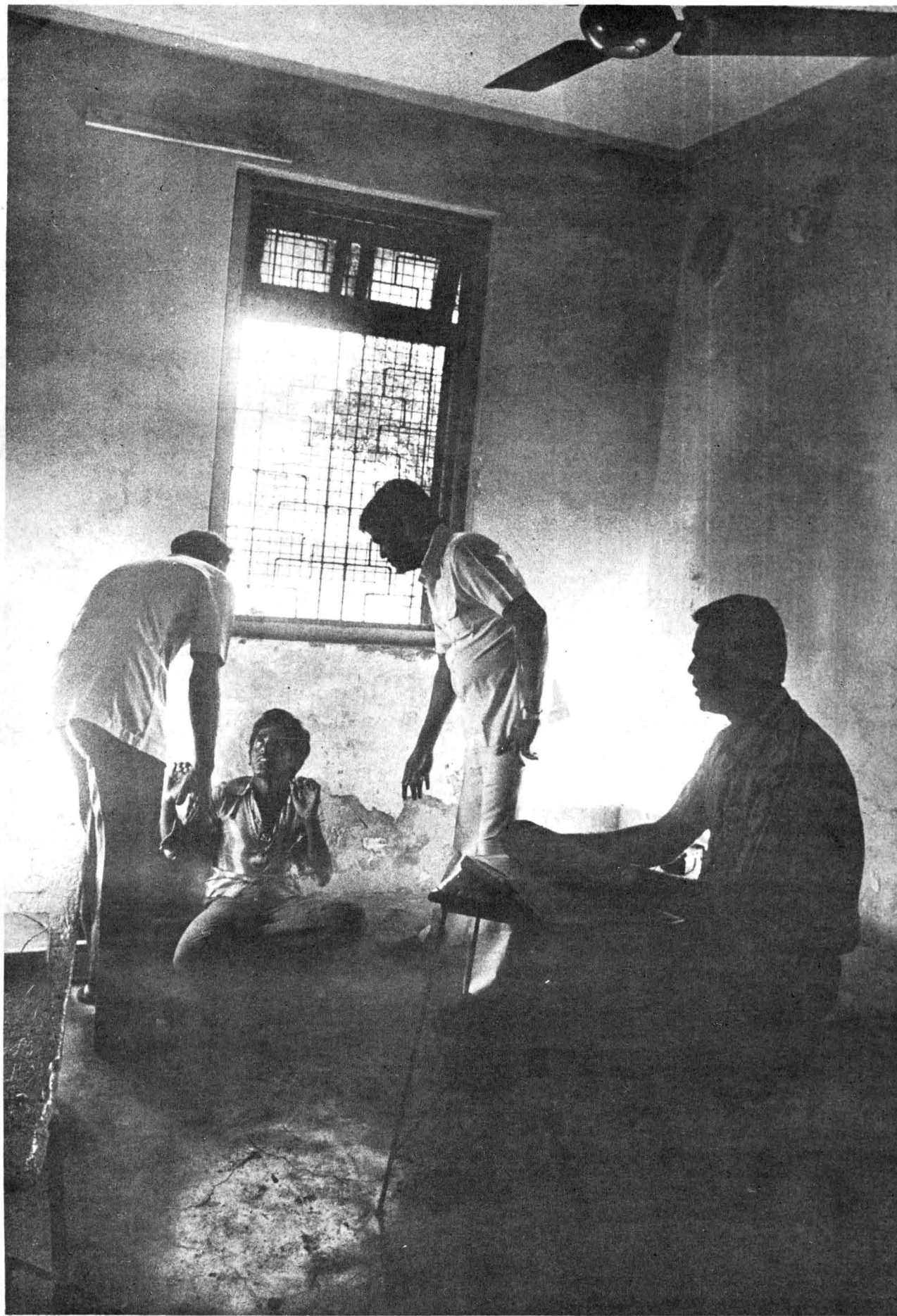
The beating ended and Salim/Kasim was led away to the lock-up. Surwasi turned to his other business, pleased that a good thrashing had not only elicited a partial confession but had helped the police find a man they had been looking for.

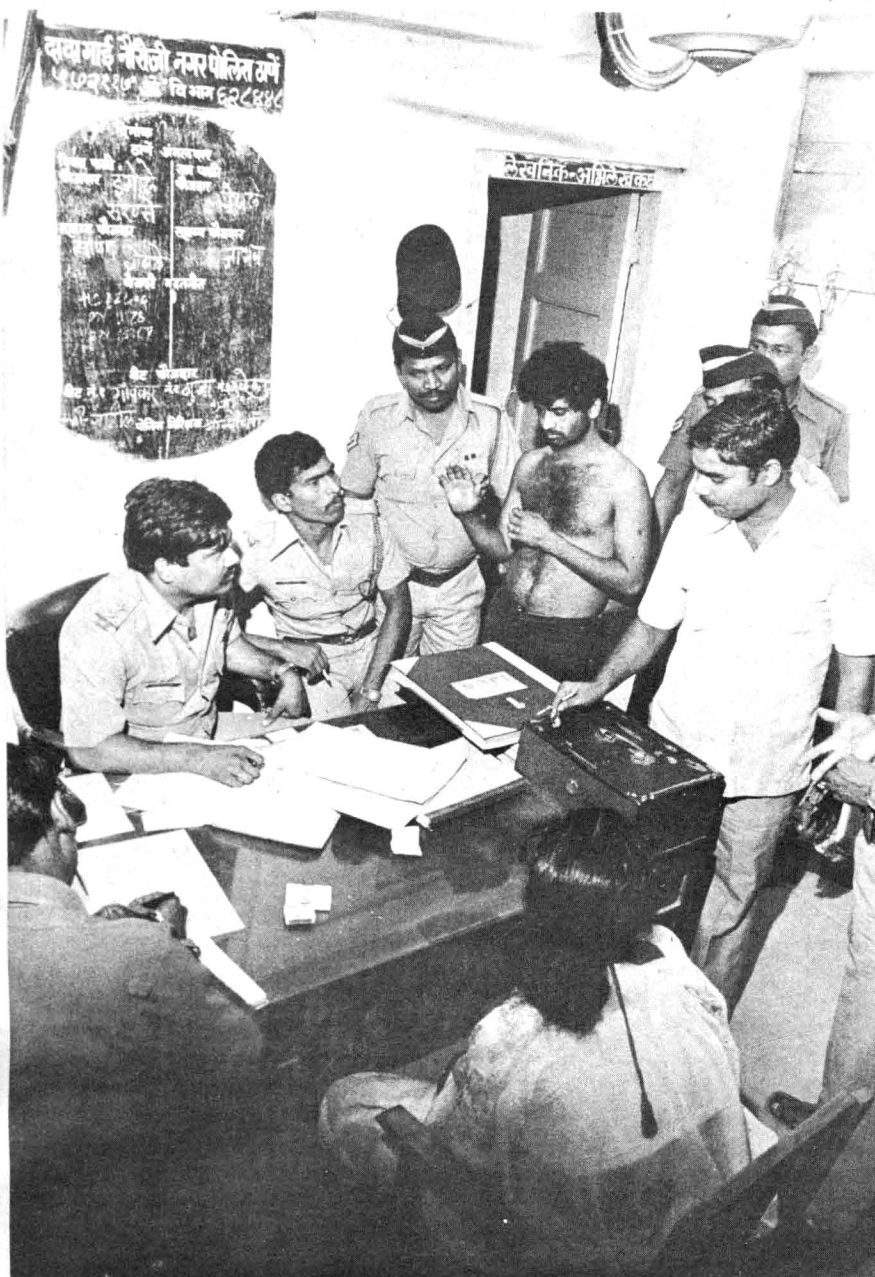
"YOU HAVE TO USE FORCE. There is no other way," the Sub-Inspector explained to me the next day. We were sitting on the rickety wooden chairs in the whitewashed Charge Room at DN Nagar police station. "*Yeh log, maarne ke baad bhi, sach nahin bolte.*"

At the time, I was more than a little shocked. But after a week at the station, preparing to write this fly on the wall account of police life, I began to understand (if not sympathise with) his reasoning. It had been strange for the all-male staff of the station to get used to the idea of a girl sitting and watching their every move. Each time they interrogated a prisoner, they shot me nervous looks and one or two officers made no attempt to conceal their hostility towards me.

It was a justifiable reaction. The DN Nagar station is one of Bombay's busier small stations and its few rooms are always overflowing with criminals and complainants. The policemen work round the clock, spacing out the day by dividing it into three shifts. Often the massive work-load keeps them there beyond their allotted time, because as one constable was to explain: "This is not a factory. We can't

Amrita Shah is on the staff of Imprint. Her last article was Paunar After Bhaye in December.





For an hour, they thrust boots and fists in his direction. . . Finally, Salim confessed. Yes, he had helped in stealing the wallet.

say, 'Sorry, duty's over' if something important happens."

The Senior Inspector—GI Changlani—is a balding, avuncular personage in his late 50s who has five Inspectors to assist him. Sixteen Sub-Inspectors and 171 constables make up the full complement. If this seems like a large number, consider these facts: the station is responsible for nine lakh citizens, spread over nine square kilometres and the final ratio is only one

policeman for every 4,700 citizens.

The Charge Room on the ground floor is the heart of the police station. The Sub-Inspectors who pride themselves on forming the backbone of the police force, register all cognisable offences reported at the police station. Constables stray into the Charge Room at intervals or gossip in the room behind where messages flow in continually over the wireless.

In pink-walled cabins, the Inspectors

supervise the running of the various departments, often dropping in at the Charge Room for a chat or to assist the Sub-Inspector on duty. Members of special squads of the constabulary with names like 'Goonda Squad', and 'Robbery Special', dash into the Charge Room periodically to deal with special complaints.

CRIME IN DN NAGAR FOLLOWS A certain timetable. Nothing serious happens in the mornings. A few cases of petty robbery, the odd pickpocket and a few domestic complaints. Consequently, the morning shift is the lighter one, a chance for Inspectors to take it easy.

Because of the relatively relaxed pace of life, there is some room for kindness and consideration. One morning, a dark 10-year-old girl, in a blue blouse and skirt, her confused snub-nosed features set off by the red ribbons around her two plaits, was brought in. She was, it seemed, a pickpocket.

"How much have you stolen?" "Who are your accomplices?" "How long have you been doing this?" Angry constables hurled questions, while trying simultaneously to jostle her into submission. The little girl stood silently, her eyes brimming with tears. Even if she had wanted to confess, it was unlikely that she would have found the courage. As the constables got no response, they got progressively more irritable.

Finally, an Inspector passed by and came upon this tableau. Feeling a little sorry for the girl, he took her aside. Then gently, almost paternally, he told her: "I am fascinated by how you people pick pockets. Here, try and lift my wallet. Show me how it is done."

"But you are sitting on a chair," the girl blurted out. "I can't do it that way. I can only do it when you are getting onto a bus."

Then realising suddenly that she had inadvertently admitted her guilt, she burst into tears. The Inspector sent her away, to be transported to the children's home.

THERE IS ROOM FOR KINDNESS

and consideration, when the morning shift only has to cope with frightened children. Unfortunately, much valuable time is taken up by people who wish to involve the police in their domestic disputes. I found that such people were probably the least deserv-

ing of any kind of sympathy.

A short, bespectacled man in a green safari suit strolled into the Charge Room. His hair was vaselined back till it covered his scalp like a layer of tar and his twitching forehead supported a thick, red *tikka*. "Sir, sir," he smiled ingratiatingly, his lips curled into an expression of servile obedience. "Sir, my cousins are doing all kinds of bad things. Very, very bad things."

The Inspector shot him a stern look: "What bad things?"

"Sir, they are kidnapping my son, sir. All the time, they are kidnapping him. And also sir, my cousin's daughters. They are doing this dirty, prostitute business, sir." The Inspector continued to look stern. "Sir, illegally they are doing this prostitute business, sir." The Inspector refused to melt. By now the man was getting agitated. "Sir!" he shouted. "They are taking the rose flower and then sir, they are scratching it across the chest to make the blood come out, sir. And then they are accusing me of hurting them."

The man's agitation was justified, but misconceived. There was plenty for him to worry about, but his cousins and their rose flower were the least of his problems. After he had finished his impassioned speech, the Inspector finally looked straight at him and said: "You do realise that there is a warrant against you!"

"Sir!" he spluttered with disbelief. "You are taking the wrong step."

"What wrong step?" the Inspector asked patiently.

"You are not seeing the facts and you are arresting me!" he exclaimed indignantly. The Inspector ignored him and instructed a constable to take him away and show him the charge.

After he left, Inspector Changlani gave me the background to this long-running DN Nagar soap opera. The man was, apparently, deeply embroiled in litigation against his cousins. While the matter was winding its way from court to court, he had taken to using a little pressure of his own. When these measures had failed he tried to concoct charges against his cousins in the hope of subjecting them to police harassment. "This sort of thing happens all the time," Changlani sighed wearily.

Most people after failing to involve the police in what is, after all, not their business, complain about police inefficiency. Moreover, each party firmly believes that the police is in league with the opposite party and

thus inhospitable towards him.

THE AFTERNOON BRINGS ITS own excitement. As Inspector PI Patil kept telling me, much of the success of police work depends on a grasp of human psychology. Hardly had he finished offering this insight when constables brought in a thin, young man. Patil, dark and jaunty, turned to the man. He was, it transpired, an employee in a jewellery store. The owner of the shop had noticed that some ornaments were missing and the young man was the chief suspect.

"What is your name?" Patil began. The question evoked a mumbled response as the shop assistant settled into the posture he was going to maintain

throughout the interrogation—arms crossed across his chest, a quiet, sullen look on his face and eyes permanently downcast. He did not seem frightened but I could see that under the table, his feet were trembling uncontrollably. "Do you want to go home or not? Why are you scared?" Patil demanded.

No response.

"How much do you earn?"

"Rs 350."

"You are married?"

"Yes."

"How much can you do with Rs 350? You need much more money. Now, tell me the truth."

"I didn't do it."

"Then, tell me who did it? If you did it, tell me and then, saving you will

Members of special squads with names like 'Goonda Squad' and 'Robbery Special' dash into the charge room to deal with special complaints.



be my responsibility."

No response.

"I want those ornaments, now!"

Patil was shouting.

"And I will get them now. Where are they?"

No response.

To my surprise, Patil appeared to concede defeat. He shifted his stance and placed his hands on the other man's arms. "Own up. Tell me," he whispered. "Did you do it?"

The apparent surrender was only a ploy. The Inspector was merely trying another tack.

"Tell me, did you do it?" Patil beseeched again.

"Yes, I did it." The confession was only a whisper but it was enough. In all of two minutes, Patil had found out where the ornaments were stashed and he set off at once to recover them. In a quarter of an hour, he was back, triumphantly clutching a bag full of

gold and silver. "See," he directed. "Twenty-five *tolas* of gold. I have recovered it."

PSYCHOLOGY IS OFTEN REPLACED by the *lathi*. One afternoon a girl in a white sari was brought in by a rickshaw driver. He complained that she had taken a long ride, at the end of which she had confessed that she had no money to pay the fare. She seemed hardly 18, and she stood lost and forlorn in the Charge Room, her head covered with the sari *pallav*, while her hand clutched nervously at the other end.

Constables began shouting questions at her but she only gave confused and contradictory replies. As the Charge Room filled up with other complainants, they took her out and resumed the interrogation in the passage. Though they were now out of view, I could hear the sounds of the interrog-

ation and a mirror on the wall offered a part-view of the proceedings. For a while, nothing seemed to happen; then I saw a stick come up and hit her hard on the ankle. She doubled up in pain and started crying. "*Chup kar!*" somebody shouted. But the crying did not stop.

Despite the rough-and-ready air of every Indian police station, the prisoners themselves do not seem particularly unhappy. The DN Nagar station does not have a proper lock-up and prisoners are kept in a room. Generally, they are shifted to the lock-up at the Santacruz station if it looks as if they are set for a long stay.

ACP MINOO IRANI, TOOK ME TO the Santacruz lock-up and allowed me to talk to the prisoners, though it seemed unlikely that they would criticise the police under the Inspector's watchful eye. Nevertheless, few of them seemed unhappy. They were for the most part, hardened criminals who seemed to regard their way of life as something of a game. Sometimes, the police won. And sometimes they did.

A short, squat man in a white shirt and trousers who had been arrested for stealing a watch, cheerfully recounted the circumstances of his arrest. "I was drunk when they came to get me. I told them 'I did not steal the watch.' But they wouldn't listen."

Sadashiv Salian, accused of involvement in a violent murder, seemed relaxed, like a man who had just finished a nap (which he probably had). He too recounted how the police caught him. I was to hear more about him, later.

Nearly all of them had been arrested before. They knew the police and the police knew them. As old adversaries, they understood each other.

THE NIGHT IS THE TIME FOR violent murders. DN Nagar does not have a red-light area and so, few prostitutes are ever brought in. But there are enough crimes of violence to keep the policemen busy.

I told Inspector Patil that I had met Sadashiv Salian at the lock-up and that he seemed harmless enough to me. This was Patil's cue to recount the whole saga of Salian's arrest.

On November 13, a rickshaw driver brought a wounded man to the police station. He was bleeding profusely and seemed near death. The Duty Officer had him sent to the Cooper Hospital at once and followed in person. Sadly,

During the interrogation, the shop assistant was quiet and sullen. . . He did not seem frightened but I could see that his feet were trembling uncontrollably.



the man died without making a statement and the police did not even know who he was. An identity card on the body provided an address and the police tracked down the man's father. He was shattered to learn that his son Pramod Singh, had been murdered and told the Sub-Inspectors that he suspected that Sadashiv Salian had done it.

This was not enough for the police to go on, so they asked the rickshaw driver where he had picked up the injured man. Through a careful reconstruction, they were able to find the exact spot where the murder had taken place. Then, they set about looking for witnesses in the neighbourhood. It transpired that some people had seen seven men, one of them armed with a sickle, assaulting a man there.

But who were the men? Why had the victim's father blamed Sadashiv Salian? According to the old man, he had a long-term enmity with Salian's father. Just a few weeks ago, his son had carried the feud forward by attacking Sadashiv. The murder, he suspected, was retaliation for that.

Inspector Patil got to work. He rounded up Sadashiv and asked who his henchmen were. They too were rounded up. Then he reconstructed the sequence of events. According to the police, Pramod had gone to meet his girl-friend. Sadashiv and his men lay in wait for him. Their intention was not to murder but simply to avenge the assault on Sadashiv and carry on the feud. However, some of them had got a little carried away and a straightforward thrashing turned into a violent murder.

Within 24 hours of the crime having taken place, the police had arrested five of the seven men who had taken part in the assault. Not bad going when you consider that when the victim was first brought to the station, nobody even knew who he was.

VIOLENCE IS AN INTEGRAL PART of life around DN Nagar and the men on the night shift are constantly confronted with it. One morning I arrived to find an exhausted night duty staff on its way out. "We had a busy night," one of them announced. "We had five cases of assault. *Bambu, lakdi, chaku—sab leke maara.*"

Another night, Sub-Inspector KN Jadhav sat chatting with the Sub-Inspector on the night shift, VG Yewale, as I watched. Jadhav, a short, dark man



Within 24 hours the police had arrested five men. Not bad when you consider that nobody knew who the victim was.

given to wearing dark glasses and leather jackets when he is off-duty, was preparing to go home when a man in a blood-stained shirt ran into the Charge Room. "I've been stabbed!" he shouted. As the Sub-Inspectors listened, he spun a tale of love and death. He was in love with a girl whose brother did not approve of him. Finally, when the brother despaired of convincing his sister to leave her boy-friend, he decided to threaten the boy. A knife attack was bungled and the boy-friend escaped with his life — escaped all the way to the DN Nagar station where he now stood, telling them his saga. Yewale reacted quickly. A constable was despatched at once to arrest the brother and the victim sent off to have his wound treated. In an hour the brother was in custody.

Not all the night shift's cases are quite so dramatic. Most involve violence but many are quite mundane. A couple walks in and claims that the man's

brother regularly assaults them. A drunkard who pulled a knife on a man denies, slurring all the time, that he is drunk. Constables are despatched to break up street brawls and the participants bound over for the night.

Often the Inspectors find themselves in situations where they simply cannot help. The week I was at DN Nagar, a tearful woman walked in and asked for money. The policemen knew her. Her husband had been the victim of a hit-and-run accident and was now in hospital. "Please don't worry. You will get compensation now that the case is in court. It will come soon," an Inspector reassured her. "*Lekin kab?*" she demanded. She wanted the money now; her children were hungry. "We have no funds for this purpose," the Inspector gently informed her. "*Zaroorat abhi hai,*" she beseeched. The policemen were shaken. "What does one do in a situation like this?" Changlani later sighed.



