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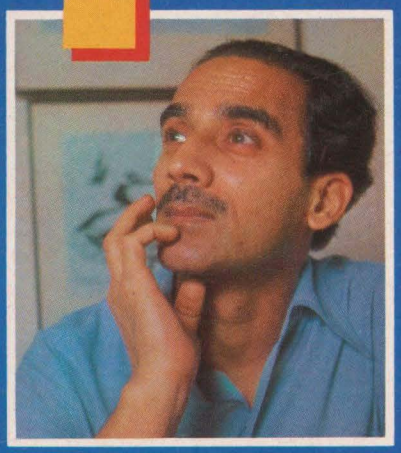
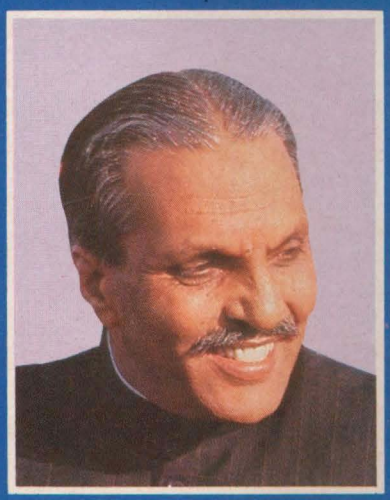
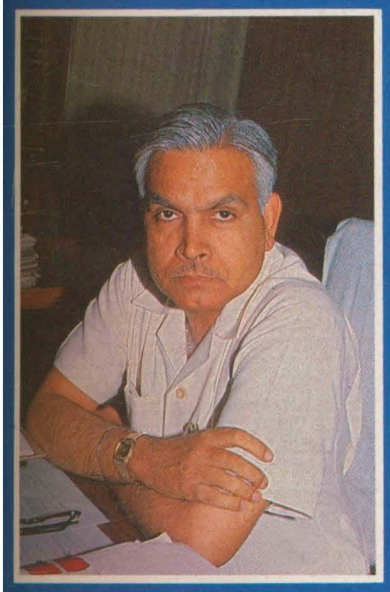
Arun Shourie



General Zia-ul-Haq



Natwar Singh



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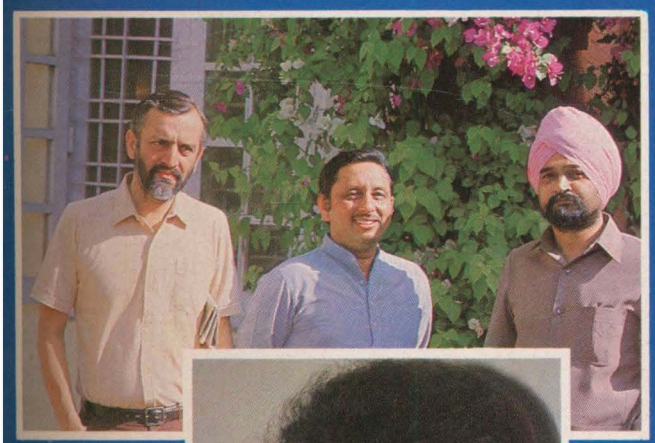

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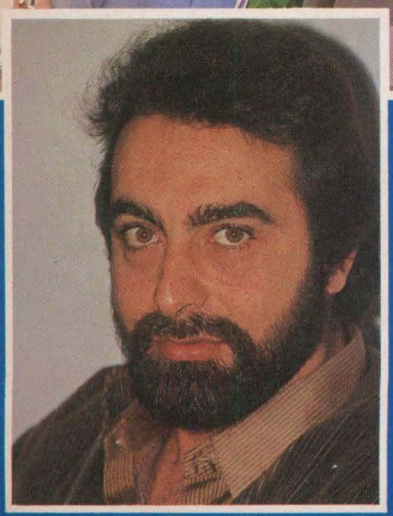
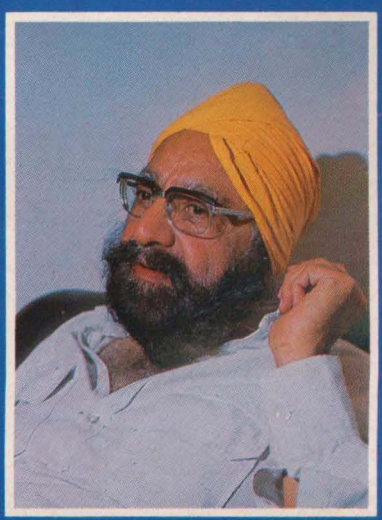


Kabir Bedi



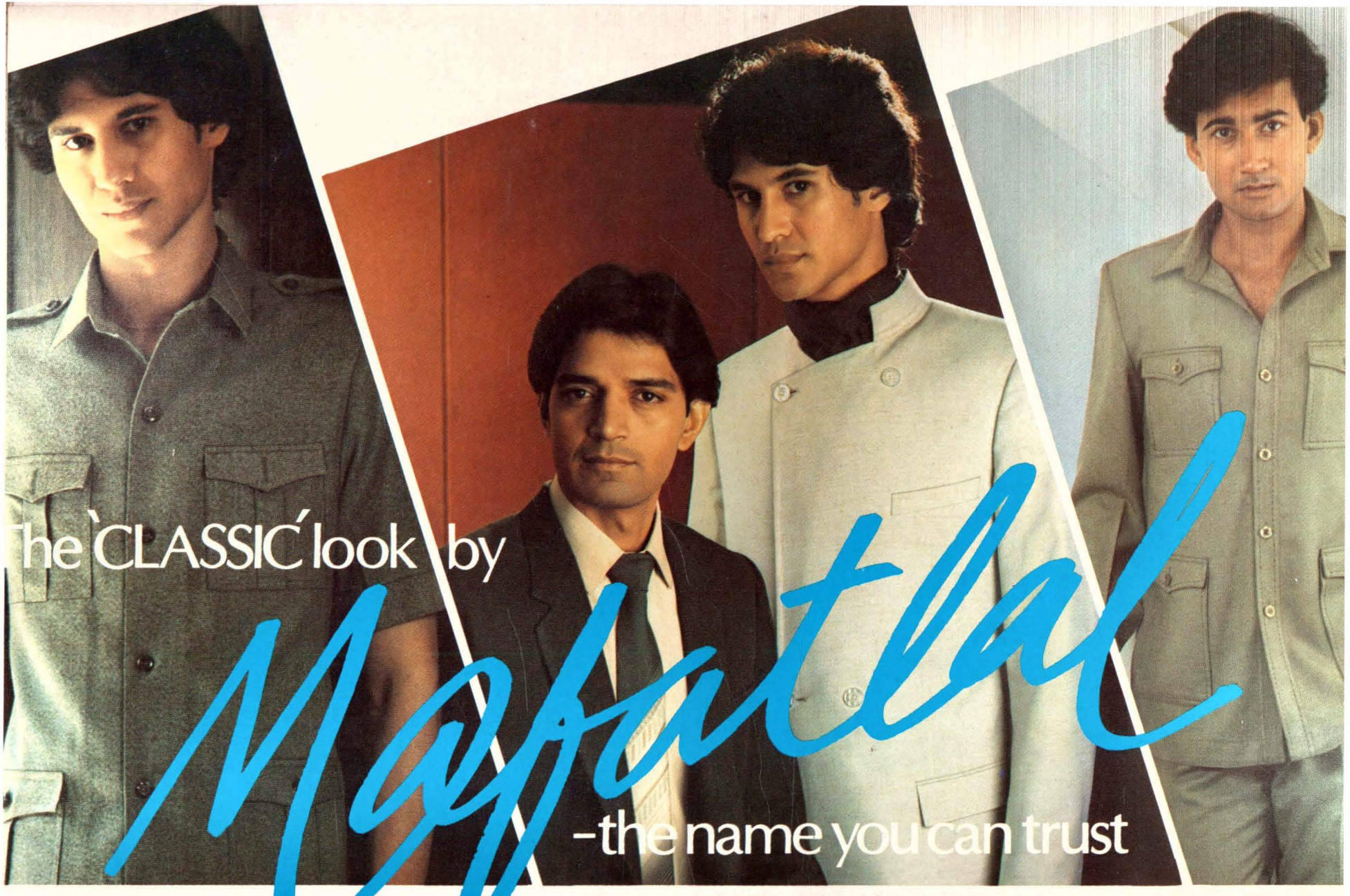
Khushwant Singh

Why Ahmedabad burns again and again

Mark Tully: the voice of the BBC

Where is the economy headed?
A panel discussion with Viren Shah, Subramaniam Swamy, B P Godrej, R K Hazari and Ajit Gulabchand

The Alavandar murder case



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ON THE MARQUEE

WE ARE A VIOLENT PEOPLE. A bloody violent people. This is the truth and the reality. It is a frightening reality, but it is true. We know this in our hearts. But we are not facing it. And unless we do, even at this belated stage, there will be no cure to the disease. It will only spread. One can quote chapter and verse from our history since Independence and paint a graphic, panoramic picture of violence which is our legacy. But I think the long weeks of violence in Gujarat and the latest death-dealing terrorist violence in the North, are too fresh in our minds to need reciting, to substantiate the assertion I have made above.

A continuous litany of our goody-goodiness, our alleged spiritualism, our claim to tunnel-links to a million gods in the firmament of our own, our bragging of civilisation, and our boast of inner peace and what not, have made us dangerously complacent. Our claim to being almost exclusive adherents of the creed of non-violence has dimmed our understanding of human nature.

There will be violence in the world while there is life on this earth. Violence is second nature to man. But we are also equipped to deal with this trait. It is our ignoring of it and our claims to the contrary that have produced this spurt in the incidence of violence in the country.

Our tragedy, today, is that very little of morality, very few civilised norms of tolerance are taught in our homes and in our schools. There is little in the public life of the country that is inspiring. We hear no moral voices. After Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the politicians who grabbed the mikes (tragically, available only to the politicians) spoke of morality of civilised norms and tolerance, but that amounted to the Devil preaching the *Bible*, and of course, the inevitable reaction has followed.

India today needs a substantial campaign through homes, schools and radio and television to teach us the values and norms of civilised, moral behaviour from A and B and C – from the very elementary level. The alternative is anarchy and more decline. In this scheme of education, the politicians of this day and time will have to be strictly barred from talking of morality, civilisation, spiritualism, and values, etc, etc.

*

THE CATALOGUE OF VIOLENCE by the police in India is lengthening alarmingly but then the policemen, too, are the product of India. It will be hard to fashion a non-violent police force in violent India. Yet, that is precisely what we desperately need. A partial solution to the police problem is offered in the National Police Commission Report of Messrs Dharam Vira and K F Rustamji. But nobody in the present government in New Delhi appears to have even seen it!

Elsewhere in this issue, we publish a detailed brief on the Ahmedabad riots. Though three of our correspondents toured the city, our concern was not so much with reporting the violence as trying to explain it. Why did the peace-loving Gujaratis take to the streets? Are police excesses inevitable during riots? Why does Gandhi's city burn again and again?

We have provided some answers – and they are not comfortable ones. Something has to be done about the police force. We cannot keep depending on the army. It is folly to play politics with traditional caste equations. And if the kind of middle class-sponsored violence Ahmedabad has seen spreads, then we are in deeper trouble than we realise.

*

NOW THAT WE ARE BACK TO SQUARE ONE ON THE PUNJAB, can we consider getting off our high horses and charting a path in humility, from New Delhi to Amritsar, and then, for the government and for many of us, the people of India, to say *mea culpa*s for all that happened in June and November 1984, and for the Sikhs to return to the brotherhood with Hindus, which alone makes sense for the Sikhs and all of India? Only the solving of the Punjab problem will enable this country to take full advantage of Mr Rajiv Gandhi's leadership so overwhelmingly secured by the electorate recently. The stalemate in the Punjab is making Mr Gandhi a prisoner of his own security and the security services. It is afflicting the Sikhs with a persecution complex – paranoia is often a self-fulfilling legacy.

R. V. Pandit

imprint

Vol XXV No 3 June 1985
A BUSINESS PRESS PUBLICATION

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LETTERS

THE 25 MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE

The cover story *The 25 Most Powerful People In India* (April 1985) made very interesting reading. The jury that chose the nominees have done a fine job of selecting the most powerful people in India.

But I feel Ramakrishna Hegde, the Chief Minister of Karnataka, was in the wrong list. He should have been in the list of nominees rather than on the panel. One wonders, though, what made the panel select the buncombe godman, Sai Baba, as one of the most powerful in their otherwise consummate selection.

Chidanand Kumar
Bangalore

Your April cover story was a shockingly biased and cynical report of people who really do matter. Why bring up a person, chosen by a 'select group of observers', and give him a sloppy write-up. The writer's attitude in most supercilious. My sympathies to most of the people whose mistake it was to appear powerful in the eyes of the distinguished observers only to be axed by the writer.

Subbiah G Yadalam
Bangalore

Your comments about Sathya Sai Baba in *The 25 Most Powerful People* are uncalled for. You have said that he speaks virtually no English. This is false. He knows English, but mostly speaks in his mother tongue, Telugu.

The other incidents mentioned – an American who accused him of sexual fondling and P C Sorcar's claim to have reproduced each and every one of his miracles – are nothing but sheer nonsense.

N Raghu
New Delhi

Superb Craftsmanship

The two short stories by Nisha da Cunha in your April issue (*Partly Living* and *Love Story*) were superb examples of literary craftsmanship. Please convey my compliments to the lady.

Khushwant Singh
New Delhi

Wrongly Captioned

Keki Daruwalla's dig at the writing in some English journals in this country was timely (*Did Shakespeare Exist?* April 1985).

