

M V Kamath's Own Obituary • Chaos At Air India

Amrita Shah On Sharad Pawar

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AUGUST 1985 • Rs 5

The Final Reel

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ON THE MARQUEE

IN ORDER TO BE CALLED a liberal democracy, we must ensure that there is no discrimination on the basis of such factors as caste, class, colour or community. This is an assertion that few of us would contest. We would agree, also, that all men and women must be treated as equal; that if two equally good candidates applied for the same job, caste or creed should not be the factor that finally influenced the selection. While we accept all this, most of us also seem to accept that, in a sense, some kind of caste discrimination is acceptable. If, of two equally qualified candidates for the same job, one is a harijan, then we seem to accept that he should be given preference. The present system of reservation is based on the acceptance of this principle.

Why do we indulge in this contradiction? There seem to be two justifications for reservation that are, on balance, not unreasonable. Firstly, it could be said that harijans and the like have been discriminated against for so long, that it is necessary to give them some preference merely to right this wrong. And secondly, it could be argued that there still exists a level of discrimination that prevents a harijan from becoming as highly qualified as, say, a brahmin. And that, therefore, he should not be treated in the same way as a brahmin but afforded some consideration.

While there is some substance to both arguments, accepting them can be dangerous. After all, by accepting a measure of caste discrimination (even if it is *positive* discrimination), we are sacrificing a liberal principle of equality. On a practical level, we are also accepting substandard candidates for our jobs and colleges for reasons that have nothing to do with their merit. Therefore, even those of us who accept the need for some reservation must guard against these dangers. We must not accept reservation for time immemorial but set some cut-off date (say 30 years, 40 years or whatever) when our society will be equal enough for us not to have to promote equality in this manner. (There is some evidence to suggest that, originally, the reservation for harijans and tribals was intended to last only for ten years after it was instituted.) And if we think reservation is justifiable because our society, in effect, denies harijans the opportunities to be as qualified as higher castes when it comes to eligibility for higher education or government employment, then we must work to remove those barriers.

As we all know, Independent India has accepted the principle of reservation, but forgotten its reasons for doing so. Now, there is no talk of a cut-off date and politicians, eager to win the harijan vote, are content to merely praise the reservation system rather than remove the many hardships and obstacles the harijans really face.

IN RECENT YEARS, the state governments have also entered the fray. They have instituted their own reservations for their own backward communities. Such reservations are not sought to be justified by the criteria of reversing discrimination. Now, a third justification has been found. If a community is not as prosperous as the government thinks it should be, then it is quite justifiable to reserve seats for it. Even a child can see that such an argument runs counter to the principles of equality so central to liberal democracy.

The Gujarat government recently claimed that, as its 82 backward castes comprised 40 per cent of the population, it was reasonable to reserve up to an equal number of seats for these castes. This is a fourth, and even sillier, justification of reservation: that the government must legislate to ensure that the caste composition of colleges is the same as the caste composition of society.

In reality, of course, the justification for the recent hikes in reservation quotas has nothing to do with political philosophy and everything to do with political expediency. Unscrupulous governments are willing to sacrifice liberal principles and to tolerate civil unrest, only so that they can win votes. This is why there is no talk of reserving seats for women, or for Muslims, who are much worse off than many of Gujarat's backward castes. And this is why quotas continue to be hiked even though there are not enough candidates to fill them.

THE ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM of reservations is not to abolish them. Certainly, where there is real and persistent discrimination, there may be a case for quotas. The best solution would be to treat reservation as a temporary measure, imposed to help remove discrimination, and backed by a series of other measures to help the underprivileged in areas other than higher education and employment.

But when it comes to reservation of the sort introduced by state governments merely to win votes, without any consideration of the issues involved, then, of course, there can be no two opinions. Both the reservation and the state governments should go.

— Vir Sanghvi

(R V Pandit, who regularly writes this column, will resume it from next month.)

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LETTERS

A YEAR AFTER BLUESTAR

Subramaniam Swamy's ramblings on Punjab (*A Year After Bluestar*, June 1985) underscore the bankruptcy of social thought in the country. His *mathatek* suggestion is ridiculous. Appeasement and compromise are not essential ingredients of statesmanship. To live and grow, nations sometimes demand the extreme price of open conflict to stamp out the forces of disruption and disintegration.

Rajiv's massive mandate was, in fact, a demand for the defence of the country's unity. Any solution even remotely suggesting an Akali victory will strike a deadly blow at secularism.

*Jitendra Kaushal
Yamunagar*

Subramaniam Swamy's suggestion that Rajiv Gandhi should apologise for the army action is unfortunate.

Apologise for what? For clearing the Golden Temple of terrorists? For trying to contain terrorism? For not allowing the terrorists to realise their dream of Khalistan?

I agree that Operation Bluestar has left an indelible scar on the minds of the Sikhs, but has Swamy ever bothered to assess the feelings of the Hindus? Let him also know that Hindus, besides having to live with insecurity, are deeply hurt and angry at the number of innocent people being killed.

Let not gun-toting terrorists and a chaotic party dictate the terms of settlement to the government. The Akalis should apologise first, not the other way around. Otherwise we will



only be setting a dangerous precedent for the future.

*S P L Suri
Bombay*

Subramaniam Swamy's suggestion that the Prime Minister should go to the Golden Temple and announce that the army action was wrong, is incongruous. This kind of mischievous advice will only strengthen the hands of terrorists.

*S P Raman
Hassan*

The deployment of the army in the Golden Temple has posed a major threat to Sikhism which will go down in history as one of the saddest chapters of Indian politics. Unless some negotiated settlement is arrived at, things are bound to take a turn for the worse.

*Srinivasan Umashankar
Nagpur*

Corruption

Sundeep Waslekar rightly points out that corruption is strongly embedded in the Indian psyche (*Corruption*, June 1985).

Corruption, specially at the political level, has increased twofold in recent years, causing a lot of anxiety and distress to the common man.

The government's decision to eradicate this malady is a welcome step as corruption has impeded the smooth flow and execution of work at all levels. A lot of will-power and sincere endeavour will be required of Indians if we wish to rid ourselves of this omnipresent malaise.

*Arvinder Singh Walia
Calcutta*

LETTERS

Yesterday, Years Ago

After blaming the worst of Malayalam films for creating the impression that 'girls from Kerala were relentless in their pursuit of pleasure', Shankar Menon has only succeeded in reinforcing this impression in his short story *Yesterday, Years Ago* (May 1985).

The story is devoid of any artistic merit and is liberally sprinkled with vulgar sex. When will our budding writers mature in their handling of sex? And all the geographical information that was flung in, failed to lend credence to the story.

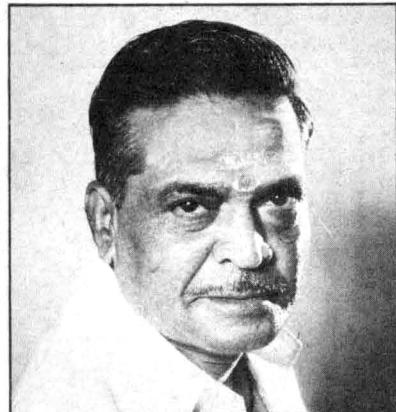
*K Madhavan Nair
Trivandrum*

Lord Of The Air

The 25 Most Powerful People in India (April 1985) mentioned an American who accused Sai Baba of sexual fondling. N Raghu, in his letter to *Imprint* (June 1985) describes this as 'sheer nonsense'. I wish it were, but it isn't. If he read Tal Brooke's book, *Sai Baba, Lord Of The Air* a Vikas publication, he would definitely change his opinion. Tal Brooke, an American, wrote about Baba's repulsive secret sex life and has even called him a hermaphrodite. He gives his own as well as other people's unsavoury sexual experiences with the Baba, which went beyond mere fondling.

*P C Lal
New Delhi*

Pradeep Shinde (Continued)



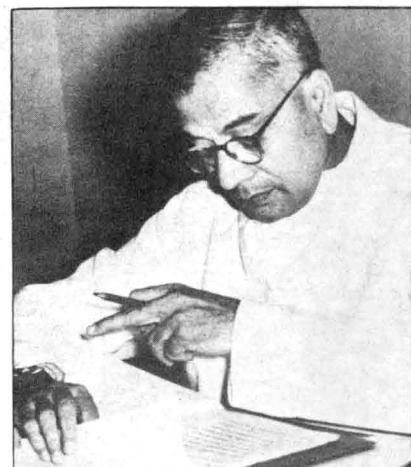
Amrita Shah's article on Varadarajan Mudaliar (*Don*, May 1985) is

IN DEFENCE OF TTK

Whenever there are reports that the government has favoured an industrialist or businessman, some journalists cite, without much thought, the Mundhra parallel to hit out at the government. It is a pity that a highly well-informed journal like *Imprint* should resort to this weapon (*Corruption*, June 1985), not for the first time.

I had known T T Krishnamachari for years. All serious students of contemporary politics are aware that assistance to the Mundhra group was extended more in the public interest and to prevent the industrial and economic fall-out of the crash of the Mundhra units and the capital market in particular, than to do a special favour to an industrialist; they are also aware that some of the leading members of Nehru's Cabinet were involved in it.

A political storm was engineered around the Mundhra affair by interests opposed to the economic policies of the then government. T T Krishnamachari resigned, stating that he, as



the Finance Minister, was constitutionally responsible for what had happened due to the non-observance of prescribed procedural rules. The storm abated. The investments as such in the Mundhra group had not, on the whole, proved unsound.

Untruths and half-truths are perpetuated through constant, unthinking repetition.

*P Ramamurthy
Madras*

quite ingenious. She sets out to write about a machiavellian underworld figure but actually paints him as a kind of Robin Hood, a man who is 'a social worker and a philanthropist'. He is a celebrity, she says, and interviews him as if he were a celebrity instead of a criminal eroding the infrastructure of society.

She is quite right when she says that 'standards in public life have dropped so completely that a mafioso is regarded as being not much worse than the average politician'. But perhaps she has not quite realised how great a role magazines have played in lowering these standards. While newspaper reports have been naively exposing underworld operations, interviews like this one gloss over the terrible and immoral and project Dons as they would film stars. These interviews may be regarded as sophisticated journalism but aren't they perverted?

Nevertheless, I am thrilled at the fact that she used, as a base for the story, my clippings from the *Indian Express* library and my story in *The Week* which was written under the pseudonym Abdul Rahim. She did not have to spend late nights in shady joints to get her story.

*Pradeep Shinde
Bombay*

Pradeep Shinde seems to think that my article glamourised Vardha. This is extraordinary because the piece described him as a bootlegger, a smuggler and the head of a contract killing racket. If Shinde considers all this glamorous, then perhaps he has been a crime reporter too long.

As for his clippings, I'm afraid I've never read anything he's written on Vardha. Considering his strange sense of glamour, perhaps this is just as well.

Amrita Shah

LETTERS

THE ST STEPHEN'S NETWORK

Malavika Sanghvi's cover story about my Alma Mater, St Stephen's College (*The St Stephen's Ethos*, June 1985) was commendable.

The late Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the fifth President of India, was a Stephanian, giving St Stephen's the rare distinction of producing two Presidents of two different countries. Salim Ahmed Salim, Prime Minister of Tanzania, is also a Stephanian. And Vikram Mahajan was never the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

If the number of Stephanians in the corridors of power is any yardstick, even in the British days, Stephanians ruled supreme in the ICS. I think it was in the early '30s that St Stephen's produced, in one year, about one third of the total number of Indians appointed to the Indian Civil Service. At that time the total number of students on the rolls was less than 200.

*Sarjit Singh Garewal
Solan*

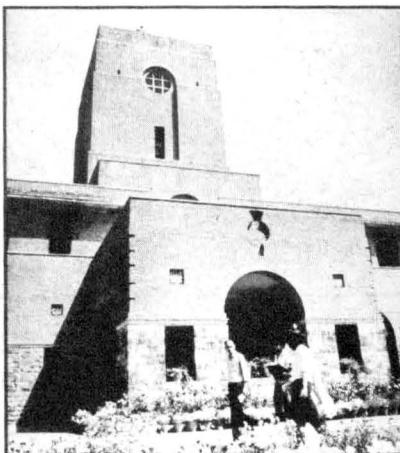
The coverage of *The St Stephen's Ethos* was impressive but I noticed an error which I would like to bring to your readers' attention.

Prem Bhatia was never at St Stephen's but is a product of the Government College, Lahore. His son, Anand Bhatia, was at St Stephen's before going on to Cambridge.

*H R Bery
Bombay*

Since I was at St Stephen's College from 1955-60 and also figured in the *Who's Who Of Stephanians*, I have read Malavika Sanghvi's article with considerable interest. But I wish she had spoken to a wider cross-section of Stephanians instead of limiting her conversations to a few people. One result is that she has more or less missed out on leading sportsmen of the college, a major lacuna considering that St Stephen's is known for its tradition of sport and sportsmanship.

Further, a gossipy, anecdotal piece like this cannot be regarded as a meaningful assessment of the contribution



of this elitist institution to national life. Had a more serious attempt been made by the writer, she would have realised that Stephanians are too easy-going and too timorous to participate in politics. The government services, business and professions are fine, but it is politics which paves the way for leadership. This aspect has been dealt with so perfunctorily that a major and thought-provoking aspect has remained insufficiently projected. The products of St Stephen's College have let down this country.

Lastly, it is difficult to understand what prompted you to put General Zia on the cover. An oppressive dictator like him cannot but be a source of embarrassment to those Stephanians who value the liberal ethos of their Alma Mater.

*Arvind Bhandari
Bombay*

The article on St Stephen's College greatly amused me, for I am convinced that the alleged Stephanian achievement is grossly exaggerated. The article was not convincing. First, the *Who's Who* did not say much. It consisted mainly of competition-*wallahs* (qualitatively different from the ICS officers of London vintage) and *boxwallahs*.

Secondly, Natwar Singh says that it is the fault of the educational system that St Stephen's has not produced any great writer! I suppose he would advance the same argument to justify the fact that St Stephen's has

not produced any great scientist or jurist. The Presidency College, Calcutta, has produced men like Asutosh Mookerjee and P C Mahalanobis. Presidency College, Madras, has produced two Nobel Prize winners in Physics (C V Raman and Chandrasekhar), several fellows of the Royal Society and Adams Prize winners (the Adams Prize is the highest honour that Cambridge can confer on a mathematician). And we don't indulge in self-congratulatory exercises — an obviously crude Stephanian practice.

*A Ranganathan
Madras*

The article on St Stephen's College was a sheer waste of ten pages. Colleges such as Elphinstone and Wilson in Bombay, and Fergusson in Pune have produced academicians and intellectual giants who would make the Stephanian line-up look like a KG brigade.

Kabir Bedi has been described as a film actor. A good-looking playboy and model would be a more apt description. Does he owe his good looks to St Stephen's? Neither do I understand why St Stephen's should be proud of Ajitabh Bachchan, a 'film distributor and drug manufacturer', and that, only because his brother does not know what to do with his money.

Both Indira and Rajiv Gandhi were at Cambridge, the former for just one term and the latter for two terms. Would you place them on a par with the intellectual giants and Nobel Prize winners that Cambridge has produced? Would Cambridge, by any stretch of imagination, be proud of them?

*A K Kerkar
Bombay*

I fear Malavika Sanghvi has made a frightful error. I was never at St Stephen's. I was at the Allahabad University and a glorious place it was in those days — in the '40s.

*Lovraj Kumar
New Delhi*

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VOLUME XXV NO 5

CONTENTS

AUGUST 1985

7 FIRST PERSON

Symptoms Of Fascism?

By George Fernandes

He would turn to violence again if there was an Emergency.

9 COUNTER-VIEW

End Of The Honeymoon?

By Subramaniam Swamy

Time to start asking questions about the Prime Minister.

11 UP-FRONT

French Letter

By Arun Chacko

Indo-French relations after the spy scandal.

15 COVER STORIES

The Final Reel

Hard times for the Bombay film industry. Crores are lost, films keep flopping and things will never be the same again.

22 The Shabana Azmi Interview

By Saryu Doshi



The award-winning actress seems keen to move out of acting.

Cover transparency: Gautam Patole.

34 INDIRA GANDHI: A PERSONAL MEMOIR

By Pupul Jayakar

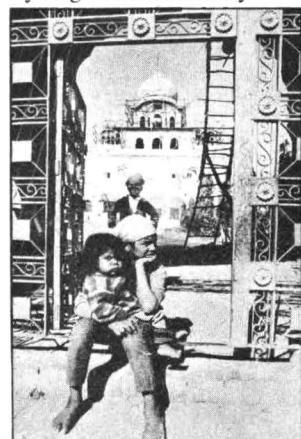


Photographs by Raghu Rai

The real Indira Gandhi. By one of her closest friends.

42 THE CONTINUING TRAGEDY

By Jugnu Ramaswamy



Eight months after the anti-Sikh riots, Delhi's

Sikhs are suffering.

50 ON THE FENCE

By Amrita Shah



A profile of Sharad Pawar that explains his talent for staying in the news.

56 THE FEMALE ORGASM

By Dr R H Dastur And Coomi Chinoy

A taboo subject, opened up from an Indian point of view.

61 BRIEF

Chaos And Confusion

By Shirin Mehta

What's going on at Air-India?

67 MY OWN OBITUARY

By M V Kamath

The first of a new series in which distinguished persons write their own obituaries.

73 WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Nothing Succeeds Like Excess (The All Night Long Saga)

76 A WEEK WITH JAGGER

By Jay McInerney



Michael Philip Jagger. Up close.

86 BORN IN THE '50s

By David Davidar

Spare a thought for the generation that missed the space shuttle.

93 GUEST COLUMN

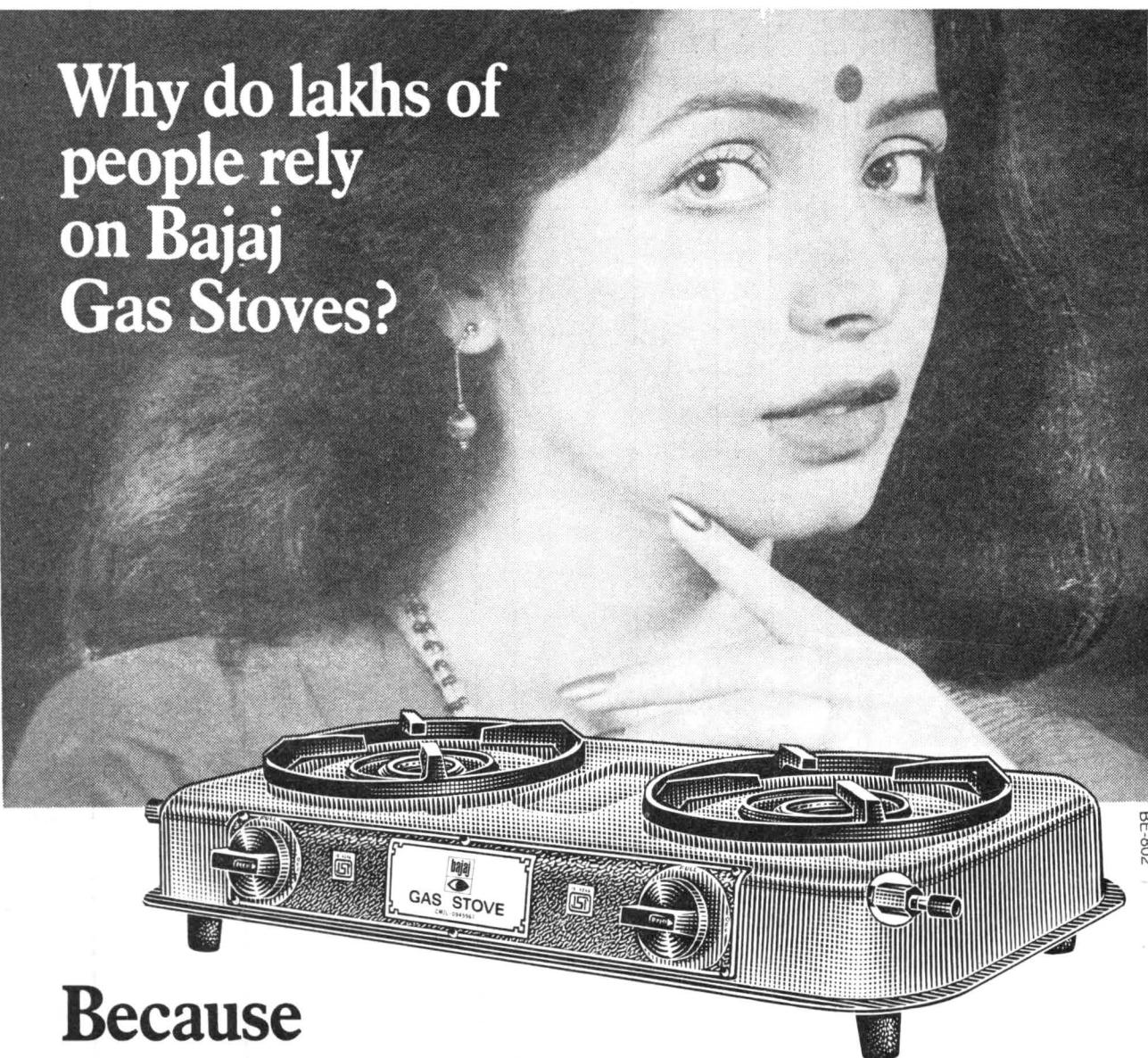
Salvaging The Police Force
By Atul Setalvad

97 NIGHTWATCH

More On Biography
By Keki Daruwalla

100 ASTROLOGY

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FIRST PERSON

By George Fernandes

SYMPTOMS OF FASCISM?

Will there be another Emergency in the lifetime of George Fernandes?

THE PRESENT may be the best time to ask if there will be another Emergency in the lifetime of people like me, and to speculate about the reactions to an Emergency, should it be imposed again. When the last Emergency was imposed, hardly anyone in the country was prepared for it. The result was that the initial responses were either muted or cautious, with even the most radical and militant elements in public life choosing the easiest option of going to prison.

I had seen the emerging Fascist tendencies in our country from the time of the Bangladesh war when Mrs Gandhi decided to take the maximum advantage of the national euphoria that followed the war and ordered elections to the state Assemblies. "I seek another mandate — from the states," read the Congress posters which bore Mrs Gandhi's face, looking remarkably like Adolf Hitler's face, sans moustache and receding hairline. That was in the beginning of 1972. I had a poster pulled down from a wall outside the Socialist Party office in Delhi and asked my colleagues if they saw the resemblance. Many of them saw the point, while others felt that I was stretching the point too far.

Though she acquired immense power both at the Centre and in the states, it was obvious that Mrs Gandhi was not going to offer any solutions

George Fernandes, a former Member of Parliament and Union Minister, was arrested during the Emergency.



to the country's problems. It was not long before the tide of the people's disenchantment swept over her. Predictably, Mrs Gandhi went about laying the blame for her failure on the Opposition parties, branding them unpatriotic. This tactic of finding scapegoats was a typically Fascist strategy. In my presidential address to the Socialist Party's national conference in Bulandshahr in 1972, I referred to the signs of a Fascist order emerging in the country, and asked the people to see the writing on the wall and prepare to fight Fascism.

Then, in May 1974, came the rail-

way workers' strike. It was a strike that was consciously and deliberately foisted on the workers by Mrs Gandhi's political strategists. All the awesome laws, including the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and the Defence of India Rules (DIR) were used against the railwaymen and their supporters, and the media launched a well-organised campaign of lies and slander against the railwaymen. Then, at Tihar Central Prison, I made a statement that the entire exercise of the railway strike was, for the government, a dress rehearsal for the Fascist takeover of India. And just over a year later, the Emergency was on us.

The Emergency was imposed not merely because of the political developments in the country (including Mrs Gandhi's defeat in the Gujarat elections on the day that the Allahabad High Court set aside her election

to Parliament; and the JP movement in Bihar and elsewhere in the country on issues like corruption, etc). The economic crisis, including rising prices and growing unemployment, was an equally, if not more, important factor in declaring the Emergency.

I remember Madhu Limaye's question to me on June 21, 1975: "If Mrs Gandhi should abrogate the Constitution, declare a state of Emergency and arrest all those who matter politically, what are our contingency plans?" There were none. When the Emergency was declared on June 25, our leaders had no way

If an Emergency should be declared, I will resort to dynamite again. All means are justified in overthrowing a State that turns its back on democratic values.

SYMPTOMS OF FASCISM?

of coping with the situation.

* * *

THE POLITICAL and economic conditions prevailing in the country today are far worse than those that acted as a catalyst for the Emergency. And, as on the earlier occasion, each one of them — Punjab, Gujarat, Assam — is the result of the ruling party's cynical approach to these problems. The economic situation has reached a point where optimism would be tantamount to day-dreaming. In the last five years, prices have more than doubled, registered unemployment has almost doubled and the concentration of economic power in the hands of a microscopic minority has reached unprecedented dimensions. And now, with computers and 21st century programmers taking over the decision-making, we are planning to aggravate an already difficult employment situation.

The government, of course, has reacted predictably in dealing with these crises. The spate of laws designed to curb human rights and civil liberties, culminating in the recent enactment of the Anti-Terrorist Law, means that those in power are now fully equipped to protect themselves and their establishment from any attempt to dislodge them from their positions of power.

Be that as it may, the best way to fight another Emergency would be to create conditions to pre-empt it which, of course, is more easily said than done. Yet, if all those concerned with bringing about a radical change in the country were to unite, irrespective of whether they belong to a political organisation or not, the ruling establishment would cave in. A dialogue among Opposition parties on all national issues, and the creation of a national alliance for democracy

and socialism should be priority items on the agenda of those who wish to defeat the emerging forces of chaos and disorder so assiduously cultivated by the Congress (I) as a prelude to the imposition of another Emergency. Trade unions, farmers' unions, women's organisations, youth and student bodies, associations of writers, journalists and film-makers, activists and civil liberties movements, should be involved in this broad national alliance. Most of these groups and individuals are not associated with any political party in the country. As a consequence, even while their work in their respective spheres is commendable, it becomes pointless insofar as an attack on the ruling establishment is concerned. The alliance for democracy and socialism should chalk out a programme for an alternative polity which is democratic and concerned with social and economic justice. Specific programmes for decentralisation of economic and political power should be drawn up and a struggle launched for their fulfilment.

Given the enormous coercive powers acquired by the State, there are genuine reasons to wonder whether the establishment would really have to take recourse to a formal declaration of Emergency. Perhaps not. After all, if the army can be called out to gun down citizens because of the total collapse of the civil administration, if Special Courts can be set up to circumvent all accepted norms of jurisprudence, and if censorship can be imposed on reports from Assam, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir — and all this with the sanction of Parliament — there is not much more an Emergency is expected to do.

It is important to restore the

people's initiative to confront and defeat the establishment. At another level, politics must be pulled out of the drawing-rooms of the party leaders to the market squares and factory gates.

Yet there is hardly any preparation on the part of those committed to the preservation of our democratic polity to fight the establishment. If anything, the situation today seems more bleak than it was in June 1975, when Opposition parties were in the thick of the JP movement, and there was a certain euphoric quality to their politics. There were suspicions then about each other's motives, but not the kind of bitterness that prevails today among the leaders of the Opposition. That is why it is important for Opposition parties to identify areas of agreement, and reduce the points of disagreement, even while they build their respective organisations and project their policies and programmes.

One last point. In my own underground fight against Mrs Gandhi's dictatorship, I had resorted to the use of dynamite which, according to the State which prosecuted me, was enough to 'overawe and overthrow' the government. But if the State turns its back on democratic values and destroys or neutralises all democratic institutions, then, I believe, all means are justified in overthrowing such a State, and that includes violence. Along with my colleagues in the underground, I had vowed to do nothing that would endanger human life while we went about the task of 'overawing' Mrs Gandhi's dictatorship. Should the need to engage ourselves in another similar fight arise, I shall do all that I then did — hopefully, without repeating the mistakes I committed then. ♦

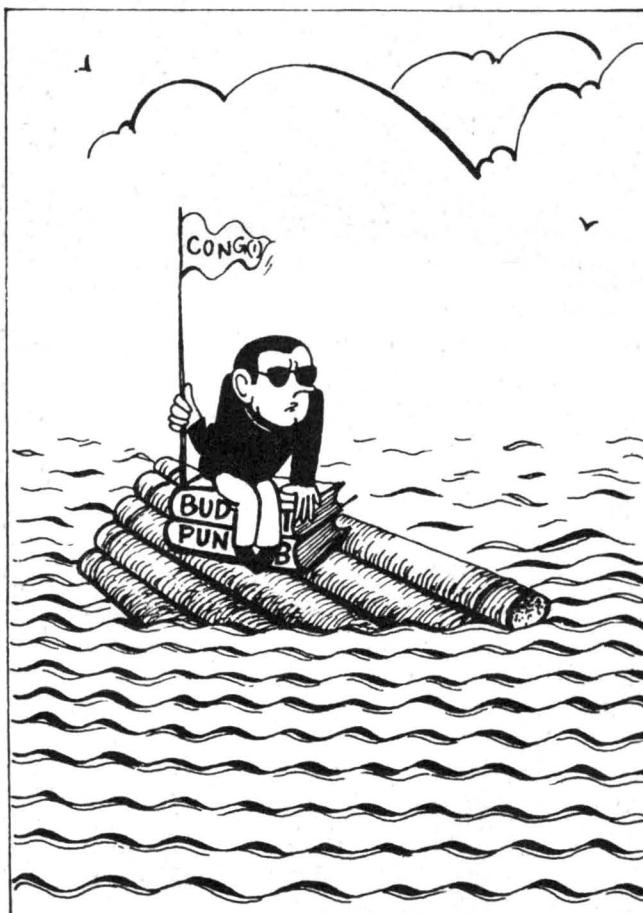
END OF THE HONEYMOON?

Let us start worrying about the serious business of running India.

THE HONEYMOON of the Indian people with Rajiv Gandhi seems to have ended. While the electoral marriage is not quite on the rocks yet, the nitty-gritty of putting one's own house in order has strained the voter-Rajiv relationship.

To start with, the much heralded budget for 1985-86 has already begun the decline. Even within the Congress (I), where dumb cattle predominate, the murmuring against the budget is quite widespread. The budget has unleashed inflation, hitting hard at the common man. The stock market is no doubt booming, but, according to insiders, this is due to non-resident investments. In any case, the rise is unhealthy and there will, inevitably, be a fall in the near future, adding to the developing crisis.

The problem with the budget (as I wrote in **Imprint**, March 1985) is that it was lopsided. Direct taxes were reduced, but indirect taxes on essential commodities and transport were raised steeply. Petrol prices are falling the world over; but in India, despite growing self-sufficiency in oil production, the price was raised by over 15 per cent. The prices of kerosene, cooking gas and other distillates were also raised to include the increased taxes. This alone hit the middle classes, farmers and freight movers; and through the cost-push linkage ef-



fect, everything else.

This is not all. The economy has been hit by a resource crunch. Last year's budget deficit was Rs 3,600 crore despite a Rs 6,000 crore borrowing by the Centre from the Reserve Bank of India. In actual fact therefore, the excess currency pumped into the economy was Rs 9,600 crore. This year, the planned deficit is Rs 3,349 crore. The resource crunch is such that the actual figure will be double that and, together with the RBI borrowings, the currency pumped into the economy would exceed Rs 10,000 crore.

Subramaniam Swamy, a regular Imprint columnist, is now Visiting Professor of Economics at Harvard.

Furthermore, beginning in 1986, the IMF loan of Rs 5,000 crore will have to be paid back with 13 per cent interest. The repayment will have to be in foreign exchange. This is naturally going to intensify the resource squeeze.

It is not just the shortage of resources which makes the crisis. Even surpluses are creating problems. Food-grain procurement has augmented food stocks to 30 million tonnes. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has storage space for only 12 million tonnes. The rest of the food stocks are lying in classrooms and in open spaces under plastic covers. But with the rains coming, these stocks will rot.

Similarly, our growing self-sufficiency in oil has not been compensated by a comparable rise in refinery capacity. As a consequence, India has begun exporting crude and importing refined oil products. Last year, we exported over Rs 1,000 crore worth of crude oil, making oil, paradoxically, both the single biggest export earner and an import liability. The loss in revenue is in the ratio 2:1. That is, we pay twice as much for the imported oil products than we would have had to, had we refined the export crude at home. And with growing self-sufficiency, the problem is going to get worse.

Not only is the economy in a grim situation, but the political context, which was so favourable to Rajiv in January, has changed. One good index of the changed circumstances is

At the moment, Rajiv is the vote-getter who is keeping the party together. But if the Congress loses the Assembly polls in 1987, he will have to go.

END OF THE HONEYMOON?

the *coup d'état* by Vasantdada Patil. He challenged the High Command (read Rajiv) and got his way. That is, he checkmated Sharad Pawar and installed a proxy Chief Minister. Today Dada is more powerful than he was as the Chief Minister.

The problem that Rajiv is having with his party is neither acute nor something that cannot be rectified. But it is there, and it wasn't there in January. The discontentment in the party is due to Rajiv's style of functioning. He consults very few, and those he does consult have no political culture. His ministers are unable to get appointments with him. Secur-

ity reasons prevent ordinary party workers or even district functionaries from meeting him. Since Rajiv has hardly been in party politics, he does not recognise most office-bearers at the state or lower levels. He cannot tell who is good, and who is bad.

All this has led to rumblings within the party. At the moment, Rajiv is the vote-getter. That is keeping the party together. But if his electoral performance deteriorates even at the same rate as it has from the Lok Sabha to the Assembly and Corporation elections in recent months, then it is certain that in 1987 when, besides Haryana and West Bengal,

Punjab, Kashmir and Assam are likely to go to the polls, the Congress (I) stands a very slim chance of winning. And, if the Congress (I) does lose, Rajiv, too, will have to go.

Besides party problems, Rajiv has still to come to grips with the internal issues of Punjab, Assam and Gujarat. These problems continue to remain unresolved and are a major lacuna in the functioning of the existing government. Even the Hindu-Muslim problem is simmering.

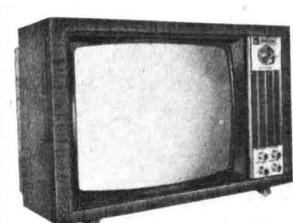
All this indicates that we are heading towards a crisis. India will, of course, survive. The question is: will Rajiv? ♦



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UP-FRONT

By Arun Chacko

FRENCH LETTER

After the Festival, nobody wants to talk about the spy scandal.

AFTER Rajiv Gandhi's recent high-profile visit to Paris and the general Indo-French *bonhomie*, with Parisians feasting on *laddoos* and *lassi* beside the Eiffel Tower as the Festival of India shifts into top gear, most Indians seem to have forgotten the country's greatest spy scandal. After all, as recently as early this year, the French were singled out for incredibly rough treatment.

This remarkable amnesia raises a few questions. Even though the Prime Minister declared the matter closed in Paris, how can we be so forgiving when, in fact, senior French diplomats were officially alleged to have indirectly bought over a large portion of the late Prime Minister's secretariat, and extracted all our innermost secrets? And this information, presumably, was shared by the NATO countries.

India's security system was made the laughing stock of the world, if it wasn't already so after Mrs Gandhi was shot in her own house by her own bodyguards. And finally, the whole incident resulted in suspicion and distrust which further divided this fragile and disparate country.

Were the French indeed guilty of all this? Even if we assume that the subsequent Indo-French *rapprochement* can be explained away to mutual self-interest, the slow pro-



gress of the espionage case makes one wonder. And why, if *The Times Of India*'s memorable and characteristic front-page editorial immediately after the event is to be believed, should a dubious character like Dr P C Alexander be appointed to the crucial position of High Commissioner to Britain?

The post-scandal sequence of events undoubtedly raises many doubts. If, in fact, things were as serious as they were made out to be, there should have been greater headway in apportioning the blame and bringing the guilty to book right

down the line — especially the Intelligence and security agencies.

Was it necessary to bring disgrace and contempt on a lot of people and, by implication, on the country, besides severely straining bilateral relations with friends, so that some smart aleck could expand his turf and a power struggle among those close to the PM could be camouflaged? The French impression of the entire drama offers a few insights.

* * * * *
THE CONSIDERED VIEW from Paris is that a mountain has been made out of a molehill. While prepared to let bygones remain bygones, the French government remains hurt and confused about the incident, which caused a huge international and domestic furore and unspeakable embarrassment. Even more galling for the Quai d'Orsay is the fact that the Indian government has yet to furnish it with any

concrete evidence of its staff's impropriety.

"This story is very astonishing," a key French official disclosed. "We had the sky all beautiful for us. An invitation was sent by the French President to the new Indian PM to come to Paris to inaugurate the Festival of India. We were informed the PM was coming. Then, in January, the story broke.

"We were very surprised," he continued. "We did not object to what was said or what we were asked to do, which was first to withdraw our Military Attaché and then our Ambassa-

Arun Chacko is Associate Editor of The World Paper. This is a regular column.

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If the French were really involved in spying, then it was reasonable to pack the Ambassador off. But why, in that case, was he allowed to leave with full honours?

FRENCH LETTER

dor, which we did. But at no point were we given any evidence of Colonel Bolley's wrongdoing, if any."

Matters were not clarified by the treatment to the then French Ambassador, Serge Boidevaix. As rumours fuelled more rumours, the French government was asked to withdraw him. In diplomacy this is pretty stern stuff, though justifiable, if his staff was really snooping as alleged. But the French were even more surprised when Boidevaix was given full honours before being packed off in what was, supposedly, complete disgrace.

A formal dinner in his honour was arranged by Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari at the External Affairs Ministry, and it was attended by innumerable top civil servants. After that, he was formally received by Vice-President Venkatraman and Policy Planning Chairman G Parthasarathy, all of which is normal practice for any ambassador at the end of his tenure.

"When we saw our Ambassador was very well treated at the end of his stay in India," the top official confided, "we realised it was an over-reaction by the press and others. But we regret that this over-reaction occurred over something for which no evidence was presented. For a certain time, only France's name was mentioned, which was very unpleasant for us because later the Indian government announced that Soviets and others were involved too. I find it strange that we were made a scapegoat during this incident."

And then came the relevant bit. "Our interpretation of the cause of those unpleasant events is that there was a fight for power among the advisors of the new Prime Minister," he continued. "We have nothing to say

about it, and we cannot interfere. Whenever there is a new government, there are new deals, new sharing of responsibilities. We only regret we were involved in it.

"However, the gestures made to our departing Ambassador by Venkatraman, Parthasarathy and Bhandari wiped the slate clean. We take the incident as a crisis of puberty. Indo-French relations are young. Things which happen during puberty have no consequence in later life. Neither will this incident."