Oblivious to the noise, a man sat in a corner polishing a pile of guns. The pistols lent a menacing air to the scene.

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE complaints that are brought in are so frivolous that they certainly do not warrant police intervention. One evening an old woman came in muttering to herself. Indignantly she told the Sub-Inspector that 'Suresh' had broken her bag handle and had to be taught a lesson. Finding the policemen laughing, made her even angrier. She was finally sent off with the assurance that a constable would come in the morning.

The woman is typical of the attitude of the people living in and around DN Nagar. Being poor they have no middle class reservations about bringing their problems to the police station and airing their grievances in public.

If the complaints are at times ridiculous, the policemen are not always faultless. Their behaviour towards complainants can be surly and rude. People are made to wait for hours before their complaints are registered and attended

to.

One night, a couple came in. The man's brother, they claimed, regularly assaulted them, and tonight, he was more unbearable than ever. The Sub-Inspector told them to wait. The couple waited for nearly two hours, while the policemen continued with their work.

Finally the man summoned up enough courage to ask the Sub-Inspector what was happening. The Sub-Inspector had obviously forgotten him entirely because he asked what the man wanted. When the case was explained again, the Sub-Inspector told him rudely that no one was free to go with him. The man and his wife protested, saying it was impossible for them to return home without help. Then, reluctantly, a constable was sent, on the condition that he would not arrest the brother if he was asleep, which he probably was at that time of night.

Another night, I was sitting on the dirty bug-ridden bench in the wireless room. An eerie groan came from the lock-up room next door, followed by thumps on the door. No one took any notice for some time. When finally a constable opened the door and inquired, it was discovered that a prisoner was hungry and wanted his dinner.

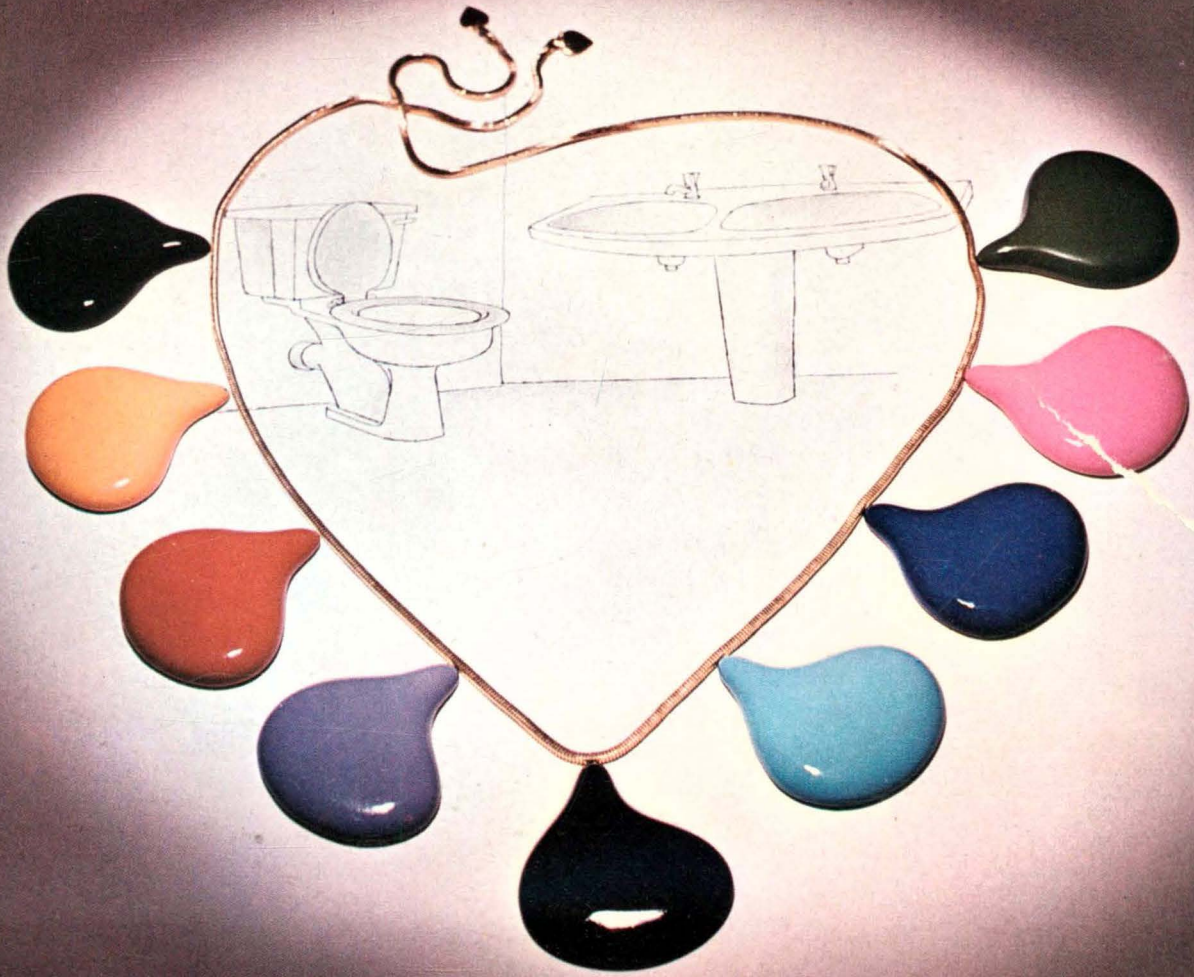
The wireless room was, that day, more crowded than usual with a group of labourers taking up half the space. They had been arrested earlier for stealing cement, but could not be questioned as they only spoke Tamil. The confusion was further compounded as constables crowded around eager to show off their linguistic powers.

Unaffected by the ruckus, a man sat in a corner polishing a pile of guns. Neatly laid out on the table, the pistols lent a menacing air to the scene.

Two men came in to talk to the constable sitting next to me. One of them, an accused in a murder case, was to be released on bail. But first the constable had to check his papers. After they left, the policeman told me how much he hated prisoners being released on bail. "I have to keep checking that he goes to court. If he runs away, I get into trouble."

It was late; after midnight. On the wireless, names and descriptions of missing persons were being announced. In the Charge Room people were still arriving, despite the time. For the rest of the night they would continue to file in with their complaints. For a police station is like a graveyard: its doors never close. ♦

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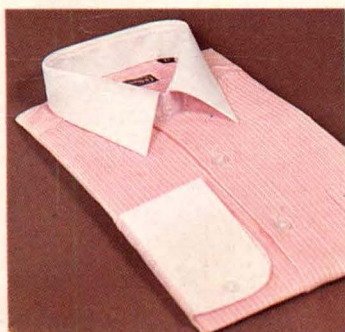
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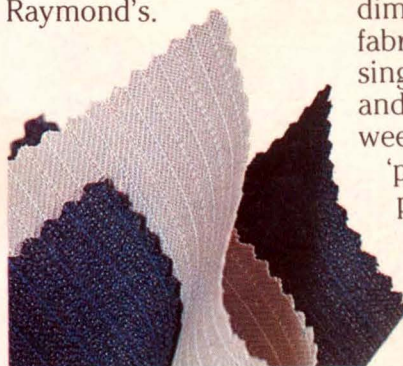


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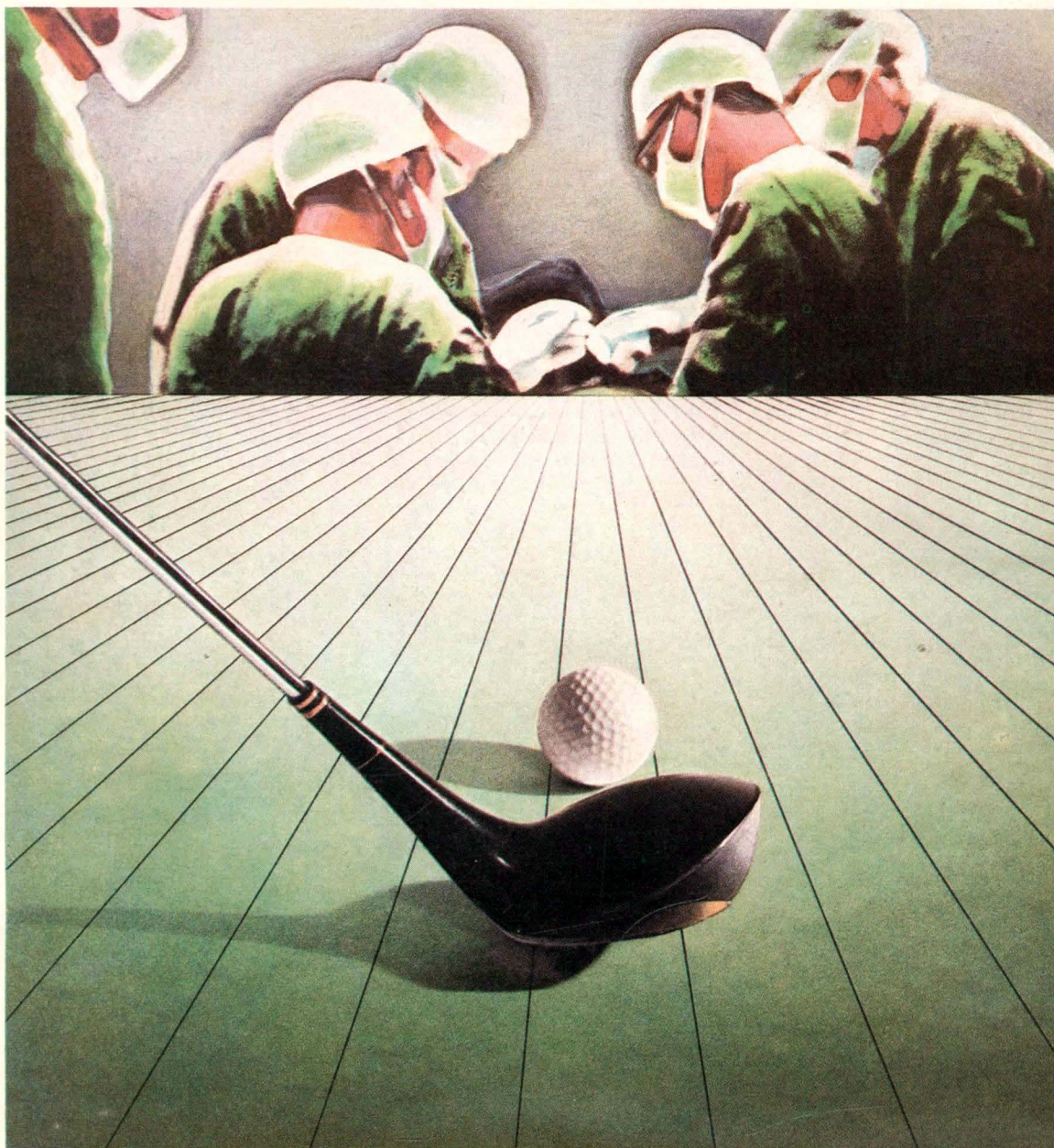
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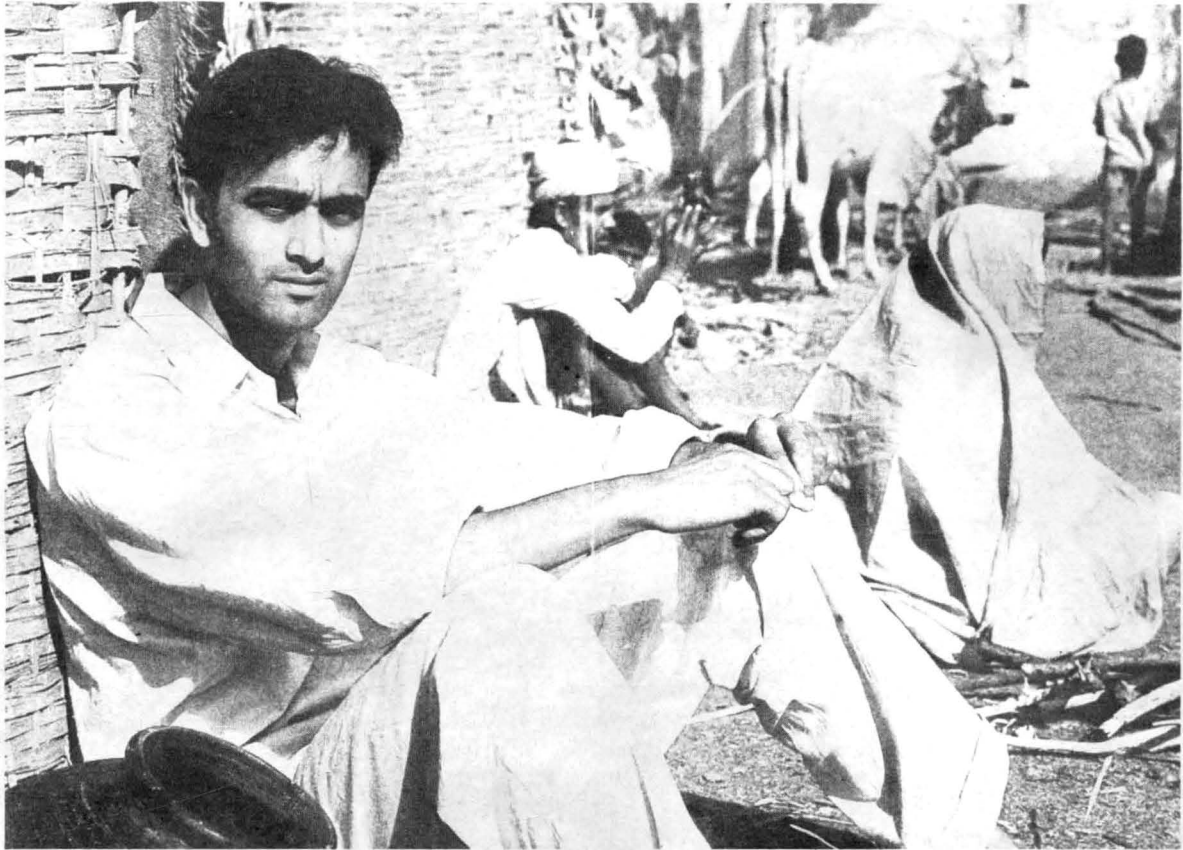
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ART MALIK: A Cross-Cultural Star

ART MALIK SANK BACK on to his sofa. "I'm sick of this place," he said angrily. He had just retrieved his Irish setter, Cassie, who had slipped out of the house and was nosing around a small dog led by a prim, middle-aged Englishwoman. As soon as she saw the brown face of Cassie's owner, she let out a tirade of abuse. Obviously she was not one of Art Malik's fans. Quite the contrary.

At the age of 13, Athar (Art) Malik made a conscious decision to be British although he was born a Pakistani. By his own admission he is as nearly British as one can be in this country. But it isn't good enough. Unfortunately he is not a chameleon. He cannot

change the colour of his dark skin to adapt to his white environs.

He portrays a similar quandary in Granada's 14-part serial of *The Jewel In The Crown*, based on Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet*. As Hari Kumar, an Indian educated at an upper crust English public school, he finds he does not belong to either side. The English refuse to acknowledge his presence; to them he is invisible — just another black face in a sea of black faces. To the Indians he is an oddity — although he looks like them he is clearly not one of them. In frustration he cries out: "I hate myself for being black and English."

Perhaps Malik, too, once spat out those words when he was called a 'wog' by his white class-mates at Coombe House, a public school in New Malden, Surrey. But he learned to use it to his advantage. Today, he is the hottest discovery in film and television in Britain

and he is destined to go far. British audiences have already seen him in the title role of Hari Kumar in *The Jewel In The Crown* and as Zarin in Goldcrest Productions' *The Far Pavilions*. He is currently shooting in Bangalore, for David Lean's *A Passage To India*.

ART, as he prefers to be known, was born in Bahawalpur in Pakistan on November 13, 1952. At the age of three he came to England with his mother, Zaibunissa, and his four older brothers to join his father who was doing a fellowship at the Royal College of Surgeons. He grew up in Balham, South London, in a conservative Pakistani household. At the age of 10, Art and his brothers were packed off to a boarding school in Quetta, Pakistan. "I think my father wanted us to decide what culture we would reject — the host culture (which was

The article is reproduced courtesy Asian Post.

"I found the English culture attractive and my own culture restrictive. . . . The idea of having blind faith in religion holds no water."



Malik with Tim Piggott-Smith — a famous nude scene.

English) or our parent culture."

But 18 months later, they were forced to return to England without having made a decision. Art then attended Coombe House where he finally made his choice — a choice which he still isn't sure was the right one. For, even today, he is a man without an identity. "I found the English culture attractive and my Islamic culture restrictive. I thought at the time — and still do — that it was important to have freeness in thought, which comes from the basis that you have to exist in your own right and not just as a product of your parents. The idea of having blind faith in parents or religion or elders holds no water with me. I give a person respect when he has proven worthy of it."

Art is the rebel in the family. His father, Mazhar Malik, is an eye surgeon in Abu Dhabi. One brother, Mayaz, is an Assistant Manager with the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) in London. Ayaz is a neurosurgeon in Texas, and Ijaz is a chemical engineer in Abu Dhabi. His younger sister, Sabiha, is studying law in Chicago. Art himself was planning to become a systems analyst while studying at Twickenham Technical College when he got side-tracked into acting. And while his brothers and sister are followers of Islam, he is an agnostic. "When I began to question the tenets of Islam, I did not get answers which satisfied me." As he said, he was not going to have blind faith in anyone or anything.

Coombe House closed two years after he joined, during Harold Wilson's Prime Ministership when several boarding schools became moribund. He continued his studies at Bec Grammar

School in Tooting Bec until he moved on to Twickenham Tech. There he discovered that it was acting, not computers, which fascinated him. Frank Hooper, who ran the drama department, recognised his latent potential and encouraged him. He quit college and worked for Hertz Rental Cars while trying to figure out how he was going to pursue a career on the stage. At this time, Susan Ford, a fellow student at Twickenham Tech, urged him to audition for the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He remembers being 'wooden and unrelaxed'. Nevertheless, he was chosen for the three-year course.

While still a student at Guildhall, Peter Brook, 'the English gentleman of British theatre', cast him as Gurjief, the Afghan mystic, in his *Meetings With Remarkable Men*. It brought forth strong objections from members of Equity but Brook was determined to have him. So Art was made a temporary member of Equity on the grounds that he was at drama school, but on the understanding that he could not use this role to apply for membership. Furthermore, if by the time the film was released, Art had not become a member, he would receive no accreditation for his work. The film took two years to complete, and by then Art was not only a member of Equity but a very busy young actor to boot.

He worked as a repertory actor in Leeds, Bristol, The Old Vic, the Oxford Playhouse and the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has played an Indian in *The Comedians* in Leicester and one of the horses in *Equus* in Leeds. He has done *Timon Of Athens* in Bristol and has even played a female prostitute in

a RSC production. He was seen in an intriguing film called *Richard's Things* with Liv Ullmann, a Bergerac episode and a few television commercials. He has also worked in plays like *Trial Run*, which was loosely based on the Southall riots and the Special Patrol Group (SPG) and *The Aliens*, based on a real life incident when a pregnant Asian woman was detained at Heathrow and harassed to the point that she lost the child.

"It has been easy for me," he concedes.

"There has been an influx of plays which require first or second generation Asians. There are such parts in Shakespeare and Chekhov, too, and since you are on a contract they find it profitable to use you in a minor role in their other productions as well. Some directors feel I can bring a special empathy to non-white roles. Besides, there are about four of us in London today who are usually considered for such roles — Derrick Branche, Dev Sagoo, Lyndon Gregory and myself. Darien Angadi, the fifth, committed suicide some time back. So, if you believe in the law of averages, there should be quite a bit of work for me. Of course, I realise this nostalgia thing with India is not going to last forever, but as an actor I see myself as a commodity to be used. I think people should stop asking questions about colour and race when casting. As actors we must be able to do any role convincingly — white or non-white. My whole concept of life is one without passports — citizens of the world if you please."

ART FIRST HEARD of *The Jewel In The Crown* in 1980, through actor



Malik in the opening scene of *The Jewel In The Crown*.

Art had reservations about doing the nude scene. Says his producer, 'as a Muslim his body is very private to him.'

Nicholas Farrell, with whom he shared rooms in Bristol. Farrell, who eventually played Teddie Bingham in the series, told Art there was a possibility that Paul Scott's books might be made into a film and that he, Art, would be a perfect Hari Kumar. So Art set to work reading the four books and it was while he was midway through *The Division Of Spoils* in May 1981 that his agent, Ken McReady, phoned to say the producer, Christopher Morahan, wanted to see him.