Idiom is of little use to many writers, especially the political pundits. In a recent caption contest sponsored by Doordarshan, a cartoon of a man with a brood of children – presumably referring to family planning – was wrongly captioned 'trouble-shooter'. How a man with a brood of children could be a trouble-shooter in this context, only the occupants of Akashvani Bhavan can tell!

Thomas Kutty
Hyderabad

Media Bias

It pains me that the coverage given to the violence that shook Delhi (*The Media And The Delhi Riots*, January 1985) far exceeds your concern about the violence that has been rocking

LETTERS

IAN JACK REPLIES TO TARIQ ALI

It's true. I was unkind to Tariq Ali's book, *The Gandhis And The Nehrus,* in my review for the London *Sunday Times* and it's perhaps understandable that he should be unkind about me in his remarks to your interviewer (**Imprint,** March 1985). But I should like to correct the Romantic Rebel's impression of me as a warped old India hand (C/o 'Cawnpore', Acacia Grove, Aldershot) who covets the subcontinent as his own, is crazed with jealousy when any other writer touches it, is bribed with black money from a Calcutta publishing house to puff the competing work of another author. No, no, let me assure the Juhu Guevara, it's not at all like that. Here I sit in a small house on the fringe of decaying East London. Shortly I shall enter the kitchen and slice the *bhindis* for the evening meal. Will Mrs Thatcher ever go away? I ask myself. Only a few miles away I expect the Bakunin of Bow is occupied with similar thoughts and tasks; according to magazine interviews he is 'one of the world's greatest cooks'.

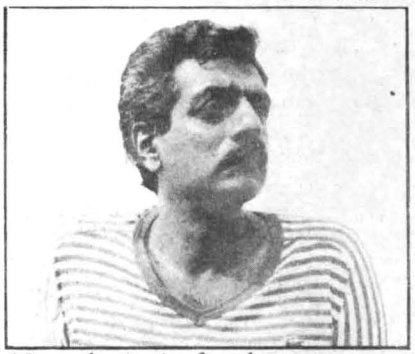
The truth is that, Ali's last book apart, I usually read everything he writes with respect, if not agreement. I made that point in the review. My points with regard to his remarks are:

One, I am not one of those 'Englishmen who regard themselves as experts on India'. I'm Scottish or British, for a start, and I can't think that journalists who write about India can be considered 'experts' in any meaningful sense. Within the limits of journalistic time and space, I try to make sense of events in India. I try to report them accurately and interestingly, probably with uneven success. On the other hand I think I know the country well enough to recognise a bad book on it when I see one.

Two, am I really 'an embittered man with an axe to grind'? What bitterness? Which axe?

Three, is it so 'entirely grotesque' to compare two paperbacks, both published in the same month, both of which attempt to explain the crises of modern India?

Four, I am amused that M J Akbar, the other paperback's author, is described as 'one of his (my) employers'. I know Akbar; so does Ali. I have written occasionally for the publications Akbar edits; so has Ali. So we all know Akbar; so what? It should be said that I also know Ali through Akbar; only slightly but (until now) perfectly amicably. Should I have declared my interest here too? Or, am I peculiarly compromised by the fact that over several years Ananda Bazar Patrika publications have paid enough to keep me in Wills Gold Flake for a few months? Had I written a bum-sucking review of a hagiography of the man who pays my mortgage, Mr Rupert Murdoch, Ali might have a point. But to imply that I praised Akbar's book because I am in some way beholden to Akbar is bizarre. Who does he think I am –



19, enthusiastic, female, pretty, or a member of the Ballia Janata party?

I do agree, however, with Ali's last point. It was unfair of me in the review to devote so much space to Ali and so little to Akbar. Destructive rather than constructive criticism is too easy a temptation. All I can say in my defence is that I usually resist it, but there are times when the innocent book-buying public needs to be warned away from over-hyped and over-hasty little numbers from publishers and authors who suddenly see that marvellous crack in the rock-face of British indifference – A Gap In The Market.

Ian Jack
London

Punjab for the last three years.

The number of innocent Hindus brutally killed in front of hapless relatives far exceeds the Sikhs killed in the flash riots. Has anyone bothered to see their pain and anguish and write about them?

Rakesh Soni
Chandigarh

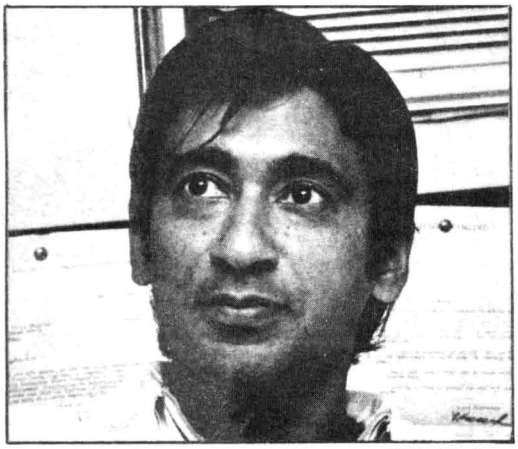
Unnecessary Exposure

Your interview of Mr Jagjit Singh Chohan (*"Indira Gandhi's Assassination Was A KGB Plot"*, March 1985) gave him more space than he deserved. I don't think there is anything left to be said about Mr Chohan. He is a maniac living in a fool's paradise and the unnecessary exposure will only contribute towards making him a legendary figure. The legend of Bhindranwale has cost us enough. The press ought not to make one more.

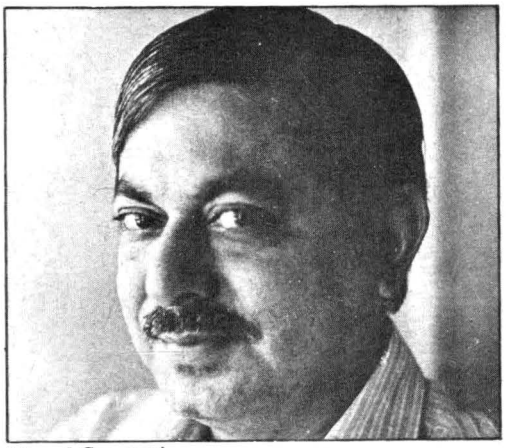
R Kumar
Lucknow

LETTERS

RAVINGS OF A 'SELF-STYLED INTELLECTUAL'?



Dilip Thakore



Nirmal Goswami

Congratulations for an excellent issue of **Imprint** in which the articles on the underworld don, Varadarajan Mudaliar, and the financial status of Britain's new tribe of Asian expatriates were outstandingly good.

Yet an otherwise excellent issue was marred by the illogicality, inanities and pseudo-profundities of Nirmal Goswami writing on the Indian media. While giving a clean chit to 'business' publications such as *The Economic Times* and the *Financial Express,* whose acts of omission and commission made the success of business magazines possible in the first instance, Goswami had several derisory comments to make about *Business India* and *BusinessWorld.* According to him, these are 'fan magazines' whose staple is 'sophisticated sycophancy, uncritical appraisals, abject deference', and they specialise in PR journalism.

My first reaction was to ignore this bit of patently untenable analysis as the ravings of one of the proliferating tribe of self-styled intellectuals who find it difficult to digest success of any sort – whether in industry or publishing. But as the first editor of each of these magazines, I feel it is incumbent upon myself to question the validity of Goswami's puerile observations which, in my opinion, are born out of a profound ignorance of what business is all about.

Perhaps Goswami is unaware that it is very difficult for a business publication to be a 'fan magazine' for the simple reason that in the business press we have to look at the track records of the individuals we write about. It is virtually impossible for us to write eulogies of individuals who are unable to manage men, money and materials without showing high profits, return on capital employed, man management abilities, above average profit-to-sales ratio and so on. Besides, the fact that both the business magazines I have been associated with are interview-based magazines, which take the pains to elicit the opinions of a wide cross-section of knowledgeable individuals on any given issue, *ipso facto* tends to reduce the scope for the sycophantic subjectivity and uncritical appraisal which Goswami is so exercised about.

If Goswami believes that hard-headed businessmen purchase almost 25,000 copies of *BusinessWorld* and pour Rs 2 lakh worth of advertising into it every fortnight because it makes loose and uncritical appraisals of individuals, he exhibits very poor powers of analysis and/or a deep-seated contempt for managers in Indian industry who are the core readers of the two major business magazines.

I am inclined to believe that Goswami's loose criticism of the business magazines emanates from the latter consideration. Like a large number of muddle-headed intellectuals, who exercise a social influence which is in inverse proportion to their ability to reason, Goswami is anti-business. The fundamental point about business journalism, my dear Nirmal, is that one has to give credit to people who are able to use men, money and materials efficiently, whether they are the scions of business families or maharajahs or any of the reactionaries whose names are anathema to leftist intellectuals and who, with their muddled thinking, have played a major role in canalising the community's savings into a massive and unproductive public sector. In the result the hopes and aspirations of an entire generation have been wiped out.

If the burden of Goswami's song is that the business magazines look for islands of excellence within the ramshackle Indian economy and give generous credit to individuals who are able to utilise resources efficiently, then they are guilty as charged. But if he believes that in *BusinessWorld* (I can't speak for *Business India* any longer) we angle our stories because our publishers' 'cold beady eyes are on the cash register', all I can offer him is my sympathy, which he obviously needs.

And lastly, one hopes that Goswami does not make important decisions on the basis of the sketchy information contained in the economic dailies which he describes as sober and well-informed. If not for his own sake, at least for his employer's.

Dilip Thakore
Editor, BusinessWorld

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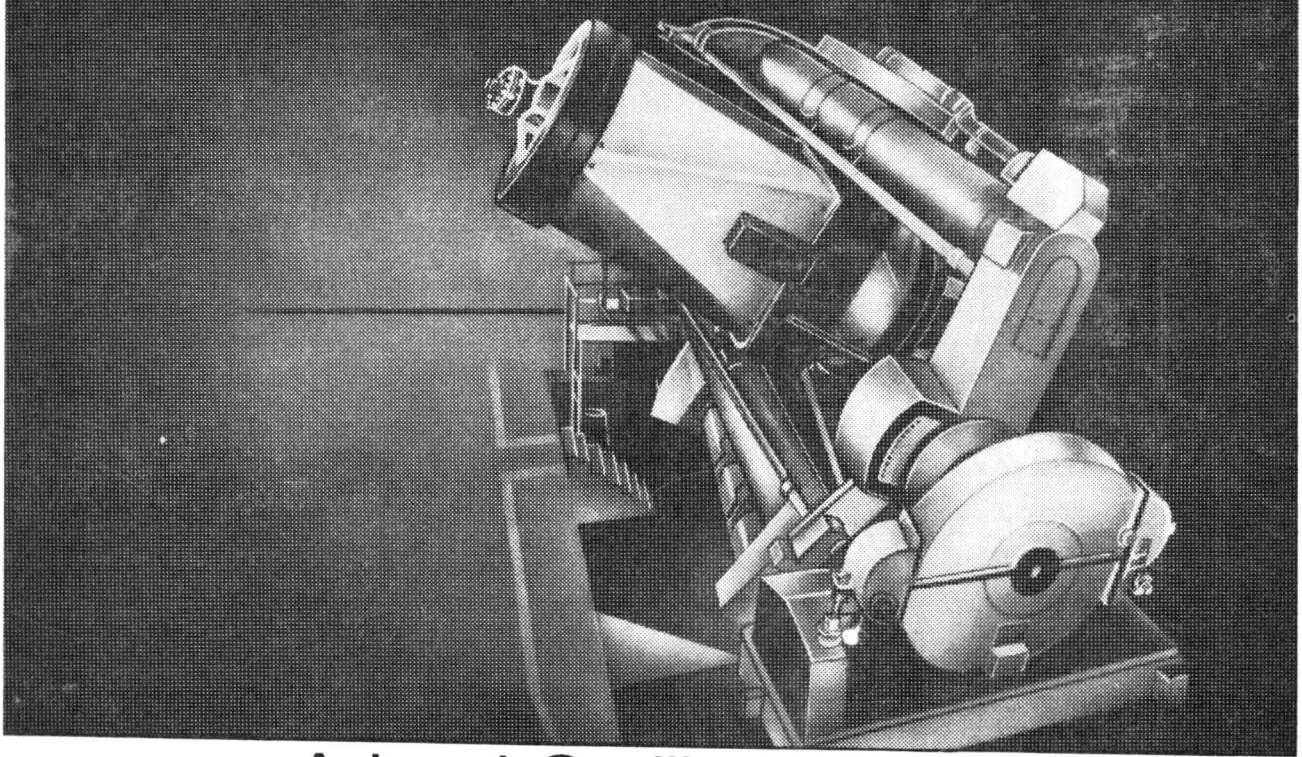

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COUNTER-VIEW

By Subramaniam Swamy

A YEAR AFTER BLUESTAR

On the anniversary of Operation Bluestar, let us count the costs.

IT IS NOW about a year since the army entered the Golden Temple complex. The late Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, justified the action on the grounds that there was no other way to deal with the terrorists. The country's support was overwhelming. There were then only a few discordant voices, such as mine.

Now, one year later, the killings by the terrorists continue in full swing. Most of the murders go unreported because of the informal press censorship clamped on in Punjab. But still, when prominent public men get shot, the news cannot be suppressed. In April, the All-India General Secretary of the Congress (I), Mr R L Bhatia, was shot. Mr Bhatia comes from a prominent family in Amritsar, and was that city's representative in the last Lok Sabha. In December 1984, elections to Parliament could not be held in Punjab. So, technically, Mr Bhatia is the sitting MP from Amritsar. In Chandigarh too, the killing of prominent persons continues. Terror has once again returned to Punjab even while the army is stationed there in full strength.