* * * * *
INDEED THEY WON'T. But why the big fuss in the first place? In fact, the French believe India made several conciliatory gestures, even before the PM's visit, which emphasised our desire for continuing cordial Indo-French relations. The quick Indian acceptance of a new French Ambassador, Jean Bernard Merimee, to replace the recalled envoy was one such gesture. The appointment of Air Chief Marshal I H Latif (Retd) as Indian Ambassador to Paris was another.

In Paris, the former Air Force Chief and Maharashtra Governor is held in high esteem. He is believed to have played an important cementing role in the crucial armaments area, being instrumental in getting the Mirage 2000 approved for the Indian Air Force.

On the other hand, the French argue that they have done everything possible to demonstrate their good faith. They maintained a studied, if embarrassing, silence while our great spy scandal unfolded, neither confirming nor denying involvement. They recalled their Ambassador at India's request. And President Mitterand sent his brother and former Air Force Chief, General Mitterand to clarify matters with the Indian PM.

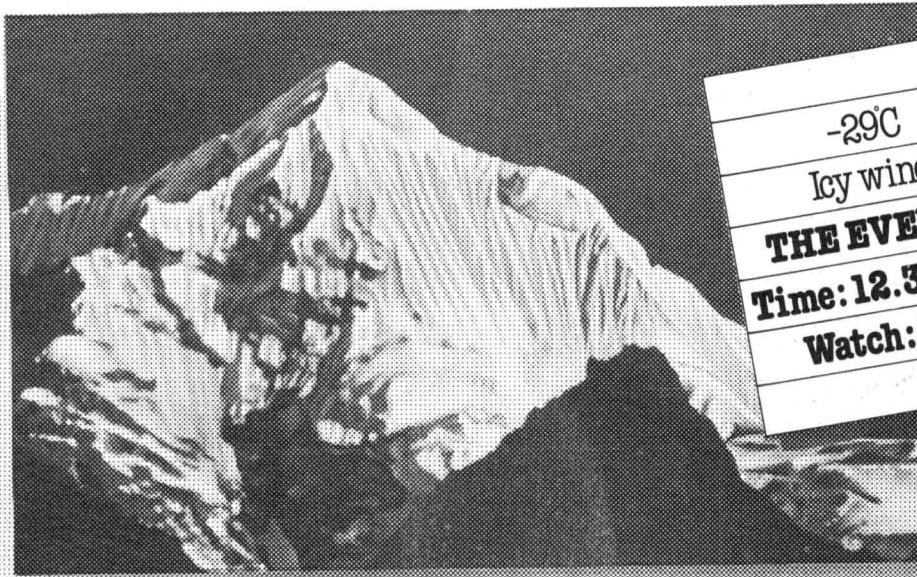
Predictably, the Indo-French problems do not seem to have caused any lasting damage. France considers Rajiv Gandhi's visit a clear confirmation of India's interest in Indo-French relations, and an effort to continue what Indira Gandhi initiated. France still feels it enjoys a confident relationship with India and sees India as a reliable area of stability in the region.

There is little doubt that France remains extremely keen on maintaining a close relationship with India. Admittedly, this is partly because some influential people, close to the French President, are sympathetic to the country. For instance, Jean Riboud, the culture tsar, who is married to Krishna Tagore.

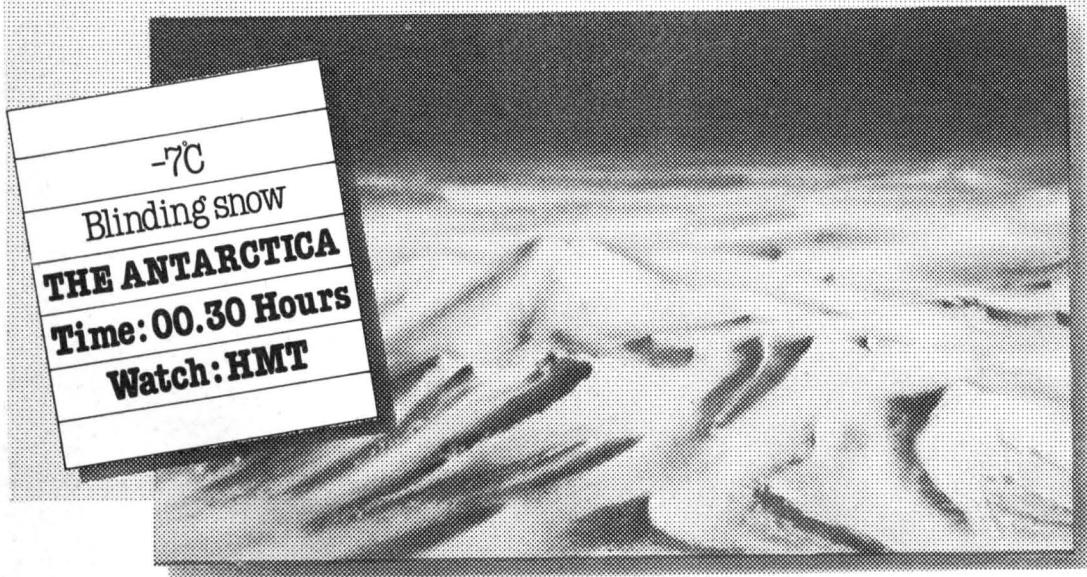
One of the first trips President Mitterand made abroad as President, was to India. Besides, he visited and consulted Mrs Gandhi often, and was, therefore, committed to the country much more than his predecessors. This positive relationship between the two countries will undoubtedly be strengthened under Rajiv.

The main question is whether this commitment to India will last beyond President Mitterand's term. He remains in office till 1988. He may be re-elected although he is currently facing severe problems. However, the composition of the French Parliament could change next year, causing complications. The Rightist Opposition is getting increasingly muscular.

Nevertheless, President Mitterand has tried to put Indo-French relations on a sound footing. The view in the French Foreign Ministry is that whoever leads the government, given Rajiv Gandhi's spectacular recent visit, French interest in India will undoubtedly continue.



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THE FINAL REEL

The Bombay film industry is in a mess today. The glamour is intact. But, says AMRITA SHAH, there isn't money in it any more.

TWO SEPARATE and quite different films probably best indicate the state of the Bombay film industry today.

Yudh was going to be the *Deewar* of the '80s. Launched in 1979 by Bombay's most successful movie mogul, Gulshan Rai (*Deewar*, *Trishul*, *Johnny Mera Naam*, *Vidhaata* and more), it was a labour of love for Rai's son, Rajiv, whose directorial debut it was to be. Bright young stars (Sanjay Dutt and Tina Munim), lavish sets, car chases, fight sequences — *Yudh* was going to have the works.

One year into production, it ran into a problem: Sanjay Dutt, its star, was a junkie. His drug habit and his disorganised private life (he wanted Tina, he didn't want her, he wanted her...) all played havoc with shooting schedules. Then, finally, Dutt departed for a cure and had to be dropped. All the footage starring him was junked, a new star (Jackie Shroff) was found, and shooting started again from scratch. New sets, new locations, new situations and new expenses.

Finally, in 1985, a crore and sixty lakh rupees later, *Yudh* was ready for

release. As Gulshan Rai hadn't made a flop for 20 years, this too, was expected to be a super success on the lines of his previous hits.

All such expectations were confounded. *Yudh* took 100 per cent box-office collections in the first week of its Bombay release but, by the second week, that figure had slid to 83 per cent. And by the third week, Rajiv Rai reconciled himself to the fact that he hadn't made a hit.

Looking back now, he is philosophical about it all. "I hope my distributors don't lose money on *Yudh*," he says. "They should come out okay or even a little ahead in a year. But there's no getting around the fact that it isn't a hit."

What went wrong? "Expenses. Coping with stars and their problems. Times changed. A script that made sense five years ago makes less sense now."

Would it have been a hit three years ago? "Absolutely. Things have changed so much. No films are doing the kind of business they used to. TV and video have knocked the bottom out of the industry. Thank God *Yudh* wasn't a bad film, otherwise it

would have been a total flop like so many other films made today."

Would he do it all again? "No way. Those days of great extravagance, of waste, of coping with star hassles, are gone. Nobody can afford all that now."

At the other end of the scale from *Yudh* was *Saaransh*, the highly acclaimed small budget film made by Mahesh Bhatt.

Bhatt had a good record: his unconventional *Arth* had been a commercial hit. And he was backed by the Barjatyas of Rajshri Productions, the film industry's biggest distributors. Both, Raj Kumar Barjatya, the son of Rajshri's boss, Tarachand Barjatya, and Bhatt were convinced that they were sitting on a sound commercial proposition. After all, *Saaransh* would cost only Rs 20 lakh, and that amount should not be difficult to recover even if the film was a hit only in the big cities.

First reactions suggested that they were right. *Saaransh* got the kind of pre-release acclaim that few films get. *The Illustrated Weekly Of India* even acclaimed it as a masterpiece. Its male star, an unknown actor called

COVER STORY

Anupam Kher, suddenly turned into one of the most sought after talents in the Hindi film industry, and Mahesh Bhatt was hailed as a genius. The film ran to packed houses at Bombay's Metro cinema and appeared to be Bhatt's second hit in a row after *Arth*.

Sadly, when the euphoria died down, the actual box-office figures were not very encouraging. The packed houses at Metro had given way to empty halls and the Barjatyas ended up paying a deficit of Rs 30,000 to the cinema to make up for the poor attendance. Elsewhere, too, the film did lousy business. At best, the Barjatyas made Rs 5 lakh out of the film, despite having spent Rs 20 lakh plus additional print and publicity costs.

What went wrong? "The audience for Hindi films is shrinking," explains Kamal Barjaty, another of Tarachand's sons. "Everything seems to be flopping." Would it have been a hit three years ago? "Who can say?" counters Kamal Barjaty. "But yes, pictures were doing much better in those days."

Would they do it again? "No." Tarachand Barjaty is emphatic. "We have burned our fingers once and that is it. For the time being, till this crisis is over, we are giving up film production completely."

As films go, *Yudh* and *Saaransh* could not have been more different. Yet, both failed to live up to expectations. Despite its lavishness and spectacle, *Yudh* limped home. And, despite needing a very low return to break even, *Saaransh* was a box-office disaster. It says something about the state of this film industry today: nothing is working. Not spectacle. And not low budget melodrama.

FOR THREE YEARS NOW, the film industry has been expecting a crisis. No dummies, the prosperous producers who make up the industry's elite knew that the rapid proliferation of video cassette recorders was going to hit their box-office collections. They recognised,



Yudh, the would-be success: expenses grew and times changed.

too, that the onset of commercial television would adversely affect the market for their films.

Yet, few of them did anything about it. Most merely assumed that the crisis would affect others and not them. And so, big budget films continued to be made. New stars continued to be signed up. Lakhs continued to be spent on lavish sets and foreign locations. The average reader of *Stardust* could be forgiven for thinking that everything was hunky-dory, that the glamour was intact.

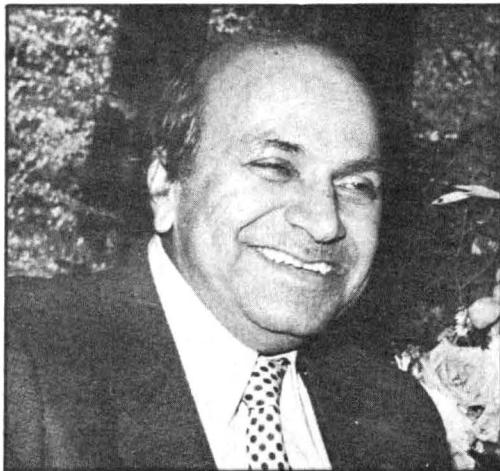
And so, the crisis that everybody saw coming still managed to take the industry by surprise. Gulshan Rai, the distributor with the Midas touch, happily signed to distribute a string of films: *Kalka*, *Rahi Badal Gaye*,

Sunny, *Mitha Zaher* and more. All of them flopped and Rai lost Rs 2.5 crore, an amount that would have ruined a lesser distributor. The top distributors all began to run scared. Many shut down their offices: N B Billimoria, Shankar B C, Jaisinh Pictures etc.

There were still hits, of course, but they were on a smaller scale. *Arjun* which would, in the old days, have done business worth Rs 85 lakh per major territory, is now expected to do business worth only Rs 65 lakh. *Pyar Jhukta Nahin* which would certainly have been a silver jubilee hit in the old days, ran for only 15 weeks in Bombay.

As Ramraj Nahata, Editor of the trade journal *Film Information* says:

COVER STORY



Gulshan Rai.



Kamal Barjatya.

"The average film of the industry is flopping. An average film costs Rs 80 lakh to make plus another Rs 40 lakh for prints and publicity. So, a producer needs Rs 1 crore and 20 lakh or so to break even. But these days, such films are making only Rs 60 lakh. And films that cost less to make are faring no better."

Adds N N Sippy, a producer and the President of the Indian Motion Picture Distributors' Association: "Five years ago I made *Sargam* which did business of Rs 85 lakh or so. Today, that same film would do only about Rs 50 lakh, despite higher ticket prices." Sippy, too, has distributed several flops in recent years: he lost Rs 18 lakh on *Painter Babu*, Rs 20 lakh on *Dharam Aur Kanoon* and large amounts on other films like *Khushnaseeb*, *Achha Burra* and *Sawaal*. "I'm not looking for any new film to distribute. I can't afford to lose this kind of money."

The films that are flopping these days cut across all categories. They include musicals, comedies, big budget epics, action films, low budget movies, art films and fantasies. No star seems to have the magic touch: Jeetendra, Jackie Shroff, Anil Kapoor, Sunny Deol, Dharmendra, Rajesh Khanna, Mithun, Shatrughan Sinha, Rishi Kapoor, Dimple, Jayaprada, Sridevi, Hema Malini — every single one of them has had more than his or her share of flops.

DESPITE ITS lavishness, 'Yudh' limped home and 'Saaransh' was a box- office disaster. Nothing seems to work in the film industry today: not spectacle and not low budget melodrama.

Summarises producer Amit Khanan: "This monolithic film industry is on the verge of collapse."

VET THE BIG DADDIES of the film industry — producers like Subhash Ghai, Prakash Mehra, Manmohan Desai and B R Chopra, have not rethought their strategy. They have no plans to reduce their budget. Says B R Chopra: "I pattern my budget according to my story and if I can't make a film properly, I won't make it at all."

There is some logic behind this apparently ostrich-like attitude. For the producer's main problem today is selling his film. And with films flopping every day, the distributors are willing to take chances only with big banners and saleable stars. The better the star cast, the better the chances

of a producer trying to sell his film.

Underlying this attitude is the belief that it is the so-called average film that is hit hardest by the crisis and not the big film which will continue doing well despite a cut in the profits. Kamal Barjatya agrees: "The average film is a total wash-out; we're losing our capital." Rajshri Films, which specialises in 'clean' low budget productions, has not had a hit for years. Their last film, *Abodh*, landed them with a deficit of Rs 32,000 at one theatre alone. The long list of average films that flopped — *Lorie*, *Kamla*, *Salma*, *Amir Aadmi* *Garib Aadmi*, etc — seems to support this thesis. "Makers of average films are now making small budget films with newcomers," says star secretary Ramesh Sharma who has launched a film with a fresh star cast.

On the other hand, the big banners are signing up stars as fast as they can. But the commercial failure of multi-starrers like *Sitamgar* and *Zabardast*, both directed by well-known directors — Raj Sippy and Nasir Hussein respectively — proves that stars do not guarantee success. Obviously, despite the unpredictability of the box-office, the calculations that go into the making of a film have not changed.

THE PRODUCER is the man with the glamour. He signs up the stars, he has his name

COVER STORY



Pyar Jhukta Nahin, the fluke success: the box-office is unpredictable.

carried large on the banners, and frequently (if he is like Manmohan Desai, Ramesh Sippy, Prakash Mehra, B R Chopra and a host of others), he ends up directing the film himself. Ironically, the glamorous sections of the industry — the producers, the stars, and the directors — have not been insulated from the crisis.

On the other hand, the risk-takers — the distribution and exhibition sectors — have been hardest hit. As Amit Khanna says: "The financial aspect of the business was never taken seriously. People were content with the old fiscal structure." Briefly put, it worked something like this: a producer would finance his film from a variety of sources — established financiers, advances from distributors, money conned out of suckers, his own funds, etc. But finally, when the film was ready, he would recover his investment — often, even before the release — from a distributor. The distributor would buy the rights to screen the film in a parti-

cular region and would sub-contract these rights to various exhibitors. These exhibitors would find the cinemas and arrange for the actual release. Thus, even if the film flopped, in most cases, the producer was covered: he had already recovered his investment from the distributor. If it became a hit and the distributor stood to earn much more than he had paid the producer, then the 'overflow' would be split between the producer and distributor.

Given this structure, it is only natural that the crisis has hit the risk-takers — the distributors and exhibitors — first. For a start, their costs have shot up dramatically. In the last five years, the cost of air-conditioning a cinema theatre has shot up by an astounding Rs 22,000. Consequently, theatre rentals have also gone up substantially. But ticket prices have not gone up by the same amount and so, exhibitors have found it difficult to pay the cinema owners.

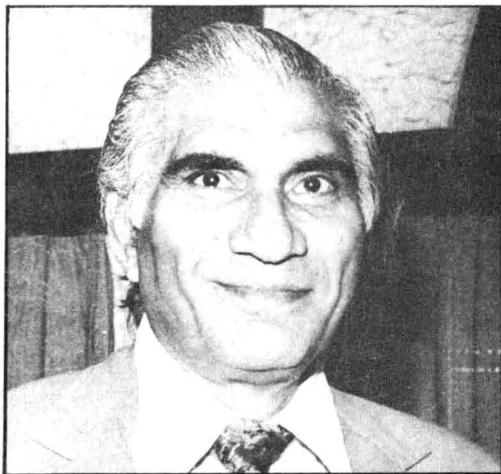
Inevitably, this has led to the clo-

sure of cinemas. In Hyderabad, 28 cinemas have closed down. Elsewhere, cinemas are hastily being pulled down and new shopping malls are being erected on that valuable real estate. (Except in Bombay, where the law makes this difficult to do.)

Added to this escalation in exhibition costs, has been the reluctance of audiences to come and see films. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that distributors and exhibitors are going bust with an alarming frequency. Those that have survived are cutting down on their activities. After losing Rs 2.5 crore, Gulshan Rai is in no hurry to accept new films for distribution. The Rajshris, who run the country's largest distribution network, are planning to close down many of their offices. And the smaller distributors have all packed up and gone home.

Producers are now feeling the impact of the slump in distribution. Over 100 completed films are lying on the shelves of Bombay labora-

COVER STORY



B R Chopra.



Mahesh Bhatt.

tories. No distributor is willing to touch them. The big, successful producers are also reduced to begging distributors to take a chance on them. Ramesh Sippy, the maker of the legendary *Sholay* and the recent much-hyped *Saagar* has not been able to sell this film all over the country. Now, he has entered into a 'commission-basis' arrangement with the Rajshris, whereby they do not buy the film from him but only release it, agreeing to split the profits, should any ensue.

Such risk-splitting deals are becoming more and more common. In recent months, both H A Nadiadwala and Brij have given their films to distributors on the understanding that all profits and losses will be shared.

As Kamal Barjatya says: "Who can afford to take a risk these days?"

THE FILM INDUSTRY attributes its problems to video and television. "Video has affected us very badly," claims producer-director B R Chopra. He is right, but with a nightly audience of 50 million, TV seems to be the bigger threat. All the country's cinemas can only accommodate roughly 13 million people at a time, so TV, with its stupendous reach, is bound to adversely affect the film industry's fortunes. The sponsored shows and new 'filmi' quality of TV programming has already taken its toll of the

A 100 FILMS ARE lying unsold in Bombay's laboratories. Video has affected the industry badly but the new 'filmi' quality of television programming poses an even greater threat.

industry. Says director Mahesh Bhatt: "I was amazed recently to see how much attention TV stars were getting from crowds: more than even film stars."

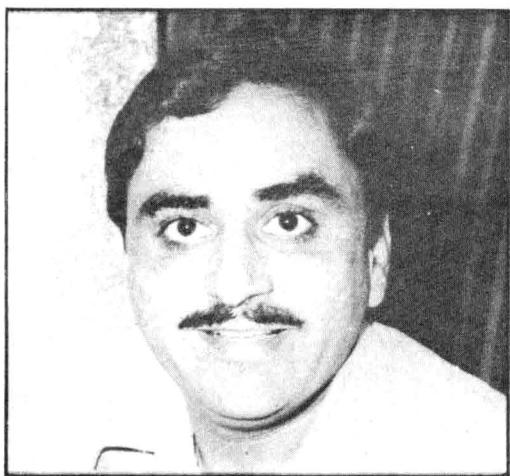
Obviously, the industry is going to have to come to terms with the fact that after the TV boom (and particularly as the TV audience grows), things can never be the same. Oddly enough, the producers spend most of their time abusing video pirates and the official attitude seems to be that video, rather than TV, is the bigger threat. This stance makes some sense when you consider that each time the industry says it has a problem, what it really means is that the government should rush to its rescue. The government, after all, is hardly likely to abandon its TV expansion plans because of its adverse

effect on the Bombay film industry. And so, the industry steers clear of TV and asks, instead, for tax reliefs and action against video pirates.

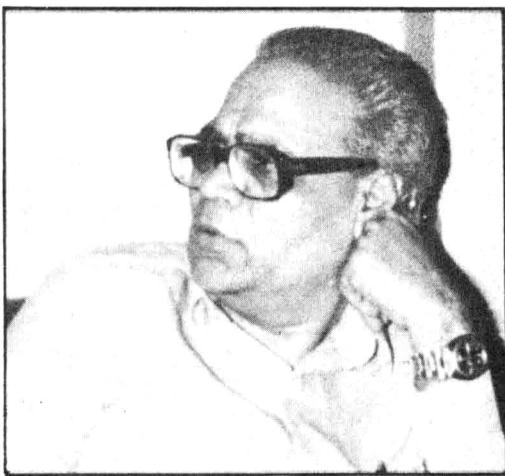
The claim to tax relief has some substance. In some states, entertainment tax accounts for 60 per cent of the price of a cinema ticket. Excise duty on prints is also needlessly high. Worse still, the government refuses to recognise that film-making is an industry and, therefore, denies it most tax benefits.

Nevertheless, frequent trips to Delhi by a bevy of producers and repeated pleas ensured, at least, that the Copyright Act was amended, making it easier to prosecute video pirates. Once this was done, the industry was in a position to crack down on the pirate. Unfortunately, no such crack-down was organised. Instead, the producers decided to go to war with each other.

THE industry's single most important body is the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association (IMPPA). For 12 years, this was run by a single, corpulent President, Sriram Bohra. In September 1984, a group of producers, including Vikas Mohan, K D Shorey, Vinod Pandey and Ramraj Nahata (who also owns the trade journal *Film Information*) set up the Democratic Group. Their aim was to dislodge Bohra and to 'restore democracy to



Vikas Mohan.



Ramraj Nahata.

IMPPA'. Accordingly, this group put Nahata up as its candidate for President. Nahata defeated Bohra and 'democracy' was said to have triumphed.

It seemed, then, that the industry had finally got its act together. Vikas Mohan was an active organiser of raids on video pirates and his Anti-Video Pirates Organisation (AVPO) had been instrumental in drawing attention to the damage that piracy was doing the industry. Now, with an ally as IMPPA President, Mohan seemed well-placed to take on the pirates.

But things changed after the election. The Democratic Group felt that Nahata had joined hands with Bohra and was hushing up the latter's misuse of IMPPA funds. Mohan even discovered that Nahata had been declared insolvent, a fact that rendered his election unconstitutional. Nahata defended himself as best he could. "I was discharged of insolvency in 1975," he protested. As for helping Bohra, 'it was the executive committee that accepted Bohra's apologies', he claimed.

The battle continued, with allegations flung on either side. Nahata accused Mohan of taking bribes from video pirates, while Mohan maintained that Nahata was jealous of the popularity he had gained through his raids. Finally, the executive committee passed a vote of no confidence in Nahata, who resigned in May this

THE IMPPA BATTLE exposed the disunity in the film industry. Allegations of corruption, insolvency and authoritarianism were exchanged between its members.

year. But the animosity continues. "Nahata is a power-hungry dog," says Mohan. And Nahata's supporters retaliate by demanding immediate elections and threatening to go on a hunger strike.

Ironically, though, both Nahata and Mohan insist that the industry is united. At the moment, the industry's hopes reside entirely in their influential MP, Amitabh Bachchan. In a letter to the trade journal *Trade Guide*, Bachchan clarified his intention to take up the problems of video piracy and excise with the Prime Minister. If successful, his efforts would provide some relief to the industry.

GIVEN THAT TV and video are not going to go away, will things ever be the same for

the film industry? "The whole concept of entertainment will change," insists Amit Khanna. Others are not so sure. Many seem to think that it will be business as usual in a year or two. Journalist Rauf Ahmed feels that TV will rapidly degenerate under bureaucratic pressure. Some observers point to the flash-in-the-pan success of a couple of recent films (*Ghulami* and *Pyaar Jhukta Nahin*) and use this to demonstrate that the crisis is, in fact, ending.

Considering that the film industry's refusal to take steps to deal with the video and TV threat over the last few years has landed it in this mess, such Micawberism seems bizarre. As Gulshan Rai says: "We have to learn to live with TV and video."

But what can the industry actually do? One solution would be to look at Hollywood which, despite an even bigger threat from TV, has managed to survive. The major Hollywood studios have done this by churning out TV shows and by considerably reducing the number of films they put out each year. The films that do get made are intensively market-researched with gaps in the market being identified. For instance, the youth market, consisting of 16-25-year-olds who do not enjoy network programming, has suddenly become a hot favourite. Steven Spielberg and George Lucas have both

COVER STORY

made fortunes by concentrating on the summer market, when schools are closed, and everyone is in the mood for spectacular entertainment of the sort that can't be fully appreciated on TV.

Is the Bombay industry likely to adapt to changing circumstances? The short answer seems to be: No. When Ramesh Sippy, who had trouble finding distributors for *Saagar* decided to release an official video cassette of the film, the entire weight of filmdom came down on his head. Finally, Sippy had to back down, and the official line seems to be: we won't touch video.

Much the same is true of TV. If the Hollywood pattern was to be followed, then it should have been the big producers who took over TV. Instead, it has been the commercially unsuccessful directors like Mahesh Bhatt, Basu Bhattacharya, Jalal Agha and Basu Chatterjee who have directed TV shows. Except for the Rajshris, who produced *Paying Guest*, the big banners have all pretended that TV is not going to be part of their own lives. Even B R Chopra, who earlier made two films for video and whose B R Films has a 'Video Division', has not moved into TV. "Too much red-tapism," he sniffs.

The film industry has preferred gimmicks to strategy. Last year, a South Indian film, *My Dear Kutti-chetan*, was dubbed in Hindi and released as *Chhota Chetan*. The film had nothing to recommend it except for one gimmick: it was shot in 3-D. Much to everyone's surprise, *Chhota Chetan* became one of the year's biggest hits. At once, a full quarter of the industry launched new 3-D projects.

Anyone who has studied the history of Hollywood could have told the producers that they were wasting their time. Thirty years ago, Hollywood, too, turned to 3-D in an attempt to beat TV. A few films were hits because of the novelty value but then, the craze died out.

When *Shiva Ka Insaaf* failed to repeat *Chhota Chetan's* success, most producers went back to making flat



Amit Khanna.

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films. With most films bombing at the box-office, few would risk making spectacles. "Those who can afford them will make them," says Kamal Barjaty.

Strangely, despite the fact that the industry is facing its worst-ever crisis, it gives the impression of carrying on. The number of Hindi films produced annually has gone up from 100 to 120 and is expected to touch 150 this year.

Films are not doing too well, so where does the money come from? The money, basically, comes from where it has always come so far — the sucker financier.

Every year, new entrants — smugglers, non-residents and honest people with a lot of money — are attracted to the film industry and get suckered into financing a film. "Of every 150 films produced, 60 are financed by newcomers," claims Nahata. "The biggest element in keeping this indus-

try going is the glamour," adds Amit Khanna. In fact, as he points out, had it not been for the emergence of magazines like *Stardust* and *Cine Blitz* which kept the myth alive, the industry would have busted years back.

The 'newcomers' are of all kinds. There are the Mahmud Sipras for whom the only way to star in a film is to make it; there are the Sattee Shouries who see it as a means of easy publicity; there are the Haji Mastaans who see it as a glamorous way to plough back their money; and there are the star-struck small-towners, naive enough to believe they can make their millions by making movies.

R S Dhaka of Indovision Films probably fits the last description best. A lawyer from Meerut, he came to Bombay and put Rs 13 lakh — his family's joint savings — into a film called *Nafrat* starring Arun Govil, Sadhana Singh and others. The film has yet to be released but he already has plans for a second film. "It is a thrill," he says, "for a person like me to see stars and shooting."

That thrill, at least, will never fade. As long as there are suckers with money — and in the Bombay industry, there really is one born every minute — producers will find the finance to keep going. The films might never get released, distributors may be loath to touch them but, as N N Sippy concludes cheerfully, 'the show will go on'.

His optimism is not without basis. The number of films made every year has gone up from 100 to 120 and is expected to touch 150 this year. Collections, too, have increased by 12.5 per cent, though this increase is negated by a proportionate rise in production costs. Perhaps Mahesh Bhatt is right when he says: "This is just a winter we are going through — in a year or two some pattern will emerge." But will the industry rearrange itself to fit the new pattern by then?

So far, there is nothing to suggest that the industry is willing or able to do this. ♦

"I WANT TO DO JUST A RARE FILM A YEAR"

Shabana Azmi discusses her kind of cinema, the roles she enjoys playing and talks about moving out of acting with DR SARYU DOSHI, the Editor of 'Marg'.

Saryu Doshi: You said that *Damul* was a film that tried to work on many levels and that this came across only partly.

Shabana Azmi: It is a very dense film. I felt that here was a film-maker who felt very intensely about something and had jammed as much information as he could into the film.

It could have done with some editing.

Yes, but I don't believe that because it is so dense, it is less powerful. But I thought his camera movements detracted from the film. That was the one thing I didn't like.

Even then, *Damul* is an extremely important film and it is sad that on TV a lot of the film just couldn't be seen. All people saw was a black screen.

How would you rate *Paar*?

Dr Saryu Doshi is the Editor of Marg, a member of the Film Censor Board and a leading art historian.

You know, *Paar* is really two films basically. The first half could have been dispensed with: the short story is only the second half. I don't doubt Gautam Ghosh's intentions at all, though. I don't think he did it for any exploitative reasons at all. But I had said, right at the script stage, that I thought it was two different stories.

Gautam was somebody I didn't know at all. Shyam Benegal introduced us and he offered me *Paar* around the same time that I was offered *Damul*. I felt Gautam was using a flashback technique that was totally unnecessary. I told him that, and he agreed with me. It was the first time we were meeting and he could have chosen to be offended and say, "Who is this actress to give me suggestions?" But I think he saw that I wasn't trying to be upstartish and, fortunately, most film-makers I work with don't resent my involvement — though they are surprised at the outset.

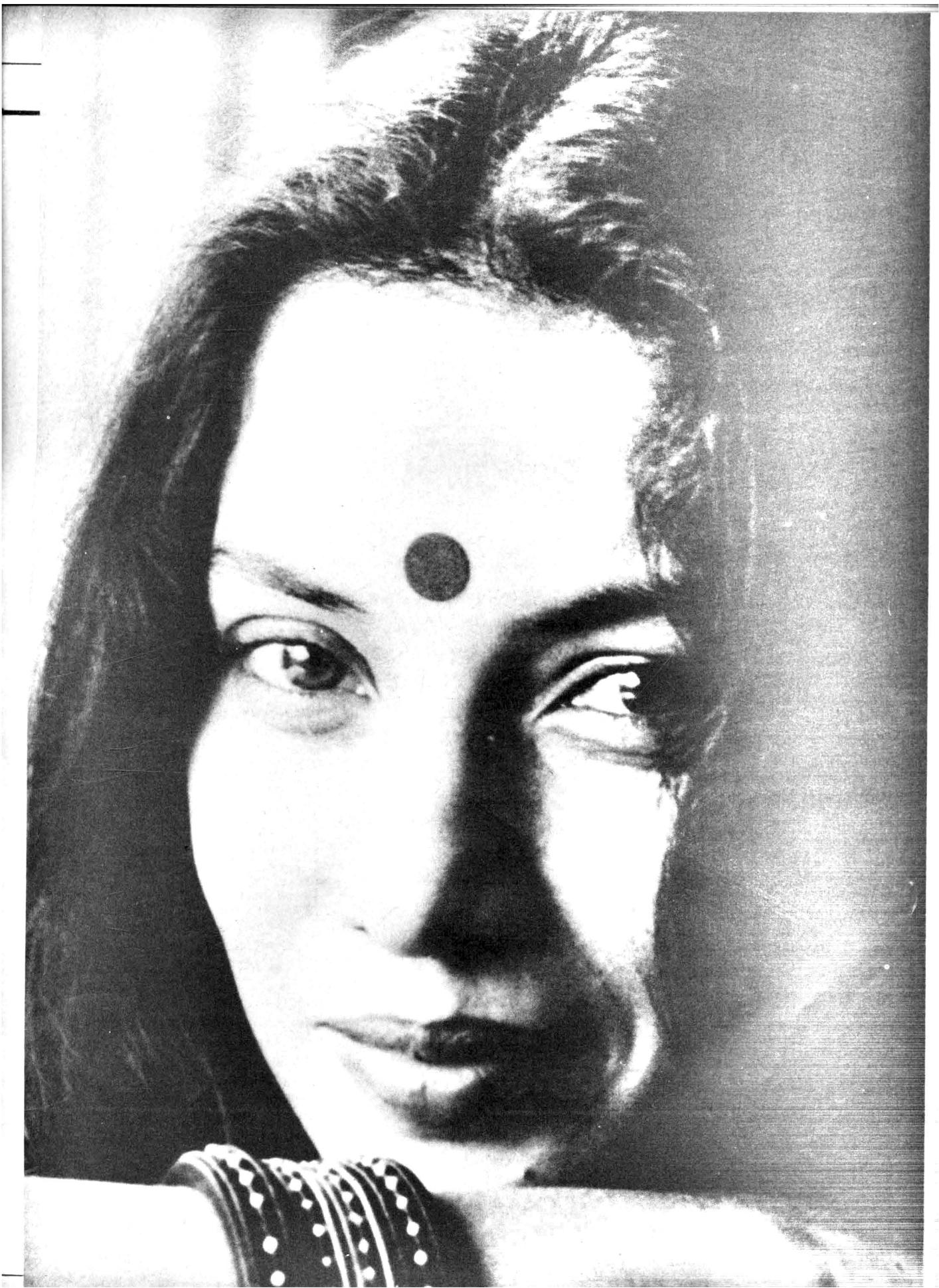
It is a strange kind of system in

the film industry — the 'commercial' industry — where it is taken for granted that the hero will interfere. He will decide who the music director is or who the leading lady is. But never will the leading lady be allowed to contribute. Her job is to look pretty and decorative.

I am not saying that I was the first to break this trend. But I couldn't have done it if I had not started out working with Shyam Benegal who expects total participation from the cast. And our relationship has progressed to the extent that in *Mandi*, we were almost like colleagues. Shyam could have turned around and said, "This girl! For heaven's sake, I brought her into the industry."

Do you interfere only to see what your role is like, or do you also object if you don't like the way the script treats women?

This is a very recent development. Over the last four years I have objected very firmly to this sort of



COVER STORY

thing. When I came to this industry, I had lots of films from the word go, and many of them revolved around me. And I thought this was great and that I was wonderful.

Till I realised that I had never given a thought to what the women I was playing were saying. I can't believe now that I agreed to act in films like *Thodisi Bewafai* where, at one point, the hero says, "Pati ke ghar ka dukh bhi, maike ke ghar ka sukh se achha hota hai," and ultimately the woman eats humble pie.

Now, I'd never given a thought to what this film was really saying. All I was thrilled about was that I was the central character. Then, when this realisation dawned on me, it came as a major shock.

Of course, it is difficult to take stands. In a sense, the actor's job is an interpretive one. It is not a creative one, like the director's or the writer's. But even so, there comes a time when you have to say enough is enough and take a stand.

That makes you sound a little like Jane Fonda.

No, no. Not at all. Not Jane Fonda. In fact it is strange that I haven't taken this stand earlier, considering the kind of family I come from. After all, my father is somebody who wrote a poem called *Aurat* 43 years ago, in which he said that women should walk shoulder to shoulder with men. Having come from a household like that, I should have seen this earlier.

Perhaps you were too immature to have seen this.

At one point I think we were fed by romantic notions. You know, one wants to merge with the identity of your man. Think how wonderful, to give up everything you call your own for the sake of somebody you love (laughs).

That's changed now, obviously.

Oh yes! You know, I was at a party in Delhi where a hostess introduced me to a visibly pregnant woman.

And I was told that she had had three daughters and was dying to have a son. And her husband came and started telling me in gory detail how he had tried every technique in the world to make sure it was a boy. I thought it was such a humiliating experience for the woman that I got really angry. I started screaming at him. I said, "How can you talk like that? What's wrong with a daughter?" and he said, "How will she continue the family name?" So I said, "What happens if it is a boy and he turns out to be a *goonda*?" And he said, "My training will see to that."

So I got angrier and I said, "Why can't you train your daughter so that she becomes an individual, like I

"I can't believe now that I agreed to act in a film like 'Thodisi Bewafai' in which the woman is placed in such a humiliating position. I'll never do that again."

am?" He said, "Your case is different." But it isn't really. It is my parents who made me what I am.

After this, there was a section of women at the party who attacked me so violently. They said, "We are perfectly happy in the worlds that we live in. Who are you people to come and disturb us like that?" And the greatest hostility was from the women. They want to shut their eyes.

To what extent do your films actually help change this?

I am totally convinced that they can.

Even films like Arth?

It was amazing. After *Arth*, there

were women walking into my home at all times and it wasn't a star-fan relationship at all. It was one woman to another. It was the most amazing experience of my life. And the power of the medium was brought home to me after *Arth*.

What kind of problems did they come to you with?

All kinds. Not just women whose husbands were having affairs. Women who wanted to work and their husbands wouldn't let them. And then, after that, when I started working in *Savvy*, it increased a hundredfold.

People take the printed word and the cinema screen very seriously. Once you take up a little stand and see the impact it has had, it becomes criminal not to take up other stands and to do some good.

Are you ready to take up stands such as these?

I would love to say 'yes', but that wouldn't be entirely honest. I haven't done very much. I would like to do a lot more.