As soon as he saw Art and spoke to him, he knew he had his Hari Kumar. Says Chris Morahan: "Art was brought up in this country. His father sent him to Pakistan to introduce him to his roots. He had immediate personal experience to draw upon. He struck me as a very attractive person, a handsome young man. It was important that Hari Kumar be strong and good-looking, not an eccentric but a heroic figure. Art was not experienced but he had so much to contribute to the part."

The Jewel In The Crown is a 15-hour dramatisation of *The Raj Quartet* which is shown in one-hour weekly episodes on London's ITV and Channel 4 stations. The last episode will go on the air sometime in April. Art plays Hari Kumar, the Indian boy educated at a public school in England who returns to India as a man. The series starts in 1942 when Gandhi began the Quit India movement. Hari Kumar works as a journalist with the *Mayapore Gazette* and runs afoul of the town's Superintendent of Police, Ronald Merrick. To make matters worse, the English nurse, whom Merrick falls in love with, spurns him for Hari. Her feelings are not unreciprocated. What follows

is a battle of wills between Merrick and Hari. It is a complex confrontation: white against black, ruler against ruled, English grammar school boy against Indian public school boy, spurned suitor against lover, contempt against hate. It is from this confrontation that the story and action snowball and it is this confrontation which sums up the nature of the trouble which led up to India's independence.

JEWEL is ITV's most expensive production since *Brideshead Revisited*. It cost £five million to make, £750,000 more than *Brideshead*. It took three years to complete and was shot on location in Udaipur, Mysore, Simla, Srinagar, Delhi, Bombay and Bangalore. According to Chris Morahan, "The story of the British in India is very complicated but I think we should try to record it while there are still people alive who actually took part in it."

The series has received ecstatic press reviews in Britain. "Culturally, *The Jewel In The Crown* might be about to perform a role in Britain analogous to that played by films like *Apocalypse Now* and *Coming Home* in America. It says a lot about Britain that such a catharsis has taken so long, and a lot about the series that surpasses its US equivalents in expiation by a very long way," wrote *Time Out's* reviewer. The *Daily Mail* had this to say: "Sometimes there are not enough superlatives to go around. I felt that strongly after my first viewing of *Brideshead Revisited*. I felt it even more strongly about this miracle of TV — Granada's meticulously acted and adapted version of Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet*. . . just watch it and wonder. . . It will make you very

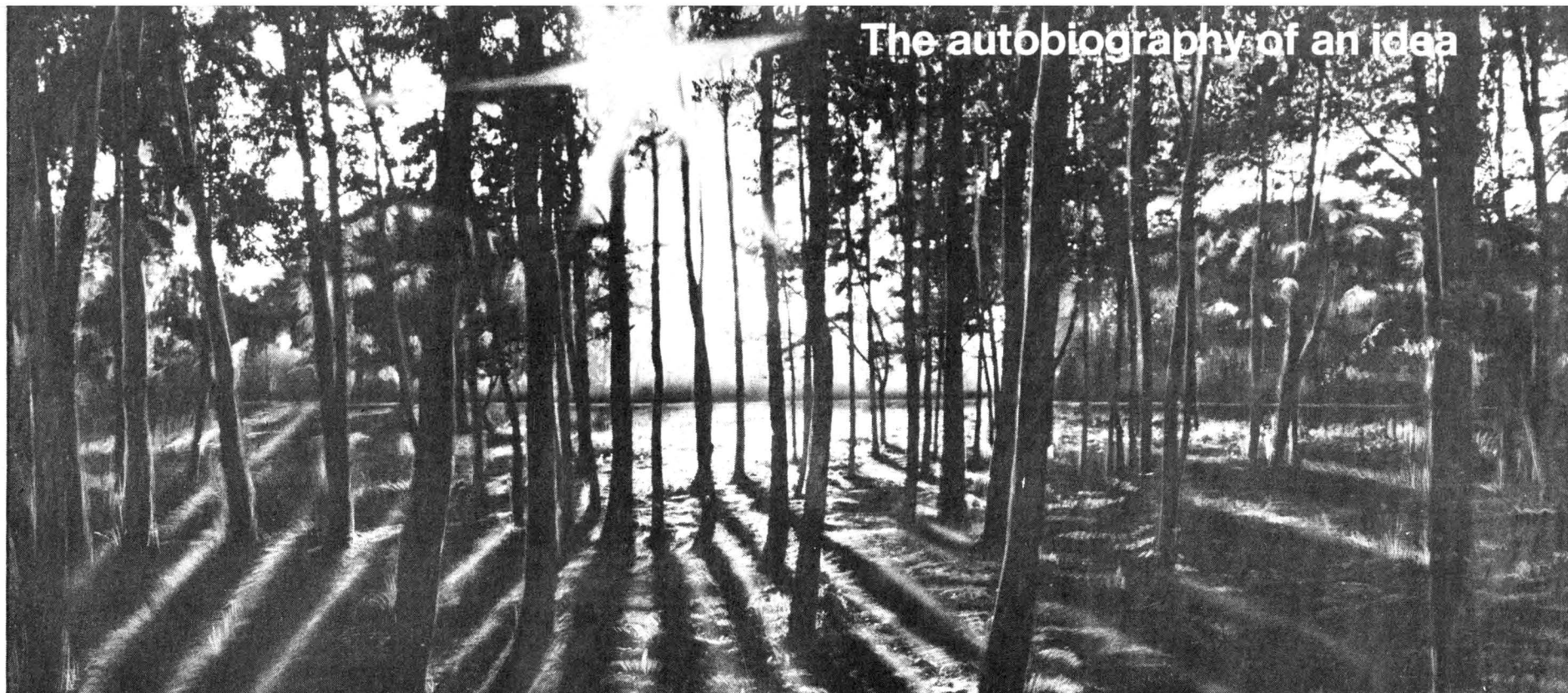
proud of British television."

The Jewel In The Crown is perhaps the best thing to have happened to British television in a very long time. It has been made with true feeling and a genuine understanding of the relationship between the British and the Indians. It is dramatic, moving and horrifying. The casting is first-rate and the script *par excellence*. Art Malik is Hari Kumar—an Indian with a backbone but no identity, unwanted by a people he grew up with, and a mere curiosity to a country he was born in. He has played the role superbly, getting into the skin of Hari Kumar and bringing all the frustration, unhappiness, hurt and anger to the surface in a fine and feeling performance. Tim Piggott-Smith as Merrick is just one thing — frightening. It is difficult to understand such contempt and yet there must be hordes of blacks and Asians who have encountered a Merrick somewhere in Britain. And then there's Susan Woolridge, who plays the gritty but awkward Daphne Manners with touching grace.

Talking about the role, Art admits to having great reservations in doing the nude scene in a prison where he stands with back to camera at the mercy of Merrick. "I talked it over with Gina (his wife) and also with Chris and Jim. It's difficult to disrobe in front of actors and technicians and other members of the crew. I don't think it's a question of my background. I doubt if any actor would consent to do such a scene blithely. Nudity puts a different emphasis on a scene but I knew it was justified in this case. It set the tone."

"The question of being naked was very important," says Christopher

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The Maliks at home – his wife Gina is English and their daughters are Jessica and Keira.

Morahan. "As a Muslim, his body is very private to him. I believe it creates a difficulty to stand there manacled and defenceless but it lent dignity to the performance."

But perhaps the greatest accolade comes from Scott's daughter who wrote him a personal letter: "You know, on that screen you *were* Kumar and Susan Wooldridge *was* Daphne. There are scenes between the two of you which are exquisite and poignant and moving and funny. Papa would have loved you both."

After *The Jewel In The Crown* came *The Far Pavilions*, where Art played a minor role as Zarin, Ash's childhood friend. "*The Far Pavilions* was about creating fantasy and escape from reality through a good yarn. I didn't need to do any in-depth analysis to play Zarin." It was torn to pieces by most reviewers who, having seen *Jewel*, naturally compared the two and found it wanting.

Art likes to do work which will get the Asian community interested. "Their approval means a lot to me," he says, "and yet I doubt if even one per cent of the readers of *The Raj Quartet* – or, for that matter, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* – are Asian."

ART LIVES with his attractive English wife, Gina, and two daughters – Jessica, almost three, and Keira, ten months – in a tiny cottage in Virginia Water. They met at Guildhall and married in 1980 while they were 'gainfully unemployed'. Gina lost interest in her career af-

"My ambition for my children is that they grow up to be good so they don't need any cultural references."

ter having got a few television roles, when she found the competition too tough. The house is a shambles, testimony to the presence of two children and the delightful Cassie who simply can't keep still. The lounge has a relaxed look about it, what with bottles of baby powder, baby cleansing milk, boxes of diapers, a walker, a mini-trampoline and assorted toys all over the place. But then, the Maliks are a happy and carefree family.

Art is immensely likeable and quite charming in a quiet sort of way. Dressed in faded jeans and a checked shirt, he sprawls on the off white sofa, smoking his Marlboros and rattling away about his life and his recent windfall. Though not classically handsome, he is a very good-looking man. Most appealing of all are his spaniel-brown eyes. His voice is rich and he speaks with a

pronounced English public school accent. He seems to enjoy the quizzing and self-analysis and every so often his boyish face breaks into a grin.

What kind of culture are his children growing up in? They would naturally imbibe an English culture from Gina, but what of Art? "It's absurd to try and give something I don't know. I don't know very much of either my own Islamic culture or the English culture I live in today. If my ambition for my children is that they grow up to be good, which it is, then they don't need any cultural references. I grew up in a restrictive environment where children were seen but not heard. I don't want to bring up my children like that. I encourage them to ask questions and be curious."

Times have certainly changed for Art and yet, in a way, they have not. He refuses to talk figures but he admits that in terms of work, general exposure, confidence and a belief in himself as an actor, he has received a tremendous boost. "I can now afford to take time out and enjoy the luxury of sitting back and not taking any job just because I need the money. It's nice to be flavour of the day, let alone flavour of the week."

After his exposure in *Jewel*, he could be destined to become a very sought-after commodity, but the female adulation is a concept he doesn't want to think about. Star to him is Rats (spelt backwards), 'and as long as you hold on to that, you're OK'.



SEX AND THE

Sexual taboos, myths, ignorance and a false sense of modesty prevail among a large section of the educated, says the author of *Sex Power*.

SEXUALLY I WAS the most ignorant 15-year-old greenhorn when I came to Bombay in 1930 from a Jesuit school in Belgaum where any talk of sexual physiology was taboo. My enlightened class-mates at the Master's Tutorial High School were eager to show off their superior knowledge. Mukesh cornered me the first day of term and asked, "What happens if you masturbate?"

"Nothing," I answered hesitantly. Everybody roared with laughter.

"Don't you know you lose your memory and become mad?" he said. I remained silent.

The prefect, Dara, intervened. "Give the blighter one more chance," he said as he strode over to me. "How many drops of blood make a drop of semen?" I shook my head miserably. "You ignorant blockhead! Four hundred drops of blood make a drop of semen," he said.

Pradip chipped in, "It needs a lot of nourishing food to make semen. You are born with a fixed quantity. If you masturbate or have frequent wet dreams (night emissions), you exhaust the precious fluid and become impotent."

Fortunately, the teacher walked in, so my 'lesson' ended there. Tears welled in my eyes as I sat motionless at the broken desk, waiting for school to be over. I ran home to my uncle and aunt with whom I was staying. Noticing my woe-begone face from underneath his half-panto spectacles, my uncle stopped to ask, "Anything the matter?"

I gulped and gathering up courage, asked in a rush, "Where can I get a book about sex?" Uncle was utterly surprised, shocked and speechless. All the 206 bones in his body rattled with

rage and he articulated between clenched teeth, "I must report to your father that you are interested in sex, not study. You study first, settle in life and only then think of sex and marriage. Go to your room and study, study, study!" Then he shouted to the servant, "Marquis, give *baba* a cup of tea and some cake."

Minutes later, the middle-aged Marquis, cook-cum-bearer-cum-jack-of-all-work, brought my tea. Apart from working for my uncle and aunt for the last 20 years, Marquis also looked after the needs of many lonely *ayahs*. He told me in his broken Gujarati: "Don't worry, *baba*. I'll teach you everything though I've never read a book. Come to my *kholi* after *budha* and *budhi* go off to sleep."

Just then my aunt walked in and gave me some worldly advice. "Don't run after girls or talk to them in school. How will you become a big doctor if you don't concentrate on your studies? You can so easily go wrong in a treacherous city like Bombay, where 'bad' girls are everywhere. They will *fasav* (trap) an innocent lad like you!" She paused for breath, then said, "Marquis will give you dinner. We are going out. Don't ever upset uncle again. Promise?" I tried to explain that all I wanted was some basic knowledge of sex so I could hold my own against my class-mates. "Nonsense," she said, "No good boy ever reads about dirty things like sex."

My aunt and uncle left for the party and I waited for Marquis's return from his evening expedition. He

Dr RH Dastur is the author of Sex Power, and writes a regular column on health for the Sunday Review of The Times of India.

URBAN INDIAN

By Dr RH Dastur

came, hurriedly prepared my dinner and sat on a stool beside me. He was my father confessor and I poured out my heart to him. "Is it true that if one masturbates, he loses his manhood, memory and can even become mad?"

"Absolutely true, *baba*," replied this self-crowned high priest of sexuality. "Three months ago, the Alwaris boy from Mazagaon who could not stop masturbating, was so disturbed, he committed suicide."

"It can't be true," I said, which infuriated the maestro.

"Do you know the bright lad next door lost his memory and failed in his exams? And that boys who masturbate lose their manhood? Rosy, who works on the third floor, told me that 20-year-old Ravindra could not do a thing when he tried sex with her, all because of masturbation!" The maestro's advice was simple and clear. "As soon as one has the desire, one must have a partner, so the urge to masturbate doesn't arise."

* * *

LET US LEAVE MARQUIS behind and turn the clock of time forward by half a century. Things are not very different from what they were in my teens in the land of Vatsyayana (the world's first sexologist of *Kama Sutra* fame) and the famous Khajuraho sculptures. A 14-year-old schoolboy from Delhi wrote to me pathetically, "I am desperate and cannot sleep. If I practise self-abuse (masturbation), I get instant relief but our cook told me that I would not only lose my manhood but also become mad. I have been very worried. My dad says he will talk to me when I am eighteen but

what do I do till then? Please doctor, reply immediately, otherwise I will become more mad."

Sexual taboos, myths, ignorance of the basics of sex and a false sense of modesty prevail even among a large section of the educated. Serialisation of my book, *Sex Power* in *The Daily, Blitz* and *Current* provided an opportunity for middle class youths to ventilate their sexual grievances. It got a mixed reception — extremely hostile from a few middle-aged, sex-is-still-taboo group and extremely gratifying from many more adolescent and adult victims of sexual ignorance and fallacies.

A senior opthalmic surgeon came to see me. I noticed he was a little huffed. "I have come to give you advice. At this stage of your career, why do you want to ruin yourself by writing on dirty things like sex?" he admonished. "I have to hide *The Daily* from my wife and 19-year-old son." I tried to reason with him how vital scientific sexual knowledge was for our confused adolescents. But a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.

A retired IAS officer of Uttar Pradesh wrote to the editor of *Blitz*: "Are you competing with another Bombay journal in publishing porno material? Yours is a dignified and well-respected journal where the shameless writings of Dr Dastur should find no place . . ."

On the other side of the coin, let me analyse the main sexual problems and fears that exist in this country as stated in 939 pathetic letters from readers and 283 personal interviews with readers of *The Daily*. Surprisingly, 85 per cent belonged to the age group 16 to 26, were single and came of



middle class background. The remaining 15 per cent were between 30 and 65 and married. Females were few but many had been the propelling force in prodding their partners to seek medical advice.

Let me reproduce just two typical cases.

Twenty-one-year-old Naresh from Borivli wrote: "I have been closely following extracts of *Sex Power* in *The Daily*. You are doing a great service to miserable lads like me. Six to seven years ago I started masturbation. As a result my penis has gone completely limp. And Doctor, to add salt to the wound, girls find me attractive. I avoid having sex with them for fear of being rejected. Please help me. Unless I have sex soon, I will go mad."

Samuel from Byculla says: "I am a boy of 18 years. I can no longer bear my problem. My penis isn't growing. My friends laugh at me when they see me urinating. My penis is less than two inches when it is normal and only four and a half inches when erect. Please tell me if I can satisfy a woman. If there is no solution, I will end my life."

The pride of place amongst the adolescents' fears was the evil and harmful effect of masturbation. A close second was the small size of the penis and testicles, closely followed by anxiety about night discharges, spermatorrhoea and phosphaturia and in-built fear of the nude female.

* * *

I WILL DIGRESS a little to cremate the prevailing myths about spermatorrhoea and phosphaturia. *Spermatorrhoea* or *semenuria* is the involuntary discharge of semen in the urine. In our tradition-bound culture, life-producing semen is rated as a priceless fluid to be hoarded like gold. Loss of semen is equated with loss of vitality, and a slight white discharge from the penis is an alarm signal for the worried victim. Quacks call it a dreadful disease. (Spermatorrhoea means loss of vital semen.) Having frightened the unfortunate victim out of his wits, they treat it with every conceivable medicine and even electrotherapy to fix the leakage.

Phosphaturia is a harmless condition where the urine contains a high percentage of phosphates. It is a common condition in vegetarians whose diet tends to produce an alkaline urine loaded with crystals of phosphate which give it a whitish appearance. Many



The men are looking for sex to prove their manliness while the women want love, security and ultimately marriage.

adolescents mistake it for spermatorrhoea and worry that the continuous loss of vital semen will make them impotent. A simple microscopic examination of the urine can set such fears at rest.

All the 1,222 respondents were convinced that they had lost their manhood and become impotent, though only 36 actually failed when they visited prostitutes and 18 tried with their girl-friends. The remaining 1,168 middle class and lower middle class adolescents believed that they had harmed themselves sexually and were impotent because of hand-practice (masturbation) and consequent loss of semen.

* * *

LET US SWITCH FROM the no-can-do adolescents of the middle class to the any-time-with-anyone-can-do upper middle class and the affluent jet set comprising the young tycoons-cum-Casanovas of Bharat. Both groups have read from cover to cover *The Kinsey Report*, Masters and Johnson, the hairdresser turned sexologist Shere Hite, and Dr Joyce Brothers. They think they know everything a young man ought to know about sex and sexuality. The similarity between the two groups ends here.

First we will explore the sexual exploits of the upper middle class. Their field of operation extends to collegians and call-girls, typists and telephone operators. The men are looking for just sex to prove their manliness while the women want love, security and ultimately marriage. The latter's common complaint is: "I broke up with so-and-so as he was only interested in my body and not me." A survey of 69 adolescents in the age group 17 to 24 years showed that nearly 75 per cent had at least two or more sexual encounters prior to their marriage, the frequency of sex increasing to once or twice a month in the successful ones. The unlucky ones who did not do so because of derisive remarks of their partners ("What a small organ!" or "Finished so fast!"), or due to fear of being detected or the revolting environment of a call-girl's quarters, were miserable.

By contrast the jet setters have no sexual hang-ups. On their return to India they acquire overnight a partnership, power, patronage and privy purse in their vast family business, which gives them the right mix to be irresist-

ibly 'tempting' to some. Young ladies fall for them hook, line and sinker. But their favourite targets are the hostesses of airlines and five star hotels, models, starlets, sophisticated call-girls and occasionally female libbers from their own class.

What do their female partners think about their expertise in bed? A Miranda College model says, "The majority of them are lousy lovers," while a Boeing-747 hostess and veteran of many sexual encounters says, "Most young men have a one-point programme in love-making. Quick in. Quicker out." She lit a cigarette and drawled, "I don't like the hasty way they pounce on me by gritting their teeth to prove they can engage their partners in sexual ecstasy. Any day I prefer older men with a more confident sexual air who are not interested in breaking records." However, it would be unfair to condemn the young Casanovas on the strength of two opinions of females who failed to reach their orgasms.

Of the 39 tycoons in the age group 18 to 25 who consulted me for medical disorders arising from excessive stress in their lives, 18 complained that they triggered off very quickly. According to the well-known consultant physician in sexual medicines, Dr Prakash Kothari, "The incidence of sexual disorders, particularly premature ejaculation, is more prevalent than the common cold. Nearly 50 per cent of Indian males suffer from it." Dr Kothari was talking in general and not of any particular age group.