With the passage of time, things are bound to get worse. The 12-month exposure of the civilian population to the army has jaded all fear of the armed forces. And beyond the army, the State has no other more lethal instrument to deal with insurgency. As the old saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt; that is what is happening to the army in Punjab.

ILLUSTRATION BY EDGAR SILVEIRA

The most unpalatable fact facing the Rajiv Gandhi government is that the army action in the Golden Temple was a disastrous failure. Undoubtedly, at the time of the action a year ago, there was applause all around and voices like mine were drowned in the din. But now, with the confetti and dust settling down, one can see that the Prime Minister is in an unenviable bind. His mother died at the hands of her own security guards. She died because she ordered the army action in the Temple. No son, specially not a sensitive one like Rajiv Gandhi, can wipe that ghastly episode from his mind. Further, the Prime Minister knows, as do all knowledgeable people in Delhi, that it was he who acted as the catalyst in his mother's decision to order the military crackdown last year. He cannot, therefore, retrace his steps without a sense of great personal loss and humiliation.

But retrace these steps he must because this confrontationist policy in Punjab has failed to produce results, and its continuation will almost certainly dismember the country.

The cost of last year's army action has been very high. Not only was Mrs Gandhi murdered, but thousands of innocent Sikh families were mercilessly massacred. Living in Delhi those days, I was an impotent eyewitness to the hatred and fury. It was a horrible glimpse of German history during the '30s. Except for providing clandestine protection to a few Sikhs known to me personally, there was little I could do except watch in horror. As a consequence, just as Rajiv is bound by his mother's memory and legacy, scores of Sikh relatives are scarred by the knowledge of what happened to their kith and kin and now these Sikhs seek revenge. Similarly, many Hindus, humiliated in Punjab, are in agony, their rage bottled up by their circumstances. The spiral of hatred is visible from a dis-

Subramaniam Swamy is now Visiting Professor of Economics at Harvard University. This is a regular column.

The government has jailed 6,000 Sikhs. If they are kept in jail, they will become hardened extremists. If they are released, all hell will break loose.

A YEAR AFTER BLUESTAR

tance but not to those who are enmeshed in the spiral itself.

Because of all this, Rajiv Gandhi is in a tenuous situation. Is this any way for a prime minister to live? Recently I had been to a wedding reception hosted by a VIP government official. Rajiv Gandhi was also there. The security arrangements were beyond description. It was obvious that, despite a posse of gun-toting commandos and having sealed off all entry points to the reception hall, the PM had donned a bulky bullet-proof vest.

What is to be done now? This was a fruitful question before the army action. But now, with the despatch of the army to the Golden Temple, the government has played its last trump card. Now, there are none left, and nothing left to do, except start afresh with a new deal.

But procrastination will have deadly consequences. Punjab is a time bomb with a burning short fuse. The government has jailed 6,000 young Sikh boys between the ages of 16 and 21, all of them innocent when picked up last June but who, in the course of a year in jail, have become sworn extremists. If they are released without a settlement on Punjab, all hell will break loose. If they are still kept in jail, they will become hardened terrorists.

In fact, just recently, the People's Union for Democratic Rights held an inquiry and reached the conclusion that there had been a 'serious and widespread violation of fundamental rights of the people through both the use and misuse of the black laws enacted in Punjab' and emphasised that under the guise of fighting terrorism the police were using the enactments to settle personal scores.

Another chilling aspect: the proximity of Punjab and Pakistan. The hatred the Sikhs had for Pakistan and, therefore, the solid vanguard they provided against Pakistani aggression, is gone. General Zia-ul-Haq has played his cards well. Without openly interfering, he has shown his sympathy for the Sikhs by not refusing them sanctuary, by beaming sympathetic TV programmes across to Amritsar, and by reasonably accepting the demands of Sikh pilgrims. No Pakistani has forgotten Bangladesh and what we did then. A more inflammable Pakistani President would have openly looked for revenge and ruined Pakistani interests. But Zia is more dangerous. I admire Zia for his morality and personal honesty. But I also know that he is a Pakistani first and last. And because he is cool, he is dangerous. As of now, Pakistan is winning the propaganda war in Punjab. This is a grave threat to our national security.

So what can be done now? I am afraid I have no answer to that question.

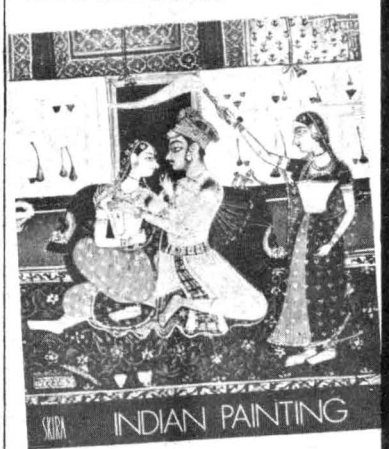
But I do have an answer to the question: What *should* be done now?

The Prime Minister should go to the Golden Temple, and after *mathatek* (offering prayers) announce that the army action was wrong, that he personally apologises for it in the nation's interest. A negotiated settlement with the Akalis would easily follow. Lal Bahadur Shastri did that on the Hindi issue with the Tamilians. Today, secessionism is dead in Tamil Nadu and that state has become one of the biggest producers of Hindi films and Number One actresses from Hema to Jaya.

But Lal Bahadur was a humble man who held the nation above himself. About the Nehrus, I have no such confidence. *Que sera sera.*

♦

TAKE A LOOK AT ANTIQUE INDIAN PAINTING THROUGH THE EYES OF THE KEEPERS OF ORIENTAL ANTIQUITIES AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.



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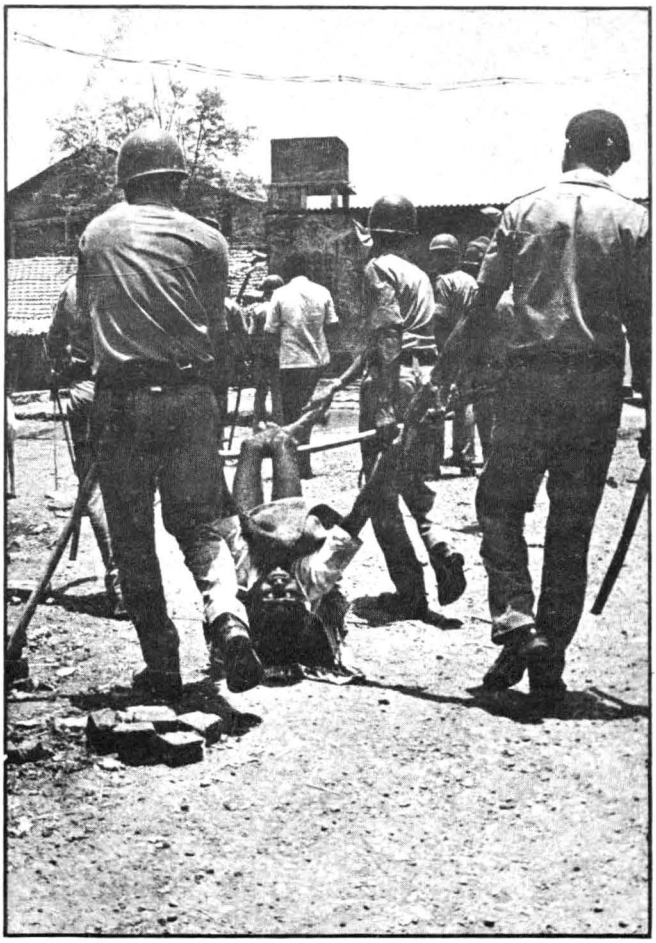
FOLLOW-UP

By Sheela Barse

A TIME BOMB

Bhiwandi remains tense, it could blow up at any time.

ON SHABE BARAT, May 16, 1984, communal riots flared up in Bhiwandi and tore through Thane and Kalyan, destroying, within 36 hours, 100 lives, injuring several hundred more and damaging property worth Rs 6.2 crore. Among those affected in the 1984 conflagration were victims of the 1970 riots, in which 78 people had died and property worth Rs 1.4 crore had been damaged.



What makes Bhiwandi so volatile? To begin with, it is perhaps the only big business town in India which is totally free of any kind of government control, getting not even one per cent of the benefit from its production units. If the popular estimate of 2,50,000 powerlooms in Bhiwandi is accepted, then Bhiwandi has a 55 per cent share in Maharashtra's powerloom sector and a whopping 28 per cent share in the national sector, matching the total share of four other important powerloom states: Andhra Pradesh (2.5 per cent), Karnataka (5.3 per cent), Tamil Nadu (16.7 per cent), and Uttar Pradesh (4 per cent). The profits are, by all accounts, phenomenal.

But these profits are held by unethical businessmen from Bombay. Their cunningly bought immunity has kept the workers, including child workers, out of the protective periphery of labour laws and trade union activity. Most of the powerlooms in Bhiwandi are old, used ones and their destruction in a riot does not hurt the owner who can make a gross profit of upto Rs 40,000 a year from one unit. Going by the Surat industry's figures, the factory owner in Bhiwandi has a whopping 25 per cent profit margin – all of which is siphoned off to Bombay and Ahmedabad.

Most of this income is not accounted for. About 50 per cent of the powerlooms in Bhiwandi are unlicenced (the Central government puts a TEXMARK stamp on authorised looms). The ownership of powerlooms, licenced and unlicenced, is *benami*. Each owner owns two or four looms and avoids provisions of the Factories Act *and* excise duty. Since most of the taxes and duties on cloth are applicable only when the cloth is processed (dyed and printed), the owners avoid these taxes by not dyeing and printing the cloth in Bhiwandi. About the only duty paid is the octroi, but even here, traders avoid payment by clandestinely transporting cloth in Ambassador cars. The police have the licence numbers of 30 such Ambassadors.

Government officials turn a blind eye to this illegal activity. Though the government concedes that the number of powerlooms in Bhiwandi has shot up from 18,000 in 1964 to 1,31,180 in 1984, the Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories, D P Matharani, says that most of the 59 registered powerloom factories have closed down and there are not even ten registered powerloom factories in Bhiwandi today! Labour Commissioner Patrick Ovid, the Joint Chief Inspector of Factories, Mirashi and Legal Advisor Damle, explain away their inefficiency by pointing out that the scores of loopholes the owners can take advantage of, make it difficult for them to act against the offenders.

Lethargy and inefficiency are manifest everywhere. Recently, the Ambekar Institute of Labour Studies (a wing of the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh and the Indian National Trade Union Congress) conducted a study

Sheela Barse, a freelance journalist, covered the Bombay-Bhiwandi riots in 1984.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MUKESH PARPIANI

Last year's Bhiwandi riots shook the city of Bombay. Communal violence has a way of spreading. Now, as the police force tries to cope, everyone knows it could happen again.

A TIME BOMB

financed by the Germans. But for inexplicable reasons, they are treating it as top secret, refusing to release the results. Their investigator, when interviewed, claimed that all powerlooms in Bhiwandi were owned by craftsmen who worked on the looms themselves. Thus, there was hardly any labour in Bhiwandi!

The workers have a different story to tell. They allege that the factory owners bribe government officials and trade union men, and unleash *goondas* on any *mazdoor* who tries to organise protests, threatening his life.

"One can be waylaid around any of these corners, killed and disposed of. How can a *mazdoor,* who does not have a good physique or good health, and is tired after 12 hours of duty, dare to take on the gangs hired by *maliks* and slumlords?" asks one worker.

The working conditions are horrible. Every worker, man or child, works a 12-hour, or even a 24-hour shift, and tends three to four looms. The powerlooms are close to each other, (leaving just enough room for the worker to stand) in hot, ill-lit, unventilated premises packed with soot, dust and fibres. There are no fixed breaks for tea or lunch, and no regular timings for the end of a shift. Provisions for drinking water, latrines, first aid or rest rooms do not exist. The only place where the worker can sit down for a smoke or a cup of tea, is in the dirty, narrow street.

After the long hours of duty, the worker returns to his eight-by-ten-foot hut in a congested, gutter-lined colony. The hut is rented from a man or slumlord from the worker's own district, or a man of the same community. Every once in a while, the worker, tired of the inhuman conditions in which he has to survive, packs his bags and pushes off to his *muluk.* But a few months later, the no-job, no-opportunity *muluk* pushes him back to Bhiwandi again, but, perhaps, to a different area.

And so, neighbourhoods do not evolve. There is no society or sense of belonging, no loyalty to the land. There is no time for other activities. Marriages are performed in the *muluk.* The migrant worker's only link with his roots is the *gaonwallah* of his own community, who he perceives as a man who has the strength to flout authority.

The *bastis* of Bhiwandi, built along regional and communal lines, also attract criminals on the run. Also, in Bhiwandi, you can always find another *gaonwallah* to help you escape or an innocent to help you store your weapons.

Not surprisingly, the manufacture of illegal weapons is a burgeoning trade. In the preceding months, the police have registered 37 cases of possession of *kattas* (handmade guns), handmade bombs, swords, cartridges etc, and grounded two illicit firearm-manufacturing units. They arrested 104 persons in connection with these crimes, and identified and externed 305 *goondas.*

Given the conditions in which migrant labourers exist, the police can have no intelligence on their activities. This means that more than 80 per cent of the population of 1,70,600 cannot be kept tabs on. In case of trouble, police vehicles cannot even use the main paths which are narrow, winding, uneven and muddy.

However, R D Tyagi, Commissioner of Police, Thane, claims that so long as the police are aware of them, these handicaps are not detrimental to effective policing. Deputy Commissioner of Police, K P Gaikwad, even identified 54 sensitive areas in which communal ill-will could spark off violent riots and incidents of arson.