I am selfish and I don't want to become a counselling body for women except through my performances. I don't want to set up a women's centre. As an actress, I'll do what I can through what I am best at.

But you would make films only to get a message across?

Absolutely. I would do films for free. I'm already doing it to an extent.

Have you inherited your commitment from your parents?

Yes. It stems from there. Unfortunately, I lost it along the way but now it is back.

It is funny, but sometimes I can stand back and look at my life as though it was a film script. You know, there is this actress who has no stands in life. She has talent but she doesn't know a thing about the world around her. Then, slowly, through the films she is doing, she becomes aware of the reality of

things. She goes to ghettos to research roles. She comes to terms with the characters she is playing.

And then, she can no longer cut herself off from the world around her. She is drawn out of her little world and into reality. My God, I'm getting goose-flesh telling you this. (Laughs.)

But I see myself as a character in a wonderful script that could be made — sometime. A script about an actress who is thrust into situations. Strange things are happening to me.

I am somebody who had no religious beliefs. Then Shanaz Sheikh — this girl who was given a divorce under Muslim Personal Law by her husband, without the presence of witnesses — came to me. You know, her husband didn't give her anything and threw her out of the house and she petitioned for a change in Muslim Personal Law. After she came to me, I was totally on her side. Day before yesterday, she called to say that the judgement had ruled that a woman was entitled to maintenance as well as *meher*. You know, what happens is that *meher* is an amount that is fixed, that you will get at the time of a divorce. And a lot of husbands tell their wives: "Maaf kardo *meher*." And the wives *maaf karo* it, in moments of weakness.

Yesterday, some strange women dressed up in burkas came to me and said, "How can you be on Shanaz Sheikh's side? You are a Muslim yourself." I said, "Can you not see that the judgement benefits women?" And they said, "No, now we'll all go to hell." And they were telling me that I, too, was in danger of being damned for life! It is frightening that even when a judgement goes in favour of women, they are conditioned to object to it.

Well, women as a rule tend to be scared of change. On TV, recently, Simi said it was men who agreed to infidelity and women who objected, and I thought she had got her statistics wrong.

I agree. But women are scared of



Shabana with Saryu Doshi: "Four national awards. That's amazing!"

change because they have never been placed in situations where they can assess their strengths.

I observe women a lot. When I'm playing characters of whom I have little personal experience — in films like *Mandi* or *Doosri Dulhan*, for instance — I rely on observations about women that I have picked up in everyday life. I am an extremely curious person by nature. The moment I meet you I'd like to go to your house, see how you handle your children — that sort of thing.

The other interesting thing about my job is that I get to meet so many different kinds of women. I try and study them before I play characters that are outside of my everyday life. But it can get uncomfortable. People talk about how I went to these *kothas* for *Mandi* or how I called three street-walkers to my house

when I was doing *Doosri Dulhan*. But once you do that, once you get people to talk about their lives, then a relationship of trust is created between these characters and you and it does impose its own limitations.

In the beginning, people are reluctant to talk about themselves. These three street-walkers I met for *Doosri Dulhan*, for instance, were very quiet to begin with but then they put their trust in me. Now, when you play a street-walker, there is a tendency to play stereotypes. But when you play stereotypes, you are not doing justice to the kind of full-blooded women they are. And once you've met them, you can't stamp on their trust and reduce them to stereotypes.

Perhaps, it is your reluctance to do

this that has got you these three national awards.

Four. Not three. Four awards.

Yes, but three consecutively.

Yes, that's amazing. It is amazing because the odds are against you, because of your having won twice before already. And they want to hold back and say, "Are yaar, come on, not her this year also." And a film like *Paar* is such a subdued sort of film that there are no dramatic highlights. It is difficult for an actress to call attention to herself.

Well, that is even more creditable.

You know what surprised me about *Paar* was that I went into it having done an extremely commercial Madras film and straight from Madras, I was flying to Calcutta for *Paar*. Normally, it takes a period of adjustment from the commercial cinema to something like *Paar*, but no, this time, I got right into it.

I'm glad you've brought up this subject of two levels because I've always been intrigued by the manner in which you manage what are really two quite distinct and successful careers in art and commercial cinema. In a sense, your father did this, too. He is the greatest poet of his generation and, at the same time, writes lyrics for Hindi films.

You know the parallel with my father had never struck me – but you are right. It is just so true. Because it was my father who helped raise the standards of lyrics in commercial cinema. Now, if I can do the same to the level of performances in commercial cinema, then that would be something.

Was it the atmosphere in the house that made you want to become an actress?

Yes. It was the ambience in the house. My mother was part of Prithvi Theatre and she would go away for three months at a time and I would be left with just my father. But it was okay. I didn't become neurotic. He was enough for me. I had a

totally non-traumatic childhood.

Except for one period, when I was about nine and I thought my mother had gone mad. She was doing a play and she had to appear for the state competition in Maharashtra and within a week she had to do that play. Now, my mother gets extremely involved. So she would be cooking and suddenly she would start screaming and shouting her lines. Or she would be taking the dhobi's *hisaab* and she'd start saying her lines.

I was extremely frightened. I thought she had gone mad. Fortunately, my father took me for a long walk on Juhu Beach and explained what had happened. But I was very upset. I said, "She

"It is absolutely understandable that Goldie Hawn can sit on a potty and still talk to her husband. It makes sense in the context of American society."

embarrasses me. Why does she do this?" But he told me, that if I cared for her, I had to help her. That he should say all this to a nine-year-old, and trust her, says a lot about my father.

My parents are amazing. My mother has a passion and an obsession for Indira Gandhi and my father is a staunch communist. It is a miracle that they have lived in the same house and not murdered each other.

Moving on to another subject, I wanted to ask you how you feel about censorship. Till I joined the Censor Board, I was very critical of the way they did things. Now I tend

to agree that many things that we find acceptable in foreign films are not acceptable in a Hindi movie.

I agree absolutely. One hundred per cent. One should try and see things in terms of the Indian ethos. It is absolutely understandable in a foreign film that Goldie Hawn is a wife and she is talking to her husband. Except that she's doing this while he's shaving and she's sitting nude on the potty and doing her business. That is totally understandable in American society. Both of them are in a hurry, both have to go to work, and this is the kind of thing that would take place. It does not appear vulgar and because she is so busy telling him something so intensely, you really get caught up with what she is saying and not with what she is doing.

But this scene would be horrific in an Indian film because I see that happening rarely. This doesn't happen here. People will say, "Shabana Azmi is being retrogressive." But I believe that you have to realise that some things don't happen in some societies.

That's an unusual stand for a 'progressive' actress to take. Do you have strong views on morality?

Yes. I'll give you an example. I've been fascinated by a subject. I know it'll make a spine-chilling, a really riveting film. The problem is that it deals with the relationship between a stepmother and son. Now, as it is, people have horrible notions about the stepmother, about how evil she is and the stepchild has all these fears about the stepmother.

Now, if you make a film like that, you reinforce all these notions. Even if you leave it as a question mark, people say, "Perhaps, *is mein kuchh sachaai hain.*" In spite of the fact that I know that this will make a very successful film, I will not touch this subject.

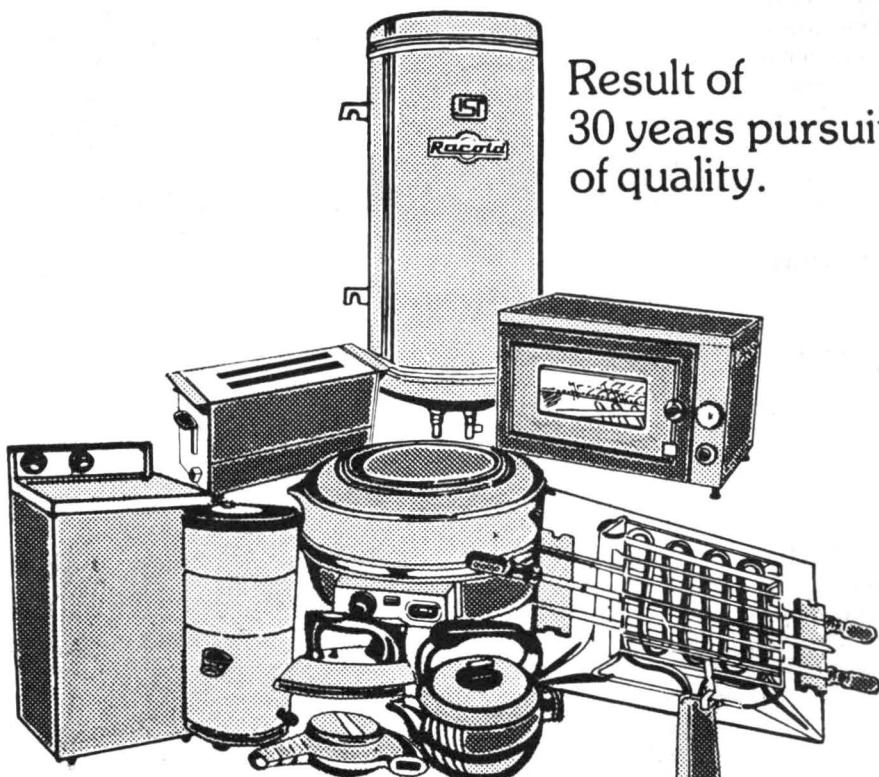
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and Deepa Gahlot of *Filmfare* saw it. She told me she was really upset by it. There's this man who goes round killing women because he's discovered that his mother was a whore. Deepa asked: "Why should the entire onus of morality be placed on the woman? Men can go around doing anything and they don't get killed in the bargain." That was the kind of feeling she got from the film.

Now, this was something that had never struck me. But I feel sometimes that when you start taking positions you tend to see everything through a keyhole. Whereas if you can see that it is a fun film and it is keeping your interest at one particular level, then you would see that it isn't really saying that he was right to kill all those women.

Do you find that films strongly influence you personally? I mean, have there been any films – Indian or foreign – that have had a great impact on you in the last ten years?

No, not individual films. Performances really. A body of Meryl Streep's work. A body of Liv Ullman's work. That is something that I'm impressed by. Otherwise, of the directors, Bergman, Kurosawa. Not Godard.

What about Indian cinema?
(Long pause.) What about it?

Any Indian director or actor who has had an impact on you?

Shyam Benegal has been a great influence in my life. If Shyam Benegal hadn't moulded me at the outset, I could have been very different. *Ankur* was very important in my life. I learned how to go to Festivals, what to order at restaurants, how to appreciate art. I think Shyam inculcated values in me at a very impressionable stage of my life. It is wonderful that he can now treat me like an equal.

How do you see your career over the next few years?

Well, what I want to do now – having won these awards – I now want to



"Strange things are happening to me."

do very, very little work. I want to do just a rare film. And do it for no other consideration except that I believe in what the film is saying. That in terms of performance, it gives me a chance to do what I've never done before. I don't want to care about the banner, the hero, the money, or even that is *mein* award *mil saktा hain*.

What'll you do the rest of the time?
At the moment, I'm on a long strike. *Hartal!* Since I've got married, I've had no time with my husband. I want to be lazy. I want to go on a long holiday.

Then, after that, I'll gather my energies together and work on a script.

Will you turn to direction?
Yes. Depending on how well I make

my first film, I can start making films full-time.

What about acting?

I'm not sure I want to act in a film that I direct myself. I don't really see the two as being related in any way.

Even if there is a role for you? Which there might be, if it is going to be a woman's film.

Umm... It becomes very difficult to direct a film and play the lead role at the same time. If it is a small role then it is okay but this is not the case if it is a major role.

My main interest is making the film, not directing it.

Is that how you see the future?
Yes. As a film-maker. ♦

A

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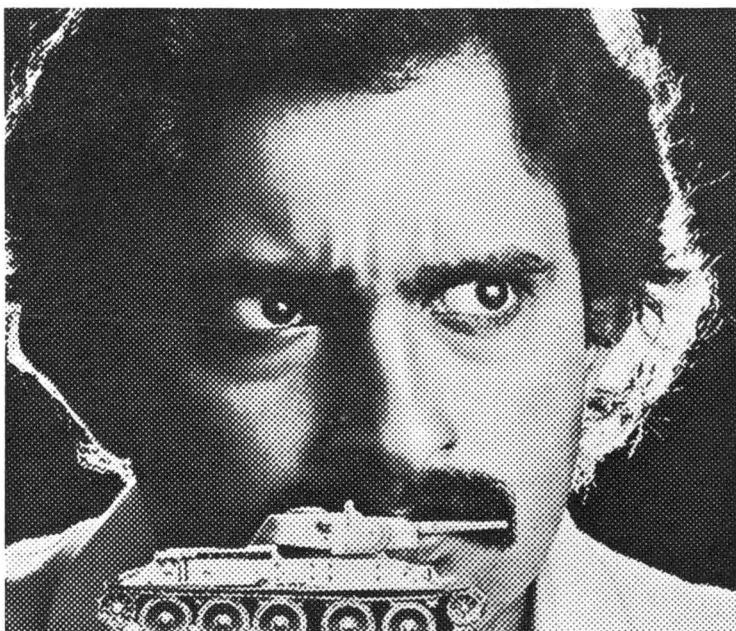
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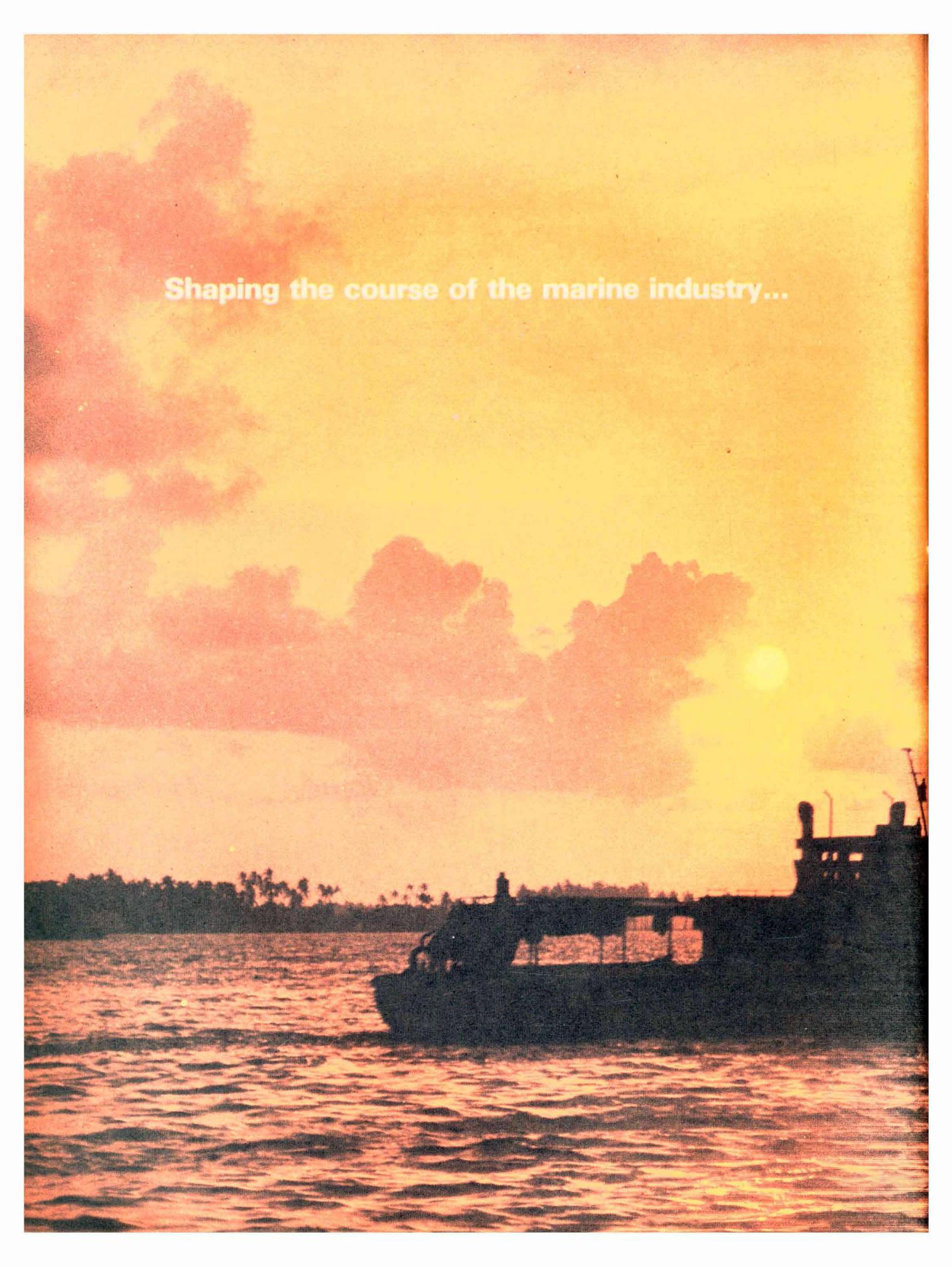
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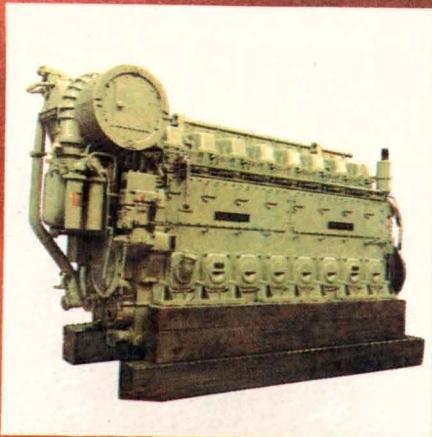
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A photograph of a large cargo ship sailing on the ocean at sunset. The sky is filled with warm, orange and yellow hues, with large, billowing clouds. The ship is silhouetted against the bright sky, showing its dark hull and the tops of its cargo containers. The water in the foreground is slightly choppy, reflecting the warm colors of the sunset.

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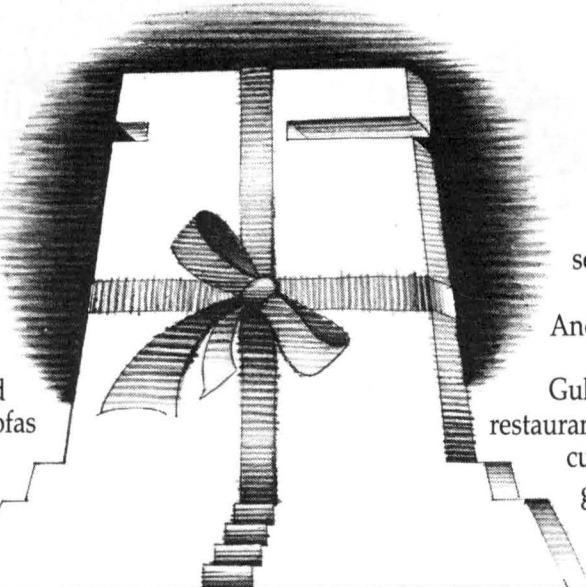
Fashioned from pure Italian marble, lit by exuberant, amber and white chandeliers, carpeted in soft olive striped with maroon and saffron. There are luxurious sofas to sink into, more than occasional alabaster tables, enlivened by lush greenery in gleaming brass planters.

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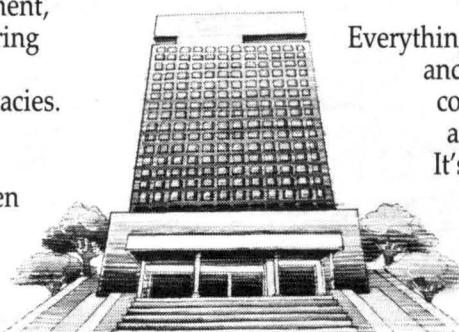
sunny Italy to you. Home-made pasta in a variety of flavours and shapes. More vegetarian selections, a greater choice of snacks and desserts. And, of course, Pizza as only a trattoria could make it. Gulzar, the Indian speciality restaurant, now offers the regional cuisines of India. With live ghazal and sitar performances in the evenings evoking the romance of a gracious past.

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INDIRA GANDHI: A Personal Memoir

There was an Indira Gandhi that only her closest friends saw. In this moving, anecdote-filled memoir, that side of Mrs Gandhi finally emerges.

Text : Pupul Jayakar Photographs : Raghu Rai

IN JANUARY 1966, Indira Gandhi was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India. In the midst of the wild euphoria and the enormous crowds that gathered to welcome her, I had a sudden insight into the future; the onerous burdens her Prime Ministership would entail and the darkness that loomed far ahead.

Ominous happenings coincided with her taking the oath of Prime Ministership — an Air-India plane crashed in the Alps and Homi Bhabha, an old friend and the most eminent scientist of India, was killed. During her first speech at the Red Fort on August 15, 1966, as she began to speak, first hesitantly, then reaching out to the crowds with emotion-charged words, an earthquake struck, rocking the rostrum. She told me later that she felt the railings give way and for an instant hesitated, bewildered, before resuming her appeal to the youth of the country.

I met her a few weeks after she took over as Prime Minister. It was the eve of her first session in Parliament as Prime Minister. I asked her what the three weeks of Prime Ministership meant to her. She responded: "Is it three weeks?" and then she added: "Parliament opens tomorrow and I am terrified." I could feel the underlying anxiety.

In the years that followed, in spite of political turmoil within her party, Indira blossomed. To counteract the insensitivity and ruthlessness of the political environment and the constant anguish of having to face famine, flood and increasing violence, she found sustenance in nature and in a close identification with the creative. Her senses, finely tuned, flowered and led her to 'that refining fire, where you must move in measure, like a dancer'. She visited exhibitions, quickened to dance and theatre, and soon developed a perceptive eye for fabrics, delighting in

colour, design and texture. Immaculately groomed, she was soon to be regarded as the most elegantly dressed woman in India. With impeccable taste, her palette too underwent a total change. She wore saris woven in deep, passionate colours of red, yellow, orange, rust and the delicate tones of old rose and water green. The colours reflected her changing mood and personality. Meeting and talking to artists and writers, philosophers and scientists, revived her, enriched her mind and provided regenerating sources of energy. She also travelled to distant tribal and rural communities or homesteads to participate in the festivities of the common people, holding hands with the women, wearing their costumes, laughing with them, joining in the circular dances of India, stepping in time to song and drum-beat, defining the energy-charged spaces.

IN HER RELATIONSHIP with sophisticated people she was ambiguous. Speaking of her relationship with people, she said: "The difficulty is, I move. Other people remain static. And, therefore, relationships drop away. Circumstances and environment are the challenges I respond to. I am no longer the same person, but the persons with whom I studied expect me to take over at the same point as my childhood responses, and when I cannot, they think I am proud." She hesitated, then said: "I have never tried to be different to what I am. I have been myself, while people are always trying to be something other than what they are."

I do not know whether she was aware of the coldness that could enter her eyes, the look of distance and the

This is extracted from Indira Gandhi by Pupul Jayakar and Raghu Rai with the permission of Lustre Books, the publishers.



"I am not an intellectual but am of the time."

tightening of the lines of the mouth, that froze people whom she wished to dismiss from her presence. She could be imperious, ambiguous and, at times, even ruthless. Till the early '70s, she had an explosive temper.

When faced with a major crisis demanding action, one could feel the brooding; she would draw all her faculties into herself; become absent; tighten her hold on her body; then, like the uncoiling of a spring, she would act.

I saw her the morning after bank nationalisation. Her timing and judgement had been perfect. I commented on it, saying: "It could not have been better timed if you had taken 14 years to come to this decision." She replied: "If I had taken 14 years, I would never have acted. They had pinned me to the wall. There were no alternatives."

In 1971, the situation in East Pakistan (now Bangla-

desh) exploded. Millions of refugees from East Pakistan fled to India, seeking security and survival. One could sense the menace that the refugee problem posed for India. I was to visit Europe and the United States in the summer of that year, and went to meet Indira. She spoke to me on several matters. Then, as I was leaving, said: "Many people will ask you as to what is happening in India. Tell them that Indira Gandhi, with all the authority of the Prime Minister of India, says that in one year from now, there will not be any refugees from East Bengal on Indian soil."

War was declared and, as the East Pakistan army faced defeat, the Seventh Fleet of the American navy sailed into the Indian Ocean. Rumours were rampant that they would interfere in the war or help the high officers of the Pakistani army in Dacca to escape. Addressing one of her

EXTRACT

most historic meetings at the Ram Lila grounds on December 12, 1971, Indira refused to be cowed down by this awesome threat to India's integrity. Facing a vast crowd at the Ram Lila grounds, she made a proud and impassioned speech, exhorting her countrymen to stand firm. During the course of her speech, her voice rose clear and resonant: "We will not yield. We will not retreat a single step."

Her passion and pride for India, her steadfast courage, her capacity to take decisions and act, electrified the nation. She emerged in victory a living legend, soon to be identified with the heroes of the race.

I was present in the galleries of the Lok Sabha when she, a little late, ran into the Lok Sabha, nimble, young, her face alight with the news she carried: "The West Pakistan forces have unconditionally surrendered in Bangladesh — Dacca is now the free capital of a free country."

A MONTH AFTER the victory in the war with Pakistan, I met Indira and found her in a relaxed and reminiscent mood. We discussed the need for a contemporary mind and she told me that for her, the present held the past and she felt that she had the capacity to take this perception and relate it to the future. "That is possibly why people misunderstand me." Of herself, she said: "I am not an intellectual, but am of the time. I feel the present, the sense of the contemporary. I feel I move with the flow of events." She also spoke of moments in her life when she had not acted, but something had acted through her. "That is why, in moments of crisis, when my back is to the wall, I let go, I do not know what operates. I listen, see all the facts and a solution emerges. I then examine the solution in the harsh light of reality. When I have to do a thing which is right, I do it — without concerning myself with the consequences to me." Although she said she was flexible in many matters, there were certain basics from which nothing could move her. When the need arose, she could be totally ruthless in her actions. She saw that this ruthlessness corroded vulnerability but, as Prime Minister, it was inevitable.

Such a need for ruthless action was soon to arise.

I was abroad when the Emergency was declared. With it, Indira entered a traumatic period of her life. Suspicious of advice, her life threatened, she refused to listen even to her friends who came to her with news of what was happening in the country.

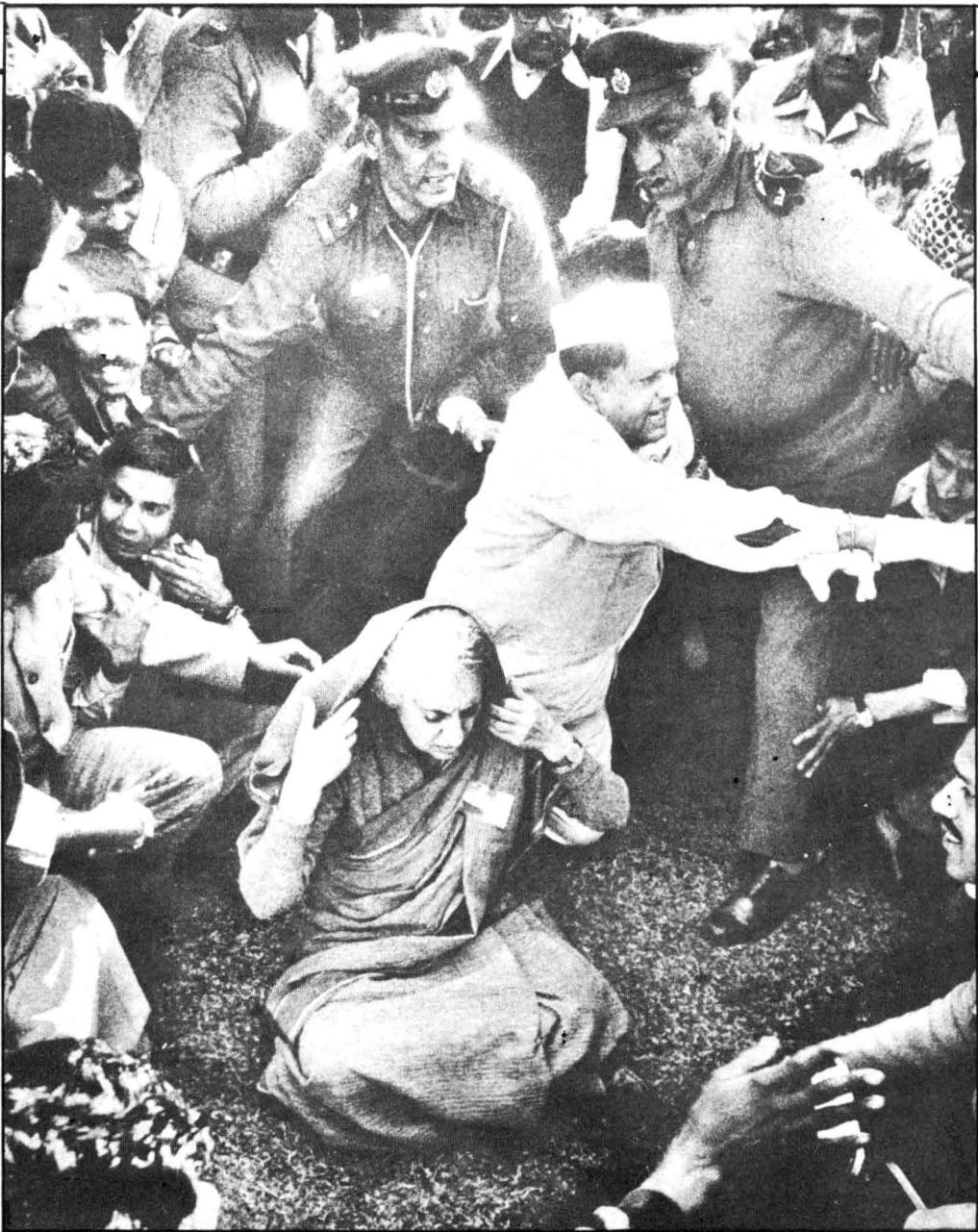
There was deep conflict within her, although she refused to acknowledge it. For a brief period, it had appeared that the Emergency would soon be over. Perhaps, she would have welcomed an end to the country's trauma; to the fear and spreading hatred.

But the news of the assassination of Mujibur Rehman and his family in Dacca reached her just before she was to address the country from the ramparts of the Red Fort on August 15, 1975. I had believed that she would, in that speech, declare that the Emergency would be lifted. But it

was not to be so. The assassinations in Bangladesh had awoken dormant suspicions. She was certain that a plot was afoot to destroy her and her family. Emergency measures, if anything, grew more stringent.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT of the Lok Sabha elections in 1977 created great ferment. It was rare in the 20th century for free elections to be called in a country that had witnessed a period of authoritarian rule. During the years of the Emergency, Indira had lost touch with the pulse beat of the nation. I met her two days after her last election tour. She looked grim and ten years older. She had travelled incessantly, addressing eight or nine meetings a day. She had been shouted down; had heard, for the first time, the angry voice of the people. She had seen the thinning of the crowds and people walk away from her meetings. On seeing me, she could not contain herself and said: "I cannot bear it any more. They have kept me a prisoner here within these four walls." She was acutely aware of her isolation, and premonitions of the disaster facing the party were arising within her. On March 29, as election results started trickling in, I heard that she was trailing Raj Narain in the historic Rae Bareli contest. I drove to 1, Safdarjang Road. The house was quiet. There were no large crowds at the entrance, no familiar sounds, even the dogs had retreated. R K Dhawan, her personal aide, looked grim and distraught. He took me to her peaceful grass-green and oatmeal sitting-room. Indira was alone. She looked quizzically at me, and seeing the distress on my face, got up and embraced me and said: "Pupul, I have lost." I had no words to say to her. For an instant, I sensed that she already knew what lay ahead. It was too devastating to even contemplate the future. We sat down together and were quiet. There was little place on this occasion to talk, or for chattering, agitated minds. Her face was taut, stoic. She had confronted the actuality of defeat, seen it as if it were her face in a mirror. Soon, however, the inner resources, the courage and the balance which enabled her to face a crisis, surfaced. This gave her immense dignity and strength. She sensed that in the months that lay ahead, she would face grave challenges, even harassment and humiliation.

As the days passed, the official perquisites that surround a Prime Minister's residence began to be removed. The secretarial staff, the numerous air-conditioners, the official servants, the gardeners and guards, vanished. The vast crowds of visitors, the rich and the well-to-do, who gathered every morning for *darshan* were soon to drift away. It was only the poor and the sorrowful who continued to come, to touch her feet or to bless her. By May, she had shifted to 12, Willingdon Crescent. I would visit her in the heat of a May evening and find her sitting on the verandah, alone, in the dark, looking out into the garden. I would sit with her, often in silence, share her sparse evening meal and leave. When their cook died, it was months



Mrs Gandhi's first public meeting post-1977: alone, hurt, unwanted.

before another cook was found. Sonia did the cooking and when she was away, Indira ate a boiled egg and a potato.

On days when the pressure became unbearable, she would suddenly drive in to my house. She had come, she would say, to sit quietly.

I resigned from my various positions in the government immediately after Indira's defeat. I had nowhere to live in the city and decided to return to Bombay. Indira was distressed that I was leaving. In the aftermath of the defeat, many members of the party started deserting her. She was very alone, deeply hurt, unwanted, not knowing what the future held for her. She was aware that the Janata government sought revenge and would go all out to humiliate and persecute her. She was apprehensive for Sanjay.

As she emerged from the darkness that had invaded her, her first act was to visit Vinoba Bhave. The old Gandhian pilgrim had supported her partially during the Emergency, and greeted her with warmth. Realising that she would sink into oblivion if she did not act decisively and regain the imagination of the people and recapture the headlines, she took the first opportunity, on hearing of the massacre of harijans in Belchi in Bihar, to visit this village in the wilderness. It was in the middle of the monsoon, and as she reached Bihar Shareef, she was warned not to proceed further. But, undaunted by the danger of floods and dacoits, she started her journey. At first she travelled by car, then, as all the paths had been washed away by torrential rain, she sat in a jeep pulled by a tractor; soon this, too, got stuck in deep mud. By now it was late evening,

EXTRACT

and villagers with torches had come out with *puris* and vegetable for her and the 500-odd people who were with her. The river was in flood and they begged her not to attempt to walk through the river on foot. But, with the eyes of India on her, she had to proceed. So she started walking, with her friends and the villagers who, in the last election, had voted against her. From the darkness, an elephant appeared and the mahout agreed to take her across the river. She mounted the elephant, sitting on a blanket, for it had no howdah and she had to keep her balance by holding the ropes, while the others had to wade through deep, muddied water. She reached Belchi late at night, having travelled eight miles on elephant back. Of the 500 people who had started the journey with her, only 25 remained. Indira visited the site of the massacre. The mourning relatives of the slaughtered harijans gathered around her. The elephant was made to sit in the mud, and the women swarmed over her, wailing. Aware that she no longer had any power to help them, she mourned with them. For a time, the orphans and the widows felt they had not been forgotten.

HER VICTORY in the by-election to the Lok Sabha from Chikmagalur, brought her back to Parliament. But the Janata party was in no mood to let things rest. A privilege motion against her had been raised and was pursued relentlessly in the Lok Sabha. I was in the galleries when, in an uproarious session, the subject was discussed. The outcome was predetermined by the massive majority enjoyed by the Janata party and the attitude of Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister. The final vote had yet to be taken when the house adjourned to meet the next morning. I was with Rajiv and Sonia when Indira returned from the Lok Sabha late in the evening. She looked weary but resilient and ready for her next encounter. I tried to cancel my ticket for Bombay, booked for the next morning. She stopped me, saying: "I have felt your love and a protective feeling from the time of my defeat. But don't waste money in cancelling your ticket. You cannot accompany me to where they intend to take me tomorrow."

The next morning, the Lok Sabha expelled her for breach of privilege and sent her to jail till the adjournment of the session, which was to take place ten days later.

1979 was a year of turmoil. The repressions and harassment that she and her family faced, forced her to the wall. She had to meet the challenge in an idiom her opponents understood and, once again, she took to the political battlefield. The Janata government had started breaking up, and shrewd and insightful politician that she was, she was quick to seize the moment. She toured the country vigorously, speaking at small and mammoth gatherings. At times she travelled 18 hours a day; her lunch consisted of roasted gram or peanuts bought on the roadside. The three years of severe persecution, of isolation, of seeing people

betray her out of fear or for gain, of being hunted and having to use all her resources to protect herself and her son, had left her greatly changed. Morarji Desai's government fell and Charan Singh became Prime Minister with the support of Indira's Congress. Elections were announced for January 1980. I was on the plane to Delhi when the election news came in. Indira had won with an overwhelming majority. I went to see her next morning. Barricades had been put up round 12, Willingdon Crescent and huge crowds were milling around. One of the old security guards saw me and took me in. She was at the telephone. I said: "What shall I say to you?" and she replied: "Don't say." Though she had known the tide was in her favour, the shock of victory took some time to register. She came into the gardens of 12, Willingdon Crescent, where vast crowds surged towards her. In their hands were garlands of marigolds and roses. Her sari covering her head, a *rudraksha* given to her by Anand Mai Ma, round her neck, she stretched out her hands to the people. The faint smile on her lips was enigmatic, her eyes were sombre, questioning herself and the crowd. She had seen euphoria before, she had also seen anger and turmoil; perhaps she wondered what lay ahead. She was again Prime Minister of the country, but the years in wilderness had left scars that were to inhibit her actions, arouse suspicions that had lain dormant and overshadow the insights that in her early years of Prime Ministership enabled her to act swiftly and with strength.