Frequent sexual exposures, particularly in the young tycoons, make them vulnerable to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). The most frequent is non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU) which has displaced gonorrhoea as the leading cause of urethral discharge all over the world, particularly in this age group. Its cause is still a mystery. Gonorrhoea is a close second. Man was jubilant that with the discovery of Sir Alexander Fleming's wonder drug, penicillin, gonorrhoea would be wiped out from earth. But the wily microbe has metamorphosed into a penicillin-resistant strain. The newer generation of antibiotics—Tetracycline and Erythromycin—are effective but scientists are on tenterhooks that the cunning microbe will again outwit them. And so, the race between man's ingenuity and the microbe's ability to counter it continues.

* * *



Indian women put up with sexually inadequate partners and are not particularly bothered about orgasm. But the jet set model of the '80s is different.

THE PRESENT DECADE is essentially a decade of viruses and in sex too, one virus has caused the same trouble: herpes genitalis. Having afflicted about 25 million Americans with 500,000 new cases annually, it now threatens to make an appearance here. It tends to be transported in the genitals of the young tycoons when they return from the USA and Europe after a rollicking time.

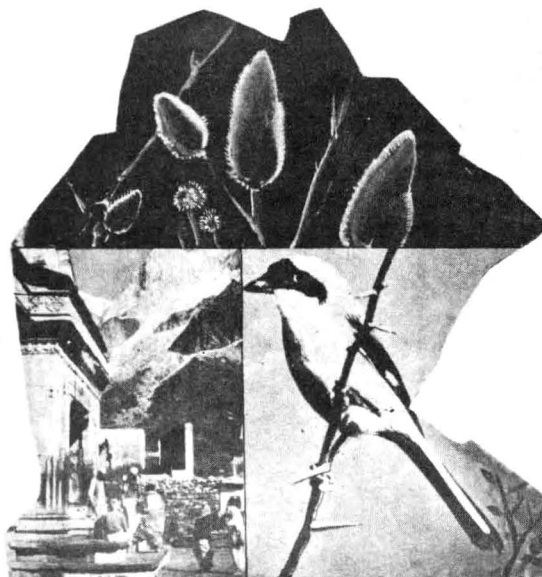
Let me tell you about Kapil, the globe-trotting tycoon from Delhi who is one of the 19 victims of genital herpes in our clinic. "Doctor, my sex life is finished!" he exclaimed. "Two years ago, I spent an evening with my girlfriend Grace in London. A week later, I had a stinging sensation on my glans penis, followed by a spot. The next day there were tiny blisters. I thought it was due to high power sex I had with my girl-friend in Delhi the previous night. My GP said it was an allergy and gave me a cream to apply. But the blisters kept coming, and when I consulted a venereologist he told me straight-away, 'You have genital herpes for which there is no cure.'"

I told Kapil that everything about the love virus was not depressing and dismal. Unlike untreated syphilis, herpes is not a killer. I advised him to refrain from sex during the active phase (tingling, spots, blisters) and learn to cope with stress as it often precipitates an attack.

NEEDESS TO SAY, only a few upper middle class and jet set women are liberated or prefer to be liberated. The majority are bound (till they are married at any rate) by the strict code of morality as laid down by Manu, the law-giver of 200 BC. "By a sacred tradition, the woman is declared to be the soil, the man is declared to be the seed. For comparison, the seed is declared to be more important than the soil. Ultimately the seed (man), owned the soil (woman) and knew that the soil was a very valuable asset," says Indira Mahindra in *The Rebellious Home-Makers*. In short, man regarded himself as the superior sex and dominated woman in every sphere. In the realm of sex and sexuality, this attitude gave woman an inferior status, her role confined to procreation and man's sexual gratification. With such an up-

Uttar Pradesh

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— All places which stand testimony to the Hindu faith for the last hundred years—years which have seen pilgrims and tourists dumb founded with awe at the visual remains of myths that have crossed history to become legends. Kanpur that has seen the prolific growth of the mercantile tendency in the Indian mind. Lucknow—the centre of ornate courtesy which charms every visitor—the centre of an aesthetic culture of beauty, rhythm and melody.

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UTTAR PRADESH—the kaleidoscope of Indian culture

bringing, it is small wonder that most Indian women not only put up with sexually inadequate partners but are not particularly bothered about orgasm.

But the jet set model of the '80s is different. Like her male counterpart, she is well-informed through magazines and movies. This group knows all about orgasm—clitoral and vaginal. They demand gratification from their male partners yet in over 75 per cent of sexual encounters they fail to reach a climax and wonder why. "Is something wrong with me?" asked socialite Pramilla. The problem is that only 25 per cent of all women reach an orgasm during penis-vagina intercourse. They need adequate clitoral stimulation. Unfortunately, their ignorant male partners blithely think that their erect organ can perform miracles.

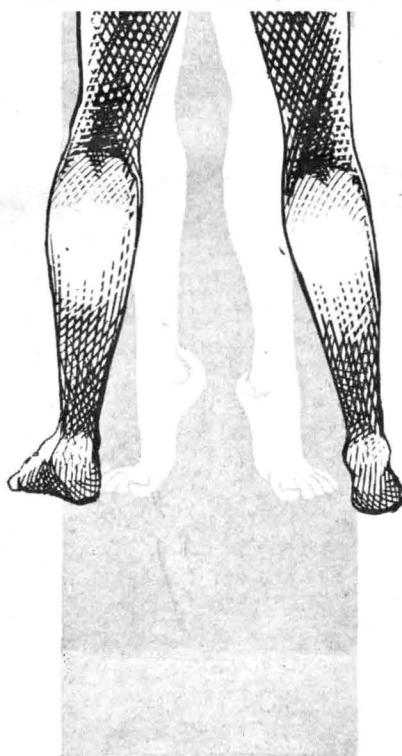
Helen Kaplan, the noted sexologist, has described this as a normal variant of female sexuality in a group of women who do not reach orgasm during sex but are orgasmic during masturbation or when their husbands stimulate them manually or orally. In such cases, if there is no sexual inhibition, anxiety or guilt feeling, both partners should not worry, as the male can bring her to a climax with the finger or orally. Eight out of 38 women in her study belonged to this group.

While men are almost 100 per cent orgasmic, orgasm for most women is a five star luxury not attainable every time she has sex. This is because a woman is not a quick performer like the male. She is slow to respond, the orgasm depending on her mood, the environment and adequate sexual stimulation—a combination of factors not easily achieved in the hurry and scurry of the 20th century. Western sexologists opine that an orgasm, though not necessary every time, is desirable for women to feel fulfilled in sex. Dr Van de Velde rightly says, "Only where love is, can the sexual pleasure be at its height, the orgasm ecstatic, the relief complete and the drowsy, dreamy relaxation which follows communication, a perfect peace."

"We need to urgently instil knowledge on sex education to our 100 lakh confused adolescents," urges Dr Mahinder Watsa, Chairman of the International Council of Sex Education and Parenthood, India. "At present many suffer from feelings of guilt and anxiety which are bound to lower their self-esteem and confidence."



While men are almost 100 per cent orgasmic, orgasm for most women is a five star luxury not attainable every time she has sex.



BUT THIS IS easier said than done. First of all, our natural inhibitions lead us to treat any reference to sex as dirty and smutty. The reactions to my columns and books have revealed an interesting dichotomy. On the one hand there have been upper middle class professionals (educated people who should know better) who snigger superiorly and warn me of the perils of ruining my reputation at this stage of my career by writing on sexuality and sex. These are people with access to the works of Masters and Johnson, Shere Hite and Robert Charthani: people who pride themselves on their own sexual knowledge and their lack of sexual misconceptions.

On the other hand, there are those who send me confused and worried letters, fearful that masturbation may cause their brains to shrink or those who feel that impotence will lead them to leap out of the nearest window. Such people have little or no access to the works of American sexologists, they do not read foreign magazines, and do *not* laugh superiorly at the said misconceptions of the vast majority. They *are* the vast majority.

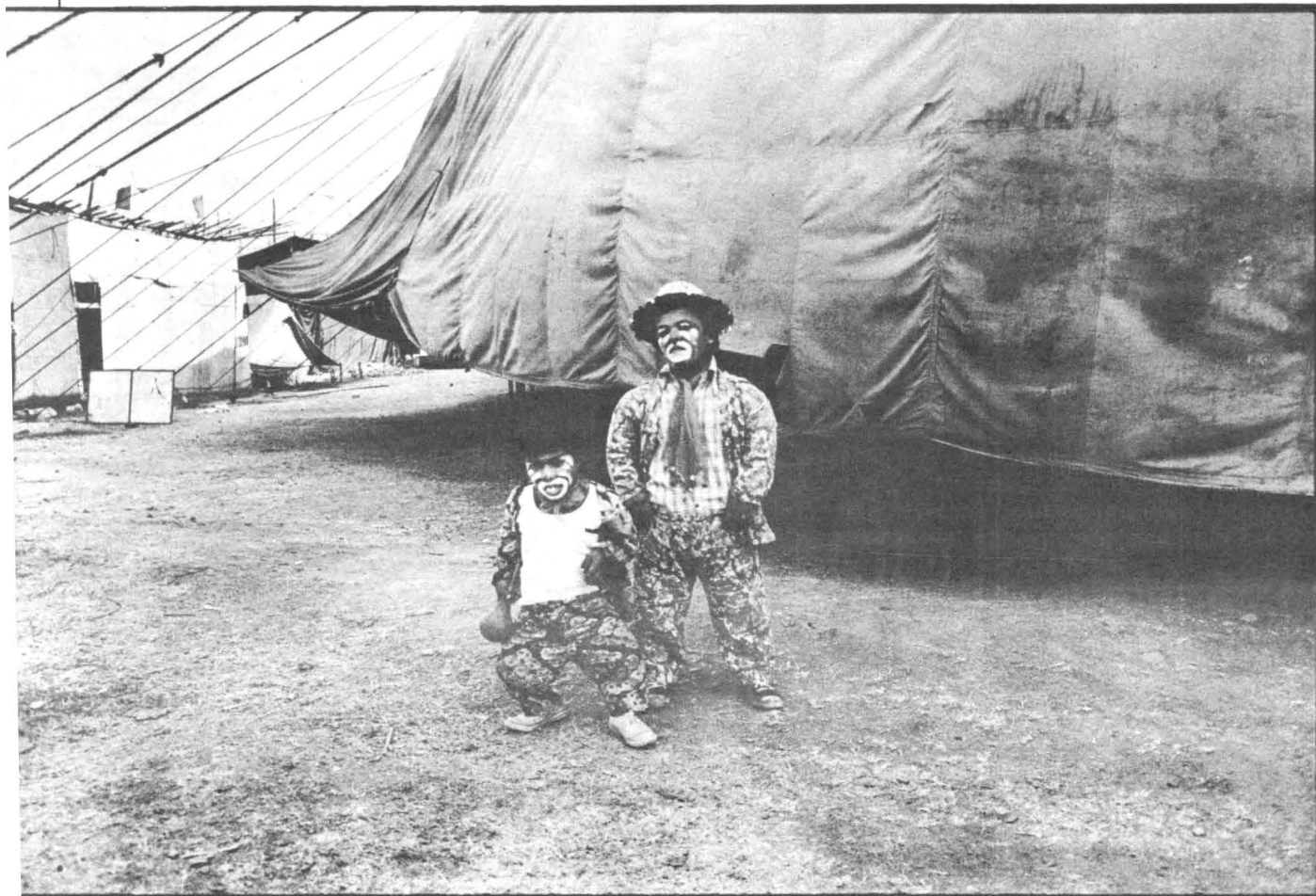
Now, if those of us who think we know better still react to all sex education with a knowing fear and conniving nudge, then how can we expect the silent, unsophisticated majority to ever overcome their hang-ups and problems? If we take physiological information and turn it into obscene humour, then will myths and conceptions ever be effectively dispelled?

And even among our city sophisticates, our globe-trotters, and jet set playboys, sexual knowledge is not as advanced as it should be. Many five star Romeos are shockingly ignorant of the perils of sexually transmitted diseases, and how to prevent them. And our performance tends to reflect the prejudices of our society. Even the most sophisticated among us, tend to take the woman's role in sex for granted.

So, are there any conclusions to be drawn in an article about sexuality and the urban Indian? Well, I for one, see reasons for hope. Centuries of ignorance are finally giving way to a new, more realistic, awareness of sex and sexuality. But the battle is not even half-won yet. All of us have miles to go, before we sleep — happily with each other!

BEHIND THE BIG TOP

Ketaki Sheth on circus performers and their lives.



“I AM CALLED SO MANY names—plastic lady, rubber doll, wonder woman. I’m an artiste. I’m not cheap. Sometimes I get so mad. Some men, they like to take photographs of us. Not because we are the artiste people. That is why I don’t like this picture-picture business. Who knows why they take?” Mohini asks defiantly as she adjusts her gleaming curls into place and deftly outlines her large expressive eyes with thick black eye-liner. Her patterned housecoat is neatly buttoned, hiding all traces of the maroon-and-gold sequined bodice and tightly-fitting shorts that have become, quite literally, her second skin. Clearly, she is both self-conscious and embarrassed by her costume and is adamant she will never be seen in it outside the ring. “When

the show starts it is part of my act. When I finish, I am no longer the plastic lady.”

We are sitting on folding chairs outside the tent Mohini shares with her sister and fellow acrobat, Ranee, in the midst of the makeshift circus village, the transit home for the hundreds of performers until they pack up to board the special train to their next stop. In front of us, the Big Top spreads out over an arid expanse of pathetic grassland strewn with popcorn wrappings and pieces of uneaten raw meat. Skirting the billowing wings of the main tent, shiny banners and filmy hoardings announce Jumbo’s specialities.

A few feet away from us, an emaciated monkey sits on the dusty rubble, chained to a cage on wheels

which houses a sleeping lion. A wretched dog trots up to a gargantuan hippopotamus who has just been released from his water cage in readiness for his act. “*Lo, lo, Sonu,*” says Mohini, as she advances towards the flabby animal and feeds him some dry grass. At a closer look, the beads of sweat on the untextured skin of the animal turn out to be drops of blood. “See there,” explains Mohini, “if he stays out of water for too long, these drops of blood come.”

We move away from the stench and the cages and the band from within the Big Top screeches a Ventures-like prelude before they settle into filmy classics. A group of giggling trapeze artistes in white satin outfits and stockings huddle in the inviting cool of a flapping tent watching their co-stars

stretch into shape as they await their cue.

At 22, Mohini is the most prized performer the Jumbo circus has and is, according to some, the most agile and versatile artiste in the Indian circus world. I watch her in the ring, her caked face flashing the teathy circus smile under the harsh floodlights in the steamy tent. She skilfully cartwheels around the ring; scissors her legs in mid-air and balances precariously atop three others, head downwards, with only her mouth as support. The cymbals clash and the drums beat faster as she moves into her solo act: her supple body twists and knots into different positions after which she straightens herself out and joins her colleagues on the silver bicycles upon which they perform a series of acrobatic feats.

Back in her tent, Mohini removes the cosmetic layers and invites me in for a glass of tea. Pinned up in her compact tent of two camp cots, a *puja* stool and a dressing-table, are posters of King Mike III ("He's a famous billiard player"), Kapil Dev ("I love cricket—Ravi Shastri is my favourite"), Sandeep Patil ("He's so handsome") and a Bombay Dyeing calendar. Occupying a special place, is a dusky beauty called Joan Young ("She's my mother. She's Scottish, you know. Has real blue eyes.")

MOHINI, RANEE AND THEIR CO-star acrobat Sweetie, are amongst the 'upper-crust' of the 184 Jumbo artistes both in terms of their skill and in the wages they earn. Not that their salaries amount to much, but compared to the average wage in Jumbo (Rs 350) the three acrobats—all trained by a Russian artiste—are like reigning queens. Their male counterparts in the social hierarchy of the circus world are the three animal trainers and the one daredevil jeep rider.

The majority of the circus troupe are acrobats and trapeze artistes, many of whom are under 18. Their pay is low, the work both perilous and strenuous (all artistes rehearse three hours daily before the three shows per day, often eating dinner after midnight) and each individual artiste is literally at the mercy of the proprietor for every additional benefit. Says Arjan Shahani, Manager of the Bombay Jumbo show: "The junior artistes are in a sense, the worst off. In many ways, they are worse off than the animals."



Kalam Khan (to the right) and Mohammed Usman, midget clowns with the Jumbo Circus, painting the clown masks in their tent before a show.

Pretty badly off also, are the bunch of clowns—nine in all—the youngest of whom is Shivram, the 14-year-old one-foot midget, who earns Rs 150 a month together with the two standard meals per day that all artistes get.

Out of the ring, the artistes slip into their own social rank, mingling mostly with their equals and keeping a distance from the *bade artiste* log. There is also a latent snob appeal coupled with an inherent pride amongst the better-skilled seniors. Says Mohini proudly from her isolated cocoon-tent while watching a bunch of clowns parade clumsily backstage: "We are the real artistes. Not them. What do they know? They simply put on their make-up and crack jokes."

Left to themselves, the clowns' facade of mimicry soon fades. I watch

Kalam Khan and Mohammed Usman, two midget clowns with the show, paint their stubbled cheeks with magenta-tinged rouge and top it off with a cherry red nose. Both have similar stories to relate of their past and both seem to have stoically accepted their circus existence. "What's happened, has happened," says Khan with abrupt finality.

Both from poor farming families from Bihar, their early childhood saw them shut away from society, tucked away in their homes, kept busy attending to in-house and on-field chores. Their dwarfed heights were considered impediments as far as schooling and jobs were concerned. "I studied till the fifth class," says Khan, who started his nine-year career with the Alankar company. "I wanted to continue and be a



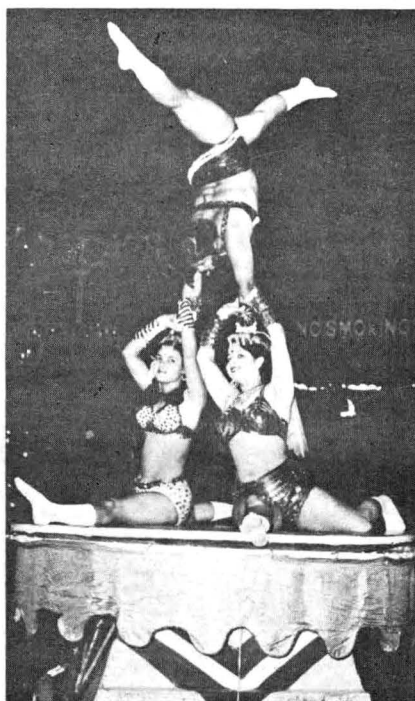
Twenty-two-year-old Mohini, 'plastic lady', relaxing outside her tent and (below) Mohini with co-stars Sweetie and Ranee.

teacher but my family, they said, 'Who'll listen to you? You are so small.' " Khan, who has a wife back home, hopes to start a small business of his own once he has saved a bit of money. Usman grins as he tunes into his favourite Vividh Bharati programme, almost as a prelude to his life. "I didn't study much. My master caned me, so I ran away. I joined my brother's *beedi* shop."

Like Khan, Usman was spotted at the local *mandi* circus by the company's ringmaster who sought permission from the parents and trained them as performing clowns.

The youngest of the team, Shivram, barely a foot high, is considered the 'hero' of the Jumbo clown show. His forte performance is popping out of a pregnant 'he' clown's stomach as the infant baby who then parades around the ring. His mentor, pater and benefactor is a corpulent, brawny, six-footer, Shankaran, one of the three ringmasters with the Jumbo show. "He's like my son," proclaims Shankaran as he combs his neatly oiled hair with a professional touch. "I've made him a hero, the star of this show."

The tiny 'hero' of the show looks up falteringly at his towering roommate as the ringmaster continues to relate the Shivram saga. "When I first saw him sitting, watching the circus, I thought he was a little boy, but then I



saw him closely . . ."

Shivram's Hindi is limited as he spoke only his local dialect until Shankaran spotted him six months ago near Bijapur and promptly enrolled him in the show. "Yeh sab acha hai," he says of the circus life, with the pedantic correctness of the cockney girl who's trained to say her vowels by her speech therapist. He fiddles with the jars of red and white paint, picks up a mirror and squats on the floor of

the tent he shares with Shankaran as he paints on his clown facade. And even after he dons his circles-and-triangles clownsuit and covers his dark skin with funny patterns, his deep-set, large eyes are filled with puddles of tears, betraying that C-shaped smile plastered on so mechanically by his distorted fingers.

AFTER SEVERAL VISITS TO THE Jumbo colony behind the Big Top, I have become a familiar figure and my presence is no longer noted with suspicion and curiosity. One afternoon, as I make my way to Mohini's tent, I pass Kalam Khan and Mohammed Usman who are performing a quick preview for a group of artistes. The lilliputian clowns generate much laughter as they prod each other clumsily and speak and grunt the rehearsed noises. They churn out the funny lines by rote as Mohini peers contemptuously from within her tent and beckons me in.