But they are confident of the police force's ability to handle the situation. "Given the constant police activity, there will be no communal riots in our area," says Tyagi with confidence.

"I will give it to you in writing that we will quell any outbreak within one hour," booms the burly Gaikwad. "It is only a question of being constantly alert and responding effectively in the shortest possible time to trouble," he asserts. Both seem to attach no importance to the pressures and long hours of duty all this extra vigilance necessarily entails.

Apart from the police, the other government agencies are not enforcing any laws or regulations. The Factories Act, the Essential Commodities Act (which controls supply of cotton and viscose), the Shops and Establishment Act, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, the powerloom licencing rules, the various provisions that protect a child from exploitation as a labourer, municipal laws about the construction of industrial sheds – all these, and more, remain unenforced in Bhiwandi.

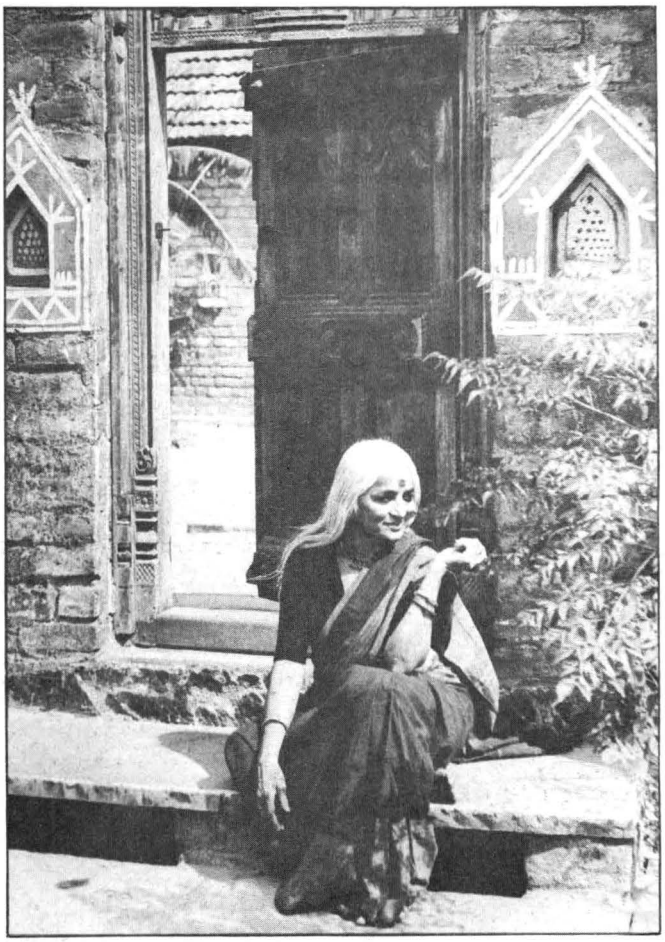
As long as these inhuman conditions continue, the criminal activity persists and the *bastis,* with Hindu/Muslim occupants, exist side by side, Bhiwandi will continue to be the tinder-box of discontent it has always been. The police will have to continue to work 12-16 hours a day, through the year, rushing off to monitor investigations of any suspicious incident at any odd hour of the night, or day. ♦

UNUSUAL PEOPLE

By Shiraz Sidhva

LIFE IS A CELEBRATION

Dancer Chandralekha brings new life to an ancient art form.



EVENING lends a special magic to the Skills open-air theatre on Madras's secluded Elliot Beach. Chandralekha watches a group of dancers rehearse her latest work on the lamp-lit stage. The half-light accentuates the heavily-kohled eyes, the maroon *bindi* that eclipses her forehead, the soft features framed by the hair that cascades to her waist like spun silver.

The earthy, sensuous dance being perfected is *Angika*, representing the traditions of mind and body language in India. It is the dancer-thinker's latest attempt to transcend the rigidity of classical Indian dance. Though the participants have all had years of formal training in traditional dance forms, it is obvious that this work requires something more of them. But Chandralekha is patient and there is perfect rapport between guru and disciples. And when the evening's work is done, they all partake of the simple meal that Chandralekha has cooked.

Thirteen years ago, Chandralekha renounced a highly successful career as a *Bharatanatyam* soloist to explore the meaning of dance. For over two decades, she had perfected her art, rendering in dance the glorified and mythical world of gods and goddesses, the eternal triumph of good over evil. Her dedication had won her much acclaim; she enthralled audiences both in India and abroad. "This bourgeois status (fame) is a lovely feeling, but after a while I began to question things," she says.

She remembers the humiliation she faced each time an agent glanced at her body before signing her on. "I was being appreciated for all the wrong reasons," she recalls. "I had the right kind of waist, the right kind of bosom." She hated the dolling up, the grease paint that restricted her facial movements and made her feel like someone else, the elaborate costumes and the special effects to distract bored audiences, and the hotchpotch of *Mohini Attam* and *Kuchipudi* dished up to create an illusion of variety. "I was being watched in much the same way as a Hindi film is. I felt terribly rejected."

Besides, Chandralekha's art alienated her from the society in which she performed and lived. What bearing did her depiction of celestial beings have on society? What was the role of the dancer in the modern context and for whom was she dancing? She could not accept the age-old belief that a sensual, physical form like dance originated from the heavens, from Lord Shiva performing his dance of creation atop Mount Kailasa.

Chandralekha sent tremors through the rigid world of classical dance, rejecting its inherent 'values of the spectacle'. And by questioning the origins of classical Indian dance, she challenged its very basis.

Ever since, Chandralekha has sought to divest the classical dance form of its ornamental, religious, cathartic and narrative aspects, and has attempted, instead, to rediscover the essence of the form through the language of the body. Years of research in the relatively unexplored history of Indian classical dance have convinced her that dance, in its most primitive stages, was linked with activities like threshing, harvesting and hunting. All classical dance forms are merely stylised versions of the ancient martial arts, she contends. Besides being a form of spontaneous expression and fostering brotherhood among

Shiraz Sidhva, **Imprint***'s Bangalore correspondent, is also the author of* The Alavandar Murder Case *elsewhere in this issue.*

Chandralekha's kind of dancer has attracted criticism from contemporaries like Sonal Mansingh who cannot fathom the close relationship between dance and social relevance.

LIFE IS A CELEBRATION

the warriors, dance was used to energise and resuscitate the body.

As a dancer, Chandralekha has discovered the body's tremendous regenerative capacities. An understanding of the body has also sharpened her senses. "I sense rather than know," she says. "It has been given to every one of us to sense." Unfortunately, man's innate perceptions have been drowned in modern-day societies, where the intellect is sharpened at the cost of the body. "The *rasa* – the essence of life, the fluid principle that humanises the body, keeps it flowing, sensual – is in danger of being dried up," she says. "When I'm upset, I cry and my emotions choke me. This is *rasa.* I get angry too – indignation is very much a part of me. I think anger is a positive emotion."

Her insight into the origins of dance and her iconoclastic attitude towards the art have only strengthened her faith in tradition. "Our traditional forms have so much to offer in terms of architectural and geometric values. *Bharatanatyam*, for example, divested of its decorative elements, has a tremendous formal richness and structural strength. I was repeatedly surprised at the modernity of the form in terms of graphic and visual values." The concept of the *mandala,* for example, which she uses as the basis of her understanding of time and space, is very much a traditional tantric symbol.

"It is this foundation, this base in tradition, which helps me choreograph my work. Besides, it makes it easier to talk to the traditionalists, if you speak their language, to develop a kind of contemporary consciousness." When she returned to the dance stage in 1984, it was this foundation of tradition that helped her find acceptance within the fold. At the East-West Dance Encounter in Bombay, she created a sensation with her *Primal Energy* and *Surya.* "Her bold depiction of Shiva *shakti* in its most primal form. . . .left the audience literally panting for more," raved one critic. "Chandralekha remained the only really innovative contributor on the traditional Indian side," enthused another. Her scintillating lecture-demonstrations at the Rabindra Kalashetra and the Music Academy have won her praise from the very traditionalists who had frowned upon her nonconformism a decade ago. Exclaimed Rukmini Devi Arundale, doyenne of classical Indian dance: "Such wonderful enthusiasm – I've never seen Chandralekha in this respect and she has this work with great originality. I've never seen *Alarippu* like this. I've never seen *Tillana* like this. . . .(She) has 'geometrized' dance. . . .I was deeply interested in her ideas and originality."

The conviction that art cannot be divorced from its social setting has led this radical aesthete to synthesise her life and work in a continuous flow of meaning. Her work for Skills, a Madras-based activist group (which she co-founded with designer Dasrath Patel and journalist Sadanand Menon in 1979), includes dance workshops for women's groups and experiments in street theatre. Chandralekha uses her fantastic capabilities as a graphic designer to earn a living and to help fund Skills's activities.

Chandralekha's graphic designs, illustrations, paintings and poetry are glowing tributes to her highly developed aesthetic sense. And as a dancer, she is constantly innovating and attempting new choreographies. Her efforts to give traditional dance a wider meaning and scope, have thrilled audiences from diverse creative disciplines. But they have also attracted criticism from her contemporaries, who cannot fathom the close relationship of dance and social relevance. Without actually naming her, Sonal Mansingh, in her interview to *The Illustrated Weekly Of India* quipped: ". . .These committed types. . .who flaunt their intellectual prowess . . . . bore me. You know the kind I am referring to. The types who talk about the social relevance of dance... who try to show off their minds and yet disappoint you when they actually perform on stage." At the East-West Encounter, most dancers made it clear that they would hoist no flags ("We need our hands to dance") and tout no causes.

When you see pictures of Chandralekha as a young girl with Nehru and Brezhnev, you are struck by the difference. There is no doubt that she has changed over the years. She is no longer girlishly slim, her hair has whitened completely, her face has wrinkled ever so slightly, the graceful hands are gnarled. She is the first to admit and accept this change. When dancer Indrani Rehman commented that she hadn't changed a bit since they met years ago, Chandralekha could not take it as a compliment. "Of course I had changed. And why not? Nothing must remain static. For me, every day is a different experience."

The years may have changed Chandralekha's appearance, but they have not diminished her overwhelming zest for life, the *joie de vivre* she exudes in abundance when she is with friends. Her large eyes sparkle incessantly, she breaks into peals of laughter when she is happy. And that is very often – her life, like her dance, is a celebration. ♦

By Arun Chacko

INDIA AND WORLD WAR II

The Indian army played an important but largely forgotten role in the war.

EARLY IN MAY, when summer had really got into its stride and the lunacy in Gujarat and Punjab continued unabated, a significant day in the history of mankind went relatively unnoticed.

May 8 is Armistice Day, which signifies the end of World War II in Europe. More important, this year marked its 40th anniversary. What makes that anniversary relevant to us is the fairly important role of the Indian army.

The Indian army's achievement in that great conflict, which spanned six long years, has been underplayed. That was perhaps inevitable because of the dominance of Western military officers, and the Western media and authors who wrote about their own great exploits.

Each US and English victory was immediately glorified and built up in Western newspapers and magazines with human interest battlefield accounts. Fed by Western agencies, our own media largely parroted these stories.

The war industry continued to flourish for years thereafter with films, books and comic strips glorifying the role of the Englishman and the American.

Russia's contribution to turning the tide in East Europe, despite 20 million dead, did not seem to count. The Germans were portrayed as a race of blundering, thick-accented half-wits whose long and often successful conduct of many major, crucial battles became strangely inexplicable. But to stick to what concerns us, the meagre publicity of the Indian contribution seems to have been obtained by default.

Those who remember or read anything about those momentous times know that the Indian army fought mainly in the Eastern theatre. The Burma War against the Japanese was almost entirely fought by the Indian army. And very successfully too.

In fact, if it wasn't for VJ Day on August 17, 1945, there was going to be a sea-borne invasion of Malaya by our army. Even thereafter, barring the Philippines, our army did the majority of the work in taking over Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia and all the other places occupied by the Japanese. But the Indian army played a very significant role in the Western theatre as well, and often performed spectacularly.

* * *

ONE of the most famous battles in the European theatre, where Indian army divisions played a decisive role, was at Monte Cassino, roughly 60 miles south of Rome. It was a turning-point in the war, opening up the road to Rome, and leading to the Allied take-over of that crucial Axis nation.

Today a major tourist attraction, Monte Cassino is the site of a very famous, imposing Benedictine Monastery located on a hill-top and dominating the countryside. At one of the narrowest points in the Italian peninsula, it is protected by both hills and rivers.

Monte Cassino was acknowledged as a strong, almost impregnable fortress. Methods of attacking it had been studied at the Italian Staff College as a regular exercise. In addition, the 1,500-foot-high hill was fortified by steel and concrete pillboxes and emplacements drilled and blasted into the rock.

The extremely rich monastery was like a castle, with walls ten feet thick

Arun Chacko is Associate Editor of The World Paper. *He is based in Delhi.*

The German paratroopers simply would not move. Three major assaults on their positions by several Allied divisions failed to dislodge them. Ultimately it was left to the Indian army to rout them in hand-to-hand fighting.

INDIA AND WORLD WAR II

and 15 feet high, fortified in the last century. It was also one of the principal bastions of German defence, defended by the Third Reich's finest troops. The linchpin of its famed Gustav Line, it was really the key to Italy. Germans displayed great art and ingenuity in fortifying the Gustav Line. Cassino was protected by diverting waters of the Rapido River to the flat ground east of it, converting it into a quagmire which bogged down armour. Approaches to the river were thoroughly mined. There were extensive minefields between the river and mountains. The Germans were confident the Gustav Line would check the Allied advance.