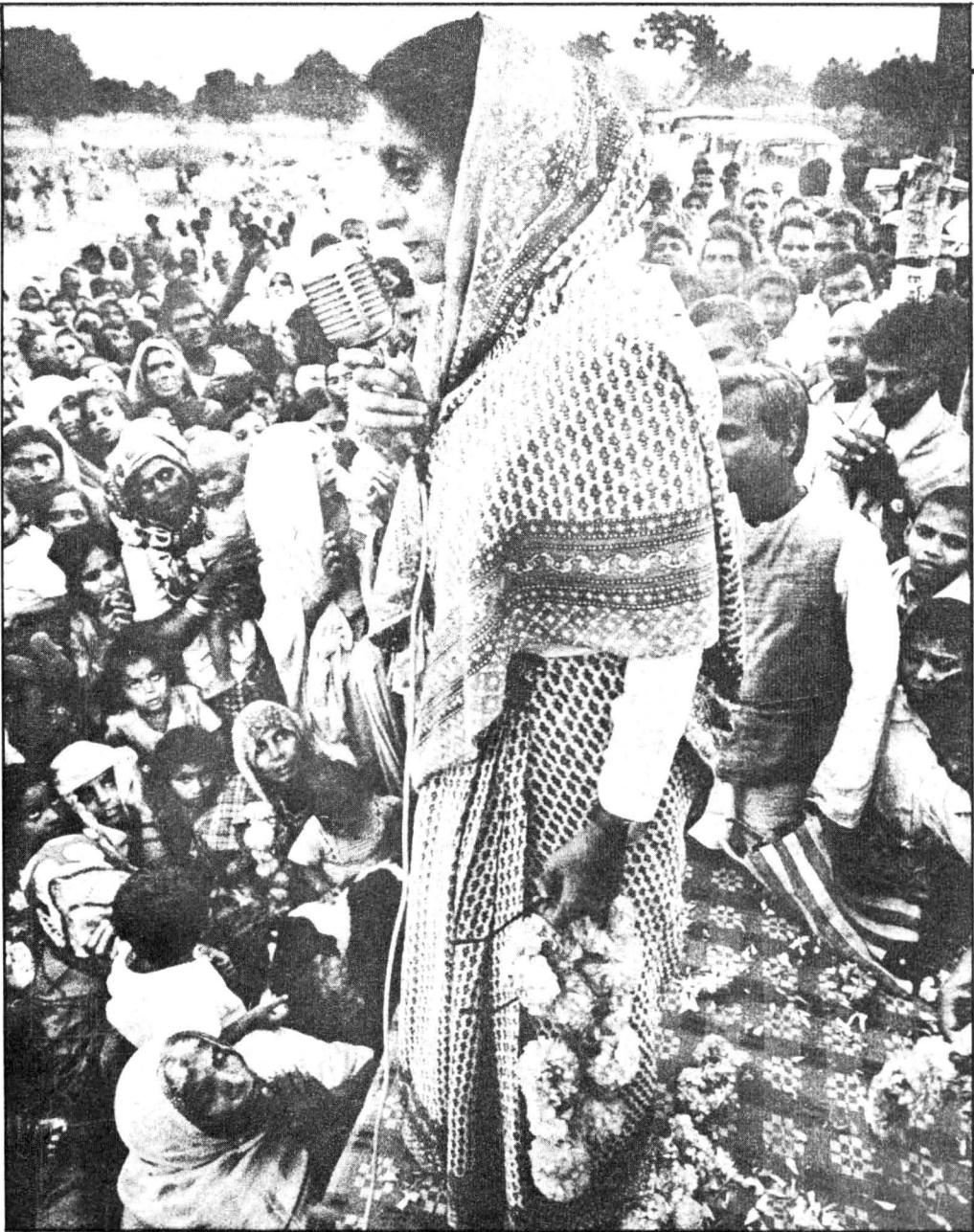
I spent a few days in Delhi, dining with the family, happy to see in Indira an ending of horrendous tensions, and with it, a relaxing of body and mind.

I was in Kashmir in June, staying with Governor L K Jha when the news came by phone that Sanjay had been involved in an aeroplane accident and had been critically hurt. I took the next flight to Delhi. Dr Karan Singh was on the plane and he told me that he had confirmation from Delhi that Sanjay was dead.

As the days passed, Indira's body, that had stood the shock of Sanjay's death with a straight back and dry eyes, started to express its anguish. The face aged, the eyes became stark, the hair was pushed back carelessly, the footsteps were heavy.

I returned from Bombay in July. Indira looked better. Letters forecasting all kinds of calamities continued to arrive. But she was in control of her anxieties. At dinner she was relaxed. We played word games with the children and she told her grandchildren about the attack by the raiders on Kashmir in 1947-48. She spoke of her accompanying her father to Srinagar. Jawaharlal Nehru talked to the Generals inside the main room. The situation was grave and they were discussing the airlifting of troops from India. She was sitting outside the room flanked by the Maharajah and Maharani of Kashmir. "Guess what the Maharajah was talking about?" she asked her grandchildren. "About guns," said Rahul, wide-eyed. "No, how to cook eggs," she said with a twinkle.

In March 1981, there is a note in my diary which says:



Addressing the women of Rae Bareli in 1980: the face had aged.

"There is a flowering in Indira. A new energy is revealing itself. She has come to life and is no longer old in mind or body. She does not droop physically or mentally. Her mind is very alert."

I had spoken to her of an energy that had liberated her from sorrow. She wrote back:

7.7.81

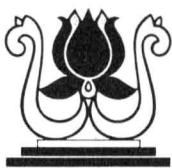
Pupul,

You let fall a phrase about my overcoming sorrow. One can overcome hate, envy, greed and other such negative and self-destroying emotions. But sorrow is something else. It can be neither forgotten, nor overcome. One has to learn to live with it, to absorb it into one's being, as a part of life.

IG

BY THE WINTER OF 1981, Indira had started once again to take infinite trouble over the house, selecting colours for curtains and upholstery; ordering menus, delighting in rare and delicately made food; she decided on the arrangements for formal dinner parties to see that the same dishes had not been repeated for the dignitary when he last ate at her table. She trained the servants to serve on table with efficiency and in silence, and would not entertain any slovenly attitudes on their part, even when she was dining alone.

A fund of anecdotes and the capacity to generate conversation tuned to the interests of her guests made her a thoughtful and gracious hostess. She could be very serious, she could also be quick and humorous in her repartees re-



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EXTRACT

counting stories against herself. I remember a dinner she gave for the ex-Queen of Greece. During the conversation, she related an incident where she gave her first public speech. She was at Oxford and had come down to London and Krishna Menon had arranged for her to speak at a function. Indira was very nervous and hesitant; Krishna Menon kept on prodding and prompting her; but she fumbled and could hardly speak coherently. Suddenly, from the audience, she heard a voice: "She doesn't talk, she squeaks." There were roars of laughter and the meeting ended.

My last meeting with Indira Gandhi was on the evening of October 26, 1984. She was to visit Srinagar the next morning.

She was intensely alive and attentive. Suddenly, she made a startling comment: "My first memories of childhood are of questioning why I was here on the earth. In the last few months I have started to feel that I have been here long enough."

I was taken aback and said: "Why do you speak in this manner?" She was silent.

A little later, she spoke of her death and said: "Papu used to love rivers, but I had told my two sons that when I die, my remains should be strewn on the Himalayan snows. I know Rajiv will remember — I am a daughter of the mountains, of the high Himalayas and that is my right resting place."

Narasimha Rao came in and, as I was leaving, her last words to me were: "Remember what I told you Papu, remember."

On the morning of October 31, around 9.40 a m, the telephone rang at my home and a voice said: "The Prime Minister has been shot." I dropped the phone and asked my nephew to drive me to the Prime Minister's house. As I approached the gate, barriers were going up and I was overwhelmed, for I realised that something terrible must have happened. They allowed me through. As I entered, I found the Prime Minister's house, so busy in the mornings, frozen in silence. I lingered, paralysed, then walked to the outer waiting-room to find Sharada Prasad, Information Ad-



A daughter of the mountains.

visor, in tears. He told me that the Prime Minister had been shot by her security guards and had been rushed to the hospital. From his expression, I gathered there was little hope.

I spent the whole day at the hospital with Sonia Gandhi. No words were spoken but the immense gravity of the situation was evident. At 2.30 p m, Indira Gandhi's death was announced. Rajiv Gandhi was to arrive at the hospital by 4.30 p m to be followed by the President shortly after. By now, the corridors were packed with people: hushed voices whispered in corners. From the street a dull moaning sound came through, a lament for something precious that had been lost. This was interrupted by explosive cries of anger. Indira Priyadarshini was brought out from the operation theatre at 8.30 p m. An old rose sari, a favourite, covered her head and body. The head, face and heart were untouched by the assassin's bullets; so were her hands and those

tender, beautiful feet. It was 10.30 at night before we brought her home.

She had fallen to the bullets, with her eyes open, facing her assassins. Some say that her two palms were raised in a gesture of greeting.

The next morning they carried her to Teen Murti House where she was to lie in state for two days.

It was on November 3, 1984, that she started her final journey; treading the ancient path of her ancestors, to a home from where there is no return.

To the chanting of hymns, they laid her on the fragrant funeral pyre. Rajiv, her son, holding a flaming torch, lit at the household fire, circled her body; seven times he circled, each time touching the flame to her forehead.

"Verily, this is the supreme austerity...."

As the flames leapt, past, present and future, woven on the warp and woof of space and time, became one. The essences which, at the moment of death, withdraw to the spaces of the heart, departed; as a swan alone, *Ek Hamsa*, flying swiftly, leaving no track as the sun was setting in the west.

THE CONTINUING TRAGEDY

Despite talk of rehabilitation, the victims of last year's anti-Sikh riots continue to suffer. JUGNU RAMASWAMY visited the refugee camps to file this report.

HOW DO I DRAW my house? My house was broken down," says a young boy simply, staring helplessly at a blank piece of paper. The other bright crayon drawings strewn around are disturbing reflections of the impressions made on these young minds by the barbarism they have witnessed. There are no turbans on these heads, the eyes have been gouged out and placed outside, the hair stands up on end, as if in terror — indelible memories of a black November when these children mutely watched their fathers being burnt alive, their mothers raped and humiliated.

Eight-year-old Avtar is dumb. He holds up his hand as he struggles to express that this symbol of Guru Nanak's protection is also the logo of the political party guilty of abetting the killers of Sikhs. When he first began coming to his new school a few days earlier, there was a tense urgency about his movements as he stopped the bus near a tree and frantically mimed a man being hit on the head, then hung from the tree. It was the tree where he had seen his father

jerk at the end of a rope until death eased his suffering.

"Will Rajiv's mother's soul get *shanti* when all the Sikhs are killed?" asks another child innocently, as he struggles to graft some method onto the communal madness that is sweeping through Delhi.

On a midsummer morning in late May, the campus of Delhi's Indraprastha College rang with the patter of running feet, and the shouts and laughter of these children discovering — some of them for the first time — the simple joys of a carefree childhood. Then they took the bus ride home to the grim reality of their uncertain existence. It is so easy to forget that for these children of Delhi's resettlement colonies, the riots last November were a point of grisly rupture in an already wretched and violent existence. Emergency's children, they are the legatees of Sanjay Gandhi's 'new' Delhi — a sprawling Congress (I) vote bank that stretches over miles of dusty trans-Jamuna resettlement colonies. Here, the 33 square yard tenements are separated by narrow streets and drunken brawls, bloody vendettas, pimps, drug pedlars, wife-beaters and school drop-outs are the stuff of a 'normal' childhood.

The school embodies the willingness of a handful of volunteers to undertake a journey into this cumulative nightmare. Both, the teachers and students, are an assorted bunch. Five teachers come from the local Shiv Niketan school; two are high school students from Springdales who work with the Music and Theatre Workshop run by Faisal Alkazi and Paramvir; and there is sociologist Dr Veena Das, seeking to establish bonds of trust and friendship with the children. Thirty-five children are from the Tilak Vihar widows' colony, 32 from Sultanpuri and 10 from adjoining areas, some of whom are not even riot victims. Their ages range from three to 12 years, and as many as 15 of them have never seen the inside of a school before. Several are unable to handle their new-found freedom and end up repeatedly drawing the national flag — a symbol of communal harmony that has been so brutally questioned in their own lives.

This school may be stymied by a lack of resources and professional expertise to deal with so vast a social problem; but it is still marvellous to observe how much a little love and patient understanding can accomplish. Allowed to give free rein to their creative expression through clay



Dumb child at Sultanpuri: the themes of their play parody real-life situations.

modelling, drawing, enacting plays and narrating stories they have conceived, the children are unusually cheerful and receptive, just five days after the school was started, on May 22. Brimming with new-found confidence, the themes of their impromptu plays parody their real-life situations. Sometimes, however, a disturbingly violent note is struck. Asked to weave a tale around the innocuous theme of *tindas* (a summer vegetable in Delhi), a child conjures up a boy consumed by hatred. When this boy went to school, he relates, his teacher asked him to draw *tindas*; so he killed her. When he returned home, his mother asked him to eat *tindas*; he killed her, too. Then he looked at his own face in the mirror and saw to his horror that he had begun to look like a *tinda* also; so he killed himself.

BUT IF THE PROGRESS has been heartening, it is also fragile. No help has come from the Delhi administration and the

radical departure made by this experiment is unlikely to be sustained, leave alone be replicated on a scale where it can become universally relevant. In all likelihood, by the time this article appears in print, the Rs 20,000 consolidated grant made by the Indian Express Relief Fund would have run out, the IP College premises would need to be vacated after the summer vacation, the voluntary teachers would have returned to their respective vocations, and the children would have been left to flounder in the mire just as they'd begun to breathe easier.

These, after all, were the privileged few; elsewhere, there are others. In Tilak Vihar, for instance, there is ten-year-old Pappi, a sprightly, impish creature, dressed in a gaily printed pink *salwar-kameez* and *dupatta*, flouncing along with her band of six — all of the same age. For the last three months, these children have unstintingly worked a steady nine-hour day — from eight a m to 5.30 p m with a half-hour for lunch — fashion-

ing a daily quota of 600 radio components for a nearby factory. They have brought home a precious Rs 150.

Or there is the despair of 16-year-old Manmeet Singh, a tenth standard school drop-out, sitting at the Bala Sahib *gurdwara*. His hair was shorn during the riots and, though it is slowly growing back, he can't bear the humiliation of going back to school. "They all jeer at us and call us *hijras*," he says.

These long-suffering few are the living embodiment of the truism that public memory is short; a society saturated with man-made disasters has quickly forgotten these people. It is hardly realised any more that of the 50,000 who were rendered homeless by the November riots, approximately 3,000 or some 516 families are still nursing futile hopes of being provided safe, alternative accommodation in as many as eight relief camps which exist in Delhi today. Spread all over the city, these camps are at: Farash Bazaar Police Station (108 families);

SPECIAL REPORT

Jehangirpuri (110); Hari Nagar (106); Subzi Mandi (50); as well as four *gurdwaras*: Nanak Piao (85); Bala Sahib (32); Rakabganj (15); and Moti Bagh (10).

The worst affected victims of the carnage are at Trilokpuri's Block 32, and not one has gone back to his former home yet. The most widely stated explanation for their adamance is a continued feeling of insecurity. In recent months, many of them have been mocked, abused and threatened by killers who continue to roam scot-free in the absence of an official inquiry into the riots that alone could have brought them to book. What is worse, the fears of those victims who were persuaded, against their will, to depose *in camera* before IGP Ved Marwah's inquiry into police complicity in the violence, came true when his report never saw the light of day. Many feel it was not a mere coincidence that when, on April 26, the Union government finally appointed Justice Ranganath Mishra to inquire into the riots, the announcement was timed to neatly supersede Marwah's findings which then became *sub judice*. While even police officers privately concede that Marwah's thorough and impartial labour had unearthed several unsavoury truths, Justice Mishra is yet to begin inquiring. In early July, over two months had elapsed since he was directed to do so, and the spoor of the murderers, who had killed over 2,500 and raped and maimed many more in a three-day orgy, was already over eight months old. According to his brief, from the day he begins, he has six months to finalise his findings.

Several camp inmates are also finding it impossible to rent houses; even the Sikhs among their former landlords are not willing to have them back. Some of them who owned plots of land have lost their property rights to illegal encroachers who have taken *de facto* possession of these plots. One such helpless individual is Sardar Dulah Singh who had built a 200 square yard house and a small *gurdwara* on a 400 square yard plot at Indira Enclave, Zilla Ghaziabad, close

to the Loni border.

Says his son: "Gujjars from the neighbourhood have broken the lock and occupied our house. The *gurdwara* has been partially dismantled and an *akhara* (wrestling pit) has been erected in its place. The Nishan Sahib (the sacred, saffron flag) has also been uprooted and replaced by a *trishul* stuck into the ground. We have all the necessary registration papers to prove our ownership but still the police take their side. After what happened to us earlier, my family is so terrified of the Gujjars that they don't even let me visit the place; that is why we are still at Nanak Piao." For all this, he can still laugh and quip; "Hindustan is all right; it has just been screwed up by Hindus and Sikhs alike."

IN MANY CASES, the 'Sikh' identity, which was so ruthlessly imposed on a diverse group of people, can be seen breaking up again as conflicting interests within this community itself reassert themselves. At Bala Sahib *gurdwara*, most of the families that remain have suffered not so many deaths as property losses. At one level, the strain and anxiety of being destitute causes several people to attack the poorer castes like the Labhanas, 'spurious Sikhs from Rajasthan who got away with compensation for deaths and injuries, while we got not a penny for our burnt and broken homes'. The struggle for survival sometimes brings out the worst in human beings; ironically, it also remains a powerful antidote to over-reaching communal identities.

The government has only succeeded in driving this wedge further by its sole concession to date on the housing issue. Early this year, it made an offer for widows only: they were offered possession of one-room slum tenements that had already been constructed by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in four-storeyed blocks at Tilak Vihar in West Delhi and two-storeyed blocks at Garhi in South Delhi. Of the total cost of Rs 28,000, Rs 1,000 had to be de-

posited as down payment and the remainder was to be paid in easy instalments over 15 years. There was, of course, a catch in small print. The deal would be clinched on an 'exchange basis' — widows would be allotted these flats only after they had surrendered to the government the right to sell their previous, self-owned property. The proceeds of such sales would be adjusted against their new homes and, if anything was left over, it would be reimbursed.

Immediately, this sleight of hand spelled a 50 per cent failure rate, as Minister of State, Ram Dulari Sinha, was forced to admit in Parliament. Of Delhi's 1,200 widows, only some 485 moved into Tilak Vihar and another 70-odd into Garhi. The reason is simple: on an average, most widows who are not from the resettlement colonies had previously owned plots measuring 100-200 square yards and above. The current market value of these would easily be Rs 2 lakh or more. (Even *jhuggi* dwellers in the trans-Jamuna colonies had enhanced the value of their 25-33 square yard houses by adding a floor after the son got married.) They can hardly be blamed for being unwilling to entrust these to a government they have learnt to mistrust, especially at a juncture when distress sales have depressed the value of Sikh property. For many widows, the money they hope to earn by bidding their time to sell for a good price, is the only financial security they can rely upon in an otherwise bleak future. To top it all, having lost their source of livelihood along with their husbands and sons, quite a few widows are unwilling to move into cramped rooms in multi-storeyed blocks which are impossible to convert into a shop-cum-residence.

Forty of the 92 widows who eventually went to Tilak Vihar from Nanaksar camp resisted till the end but the closure of the camp in mid-April left them no option. At the Hari Nagar camp however, 118 doughty widows formally registered themselves as the Guru Nanak Widows' Relief Society and began a



Widow and child back in their broken house: denied compensation and help.

fight for their rights. The association's President, Mrs Amarjit Kaur Sur, says bitterly: "When we were being killed, did anybody distinguish between tenants and landlords? Now, tenants can pay Rs 28,000 and move into their new lives, whereas the propertied are expected to forsake their rights over whatever little they possess."

NO DOUBT the wheels of government turn slowly but they also grind exceedingly oddly. According to one volunteer, who has been carefully following the course of events, one little known fact that has been buried under the fanfare surrounding the widow housing scheme is that, even in normal times, one per cent of the DDA's total housing is meant to be reserved for widows. What we are witnessing today is only five years' of untapped potential. In fact, the list of mindless government action would be inexhaustible. A former resident of Shahdara and an inmate of the Rakabganj camp, Avtar

Kaur, a widow in her 30s, was allotted a tenement at Garhi by the Senior District Magistrate at Tees Hazari; but her husband's death is yet to be certified by the SDM at Shahdara. (The latter says he forwarded the papers to the former who denies receipt of the same.) On the other hand, 48-year-old Satwant Kaur of 996, Janata Flats, Nandnagri, lost her husband eight months before the riots, which further claimed the lives of her two sons. Today, she has been left sitting at the Nanak Piao camp with three young daughters, and one five-year-old son. By a quirk of fate she has been denied the benefits of a widow, though her liabilities are no different.

From February 12 onwards, three protest rallies were organised by riot victims in the hope of inducing a sympathetic response from the government towards their genuine need for safe, alternate accommodation. Throughout, it was emphasised that they were not begging for charity; after all, they were willing to pay for

the housing. The first was a highly emotional protest *dharna*, when some 250 people gathered at the Boat Club on the India Gate lawns to relate their experiences. But by March 20, when a rally was taken from the Bhagat Singh bus terminus near the income-tax offices, to the DDA's Vikas Minar, their number had swelled to 500. But DDA Vice-Chairman Prem Kumar promptly retorted that he could take no independent initiative since he was only the 'executive authority' whose actions depended on the decisions of the ex-officio Chairman — the Lieutenant Governor.

Thereafter, on April 17, a 300-strong rally marched from Mori Gate bus terminus to Raj Niwas and earned an appointment for a personal meeting with Lieutenant Governor M M K Wali the following day. Thirteen victims and one volunteer met Wali on April 18 and, though Wali was not available to *Imprint* for comment, the volunteer's reports indicate that Wali stressed that the government had never before done so

SPECIAL REPORT

much for riot victims and the government could do no more.

On May 7, one representative of each camp signed an appeal which was despatched by registered post to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. A rally to the PM's house was tentatively planned for May 13 but it was overtaken by the Delhi bomb blasts. Nothing has been possible since then.

If these rallies were not as well-attended as they should have been, there are two possible explanations for this. In the first place, if the riot victims' insecurity continues to fuel pent-up resentment at the government's inaction, it has also begun to express itself in individual attempts to ingratiate themselves with the ruling Congress (I). These are the gut-level survival instincts of time-tested campaigners like old Sadora Singh who, in his prime, was both a Congress (I) worker and a CPI card holder. It is startling to find that for many who had openly indicted H K L Bhagat for his role in the riots, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs is no longer a pariah. Sitting on a cot outside Tilak Vihar, Sadora Singh says craftily: "We voted against him in the last Lok Sabha elections but then we went to congratulate him afterwards." Attempting a more convincing tack, he continues: "In our presence, when Bhagat remembered the deaths of Sukkha Singh (our Block 32 *pradhan* who was his associate) and his sons, he broke down and started crying. He told us that it was like his own sons had been killed. The killings were all Indira's son's doing; Bhagat had no part in these."

In the second place, the explanation is much simpler. Those who did make it to the rallies came on their own, travelling in DTC buses to reach the appointed places. But others, such as the Labhanas of Trilokpuri, have for so long lived in a Congress (I) pocket burrough (a network which is operated by the *pradhans* of this close-knit community), that they are utterly habituated to the culture of party rallies. When the organisers ignored a time-honoured tradition and did not send buses to pick them

up, most of them never bothered to stir out.

WHOEVER THOUGHT UP the idea of cramming 500 widows under tremendous psychological stress into a single colony populated entirely by them, must have had a really morbid notion of what rehabilitation is all about. There are obvious, attendant dangers of women in these circumstances being isolated from their relatives who can afford them neither protection nor help in sorting out their day-to-day problems.

The rehabilitation schemes have fared no better than such examples of 'protection' and for this, not only the government but the widows' Sikh 'benefactors' are responsible. Even here, the levels of deprivation vary according to the social class of the widows. On one side of a *katcha* road that divides the colony are the really poor Trilokpuri survivors in a cluster of some 150 houses. The clothes they wear tell a story; their life-style is not so ordered; their families have five children or more. As she hobbles around on crutches, her face lined with wrinkles, Jassi Bai is a typical example of this class of people, mostly Labhanas.

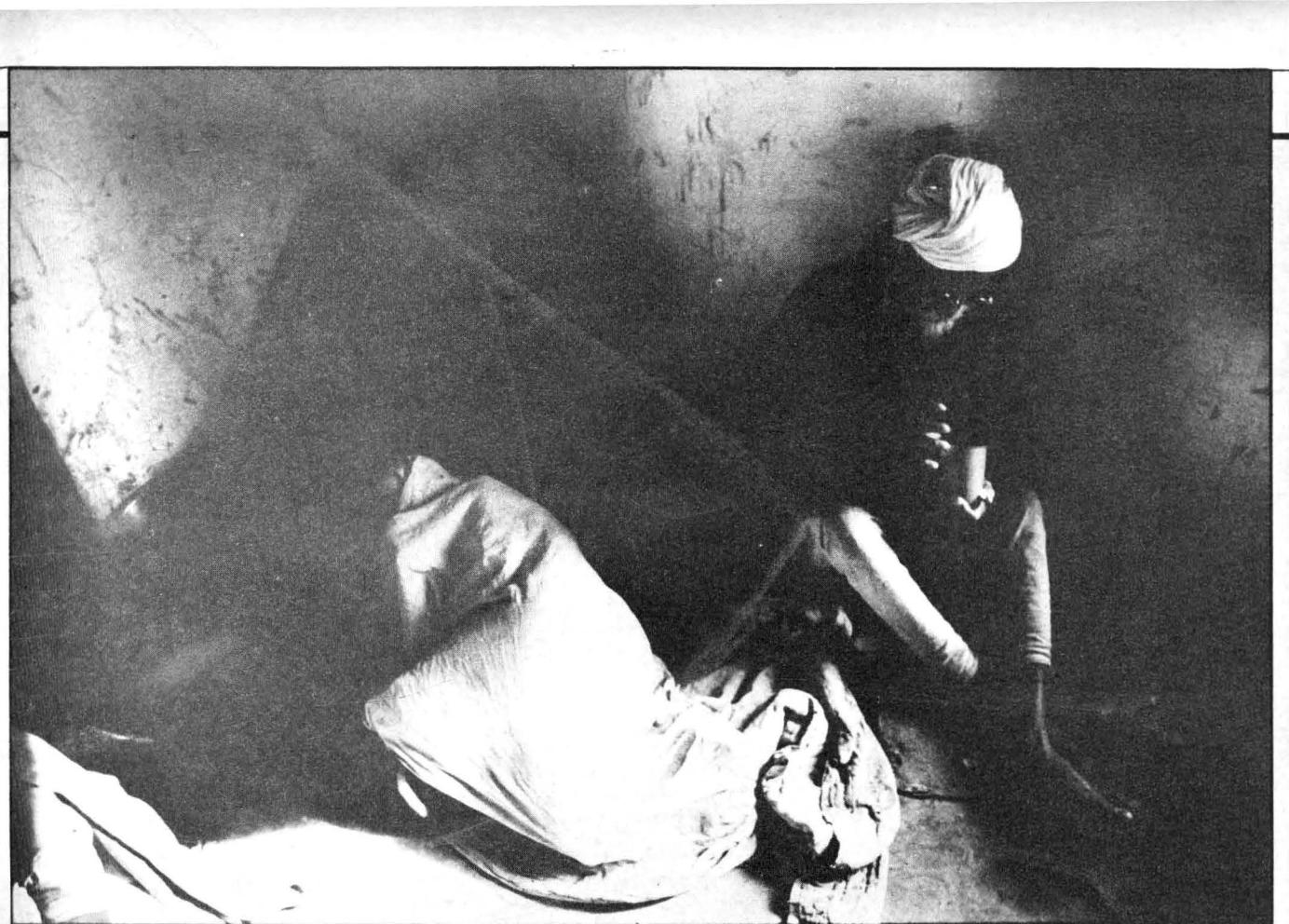
Her leg was amputated eight years ago; of her five boys, four died of small pox earlier; the last worked as a coolie at Nizamuddin station and was the mainstay of the family. He was in his early 20s when he was killed in November along with his aging father who used to hawk odds and ends on a cart. Of her daughters, two are married (one is already a widow) and three are still unmarried. They are expected to sustain themselves indefinitely on the Rs 20,000 received as death compensation; in addition, the SGPC pays each widow a monthly pension of Rs 250 which can stop anytime. Meanwhile, Rs 28,000 still have to be paid for the house.

Things wouldn't have been so bleak if Jassi could have sent at least one daughter to the government's training-cum-production centre, which opened in February to learn

stitching and earn an additional Rs 200. But, for some bizarre official reason, the centre entertains only widows and not their dependants; since she couldn't go herself, her family lost out completely. But a body called the National Sikh Welfare Council had an alternative scheme for others like her. Four months ago, they started a *papad*-making unit; for this, the widows were given a princely Rs 2.50 per kilogram. Says Jassi: "Even with five members from two families working hard at it, we never managed to do more than two kilograms a day. In a whole month, only Rs 150 was earned; by then, all the 20-odd women had fallen ill and ended up spending the money on B Complex injections which cost Rs 10 each. Now no one does it any more." Incidentally, the market price of *papads* is around Rs 16 per kilogram.

Across the *katcha* path, not only are the more well-to-do families smaller (with two-three children, on an average) but the schemes are marginally better. For instance, Wings Exports involved some 20 houses, working an average of 20 days a month, in making cloth bags at Rs 2 per bag. Most families managed to produce approximately ten bags daily. Alternatively, there were pyjamas to be stitched at Rs 2.50 each or gowns at Rs 5 each. All widows, however, were fated to be cheap labour since the items came pre-cut and prevented any learning process from taking root. But some of these widows obviously have the resources to strike out on their own: a neat board on this side of the colony reads "Jasleen Tailors, Specialist, Gent Wears, Tilak Vihar".

As if all this were not enough, widows from the poorer, clannish communities like the Labhanas and the Sikligars are deeply resented by the *pradhans* whose word is law in these extended families. Says a volunteer: "For so long these *pradhans* have exploited these widows to draw attention and sympathy to themselves. When the widows were allotted houses, they tried to suppress allotment papers till they too were accommodated. But even this failed,



Refugees at Farash Bazaar camp: nursing futile hopes of being provided alternative accommodation.

and now they accuse these women of abandoning the community and running away." A typical example of this species is Trikotpuri *pradhan* Inder Singh at Farash Bazaar who is known to have forced some widows to sleep with him on the assurance of getting their compensation claims cleared soon.

THE SETTLEMENT of claims is as arbitrary as anything else. Until the official cut-off date of November 30, all claims were made on the stipulated R-1 forms and receipt numbers were given to the claimants. Subsequently, however, the receipts were withheld and, to date, the government has not given a single, clear-cut, written reply which stipulates the grounds for the rejection of any claim. While almost all death claims have been met, some 500 claims for injury or house damage are still pending. It seems that victims will have to be satisfied with Muslim League MP Banatwala's remark to a crestfallen volunteer:

"Even this much compensation is unprecedented and you should be satisfied. In the history of Hindu-Muslim riots, not more than six per cent of the victims have ever been compensated."

But the government's criminal indifference really becomes apparent in its treatment of cases of sexual assault. These cases have not even been treated on a par with ordinary fractures for purposes of compensation. Victims of gang rape, Taimi Bai and four other women in their 40s, were referred to Irwin Hospital by the Farash Bazaar camp but the doctors there deterred them from an examination by a graphic description of what this would involve: "We will have to push a hand into your vagina," they said. On November 5, at the Nanaksar camp, 35-year-old Niranjan Kaur was found passing blood in her urine. She had been ostracised even by her own relatives who declared that it was better if she died. On examination, a medical volunteer found that she had

not been raped; an iron rod had been shoved up her vagina, resulting in a tear and haemorrhage in the abdomen. A resident of Nandnagri, she had been stripped and paraded naked before being humiliated in this fashion.

Says a volunteer: "In Taimi's case, at least the claim form indicated gang rape. But Niranjan was shifted to St Stephen's Hospital around November 7, where she was treated without a medico-legal case being filed. When even doctors become unwilling to undertake court rounds, what do we do? Nevertheless, we took these up as test cases before the Lieutenant Governor, but while some hand injuries got Rs 2,000, these women were not even given Rs 5."

THE TRIBULATIONS of these riot victims are never-ending. On May 20, bombs exploded all over Delhi and opened a new chapter in their tale of victimisation. Early the next day, at three a m, ten 'suspected terrorists' were picked up

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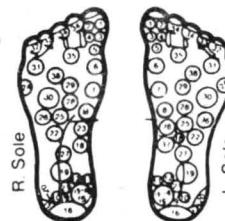


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SPECIAL REPORT

from the Bala Sahib *gurdwara* camp at Lajpat Nagar and taken to Srinivaspuri police station. They were released from police lock-up only six days later, at midnight, after signatures were taken on statements which detail their names, addresses and movements during the blasts. No explanation was offered.

At 6.45 a m on the same day, plainclothes policemen entered Nanak Piao *gurdwara* camp and picked up four youths at random. Three of them — Joginder Singh, Jaswant Singh and Rajvant Singh — were in their 20s; and Pritam Singh was just 18. Says Joginder: "I was still wet from a bath, wearing only my *katcha*, when they pushed us into a jeep and took us to the *thana*. Each one of us was photographed twice — front and profile — and independently asked detailed questions about our family histories. We were given no copies of the various papers they made us sign; in any case, they were in English, which none of us can read."

There was an even more bizarre sequel to this episode. Just outside Nanak Piao, there is a small tea shop run by three Sikh brothers — Amarjit, Manjit and Bhupinder. All through that day, the police allowed the Sikh owners to ply the four hungry detenus with tea and bread, while all relatives were denied entry into the *thana*. Suddenly, after seven p m, when the foursome was set free, this unsuspecting trio was shoved in instead. Says Amarjit: "Manjit was held back first and we followed at around 8.30 p m. At midnight, we were locked up after being made to remove our *kirpans*, *kadas*, turbans and money." Gradually, other familiar faces from the neighbourhood trickled in.

The following day was a Sunday and at two p m they were all handcuffed and taken amidst tight security to the ACP's special office, where they were declared held under Sections 107 and 151 of the IPC and remanded to Tihar camp jail. Over the next three days, according to Amarjit, they were joined by some 500 Sikhs who had, by and large, been charged



Riot victim: never-ending troubles.

under the same Sections. They were all released, eventually. But such harassment continues to this day.

Not only is the callousness of such random arrests inexplicable, but the police's guiding motive seems to have been to statistically demonstrate the efficiency of its counter-terrorist action. The callousness of the police is matched only by the indifference, even ill-concealed satisfaction, of some *gurdwara* authorities at the terror of the victimised families.

During the initial panic at Bala Sahib *gurdwara*, the head *granthi* is known to have slammed the door shut on the faces of women begging for help after shouting: "If you refuse to go home and continue to hang around here, you are bound to get arrested. What else do you expect?" Says an inmate of this camp: "The police must have come for the *granthis*. They are Akalis; if there are any *ugravadis* here, they must be amongst them. If the SGPC had wished it, the police would never have been allowed to enter the *gurdwara* but instead, they directed them to us. The SGPC wants to get rid of us because it is scared that an inquiry will expose the misappropriation of funds and gifts which are not allowed to reach us directly. For over a month, now, the *langar* has been reduced to only *dal* and *roti*. It is a dog's life."

The story is very much the same at Nanak Piao. Says an old woman: "When the police took my son away, it brought back visions of a crying mother clutching her handsome young son who was being dragged away by three policemen surrounded by a howling mob; his bloodied corpse was later thrown on the road. We have seen such things in November. So when Head *Granthi* Ishar Singh told me: 'What are you howling about? Your son has only been arrested, he isn't going to be shot,' I got angry and said to him: 'You are the one who should be shot.'"

These are little-known details grudgingly provided by a scared people who have been cut off from their only hope of succour by the votaries of their own religion. But what is worse, in Delhi's increasingly hostile communal environment, the 'other side' continues to regard them as potential killers and their homes in the many, fortress-like *gurdwaras* — surrounded by high walls built after the riots — as the nesting grounds of terrorism. Yet, as early as the third week of November, a volunteer working at Rakabganj *gurdwara* was asked by Sucha Singh, General Secretary, Delhi SGPC: "Who are you helping? They are thieves who sit on the railway station and beg. They have no real claims to make since they had no property." On the bitterly cold night of December 31, the same volunteer saw a family's trunks being thrown out after its members were given Rs 20 to fend for themselves. That night, this volunteer unsuccessfully ran from one newspaper office to another, trying to rouse the media into action. But even sympathetic reporters, tired of crusading for the victims' cause, were unwilling to complicate matters further by exposing the callousness of Sikh towards Sikh.

Who can really answer Jassi Bai of Tilak Vihar when she cries out: "Babuji, he was my only surviving son. I reared him with such difficulty and now Delhi has swallowed him."

ON THE FENCE

Will he or won't he? As Sharad Pawar keeps India guessing, AMRITA SHAH argues that the mystery is essential to Pawar's style.

Sharad Pawar foresees the unification of all Congressmen.

— May 2, Pune, 1981

Sharad Pawar denies merger: "I merely observed that within the next fifteen years the possibility of Congressmen now scattered among various political parties coming together cannot be ruled out."

— May 7, 1981

Sharad Pawar meets Rajiv twice.

— May 9, 1981

Sharad Pawar leaves for a three-week world 'study tour'.

— May 20, 1981

Sharad Pawar denies joining Congress (I).

— June 10, 1981

SHARAD PAWAR is fickle. But, at least he is consistently so. For, if one is to go by newspaper reports, what Sharad Pawar said and did in May/June 1985 is almost the same as what he said and did in May/June 1981.

The political situation in 1981 was, in many ways, similar to the one at present. In 1980, the Congress (I) had swept the polls both at the Centre and in Maharashtra. Left with only 50 MLAs in the Maharashtra Assembly, Pawar was reduced from being a Chief Minister with national aspirations to a local Opposition leader.

Within the Congress (I), too, there had been changes. Sanjay Gandhi, who emphasised loyalty above all else, was dead. A new breed of advisors surrounded Rajiv Gandhi. They were looking for young blood, for men who would deliver results. The men around Pawar — like his lieutenant Govindrao Adik — told him that the Congress (I) needed somebody to put former Chief Minister A R Antulay in his place.

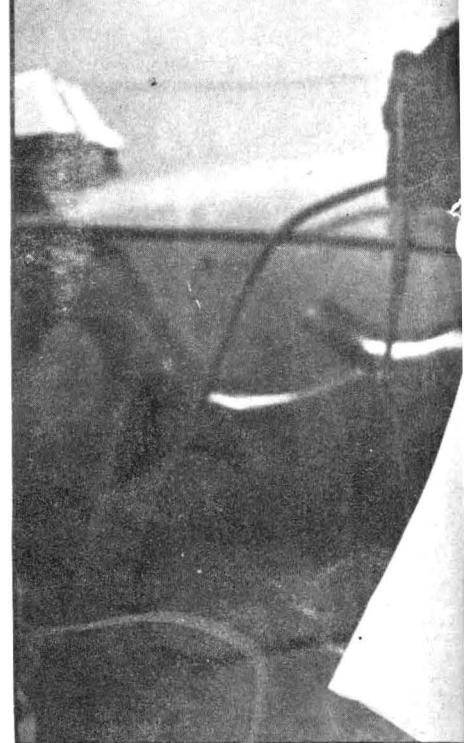
When Pawar began negotiations with Vijay Dhar, who was then Rajiv's chief aide, his return to the party seemed only a matter of time. Congress (I) strong man Vasantdada Patil was in exile; a new leader was needed.

Predictably, rumours of his comeback spread. It seemed logical. The

ruling party was in a mess in Maharashtra. Pawar seemed the only person capable of restoring order. The gains would have been mutual. Pawar did not deny the rumours. "I am reading and enjoying the rumours," was his only comment.