Mohini and Ranee come from a circus family dating back several years. Their two brothers are presently with Jumbo and their parents, Joan Young (rubber lady) and Kerala-born Gopi (flying trapeze artiste) met in the ring. Joan Young taught her daughter the skill at the age of four and trained her till she perfected the art after which training was continued with a prized



Daily expenses at the Jumbo fluctuate between Rs 15,000 and 20,000. This includes feeding and housing the artistes and the animals.

Russian acrobat. "But now," declares Mohini flatly, "I just want to be housewife, houselady, housewoman. I'm fed up of this life. When I marry it will not be to a circus man. My children will not be in the circus."

Our conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a frightened girl, draped in a sari, her head smothered by the *pallav* she keeps clutching onto. Her escort is a fiery, determined woman, who hurls the girl at Mohini and, as if in comfort, points to the gathering crowd of circus girls, muttering all the while in Hindi: "Nice girls. See, they are all nice girls." It turned out that the young girl had run away from her home in Bihar, was befriended by the *bai* who worked part-time at the circus and had been brought to the Big Top with the promise that she would one day become a circus queen.

Quite clearly, the circus is *not* a *dharamsala* for runaways or stowaways. Contrary to the *bai*'s expectations of the glitter, the tinsel, the lights, the applause and the money, life at the circus is tough, poorly paid, insecure and alienating. As Mohini describes it: "I've worked so hard. At night I am dog-tired. Don't think of the mosquitoes. Of the heat. Sometimes it's so lonely. No time to meet people. Then I think the circus is like a frog in the well. He's in there. Doesn't come out."

Many women like Mohini have got into the profession, quite literally, before learning to speak coherently, slipping into the arena with a childlike wonder and natural ease. But over the years, they have hardened, toughened and taken a definite stand to draw the line at marriage. Most men bear with it and some have pipe dreams of starting a 'permanent business'. A few lucky ones actually do. But all are aware of the fantasy in the ring and the reality behind the backdrop. And unlike many of their parents and grandparents, few really glow with the inner-pride-that-marks-my-profession type attitude. Most are marking time till their next break.

For some it could be years. For Mohini and her colleague Sweetie, alias Zumbell the Egyptian beauty, the routine will come to a halt with the entry of that special man. Mrs John Stanley, Sweetie's South Indian mother and ex-performer with the travelling Gogya Pasha magic show is quite confident that their time has come. "In just a few months now, Sweetie and Mohini will be married."

THE CENTRE OF THE INDIAN circus world is Tellicherry in Kerala. Until the circus wave hit this sleepy town, most of the local people were and many still are, daily wagers and

beedi workers. Tellicherry is the home of the circus kings many of whom have other businesses as well, the Shankar Babus of the circus conglomerate—Gemini, The Great Raymon and The Orient. Jumbo's training centre is in neighbouring Cannanore. Each company has its own training centre and gymnasium, and the trainees—many of whom are enrolled at a stipend of Rs 40 to 50 per month—undergo rigorous practice for four hours a day, six days a week. When the novices are agile and versatile enough to cope with the professional tensions under the Big Top, they are packed away with the rest of the troupe to hit the city lights.

Not all artistes inherit the skill from a circus mother or a godfather. Nor are they all children of *beedi* workers in pursuit of the better life. There are some, like clowns Kalam Khan and Mohammed Usman, who came as unsuspecting spectators to the *mandi* circus and enrolled as its life members.

Most of the Jumbo artistes are from the South and travel continuously ten months of the year, often in very squalid conditions especially in big cities like Bombay and Calcutta where accommodation is both scarce and expensive.

There was a time when Maharashtrians dominated the Indian circus world. The very first Indian circus,



Mohammed Usman in the wings before his act: "I didn't study much. My master caned me, so I ran away."



The Chatre Show, was started by Vinayak Chatre in 1881. Chatre, a veteran horse trainer and a daring horseback rider, was given the break by his employer, the Rajah of Kolha-

pur, who, pleased by the equestrian feats of his horse trainer, presented him with a fleet of animals and financed the first of the many circus shows that were to follow.

With the growing realisation that the circus is no more what it used to be and with its artistes no longer flushed with the optimism and pride that marked their fore-performers years, the circus as a business is in a bad way. This is evident from the growing cynicism of its artistes and the inflating costs of keeping up 'appearances' three times a day, all year round.

Since Chatre's time, the circus has enlarged its repertoire. But despite these strides, there are many within the circus world who feel that the circus will soon die as an entertainment. Says Mohini: "In another ten years, there may be no circus."

Daily expenses at the Jumbo fluctuate between Rs 15,000 and 20,000, which covers the cost of renting the space, housing and feeding the 184 artistes, the 200 workers and the zoo of animals including 39 'wild animals'. Expenses also cover the cost of providing electricity, water and housing to the village in transit. What's even more staggering is the cost of closing up and shifting house. For this operation, the cost of jeeps and trucks is Rs 25,000 and the chartering of an entire train each time a circus shifts (which varies between 15 to 50 days depending on the locale) is Rs 78,000. Just dismantling the main tent takes two days and involves 200 people. As government assistance is negligible, many

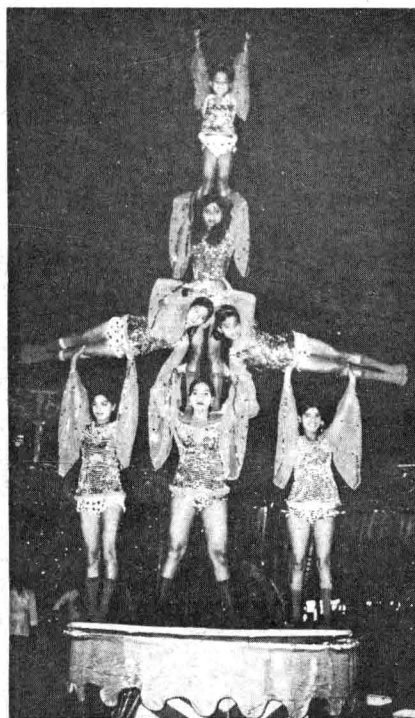


His deep-set large, expressive eyes betray that C-shaped smile plastered on so mechanically by his distorted fingers: Shivram, the youngest clown, awaiting his cue.

smaller companies are folding up and closing down. There are 18 circus companies dominating the Indian scene today.

Some of the older veterans feel that in a few years, the story of the Big Top will be just another fairy-tale to relate to future generations. And that the circus, quite sadly, is no longer that one big happy family where marriages, births and deaths, trials and tribulations were shared by all. Says Mohini's mother, Joan Young, "In my days there wasn't the perfection there is today. But after the lights are out, the real life begins. Each one comes back to his separate tent and nobody really mingles with other groups."

Joan Young's words ring true. Even to an outsider behind the scenes, the divisions, the segregations, the hierarchies, are quite noticeable. The performers with families live and eat quite separately from the unattached. Those with skills who perform daredevil acts are contemptuous of those whose seven-minute act is just a series of prods and pokes and a couple of poor jokes. The under-21's in the 'Miss' category, live shielded in their tented dormitories, separated from the rest by the sheets of corrugated iron so that they can hang their underclothes without embarrassment. Those who sport a flashing smile and strike a



macho pose in their tinselled tafetta are frowned on by a section of the community and are considered pompous and trite.

OUTSIDE THE JUMBO TENT, across the Mahim causeway in a busy section of Bombay, film posters with giant heroes and dancing figurines loom large—almost spitefully—as they tower

above the Big Top. The cinema, with its real heroes, its dream girls, its action and its tense emotions has captured the majority of the entertainment-seekers who will quite willingly pay Rs six each time to see Amjad Khan deliver his *daku* lines or Amitabh Bachchan as he fast spins into a pseudo karate act. The circus—with its open-air appeal, its tickets of Rs four to Rs 25, its real life performances of dexterity, agility and strength, where the spectator can see for himself that nothing is faked—has lost out to the celluloid world.

The circus may not be profound, it may not be unforgettable, but it is still undoubtedly great entertainment for the thousands of children who come year after year to watch the clowns and jugglers, the ladies in white satin sashes, the tightrope walkers and the performing animals. And sadly, but inevitably, these images will be replaced by the screen idols of the '80s as the circus-watcher steadily grows to become a star-gazer.

Perhaps, one day, when Mohini fulfils her dream and becomes a 'house lady', she will bring her family to the tented stadium—this time as spectator—and point to the sequined girl in the ring balancing on a row of green bottles and say, "I was once her." ♦

Prithviraj's Horse

By Manoj Das

IT HAD BEEN A FOND HABIT WITH Mukund, the teacher of history and often geography, to offer his smiles to the tall, the burly and the brawny, by way of greeting. He did not do it just as a safety measure, weak and lean though he was. "These stalwarts roaming up and down the earth could cause a fat lot of trouble to the already harassed humanity if they so pleased. But how innocently they move about! Who deserve a show of gratitude if not they?" was his thought. In fact, he thought on behalf of humanity.

One in three such stalwarts acknowledging his greeting, smiling back or giving him a nod, was enough to tide him over his anguish due to the other two taking no notice of his gesture. Often he conquered those disinterested heroes with a second or third round of his undaunted smile.

Mukund was new at Parvatipuri. His lodge was five kilometres away from his school, the Goswami Academy. Far from grumbling on that account, he felt happy. Time had reduced Parvatipuri to a hick town but she had a glorious past. And Mukund loved walking.

What a thrill there was in finding new routes to his destination—discovering a blind lane on the way—or taking a short detour for a closer look at a building that appeared hoary! Who knows if the lane he had just covered did not contain the dust of a great king or the nook he surveyed was not the seat of a *Yajna* performed by a great rishi? Who knows if those old monuments do not still contain a stone or two of the legendary castles that adorned the city in her golden age?

There was no dearth of time. He lived alone and took his food at a small hotel close to his lodge. His relatives had made several attempts to deprive him of his solitude, providing him with a consort. But in each case the prospective bride appeared to be stronger than him. After turning down the sixth proposal, he had declared to his tired

well-wishers that he would remain a bachelor forever. The cause of his grim decision, of course, remained buried in his heart.

He had retained and reinforced his reputation as a perfect gentleman as he changed from school to school. In every farewell meeting the budding speakers—his pet students—declared in voices vibrant with emotion, that their only aim in life was to be as noble a soul as their departing mentor. Mukund was the star — the pole-star — to which they must hitch their wagons.

He was sure that rarely did anybody equal him as a teacher, of history in particular. He tickled 'the dead past back to life. Students forgot football and cricket — that is what he thought — and sat gaping at him when he spoke of the great moments of history and went on speaking till minutes past the last period.

The character that fascinated him most was Prince Prithviraj. He was unhappy with the lack-lustre manner in which the textbooks presented the remarkable story of the hero's elopement with Princess Samyukta. He retold the story with a vengeance, so much so that the students in the first row could see his hair stand on end and he could see theirs!

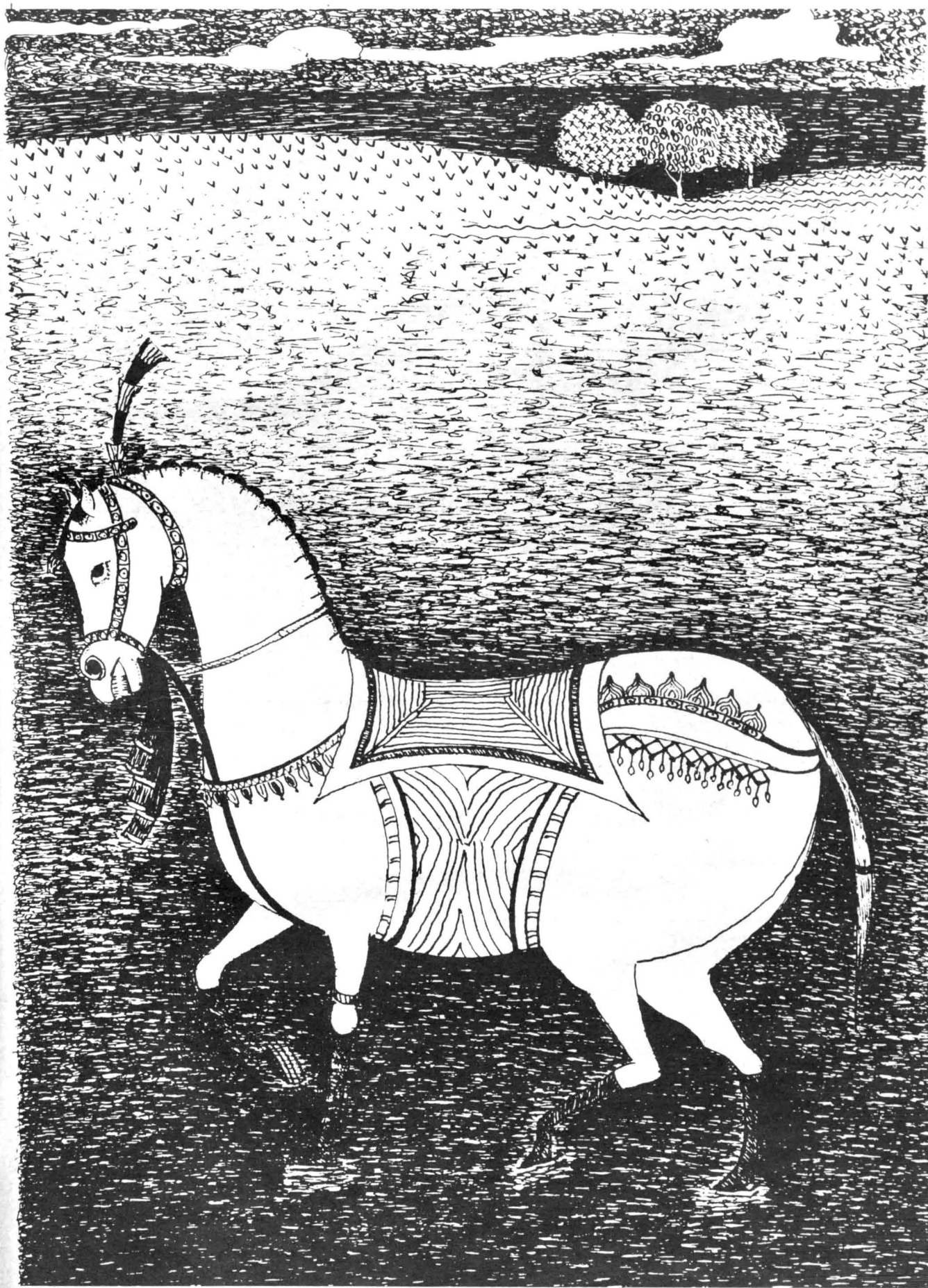
A normal Monday suddenly became a red-letter day for him when, at the end of a period, he heard a girl softly telling another, "It looks as though Mukund Sir had been a witness to the Prithviraj-Samyukta episode!"

"Indeed!" commented the other.

It was not often that one heard such highly original comments behind one's back. Mukund felt rewarded, delighted and grateful.

It was a quiet sunset and he took to one of his newly discovered lanes leading indirectly to his lodge. More important than the way itself was a rare object of adoration he had found in that lane. At the very first glimpse of the man, six times his volume if not more, he had remembered the mighty Bhim of the *Mahabharata*. But as the man was young, he preferred to name

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him Ghatotkutch, Bhim's gigantic son by a giantess.

His first smile had evidently blown over Ghatotkutch's head. When he smiled at him at the second opportunity, the giant looked rather intrigued. His reaction had not been any different even to Mukund's third attempt. But Mukund did not give up. If anything, he felt even more fascinated by that mountain of a man. He looked at him like a mountaineer gauging a defiant peak he aspired to scale.

Upon Mukund throwing his smile for the fourth time at him—that was this morning—Ghatotkutch's lips had parted and his eyes had grown bigger. Maybe that was the fellow's manner of responding to his show of affection, thought Mukund. There was some consolation in the thought.

Who was he? His red, round eyes

This was entirely unexpected. Never before had Mukund, always an inspiring talker, known a state of speechlessness.

Ghatotkutch's kinsmen paused in their game and gazed at Mukund and his captor. Mukund saw in them a troop of tigers, making a silent allocation of his limbs among themselves.

"You find me funny, do you?" Ghatotkutch demanded again.

"Does he possess a pair of horns?" asked a card-player.

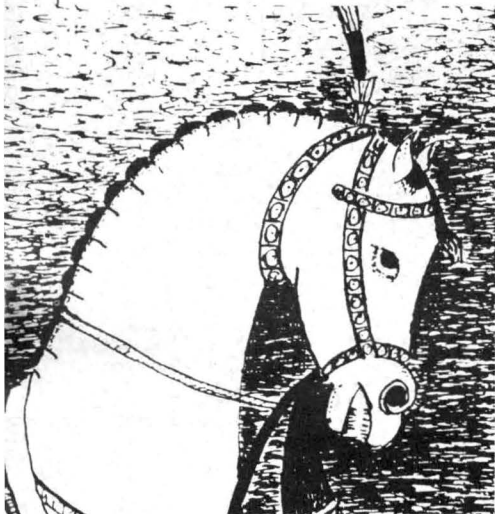
"Is he a creature in a zoo and are you a mere toddler to feel amused at him?" asked another.

Mukund was shaking. Suddenly he gave out a yell. Startled, Ghatotkutch released him. Mukund ran away at great speed.

"What's the matter, Babu?" asked several voices, some curious and some anxious. Mukund did not stop.

Back home he lay down. He felt

**His lips curled with
ridicule for
Ghatotkutch. If
only the chap had
heard what the
girls had to
say—that his soul
belonged to the era
of Prithviraj.**



and long, sinewy arms gave one the impression that crushing men with a huge mace had been his vocation till the last week.

Mukund slowed down his pace. He spotted Ghatotkutch on the verandah of a dilapidated house, a picture of Vir Hanuman pasted on the door overlooking him. A few yards away sat four or five elderly men of the same clan, playing cards. He had not seen them there before. Obviously they were all outsiders, living in the town, meeting for a relaxed evening.

As soon as Ghatotkutch's eyes fell on him, Mukund gave him the broadest smile ever.

Suddenly Ghatotkutch jumped down and held him by the arm. Mukund had a feeling that his arm was fast liquefying.

"Why do you laugh at me?" demanded the man in a mixed language.

scalded within and battered outside. He who had successfully steered clear of seven proposals of marriage; he who looked ten years younger than his age, an acknowledged good man and an able teacher; he who dreamt of becoming the founder-president of a cultural club-cum-gymnasium upon his retirement, was just going to end up unceremoniously in a dusty lane in the grip of a dunderhead!

He was still shivering, not with a feeling of shock any longer but with a sort of bewilderment and a weird agitation.

"Who could have taken my life away? Is it not invincible?" he told himself and felt brave and his lips curled with ridicule for Ghatotkutch. Only if the chap had heard what the girls in the classroom had to say—that his soul dated back to the era of Prithviraj, if not to that of Vikramaditya!

And couldn't that be true? Why not? He felt the need for being sure of it once and for all. He sprang out of his bed.

It was dark by the riverside and he jogged on comfortably.

"Tantrik-Astrologer, Gold Medallist Worshipper of Goddess Kali, Advisor to Kings and Emperors, Predictor of the Future, Expert in reading the *Bhriгу Samhita* and Revealing your Past Life—Pundit Purandar Sharma," said the signboard under a dangling bulb. The door was half open. Mukund had wished to meet the occultist before. The moment had come.

"Yes?" Sharma focussed a searching look on Mukund.

"I want to know who I was in my earlier incarnations."

"I have closed the *Bhriгу Samhita* for today. Once closed it cannot be opened before sunrise..."

"All I want to know for the moment is my status in the court of Prince Prithviraj, the last of the Chauhans..."

"Rupees ten."

Mukund handed out the money. Sharma sat down. He scribbled on a slate Mukund's date of birth and time. He took the slate closer to the table lamp and mumbled something for a couple of minutes. Mukund stood breathless.

The occultist shook his head and shut his eyes. A minute passed. He opened his eyes wide and at once fixed them on Mukund's.

"I saw you, sonny!"

"Really? What was I? Was I by any chance Pr...Prithvi..."

"You were his faithful horse, my boy. Come again. The answer to the first query costs ten rupees. The subsequent ones cost five each."

Sharma patted Mukund on the back. "Yeh, you used to bear Prithviraj here!"

"And Samyukta too!" added Mukund.

The occultist nodded. It was not clear whether he understood the relevance of Samyukta to Prithviraj or not. "A monarch among stallions. Yes, that is what you were!" he exclaimed.