By mid-January, 1944, the Fifth Army closed in on the Gustav Line, and prepared to attack its formidable defences. In the centre was the II US Corp, and on the right flank was the French Expeditionary Corp. Later, the VI US Corp landed at Anzio to cut the road from Cassino to Rome.

Despite a continued assault over ten weeks which brought them within 300 yards of Monastery Hill, the Americans and others wilted under the murderous fire of the Germans led by Field Marshal Kesselring. And despite blanket bombing by Allied planes and three bitter assaults over two months, the Germans were not moved.

This is when the Fourth Indian Division, commanded by Major General F I S Tuker and containing the Fifth, Seventh and 11th Infantry Brigades, was ordered in. It had to attack and capture Monastery Hill, cut the north-south road to Rome and capture Cassino from the west. The Second New Zealand Division was to assist with fire.

The fighting was among the bitterest in World War II. Despite heavy rainfall, pitch darkness and unceasing German fire, which caused heavy casualties, the Fifth Indian Infantry Brigade entered Cassino. Then the Germans counter-attacked and the ding-dong battle raged. In six weeks of murderous fighting, the Fourth Indian Division suffered 4,000 casualties, many of them from the Seventh Infantry Brigade.

* * *

ON MARCH 15, 1944, the battle was resumed. The whole Mediterranean Air Force pounded Cassino day after day.

The town of Cassino and the monastery were reduced to rubble. But not the German defences. Those German paratroopers were dazed, but undaunted.

Three major assaults on their positions by several Allied divisions failed to dislodge them. The Americans, with all their modern equipment and firepower, failed. So did the others. Ultimately, it was left to the Indians of the Fourth, Fifth and Eighth Divisions, representing almost every part of the country, to succeed in some of the severest hand-to-hand fighting seen in that war.

* * *

"IT WAS ALL a combined effort," Lieutenant General K S Katoch, who won a Military Cross for gallantry at Cassino and retired in 1970 as Vice Chief, told me. "But the Indian army did set an example which has not been fully appreciated. One of the reasons was that all our top commanders were Britons. Also, their propaganda machinery was much better than our public relations.

"But there is no doubt in my mind that the Indian army certainly played a very crucial role," the elderly, soft-spoken, self-effacing General added. "In fact, it had its finest hour in Italy. It had less of a role in the North African Desert because armour predominated. The Indian army, then, had virtually no armour.

"The Americans had made three attempts to cross the crucial Gari River," he recounted. "They had landed at nearby Anzio. But their effort was a complete failure. What we thought would assist us became a debacle. This really surprised us, given all the arms and firepower the Americans had.

"Their commanding officer then laid a bet with our CO, General Russell, that we would not be able to cross the Gari River. But we did. That showed what the Indian troops could do when they were well led and well trained. Our divisions fought there right till the bitter end, and their morale remained extremely high.

"Eventually, it was the winkling out of the Germans by the Indian forces, especially the Fourth Indian Division, in hand-to-hand combat, that sealed the issue. The Germans fought to their last man. The Gurkhas fought with their kukris. And the casualties were extremely heavy. But we neutralised them and went on to Rome."

There were several acts of incredible gallantry and comradeship. Dozens of awards were won, including Victoria Crosses, in one of the war's most difficult campaigns.

After the outstanding performance, Major General Tuker, CO of the Fourth Indian Division, said: "The Division has made the whole of my life worth living. It has shown me on a huge scale, utter devotion and endurance until death. . . .It has built a brotherhood in arms such as has seldom been equalled in our long history." ♦

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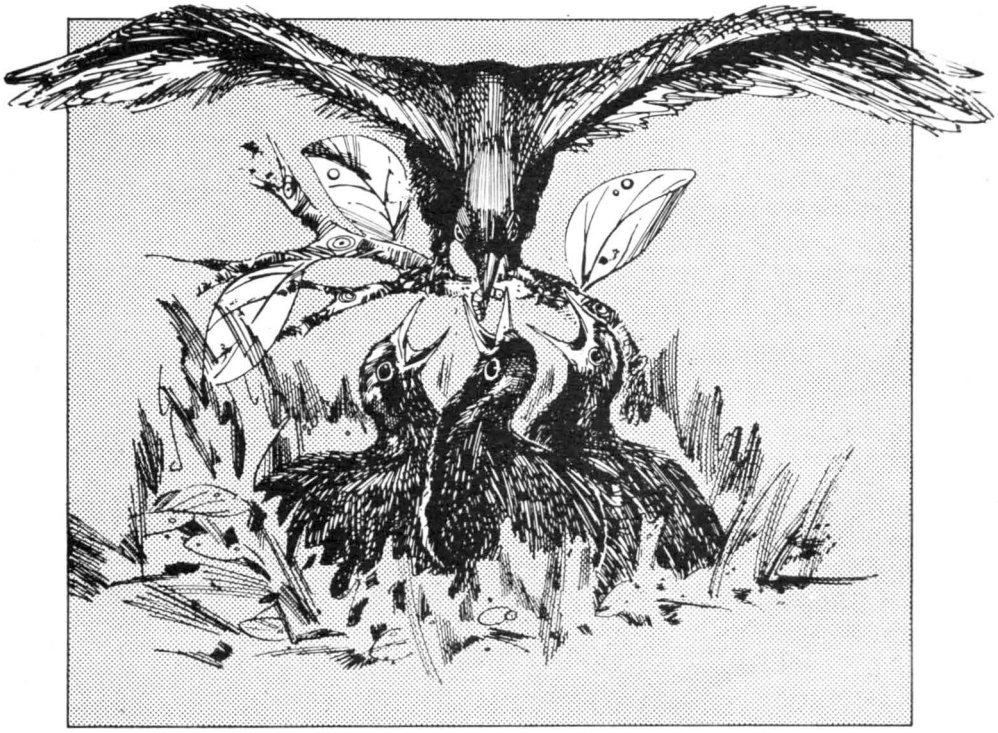

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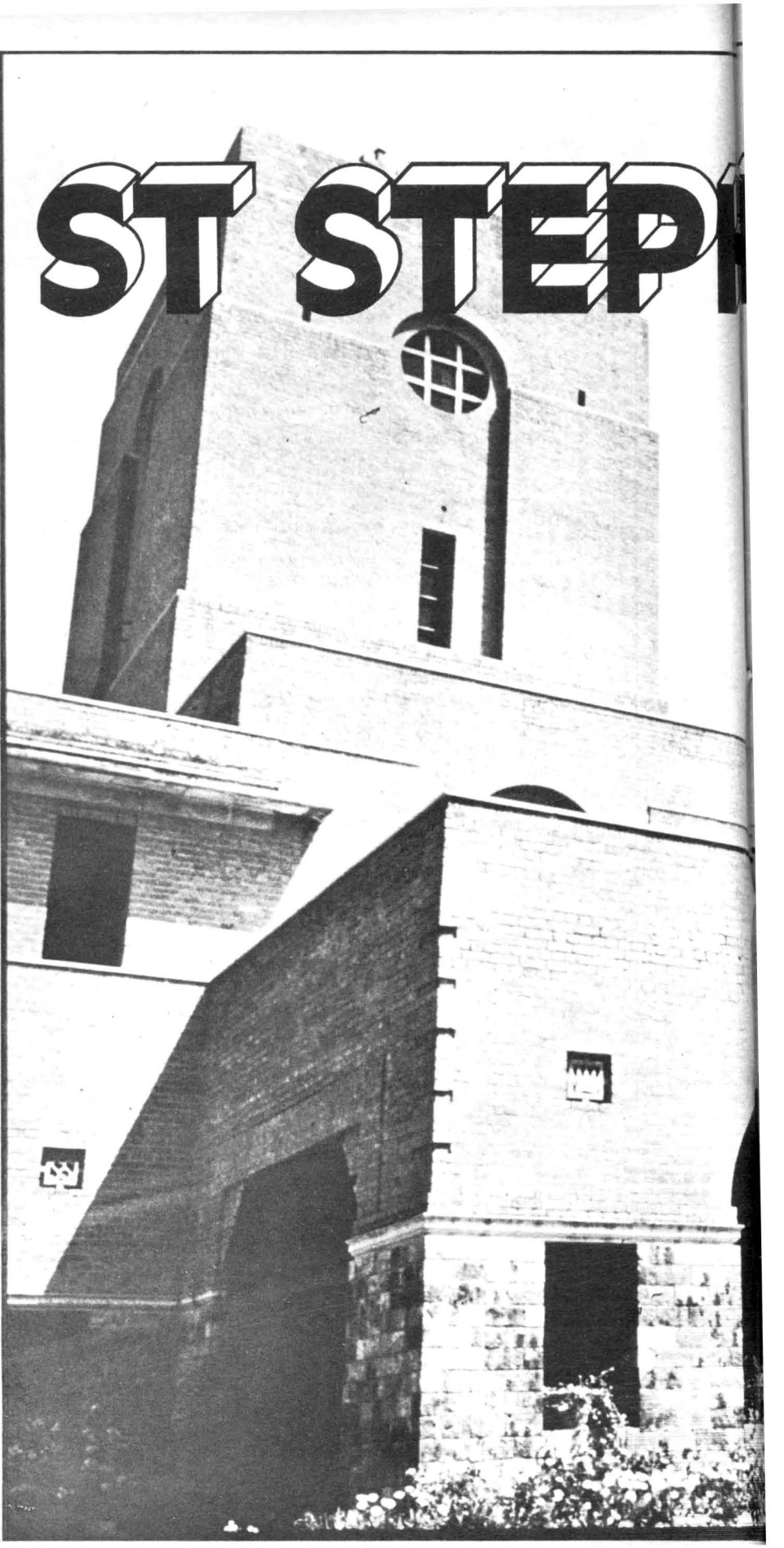
COVER STORY

THE ST STEP

BY
MALAVIKA
SANGHVI

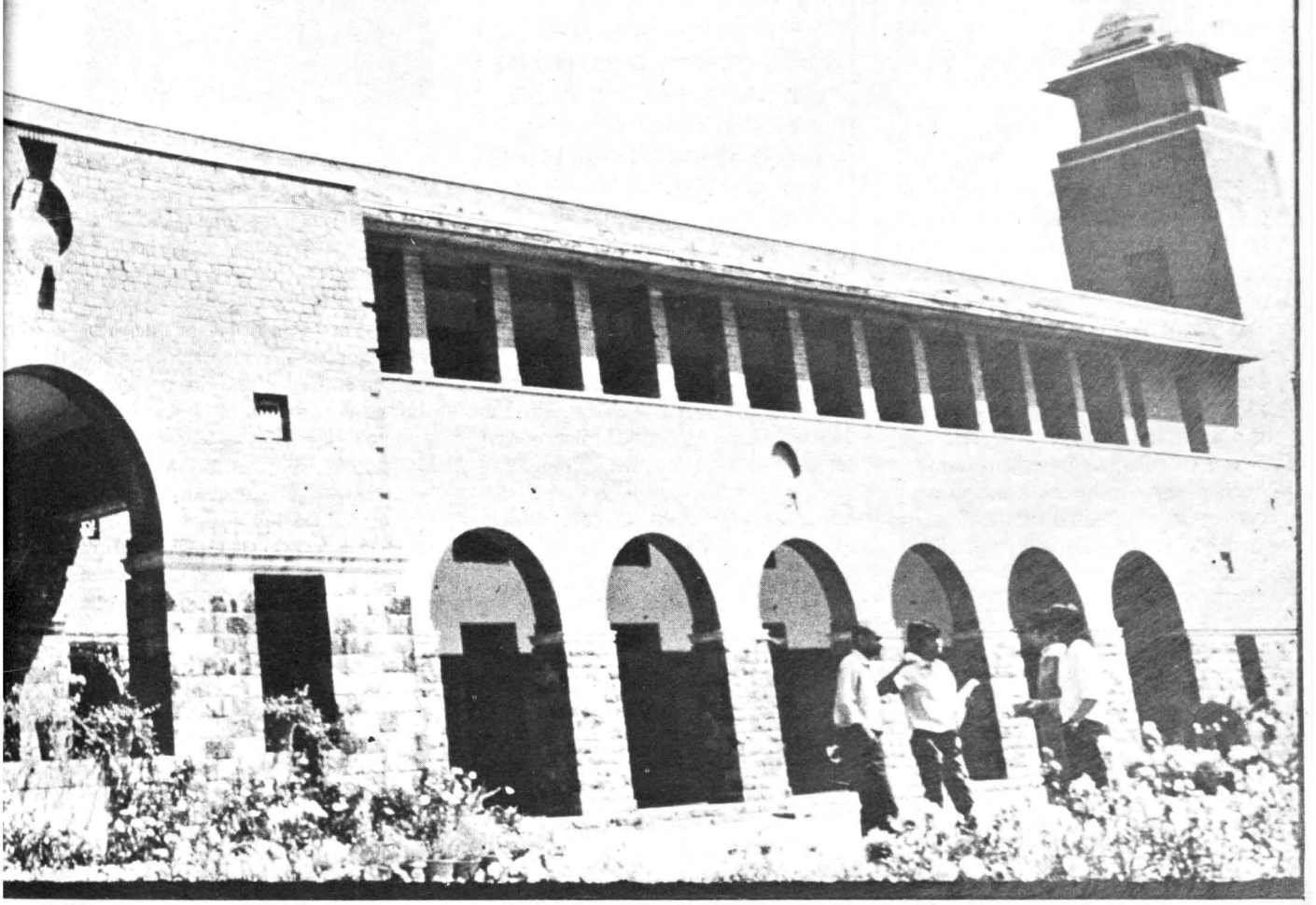


WHAT do Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq and fabric model and Hollywood hopeful, Kabir Bedi, have in common?