Rumour became certainty when Pawar, delivering the spring lectures in Pune, talked of the reunification of Congressmen.

The question was no longer "Will he join?" but "When?" Pawar was not around to provide the answer. He had left the country, ostensibly to observe agricultural research abroad.





By early June Pawar was back, denying the reports. "Pawar is a man, not a mouse," observed Rajni Patel. "He is a man of principle and his stand is praiseworthy."

For a 'principled politician', Pawar came amazingly close to defecting the following week. The suspense ended on June 10, when Pawar decided to stay while a large chunk of his party members walked over to the Congress (I).

FOUR YEARS LATER nothing has changed. Sharad Pawar is still making news of the same

kind.

The pattern, too, is familiar:

In May, following his defeat in the Assembly election, Pawar delivers the annual spring lectures in Pune. Significantly, he chooses to talk about 'Congress culture'. This culture 'alone', he observes, is capable of solving national problems, including the problem of Punjab. The speech makes headlines. The old controversy over the possibility of Pawar's defection to the Congress (I) is set in motion again.

His denial, issued a fortnight later, does not lessen the speculation. His

visits to Delhi are watched. With Vijay Dhar and Govindrao Adik out of the picture, Arun Singh and Suresh Kalmadi take their place. But, at the height of the controversy, Pawar is unavailable for comment. He is in London at the invitation of the British government.

The Janata and BJP, Pawar's partners in the combined front that contested the 1985 Assembly elections, are agitated by the rumours. The Congress (I) state unit is even more upset. Vasantrao Patil's supporters see Pawar's return and probable elevation to the chief ministership as an

injustice to Patil. "Where was the 'Congress culture' when he stabbed Vasantdada in the back to form a coalition with the Janata?" asks former state Home Minister Ramrao Adik angrily.

By July all doubts seem to have vanished. Only the question of dates remains. *Blitz*, quoting Congress (S) sources, asserts that Rajiv Gandhi will welcome Pawar to the Congress (I) on August 9, or October 2 or, latest, December 28.

But, as political columnist Janardan Thakur points out, Sharad Pawar's homecoming will not be an earth-shaking event. After all, why should the re-entry of a local Opposition leader to a party with a three-fourths majority in Parliament be the focus of national attention?

THE ANSWER has more to do with style than substance. Pawar has always managed to turn every move of his into a minor national event. And as a result, he has always received publicity exceeding his importance.

His apparent indecision on the question of joining the Congress (I) – revived every year – has, of course, contributed largely towards keeping him in the news. But so have his periodic statements about forging Opposition unity.

The press has blown up his many publicity stunts. In November 1980, for instance, he led a crowd of farmers to Nagpur to press their demand for remunerative prices. The Maharashtra government tried to scuttle the march by arresting Pawar and 440 others but didn't succeed. Undaunted by the *Indian Express*, which denounced the *padayatra* as a 'march of opportunism', Pawar went on to stage his next spectacular – a cycle procession of unemployed youths from Pune to Bombay. And the following month he decided to lead another procession – of five lakh farmers – to the Boat Club in Delhi.

That Pawar has an excellent sense of drama does not, however, detract from his brilliant political career.

As the son of Govindrao Pawar,



**PAWAR HAS
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And the press has
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publicity stunts.**

Sharad Pawar was an influential person in the Baramati district of Pune. His father was not only a leading progressive farmer in the area but also one of the founders of a co-operative sugar factory at Sansar near Baramati.

At 20, when Pawar graduated from the Poona Commerce College, Y B Chavan chose him to run the Youth Wing of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC). Pawar's speedy rise in Maharashtra politics is partly attributable to Chavan's patronage. In fact, former MPCC (I) President, N K Tirpude, once referred to him scornfully as 'Chavan's Sanjay'.

In 1967, the 27-year-old Pawar became an MLA. In 1972, he was made a minister of state and by 1974, he was inducted into the Maharashtra Cabinet. As minister he held various portfolios, including Agriculture, Development, Home, Industries and Labour.

By 1978, he was Chief Minister of the first non-Congress ministry in Maharashtra. And he was only 40 years old at the time.

Unfortunately, the unsavoury manner in which he became Chief Minister has not been forgotten.

In 1978, at the time of the Assembly elections, the Congress had split and Maratha leaders like Vasantrao Patil, Sharad Pawar and Chavan were opposing the Indira faction. None of the parties got a clear majority and the two factions of the Congress formed a coalition government under Vasantrao Patil. Having denounced the Congress (I) as a group which supported 'atrocities perpetuated during the Emergency', Pawar, as Minister for Industries and Labour in the new ministry, was forced to explain his position. "A coalition is not a merger," he said defensively.

But he was not believed. Rumours of an imminent Congress-Congress (I) merger continued to flourish. And subsequently, Madhu Limaye's offer of a Congress-Janata coalition gave rise to fresh rumours.

Pawar struck out on both sides. While persisting in his attacks on the Congress (I), he maintained that Limaye was 'day-dreaming' if he hoped for a Congress-Janata coalition in the state.

But obviously, Pawar approved of Limaye's day-dreams. For, on July 17, he toppled the Vasantdada ministry and formed a government with 40 Congress MLAs, and legislators from the Janata, Peasants and Workers Party and others.

The Congress Working Committee expelled Pawar. Y B Chavan remained silent throughout, but was said to be hurt by the betrayal. Pawar achieved his ambition of becoming Chief Minister, but his credibility was irretrievably lost.

In 1980, Mrs Gandhi returned to power, dissolved the Maharashtra Assembly and held elections. Pawar's party (the Progressive Democratic Front or PDF) got only 50 of the 288 seats.

The results were a blow to Pawar's ambitions. Three years later, in an interview with the *Indian Express*, he maintained that the PDF lost in 1980 because of infighting in the Janata

PROFILE

party. "That most of the MLAs elected on my party's ticket are not with us any more is something else," he added bitterly. Pawar had reason to be upset. For by 1983, three-fourths of his MLAs had defected to the Congress (I).

As the anti-Indira forces thinned, Pawar had rejoined the non-Indira Congress (U) — the same party that had once expelled him for breaking up its ministry. But it was a shambolic party. Senior leaders like Vasantdada Patil had long returned — cap in hand — to Mrs Gandhi and even Pawar's mentor, Y B Chavan, was begging to join the Congress (I).

The President, Devraj Urs, quit in 1981, when he wasn't allowed to merge with the Opposition. Partymen in the North had defected to the Congress (I). The Orissa unit crossed over to the Janata. Several workers in Karnataka left with Urs to form the Kranti Ranga while others joined the Congress (I).

Pawar took over as President of an emaciated Congress (U) or Congress (S) as it came to be called. Having achieved national eminence, however illusory, Pawar clung to it. He talked of Opposition unity and continued criticising Mrs Gandhi, particularly on the subjects of Assam and Punjab.

But, realising that his strength lay in Maharashtra, he concentrated on preparing for the next Assembly elections.

In the 1984 Parliamentary elections he surprised many by winning his seat — with the second highest number of votes in the country — while major national Opposition leaders lost theirs. But considering his strong hold over his constituency, Baramati, his success was not really surprising. The real test lay in the Assembly elections which would reveal Pawar's hold over Maharashtra.

And even though Pawar had forged a combined front with Opposition parties such as the BJP, Janata and others, his prospects in a state where the Congress (I) had swept 40 of the 48 Parliamentary seats seemed very dim.



PAWAR'S strategy went wrong when the Congress (S) failed to win power in Maharashtra. Now, he was back to square one again.

BEFORE the Assembly elections in 1985, Pawar personally campaigned in various parts of the state. He addressed nearly 200 meetings in 135 constituencies. He was so busy soliciting votes for others that he didn't visit his own constituency till three days before the actual polling date.

His confidence was not unfounded. For weeks before the elections, the little township and its surrounding villages had been converted into a battlefield. The war was mainly verbal. Rickshaws with Congress (S) flags zipped around, dodging campaigners in bullock-carts. Amplified voices sang Sharad Rao's praises. A large photograph of Indira Gandhi and a smaller one of Rajiv Gandhi dominated the market-place, incongruous in what was clearly Pawar's domain.

Men, women and children — many from outlying villages — streamed into the massive clearing where Pawar was to address his first public meeting in Baramati. When Pawar arrived inconspicuously, in a white Ambassa-

dor, the crowds had swelled.

Standing between two full-length portraits of himself, Sharad Pawar spoke softly but clearly. The crowd listened attentively as he promised to improve the lot of the farmer; laughed as he joked about Rajiv Gandhi solving the people's problems from the air; and cheered as he modestly described how the Opposition parties had chosen him to lead the front.

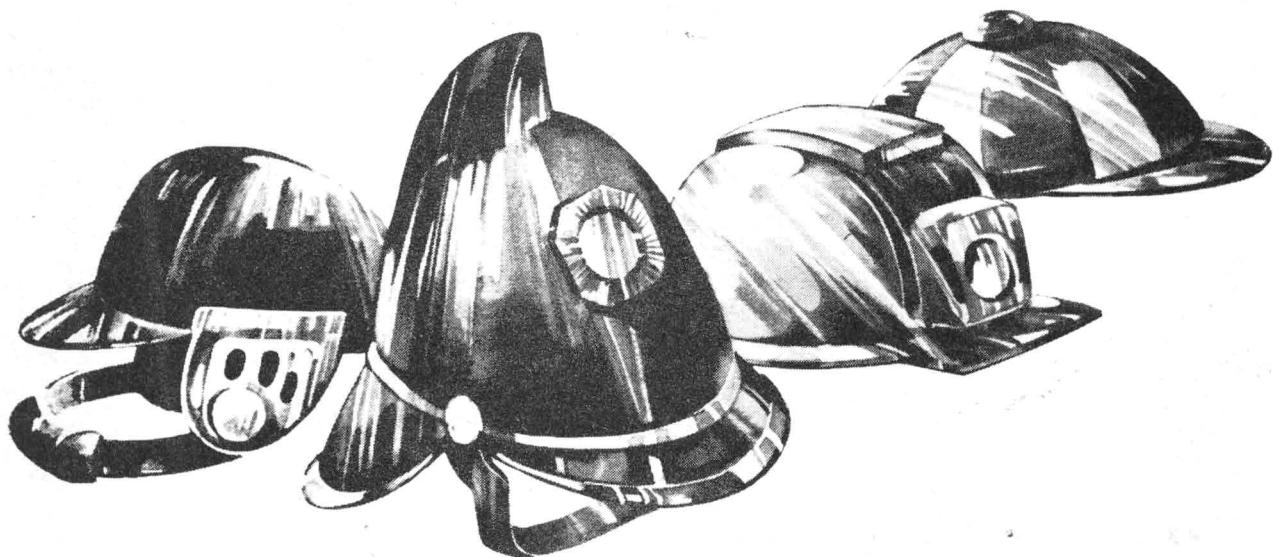
As Pawar finished, the audience surged forward. The portly politician, his white *kurta-pyjama* covered with dust, was almost thrown into the car. People ran alongside, flinging flowers and purses into the car. Eager hands reached out to touch Pawar. But Pawar, with obvious disgust, touched some dismissively, muttering "Leave, leave," to the driver in Marathi.

The election results proved that the adulation for Pawar was not restricted to Baramati. The Progressive Democratic Front did well, capturing 104 of the 288 Assembly seats. But Pawar had hoped for a majority. And with the passing of the Anti-Defection Bill, Pawar was faced with the prospect of another five-year term out of power. In the circumstances, talk of Sharad Pawar's return to the Congress (I) was not at all unexpected. As Ramrao Adik observed: "He can't live without power for long."

BUT, for the old residents of Baramati, all this doesn't matter. They still remember Pawar as a little boy playing *kho-kho* and *kabbadi* in the fields, who went on to become Chief Minister. And Pawar obviously remembers them, for it is mainly through his efforts that percolation tanks were set up in the drought-prone district.

Pawar is, however, as comfortable campaigning on the dusty roads of Maharashtra as he is in his large well-furnished flat on Bombay's Peddar Road. He is constantly on the move. Only the destinations vary: he could be going to Sholapur one day and flying halfway across the world the next.

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He is known to be an efficient administrator and his attitude, in many ways, is notably un-traditional. "His thinking is modern," observes Bakul Patel, wife of his former associate, the late Rajni Patel. "He has seen people falling at politicians' feet and doesn't like it." This much is obvious from Pawar's lack of enthusiasm at public meetings.

WHEN SHARAD PAWAR entered politics it was widely assumed that he would follow in Y B Chavan's footsteps. Certainly there are parallels between the two. Till Pawar became Chief Minister, Chavan was the youngest Chief Minister Maharashtra had had. Both were seen as Maratha leaders with an eye on the Centre. Chavan realised his ambition of achieving national eminence. Whether Pawar will do likewise has yet to be seen.

In 1983 Vasantrao Patil called him a 'jester' and claimed that his hold was restricted to Maharashtra. At 45, however, it is premature to speculate on Pawar's future. But so far, at least, he has failed to make a serious impact at the national level.

The Congress (U) which he inherited in 1981 soon dwindled in membership to become a Maharashtra-oriented party centred around Pawar. In the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress (S) managed to get four seats — but that was still more than the seats either the Janata or the BJP won. However, this does not mean that the influence of the Congress (S) surpasses that of those parties. If the number of seats was the criterion, the Telugu Desam emerged the strongest. Yet it does not mean that the Telugu Desam has any influence outside Andhra Pradesh. In fact, even the number of seats obtained by the Congress (S) was not really a reflection on the strength of the party. For, apart from Pawar — who won from Baramati — and another MP from Aurangabad, the other two seats were won in Kerala and Uttar Pradesh where the Congress (S) has no hold at all. Obviously, the candidates themselves and not the party, won



CONGRESS culture may not solve India's problems. But it can certainly solve Sharad Pawar's own problems and perhaps those of the Congress (I).

the election.

In many ways, however, Pawar is not like the usual Maharashtra politician. He does not appear to be casteist and is not chauvinistic. In 1974 he came out strongly against the Shiv Sena, warning them against forcing people to put up Marathi signboards.

It is not known if he has any strong political convictions for he has rarely aired his views. On situations like Punjab and Assam he had toed the Opposition's line, accusing the Congress (I) of mishandling both. In his Pune speech in May this year, he expressed his approval of Rajiv Gandhi's approach: "It appears to me to be a chance in favour of accommodation rather than confrontation, distinct from the rule of Indira Gandhi."

In 1983, he criticised Mrs Gandhi for veering away from Leftist policies. But earlier he had also denounced the Janata government for following 'Rightist policies'. That did not affect his loyalty to the party. Neither has his disapproval of the Fascist Jana

Sangh elements in the BJP been an obstacle to relations between the two. Clearly, Pawar rates expediency above political conviction. As he honestly admits: "Even today, there is a difference between our ideologies. Basically, they were fighting against the Congress (I) and it was necessary to unite."

His current importance stems mainly from the messy state of affairs in Maharashtra. The state unit of the Congress (I) has not thrown up any potential Chief Minister. Vasantrao Patil's age and ill-health weighed heavily against him. Patil's critical comments on the Congress (I) leadership, his role in creating the controversy over delinking Bombay from Maharashtra and his eventual resignation, all made up a calculated reaction to Pawar's intended defection.

However unexpected, his resignation did not lessen Pawar's significance. As a member of the audience at one of Pawar's meetings pointed out: "Pawar's victory is the need of the hour. He is the only person who could fill the vacuum left by the sudden death of Y B Chavan. Dada just cannot do it. He is getting old and his domestic handicap is just too heavy."

Pawar is aware of this sentiment. "There is no one," he says dismissively of potential leaders in the state wing of the Congress (I). But the former Chief Minister has higher ambitions. "I have been in Maharashtra politics for nearly 20 years," he says. "It's high time I moved to Parliament."

And he knows that the Opposition cannot do much for him. "The Opposition can provide viable alternatives in the states," he maintains, "but I doubt they can do so at the Centre."

The Congress (I) needs Pawar. And Pawar needs the Congress (I) even more. All things considered, perhaps it would not be such a bad idea if the two came together. One may not agree with Pawar when he says: "Only Congress culture can save the country." Still, it would certainly solve the problems the two are currently facing.

THE FEMALE ORGASM

Nobody talks about the female orgasm in India. Nor is much research conducted. In this feature, specially written for Imprint, DR R H DASTUR and COOMI CHINOY try and dispel the ignorance.

THE ORGASM is generally, amongst Indians, in particular, considered a male prerogative. But, contrary to the general impression, the female orgasm is not unheard of in India, and even finds a place in its ancient texts.

What is the orgasm that every woman pursues and desires? Orgasm, aptly, means 'the peak of pleasure'. Physically, an orgasm is a sudden release from sexual tension. While the lucky male almost always reaches a climax any time, anywhere — in a hotel room, in a car, on the bed or even under it — orgasm for most women is a luxury not attained at every sexual encounter. A woman can only reach her orgasm if she is properly aroused.

Professor Prakash Kothari, sexologist at KEM Hospital, Bombay, says that orgasm means different things to different women. The woman from Maharashtra calls it *sama-dhaan* (being settled); her Gujarati counterpart uses the word *santosh* (satisfaction); in Sind it is described as *shanti* (peace); and the woman from the *zopadpatti* out-smarts them all by saying: "I am intoxicated when I am with him!"

The much talked about orgasm is nothing new. As early as 400 AD the great sage Vatsyayana of *Kamasutra* fame, and Kalyanamalla, who wrote the *Anand Ranga* (1600 AD) described orgasm in the female. Both Vatsyayana and Kalyanamalla emphatically stated that 'sexual satisfaction in a woman is as important as in a man', and warned that the absence of it might impair her health.

Here is how Vatsyayana describes the female orgasm: "Lassitude of the body, closing of the eyes, absence of

bashfulness and greater pressure applied towards the man's pubis with that of her own, so as to effect closer contact. Just before she attains her final pleasure, she shakes her hands, perspires, bites her partner, prevents him from detaching the sexual connection or from rising and beats him (on the legs or buttocks) with her feet. If the man attains satisfaction (ejaculation) first, she would not let him rise, and would exceed the man in forwardness and want of restraint, contrary to her natural bashfulness."

"A man versed in the art of love can subjugate the gazelle-eyed one by pleasing her with his various accomplishments and making her finally attain her orgasm," says Kalyanamalla. "Towards the end of the sexual act, the woman, when she does secrete the coital fluid (attains orgasm) dances with pleasure, speaks too much and cries; she becomes deranged, her beautiful eyes become half-shut and she cannot bear any great exertion!"

Unfortunately, their teachings were forgotten with the advent of Manu, the law-giver who advocated the cult of male superiority. Manu's teachings were reinforced by the British who spread their repressed Victorian sexuality throughout India.

Sigmund Freud grudgingly permitted women to be orgasmic in penis-vagina intercourse but not during auto-manipulation (masturbation). He and his followers debated endlessly about the seat of the female orgasm. Was it the highly sensitive clitoris or the vagina? Freud maintained that little girls achieved orgasm by stimulating their clitoris manually or by friction of the thighs. When they grew up, they were expected to transfer their orgasm from the

Dr R H Dastur is the author of Sex Power. Coomi Chinoy is a freelance journalist.



clitoris to the vagina — an impossible feat. The woman who failed in this was dubbed 'vaginally frigid' even though she was perfectly normal and orgasmic during manual clitoral stimulation.

Freud presented his findings in 1910 in *Theory Of Sexuality*. Freud was supported in his belief by several psychoanalysts, notably Marie Bonaparte. She outdid the maestro by stating that a mature woman performed a biological somersault by transferring the orgasm from the clitoris to the vagina. Later, she conceded that women were capable of clitoral *and* vaginal orgasms. The few psychoanalysts who aired their doubts about Freud's theory were ridiculed.

SIX DECADES LATER, Dr William Masters and Dr Virginia Johnson sparked off the sexual revolution, giving women the green signal not only to be orgasmic but to enjoy multiple orgasms. Masters and Johnson proved scientifically that all female orgasms originate in the clitoris, and later spread to the vagina and pelvic musculature. The two researchers also stated in the *Western Journal Of Surgery, Gynaecology And Obstetrics* that the response of the pelvic organs to effective sexual stimulation occurs regardless of whether the clitoris is stimulated manually or during natural coitus or by mere stimulation of the breasts. In other words, whatever the source of stimulation, the woman's response is identical. They concluded that there is neither a pure clitoral nor a pure vaginal orgasm. Both respond to a predetermined pattern in sexual intercourse.

Simultaneous with Dr Masters's findings came the discovery of the birth control pill which removed the fear of unwanted pregnancy. These two events, coupled with the emancipation of women after the Second World War, led to the sexual revolution of the '60s. Women felt that orgasms were their birthright and demanded performance from their male partners! The balance was upset and the tremendous performance pressure on the male created a spate of sexual problems.

The battle over orgasms in the West did not, initially, involve India. But the publicity in the local media to the theories of Masters and Johnson, the proliferation of good books on sex, and the arrival of trained sexologists, has increased the awareness of sex among the upper classes. Sex education will gain momentum when the World Congress on Sexuality is held in the East for the first time in November 1985. Its theme is: 'Sexuality in a changing world'. However, the world has not changed very much for the common Indian woman in search of sexual freedom and fulfilment.

A WOMAN can reach her climax through automanipu-

lation, artificial aids like vibrators and sexual intercourse.

Shere Hite, the hairdresser-turned-sexologist, reports that of 1,844 American women interviewed, nearly 82 per cent masturbate, the favourite form being clitoral stimulation with the hand. Statistics for India are not available, but in a very limited study among 86 college girls done by our researchers, 60 per cent admitted to masturbation. Unlike their Western counterparts, most Indian girls had a guilt feeling about it.

The vibrator, an ordinary electric massager used since 1900 to relieve muscular aches, pains and cramps, shot into prominence in the '60s as an excellent erotic stimulator. Millions of women in the USA and Europe are using the mini massager over their mons and clitoral regions to produce orgasms. They claim that the vibrator is a perfect lover available at a moment's notice to stimulate the erogenous zones as long as one wants. However, the users are unanimous in their belief that the machine is no substitute for a man.

THE SEXUAL revolution of the '60s was sparked off by the discovery of the pill and the writings of Masters and Johnson. Orgasm now became a female birthright and men found it difficult to cope.

Vibrators are also used in unlocking inhibitions and guilt attitudes which prevent a female from reaching an orgasm. "In our desire to be good little girls," says Betty Dodson in *Liberating Masturbation*, "many of us learnt to cut off genital sensation. This negative conditioning can be reversed. The vibrator's strong, consistent stimulation allows a woman to achieve satisfaction very quickly, without the risk of becoming discouraged."

Many women, however, do not like the idea of reaching 'an artificial orgasm' either with a vibrator or manually. They believe that the right way to achieve an orgasm is only via penis-vagina intercourse. But if they can use face make-up to look attractive and domestic gadgets to ease

housework, why not a vibrator to become orgasmic? It is not habit forming, and nor is it the only means to achieve an orgasm. "Sometimes it is a good idea to begin with a vibrator, then, once aroused, to proceed to orgasm manually. That gives you more of a chance to savour the sensations that build up to a climax," says Dr Shirley Zussman, President of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counsellors and Therapists.

This raises the question: Is automanipulation harmful to women? Is there a difference in the quality of orgasm achieved by automanipulation and penis-vagina intercourse?

Self-stimulation or masturbation is not harmful to either sex. But if automanipulation is preferred to normal sex, then it is abnormal. The incidence of masturbation is higher among men as their sexual urge is more demanding, and concentrated (or confined) in the male organ. The *Hite Report*, which studied the sexual behaviour of over 3,000 women for four years, states that there is a difference in the quality of orgasm achieved by clitoral auto-

manipulation and penis-vagina intercourse. The clitoral orgasms were sharper and of a longer duration, while the orgasms during penis-vagina intercourse were softer and shorter. The sensation in the former is localised, intense and electrifying; in the latter, it is like a volcanic eruption giving one a feeling of being shaken.

THERE ARE IMPORTANT differences in arousal between the sexes. The visible and infallible proof of male arousal is the erect penis flying the flagpole of potency. By contrast, the early indication of arousal in the female is the invisible lubrication of the vagina. Secondly, arousal in the male is almost instantaneous in youth, takes a few seconds in middle age, and longer in the elderly. Arousal in the female takes ten to 15 minutes though some highly passionate women respond rapidly, without much foreplay.

It is important for men to realise that the orgasmic potential in a female is not stamped on her. In fact, she herself may be unaware of her powers. Often the so-called 'sex bombs' with pouting lips and swinging hips may be only mildly orgasmic or not orgasmic at all. On the other hand, some 'plain Janes' can be sexual surprises. There is a torrent of pent-up emotion in these not-sexy-to-look-at types, waiting to be ignited and exploded by a sensuous male.

Arousal in a female hinges on physical fitness; knowledge of her anatomy; her mental and emotional make-up; environmental factors; cultural conditioning; and skill of the male partner.

Physical fitness: "Nothing handicaps the chance of happiness so severely as ill-health, on either side," says Dr Van de Velde. "In turn, good sex results in vibrant health." Any debilitating or chronic disease interferes with a woman's response. Apart from organic disorders, stress and tiredness are enemies of relaxed sex.

Knowledge of her anatomy: The highly sensitive and sensuous clitoris is the primary organ of sexual pleasure in the female. Other erogenous zones are the lips, breasts, ears and the side of the neck. A woman's moods are considerably influenced by her ovarian hormones — oestrogen and progesterone — which regulate ovulation and her menstrual cycle. Oestrogen governs the first half of the cycle. At this time, the woman feels happy, relaxed and cheerful. During the second half, governed by progesterone, many women are tense, irritable and sometimes acutely depressed or even violent. "Doctor, my wife is a jewel for a few days," said Anand, an electronics engineer. "Then, inexplicably, she is irritable, quarrelsome and off sex. After a few days, she is her cheerful self again." She is suffering from premenstrual tension (PMT). Most women are responsive just before and during a period. Sex is permitted

if both partners do not mind the messing up of the linen. However, both the vulva and the vagina are more vulnerable to lacerations as well as infection during menstruation. It is also advisable to abstain when the discharge is copious or if the woman has a tendency to haemorrhage. The woman is least responsive immediately after a period.

Mental and emotional make-up: "There should be no mental blocks about sex," a lady patient of mine remarked. If the woman has a mental block due to an unpleasant incident such as a man forcibly trying to possess her, or a boss at the office pestering her about a date, a woman may not be aroused fully or at all.

Environment: makes or mars a woman's response. A quickie in the back seat of a car, in a hotel room or in the boss's office, does not bring stars to her eyes; just tears!

Cultural conditioning: shapes a woman's sexuality. If she is living in a society where sex is free, she will indulge in it without pangs of conscience. On the other hand, if she has grown up in a culture where sex is taboo, and even touching a male before marriage is unthinkable, she may develop a guilt complex which may affect her arousal.

Sexual skill of the male partner: "Very few Indian men know the art of arousing a woman," observed Monica, an advertising executive. "Most of them are clumsy and heavy-handed and just want to grab the breasts. They think they are peeling mangoes! As for intercourse, most of them are what the Americans call 'Slam-Bam-Thank-You-Ma'am' types and discharge in a few minutes."

The man's sexual skill plays a crucial role in a woman's fulfilment. She must be aroused gently and tenderly for a sufficient length of time in the early stages by her male partner to successfully reach a

climax. Unfortunately, most men are impatient to get in, and quick on the trigger, leaving their partners high and dry.

Sexologists Dr Helen Kaplan and Shere Hite have observed that only 30 per cent of American women reach orgasm during normal penis-vagina intercourse in the man-on-top position. In a limited study of 189 females in Bombay, hardly 15 per cent reached orgasm, but most became orgasmic sooner or later with manual clitoral stimulation.

THE RESEARCH of Masters and Johnson into the female orgasm has stoked the fertile imagination of many writers. If such writers are to be believed, even a seismograph would record shocks of mild intensity during the orgasmic experience! Unfortunately, a large number of women read such fantasies and watch them in the movies, and are deeply disappointed when such orgasms do not happen to them. For the majority of women, an orgasm is an extremely pleasurable event, though it is fleeting and has

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none of the components they sometimes hear of. The exceptions are a few passionate women who have violent orgasms when they wriggle, cry, scratch or even bite their male partners.

It is extremely difficult for a sexually aroused woman to accurately describe her feelings during orgasm. Dr Alfred Kinsey says: "The participant in a sexual relationship becomes physiologically incapacitated as an observer. Sexual arousal reduces one's capacity to see, to hear, to smell, to taste, or to feel with anything like normal acuity, and at the moment of orgasm one's sensory capacities may completely fail."

This difficulty in objectively reporting on the orgasm was overcome by direct observation in Masters' and Johnson's sex laboratory. It was a means of double-checking the statements of the participants.

The response differs from female to female. But it is a total body response with a sudden release of tension from extreme vasocongestion and muscle tension. Her facial expression appears painful and in agony. There is a marked contraction of the arms and extremities. The partner is clasped tightly and the muscles of the abdomen, buttocks and back are tautened to intensify the sexual tension and orgasmic release.

The onset of orgasm is heralded by involuntary contractions of the muscles of the vaginal wall, usually five to eight times, at intervals of 0.8 seconds. The total number of contractions and their intensity vary widely. Along with the vaginal contractions and contraction of the pelvic muscles, a few women also experience contractions of the rectal sphincter (the muscle guarding the opening of the rectal canal) and also the urethral sphincter. The clitoris, which is withdrawn during the pre-orgasmic stage, returns to its normal overhanging position. The vasocongestion in the breasts and areolae also disappears rapidly, making the nipples erect and prominent. The prominent nipples with the wrinkled areolae provide, to the male, visual evidence of his partner's climax. The heart rate goes up from 110 to 180 beats a minute. The systolic blood pressure shoots up by 30 to 80 mm of mercury, and the diastolic pressure by 20 to 40 mm of mercury. The breathing becomes more rapid, and the skin looks flushed after an orgasm. These changes, however, soon disappear.

These physiological changes occur irrespective of the mode of stimulation — automanipulation, mechanical manipulation with a vibrator or stimulation of the breasts. A word of warning: An orgasm in the laboratory may not necessarily happen in bed every time. Many Indian women compare their experiences to those of the lab subjects and feel let down. They overlook an important fact: The orgasms in the laboratory described by the researchers and publicised by the press took place during automani-

pulation, not penis-vagina intercourse.

Many women cannot feel the contractions during an orgasm, though their male partners can feel them during sex or with the finger in the vagina. A large number of women are inhibited because of their strict upbringing. In such cases, although the contractions occur, they block them from their conscious mind. However, Irving Singer in *Goals Of Human Sexuality* and other sexologists have described a type of orgasm which occurs without contractions and is normal for women. Hence the Masters and Johnson type of orgasm triggered off by clitoral stimulation is not the only type.

It is difficult to describe mental reactions during orgasms. Masters and Johnson have noted three distinct stages in the course of their research:

The woman feels a sense of suspense followed by a biting awareness beginning in the clitoral region, and radiating upwards to the pelvis. She then feels a sense of warmth in the pelvic organs, which spreads rapidly all over her body.

And the contractions of the vaginal wall give rise to a throbbing sensation which spreads to the pelvis, so that the pelvic muscles contract, giving rise to a feeling akin to heartbeats.

A WOMAN can easily and quickly reach the most intense orgasm with cunnilingus. Most women are highly stimulated by a genital kiss. However, unlike their Western counterparts, most Indian men are averse to oral sex.

The woman enjoys a greater variety of orgasmic experiences (in terms of intensity and duration) than a man. She may have a very mild and fleeting climax, or an overwhelming one. Dr Masters aptly calls a male orgasm 'a rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose sort of thing' whereas the female orgasm

goes all the way 'from poppies to orchids'.

There are many women who are quite content to lead an anorgasmic life. Several claim that having an orgasm is not as important as the whole feeling of being held close, touched, caressed and kissed by their partners. The female differs in this respect from the male for whom the main pleasure is centred in the orgasmic phase.

But women often complain that when they do not reach an orgasm they feel tense and irritable and experience a congested feeling. As an orgasm during penis-vagina intercourse is a rare event, it is better that the woman herself or, preferably, her partner, manually or orally stimulates her to orgasm.

Many chauvinistic males still feel that an orgasm is a male prerogative and are not bothered about their partners' pleasure. One Shere Hite correspondent has succinctly summed it up: "Whoever said an orgasm was not important for a woman must be a man, either a physician or a clergyman." ♦

**WHILE
researching my
book *Sex Power*
in 1983, we found
that an
overwhelming
majority of Indian
women (80 per
cent) much
preferred
cuddling and
caressing to
coitus.**

AIR-INDIA: CHAOS & CONFUSION

Infighting, petty charges, union unrest, delayed decisions and corruption — the list of Air-India's problems seems endless. Can the airline survive this internal chaos, asks SHIRIN MEHTA, or are things going to get worse?

No INDIAN public sector corporation receives the kind of media attention that Air-India has got used to. Over the last two months, after the crash of the *Emperor Kanishka*, media scrutiny has increased considerably. Questions are being asked about the causes of the crash (though these are difficult to ascertain), about the level of security on the airline's flights and, finally, about the manner in which Air-India is run.

Most Indians who have ever travelled abroad have an opinion about Air-India and, generally, this opinion is unfavourable. But despite the horror stories about mishandled baggage, indifferent inflight service and endless delays, Air-India is an airline with many inherent strengths. It is still profitable, employs one of India's best technical forces and can, if managed well, grow at a phenomenal rate.

At the same time, there can be no denying that in international terms, Air-India has lost its direction. The first of the Asian airlines to make its mark internationally, it has lost out, in terms of image, to the likes of Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines and Thai International. It is being seen, more and more, as a cattle-train for ethnic traffic, and is seen

less and less as a quality, world-class airline.

Part of the problem lies with Air-India's management. Despite firm denials from the management, it has become a victim of its own infighting. Senior managers tend to group themselves into camps and spend more time quarrelling with each other than planning for the future. The corporation has lost much of its initiative, and a babu-type bureaucratic culture has taken root. Charges of corruption and nepotism are traded freely between managers and the concept of accountability has yet to become a part of the airline's management ethos.

INFIGHTING

“EVERY organisation has differences within itself,” says Captain Dhruba Bose, Air-India's Managing Director. “But when it comes to the crunch we pull together. These differences do not really matter and the media tends to exaggerate them.”

Bose, who took over as Managing Director of Air-India from Raghu Raj on April 4, 1984, inherited a profitable airline (in the year ending March 1984, Air-India had recorded its highest-ever net profit — Rs 57 crore). Despite this, the problems were enor-

mous. Raghu Raj, a former banker and an outsider brought in to salvage the airline, had steered Air-India from the red into the black by introducing stringent budgetary cuts and pushing his managers into better performance, by insisting on greater accountability. In the process he'd alienated most of his managers. Towards the end of his term, he was at loggerheads with C L Sharma, his Deputy Managing Director.

When Raj left, Sharma was perceived as his natural successor (though Bose and Sharma were on the same grade, Sharma had the advantage of seniority). But the government preferred Bose. At the time, it seemed probable the two men would work together — they were both from within the airline's managerial cadre and, this time at least, no outsiders had been imposed on them.

But this was not to be. Today, the internal politics in Air-India revolve around Sharma and his many influential allies who are seen as opposing the Managing Director and other departmental heads. (To Bose's credit, he refuses to acknowledge the rift and will only say, “Mr Sharma is a very good officer.”) The invisible divide has affected the efficient functioning of the management. Sides are taken, issues are divided and many

decisions are left unimplemented.

The recent uproar over the London General Sales Agent (GSA), Joginder Sanger, is the best-publicised instance of the Sharma-Bose rift. Officially, however, Sharma was not involved. The attack on Sanger was launched by Captain A M Kapur, the non-executive Chairman of Air-India and Indian Airlines. Accusing Hari Kaul, Commercial Director, 57, of having received gratification from GSAs in return for granting additional incentive commissions, Kapur recommended disciplinary action against both Kaul and Sanger.

Kapur's allegation was based on evidence he had collected that Kaul's daughter's wedding bill had been paid for by V K Reddy, a director of Air-India's GSA for Canada. Kaul, in return, pleaded his innocence and claimed the money had been fully reimbursed to Reddy. Bose sprang to Kaul's defence, stating he had faith in him and that there was no question of his guilt. Joginder Sanger, who had been similarly accused of taking almost 37 per cent commission on his ticket sales and of owing the airline £90,000, was exonerated on both charges. (He proved that he was paid 20 per cent commission only after crossing a revenue target of Rs 20 crore and that the airline was mistaken in the estimate of his debt—in actual fact, his outstandings were only £3,900.) J R D Tata, ex-Chairman and founder of Air-India, entered the fray at a Board meeting last month, by vouching for Kaul's impeccable service and credentials.

Eventually, of course, things have returned to normal. Hari Kaul, whose very integrity was in doubt, was shifted from the position of Director, Commercial, to Director, Planning, and there is no change in the London GSA status. Joginder Sanger had, after all, always met targets and contributed Rs 400 crore to Air-India's revenue in his 14 years as a GSA.

But the Managing Director and Chairman still do not see eye to eye. For instance, Kapur has made it clear he wants to negotiate directly for the non-stop London-Bombay flight with



Kapur wrongly accused Hari Kaul of receiving gratification from GSAs. When Captain Bose and J R D Tata sprang to his defence, the charges had to be dropped.

the Indian Pilots' Guild, even though this is part of the Managing Director's brief. Further complications seem inevitable — no one knows for sure what a non-executive Chairman is supposed to do or how much power he can wield.

The conflict in the top management has, understandably, affected its efficiency. There have been instances of posts remaining vacant for months on end. A recent instance of this was seen in the Inflight Service section. An employment notice was sent out on January 24, 1985, for the post of Deputy Director, Inflight Service. On February 11, 1985, a corrigendum to the notice was issued: the post was only reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. On April 4, applicants who turned up for the much-awaited interview, were made to sit for two hours and informed (by the Deputy Director, Establishment) of another postponement of three weeks. Much later, a man from the Commercial department was brought in to fill the post.

Air-India officials are, naturally, taking advantage of this laxity. Nani Mittal, Air-India's Regional Director in New York was at the centre of a recent storm over his participation in a function felicitating South Africa. Various African nations complained

to the government and Air-India recalled him to India. Mittal, however, worked his way round his bosses and still holds the post.

ACCOUNTABILITY

A JOKE doing the rounds of Air-India's offices states simply that if you are caught doing anything wrong, plead your guilt and you will be condoned.