Mukund was on the road again, his body charged with a hitherto unknown thrill. He was no longer surprised over the speed at which he had run while giving the slip to Ghatotkutch. It was the culture that came down to him from his own past life. The yell that made the would-be assailant let go his arm was an atavistic outburst of the

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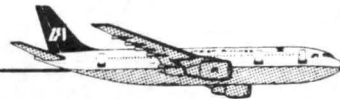
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stately neighing with which he had struck terror in the heart of Muhammad Ghuri in the year 1192.

What a stalwart among horses, how handsome and smart he must have been!

The darkness was only partially dislodged by the miserly street lights and a reluctant moon. Mukund began to run again. Despite the disappearance of two legs, he believed that he was able to run like a horse.

He reached his destination within minutes.

He peeped through the window. Ghatotkutch sat cross-legged before a lantern and munched *chappatis* meditatively.

Mukund stormed in. Ghatotkutch was taken aback.

Mukund grinned. "So, you really take yourself to be Ghatotkutch, eh?"

Mukund began to run again. Despite the disappearance of two legs, he believed that he was able to run like a horse. He reached his destination within minutes.

Scaring a mere teacher of Goswami Academy was as easy as shooing away a kitten, wasn't it? What a hero! Get up, boy, let's have a fight!" challenged Mukund, his hands resting on his waist. "Yes, a fight. I mean it."

Ghatotkutch had instinctively thrown a whole *chappati* into his mouth lest an opportunity for that should never come again and was nervously trying to swallow the lump. It got stuck in his throat. He made a gurgling noise.

Mukund saw his own reflection in an old mirror on the wall. He looked menacing and weird. He began to laugh.

"You synonym of ignorance, do you know who I am? Squeezing my arm, eh? Munching *chappatis*, eh? I can munch and munch and reduce you to a mouthful of syrup and gulp you

down too, follow?"

Mukund took a step forward and gave Ghatotkutch a shake. He tumbled.

Mukund laughed aloud again and left the place. His return journey was leisurely. He even whistled and hummed a tune. He ate double his usual meal and had a sound sleep.

Next day, while he was explaining to his students the phenomenon of heavy rain over Cherrapunji, for the geography teacher was on long leave, he was summoned by the headmaster to report to the Teachers' Common Room.

The septuagenarian chairman of the Managing Committee of the school said, addressing the assembly of teachers, "You will be amazed to learn that a certain *goonda*, declaring himself to be a teacher of our school, man-handled a poor job seeker from a remote place. Is it not rather baffling that someone should try to besmear the fair image of our institution? When the victim, his guardian and the secretary of their association complained to me this morning, I straightaway offered to hold an identification parade of our teachers! Let them feel sure that we have no brigand on our payroll! Please bear with the inconvenience."

The chairman smiled and, through the window, signalled Ghatotkutch and his guardian to come in.

Ghatotkutch looked nervous. Directed by the chairman he began surveying the teachers, one after another.

"This...this...!" he squeaked, shaking feverishly, pointing out Mukund.

"Who, our Mukund Babu?" asked the amused chairman.

All the 18 teachers giggled. The chairman and the headmaster suppressed their laughter.

"My boy, had you accused me of the crime, that would have made some sense," commented the old chairman heaving a meaningful sigh. He then took Ghatotkutch's guardian aside and said as politely as possible, "Don't feel offended. I suggest that you take the young man to the hospital, I mean to the psychiatry department."

Ghatotkutch, on the verge of weeping, was led away by his guardian. The chairman apologised to the teachers and left with the headmaster.

The 18 teachers surrounded the blushing Mukund and burst into a belly-laugh that surprised even the half-deaf watchman doing his duty a 100 yards away. ♦

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THE CHANGING FACE OF GOA

A province metamorphoses into the land of fun and fenim.

WHEN I FIRST landed in Goa in December 1976, not only was I disappointed, I felt personally cheated. Having read all the hype about the land of golden beaches, (ostensibly produced by three Goan boys, Mario Miranda, Dom Moraes and Frank Simoes) I had gone there eagerly, one of the first brave souls, in the hope of being seduced by the natural beauty of the place. As I have said, I felt bitter and let down. "What's so special about this strip of land that looks like Mahim, with bits of Juhu thrown in?" I asked my companion, as we allowed a pig to pass.

To be fair, the Goa I saw was only the Goa we see now, in bits and pieces. The Aguada had only just opened the previous year, and had attracted as its clientele what seemed like every moron who couldn't get bookings to Simla that year, (a whole guest list almost by default — breakfast conversations were usually always about which airline let who down.) The Holiday Village was not even a gleam in Kerkar's eye, and Goa was overrun with hippies. What's more, it took two hours to get from the airport (I'd seen better garages) to the hotel, and it involved a very painful procedure involving a ferry ride, along with what looked like that day's entire fishing haul.

Of course, the whole point of the story is that all that changed. Remarkably. A subsequent visit in 1980 revealed the incredible metamorphosis. We stayed at the Bogmalo. Which meant that the ride from the airport was considerably shortened. The welcome drink was an indication of exactly how welcome the tourist trade really was, (it was off-season, a discount package tour) and thankfully, either due to local intervention or plain disgust, the hippies kept to themselves.

Of course, this was only the shape of things to come. In December 1981, I



booked myself into the Holiday Village, well aware that the international jet set, (a motley collection of Italian counts, members of the Kuwaiti royal family, textile tycoons, and sundry beings) had been totally charmed and sworn to put it on their 'international map'.

This time of course, things were even better. It still took hours to get from the airport to the hotel. Pigs and hippies still occasionally crossed your path in places, the 'rolling fields' of Goa didn't roll, so much as snapped and crackled in unremitting sunlight. But Goa had, almost self-consciously, like an adolescent, become aware of its 'beauty'.

It was not unusual to have local hotel staff try and engage you in a brief history of their cuisine at home, or what their grandmothers said to the Portuguese. Having for so many years been no more than a sleepy little overgrown village, overrun by rivers, the Goans were waking up to find that they too could play up to the gushes around them. Suddenly the whole Goan lifestyle thing began to be held up to the light: the *bibinca*, the *catju fenim*, the Basilica of Bom Jesus and the wide

verandahs of the villas in Guirim. As a hungry audience brought camera, pen and paper to record, Goa began to preen itself.

Of course, the first thing to be pulled out of its musty cupboard, was the place's unusual history. In 1510, when Alfonso de Albuquerque occupied Goa with little opposition, he fathered a flourishing empire. Having stolen it from under the noses of Muslim dominance, he established it as the Portuguese Empire in the east, and mistress of the sea from the Cape of Good Hope to the China Seas.

But even before 1510, Goa had had an eclectic and unusual history. There are indications such as the Buddha statue which trace its inhabitation back to 200 AD.

Later, the picture gets hazy though with a mention in the *Suta Samitha*, it is quite easy to guess that a land that had so much to offer would attract the attentions of the rulers of the then powerful Bhoja, Satavanaha, and Kshatrapa dynasties. When the seafaring Rashtrakutas overran it in 754 AD, it became a trade centre. Then in the following centuries, there seems to be a see-saw tussle between Hindu and Muslim domination, with Yusuf Adil Shah, the great Sultan of Bijapur, receiving it in his share of spoils in 1489 and appointing it his capital. Of course, this was to be short-lived as already Portuguese navigators were scouring the seas, looking for Christians and spices.

From 1510 to 1852, Goa enjoyed relative peace (there was, though, a Dutch challenge, a brief foray by the Marathas, and a British invasion but these did not make much dent on its Portuguese hard core) till 1852, when, along with the rest of the country, nationalists were clamouring for independence from Portuguese colonialism. In 1953, the Goa Action Committee was formed. And on December 19, 1961, Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule when it became part of the Indian Union.

Vikram Sinha, our food and travel columnist is also the restaurant reviewer for Bombay's The Sunday Observer.

Options-Special



Quite naturally, these brief flirtations with various rulers, left varying and diverse influences on its culture. A decade ago, thanks to all the hype, it would have been easy to get taken in by the hard sell and believe that all there is to Goan culture was the siesta and the fiesta. But a more analytical, rational approach is already under way. And in its wake there is an entire body of culture, hitherto neglected, that is emerging. Temples, Hindu pottery and Muslim architecture, are now being given due attention.

And for those who think (thanks to the impression given by our Hindi films) that every Goan is a jolly drunk Braganza, the fact that there are some of the most dignified, affluent and established families in Goa might come as a surprise too. The Salgaonkars, the Chowgules, the Dempos and the Quemins, all affluent business houses, who are known to maintain the highest of business scruples are a complete antithesis to the Braganzas and the old maxim that Goa was the ABCD of India (Ayah, Bearer, Cook, Driver).

Of course, Goa has had natural advantages over other places in India.

With the guitar-playing, fenim-drinking locals, the magnificent carnivals—Goa could almost be Madrid, or the coast of Sicily.

The rolling canvasses of secluded, virgin beaches. The lush green of the landscapes, the turbulent, brimming rivers; Goa is blessed with a lot of natural beauty. But that is not the only thing that has made it such a popular resort.

It is the Portuguese influence (after all they were here only 23 years ago) that has made Goa what it is. It is the psyche of the land and the people. The Goan life-style reminds holiday-makers of European beach resorts: with the guitar-playing, *fenim*-drinking locals, the magnificent churches, the carnivals, the leisured life-style of hammocks,

beef- and pork-eating villagers. It could almost be Madrid, or if you stretch your imagination a little further, the coast of Sicily or a village in Spain.

That is really what Goa has got going for it. The fact that in a vegetarian, taboo-ridden, superstitious country, the international traveller is pleasantly surprised to come across a people who will not balk at his culinary habits, his alcohol consumption, or his mode of dress. In some ways, the hippies too, have helped: they have made the atmosphere even more informal, laid back, and Western.

Whoever hit upon developing Goa as a holiday resort, must have realised its potential. That its cultural climate, coupled with its natural beauty would ensure that the tourists would keep coming.

And is it so surprising that they are coming by the thousands? When there are uninhabited landscapes of beaches, gurgling streams, spicy *sorpotels*, a calm inviting sea, good wide roads, well planned traffic, a charming airport, excellent *fenim* and a hammock under the sun.

What more could one ask for?

AN EPICUREAN DELIGHT

A guide to Goa's gastronomic specialities.

IF GOA HAS RETAINED much of its ancient food habits, embellished by the Hindu, Brahmanical, Islamic and the Latin cultures, it is only because the old tribal clans — like the aboriginal agricultural community, the Kunbhis — learnt to survive on a subsistent economy. This Rousseauesque primitivism of Goa enchants and attracts many of those who come from the counter-culture and established society of other countries to bask on the lotus-eating beaches and indulge in the food fantasy of this now 'Latinised' part of India.

Rice: Rice, Goa's staple grain and a versatile ingredient, is holy, and the huge rice jars and bins that store the season's supply are like treasure chests for the Goan family. Eating rice and curry or *sheath-kodi* with friends or guests is equivalent to breaking bread in wheat eating cultures. Puffed rice and pressed or beaten rice, called *moori* and *phova*, are part of the Goan rice cuisine.

Coconut: Coconut forms the other staple survivor for the Goan gastronomy. Apart from the toddy, tapped from its palm, the nut has a sweet juicy kernel which in Goa is used to make spiced saucy curries and savouries.

Bread: Goan bread was once made from rice. The Portuguese soon learned the value of the toddy-yeast and used it to leaven their oven baked wheaten loaves, which they called *pao* after the *pau-ping* of South-East Asia made with black beans. The little breakfast rolls called *oondehs* are usually eaten with *kalchi-kodi* (yesterday's curry), which always tastes better, or with a cow-pea or black-eyed bean curry called *fejoan*. Since the wheat breads rose to twice the height of the *tandoori roti*, the Portu-

This article is reproduced courtesy Marg magazine. The author is Dina Simoes Guha.



guese breads came to be called in British India, *pao-roti* or *double-roti*.

Soup: The *Sopa Grossa* seen on the menu cards in Goan restaurants is full-bodied and often a meal in itself. It consists of a rice gruel called *pez*. It is eaten in rural Goa as a mid-morning reinforcement with the accompaniment of the lowly, fried, salted, dried fish called *kharen*. Fish, meat and vegetables or their various stocks are then added to the *pez* to lend flavour and variation. Each housewife makes her own version of *sopa grossa*.

Sweetmeats: In Goa, sweetmeats are made almost always from rice, coconut and palm-jaggery. At Christmas time trays are dressed with decorative crocheted doilies for the presentation of sweets known as *kumsoad*.

Many of the rice and coconut sweets must belong to the ancient Kunbhi gastronomy, offered to the Mother Goddess — the dark ones to the Terrible Dark Creatrix and the light ones to the Good and Great Creatrix, both called by many names, in the Hindu ethos known as Kali and Durga. The Christians make them on different dates of the calendar but usually for Christmas. The oldest known of these dark sweets is a black halwa called *dodol*.

The *piece de résistance* among Christmas sweets is the many-layered halwa — the brown *bibinca*, each layer baked at a time with coals on the lid

and below the pan in the old *dhum-pakav* fashion.

Fish And Seafood: Fish and seafood in Goa forms its soul-force. Whatever the religious persuasion be, try and deprive the Goan of his fish and he will lose his vitality. The ubiquitous 'Goa Fish Curry' is a generic label given to the thick red, hot-sour-sweet coconut gravy used to cook crabs, shrimps and fish, all along the Konkan coast. The curries were made hot at one time with black pepper. It was called 'black gold' as people paid 'pepper rent' and fought 'pepper wars' over the monopoly of this exotic Indian spice.

Meat: Pork is accredited to the Christian community who have made its preparation into a *haute cuisine*. Mutton and chicken are usually made into a brown coconut curry called *xacuti*. Best known of all are the Goan sausages made by drying the bacon in a vinegary marinade. The sausage-meat is also pickled and bottled into pork *balchaun*, which homesick Goans carry with them to other countries. Or, when preserved in palm liqueur or *fenim*, it is stuffed into casings like chitterlings and called *chouricos em vinho*. Chains of *chouricos* are hung to dry in the kitchens on bamboo rods and they can be bought at the quayside where the Bombay-bound steamer docks in Panjim.

Wines And Alcoholic Beverages: The cheapest wines are made from the palm-toddy or *soor* called *fenim*. The first draw of the liquor is light. The stronger, heavier liqueur is called *fenim*. Most older Goans prefer the palm *fenim* to the cashew, since it is odourless like vodka. The cashew *fenim* is very much like the European wild cherry liqueur, *kirsch*, and is regarded as a cure for all ills. In fact, the Goan now identifies himself with the cashew tree as if it were an ancient totem.

Options-Special

GETTING TO GOA

How to get there and where to stay.

GETTING TO GOA is not as difficult as it once was. In fact, the tourist has a choice of air, sea and land travel. Two flights from Bombay (Nos 163 and 169) and Flight No 523 from Bangalore, transport passengers everyday to the land of fish and *fenim*. Obviously this is the most expensive choice at Rs 323 for a one-way trip between Bombay and Goa, and Rs 370 from Bangalore.

A 16-hour journey by bus, of which there are 13 leaving daily from Bombay, brings one to Goa at prices ranging from Rs 120 (for an air-conditioned coach) to Rs 76 for an ordinary bus.

The more adventurous tourist is advised to try the 24-hour steamer trip leaving from the New Ferry Wharf in Bombay almost every day of the week. Admittedly long, the journey is likely to be more exciting and one can choose between the comfort of a private cabin at Rs 300 and a night under the stars on the lower deck at Rs 50.

Accommodation is no problem as Goa has a variety of good hotels to choose from. Nearly every major hotel group has opened a hotel there. In the deluxe category there is an assortment of beach resorts:

The Fort Aguada: Owned by the Taj Group, its rates are Rs 525 for a single room and Rs 600 for a double room.

The Taj Holiday Village: Recommended for its peaceful ambience, the hotel charges Rs 350 for single room accommodation and Rs 400 for a double room.

The Oberoi Bogmalo Beach: Owned by M/s Trade Wings Limited, Bombay, this hotel is the right place for an invigorating holiday. Its rates are Rs 400 for a single room and Rs 475 for a double room. Trade Wings also has a registered office in Goa and is reputed for its efficient travel service.

Cidade de Goa: One of the Welcomgroup's chain of hotels, it is noted for the quality of its service and food. Accommodation charges are Rs 350 for a single room and Rs 400 for a double room.



Also in the deluxe category are these two city hotels:

Hotel Mandovi: Less expensive than the others (Rs 140 and Rs 250 for a single and double room respectively), regular visitors claim that it is the best hotel in Goa.

Hotel Fidalgo: Centrally located, accommodation rates vary from Rs 165-220 for a single room to Rs 200-300 for a double room.

Recommended hotels in a lower category include Keni's Hotel, Hotel Nova Goa and the Bamboo Hotel.

Any time of the year is right for going to Goa. Even the monsoon season has a charm of its own although swimming in the sea does get risky. December to May, however, is the tourist season in Goa. Reservations are made far in advance and accommodation is difficult to obtain. The season reaches its peak during Christmas and again at Carnival time. The Carnival, held every year in February/March, is a last burst of festivity after which begins the mourning period of Lent. It is an extremely colourful affair with attractive floats and drunken merry-makers thronging the streets.

The off-season begins in June and goes on till September. It is the season for cheap travel as most hotels offer attractive discounts and package deals

during this time. The Cidade de Goa for instance, offers a package deal at Rs 899 per head or Rs 1,800 per couple for three nights and four days. The deal includes meals, transport from the airport, a city tour and a drink on arrival. The Oberoi Bogmalo offers a similar deal for Rs 2,200 per couple.

Returning from Goa has become a relatively simple affair with planes (Flights No 164 and 170 to Bombay, and Flight No 524 to Bangalore), buses and a steamer available everyday.

For the well-advised tourist there is an abundance of good food to be found in Goa — not necessarily at five-star hotel prices. The gourmet is advised to try the food at O Coqueiro in Porvorim and the restaurant at the Mandovi Hotel. For seafood there is the El Pescadores in Miramar and Tito's at Baga Beach. Tito's serves a variety of exotic salads and a delectable Butter Fish. For a sampling of genuine Goan cuisine, a visit to St Anthony's Bar on Baga is a must.

For those with a sweet tooth there is an excellent confectioner's shop called Mr Baker in Panjim whose meringues in particular, are first rate.

So, if you want to soak in the sun, ride on the waves and sample some of the delicious Goan fare — pack your bags and get going. ♦

Ratan Mody

*Photographed By
Soonil Taraporevala*

RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC struggles noisily on the street below his studio and horns honk impatiently as lorries stall with their consignments of milk for Parsi Dairy Farm. On the first floor, if you were to ever look up from your car window at that innocuous-looking sign that says 'Mody Studio', lies the second-oldest living studio in Bombay. Climb the stairs and leave the street behind you as you walk into Ratan Mody's time machine.

Mr Mody, 66 years old and single, grew up amidst developers and stop-baths, fixers and formulas, in the environment of his father's photo studio, begun in 1901. Ratan, the only one in his family to be enamoured with a photographic existence, apprenticed with his father and learnt the ropes, sometimes painfully, for his father was a stickler for perfection and could tweak ears till they hummed.

Much of what Ratan Mody learnt has become irrelevant in the world of today. Qualitatively when we are satisfied with so much less who cares about 27 different formulas for developers? The full-size camera which occupies the central part of the tiny room and which once took portraits of Gandhi and Nehru, today takes passport pictures. And in the cupboard, which sits huddled in a corner, lie two Japanese 35 mm SLR's because you can't be a photographer in today's world without them. Much of Ratan Mody's business lies outside the studio now — photographing functions, weddings and *nav-jotes*. The studio has become a haven to which he comes every morning after having served his mother her lunch and in the night after having his dinner.