Can anyone spot the similarities between writer-raconteur Khushwant Singh and industrialist-musician Vinay Bharat Ram? Or, for that matter, between high-flying diplomat-turned-politician Natwar Singh and journalist-guru Arun Shourie?

And what about economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia, 'India Today' Managing Editor Suman Dubey, self-styled versifier Bulbul Singh, Olympian sprinter Ranjit Bhatia, bearded newsreader Rajiv Mehrotra, 'Indian Express' Editor B G Verghese, wild-life enthusiast Jugnu Singh and pretty boy Benjamin Gilani? What on earth could these men have in common?

EN'S ETHOS



In most cases not much more than the fact that they were all at Delhi's St Stephen's College. And that, at some stage, they bruised their knees on the same playing fields, whiled the hours away at the same cafeterias, scratched their names onto the same pieces of furniture and had the same fantasies about the same girls' college across the road.

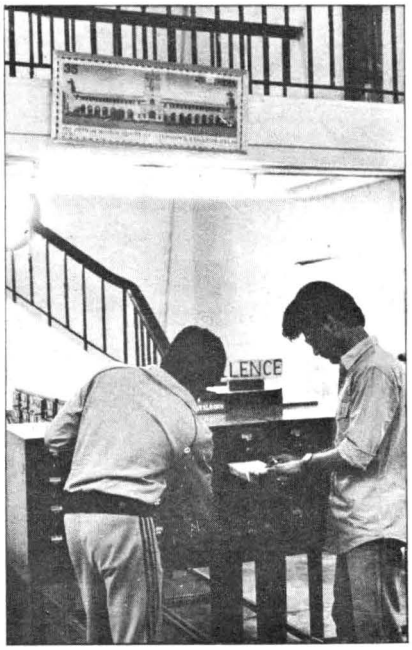
Such is the St Stephen's phenomenon that it has single-handedly produced a diverse array of men: failures and successes, frauds and first-classes, bureaucrats and businessmen and diplomats and dictators. And among its products are the leaders of the subcontinent's meritocracy.

Of course, with the celebrated underwear-flaunting scandal this February, St Stephen's has received more than its fair share of press coverage. There is, nevertheless, more to the college than the high spirits of a few pranksters. And if anything, the February incident only further proved that the college was important enough to have questions asked about it in Parliament, and to merit a barrage of publicity in the national press.

This, of course, comes as no surprise to those familiar with North India. For over half a century, St Stephen's has educated the cream of the North Indian upper classes, almost acting as a bargain basement Cambridge, a Mecca of education and elitism, taking on the mantle of the Government College, Lahore, in its pre-Partition days of glory.

For a college founded in 1881 by a handful of over-zealous Christian missionaries, eager to spread the *Bible* on alien Hindu soil, the college's current status is high tribute indeed.

St Stephen's was founded with five students who had matriculated from the Mission High School. At first, there were misgivings over the quality of the students (aside from the quantity). "We are very anxious

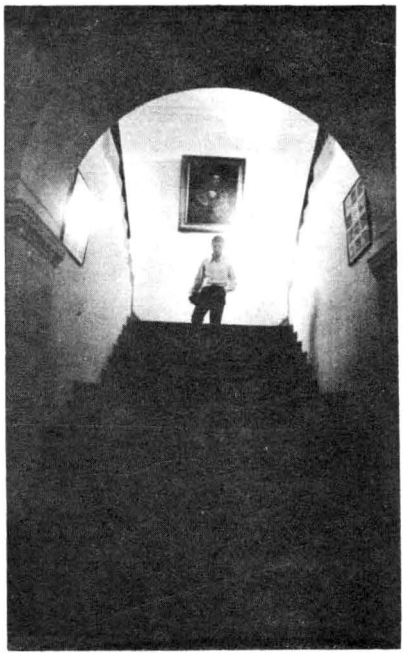


After the underwear-flaunting scandal St Stephen's has received more than its fair share of publicity. But there is much more to the college than that.

about our college boys who are in for the first year. These boys are failures from the last Calcutta examination in January," reveals one missionary's letter. But by 1883, the number had risen to 25, including almost all the students from Delhi who stood highest on the list, and the college was well on its way.

In 1907, Mr S K Rudra was appointed the first Indian principal, and in 1939, the college shifted from its Kashmir Gate environs to its present precincts in Delhi University. It had been 32 years since the first Indian principal had taken over. And now, well into the turbulent pre-Independence '40s, the college had come into its own.

It was a period when the imposing



frame of the then Principal, S N Mukarji, threw its shadow across the college. The Cambridge-educated principal was a disciplinarian and his morning assemblies, many an old-timer will recall, were conducted in pin-drop silence.

But for all the order and discipline, the characteristic high spirits of the Stephanians found expression. Stories about the more notorious of the old students like 'Two Ton Tony' Baij Malhan, have passed into college legend. One of them, involving the discovery of alcohol in Malhan's Allnutt Hall residence, is particularly interesting, because it displays the genteel sophistication of both the Stephanian professor and the student ('senior' and 'junior member' as they are wont to be called). The professor is reputed to have asked in mock ignorance what the brown liquid was. "Only kerosene, sir," was Two Ton's agile reply. "Well, don't tell me I've been drinking kerosene all my life," was the professor's response, as he emptied the contents of the bottle

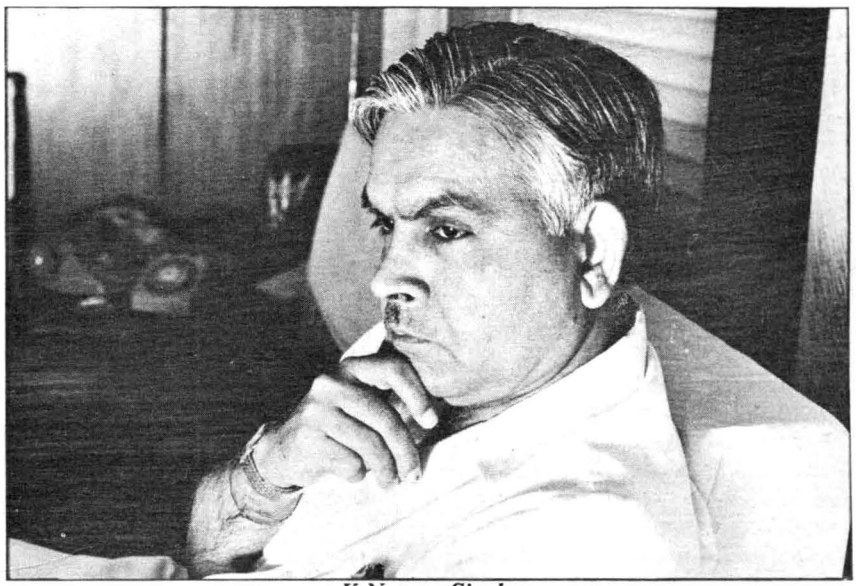
down a drain. Zia-ul-Haq's novel method of ragging freshers, by parading them down the fields in the middle of the night, is also college history.

The '40s seem to have had their fair share of soon-to-be celebrity undergraduates. Sucheta Kripalani (chief minister of Uttar Pradesh), Dr Karni Singh of Bikaner (Olympian rifle-shooter), Lalit Sen (MP, Secretary to Lal Bahadur Shastri), Vir Bhadra Singh (MP), Vikram Mahajan (chief minister of Himachal Pradesh), the Nawab of Rampur, Gyan Prakash (Auditor-General of India), Justice P C Jain, and journalists Ajit Bhattacharjea, George Verghese and N B Kagal, along with Zia, attended the college during that time.

"We had (or so we thought) the world at our feet, and with supreme self-confidence, born of youth, we thought we were very special people," says Pramila Raghubir (English, 1944-49), one of the small cluster of women who attended the college.

However, two events of grim foreboding shook the even tenor of college life. The first was the passing away of Principal Mukarji, one of the pillars of the college. And the second was the pre-Partition riots that tore North India apart, and threatened to engulf even the pocket of education and elitism that was the college. "It was the worst of times and the best of times," says D S Babu (Physics, Maths, 1947-51). "The euphoria (of Independence) was soon to be shattered." For some unknown reason, rumours had spread that a mob was going to attack the Mission College which was suspected to be sheltering members of a certain community. Senior students soon took over the job of organising groups of students to guard the various entrances to the college.

The '50s proved to be peaceful. "There was a post-Independence lull in politics. And in 1949, with the starting of Miranda House, the college went all-male again," says K Natwar Singh, (History, 1948-52) about the period. "It was really a good time to be alive and nearly heaven to be young. Even the scars of Partition and Gandhiji's assassination did not dim our zest for life."



K Natwar Singh.

St Stephen's has always had more than its fair share of celebrity alumni: Dr Karni Singh, B G Verghese, Sucheta Kripalani and, of course, Natwar Singh.

Stephanians went back to their usual activities in the '50s. "Bertrand Russell was the most respected and widely quoted author in our days," says N Panchapakesan (Physics, 1949-54). Students set up an intellectual body called Zi-Eta-Zetta, after the Phi Beta Kappa of America. It was also the time when, after much persuasion, Principal Rajaram gave his sanction to the college union. (It was argued that, after all, even Oxford and Cambridge had their own student bodies.)

But far from setting the Jamuna on fire, students were more concerned about traditions and continuity. "It was a decade in which old values and social mores were still cherished," says Devki Nandan Prasad (Economics, 1951-56). "The Stephanian of 1951 had a well-defined role and image. Actions were classified as done, and not done. Academics were important and scholars held in high esteem."

"There seemed to be time for the arts and graces of life," says Pushkar Johari (History, 1952-57). "I think the '50s were Stephen's best period."

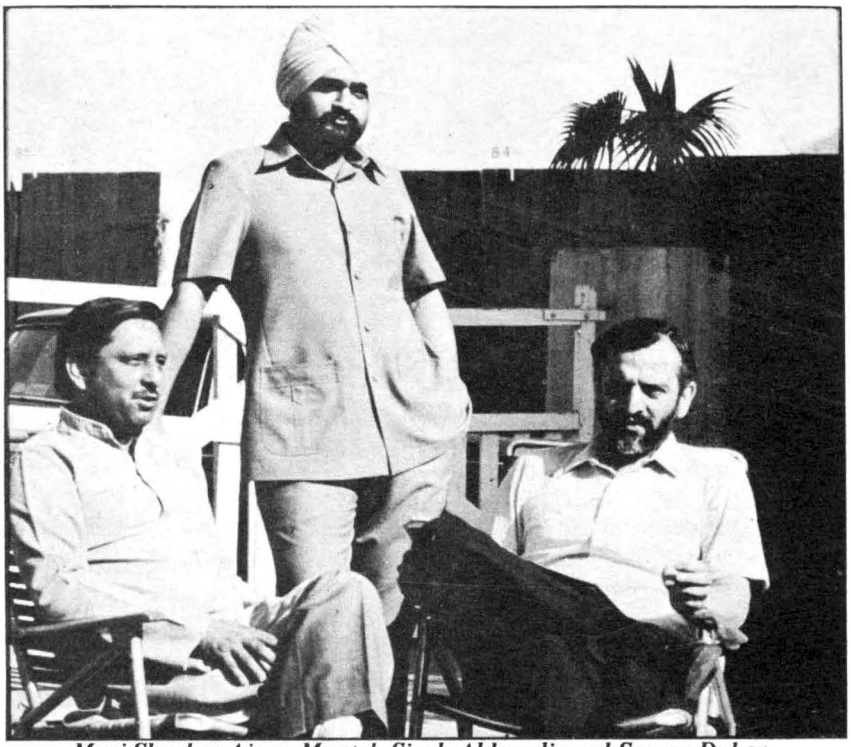
Certainly the arts flourished, albeit under the influences of Punjabi *bonhomie*. Students recall the incident when an emotional Cassius, striding across the hall in a Shakespeare Society production of *Julius Caesar* said, "Brutus, you wrong me, *yaar*." And the Anand Bamroo incident – in which the prankster was chased around the college corridors at night, in the buff, by an irate Hindi professor, Mr Arya – is cited as one of the high points of college ribaldry. "Why didn't you stop, Bamroo?" is what the principal is supposed to have asked the next day. "In my condition?" is what the unruffled student is supposed to have replied. Lenin

Mitra, another prominent student, had his fair share of anecdotes, and Natwar Singh and company made college history by being sent down for two weeks for ragging excesses.

Again, a respectable number of luminaries were schooled at Stephen's in the '50s. K Natwar Singh (ambassador and Minister of State for Steel), Manmohan Malhotra (Deputy Secretary to Commonwealth head, S Ramphal), Veerindra Dayal (UN Chef de Cabinet), P Gopinath (ILO), Salman Haider (IFS), Loveraj Kumar (the first Indian Rhodes Scholar), Peter Sinai (IFS), Shunu Sen (Hindustan Lever's) and Arun Maira (TELCO).