Things are not so bad, but there is no doubt that accountability has never been as important in Air-India as it should be. To cite an old instance: in October 1976, R G Patwardhan, the then Assistant-Controller, Ground Support Division, was charged with specific acts of misconduct. Found guilty of the charges, he was sacked in February 1977. In August 1977, Patwardhan appealed against the order, stating that, in view of his long service, the punishment of removal was very harsh. K G Appusamy, the then Managing Director, rescinding the earlier order of dismissal, states in his letter, dated February 6, 1978: "He (Patwardhan) has stated that he and his family had to undergo tremendous hardships because of the above punishment of removal. In view of the unequivocal repentance expressed by Mr Patwardhan. . . I modify the Order dated February 21/22, 1977, removing Mr Patwardhan. . . to reduction to a lower grade of pay. . ."

Raghu Raj, during his brief tenure as Chairman-cum-Managing Director, changed all that. When, in April 1981, four vital control cables of an Air-India Boeing-707, *Makalu*, were found to have been cut, he dismissed five officers of the airline, including M P Kharkar, Director of Engineering (Maintenance) and his deputy, A S Karnik. Even given the fact that the Boeing was set aside to transport the Prime Minister to Switzerland, the measure seemed extremely harsh and was widely criticised. But Raj had driven the point home — Keep your departments in order. Or else. . .

But this strictness was not consistent. In 1978, Air-India was discovered to have lost Swiss francs 781,000

(approximately Rs 38 lakh) when Knight-Keeley, their advertising agency in, Geneva, declared itself bankrupt. The original contract, given to Knight-Keeley in London, was subsequently shifted to their Geneva branch. In September 1975, Knight-Keeley Ltd, London, informed the Regional Manager, Air-India, Geneva, that they had severed their connections with the Geneva branch and that Zadig Ltd, owned by Jim Vakeel, would take over Knight-Keeley and its account. Advance payments, however, continued to be made to Jim Vakeel without entering into any fresh agreement. The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), who looked into the case in 1982, passed strictures against the directors involved in the fiasco. Listed among the guilty was J R Jagtap, the then Accounts Manager in Geneva – by 1982, the Deputy Secretary, Air-India.

But Jagtap was a Sharma protégé. And Air-India was not going to allow him to be charge-sheeted so easily. From January 1982 to September 1984 the correspondence criss-crossed back and forth: the CVC recommending that minor penalty proceedings be instituted against Jagtap; the Air-India Security and Vigilance cell pleading his innocence. (Jagtap was not associated with the selection of the agency, they argued; even the government audit had proved that no over-payments were made during Jagtap's time as Accounts Manager; and, finally, Jagtap was only obeying orders from his seniors. Why should he be blamed?) The Vigilance cell wanted all charges against Jagtap to be dropped.

It is a tribute to Sharma's manouevring that Raghu Raj did not get wind of the matter till August 1983. (The CVC would not consider dropping the charges against Jagtap unless it had the approval of the Managing Director.) In a stern letter to T R Varadarajan, Chief Vigilance and Security Manager, written on August 31, 1983, Raj said: "I am surprised that neither the CBI report...nor the CVC's letter recommending institu-



C L Sharma bypassed Raghu Raj's authority when he liaised directly with T R Varadarajan to suppress the charges against Jagtap. Raj was furious.

tion of minor penalty proceedings against Mr J R Jagtap were put up to me earlier but on your own you chose to write to CVC after obtaining the approval of the Deputy MD... I must express my displeasure for you as the Chief Vigilance and Security Manager should have reported to me directly all matters relating to Vigilance." However, Raghu Raj approved of the step.

After 20 months of haggling, the CVC agreed to drop the charges. Jagtap's charge-sheet was amended. S Narayanswamy, Air-India's Secretary, wrote to Varadarajan that this matter should not be pursued. Jagtap is today the Joint Secretary and Assistant Director, Administration. On the other hand, Sulochana Panigrahi, the then Regional Director (Tourism Operation) Europe, of the Government's Tourism Department, ended up taking the rap.

Air-India has always preferred scapegoats to genuine accountability. In the late '70s, Jyotirmoy Basu headed a Parliamentary Committee that examined Air-India's workings. Basu had many unpleasant things to say about the airline and, ultimately, Inder Sethi – AI's Commercial Director, who had been damaged by the findings – was eased out. Ironically, many of the others Basu named are

still in positions of influence. One such officer, whom the Committee said should not be handling offices of trust, is now tipped to become Commercial Director!

MORALE

Against this background the morale of AI's 17,000 employees is disturbingly low. Many of the executives have inquiry charges pending against them, the atmosphere in the plush Air-India building is tense and suspicious, and there is the attitude of waiting to see who emerges victorious.

Shortly after **Imprint** started this investigation, we began to receive anonymous letters alleging all kinds of irregularities at Air-India. Many of the allegations concerned C L Sharma. One letter pointed out that though Sharma had passed a directive forbidding Air-India staff from travelling abroad for medical treatment, he had gone off to London in July for the same reason. Another letter pointed out that an Air-India doctor had been sent to London, ostensibly to recover bodies from the *Kantishka* crash, but actually to assist Sharma's treatment. Somebody even sent us a photocopy of a minicab bill for £1,430 claiming that Sharma had run up this huge bill during a 13-day stay in London in October 1983.

Captain J R Martin, AI's Public Relations Manager, insists that the charges relating to Sharma's medical treatment are mischievous. (Disgruntled employees had even claimed that he travelled British Airways because he was scared of flying Air-India after the crash.) According to Martin, Sharma did not violate the medical treatment directive, and the Air-India doctor's visit to London had no connection with Sharma's treatment.

Even so, the number of allegations – most centring around Sharma – indicate something about Air-India's morale. Says one Air-India employee: "Sharma ran up a taxi bill of £1,430 when all he was supposed to do was sit in our offices and go through the books. How can manage-

ment set such a bad example?" The pettiness of the charges — on a par with the row over Kaul's daughter's wedding reception — is in keeping with the level of Air-India's office gossip these days.

The charges against others are just as petty. T R Varadarajan, Chief Vigilance and Security Manager (originally from the Maharashtra IPS cadre) has clearly exceeded his limit of three years in a public sector company. From May 1, 1985, his term was extended into the fifth year. In addition, a bill amounting to Rs 1,944 was passed by Varadarajan as 'official entertainment' when his wife hosted a lunch at the Centaur. Narayanswamy, Secretary and Deputy Director, Administration, is conducting the inquiry into Varadarajan's misdemeanours. Varadarajan, in turn, is supervising the inquiry into Nayarswamy's lapses — accusations of bribe-taking, clearing excess baggage for others, etc.

The buck-passing has to stop somewhere. And the unions seem to be the worst sufferers. Genuine demands — the Flight Engineers Association's demand that their responsibilities be increased on board aircraft (at least one crash, the 1982 Boeing-707 disaster, was due to this) — have been pending for years, while the management considers them. P V Rao, President of the Association, is disgustedly brief when he says: "We are not making heavy demands for extra wages or perks. All we ask is that the safety of the aircraft be taken into consideration."

The Indian Pilots' Guild has often negotiated directly with Kapur for additional incentives, only to find Bose refuses to acknowledge the veracity of these deals as he was not informed about them. The Cabin Crew Association's General Secretary, Chandra Dhingra, is dismissive: "It's like the airline is divided into two parties and we're the third party that doesn't count. The management's attitude has consistently been, 'Don't interfere, we'll sort out the problems for you.' And they don't." Among the Association's demands: better pay



Bose refuses to acknowledge the deals that Kapur makes directly with the Indian Pilots' Guild. In the cross-fire, the unions suffer.

for staff, better hotels in foreign countries, higher allowances for their postings.

The problems need to be sorted out — fast. For they undermine the very basis of the functioning of Air-India. But for that the management needs to sort out its own problems first. As Dhingra says: "We are not really asking for much. If only the management would bother to listen...."

FINANCE

AIR-INDIA'S profit-making ability has always been in inverse proportion to that prevailing in the world aviation circles. In the late '70s, when airlines were making record-breaking profits, Air-India was on a seemingly uncontrollable down-slide. (During Raghu Raj's first year in office — ending March 1981 — Air-India recorded a massive net loss of Rs 21.30 crore.) By 1984 — when the airline industry was in one of its biggest slumps ever — Air-India had made a spectacular turnaround into the black, with a net profit of Rs 57 crore.

But since last year, profits have begun to slide again. The net profit for the year 1984-85 was Rs 44.42 crore. Though this is the second-highest profit ever recorded, things are

not set to pick up. The Gulf traffic, hitherto the mainstay of the airline's profit ratio, has decreased by two per cent and will dip further in the years to come. The reduction in available capacity has forced Air-India to close down certain routes and cut back on others. Tourist traffic has also diminished: the political situation and the hassles of obtaining a visa are powerful deterrents. Lastly, the security threats to Air-India aircraft have taken their toll on the airline's image.

On the other hand, Air-India officials are quick to point out, the load factors have not dipped — even after the disastrous *Kanishka* crash. Despite a reduction in the capacity available, the utilised capacity shows an increase of 0.3 per cent over 1983-84. Fierce competition and undercutting from foreign airlines, who have bigger fleets and better on-board services, have hit Air-India, but not to the extent it would have seemed. In fact, by increasing club class and first class seats, the airline has improved its yield from 0.9 per cent in 1983-84 to 5.7 per cent. The on-time departure index is 95 per cent — one of the highest in the world.

Much of the credit for this performance undoubtedly goes to the long-suffering ethnic passengers. No matter what, the average Indian going abroad prefers to travel on his national carrier. This has become such a source of strength for Air-India that no efforts are genuinely being made to lure in foreign passengers or to expand the route capacity to areas which do not contain Indians. Other Asian airlines have become viable by just such a strategy: Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Thai International, all offer top quality service to ensure their planes run full.

This peculiar apathy has led to unutilised bilaterals. In return for allowing foreign airlines to land in India, Air-India has the benefit of reciprocal landing arrangements abroad. But several such bilaterals are going waste: the San Francisco and Tokyo ones, for instance, and more recently, the Montreal sector. Air-India's official explanation is quite simple: there is

not enough ethnic traffic in these cities to guarantee a profit on the overheads. But the long-term solution, of improving service to attract other travellers, has been by-passed.

There is also the problem of blocked funds. Through bad financial management, Air-India has found itself stuck with large amounts of money in soft currency countries that have refused it permission to repatriate these to India. On November 22, 1983, Raghu Raj wrote an angry letter to C L Sharma complaining that while he had asked him 'to investigate the problem of repatriation of our blocked funds', Sharma had, in fact, not even moved to regulate the issue of tickets in such areas. "This only confirms my doubts," raged Raj, "regarding the existence of a practice of siphoning out the funds by way of tickets, PTAs and MCOs." Raj went on to call this a 'shocking malpractice' that 'would only compound the problem of repatriation of blocked funds'.

To date, those funds are still blocked and while Air-India officials are tight-lipped, at least Rs 60 crore are said to be unrecovered.

FUTURE

AIR-INDIA'S MANAGEMENT is more than hopeful about the future. All the infighting and problems notwithstanding, the airline's foundation has been laid on pretty solid ground. Even comparing the performance of the airline in 1984 against the 134 IATA airlines, it does not lag far behind. IATA figures show that there was a 10.5 per cent growth in traffic, but due to an additional capacity of 6.2 per cent, the yield dropped by five per cent. As against this, Air-India's capacity dropped by 3.1 per cent but its yield increased by about five per cent.

In addition, the first quarter of the current financial year (April-June) shows a revenue growth of 6.5 per cent, with a net provisional profit of 8.55 crore. If the yield continues to improve at the rate of 14 per cent, as expected, the budgeted profit of Rs 35 crore might well be achieved.



Ashok Gehlot, Aviation minister, is optimistic about Air-India's short-term success. But will it pull through in the long run?

"Despite the declining profits," says Captain Bese, "our performance is still pretty good. This is a time when the aviation industry is labouring under fierce competition. Air-India's capacity is much lower than other airlines and this is bound to affect us."

The optimism is echoed by Ashok Gehlot, Minister of State for Tourism and Civil Aviation: "The government is confident that the management problems will be sorted out. Although last year's profit of Rs 44 crore may seem a decline from the high point of 57 crore, it has still been good. In fact, if things keep up this way, Air-India might even achieve a profit slightly higher than the 35 crore budgeted for this year."

No matter what the short-term advantages cited by the management, there can be no denying that the airline is cruising along on its initial momentum. There has been no serious long-term plan drawn up to keep pace with its competitors; problems are not tackled quickly or efficiently; and the rift in the top management could widen into a chasm of unbridgeable proportions. Most of what the airline claims are its strengths could disappear in the near future: the yield might drop, the Gulf traffic will slowly dry up, and

the inevitable lure of cheaper rates and better service may drive the die-hard Air-India traveller to its competitors.

Within its own ranks, discontent is bound to grow. The unions — already divided upon issues and what they perceive to be the management's partial attitude to the other — might well grow hard in their demands, cutting back on attendance if disgruntled. The first rumblings have already been heard: after the *Kanishka* crash, an Abu Dhabi flight was delayed by over 20 hours while security checked up on a potential bomb scare. The cockpit crew refused to board the aircraft when ten hours were up — saying they had exceeded their official duty time. The management threatened to charge-sheet the crew officers for this misdemeanour. The Indian Pilots' Guild retaliated by promising to go on an indefinite strike. The management bowed down.

Captain Bese feels too much is being made of all these petty problems. "We are a high-profile public sector company and, as such, media attention is bound to be focussed on us," he says. "Inevitably, there is a tendency to exaggerate our problems and predict our decline. But quite honestly I don't see this happening in the near future."

The airline does have a sound financial base with a Rs 148.73 crore capital and Rs 883.45 crore worth of assets. But without doubt, Air-India's international image has taken a knocking. It may be India's public sector showpiece, but in comparison to other international airlines it has been left far behind. Airlines like Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines and Thai International — the more recent Asian entrants into the international aviation scene — have already built up sizeable fleets and reputations for impeccable inflight service. These qualities have helped their growth and employee morale is high. In contrast, Air-India is seen as a perennial second-best: the airline you travel on if you happen to be Indian but not much good otherwise.

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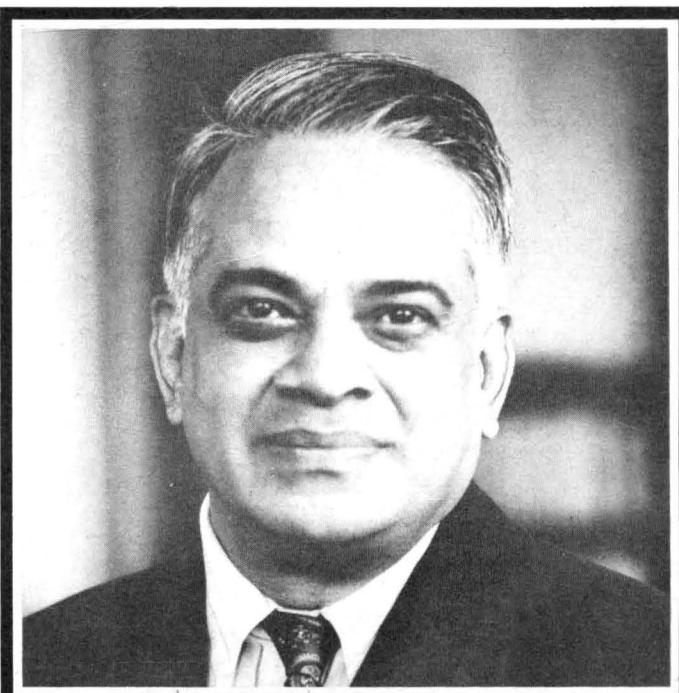
The first of a new series in which distinguished persons write the obituaries they think will appear after their deaths.

This month, M V Kamath writes his own obituary.

M V KAMATH, a frequent contributor to **Imprint**, died the other day as he wished to die — laughing. When the sudden attack came (he had an earlier heart attack in 1982), he was rollicking with laughter, tears streaming down his face, at an article he was then reading. Friends later identified it as Khushwant Singh's latest column.

Kamath adored Khushwant Singh. When he spoke of his predecessor as Editor of *The Illustrated Weekly Of India*, his eyes would light up. "That man," he would say, "is a walking saint." He always kept a stack of Khushwant Singh's columns by his side. "When I am tired and depressed," he would add, "I pick up his column — any column — to bring a smile to my face. Bless his heart."

It was impossible to say an unkind word about Khushwant Singh in his presence without being severely reprimanded. "You do not know that man," he would say. "He is the greatest journalist India has ever produced. A master craftsman. One without a second." In his less angry moments Kamath would speak softly about the man he tried, in vain, to copy. He once told a reporter: "You know, in my time I have met many great journalists. But



Khushwant Singh is a cut above them all. He is Gandhi, Radhakrishnan and Mohammad Iqbal rolled into one."

He admired Khushwant's abstemiousness, his steadfast refusal to bow before the mighty, his abhorrence of rewards — and above all — his modesty. When Kamath discussed Khushwant's literary style, he would go into rhapsodies. "Lord, can he write!" he would say, throwing up his hands as if some things were beyond him.

This was not modesty on Kamath's part. His writing never rose above the matriculation essay level. He last read Shakespeare when a few lines from *Hamlet* appeared in his textbook for Standard X. But he always kept a well-thumbed copy of *The Oxford Book Of Quotations* on his desk for ready reference. He obtained a lowly degree in Science around 1941 and it was then strongly rumoured that he passed because of an error of judgement. His later failure as a chemist bears ample testimony to what has merely been hearsay.

Unlike Khushwant, whose character he always kept praising, Kamath had a weakness for women that he made little effort to hide. His stock answer was a quotation from

MY OWN OBITUARY

Shakespeare, no doubt borrowed, as usual, from the *BOQ*. The lines are from *The Tempest*:

"For several virtues,
Have I lik'd several women; never any
With so full soul but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she ow'd
And put it to the foil."

If Khushwant disdained liquor, as any religious Sikh would, Kamath had a fondness for the bottle. He kept a good stock, he would say with a wink, thanks to the generosity of his friends in various embassies and consulates. "I never ask," he would say by way of explanation, "but it would be rude to return gifts sent to me with such genuine affection and regard."

After his first heart attack, he frequently spoke about death as a friend. His favourite line was: "If you have death as a friend, you wouldn't need an enemy!" And he would laugh. Kamath laughed easily. Actually his laughter, sometimes self-derisory, was a cover-up for his failure. He could never rise above the editorship of *The Illustrated Weekly Of India*. His one ambition in life was to be a member of the Rajya Sabha, but he never made it.

No explanation is available as to why he was not nominated by Mrs Indira Gandhi, towards whom his attitude has always been that of a *bhakta*. If Khushwant Singh was his beau ideal as a journalist, Mrs Gandhi was his model of what the perfect Indian Prime Minister should be. "That lady," he would say, "single-handedly lifted India from the trough of despair to the heights of glory. She was a builder of men and of institutions!" He would speak glowingly of Mrs Gandhi's visits to Paris, London, New York and Washington, of her charm and winning ways and he was one of her stoutest defenders during the Emergency.

Kamath's journalistic career spanned some four decades during which he rose from cub reporter to foreign correspondent and still later, to editor of *The Illustrated Weekly*, all because of other people's favours. Never one to forget other people's virtues, especially if they happened to be his company directors, Kamath made up for his lack of expertise in any field by his commendable knowledge and appreciation of his bosses' susceptibilities. One exasperated news editor once said: "If ever that man steps into the news-room, I'll wring his neck!" It turned out that it fell to that unfortunate man to rewrite Kamath's copy, which most sub-editors on the desk considered unreadable, if not unprintable.

Nothing fazed Kamath; he would take the constant snubs administered to him by politicians with the remark that the man was probably too tired and deserved a rest. Some said he was thick-skinned. Others said he was too dumb to know when he was insulted. Still another said: "And what do you expect of a man who was a failure as a chemist, a failure as a reporter and an abject failure as an editor?" Once, when he overheard that remark, Kamath retorted: "Say that at least I have not been a failure at being a failure!"

Kamath wrote several books in his lifetime, serenely unaware that no one read them, not even the reviewers. "But my proof-readers told me I wrote excellent copy," he would remark. No doubt they *felt that way* because they never bothered to edit it. The errors in grammar, spelling and syntax were so glaring that one reviewer, who was offered one of his books to review, angrily returned it, saying: "What am I supposed to do? Tell him that he cannot write?"

An extremely complex man, Kamath never quite knew who he was. There were many Kamaths besides the one who paraded in public. Once, in a self-revelatory mood, he said he wished somebody would identify him. Behind the flurry of activity in which he engaged, was a very private individual. A moralist in his writing, his private life too, was unworthy of scrutiny. Often he could not make a distinction between truth and falsehood. And he was singularly bereft of humour. At one party he confessed that he

would have liked to be a writer of fiction. A pretty damsel who overheard him retorted: "Darling, and what do you think you have been doing all these years?" Kamath blanched.

Kamath's loud laughter betrayed a singularly shallow personality. When he was not being loud and pompous, he was sulking. He was singularly incapable of taking criticism — even the mildest sort. He would get on the defensive, and embarrass his few friends who got fewer as the years rolled by. Of his meagre talents, making and keeping friends was not one.

Married late in life, divorced not long after, wishing for company but afraid of being rejected as a boor, Kamath soldiered on, ignored by those whose admiration he privately sought, the subject of many a joke among those he called his friends. His epitaph could well be the lines attributed to Khushwant Singh: "The besotted idiot! Whoever made him an editor!" ♦

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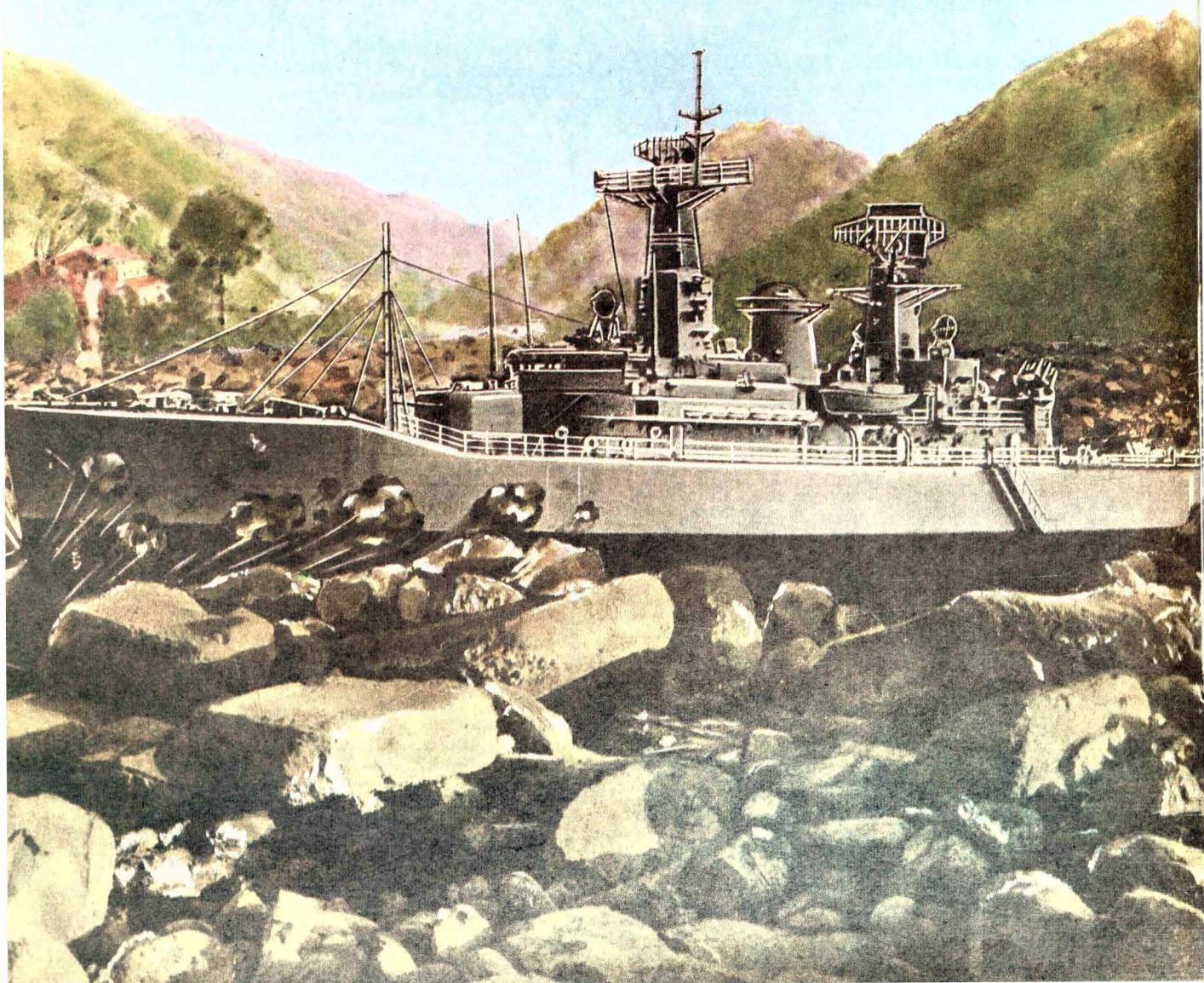
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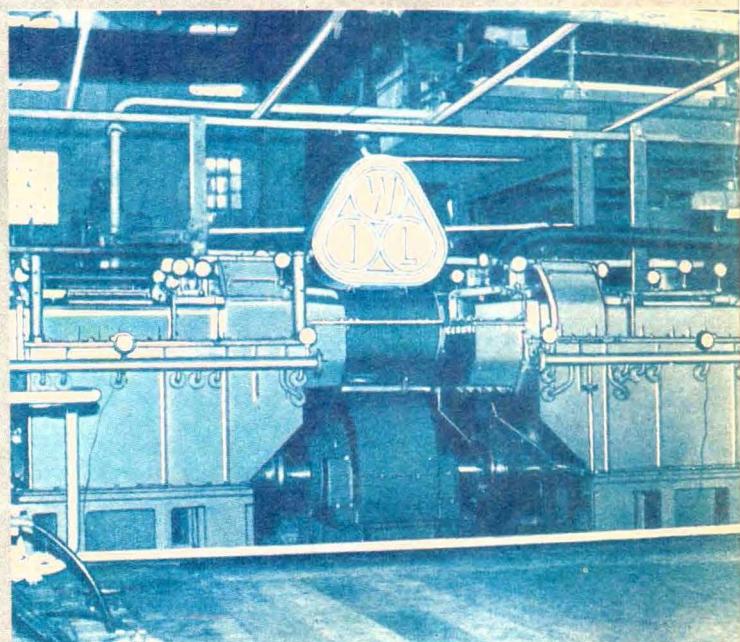
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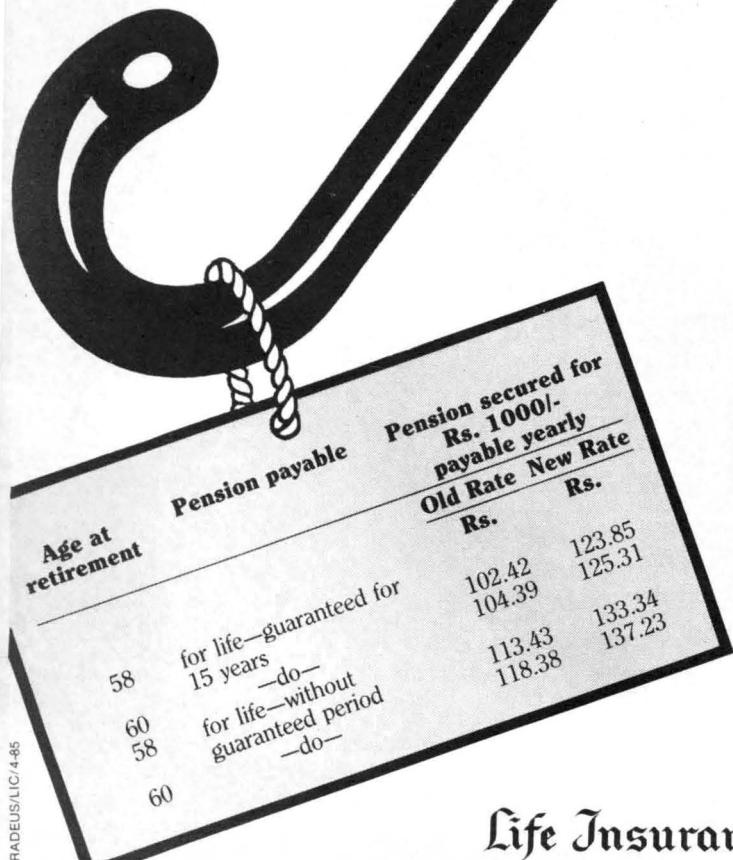
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WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Nothing Succeeds Like Excess (The All Night Long Saga)

I DON'T KNOW of any other movie that better illustrates the interrelationships of studio execs and stars than the Gene Hackman film *All Night Long*.

All Night Long is a fragile film, very short—it runs only 84 minutes and has a distinctly European feel, which is not surprising when you consider that the idea began with its ultimate director, the Frenchman Jean-Claude Tramont.

Tramont wanted to do a movie about people who work at night.

That was all he had, just that notion, but it struck a chord with the people at Fox, who said to go ahead and find a writer. They would develop it step by step.

Tramont found the wonderfully talented W D Richter (*Slither*, *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*), and Richter agreed to attempt a script. What Richter eventually wrote was the story of a man in crisis, a man named George Dupler. (The part eventually played by Hackman.)

George has worked, for 20-plus years, in regional sales for a large pharmaceutical company. His wife is sort of a sludge, but not evil. His teenage son also isn't much to crow over: The kid is done with school and, when he works at all, paints houses. George has the kind of life, then, that's okay if you're happy, terrible if you're not.

George isn't happy—all he ever wanted to do was be an inventor.

As the story opens, George has

just been passed over for promotion. He takes the news badly: first he slugs his boss, then he throws a chair through a closed window. Because of seniority, he isn't fired; instead, he is made the night manager of a huge California-type drugstore that is open all night long.

Now a distant relative dies, so George and his family pay a condolence call at the house of a macho-type fireman who also works at night.

The budget of *All Night Long* could scarcely have been lower but Universal hated it. It won't sell, they said. But they couldn't get out of doing it for contractual reasons.

During the visit, George sees his son kissing the fireman's wife, Cheryl. The next day he confronts the kid and asks, are you having an affair with Cheryl? The answer is yes, but the kid adds that he loves her. George says to end it. The kid is upset.

That night Cheryl visits George in the store to talk about the situation. A few scenes later, George is at Cheryl's house, having a meal, when the kid rings the bell. George quickly

sneaks out, hopefully without having been discovered.

But his son is convinced that his father is having an affair with the woman he loves—this news is spoken in front of George's wife—and George snaps. He packs up and leaves, taking a crummy room in a hotel.

Eventually, George and Cheryl actually begin an affair, but before it is consummated, she talks a little about her life. And her fears of being a failure. That's why her music is so important to her—she composes and her dream is to be a songwriter. But as she speaks about her music, it's sad. She's just a *neb*, poor Cheryl; a weak sweet, quiet, pushed-around, lonely lady. (She married her fireman husband only because he had saved her life: she said yes out of *gratitude*.)

When George and Cheryl are in love, he quits his job, rents a large space in a warehouse to be an inventor. He goes to a family gathering, bodily takes Cheryl off with him. But then she leaves—she hasn't the guts to stay.

Finally, she sucks it up and goes to the firehouse to talk to her husband, to try and take a stand. He's furious, shoves her around, and probably would do worse, when the alarm bell goes off.

George, it turns out, set the alarm. When the firemen are gone he pleads with her not to be afraid any more. She hesitates, then slides down a fire pole into his arms and the two of them begin a new and, hopefully, better life.

Fox passed on the project.

Eventually, it found its way to producer Leonard Goldberg, a giant television name (*Hart To Hart*, *Family*, etc). Goldberg and his partner Jerry Weintraub (*Nashville* and *Diner*) had a deal at Universal that gave them the authority to make movies there whether Universal liked the movie or not—provided that the budget was low enough.

The budget of *All Night Long* could scarcely have been lower for these inflated times — three-million-and-change.

Universal didn't like it, felt they couldn't sell it, didn't want to do it. But for contractual reasons, they were not in a position to pass.

If Universal hated the project,

Extracted from Adventures In The Screen Trade with the permission of India Book Distributors.

Getting Hackman was no problem. His agent is Sue Mengers. So? Well, nothing, except that Mengers is married to Jean-Claude Tramont, the movie's director, and had more than a little interest in the project.

Gene Hackman *loved* it. Hackman, an Oscar winner for *The French Connection* and one of our finest actors, was crazy to play the vehicle part of George. (Getting the script to Hackman undoubtedly caused no problem, since his agent is the most famous in Hollywood, Sue Mengers. Mengers had more than a little interest in the project, since she was married to the director, Jean-Claude Tramont.)

Hackman was so anxious to play the lead that he was willing to gamble: He would forfeit at least part of his up-front salary in exchange for a larger percentage at the other end; if the picture cleaned up, so would he.

Now, logic would dictate that since Universal didn't have any faith in the picture, they would have grabbed Hackman's offer. Since they felt the picture would stiff, why not keep costs down up-front? Beyond that, if their feelings were correct, Hackman would essentially be doing the picture for nothing.

Universal insisted on paying him his regular salary. So the three-million-and-change movie was now going to cost four-and-a-half.

With Hackman on board, the problems of casting the rest of the picture arose. Hackman's was the giant part—in almost every shot of almost every scene—but there were four major supporting roles: Hackman's wife, his son, the fireman and, of course, Cheryl.

Cheryl was the most tricky. The creators felt that, sure, she was attractive, maybe even the belle of the block, but in the great world she shouldn't be a traffic stopper, because that would make the movie about a guy with hot pants. If this had been an English film, Julie Christie would

have been wonderful—quiet, pretty but not too pretty, vulnerable. The studio suggested Loni Anderson, the sexpot on the TV series *WKRP In Cincinnati*.

Lisa Eichhorn got the part.

Eichhorn, a fine actress, had received wonderful reviews in the 1979 film *Yanks*. *Screen World Annual* selected her as one of the most promis-



Barbra Streisand.

ing new performers to appear that year, an honour Eichhorn shared with, among others, Bo Derek and Bette Midler. Probably Eichhorn has less instant star quality than these other two ladies, but the part of Cheryl, after all, didn't need star quality—not only is it a secondary role, the entire essence of the role is that this lady is the antithesis of a

star. Shy, picked on, lost.

Shooting begins.

This is always a nervous time, but no giant problems arise. The first weeks go pretty much according to schedule.

Then comes the phone call.

Goldberg listens to the voice of agent Sue Mengers on the other end. Mengers parcels out this titbit of information: Another of her clients would be interested in taking over the part of Cheryl. Who?

Only Barbra Streisand.

Goldberg hangs up, thinks awhile. There is no question in his mind that although both Hackman and Eichhorn are splendid in their roles, there is undeniably a certain chemistry that is lacking. Still, they're well into production.

No matter what, Goldberg can't just sit on the information. So he calls Universal and informs them that Barbra Streisand will do the Lisa Eichhorn part. Universal says, don't go anywhere, we'll get back to you.

Which they do. And now they *love* the picture. The sales force loves it, the advertising people are in ecstasy, fabulous.

Goldberg tries to explain that it's still the same little picture it always was, the one they so recently loathed, hated, and despised.

That was in another country, and besides, the wench is dead.

All Night Long shuts down. For several weeks. Now, this is costly, because all the people who are on salary stay on salary, even though they're not doing anything.

But closing costs are nothing compared to what it takes to sign Streisand. No one knows the truth outside of the people who made the deal, but the rumour around town is \$4-4.5 million plus a gigantic contribution to her favourite hospital charity. That's a lot of money, but Barbra Streisand is something very special.

As the lyrics to one of the songs she sang in her breakthrough role, *Funny Girl*, proclaim: "I'm the greatest star." The lady just may well be. Oh, you can argue that Reynolds or Redford or Eastwood is bigger by a hair at the box-office—

—but do they sing? (Actually, Reynolds did once, in a 1975 stiffener called *At Long Last Love*, but pro-

bably it's not his favourite topic of conversation.)

Has any female soloist ever sold as many records as Streisand? Name her.

She doesn't choose to play Vegas any more, but when she did, she killed them. She doesn't choose to do television any more, but when she did, her specials went through the roof. And if she ever chose to return to Broadway, she'd outrun *Fiddler*.

The most remarkable thing about Streisand is that she can do it all—there is no area of popular performing where she isn't *it*. Redford would sell out on Broadway, too, if he ever came back, and so would Reynolds, but how would they do standing alone for an hour on the stage of Caesars Palace with a microphone in their hands? In films, she has been the unquestioned female star for 15 years. Her movies may not always be successes—*Hello Dolly!* cost too much to get its money back—but they have almost always done business in the past.

(Remember the 'almost', because now I have to talk about the handling of story material, something that may not seem germane but I think may prove to be.)

There is a famous, probably apocryphal, story about a Broadway actor who had a tiny blink of a part in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He appeared only at the very end, and then to help cart Blanche away. Someone asked him, before the play opened, what *Streetcar* was about. And this actor replied: "It's about a man who takes a woman to a booby hatch."

All right, *All Night Long* is the story of George and his mid-life crisis—but that's only because the writer wrote it that way. *Gone With The Wind* is only about Scarlett and Rhett because that was the creator's decision, but you could have told about the Civil War through the eyes of Ashley Wilkes, in which case Scarlett would have been of secondary importance and Rhett nothing much at all. Or you could have done the whole thing centring on the Tarleton twins, minor roles who are with Scarlett at the beginning of the story, in which case *everybody* major now disappears.

Look, the story of *All Night Long*

Why didn't it work? It didn't work because the audience wants to see Barbra Streisand playing Barbra Streisand. Universal paid her \$ 4.5 million to play somebody else. And the fiasco probably cost them \$ 20 million.

could have made a terrific Jane Fonda picture. A noble, decent wife whose husband leaves her but she goes on alone.

If you'd had Travolta, it becomes the son's story—a strong drama about a young man in love and on the brink of manhood who finds himself in dangerous competition with his father over the same object.

The fireman would have been great for Robert Duvall—a tough, expert guy in a dangerous line of work who finds his wife is sleeping with another man, and how does his macho soul come to grips with that?

Or easiest of all: Cheryl's story—it would make a super sex comedy. Start it this way: She's cooking up some concoction in her kitchen, fumbling and funny, when suddenly there's a flash fire and she's saved by this gorgeous fireman. Dissolve. They marry. He's still gorgeous, but not only is he crummy to her, he's away all night long. Enter this handsome teenager to paint the bedroom: he's confused, insecure—boom, they're in the sack. Only next comes something she hadn't counted on: he's got a real crush on her. Madness: she's a married lady much older than he is. Now another boom: the kid's father finds out and says, look, stop playing around with my son. She says sure, and the next thing you know, she's playing around with the father. She's in the sack with him and the son comes knocking at the door—instant farce. Men are flying in one door and out the other, with Cheryl at the centre, trying to handle her husband with one hand, the kid with the other, and the kid's father with any parts of her body left over.