Here, in this dimly-lit room, Ratan Mody has lovingly preserved the past under the dust of ages. His prized possession, besides his old cameras, is an old Kodak diary in which his father has written the history of Indian photography as told to him by Elban Cohen. The camera in the photograph once belonged to Cohen who Ratan Mody credits with having first intro-

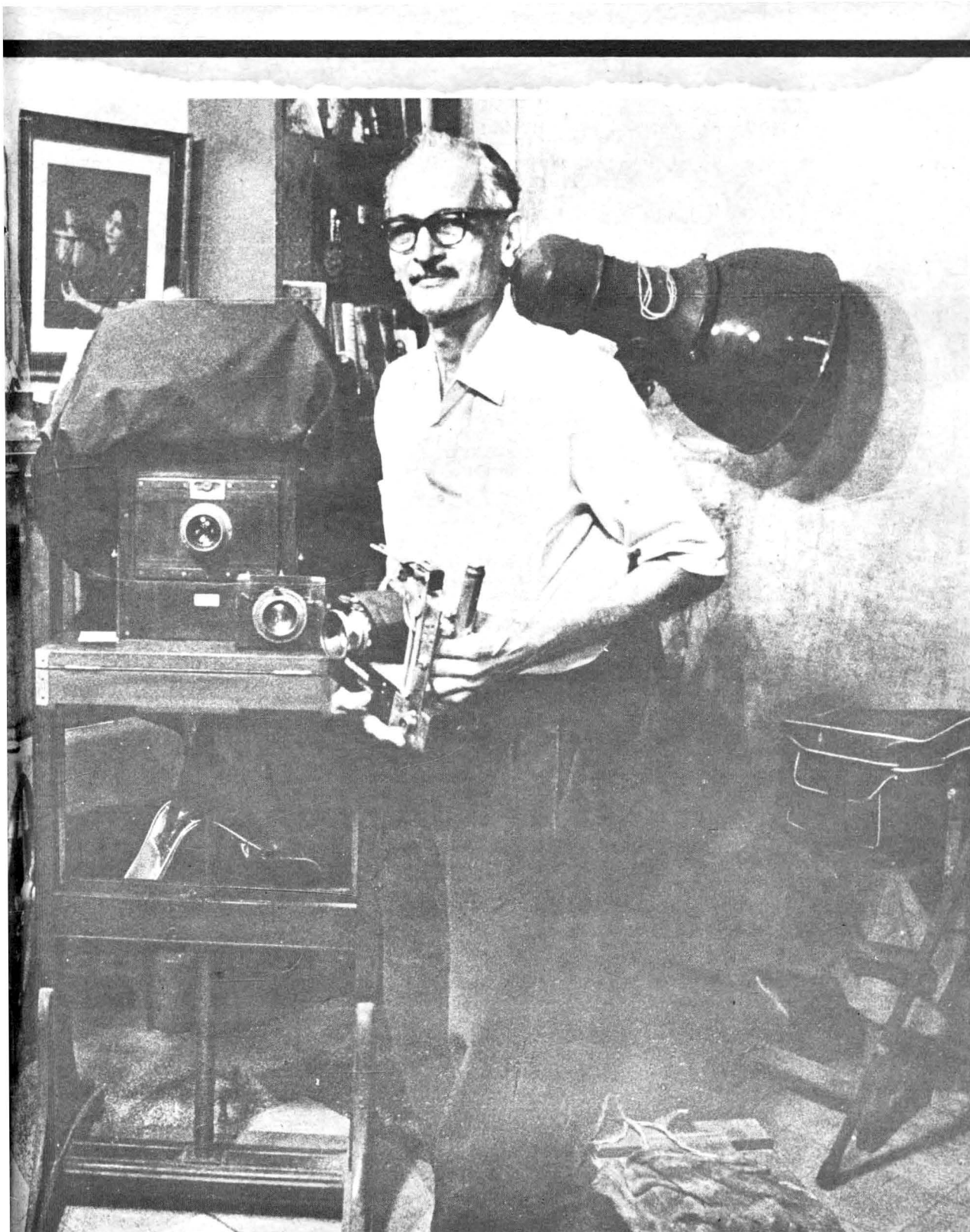
duced the photographic process to Indians. Cohen, a good-hearted German Jew, was taken advantage of by the same people he had once taught. He almost died an ignominious death, a pauper, forgotten by all, missed by none — except one, for Ratan Mody still remembers him. In fact, Mody has made it his life's mission to resurrect Cohen to his rightful place in history.

In the old days when work was

plentiful and the photographic field open and challenging, Ratan Mody did well for himself. One of the first to take aerial pictures of Bombay, he did this with a 21-rupee camera leaning out of an obliging friend's glider (and in the process lost one camera when his friend suddenly took a dive).

Since his father's death in 1962, Ratan Mody has run the studio single-handed. Business today certainly war-





rants no assistants for there are few who disturb the calm of this little room. Its once scenic painted backdrop is now uniformly brown and its old wooden cameras are beautiful strong survivors of a not so distant past. Even the bulbs that flood the studio with light, date back to 1934 when they were bought in bulk by Ratan Mody's father. Although his father is a tangible presence in the

studio, Ratan Mody has added to it his own concerns. The books on the shelves under the large map of Iran encompass a variety of interests from the *A-Z Book Of Universal Knowledge*, to HG Wells' *Outline Of History*, *The First Principles Of Theosophy*, an Avestan Dictionary, Shakespearean volumes and Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*.

When business is slow, as it usually

is, Ratan Mody picks up a chair by his full-size camera and sits down to read as the portraits of his mother, Sai Baba and Zarathushtra watch over him benignly. Perhaps it is they who have looked after him and assured his survival. I leave this solitary man in his cluttered abode, hoping that the world of today will not destroy this portrait of the past.

—Text by Sooni Taraporevala

GOA

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GRAHAM GREENE

The Lines On The Palm: They Never Really Alter

HOW LITTLE WE CHANGE.

We are pursued through life by a shadow which caricatures us but which only our friends notice. We are too close to pay it any attention, even when it quite outrageously plays the clown, exaggerating our height in the evening and dwarfing us at the midday hour. And then there are those lines stamped on the left hand . . . I wonder whether, if our tracks about the globe were visible at one glance from a god's point of view, they would not have the same designs as they have on the palm. In my case perhaps African rivers run down below the thumb and a skirmish in Indo-China lies where the cross is formed below the mount of Venus.

These are thoughts which rise whenever my old friend Robert Scott comes to mind. He was one of my greatest friends at Oxford, but I lost touch with him completely for nearly 30 years. One day I arrived in Nairobi to report the Mau Mau rebellion and 48 hours later a message was left at my hotel that the High Commissioner for East Africa wished to see me at his office. He was sending his car and his secretary.

In the car I asked his secretary the High Commissioner's name. "Sir Robert Scott." The last time I had heard of Robert, he was a Colonial Secretary in Palestine. Scott is a common name. It seemed unlikely that this was my old friend.

"Sir Robert has asked me to show you straight in."

It was indeed Robert. He sat in the enormous gleaming room completely

unchanged—Gaelic, dark, brooding, somehow nervous, behind his great bare desk, fingering a pipe. At Oxford he had always fingered a pipe as though it kept him by a finger's breadth in touch with reality, because the odd thing about this heavy blunt figure, who always seemed to speak with some reluctance, after a long pondering, with a heavy Scottish accent, was that at any moment he was liable to take flight into



the irrelevant, irrational world of fantasy.

"Robert!" I exclaimed. "Then it really is *you*."

It was as if we had been whirled back simultaneously into that Oxford past. At Balliol I had sometimes teased him mercilessly. Coming from a Scottish university, he seemed so much older than I was, and his pipe gave him, in my eyes, an air of bogus wisdom against

which I reacted. A puff was the excuse for a long laconic silence. If I hadn't teased him I might have been in danger of accepting him as an authority on life and that would have been rash indeed.

For instance there had been the affair of the young barmaid, at The Lamb and Flag in St Giles, whom we all agreed resembled in her strange beauty the Egyptian Queen Nephertiti. What quantities of beer we drank in order to speak a few words with her. We were too young and scared to proceed further, and more than a month of one summer passed before I realised that the slow pipe-smoking wiseacre Robert had gone beyond us all. He was regularly taking her out on her day off in a punt on the Isis and reading her translations from Ronsard. His own translations, for like myself he wrote verse in those days—very traditional verse, but unlike me he was lucky enough not to find a publisher. They might not have done well for his future in the Colonial Office, and anyway who would need a publisher when he had Nephertiti as an audience?

One evening he came to see me. He was even more laconic than usual and puffed a great deal at his pipe. He wanted my advice, he said, and that surprised me, for it had usually been his part to give advice. Apparently Nephertiti had threatened to write to the Dean of Balliol and complain of his conduct.

"What have you done to her?"

"Nothing."

"Perhaps that's why she's complaining."

Nevertheless the danger was serious. The Dean, the notorious 'Sligger', was not a man to sympathise with any heterosexual dilemma. Now if it had been a page-boy at the Randolph. . . I was at a loss what to advise.

"I have thought of a plan," Robert said.

"What?"

"I will invite her to tea, and while she is coming up the stairs I'll lean over the banisters and empty a glass of water on her."

"But Robert. . . surely that will only make things worse."

"I can think of nothing else," he said sadly.

A few weeks later he called on me again. "It worked," he said.

"What worked?"

"The glass of water."

I looked at him in amazement. A douche of cold water. . . no more Ronsard. . . it seemed to me he must have

This regular column by Graham Greene will alternate with one by Truman Capote.

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I was thinking of young Robert bending over the banisters and pouring water on Nephertiti's head, praying with the rector's wife—life that begins absurdly will go on absurdly to the end. The lines don't alter the palm.

tapped some deep source of irrational Celtic wisdom. The Lamb and Flag lost a group of customers, but there was no complaint to the Dean.

I remember another illustration of his strange irrationality, which never appeared in the rather pedestrian essays he read aloud at tutorials (we had the same tutor, Kenneth Bell, who was often impatient with the slow impeccable logic of Scott's prose leading to a conventional judgement which condemned once again the errors of Henry VIII or the frivolity of the Young Pretender). A number of us in a manic mood had decided to enliven the little town of Wallingford. I chose to go as an artist drawing souls in the market place at sixpence a time: I think the future father of the House of Commons, Robin Turton, was one of us, but I can't remember what part he played. Robert went as a middle-aged clergyman who was hunting for a runaway wife. He called at the rectory and took tea with the sympathetic wife of the rector in her husband's absence. She urged him to be generous and forgive, and after tea they prayed together. As we returned to Oxford he added a detail to his story. "When she went out of the room to find her prayer book I left a bunch of bananas in the grand piano."

"Bananas? What on earth for?"

"It seemed the right thing to do."

NOW IN NAIROBI the High Commissioner looked nervously at me over the great bare desk. Was he too thinking back into that absurd past? He asked me to stay with him. He had a house on the outskirts of Nairobi. "Scotch baronial," he said shyly, perhaps afraid that I would laugh.

But I had hired a car with an African

driver and was leaving next day for the Kikuyu reserve. "I'll be coming back in a week or two," I promised.

It was nearly a month before I returned to Nairobi and I rang up the High Commissioner's office.

"Sir Robert is not at the office," I was told. "He is not well."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"He will not be back to work for some days," I was told guardedly, but an hour later his secretary rang me at the hotel and I was told that Sir Robert



would like me to go to dinner and spend the night. A car would be sent for me.

The house — I'm not sure that it was not called Abbotsford — was certainly Scotch baronial, singularly out of place in Africa, though not perhaps in Nairobi. My voice when I called "Boy!" was hushed and lost in the great stony hall and nobody came. It was like the opening of a Hammer film. At last I heard Robert's voice faintly calling to me from above to come up. A door stood open and I went in. Robert lay

in bed propped on two pillows. He fingered his pipe nervously.

"What's wrong, Robert?"

"I've had an accident."

Again there was that apprehensive look as though he expected me to laugh.

"What happened?"

"I slipped in my bath."

"You haven't broken your hip?"

"I sat down on the soap dish," he said.

I wish I could convey that slow Scottish accent which could even make putting bananas into a grand piano seem reasonable, even banal. He said, "The soap dish broke. I was badly cut and I called for my boy. He came in, and when he saw the blood he thought it was a Mau Mau outrage so he ran away."

He paused, perhaps waiting for the laugh which I suppressed easily as I was no longer young.

"I got to a telephone," he said, "and asked a doctor to come. But when he came there was a power cut—or it may have been the Mau Mau. He had to put in twelve stitches by the light of an electric torch." He finished his story and looked at me with relief — I still hadn't laughed.

"Poor Robert," I said, but I was thinking of young Robert bending over the banisters and pouring water on Nephertiti's head, praying with the rector's wife in Wallingford—life that begins absurdly will go on absurdly to the end. The lines don't alter the palm.

It was the last time I spent with him. A few years later I had a Christmas card from Mauritius where he had been appointed Governor and lived in a beautiful old colonial house with, I think, an 18th-century cannon on the lawn. He invited me to stay, but I never went, and I regret it now, for who knows what bizarre event might have occurred there?

Sir Robert Scott died some six years ago. I have reached the age when one outlives one's friends more easily than one's memories of them and now, as I write, another incident returns to mind—that occasion outside Berkhamsted Town Hall when he wore a heavy false moustache and appeared as Rudyard Kipling making an appeal for the Boy Scout movement, and a retired admiral called Loder-Symonds took the chair until he noticed that something seemed wrong. . . . I don't think the Colonial Office can ever have realised how strange a servant they had enlisted. ♦

DOWN AND OUT IN BOMBAY

By Ishwar Sharan

IT IS ALL VERY DEPRESSING. The peon who looks after this waiting room wants more money. I have been living here in Bombay Central for a week. It is a good place and I have no complaint about its amenities. There are fans and a washroom and big wooden chairs to sleep in and when I need a diversion there is always the balcony from which I can study the people in the concourse below. Half of India seems to pass its life in that great hallway. Perhaps I should join them, for the peon up here is greedy and has begun to quote rules and regulations at me. I do have a ticket—Wadi Junction to VT—that I found on the platform, but both he and I know that it will never pass inspection. It is not even for the right terminus. He insists I get another with a new number. I gave him a rupee early this morning and told him to copy its serial number down instead. We had an argument and even my well-developed sahib act didn't faze him. He asked for another rupee, which he didn't get. Really, it is very discouraging, this business of the poor begging from the poor, and given my growing ennui and chronic anorexia, I think it is time to get out. And the cheapest and fastest way out of India, I imagine, is deportation.

Downstairs, in the police station, I accost a rowdy leaning against the wall. "Sir, tell me where I can find the CBI office?" He points to a doorway and tells me to go right in. I walk over and push it open.

The policeman behind the desk looks up at me, a broad smile creasing his round, pock-marked face. "My dear young man," he says heartily, "come and sit down over here." He leans out and pulls up a chair, the effort making him wheeze and cough vociferously. He is so fat I wonder if

he can stand on his own. "Here, drink some tea," and he pushes one of the steaming cups before him over to me. "Drink up, drink up—it will make you healthy and strong and..."

"And what?" I say brightly, tasting the deadly sweet stuff in the greasy cup. His naturally kohled eyes widen briefly, then slide away from mine. He chuckles, squeezing my knee so hard that I kick out at the desk, spilling the tea.

"Never mind that," he says. "Here are some biscuits," and picking one out of the packet he is eating from, he hands it to me.

"Where is the CBI office?" I ask abruptly, suddenly uncomfortable beside my heaving and sweaty host.

"Never mind the CBI," he says, patting my knee again and then letting his thick palm rest on it lightly. "They are always waiting when we need them."

"I think we need them now," I say, squirming in my seat. The heat from this fleshy fellow is intolerable. He doesn't answer but goes on eating, two biscuits at a time, with the crumbs falling down his shirt front.

"In your country you are having

the free love, isn't it?" he says matter-of-factly, wiping his mouth.

Oh dear, I think, here we go again—another cultural exchange to take place below the navel. If this gentleman of the law is seducing me, he is sure going about it the wrong way. He might have offered me another biscuit instead of eating them all himself.

"Where is the CBI?" I say sharply, but he doesn't hear me.

"In your country there are no laws against these things..." His eyes flicker over my face, searching for something.

"What things?" I say, being difficult. If things do get out of hand I can always run away.

"You know," he says, grinning.

"Perhaps," I say sweetly, relenting just a little. "But in my country everything is very expensive."

"Yes, I know," he says with resignation. I thought he would fake his hand away but he didn't.

"In India everything is very cheap."

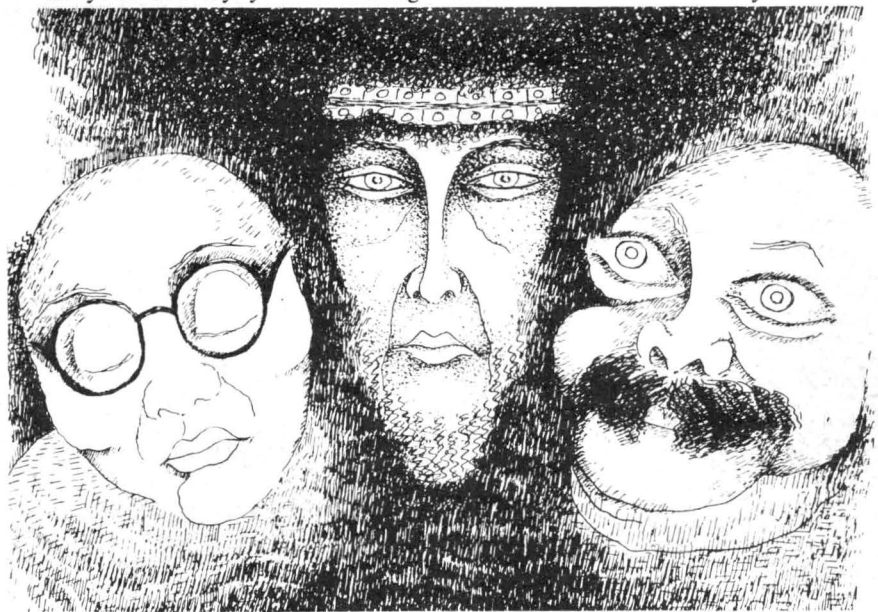
"That may be," I say tartly, "but I'm not. I doubt if you can afford me."

He is abashed, just like a small boy, and I take his hand and put it back into his own lap.

"You foreigners are very direct, not like us Indians," he says, regaining his composure.

"And very expensive," I say, leering at him as I make for the door.

I DON'T KNOW WHOSE OFFICE I'M in now. Nobody will say whether this is the CBI or the CID. Maybe it is an



This article is reproduced from the Madras-based Aside magazine.

It seems to have passed noon and I begin to regret ever having come here. Even the fat rogue at the police station was more congenial company.

outpost of the CIA. Whoever it belongs to, they don't show very much house-pride. It is a dusty cubby-hole somewhere in Fort, a top-of-the-stairs room with grimy windows looking down on a backstreet. The man behind this desk wears a frayed collar and steel-rimmed glasses like a Victorian bookmaker. The flat panes of his spectacles reflect the light in bright white circles, winking at me everytime he moves his head. He is grey-faced and balding, with a red pressure line running the width of his forehead where he might have worn an eyeshade. There is a telephone and a stack of green ledgers on the battered desk. He ignores me when I enter, counting the figures in the open book before him. When he completes a sum, I say: "Excuse me, sir, but I would like to be deported."

My words hang over his head—and my own—like a deadweight. When he looks up, he stares at me without blinking, one ink-stained finger holding his place in the ledger.

"I see," he says finally, as though he really did see and knew just what to do with the sight. "Sit down," and he points to a chair pushed hard against the wall. "These things take time," he says, turning back to his books.

I sit down gratefully, relieved to have stated my business and that it wasn't as difficult as I had fancied. I wait, watching him at his work.

After some time the phone rings and he speaks into it curtly, then hangs up. Still later a peon enters and quickly tiptoes out again. I wonder if I dare light a cigarette, but think better of it. He might think I was rude if I did so. I watch him start another column of figures and try to add them with him, straining to see the numbers on the ruled page. He corrects an entry, does another sum and moves to the next row. I wait, crossing and uncrossing my legs, fearful of interrupting him.

It seems to have passed noon from the way the sun slants through the

windows. There is a lull in the street noise below and I can hear his pen scratching over the paper. I begin to regret ever having come here. Even the fat rogue at the police station was more congenial company. This little man has not glanced up once from his books. He completes another addition and I stand up, leaning over the desk at him.

"Excuse me, sir," I say, "but I would really like to be deported." I stop speaking a moment to emphasise my demand, then continue. "You can just declare me *persona non grata* and ship me out. Anywhere is all right with me."

He looks at me coldly, then points to my chair with his pen.

"No," I say firmly, holding his eyes. "I will *not* sit down again. You must help me."

"THEN STAND IF YOU LIKE," HE says indifferently and goes back to working his sums.

"Listen," I say helplessly, "I have no visible means of support. I smoke dope and ride the trains without tickets. I even change money in the streets, when I have any. That is all a crime you know."

He is not listening. I am incensed and consider what kind of scene I must make to get his attention. I try a threat.

"I will take pictures of all your bridges and sell them to the Pakistanis and an officer at Bombay Central has just offered me a place in the Falkland Road cages." There, that should get the wizened little fellow jumping. He is listening, and his spectacles wink as he bobs his head at my speech.

"The Pakistanis already have pictures of all our bridges," he says with mild reproof. "But if you insist on taking more, then we will put you away and forget about you." He eyes me appraisingly, like a horse dealer inspecting a filly. I am tempted to open my mouth so that he can count my teeth. "You might do quite well for yourself



in the cages," he murmurs approvingly.