The '60s proved to be, however, culturally and socially more exciting. Caught up in the changing winds of the world, Stephanians, faddish to the end, clambered onto the '60s bandwagon of new anti-establishment ideas, revolutionary music and counter-culture behaviour. A random glance at *The Stephanian* (the official college magazine) provides an interesting glimpse. A single issue could contain an article on the comparative study of religion, an appreciation of Ian Fleming, essays on Omar Khayyam and his *Rubaiyat,* Nehru and Free India, and the history of the 11 *karanas* of Indian astrology. "Certainly the order of superficiality was pretty high, but whether the reason was that we were 17, it was the '60s, or that we were at Stephen's, how can one say?" laughs Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

It was a time when Roshan Seth (History, 1962-65) played apothecary to Zafar Hai's Romeo in the college production. Suman Dubey (Maths, 1959-63) was president of the Mountaineering Association and accompanied the second Everest expedition. Mani Shanker Aiyar, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Sarwar Latif, and Peter Philip started the underground paper *Kooler Talk,* named in some complicated way after *The Blacksmith's Song,* a particularly *risqué* ditty, which Stephanians are said to know by heart. Kabir Bedi organised blood donations, Michael Dalvi represented the college in cricket matches against Hindu College, Arun Shourie played hockey and was secretary of the Informal Discussions Association. ("At present," wrote Shourie in his annual report, "talks are seldom followed by a purposeful discussion but rather a cross-examination of the speaker.") Rajiv Gandhi's buddy, Sanjeev Mukherjee, represented the college in the university swimming meet and won the 100, 200 and 400 metres. Bulbul Singh wrote poetry and Mani Aiyar, effortlessly vaulting over all standards of decorum, penned *Love Among The Gonds,* an essay about the sexual norms of a tribal group, which passed itself off as anthropology! "We must remember that it is precisely such looseness which rids the world of sexual neurosis which precludes promiscuity, which, in the last analysis, is merely desire inflamed by secrecy," wrote the breathless 17-year-old.



Mani Shanker Aiyar, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Suman Dubey.

Suman Dubey was a dedicated moutaineer while Mani Aiyar and Montek Singh Ahluwalia founded 'Kooler Talk,' the underground paper. The three remain friends.

"We probably read Perry Mason, those days," says Ahluwalia about his generation's reading habits, "but we liked to give the impression that we were reading Russell."

Another slightly smug essay in a *Stephanian* of that period classifies, quite graphically, the various types of Stephanians. There existed: The Trekker (with 'sun-tan and beard'), 'The Pap' (one whose trousers measure more than 19 inches), The Toughie ('can't abide intellectual talk, Gandhism and loose change'), The Pseudo (*'Encounter* or *Quest*

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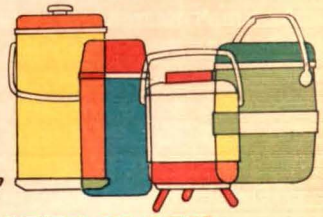

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under his arm') and The Killer ('tight black trousers and a yellow sweater – smooth chin').

Certainly, the Stephanian came in all shapes and sizes, and by the '70s, a new type was added to the menagerie – the Naxalite.

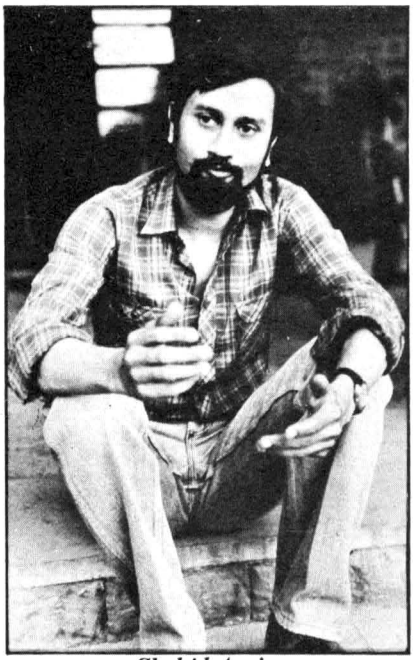
Why Naxalism found a breeding ground in Delhi's most elite college would perhaps make an interesting sociological treatise. According to Brijraj Singh (Lecturer, English, 1965-74) the roots lay in the Bihar famine. "For weeks we had been reading about the terrible famine in Bihar," he writes. "One day Bunker Roy, an MA final student of mine, said that he and Suman Dubey were thinking of going to Bihar during the vacation to see things for themselves. Would I like to come along?"

On his return, Singh addressed the students in assembly and told them that their help was required. Many students volunteered and went to Bihar between January and September 1967. The experience left a deep impression on many students. Bunker Roy, one of the brightest, decided to devote the rest of his life to social work in Tilonia in Rajasthan.

"Some others from among my Bihar boys later became Naxalites and I had been told by some of them that their conversion to Naxalism had its roots in their experiences in Bihar," writes Singh.

"The college was going through a period of transition," adds academician Shahid Amin (History, 1967-72). "The general political awakening of the '60s, Vietnam, Prague, May 1968, and Naxalbari had managed to penetrate the smugness of public school-educated lads. A counter-culture was growing. The power of Naxalism lay in the metamorphosis of students poised for an elitist career, into romantic revolutionaries, albeit for a short period."

The '70s were also a time for



Shahid Amin.

"We saw the world as being divided into types," recalls Shahid Amin. "Kabir Bedi was the Shakes Soc type. People who listened to 'Date With You' were Dudes. And so on."

Eliot's *Prufrock,* and indulging the Stephanian funny-bone. "Though the task of creating jokes and puns was confined to a small number of wits, there was an ever-present and appreciative audience only too willing to spread the cheer," says Shekhar Singh (English, 1967-73). A hapless Rev O'Connor and Rev Hiscock seem to have been the inspiration for much of this humour. And the Wodehouse Society's Lord Ickenham competitions were dutifully attended. A highlight was when Benjamin Gilani and Amitabh Pande demonstrated how senior members would bark had they been dogs!

Deepak Vohra, Shahid Amin, Manjeet Singh, Amit Khanna, Rajiv Mehrotra, Dilip Simeon, Novy Kapadia, Shashi Tharoor, Inderjit Badhwar, Aman Nath, Salman Khursheed and Gautam Philips were the prominent students of the period.

Stephen's preoccupation with types still continued. "We had the Shakes Soc type," says Shahid Amin. "The type represented by Kabir Bedi or Siddharth Kak. The Science type. The Dudes, with their ears pinned to All India Radio's *Date With You*. What we called the 'locals', the yellow-pant syndrome, and a ginger group of Marxists, who brought the college a lot of notoriety."

Rukun Advani (English, 1972-77) writes, "Everything was 'this type' or 'that type'. Type was used as a moral category for people we didn't know. These categories broke down once you got to know people and then even a 'Science type' became a 'good type Science type'."

This obsession with characterising people as 'types', of fitting them into neat categories, may advance the common perception of Stephen's as elitist – after all, what are types but water-tight compartments that exclude others?

Of course, most Stephanians take strong objection to the elitist tag they are stuck with. "Has anyone done a survey of what backgrounds Stephanians come from?" asks Arun Shourie (Economics, 1958-61). According to Shourie, most of his contemporaries hailed from the middle class meritocracy. "This image of the knife-and-fork-wielding English-accented gentleman is just not true. Like all generalisations, it has no basis in reality."

Mani Shanker Aiyar, (Economics, 1958-61) does not quite agree. "It wasn't just the elite that sent its sons to Stephen's, but the cream of the elite. Remember, you had to have over 80 per cent to get in, so in essence, you had the brightest and the

A WHO'S WHO OF

Rukun Advani: Publishing, Oxford University Press.
Montek Singh Ahluwalia: Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister.
Titoo Ahluwalia: Market research, Chairman, MARG.
Mani Aiyar: Information Advisor to the Prime Minister.


Titoo Ahluwalia

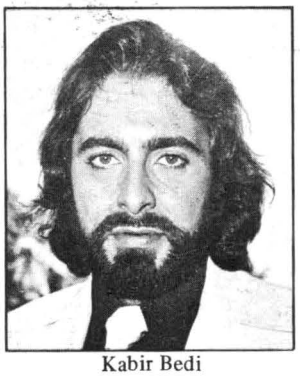
Swaminathan Aiyar: Columnist, *Indian Express.*
Ketan Anand: Film director.
Jai Arya: Assistant Vice-President, Bank of America.
Kirti Azad: Test cricketer.


Bhasker Menon

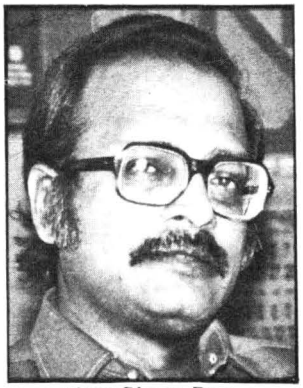
Zahoor Azhar: Cabinet Secretary, Pakistan.
Ajitabh Bachchan: Film distributor and drug manufacturer.
Inderjit Badhwar: US columnist, *India Today.*
Rahul Bajaj: Managing Director, Bajaj Auto.
J R Bammi: President, Macneill & Magor.
Pablo Bartholomew: Photographer.
Kabir Bedi: Film actor.
Ram Behari: Vice-Chancellor, Jodhpur University.
Arvind Bhandari: PRO, Reserve Bank of India.
Vinay Bharat Ram: Director, DCM.
Narendra Bhati: Minister, Rajasthan government.
Arun Bhatia: Former collector of Bombay.
Prem Bhatia: Editor, *The Tribune.*


Rahul Bajaj

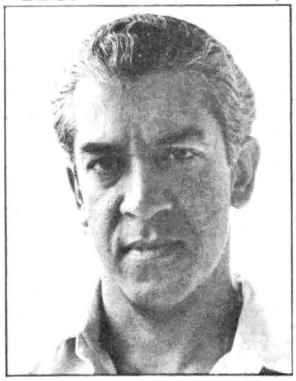
Ranjit Bhatia: Olympic athlete and University lecturer.
Ajit Bhattacharjea: Columnist.
Ajoy Bose: Correspondent, *The Guardian.*
Mahesh Buch: Former IAS officer.
Arun Chacko: Associate Editor, *The World Paper.*
Ashok Chatterjee: Executive Director, National Institute of Design.


Kabir Bedi

Dilip Cherian: Assistant Editor, *Business India.*
Ranjit Chibb: Market research, Managing Director, MRAS.
Romesh (Romi) Chopra: Advertising consultant.
Vijay Crishna: Stage actor.
Michael Dalvi: Cricketer.
Ashok Dayal: Regional Director, Grindlays Bank.
Ravi Dayal: Managing Director, Oxford University Press.
Veerindra Dayal: Chef de Cabinet, IFS.
Niranjan Desai: Minister, Indian Embassy, Washington.
Bansi Dhar: Director, DCM.


Vinay Bharat Ram

Suman Dubey: Managing Editor, *India Today.*
Benjamin Gilani: Film actor.
Ravi Gulhati: Economist, World Bank.
Prabhu Guptara: Advisor, Greater London Council.
Zafar Hai: Film-maker.
Salman Haider: Indian Foreign Service.
Vinit Haksar: Professor of Philosophy, Edinburgh.
Satish Jacob: Journalist, BBC.


Arun Bhatia

Saeed Jaffrey: Film actor.
Prem Shankar Jha: Senior Assistant Editor, *Times Of India.*
Siddharth Kak: Actor and TV newsreader.
Madhur Kapoor: Artist.
Shekhar Kapur: Film director.
Sumer Kaul: Senior Assistant Editor, *Indian Express.*
Amit Khanna: Film director.
Salman Khursheed: Advocate and journalist.
Sucheta Kripalani: Former chief minister, UP.
Ajay Kumar: Assistant Editor, *India Today.*
Loveraj Kumar: First Indian Rhodes Scholar.

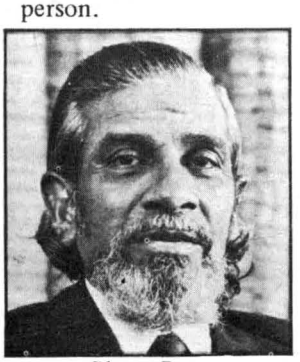
STEPHANIANS

Saeed Jaffrey

Arun Lal: Cricketer.
Deepak Lal: Economist, World Bank.
Air Marshal P C Lal: Former chief of air staff.
Dr K B Lall: Chairman, Guest, Keen & Williams.
Vikram Mahajan: Former chief minister, HP.
Arun Maira: Resident Director, TELCO.
Manmohan Malhotra: Commonwealth Secretariat.
Satish Malhotra: Chairman, Empire Industries.
Ranjit Mathrani: Director, Lazards.
Anurag Mathur: Editor, *Centre.*
Rajiv Mehrotra: Film-maker and newsreader.
K P S Menon: Ambassador to China.

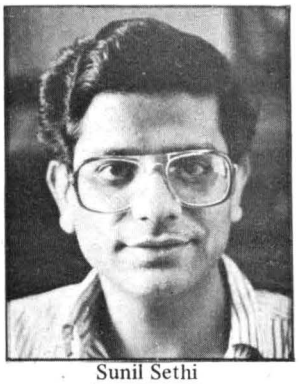
Shekhar Kapur

Bhasker Menon: Chairman, EMI Music.
Shanker Menon: Managing Director, MTDC, and writer.
Joy Michael: Theatre director.
Sanjeev Mukherjee: Director, Western India Tanneries.
Bal Mundkar: Chairman, Ulka Advertising.
Aman Nath: Culture person.



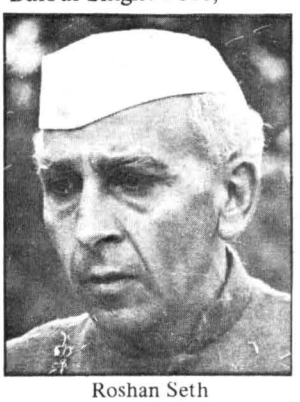
Bharat Ram

S Shah Nawaz: Secretary-General, Foreign Ministry, Pakistan.
Ashok Nehru: Consultant, Swedfund.
Prabhat Patnaik: Professor, JNU.
Gautam Philips: Advocate.
Ishtiaque Hussain Qureshi: Former education minister, Pakistan.
N Raghunathan: Finance Secretary, Maharashtra.
Mangat Rai: Indian Civil Service.
Suraj Rai: Film-maker.
Bharat Ram: Director, DCM.
Charat Ram: Director, DCM.
Bunker Roy: Former squash champion and social worker.