As a matter of fact, not only would this make a sex comedy, it

would be a perfect part for Barbra Streisand.

And what is that?

Streisand's persona was pretty much outlined with *Funny Girl*: This is a lady who dominates. She wins every scene. And she may not be classically beautiful, but her energy and drive are enough to captivate the most beautiful of men—O'Neal, Sharif, Redford, Kristofferson. She can do musicals, she can do farce, she can do romantic comedy. Just let her dominate and you're home.

Remember *Up The Sandbox*?

It's maybe her most telling film performance, and also her sole disaster. What did she play? A put-upon, forlorn housewife with day-dreams that don't quite work. Why did it fail? Because she may have been acting, but she wasn't acting *her* role. And what was the part of Cheryl? Nothing else but a put-upon, forlorn housewife with day-dreams that don't quite work.

Why didn't the studio alter the film, once they'd shut down, to accommodate their star? And why didn't they add a bunch of musical numbers? (Cheryl, after all, is a songwriter in the story.) Because Barbra Streisand wanted to play Cheryl as written. (She was perfectly fine, by the way.)

So what the studio had done was to take a frail, \$ 3 million film and turn it into a \$ 15 million film that was a total disaster and that, when you add in prints and advertising, probably lost them \$ 20 million.

Because what they were doing, in essence, was to pay Barbra Streisand \$ 4.5 million *not* to play Barbra Streisand.

And if the same thing happened today, they'd do it all over again... ♦

A WEEK WITH JAGGER

Is there a real Mick Jagger? Why is he making music without the Stones? Jay McInerney spent a week with the star while he was mixing his solo album to try and find out.

“YOU CALLED ME manly, so masterful..." Mick Jagger's voice snarls from the speakers in the mixing room. He is standing behind the mixing board, shaking his limbs and head like a man in a terminal stage of epilepsy. "Play that back," he says to the engineer, pronouncing 'play' to rhyme with 'toy', his accent a marbles-in-mouth Cockney that fades in and out of a more articulated version of the King's English over the course of the week that I observe him. He stands relatively still this time, listening with his head cocked to one side, raising his arms once for a brief riff of air guitar.

"You called me manly, so masterful.

You called me manly, so powerful — was I ever gullible...."

The sneering lyrics and phrasing are classic Jagger, and it is a wonder that he can manage not to sound like a parody of himself. At times he has. If there was ever a moment when it seemed this voice was going to change the way we lived, that moment has passed. It's only rock 'n' roll. But the energy is still there. This could be the

voice of 20 years ago, except that the reproduction, in this computerized studio, is sharper than anything in the days of four-track monaural recording. The other difference is the lack of Rolling Stones. The word from associates is that the others are not pleased about this solo trip, particularly its timing — the record will be the first product from anyone in the group since their new, four-album, \$28 million deal with CBS.

As the engineer rewinds the tape segment, Jagger picks up *Blitz*, a British arts magazine. The cover says, *How To Be Famous*. Bill Laswell, one of the album's two producers, is hunched in a corner of the room, wearing a grey suit, three days' worth of beard, and a Yankees cap. Jagger reads. When the song has played again, he looks up at Laswell. "You've got no more bass drum on the intro."

"It's there," Laswell says.

Mick wrinkles his face, moves his tongue around his lips, wetting them down. "Needs a lot more," he mumbles.

Laswell shrugs, resists being seduced. As the engineer changes the mix, Jagger shifts in his chair and tugs at his ears, his nose, and his crotch. He is a study in raving body language, exercising either a genuine sensuality

or the licence of a star to scratch himself whenever and wherever he itches.

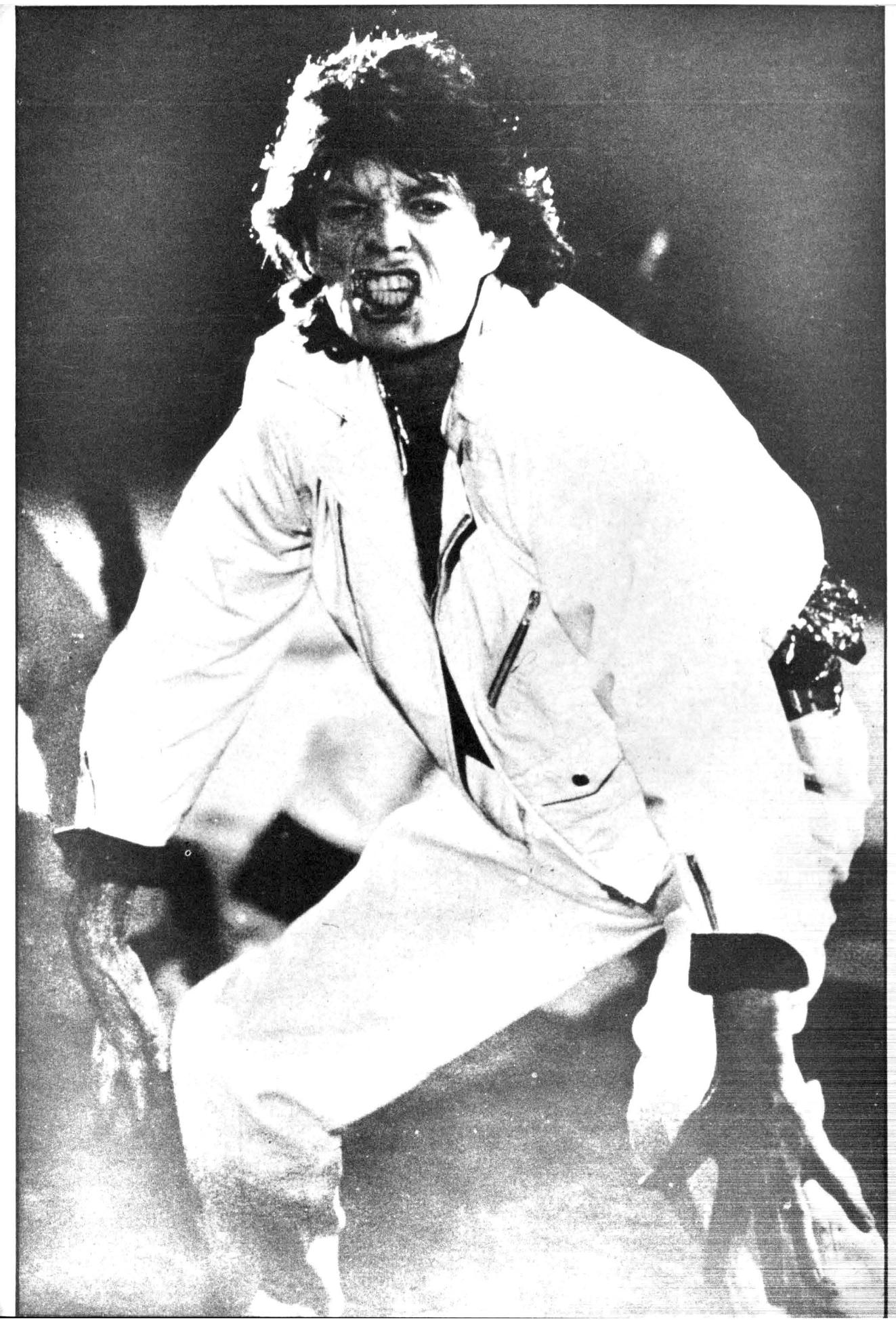
Jagger stands up and leaves without explanation for another floor, where Nile Rodgers, his second co-producer, is working on another track. "There's a little competition going between Nile and Bill," he says to me in the elevator. "That's all right. I want to get different things out of them."

Upstairs, Rodgers, a large, bejeweled black man with a modified Grace Jones coiffure, is sprawled on the couch watching *General Hospital*. Jagger turns down the sound on the TV set. "Spanish soap operas are better," he says.

He goes around to the kitchenette, pours a cup of tea and walks back with Rodgers. As Rodgers opens the door, Jagger's unmistakable whine fills the hallway, interlaced with a stinging guitar riff that is definitely not Keith Richards's. (It's Jeff Beck's, I learn later.)

The engineer runs the tape again. Jagger lifts his left hand, lowers his right, and mimics the Jeff Beck part. As one who has often been caught playing air guitar, I find it comforting to see Mick Jagger do it. Jagger seems to be dancing for the sheer hell of it. Just when he seems to have sur-

This article first appeared in Esquire, May 1985.



rendered to the music, he pulls himself up and cocks his head.

I JUST WANTED to experiment a little, try something different," Jagger says of his decision to do a solo album. "Sometimes you need a bit of a break. You can't always be with the same girl." He winks. It is a function of Jagger's immense caution and political savvy that he can pre-empt criticism of most of what he does with a built-in sneer at himself and those who would mythologise him.

We are in one of many heavily upholstered lounges that supplement the working facilities of the studio, drinking tea.

"So what do you want to ask?"

"Nothing in particular," I say, which isn't quite true. "I'm just supposed to hang around and observe. Your basic fly-on-the-wall thing."

"A day in the life, eh?"

"Three or four days," I remind him.

"I could put on an act the whole time," he says.

I have worried about this very thing, but there doesn't seem any way around it. We both have to try our best, me to catch a glimpse behind the mask, him to use me for his own purposes.

"I mean, there are acts and there are *acts*, you know." Jagger strokes his chin. He picks up the phone on the wall and dials, explaining that he has to line up two girls for a video he is going to shoot in Rio next week. He calls an agency, identifies himself. "He's not? Well, tell him to call me. Tell him I'm *giving* work, not *asking* for it." Then, to me: "It makes a difference."

He gets through to a second agent. After some small talk he says: "I'm looking for one big-busted Spanish-type woman and one black 18-year-old who can dance."

He hangs up and dials again, this time in quest of a model for the album-cover photo. "I don't want her to look like a model," he says to another agent. "And I don't want to get ripped off. It's just a background

"THESE YOUNGER performers, they don't have any energy at all."
Jagger is proud of his athleticism. He says he works out every day: weights and jogging.

thing. I talk to these agents — they hear 'Mick Jagger' and 'album cover' and they double their prices."

Jagger hangs up as Laswell shuffles into the room.

"How you feeling, Bill?" he says.

"Terrible," Laswell answers. He explains that he found himself in a limo with Herbie Hancock at four in the morning and that loud music is now painful.

"I know 'ow you feel," Jagger says. "I went out Saturday night. Came in next day very 'ung over. The 'orns were killing me. 'Ad to go 'ome after an hour." Jagger runs his hands through his hair, massaging his head. They appear to be the hands of a larger man.

HOW ABOUT some supper?" Jagger says to me. It's 8.30. We have been in the studio for five hours.

Karle Brade, Jagger's bodyguard and driver, is waiting for us in the front room. Karle is no taller than Mick, but very broad. Born in Antigua, he grew up in London, where he majored in karate, judo, and weight-lifting. He has the aspect of a Zen *roshi* — an imperturbable, sleepy smile.

"I get the car," Karle says.

The car is a dowdy beige Ford LTD. Karle opens the door and we climb in. "Take us to the Thai place," Jagger says, slumping low in the seat, almost disappearing inside his coat.

When Jagger is in public space, he

moves very quickly between points, but the restaurant, when we get there, is half empty, and the other patrons do not appear to notice that they are dining with Mick Jagger.

I ask if he gets hassled much in public.

"Not too much," he says. "It's the fashionable places that are the worst. Some waiter will call the *paparazzi* up and get 50 bucks for telling them I'm there. I don't go to those places too often."

A waitress comes over and asks if we would like anything to drink. He orders a Perrier. "You got to watch out for the ones with the asterisks," he says, opening a menu. "Very 'ot." I defer to his selection.

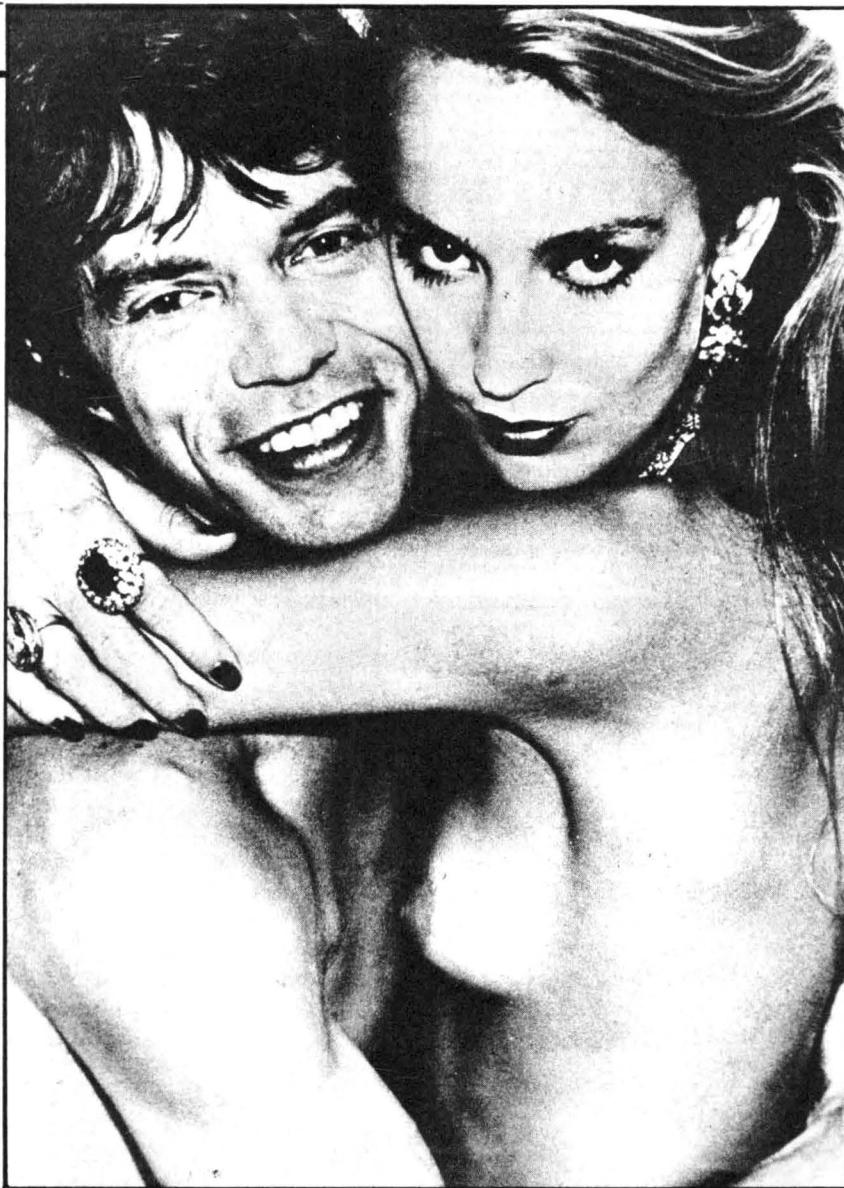
I ask if he feels trapped by expectations that he will be an animal, even when he just wants to eat a quiet dinner.

"I don't think that's been expected for many years." This is news to me. I was hoping for some Dionysian revel. "I think maybe Keith is expected to be that way. What I've been trying to do for the last ten years, without being too kind of milksoppy, is to try and be a little more mature. Obviously, I still misbehave myself, but in a slightly different way. Everybody wants to let off steam once in a while, but I don't think I want to do it *de rigueur*." As he speaks, Jagger rubs his face, tugs at his nose, his ears. "Even Ozzy Osbourne has a night off."

"Is it strange being a 40-year-old rock 'n' roller?" I ask him.

"Forty-one," he says. "Obviously, you can't do it forever. But I can still do it. These younger performers, they don't have any energy onstage at all. They make one or two half-hearted lurches around the stage and that's it. There's not much competition in the athletic department. I mean, you don't necessarily have to have the athleticism of even baseball players to sing rock 'n' roll. But you need *some*." He says he works out every day, weights and jogging.

Food arrives. Jagger thanks the waitress, as he does each time she comes over, and then spoons noodles



Mick Jagger with Jerry Hall : She's The Boss.

onto his plate. "On tour you've got to be even more disciplined. You don't want to wake up with a hangover. All that '60s on-the-road behaviour — I don't think I could do that any more. The shows are much longer, much harder. I don't want to be an asshole. I don't want to go onstage screwed up." Jagger talks with his mouth full. He is not a fastidious eater. "It was fun. It was tough too. I look at these old movies of the Stones getting off the plane, they're almost always half asleep, rubbing their eyes." I notice that Jagger always refers to the Stones in the third person plural. Not 'we' but 'they'.

He sometimes refers to the United States in the first person plural, as if

he were a citizen, although his official residence is Mustique, a tiny island in the Caribbean, and he spends parts of the year in London and at his home in France.

We talk about countries he has toured, about books — he has just finished Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* and is in the middle of Lady Antonia Fraser's *The Weaker Vessel* — and about the blues. At the end of dinner, after the cheque is paid, he bolts for the door, giving me a chance to observe several heads turning in his wake.

"What are you doing tonight?" I ask, leaning in the window of his car.

"There's a party, but I don't think I'll go. I'm tired." He waves

from the back seat. "I'll call you tomorrow morning," he says. "Maybe we'll go jogging."

NEXT DAY at the studio, 3.45 p.m.: Jagger arrives looking several years older than he did yesterday. His eyes are squinted; his hair looks slept on. The jogging didn't work out.

"I went to that party," he tells me. "How was it?"

"My ex-wife was there. She said to me, 'How does it feel to know you've fucked every girl in this room?' I said to her, 'Well, you've fucked every man in the room.' And it was true. Really awful." When he is confiding, Jagger crowds his listener, shamelessly penetrating personal space. This listener is both flustered and flattered. Jagger could give Michael Korda lessons in power.

In the mixing room, Jagger listens to the latest version of *She's The Boss*. Laswell, who has been here for hours, is wearing the same suit, the same baseball cap. Jagger's voice blasts from the speakers.

"It's all over!

The party's over!

It's all over! I'll just shut my mouth."

When the tape segment ends, Jagger rifles through his nylon tote bag, looking for a lyric sheet. The contents of the bag include a notebook, a Hohner harmonica, Di-Gel tablets, *The New York Times*, a Sony Walkman deluxe, cassettes, *The Guardian Weekly*, typed lyric sheets.

Jagger leaves to make a phone call. Laswell says to the sound engineer: "I think we lost a perfectly good guitar solo there. But that's how he wants it." Then, noticing me, he adds: "Otherwise, it's the greatest thing I ever heard in my life."

IN ANOTHER ROOM, Jagger looks over a set of photographs from the Ford Model Agency, not finding what he wants. "She's got to have tits. She'll be in profile."

He picks up the phone and dials his own number. "Jerry, what's the name of that fat-girl agency?"

THE SOUND ENGINEER is running the tape. Jagger dances, then tells him to run it back. "I think we need a scream there," he says. Rodgers nods.

In a studio separated by a pane of glass from the mixing room, a technician sets up a huge mike boom and a lectern with lyric sheet. Jagger dons a pair of headphones, stands in front of the mike, which is nearly the size of his head. The engineer runs the tape and Jagger does the Joe Cocker again, twisting his wrists, his jaw working like a wounded animal's. A moment ago he was yawning in the mixing room. On demand, he has whipped himself up; suddenly, he screams, his mouth opening wide enough to consume two thirds of his face.

The tape ends. Jagger falls still. "Let's do one more," he says.

Back in the mixing room, Jagger listens to the scream played back. "Mute it down a little bit at the start and then bring it up," he says. He listens again and says: "I don't know. It sounds a little contrived. Maybe I should do it again."

"We can enhance it," Nile says. "Where's our scream enhancer?"

Over the course of the night, the scream is tinkered with, re-mixed, muted, and enhanced. It is not a bad metaphor for Jagger's polished professional approach to the creation of apparent primal energy, aural sex, rock 'n' roll raunch.

While Jagger has been working on his scream, business has been piling up in the front room, now full of supplicants and assistants. Jagger breezes in, greets the courtiers, then begins to despatch them.

First, an agent who wants him to see a portfolio. The agent, a black woman, pitches a model: she's new, she's hot, she's French. She's also very expensive. Jagger thumbs through the portfolio. "Great-looking bird," he says, handing it back, "but \$7,000 is a little more than I wanted to pay." He climbs over the back of a couch perpendicular to the one on which a man and a woman are perched stiffly, squeezes the knee

ANYONE WHO works with Mick Jagger learns to set his watch back a couple of hours. Or even days. He won't be photographed in the morning, for instance.

of the man, the art and design director for the album cover, and is introduced to the woman, Erica, who is going to do the photography.

"The idea for the art," Jagger explains, "is kind of modern life. A man and a woman. They've just made love, and now they're doing their thing. He's watching TV. She's exercising, or maybe she's on a weighing machine."

The director and photographer nod vigorously.

The director says: "Can you get up at ten in the morning for the sunlight?"

"I don't look very good at ten in the morning," Jagger says, getting intimate with the couch. "Nobody does."

The others in the room have appeared to be minding their own business, but everyone laughs at this.

"How about one?"

"I could probably make it earlier than that," Jagger says. "Maybe 11." Jagger's personal secretary, Alvenia Bridges, makes a note of this. She is a tall and stately black woman in a grey suit and matching hat.

Erica leans forward and assumes an earnest frown. "Do you see this full-frame, square, or rectangular? Or am I being too specific?"

"I think you're being too specific."

"Right. Okay."

"Do we have a make-up person?" Jagger asks.

"He doesn't need make-up," Erica says to the director, as if still shy of

addressing Jagger directly. Then, turning boldly to Jagger: "You don't need any make-up. You look great."

Jagger gives her a huge, theatrical smile, then scrunches up his face, creating wrinkles. "Just a little bit," Jagger says. Then, looking over and seeing that the agent is gone, he says: "Can you believe that? Seven thousand dollars a day for a model? We've still got to find a girl." With everyone's attention on him, he camps it up: "Summat for the lads to look at on the album covah." He stands up. "All right, then..."

They are dismissed.

In a tiny room filled with recording equipment, Jagger is transcribing the lyrics for *She's The Boss*. The recorded Jagger sings, while the live Jagger dances and speaks the lyrics into a Sony Walkman. There are just the two of us in the room, but Jagger turns the chore into a performance, winking when the lyrics get kinky.

"You want to what? Not right now, baby."

I've got a headache.

You want it right now, baby?

Well, I've got to wash my hair.

You know it's my time of the month.

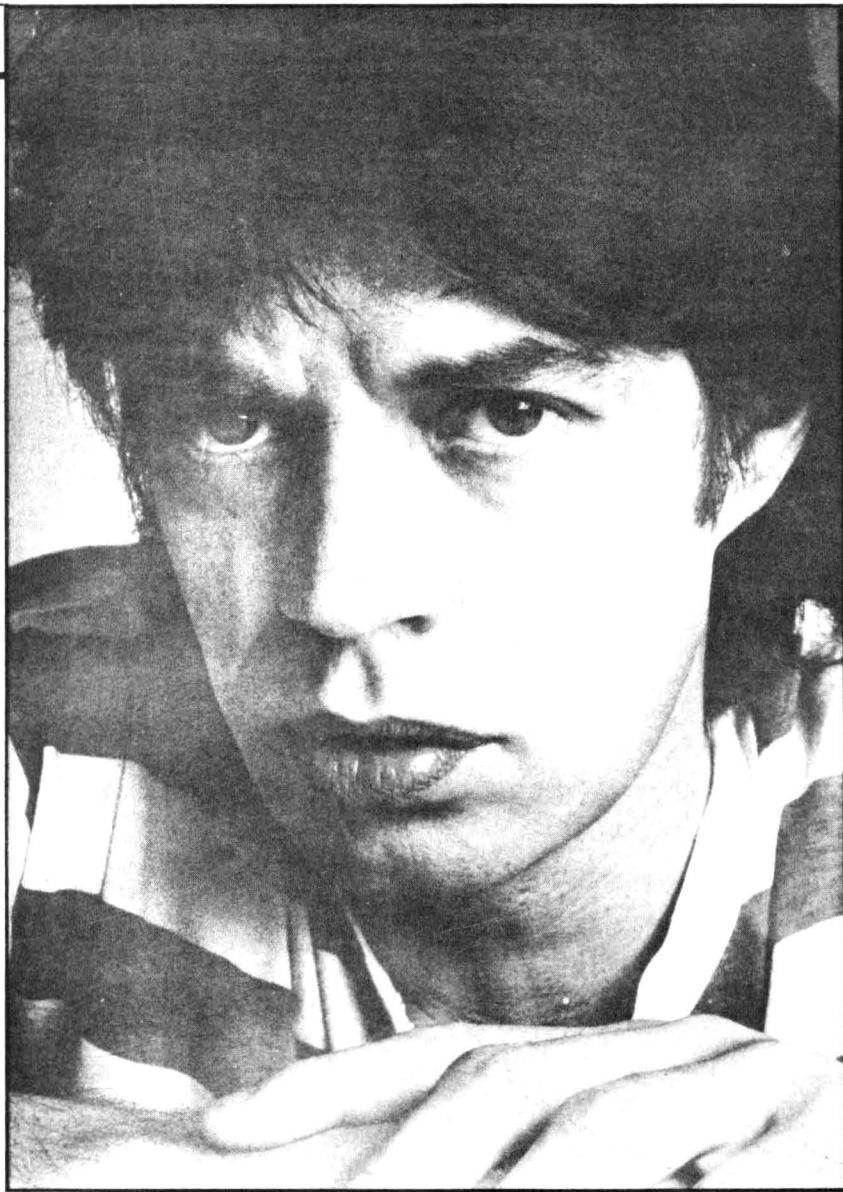
Okay! Okay! I'll do what you say."

When he is finished, he says to me: "I wonder how the ladies will react to that."

"Isn't it a little late in your career to be worried about that?" I say, thinking of 20 years of unabashed misogyny — *Under My Thumb, Some Girls*, the ads for *Black And Blue*.

"Not worried," he says. "Just interested."

A DAY-AND-A-HALF later we are in a photographer's studio on the Upper East Side; Jagger is having his make-up done for an *Interview* magazine shooting. It is 2.15. The session was scheduled to start at noon, but anyone on Mick Jagger time sets his watch back a couple of hours. Or days. Jagger wasn't feeling too well yesterday, so he stayed at home and I went shopping.



Not much of a role model.

Paul Wasserman, the Rolling Stones' press agent, consults with Jagger as the make-up artist works. Wasserman is a huge man who dresses like a lumberjack and speaks like a normal person, rather than a press agent. "Did you read *The New York Times Book Review* today?" Wasserman asks. It is Sunday, and there is a review of two new books about the Rolling Stones.

"I saw it," Jagger says. "Certainly didn't make me want to read the Philip Norman book. Fucking journalists." He purses his lips for the make-up artist, a young woman named Glenna, whose own make-up is cauterous black-on-white.

The hair stylist musses Jagger's

hair, and then it's wardrobe time. Two young women assist Jagger in the dressing-room, as he strips down to his white bikini shorts. "I charge double for lingerie modelling," Jagger says, vampy. He has the body of an adolescent, weighs 130 pounds. He runs through the racks of clothing, some his own, some on loan from designers for the shoot. Jagger has specified that he wants all the clothing to be from British designers. For the first shot they select a brown-and-black tiger-striped shirt, under a leather trench coat.

Downstairs, in the studio proper, photographer Albert Watson races back and forth between his Hasselblad camera and Jagger, who is sitting

under the lights. "I want you to look angry. Really angry," Watson says, and Jagger obliges. "Perfect." Jagger knows how to shape a mood on his face, and Watson seldom has to ask for anything twice.

"That was wonderful. That was so positive," Albert says, in his thick Scots accent, after 50 or 60 frames.

Jagger goes back up the stairs to change, followed by a troupe of make-up and costume people.

He thumbs through *The New York Times Book Review* while waiting for Watson to set up downstairs, stopping at a review of John Rockwell's book on Frank Sinatra.

"You like Sinatra?" I ask.

"Hate him."

"How come?"

"Well, he's not much of a role model, is he?" When Jagger is being facetious, his accent gets very thick. "I don't like his music very much either."

Under the lights, Jagger dances to Prince's 1999. Watson asks him to leap, and he leaps.

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST *chez* Jagger: ground-floor, pine-panelled kitchen with French Provincial aspect. A maid is scrubbing dishes in the sink. Boxes of infant formula are stacked against the wall beside the hutch, which displays a set of blue-and-white bone china. We sit at a big, round pine table, and the maid brings over a pot of tea, wheat toast, and marmalade. It is 1.15 p.m. Jagger has just joined me, looking as if somebody had slept on him.

I was in my jogging togs, just in case, when I arrived at the town house, an inconspicuous limestone on the Upper West Side. No name on the buzzer. When I rang, I heard a distinctly Texan female voice say, to someone inside: "I'm on my way out now." Karle answered the door. Jerry Hall slid past me in the hallway, shaking her long blond hair away from her face and nodding, as she dodged the baby stroller and disappeared out the door.

The New York Times, the New

York Post, and *The Village Voice* are stacked neatly on the breakfast table. Jagger looks briefly at the back of the *Post* to check sports. "Raiders lose," he says. Jagger acquaintances have told me that he is an omnivorous sports fan. He tells me now that he likes most sports, follows football when he is here, soccer when he is in England. He excepts hockey from his enthusiasms. "You can never see the goddamn puck," he says. In England and in Mustique he plays a lot of cricket, and last year Jagger quietly donated \$50,000 to the British Olympic Association in order to sponsor the gymnastics team. "I've been involved with gymnastics for a long time. My father and I have this interest in a gymnastics club in the north of London. So when the Olympic committee asked me for a contribution, I said: 'Well, how much does the whole thing cost?' I think Keith sponsored the judo team."

A short, middle-aged woman, loaded with shopping bags, enters the kitchen. "Buenos días," Mick says.

We move upstairs to the sitting room, a Victorian rococo parlour with neo-Conran's furnishings.

Mick spreads out on the couch, gets into a position somewhere between sitting and full prostration. We watch MTV. Stevie Wonder is crooning. "This song is number one," Jagger murmurs, in apparent disbelief. "I went to see him in London. It was really like a cabaret show. He did all the patter. Great voice, though."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Well, I have known him for years."

A Stones associate had remarked to me that Jagger doesn't have any real friends. I ask him about this.

"I don't have that many friends. People don't have that many friends, you know. Especially in New York. It's all a lot of hanging out, acquaintances. The thing about New York is that everything is a hustle. Like, I like Catherine Deneuve, and I've known her for years. I'm going to this party for her tonight at Regine's. But what am I going to say to her? Every party in New York is someone

"STEVIE WONDER IS number one!"
Jagger is amazed.
"I went to see him in London. It was really like a cabaret show."
Wonder, it is said, is a friend of Jagger's.

pushing something, a book or a film."

"Do you want to get into films?" I ask. Since 1970, when he starred in *Performance*, there has been speculation that Jagger's real ambitions are in the movies. He has made tentative moves — agreeing to appear in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*, until the delayed production schedule conflicted with a Stones tour; optioning the film rights to Gore Vidal's *Kalki*, for which he and Hal Ashby were unable to find studio support.

"Yeah, maybe. I'm doing this 60-minute video thing. I must pre-empt Julien (Temple, the director), but I was involved with writing the story and the characters and choosing the cast. It's producing, I think, that would be the word. It's all the elements. I liked the writing part, creating the characters, and then changing them."

I ask him about his book, the alleged autobiography signed up for a million pounds. The rumour is that the publisher was very unhappy with what Jagger submitted and turned it down, and that the book is less revealing than the average Jagger interview with *Rolling Stone*. "I hear that your publisher is not happy with your book," I say.

Jagger's sleepy expression turns earnest for the first time today. "They wanted to put it out," he insists. "Hey, it was *me* that didn't want to. They said, 'Hey, this is it, boy, let's go.' I said, 'No way, this is not good enough yet.' I did a draft,

but I'm not happy with it yet. I've been trying to get down the musical stuff and then some of the social thing with the '60s."

"But what people want from you," I say, "is the private stuff. Drugs, groupies, the nasty gossip about people still living."

"They're not going to get any of that. Maybe I can't even remember some of it. Or I don't want to. They haven't asked me to do any of that. I told them from the beginning this is not going to be that kind of book."

In the darkened room Jagger turns his head, and a ray of sunlight glints on a front tooth. I have been meaning to look for it during the past week, but this is the first time I've noticed it. "Still got the diamond," I say.

He grins and nods, lifting his upper lip to show me the gem mounted in his right front tooth.

We watch a U2 video and then start talking politics. Jagger is evasive. He explains the complexities of the English system, using the example of the coal miners' strike, balancing the conflicting imperatives of closing inefficient mines and keeping miners employed. The former London School of Economics student speaks knowledgeably of labour history since the '20s.

"Do you ever see yourself going into politics?"

"Can you? Do you have the talent, do you have the patience, do you have the flair for it?" he says, referring to himself in the second person, as he often does when speaking of his future plans, betraying uncertainty, perhaps, or a desire to generalise what is, after all, a unique situation. "Elective office is not what I want. Kissing babies and all that. I don't know. I'm getting more interested in something like that, but I don't see any kind of role model." He scratches his head and looks off in the direction of the formal dining-room across the hall. "Sometimes I feel like a politician," he says sourly.

He aims the remote control at the TV and raises the sound, checking out a new girls' band. "I listen to



Rock 'n' rolling at 41: "I don't have that many friends."

everything. I'm always interested in what other artistes are doing. I'm, like, real competitive. Unlike most English people, I was brought up to be super-competitive, and winning was important. I had to be a good loser, but the point was not to lose. I was brought up in a slightly American way, as far as that attitude to winning goes. Success, winning. It stays with you. As far as the music goes, I have my roots set, but I listen to everything. I don't worry about whether I'm listening to something that may be here today and gone tomorrow. That's the whole fun of pop music."

"Do you worry about getting eclipsed by someone who isn't just 'here today and gone tomorrow'?"

"No way. That's great if someone really wonderful comes along, but it

doesn't happen very often. I mean, I've been eclipsed by Dave Clark. Herman's Hermits."

AN HOUR-AND-A-HALF after breakfast, we go downstairs to have lunch. Jagger picks up the *Post* and ogles Miss Brazil on page three. This reminds him of his upcoming trip to Rio. "I'm going to have to get a Portuguese cassette," he says. "I hate going to a country and not being able to say, 'Can I have a glass of water?'"

The cook brings us lentil soup, then fish in a spicy white sauce. Ingrid, the 20ish live-in nanny, comes in and rummages through the refrigerator.

"Mo'ning, Ingrid," Mick says. She doesn't answer.

After lunch, Jagger disappears for a moment and returns with nine-month-old Elizabeth, his daughter by Jerry Hall. Jagger bounces the kid on his knee. She smiles. Blond and blue-eyed, she has her mother's looks. The father seems amused, not awkward, as some men are with babies, but still a little surprised to be holding this baby, as if he's not quite sure where it came from, or where it goes when he's not around. Elizabeth is Jagger's third. The oldest, Karis, his daughter by Marsha Hunt, is in boarding school in England, as is Jade, his only legitimate child.

Elizabeth smiles. Jagger smiles. "She's no trouble at all, is she?" Jagger says to the baby, and then hands her off to the nanny.



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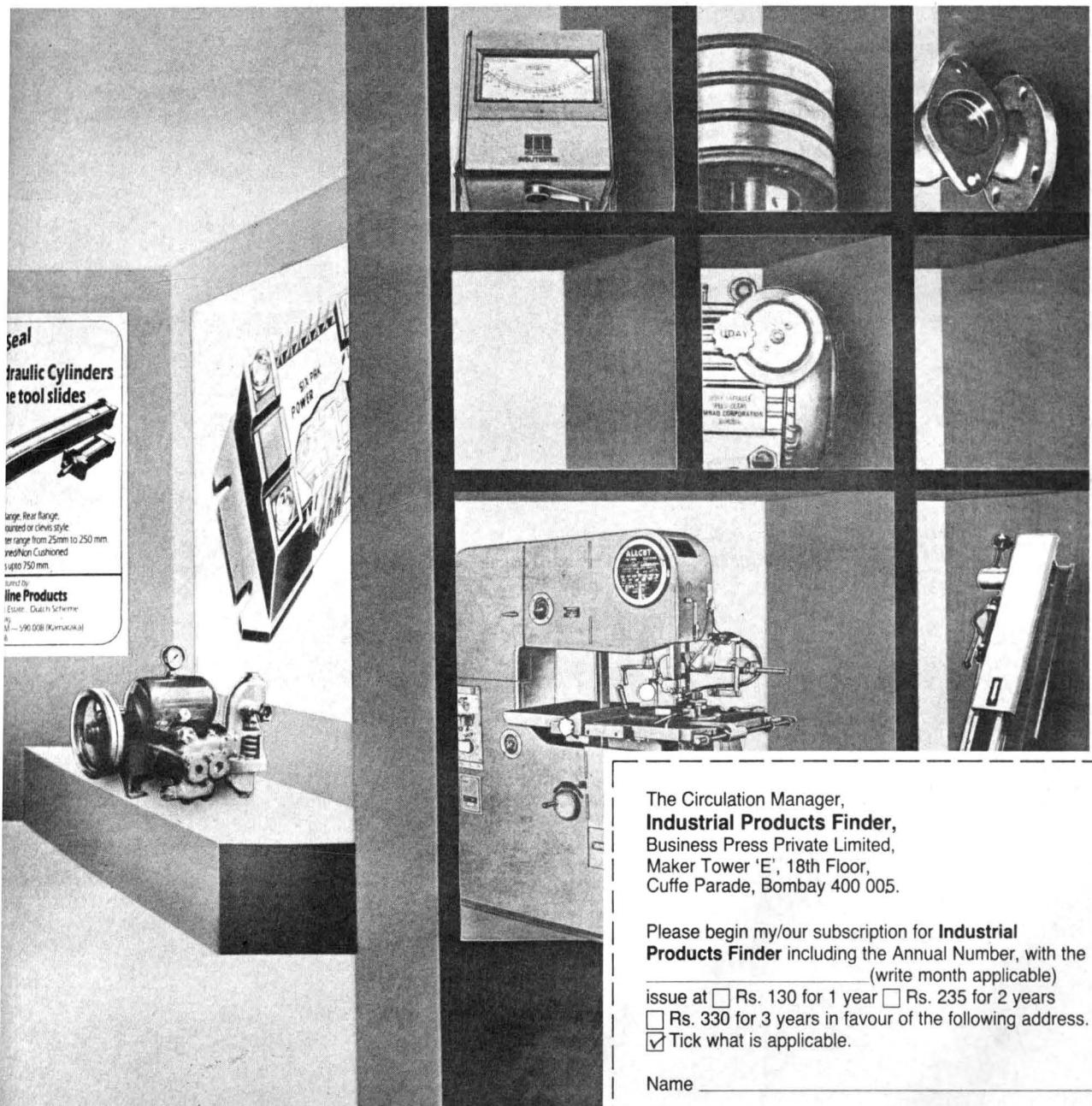
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BORN IN THE '50s

Born too late to rule. And too early for the computer wave. DAVID DAVIDAR profiles the lost generation.