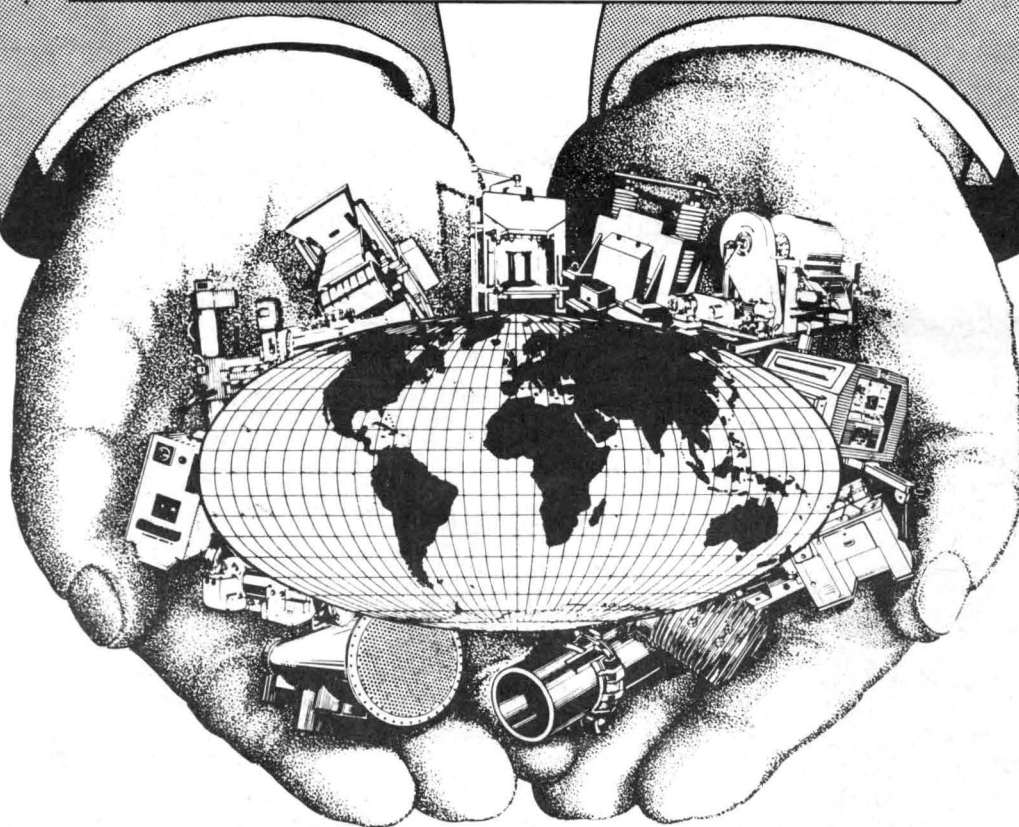
"That is not the point!" I shout. "If I should ever go into business, then London and Paris offer much better returns." I stop, suddenly embarrassed and look down at my feet.

"We are a very poor country," he says apologetically. I am bewildered by the concern in his voice. "I will call the Salvation Army hostel and you can go there for the night. Maybe tomorrow we can help you." I nod my head in agreement—there is always tomorrow and for today the Sally Ann will be a treat.

My companion in mufti disappears around the corner after dropping me in the hostel doorway. I go upstairs—everything is always upstairs in Bombay—to a bright, sunlit office. There, an Englishman sits behind a

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large, polished desk with a flag-pole standing beside it. He is dandling a pretty little girl on his knee. Both are blond and in crisply starched clothes of blue and white. I hesitate to enter and impose myself on this happy intimate scene.

"Excuse me," I say tentatively.

The laughing Englishman looks over at me, and frowns. "Just a minute," he says, putting the little girl down and sending her scampering into the next room.

"Now, what can I do for you?" he says gruffly, turning to his desk. "Oh, do sit down," and he points to a straight-backed chair directly before him.

I sit down on its edge. I am extremely uneasy in this place. I look up at the scrubbed English face, then down at my own dirty hands. I say: "The CBI sent me. They said that they would call you and that I could stay here the night."

"Nobody has called me," he says rather defensively. "And we have no place for you here. This hostel is for destitute Indians."

I don't exactly follow him. Bombay is full of destitute Indians—surely they don't all stay here. Maybe he doesn't understand me. "But I'm destitute too," I say eagerly. "Tomorrow the CBI is going to deport me." I realise now that the CBI will never deport me.

"You can't be destitute because you are foreign," he says sternly. "How did you get here anyway?"

I expect he means how did I get to

What I do get is a great surprise to me. He leans fervently over his desk, eyes aflame and begins to preach. I am too startled to even run away.

India. "Oh, you know," I say vaguely, waving my hand in the air. "Buses and trucks and trains; sometimes I even walked, but mostly I rode anything going east."

"Then why not do the same thing going west," he says with a touch of sarcasm. This is a pinprick and it hurts. I am tired and hungry and about fed up with other people's remedies for my condition. "I just don't understand you," he adds, jabbing his finger at me.

"I didn't come here for your understanding," I say, adding my own sarcasm to his. "I came here for a place to sleep and, perhaps, a meal." I grin at him. I am feeling much better now; my vagrant appetite has returned. I don't need his help or anybody else's; I am doing quite well on my own.

"I apologise for disturbing you," I say with elaborate ritual. I stand up and salute him.

"Sit down," he commands. I sit down, watching his red face redden further. Maybe I will get a meal and a bed out of him yet. After all, he has the reputation of his good works to keep, doesn't he?

What I do get is a great surprise to me. He leans fervently over his desk, his eyes aflame and squeezing his hands tightly together, he begins to preach—God help me, he really does. I am too startled even to run away. And he goes on for an eternally long time. It is rather good, I think after a while, though, there is too much passion in his words for my own taste. He makes very convincing arguments out of some rather mad conjectures; he asks clever, rhetorical questions and then answers them all by himself with ease; he voices terrible accusations and then offers forgiveness and praise. In the end, there is a consummate summing up and everybody goes to heaven. He slows down after this, becoming more conversational in his speech. What he simply cannot abide, it seems, are long-hairs in T-shirts and blue jeans.

"You look just like a girl," he

sneers, pointing first at my head and then, for some inexplicable reason, at my faithful old jeans.

"Thank you," I say. "That is just what the policeman at Bombay Central thinks too." I will get you now, mister, I think to myself. I will hit below the belt.

"And I feel just like a girl," I say raising the pitch of my voice and batting my eyes at him. The poor man shrinks away from me, blushing furiously. Surely, this is the reddest Englishman I have ever seen. I get up to go.

"Wait," he says, getting up with me. "Here's something for a meal." I take the note and put it in my pocket. "I'm sorry," he continues. "It is the damn poverty, you know; it gets to me sometimes and when I saw you in the doorway it turned my head."

"No matter," I say, then lecture him. "Don't let India's poverty get to you; it is all her own fault anyway."

"Perhaps," he says, "but is there nothing I can do?"

"No, nothing," I say with conviction and then for some reason sound off from the top of my head. "India's poverty will not go away until her women are treated differently; until they are freed."

He looks at me as if I were touched by the devil—maybe he himself is of a Pauline persuasion—then offers his hand. I shake it, turn around on my heel and trip down the stairs.

"*Nisi Dominus, frustra!*" I repeat the old Latin phrase like a curse. Roughly translated, it means: "Dammit, here I am back on the street again!" But my step is light and I find a cheap hotel for a good heavy meal. Back at Bombay Central, I give the peon a rupee and he greets me as though I were his own master, dutifully copying the serial number down in the register. "See that I'm not disturbed," I say archly, settling myself into my favourite chair. "If anybody calls, tell them I've gone home for the weekend." ♦



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FORTHRIGHT OR EVASIVE ?

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SPORTS IN THE INDIAN ETHOS

STROLLING PAST a sports centre just outside London on a Sunday afternoon recently, one was interested to see crowds of people at play under the English sun. Oddly enough, the choice of the sport seemed to tally with individual ethnic groups. White children and their parents played tennis and football. The young people of West Indian origin, looking superbly fit and athletic, pounded the synthetic track and the basketball courts, and seemed to enjoy gymnastics attempted with disco-type music. And then, further down on the swings and the merry-go-rounds, there were Indian and Pakistani children and their parents, gently enjoying the unusual weather. "Why don't they also play serious sport?" I asked my guide.

"Oh! but they do," came the quick reply, and an indication by the physical educationist in the direction of the cricket field, where Indians seemed to look quite professional.

Sport, let's face it, is not really part of the Indian ethos—although much of the happenings in sportiana tend to give the impression to the contrary. We are committed to sport because we want our leading lights to win laurels in international meetings. The obsession with sporting achievement is confused with sports consciousness. That cricket is more popular in India than it is anywhere else, but sport is not, may sound contradictory; but it is the kind of logic that makes it very difficult for one to understand the role that sport plays in our lives.

It would be no exaggeration to say that sport is, perhaps, the most intrigu-

ing aspect of human activity of our times. What probably began as a form of recreation for the primitive man and became formalised during the days of ancient Greece, has today acquired an extraordinary form of universal status—to the extent that some version or another of sport exists in every known society. At the competitive level, it has developed into a useful instrument for the propagation of political ideology. In a therapeutic sense, it is associated with the growing problems of the urbanisation of society.

The degree of emphasis given to these two aspects of *sports-kultur* depends largely upon the level of economic development, and the commitment to society at large by the governments concerned.

For obvious reasons the competitive factor has led to a kind elitism in sport that is common enough in developing societies, where opportunities for the rest are few and far between. At the other end of the scale, in the affluent West, we have seen in recent years mass involvement in sport, of the kind that has produced the jogging mania. If sport in India today is caught between these two pulls of the sporting syndrome, it is for the simple reason that it is an alien concept to our way of thinking. It is clearly understood, at least to our way of thinking, that with maturity, regular participation in sport must very soon come to an end—unless the material benefits are immense.

Mass sport as a popular means of recreation for all age groups has probably never been part of the Indian milieu. The gladiatorial approach appears to have been the 'in' thing from time immemorial, if one might be allowed to put it that way. In the

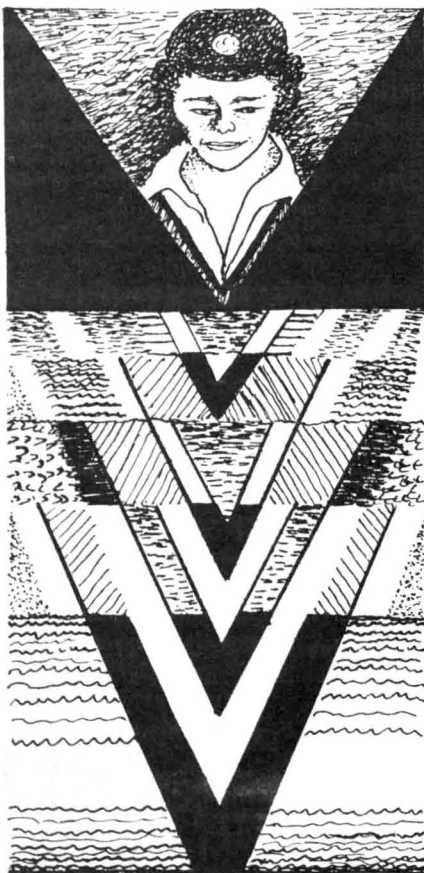


quest for international success, Indian sports planners and administrators—and there seems to be an abundance of these—have aimed high enough, without the least comprehension of the competitive syndrome in sports. "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," remarked a leading Indian sportsman the other day, when commenting on some of the grandiose schemes that have been attempted from time to time to raise standards of performance.

It is difficult to explain to these well-meaning mortals that sports is not merely a question of training teams. It is not a matter of coaching and diet money that one keeps hearing about. It is to do with encouraging the young and the old, the rich and the poor, to spend time outdoors, everyday, in the open air, in regular, and occasionally competitive, sport. This implies the development of playing fields, of subsidising sports equipment and of providing trained personnel to guide young people towards the attainment of a reasonable standard of play—not necessarily geared towards championship status. The base has to be strong enough before champions emerge.

The occasional high-flier must re-

Ranjit Bhatia, a participant in the 1960 Olympics, covered the Munich and Montreal Olympics for the Hindustan Times.



main an exception to the rule. His requirements are invariably met, irrespective of the sports policy followed in the country concerned. In fact, his share of the goodies in the developing world is perhaps far greater than would be suggested by his overall quality of performance. His chances of becoming a national hero in such a society are tremendous. In Indian sport there is plenty of room at the top. Once a star is able to get there, life is cushy enough. The nation's leading men and women once selected, are put into coaching camps under coaching experts. (Sounds rather grim, but it is not as bad as it sounds!) The idea has been borrowed from the system prevailing in nations where sport is state-sponsored and where sport has a slightly different meaning to that understood in the Indian context.

There is a strange and very naive belief that at the end of the exercise—namely the stay in the quiet comfort of a national sports coaching camp—hoards of fit and enthusiastic, well-trained men and women would emerge, raring to have a go at the world's best. The trainees, bless them, also believe in this magic. There is deep down the feeling that if one does all the right

Regular sport is a distraction considered good enough to be enjoyed from the galleries but not to be indulged in...

things (Rs 26 per day diet money et al!) then success would automatically come. How often one hears of camps, coaches and food in Indian sport! The lack of success is invariably blamed on one of these. The want of proper facilities has always been considered the main drawback for the desired progress. Every discussion in the media appears to centre on what is wrong with Indian sport; whereas it should read, where is Indian sport?

A casual glance at any newspaper would convey the impression that sport enjoys tremendous importance in the country; but there is something different about the Indian sporting scenario. It seems to have been superimposed on the kind of traditional value in which sport has not been particularly relevant. Despite the fact that organised sport has existed in India for a fairly respectable number of years, one gets the impression that its culture remains alien to us. Regular sport is a distraction, considered good enough to be enjoyed from the galleries, but not to be indulged in—unless of course one happens to be a superstar.

Thanks to the media, all the trimmings of the present-day competitive sports syndrome are in evidence in India—albeit in a superficial way. We have our own brand of hero-worship of the stars, of commercialisation of a sort and what-have-you. But the matter ends there. The sports propaganda, both at the public and private sector level, has not succeeded, for instance, in getting people to understand the real benefits of physical recreation. From all accounts it has yet to play its role as a filler-up of leisure hours—both forced and voluntary. Playing a friendly game on a Sunday afternoon is still anti-social, unless of course it happens to have tournament status—or if it has to do with cricket!

We have settled for cricket rather than waste our energies on sports in

general, because so much of what constitutes the value of this very English game appeals to us. It is almost as if our philosophic approach to life in general—to fatalism—has managed to blend so beautifully with a sport where we believe so much depends upon chance. This business of a first innings lead in a lost game is something that appeals immensely to us. When a team, following on, chases runs to avoid an innings defeat, manages just that, it is considered a moral victory—even if in the ultimate analysis it loses the match by some wickets. Witness the scenes of joy during the penultimate day of the First Test between India and England at Lord's recently, when everyone was absolutely thrilled with Kapil Dev's brilliant performance; and did not worry at all about the actual result of the game!

This is the kind of attitude that is much appreciated in these days of cut-throat competition. One recalls the remark made not so long ago by that well-known cricket scribe, Jim Swanton, when he spoke in glowing terms about Indians as 'the last people to play the game as it should be played'. Sporting attitudes and the obsession for cricket however, ought not to be confused with ultra sports-mindedness—a very common error on the part of the Western media. True, we like of appreciate good play even in other games but only by champions, especially if they happen to be visitors from abroad. Enthusiasm for a touring team, even if it beats the home side, is in a sense, our way of expressing our hospitality—but it has nothing to do with sportsmanship!

To get a clearer picture of the Indian attitude to things sportive, one would have to delve a little more deeply into a question of overall participation in sports. Consider for example, our attitude to the various training and coaching programmes which are banded

The 'killer instinct' is what differentiates the approach of Connors and Amritraj. We Indians lack that extra bit of do or die.

about so often by the sports establishment. Participation in any organised sports scheme precludes leading a normal existence of work and play. The coach is conditioned to the belief that absolutely nothing should be allowed to interfere with his sport; and so he virtually encourages absence from work, be it the academic curriculum at school or the office routine for the employed. The sportsman then, becomes a shirker in the public eye, with his sole preoccupation being the playing grounds. The lack of sufficient co-ordination of the mental with the physical invariably leads to an attitude of indifference. "These trainees are lazy," bemoans an employer. "They sit back and expect the world to be at their beck and call." The coaching schemes, it is said, are producing misfits in a society where there is an all-out struggle in the context of the insecurity of unemployment.

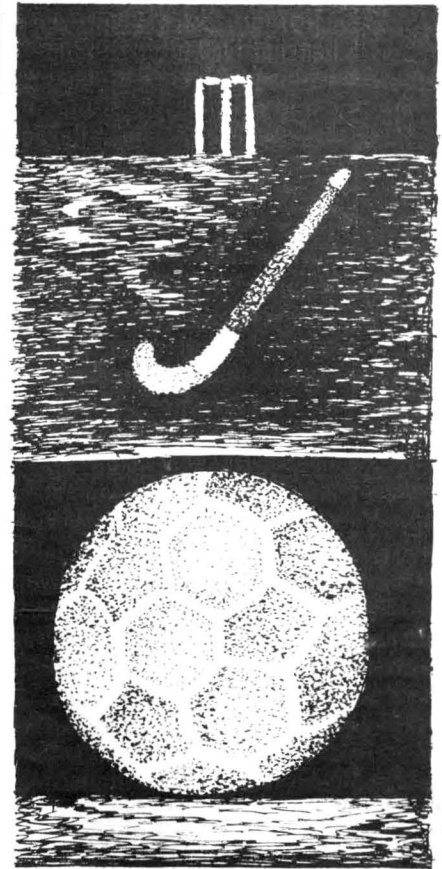
Small wonder then, that parents are not exactly over-anxious to get their children to take up sport too seriously. How different in contrast this seems, from the attitude towards the young girl learning Bharata Natyam, who spends much more time in rigorous practice sessions, learning to master the technique without missing any of her other activities at home or in school. In her case, the association with a known art form upgrades her among her peers and elders — which would not have been the case had she, instead, opted to do gymnastics. For it is not a 'distinguished' activity for Indians.

There is much in India that could well be part of sports training, (if only the latter were not considered an alien act) in the language of sports. The benefits of yoga and yogic exercise, for instance, have yet to be realised in our system. There is enough evidence to support the view that formal yogic exercises, planned scientifically, can

have immense impact on standards of performance in sports. The Australian hockey team, which reached the finals of the Montreal Olympics in 1976, was credited with being superbly fit—not only because of the fetish for building speed and endurance, but also on account of the players' practice of yoga as a part of their preparation. Integration of the concepts of physical fitness in the East and the West, if attempted in a scientific manner, could have far-reaching effects on the sporting scene.

From training to competition; and here too, one finds a bottle-neck of our own making. In sports terminology, they talk of 'the killer instinct', and how it helps the present-day stars. This is what differentiates the approach of Jimmy Connors and Vijay Amritraj. The desire to win is there, in both. But that extra bit of do or die business is missing in the Indian. So near and yet so far, has been the tale of woe of so many of our leading sportsmen, that one begins to feel almost as if it is what we want in life. It is perhaps what makes the international media intrigued about us and consider the likes of Vijay Amritraj, Ramanathan Krishnan and in recent times Kapil Dev, ever so gentlemanly and sporting!

Where, for instance, would you have an extraordinary case as that of Milkha Singh who, at the start of the 440 yards final at the 1958 Commonwealth Games at Cardiff, was willing to sign an autograph for a little school-girl, and remembered to complete his 'best wishes' in it, soon after breasting the tape in a new record. The nice guys have done their bit to raise Indian sport to a decent high, and it remains for the sports promoters in the country to do a little more spade work to make sport work better. Otherwise there is a distinct danger of desire combined with the inability to win, leading to the unsavoury aspects of competitive



sport. Rumbblings of this have already begun with the hockey people grumbling about poor umpiring, every time India loses in an international match.

In the final analysis, sport is about wanting to excel—at some level and in some physical event, it means competing against oneself. To do this the office-goer needs to carry his pair of shorts to work, so as to get a quick run or a game of volleyball in the lunch hour; the housewife does not throw a fit at the suggestion that half an hour's exercise might just make life a wee bit more interesting. Tall order isn't it? But then that is precisely what could make sport an integral part of our lives. The sheer joy of being able to relish the wide open spaces in the middle of one's complex existence can bring a saner attitude all round. It is the environmental approach that needs to be understood, separately at the urban and rural levels, if sport is to become a worthwhile healthy recreation in India. The make-believe world of film stars' cricket and what-have-you would cease to be a novelty, once we realise that everyone can be a good sport. ♦

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