TWAS QUITE LATE IN THE EVENING. An acquaintance, a Brigadier and I, were strolling along in search of a taxi after a couple of drinks at the Mess. After some time, during a pause in our somewhat desultory conversation, the Brigadier said: "I just can't understand these young people in college these days." As a comment that has echoed down the ages, there was nothing extraordinary about it. What I found interesting was that I couldn't have agreed with the Brigadier more. There was a two-and-a-half decade difference in age, outlook and interests between the two of us, yet I discovered that our sentiments regarding today's teenagers were exactly the same. How so? Well, because they are in a totally different time-warp from us, the '50s kids who grew to maturity in the late '70s. Michael Jackson, John Travolta, breakdancing, discomania, moon walking, video heads, computer nerds — these appear to be the watchwords of the new generation. And they aren't mine.

So what are the watchwords of my generation? What, indeed, is my generation? Roughly, the people who were born in the '50s (1950-1960), who are today between 25 and 35, the generation that just missed being born on the cusp of pre-Independent and Independent India. These are the people who should, ideally, be in the forefront of change, in an angry ferment, impatient to leave their mark on the world about them and a model for those who come behind. Unfortunately, it looks as though our generation will be the first one, in recent times, to sink into obscurity, without leaving a trace behind. There are several reasons for this.

The most important, perhaps, is the fact that we are probably the most con-

David Davidar, Executive Editor of Gentleman, is currently at Publishing School in Harvard.



fused, aimless generation to come along in the last half century. Our fathers had the heroes of the Independence struggle to look up to and emulate. Swept along by the tide of patriotic fervour, to use a cliché, they grew old gracefully, content that they would go down in history as those who helped usher in Independence, and reassured that the newly independent country didn't make a total cock-up of things. The generation immediately after ours is the generation Rajiv Gandhi is ultimately addressing; they are the ones who'll be computer literate, technocratically inclined and mass-lobotomised where it comes to any question of individuality. Two wholly disparate generations are on either side of us, then: our fathers, wedded to the ideas of India, and our kids, indoctrinated with the ideas of the West. So where does that leave us? As I've said earlier, bloody confused. The Independence struggle and its stars are of academic interest to us and as far as video games are concerned, they just set our teeth on edge.

When I was in college in the '70s, my heroes and those of my peers, (really one entire section of the student community in India) were protest singers and poets like Bob Dylan, the Doors, the Beatles, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, Eric Clapton... There were others too – brilliantly creative literary and other artists – Eliot, Naipaul, Nabokov, Joyce (the last named, like Kant, a hero to those of us who usually failed to understand him). They were giants who stood hugely in our imagination, fed by lashings of dope, 'meaningful' sex (I'm attempting to distinguish between the automated coupling that appears to be the norm in colleges today) and the strength of our beliefs. But, as time went by, it gradually dawned on us that these were alien gods. When Dylan sang his Vietnam theme in Indian college canteens, people sang along, for the most part unaware that Vietnam was almost over in the mid-'70s (which was when Dylan swept Indian campuses, a decade after he was hailed in America).



Rajiv Gandhi is really addressing the children of the '60s. They are the computer-literate, technocratically inclined ones.

A lot of people were concerned about Vietnam, surprisingly, considering that there were wars their own country had fought which weren't as imprinted on their minds as hostilities on the other side of the world. Which is as symptomatic of the uncertainties of our generation as anything. I mean, we were singing along with Dylan and howling along with Ginsberg, without the faintest idea of what we were shouting about. Sure, drugs were cool and sex was heavy but the concerns we talked about weren't ours (this is not to detract from great songs like *Freedom*). Generation gaps were discovered, to the bemusement of our parents, and hammered into place. Marriages took place on the strength of spurious anxiety and broke up when the ephemeral nature of those concerns became apparent. Women's libbers protested, out of context. Students rose up in arms, puzzled all the while. Something had to give somewhere and the weakest link, our own inadequate, out-of-place beliefs in something not our own, finally snapped for the lucky

few. I say lucky, because at least for them there were few illusions left and they could get on with the business of shaping their progression through life with well-thought-out values and goals. The rest of us floundered on, the drives within us at odds with our environment. Until the collapse came when the two forces pulled each other apart and left us old, jaded men and women, bereft of anger, in our 20s and 30s.

THAT, and there is no other word for it, is tragic. Here we are – people who ought to be hell-bent on changing the world, thrusting forward, with all the idealism, impatience and high dudgeon of youth at the reality around us – whimpering about money, a house, a car and how we can afford a second kid. The chopper has fallen with a vengeance; neither wholly Indian nor wholly Western, it seems like we're doomed to keep muddling on, dissatisfied, hurting, and most pathetic of all, bewildered. And these are not mere fulminations, but fact. I see people around me at work and at play, bright young people who are capable of making at least a slight dent on the world around them, moaning about bosses who don't reward hard work, grumbling about the problems of transportation, the lack of accommodation, funds – when they ought to be thinking about going out and conquering the world.

A woman in her late 20s, who is attractive, talented and conscientious, tells me at great length about the good points of compromise. Compromise! A word that's filthy in its composition, implications and derivations. And yet that seems to be one of the watchwords of our generation. A generation that compromises and has been compromised. A generation that is willing to trade off the pure excitement of taking the bit between its teeth and breaking new ground for the unhappy 'privilege' of earning a few hundred rupees more a month in order to send the second kid to school. Granted, the vast majority of us cannot be high-flying achievers,

innovators and instruments of change, but does that mean we hold back the few who can, by the sheer weight of our unadventurous natures? If hundreds of thousands of what, by rights, ought to be a humming, febrile mass are lack-lustre and discouraged, it is hardly surprising that the few hundreds who want to do something (and who probably can) eventually give up in sheer disgust.

The magazine I work for, recently did a countrywide survey on the best and brightest of what I've been referring to as my generation. The survey confirmed what I've felt for some time: apart from the professional disciplines — medicine, law, science, the media — the young people of our time are more or less quiescent. They are mercenary and lustreless, and innovation, impatience, and a rage for excellence in endeavour are words they consider obscene. So much so, that on rare occasions when someone actually decides to climb out of his/her rut and do something different, he/she is viewed with emotions that range from amazement, disbelief and sometimes (which goes to prove that all is not yet lost) approval.

I'll quote two instances. In the recent World Championship of Cricket matches, the victorious Indian team provided a very interesting study in contrasts. There were examples of old sober-sides — Sunil Gavaskar, Mohinder Amarnath — and there were the young Turks — Azharuddin, Srikanth, Sivaramakrishnan, Sadanand Viswanath, Shastri (admittedly four of those named are younger than the age limits I've set for the in-between generation, but they'll pass). And the young 'uns were truly exhilarating. Shots of Viswanath, grim determination and, yes, a clean anger on his face, egging the other teams on to conquer the home side if they could; Srikanth and Azharuddin cutting and slamming the bowlers around at will; Sivaramakrishnan spinning the batsmen to hell — it was youth, eager fire-breathing youthfulness, at its best. A paradigm, as it were, for the shambling young-old



I can accept Pink Floyd asking me to 'break down the wall' but not some rejuvenated ad-man in the autumn of his life telling me the same thing.

men who pass for youth today, to follow. And then, take a woman like Veenapani Chawla and her exciting drama/dance troupe. Shrugging off laboured convention and the jaded eye of world-weary young people (whose worlds, more often than not, haven't extended beyond their college campuses and family circles) she put on one of the most exhilarating productions I've seen in a long time. But again two, or even two score, examples of this type do not a generation, movement or world make.

Is it any wonder that we have menopausal men and women hogging the media columns, films, dance, drama and that they are angry on our behalf? There are few angry young men and women in India today; instead, we have people long past it, spouting invective and theories, posturing and screaming on every subject under the sun. Their audiences, drugged and somnolent, accept it. And it's something to be really ashamed of. I can accept Pink Floyd raging, "Break down the wall" but not some rejuvenated ad-man 'in the

autumn of his life' telling me the same thing. Where are the passionate young men and women who ought to be out changing the world? Nowhere, and this again just underlines the general malaise I've been talking about so far.

BUT SHOULD this state of affairs be allowed to go on, unheeded and unchecked? The answer is: obviously not. Not unless we want to go down in history as the generation that vanished without a trace.

Says Steven Jobs, the multimillionaire computer whiz of Apple Computer Inc, who turned 30 this year: "I think your 20s are the time to be impatient. People get stuck as they grow older. Our minds are sort of electrochemical computers. And so it's rare that you see an artist in his 30s or 40s able to contribute something really amazing." He never said a truer word. And to think that millions of us do not seem particularly bothered by the fact that we spend our 20s and 30s doing nothing very much in particular, save agonising over the boring, grimy details of when we'd have accumulated enough money to buy a new crockery set or a two-wheeler. And this leads directly to another thread that appears to run through young people in the '80s: the culture of grabbing as much as you can for yourself and, occasionally, for yours — your wife, girl-friend, kids, whatever. An *Esquire* article titled *The Lost Generation* says: "(The bottom line for people today is) those who belong to no one but themselves can never be abandoned." And this culture, apart from its me-first aspect, also derives from the fear of letting go and striking out which, in turn, has its roots in the shattered, rudderless mass that is our generation.

It's time we took a closer look at Steven Jobs's words and prepared to rethink our way of existing today: perhaps a large majority of us are beyond redemption, but surely there are quite a few who are ready to do something. Among the young working professionals, executives, creative

types and even technocrats I meet in the course of work and in my leisure hours, a high level of dissatisfaction, frustration and, yes, even a desire to do something really worthwhile does exist. A short while ago, I met a young journalist who edits the magazine section of a daily newspaper. Bright, virtually at the top of his profession, he seemed to have everything going for him, the way our '80s person would look at it: success, fame, money etc. But as we talked, it became increasingly apparent that he was very unhappy about the position he found himself in. He confessed to being frustrated, unable to do what he wanted to do and, what was worse, with no idea of how to break the deadlock. At this point I told him that I, too, found myself tremendously discouraged with a number of things and how I was looking for ways to vent whatever I felt I was capable of. My friend's reaction was palpable. He said: "Oh! You too! I thought I was the only guy who felt the way I do." I hastened to assure him that this was not the case and pointed out that there were a number of common friends and acquaintances who were silently seething at the situations they found themselves in. "So what do you do about it?" he asked, and added, "I was thinking, if I'm not able to do something about it soon, I might as well drop out." This struck me as a pretty stupid thing to do; for, contrary to the generally held opinion, dropping out just because you can't hack it in an unresponsive world is tantamount to compromising. It certainly has nothing to do with following your own drummer — it just means you've opted out because you find the going too tough. I said as much to my friend and also drew his attention to the fact that most of the people who had dropped out found themselves as miserable as before.

So it's tough for us, the in-between generation, I told him — no role models, unsatisfactory heroes, a plethora of cultural inhibitors and an unedifying majority of Cassandras-cum-play-safes — but it just means



I met a young journalist who edits the Sunday section of a daily newspaper. He had it all: success, fame, money etc. But he was disappointed and frustrated.

one tries harder.

To quote John De Lorean, the auto-maker who did have a lot of things going for him, until he crossed that fine line between achievement and overweening ambition and overbalanced: "Some of the big things in life are achieved by those who refuse to conform. A guy's gotta do what he's gotta do. We only pass this way but once." And so what if the rest of your peers are timid and prefer to discuss the erratic behaviour of their cleaning-women and the irregularity of trains. Harsh Vardhan, the 29-year-old Managing Director of Vayudoot, who muscled his way into the top echelons of India's public sector, has this to say about the merits of having an impatient spirit: "I had a spirit which was determined not to yield to any circumstances. When you have to compensate for things you don't have, you develop a fierce competitive spirit which means that whatever happens, you must achieve something." Vardhan does not have a hoity-toity accent; his suits aren't exactly well-fitting; he is small and

has a toothbrush moustache. But he's made it. He's upset people, but he hasn't let that or what other people would perceive as his inadequacies deter him.

The idea, then, is to just keep trying to do whatever one is led to do and not be unduly worried about the result. If that restlessness is relentlessly dampened, as with most of us today, then it's obvious nothing will ever happen. One just needs to go on plugging, regardless of the outcome.

THERE HAVE BEEN instances of angry young men and women who've bucked all the odds in order to keep the flag of youthful idealism flying. Take the Assam student agitation, for instance. Scores, nay, hundreds of young men and women, with no power save the powers within, defying the powerful Centre, the army, the police, everybody. It was a force to rival the Columbia, Harvard and Yale campus sit-ins and demonstrations against Vietnam at their peak. And the Assam students captured the nation's imagination. No matter that the problem still drags on; the fact remains that the young used the tempestuousness of their youth to make their dismay with the way events were shaping felt.

Earlier, the other great youth 'uprising' of recent times, Jayaprakash Narayan's youth movement, touched a lucky few; their idealism, commitment and faith in themselves were awakened by the fiery old man. While there have been other 'youth' movements in Independent India — the Naxalites, the recent anti-reservation uprising in Gujarat, the language riots in Tamil Nadu, Priyaranjan Das Munshi's youth protests in Bengal, intermittent campus ferment in Bihar, UP and other states (usually to pave the way for mass copying, hooliganism, etc) — they are of such dubious merit, that they are best left alone. Anyway, the point is we don't have leaders like JP with us now, to channelise our energies. So we need to shift for ourselves and quickly; else we'll cross the big four

oh, too, and join the hordes of pompous commentators on the warp and woof of our age. And do you remember that '60s saying in America: "Don't trust anyone over 30." Well, I'll modify it slightly and say: "If you listen to anyone over 40, you're virtually a geriatric yourself. By this I don't mean that our generation ought to be a generation of pathetically aging flower children wandering around with circlets of adolescent hang-ups. But as long as we have the energy, enthusiasm, openness and impatience to pursue goals that appear fresh and inviting, it's criminal not to do anything about it. And when I say don't listen to anyone over 40, that goes for the premature 40-year-olds who are part of our generation too.

THE FINAL POINT I want to make is that it's not too late to do something about the situation we find ourselves in. It doesn't matter if Rajiv Gandhi's computer revolution hits the kids of today, bypassing us. What we need to do is evolve an environment all our own to operate in. Look at America. After the frenzied '60s protests — hell, no, we won't go — today's generation has moulded itself to the contours of its age. Campus protest, according to *Newsweek*, has better manners today. "Today's protestors," the magazine says, "have a decidedly '80s style. Compared to the purple-hazed '60s radicals, they are exceedingly polite. Students at the University of Colorado at Boulder, for example, carefully negotiated with school officials before staging a demonstration that one administrator called 'the most civilized on the face of the earth'. But perhaps even more significant, activists have taken to high-tech 'networking': these days a computer hook-up links more than 100 campuses with news of the latest protest developments." Among young working professionals, too, the spirit of the age is reflected in homogenised yuppie culture (this, it must be stressed, ought not to be confused with the whining, mercenary culture



There are some individuals who are trying to blaze new trails. There are those involved with the PUCL, the PUDR, and young film-makers and theatre directors.

that is flattening young Indians today). So there is no call for us to throw up our arms in surrender and resign ourselves to a no-hope situation. We need to work things out, too.

Some examples exist, here and there, where youth protests and the efforts of this generation to leave its imprint can be seen. I've already mentioned the Assam movement and some individuals, who are trying to blaze new trails. To this can be added activist groups like the PUCL, PUDR civil rights lawyers, young environmentalists, committed young film-makers, theatre directors and so on. If only these individual instances could coalesce into a broad band of iconoclasm, this generation could truly make the world sit up and take notice.

That might be wishful thinking; nonetheless, what remains inalienable is that only we can figure out what we need to do with ourselves. If we don't have genuine heroes, then we either make an attempt to find them or do without. One could go Indian

or unabashedly Western or marry the two successfully, without groaning about being caught between two cultures. And even the last-named might not be such a bad thing after all. For when there is such ferment you could use it to your 'creative' advantage, if you have the inclination and talent. Take Naipaul.

Again, if one feels like opening oneself up to the waves of technocratic development that are sweeping the world everywhere, there's nothing to prevent one from doing so. After all one is only as 'dated' as one feels and if you're wide open to new influences, go right ahead and to hell with your fix in time. The danger here, of course, is that you might find out, too late, that you've cleaved to another spurious model of expressing yourself. But then there's only one age in which you can make mistakes, pick yourself up, try again, fall, and try again. Let no one tell you any different. And if you heed the timid, and refuse to risk your all for your convictions and belief in yourself, why, then there's nothing more to be said.

WHEN YOU GET right down to it, our generation is probably the luckiest in decades. Simply because there are no pre-set patterns of behaviour for us to be constrained by, no world or national movements to be part of, no role models of any stature to emulate. We are free — free to choose, free to innovate, free to do whatever we feel we are capable of. Issues abound — national integration, national development — and if we look hard enough there are several channels to funnel our anger and impatience into and come up with something devastating.

I see no reason, therefore, for our generation to go down in history as the generation that meant nothing; the anaemic filling between boards of lustre. It's wide open out there. And as Bob Dylan sang, so long ago, "The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind/The answer is blowing in the wind." Whether we want to reach up and pluck it out is up to us. ♦

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SALVAGING THE POLICE FORCE

RECENT EVENTS have highlighted the greatest tragedy of Independent India — the total demoralisation of our utterly ineffective police force. Last year, Bombay's police force proved wholly unprepared for, and unable to deal with, the communal riots. There have been gang wars and shoot-outs reminiscent of Chicago, with the police either powerless to check them or indifferent to them. And events throughout the North, and recently in Gujarat, show that conditions are worse elsewhere.

We find the police increasingly unwilling to tackle tense situations. Tension is allowed to build up without adequate preventive steps being taken, either because the Intelligence machinery is hopelessly bad or because its advice is not heeded. During the initial stages of riots there is an apathy and inaction that only seems to encourage the rioters. And when the tension finally erupts, the local police are unable to deal with it. By the time the CRP or the army is called in and the situation brought 'under control', precious lives are lost and valuable property is damaged; worse, the seeds of bitterness have been sown.

The failure of the police force is not confined to communal disturbances. If crime has not increased beyond control, it is only because we are generally law-abiding, and not because of the efficiency of the police.

Though this problem has been discussed on countless occasions, most people seem to accept it with the

fatalism with which they put up with unhygienic water and adulterated milk. If, however, nothing is done soon, it will be too late.

An ideal police force should work with, and as a part of, the community. Unfortunately, the police we inherited from the British were never trained to function like this. They kept aloof from the people and were disliked; still, they were respected and feared because they were efficient and, generally, impartial.

After Independence, the police force continued to be alienated from the community, an alienation wholly undesirable in an independent democracy. Our police are reviled for their brutality. And there is truth in this. They are reviled for being corrupt and amenable to pressure and influence. There is truth in this, too. They are also charged with inefficiency. But in making these criticisms, all of us continue to think of the police as 'them', underlining their alienation from the community.

The police force is raised, trained and manned by us. If it misbehaves or fails to function, we are to blame for allowing this to happen. Should not the citizen who gives the bribe also be blamed for corruption in the force? And are we not to blame for paying the police so badly that the temptation of a bribe is almost irresistible?

Not only do we pay the police badly, we don't even treat them well. The conditions in which they live and work are atrocious; their hours of duty are arduous. They are badly equipped. Most police stations in Bombay have one or two vans or jeeps of which one is generally out of



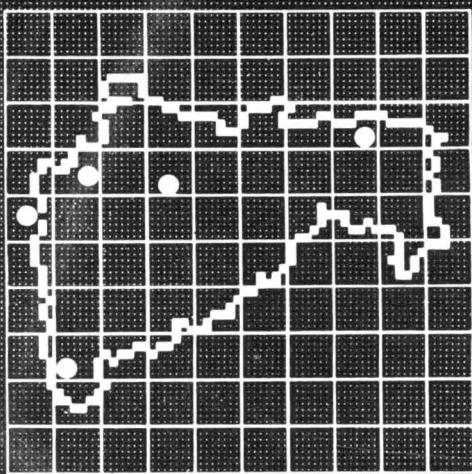
order. They have few typewriters or typists, so sub-inspectors after a heavy 12-hour day, have to write out their diary by hand. And what they write is important, as any error in it can give a handle to the defence in the future prosecution.

With poor equipment goes poor training. Few constables are trained in any modern skills. Few can drive or type; few can employ any of the forensic skills one associates with modern crime investigation; few are familiar with the hundreds of laws they are supposed to enforce. The discipline of the force is bad. There are too many promotions by seniority or as a result of influence. Nobody is sacked except in the gravest cases. The officer cannot discipline and control his men.

Political interference permeates the police force. Promotions and postings are controlled by politicians. And the politicians are often connected, in some way, to the local mafia. Can we really expect the average police constable or inspector to risk his future by acting against such well-connected criminals?

There are times when the party in

Atul Setalvad is an advocate at the Bombay High Court. This is his first article for Imprint.



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power promotes an agitation. The police are expected to go 'slow', whatever the agitators do in such cases. This was witnessed in Bombay when there were violent Shiv Sena agitations.

The British made sure that no police officer suffered because he was over-zealous. In Independent India, the police have no protectors. They are criticised if they fail to act; and they are also criticised if they react with force. In the inquiry that invariably follows police 'atrocities', the blame is fastened onto some unfortunate inspector. Nothing would, however, have happened to him if he had merely failed to act.

Riot control is not easy. It requires a knowledge of the locality and its inhabitants so that growing tension is recognised before it reaches explosive proportions; it requires a readiness to act, a display of force and (if necessary) an exercise of force; it also requires the impartiality of the force. The police must act to suppress any riot, whatever its ostensible 'purpose'. And the police force must be provided with at least a modicum of modern equipment: telephones and radios for

The most important requirement is that the police function non-politically. The control at present exercised by the Home Ministry must be relinquished.

rapid communication, vehicles for rapid deployment, modern equipment to protect the police from stones and bottles, and effective equipment to enable the police to curb violence without retaliating with excessive violence.

I think the most important requirement, at this stage, is that the police function non-politically. The control at present exercised over the police by the Home Ministry must be relinquished so that transfers, promotions, postings, etc are regulated by a non-political body — perhaps, a Police Commission. The Commission must be a small group consisting of retired senior police officers, a judge and one or two prominent citizens. It must be independent of the government in power.

The Police Commission should not only be in charge of the administration of the force but should be empowered to deploy personnel at suitable places as the need arises and to formulate requirements in terms of personnel, police stations, equipment etc. It is true that India is a poor country, but if it can host the Asiad and deploy private aircraft for ministers it can surely spare the necessary funds to ensure that police stations do not leak or police jeeps stall.

The Commission must appoint an officer in charge of every police 'area' for a reasonable period and he must be responsible for maintaining law and order in it; if he fails, he must be punished; if he succeeds, he must be rewarded.

It is the Commission that must ensure that the police act if certain laws are violated. This must not be left to politicians who will be influenced by political expediency.

Such steps would restore professionalism in the force and improve discipline and morale.

These steps will not, however, resolve the alienation of the police force from the community. As citizens, we must participate in the enforcement of the law. This means that we must not turn a blind eye either to the police beating up a 'criminal', or to *goondas* beating up a constable. We must be ready to record statements and be called as witnesses. We must not leave the 'dirty' work to 'them'.

Two things can be done relatively easily and cheaply. Both involve the co-operation of ordinary citizens with the police. I would suggest the formation of a voluntary community force — a purely voluntary, unpaid body — to assist the police. It would be a bit like the war-time ARP — a truly local and voluntary force. Such a force will be a disaster if the local mafia or politicians are allowed to dominate it. But if the able-bodied men in every household between the ages of say 20 and 50, joined it in each locality, it could work; their task would not be onerous, but at times of tension such a force could protect its own locality.

Such a force is, however, not enough. In addition, there should be a committee of citizens to be associated with each such police area; this committee would have the right (and duty) to inspect police stations and lock-ups to make sure that no third-degree methods are employed, and that the police act within the framework of the law. In addition, the committee can promote an understanding of the problems of the police within the community.

If ordinary citizens are not willing to take a little trouble to join such a force and such a committee, the idea will not work. But even if a fraction of citizens are willing to devote a small part of their time to such activity, it can work wonders. ♦

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MORE ON BIOGRAPHY

OSCAR WILDE is reported to have said: "Biography lends to death a new terror." Precisely. To mix a metaphor, many would turn in their graves even before dying, were they to have an inkling that some of my fellow-writers would be working on their biographies!

But, as a glance at the *Times Literary Supplement* or the *New York Times Book Review* would show, some of the finest literature being produced today is in the field of biography. The book market in the US and England is simply teeming with biographies. Take the year 1984. A 485-page biography of Otto Rank by E James has been published by Free Press, New York. A 550-page volume on Pope John XXIII, *Shepherd Of The Modern World*, by Peter Hebblethwaite, has appeared under the imprint of Doubleday and Company, New York. A memoir of the Rockefellers — *The Chief* — on both father and son, by Lance Marrow, has been published. A similar two-generation biography of Benjamin Franklin and his son — whom he first adored and then disinherited — is also on the stands.

Talking of writers, one can understand people writing about Rilke and T S Eliot, the two greatest poets of the modern era. The one on Eliot by Peter Ackroyd attempts to place the poet's life and work in proper relation to each other. But what we cannot easily understand is a tome being written on the life of Compton-Burnett, the lady novelist whose plots hinged on old, creaking devices like newly-discovered wills and kinship. But, as her biographer, Hilary

While good biographies are rare in India, the book market in the West is simply teeming with them. There are biographies of people as varied as the Tolstoys, Pope John XXIII and the Rockefellers.

Spurling shows, Compton-Burnett got extraordinarily critical attention during her lifetime and was favourably compared with Aeschylus, Jane Austen and Hemingway!

Perhaps, the West had a head start. After all, the first autobiography ever written was probably *The Confessions Of St Augustine*, as splendid a record of the failings of the flesh as there is likely to be. From St Augustine to a 20th-century Pope is not as great a leap as it seems to be. The painstaking work on Pope John XXIII will be welcomed because it shows how this lover of tradition and ceremonial baroque changed towards the end. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the name he bore until he became the Pope, had returned to Venice in his 70s as the Cardinal, to die amongst his people. Yet, he became Pope five years later. The Roman synod was, under him, a model of co-operation.

Books on psychoanalysts could fill libraries. Otto Rank, the Freudian disciple turned apostate, fascinates me. At a time when Rank's colleagues were trying to derive all their theories from biological instincts, he insisted that creativity was a stronger impulse in human development. He stood for free will as opposed to the determin-

ism implicit in Freud's teachings. The arts were central to his vision. The longing for immortality drove both the artist and the neurotic, he felt, and the neurotic was not a bundle of phobias but someone who was alienated and had plumbed deeper levels of reality.

Biographies, like all other books, reach our libraries late. Recently, I read two remarkable ones, both published in 1983. The first is *The Tolstoys* by Nikolai Tolstoy. Written with verve and a feel for history, the book swept me off my feet. The author was born and brought up in England in an evocative Russian home, surrounded by Russian relics — icons, Easter eggs, portraits of the tsars and *émigré* newspapers. It was at the age of eight that he learned about the October Revolution, and that he was a white Russian, as distinct from the red. Later, he came to know about the curse on the Tolstoy family. In 1718, Peter Andre-vitch Tolstoy, suave diplomat and king-maker that he was, accompanied, at Tsar Peter's request, the two assassins who smothered the eccentric tsarevich, Alexei, after Tsar Peter began to suspect his son's loyalties. The son, already terrified of his father, cursed 25 generations of the Tolstoys — each generation would produce men of outstanding ability, he said, but also mad and witless individuals.

But the one book which flew like an arrow to the heart was *Isfahan Is Half The World (Memories Of A Persian Boyhood)*, by Sayyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, published by Princeton University Press. Though written as far back as 1955, the Americans decided to translate and publish it only now, mainly because of their post-revolution trauma.

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How could a people reject all that the West had to offer? "What could be the appeal of traditional Iranian life in the modern world?" they ask. Jamalzadeh is one of the few Persian authors to have written on the Persian clergy and his upbringing among them, and to have recounted a life within Islam as seen by a mullah's son, presenting both, the good and bad facets. Born in 1895, he studied in Lebanon, France and Switzerland till 1910. He published two books from Berlin, including one of short stories entitled *Once Upon A Time*, which created a furore. It was praised by the liberals and denounced by the orthodox. Jamalzadeh was excommunicated and declared a non-believer whose blood it was lawful to shed.

All the nuances of city life and a typical Iranian childhood come through in his writings: the sinuous lanes of Isfahan where it was so dark 'you could not see the white of an

eye in daylight'; and the relative who wanted a son, falling victim to cheats like the *falgirs*, who made prophecies by opening books at random; and the *tasgirs*, who claimed to be water diviners.

Both the tolerance and the fanaticism of the people of Iran come through. There is Haji Abbas who kept the *Torah*, the *Bible* and the *Koran* by his side. As for the fanaticism, the young Jamalzadeh got caught in a 'Babi-killing' in the first decade of the century. Not knowing what the mob was so excited about, he asked an adult what was going on. The passage needs to be quoted in full, if it is to reveal what the Baha'i's would be up against today:

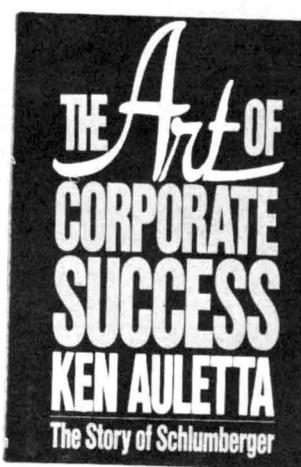
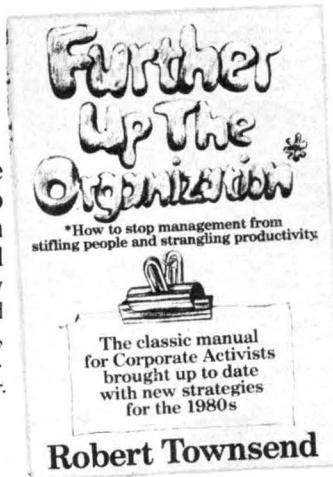
"Finally we hung onto an old man and said, 'Please, uncle, for God's sake, what's going on?' Without even glancing at us, breathing hard, he said: 'It's a Babi-killing! Hit them!' and threw himself like a madman into

the pandemonium. The sashes of those two wronged and helpless bare-headed men had been thrown around their necks and they were being dragged along, bleeding, as degradingly as possible. They were attacked by people like mad dogs or bloodthirsty wolves — men and women, adults and children, their bulging eyes glittering with sparks of fanaticism and viciousness as they tried to outdo each other at hitting and hurting their victims and at shouting insults and abuse and curses and obscenities. They were yelling like lunatics, that the two men should be branded and scarred, stoned to death, should have their eyes put out, be torn to pieces, their heads pounded under mallets, burning candles put under their skin, their noses and ears cut off, they should be split apart, stuck in a canon's mouth, walled up, put before a firing squad, burned alive, horse-shoed, strung up, buried alive, hung on meathooks, mutilated. . . ."

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Bejan Daruwalla's Predictions



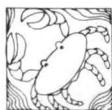
ARIES: March 21 to April 20: The Sun-Uranus trine signifies a bout of romance and speculation. Hobbies and studies will have an unusual importance. The luck of the draw will be with you. Around August 16, expect collaborations, trips and ties. In short, combine pleasure and profit this month. The focus is on partnerships and long distance connections.



TAURUS: April 21 to May 21: The conjunction of the Sun and Mercury suggests that the home front will be the high spot now. The health of parents and in-laws is suspect. Expenses will be very heavy. Rentals and taxes will have to be paid. The pressure will ease on and after the 23rd when the Sun shifts into the next sign. Pay attention to news, letters and documents, please.



GEMINI: May 22 to June 21: The full Moon on July 31 is in the angle of communication and transport. Therefore, pay particular heed to letters, calls, appointments, interviews, and even gossip. It is time you got your travel kit ready. Those of you in research, writing and music, should do splendidly. This is a month to prove to the world how good you really are.



CANCER: June 22 to July 22: Venus in your sign from the second implies that the good things of life will be yours. Obviously, expenses will mount. A financial deal or a business contract should be completed this month. The last eight days are crucial for any major decisions or negotiations. Do not hesitate at all this month. Just rely on your intuition.



LEO: July 23 to August 23: Despite the Sun-Jupiter opposition this month, your wishes will be granted. However, you are advised to take good care of your health. A struggle for power is predicted. But you will come out well on top because Mars is in your sign. Between August 2-27, a trip is possible. After August 21, a confused picture of things and events will come into focus.



VIRGO: August 24 to September 23: This is a tough month: you might be deceived by those you trust. Also, expenses will skyrocket. Rendezvous, secret meetings and a deal under the table are not ruled out. This month holds potential of an important journey. After the 23rd, the going will be smoother. Learn to control your wild impulses.



LIBRA: September 24 to October 23: Venus-Saturn trine boosts your ego and gives you charisma. People will do you favours. Group activities, socials and functions find you in your element. A promotion, alliance and collaboration, are predicted for Librans. In the last week, expect expenses and journeys. Your popularity will shoot up. Await awards and rewards.



SCORPIO: October 24 to November 22: A sharp struggle for power will be on now. You must learn to safeguard your interests and health. The same goes for parents and in-laws. Thanks to Mars in your sign, you will succeed in warding off the attacks of rivals. After the 15th, your work will be done. There is a danger of accidents. Remember, matters could go to the law courts.



SAGITTARIUS: November 23 to December 21: Communication is what the month is all about. August favours salesmen, teachers, editors, fashion designers, research scholars and scientists. Your intuition will be uncanny. Partnerships and journeys were meant just for you. A time to go places. Make your major move in August! Publicity-wise, simply super!



CAPRICORN: December 22 to January 20: You will be involved with legacies, gifts, intimate relationships and religious rites. A few problems connected with your health will crop up. This is not the time to try the off-beat and new. You will be swimming against the tide. But by August 23, the opposition will have spent itself. The last week is lucky for new ventures.



AQUARIUS: January 21 to February 18: It is advisable to reach out to people. Your rivals will try to gun you down, but so strong is the impact of Jupiter in your own sign, that they will not succeed. There will be a few changes on the work front. You will probably be angling for funds, and you will get them by September or October. A break in partnership is possible.



PISCES: February 19 to March 20: If you feel under the weather, go for an outing. This month, the focus will be on pets, health and work. In all these three areas, expect a little trouble, and plan accordingly. August and September will be crucial for finance, collaborations and intimate ties, which could result in an attachment or marriage.



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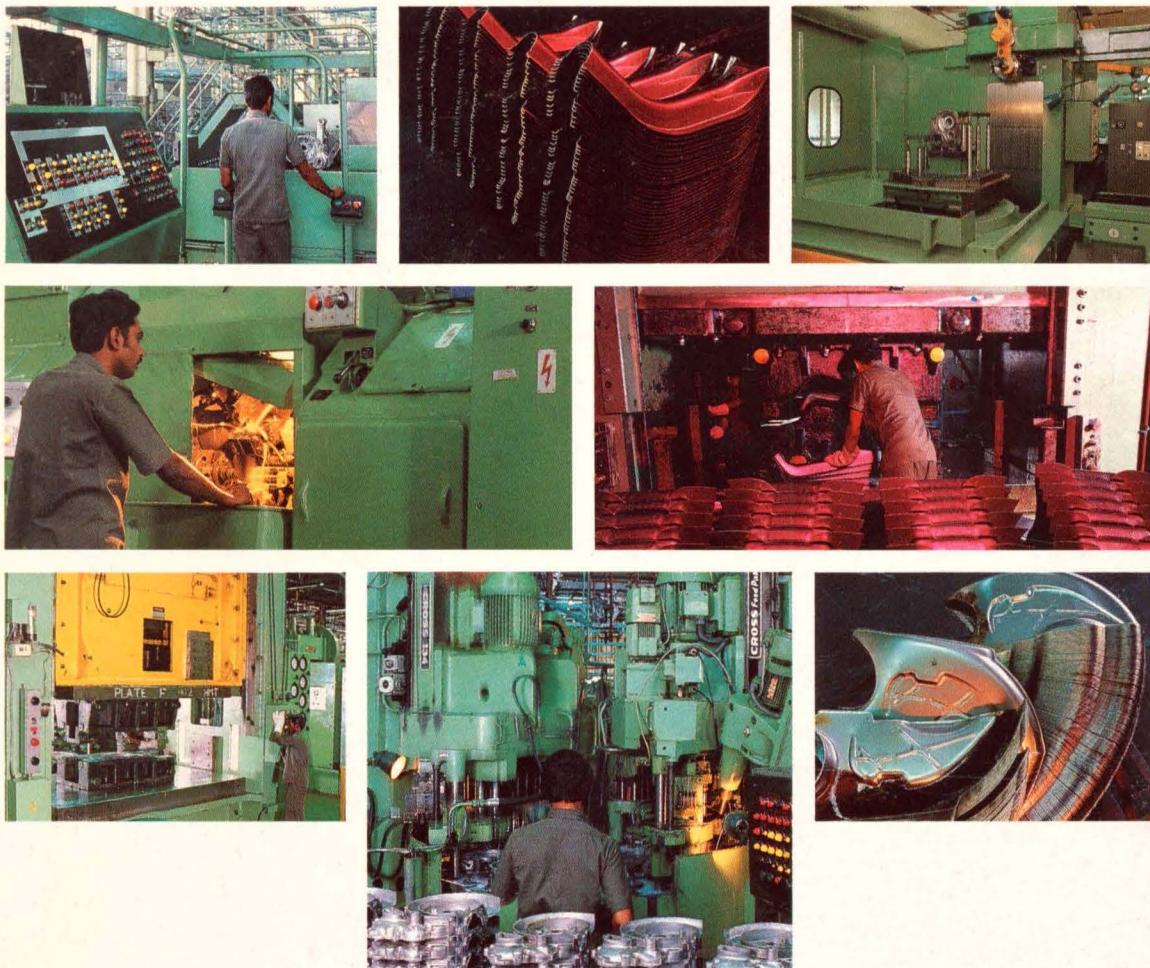
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