Sunil Sethi

Parikshit Sahni: Actor.
Aftab Seth: Indian Foreign Service.
Roshan Seth: Actor.
Rajiv Sethi: Culture person.
Sunil Sethi: Principal Correspondent, *India Today.*
C L Sharma: Deputy Managing Director, Air-India.
Arun Shourie: Economist and writer.
Kapil Sibal: Lawyer.
Peter Sinai: Indian Foreign Service.
J D Singh: Indian Foreign Service.
Arun Singh: Parliamentary Secretary to PM.
Rao Birendra Singh: Minister for Agriculture.
Bulbul Singh: Poet,

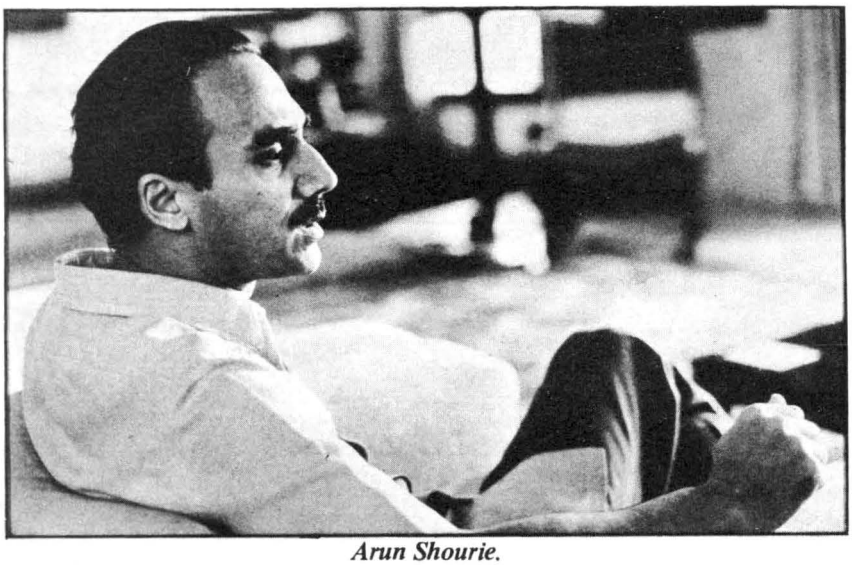


Roshan Seth

artist, etc.
Digvijay Singh: Former minister for environment.
Jugnu Singh: Film-maker.
Karni Singh: Maharajah of Bikaner and champion shot.
Khushwant Singh: Writer and journalist.
Martand Singh: Secretary, Intach.
Natwar Singh: Minister for Steel.
Rahul Singh: Resident Editor, *Indian Express,* Chandigarh.

B G Verghese

Chaudhary Randhir Singh: Former MP.
Ram Tarneja: Managing Director, Bennett & Coleman.
Raj Thapar: Editor, *Seminar.*
Ashok Vajpayee: Poet.
Brahm Vasudev: Managing Director, Pressure Cookers & Appliances Ltd.
Kapila Vatsayan: Art critic and scholar.
B G Verghese: Editor, *Indian Express.*
Gautam Vohra: Assistant Editor, *Times Of India.*
General Zia-ul-Haq: President of Paksitan.



Arun Shourie.

best."

Ranjit Bhatia, lecturer in Maths, feels that even if Stephen's was elitist in the past, it's just not so today. "We have a lot of homogeneity. Boys come in from out of town, and are chosen only on the basis of their marks. Daddy's recommendations just don't matter. Just the other day, Gulab Ramchandani, Principal of Doon School, was asking why more of his students didn't get in. What could I say? It's cut-throat competition. If you're good, your social class is irrelevant."

"Yes, some of us did think we were the elite," chuckles K Natwar Singh (History, 1948-52), "but with very little reason, I must add."

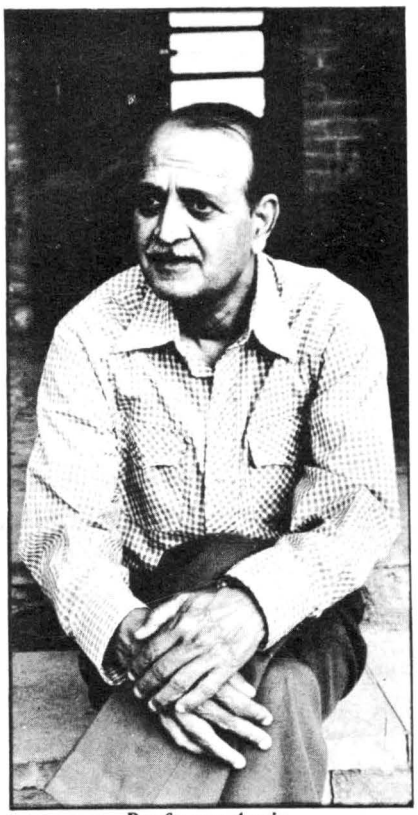
"So much for this elitist tag," snorts economist Montek Singh Ahluwalia. "When the lights went out in the dining-room, boys were known to fling chapattis at each other."

"In my time," recalls Bhatia, "we also had some very conservative trans-Jamuna types who cycled to college with *katoris* of *ghee* to sprinkle on their food." And Professor Amin, Head of the Department of History, remembers the times when zealous principals would scour the outskirts of Delhi – villages like Gurgaon, Panipat, and Karwa – looking for boys to enroll, to widen the social basis of the institution. "I remember having joined the faculty in 1949,

Arun Shourie denies that the Stephanians of his time were particularly elitist. And Professor Amin recalls feeling like a fool coming to college in a felt hat and suit.

wearing a suit, a felt hat, and clutching what I thought was the mandatory box of English cigarettes, only to be informed by sympathetic colleagues, a week later, that I could relax, that I was cutting a ridiculous figure," laughs Amin.

However, some Stephanians feel betrayed by their institution's preoccupation with the upper classes. "We have produced decent civil servants who would have the character to do the right thing and fall by the wayside in the rat race that the Indian bureaucracy has become," writes Bibek Ananda Jena (English, 1956-59). "We have also produced business executives who know their Tom Collinses from their Wilkie Collinses. But that is all. And that will not be enough, perhaps," continues Jena. "My son shall not go to Stephen's



Professor Amin.

even if I could afford it by some miracle. I would prefer that he belongs to his people, no matter how smelly, and how silly they are. And no matter if he ultimately never comes to know the difference between a fish knife and a fruit knife."

Perhaps a consensus may never be reached on whether a Stephanian regards his college as being elitist. But what most Stephanians are in agreement on, is that the Stephanian is not as inclined to go into private enterprise as, say, the Xavierite from Bombay. "Look, in India sons go into the professions of their fathers," says Arun Chacko, "and the son of an IAS officer is less likely to want to start his own import-export business."

"Delhi is the seat of bureaucracy and Bombay, the centre of commerce," says Ranjit Bhatia who, being

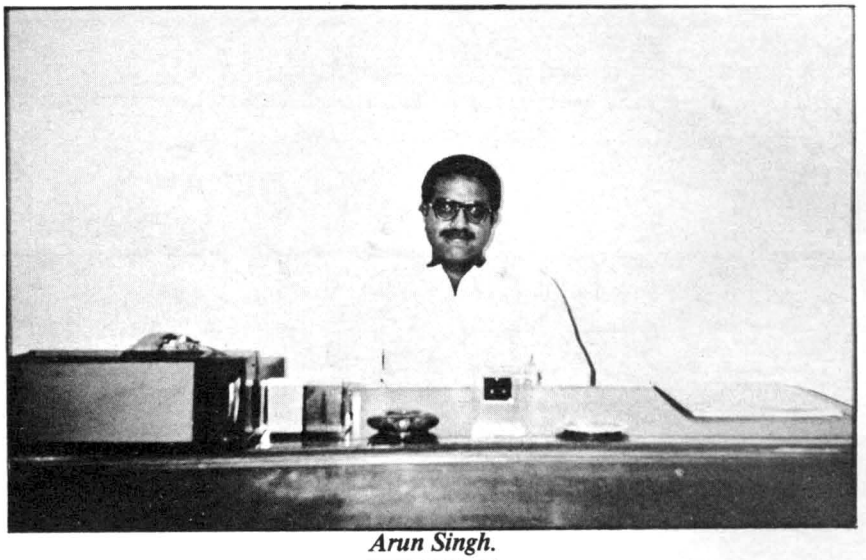
on both the Rhodes Scholarship Board and the Inlaks Selection Committee, has interviewed graduates from Delhi and Bombay.

"I once interviewed two girls who wanted to study French abroad. The girl from Bombay said that it would enable her to get a good job with either the Oberois or the Taj group. The girl from Delhi said she would join the UN or teach at the Geneva school. Delhi students feel it's the 'right thing' to sit for the civil service exams. In fact, some Stephanians refused to wear dark suits for their interviews, because that's all part of the business world. But all that is changing now," says Bhatia. "For instance one of my students who was frustrated in the IAS gave up, and is now heading the computer analysis division of a five-star hotel."

Professor Amin does agree that the Stephanian is not likely to be a hard-nosed businessman. "Even Vinay Bharat Ram. Maybe his family regrets sending him here. Because he's hardly a typical industrialist. He's done a doctorate. He takes lectures. It is the Oxbridge syndrome."

But is this Oxbridge syndrome, this gentleman's approach to commerce, this stepping aside from the rat race, working against the Stephanian? Twenty years ago, in a more relaxed, easy world, the Stephanian could drift easily into government service, or academe, and seek solace in a game of tennis at the club, and whisky at night. Today, with salaries shrinking in such jobs, tough competition from the burgeoning business classes and inflation, does the Stephanian find himself caught in a world which he no longer understands, or can control? Is the gentlemanly approach to life, in fact working against the Stephanian?

Arun Shourie does not agree. "Most of my colleagues from college, are doing just as well as the next man,



Arun Singh.

Have Stephanians let the country down by not entering politics? Many of those who are now politicians — Arun Singh, for instance — started out doing something else.

and work just as hard. They don't take things easy. This is just another baseless generalisation."

Chacko is even more emphatic. "Look. The brightest Stephanians joined the government services where seniority and not brilliance is what is rewarded. And even in such careers, Stephanians are at the top. High-fliers like Natwar Singh and Mani Aiyar are a dime a dozen."

Suman Dubey calls the attitude 'one of coasting along', but hastens to add that rather than a college phenomenon it was a personal characteristic. "I came from a reasonable services background. I was reasonably bright. So under normal circumstances, I knew I'd get a good job, so I tended to coast along."

Perhaps, it has more to do with Stephanians perceiving certain careers as the 'right' ones for their status. Says Ranjit Bhatia, "Men like Benjamin Gilani were victims of the system. They felt they ought to go into teaching or government, and realised only too late that they were not suited to it. Perhaps it has to do with the Oxbridge hang-up of turning out perfect gentlemen, good for a lot of different things, but with no specialised knowledge of anything."

Shanker Menon (Economics, 1956-61), Managing Director, MTDC, asks a pertinent question, "How is it that a college that laid such emphasis on sports and English, has produced few sportsmen (aside from cricketers Kirti Azad, Arun Lal and Michael Dalvi) of repute? And as for writers," says Menon, a twinkle in his eye, "the only two seem to be Bulbul Singh and myself!"

Montek Ahluwalia agrees that there might have existed in St Stephen's a system where students were given to understand that they should take part in all kinds of activities. "Stephen's is an undergraduate university. At 16-17, you can't expect a young boy to make up his mind on the career he's going to choose, and concentrate on it totally." Mani agrees. "It was a true undergraduate experience. In our first year, we were told not to concentrate on the academic side. Students were encouraged to play games, chase girls,

do plays." "The thinking was, yes, we know that you are brilliant academically, but what else can you do?" says Bhatia. "And ironically, at job interviews, today, students are being asked for a record of their extra-curricular activities." So, whereas in the past, Stephanians were turned into Oxbridge 'gentlemen' for social reasons, the all-rounder approach is now an advantage in the job market.

"Look, I agree that we were bred to be generalists," says Natwar Singh, a trifle irritated. "But that is the Oxbridge syndrome which Stephen's emulated. And as for not turning out writers of national stature – that's the fault of our education system as a whole. Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai and R K Narayan were not products of any education system."

But whereas there might not be many writers or sportsmen of any repute who sprang from Stephen's there is no doubt that in some professions Stephanians have had a virtual monopoly. The government services, in general and the IFS, in particular. "There are more Stephanians to be found in the corridors of the External Affairs Ministry than at St Stephen's itself," says Mani Aiyar. And the truth of this statement is driven home all too clearly when one learns that when Aiyar was Consul-General in Karachi, the Indian Ambassador, the Minister in the Embassy in Islamabad, and the Commercial Counsellor were all Stephanians! Certainly the Stephanian has a pronounced inclination to venture into the bureaucracy, and from it, the cream of the system – the IFS.

In his moving essay in the annual publication of *The Stephanian*, Aiyar writes, "There were six of us (friends). Someone bestirred himself and asked, '*Yaar* after you leave college what do you want to do?' Five out of the six of us answered, 'Join the Foreign Service.' And all five of us are now in the Foreign Service. A random selection of five, competing with over a hundred thousand others, and all five emerging successful. It shows how narrow is the economic and social base in India from which the privileged elite of the country breeds others of its kind."

Khushwant Singh.

The network endures. Khushwant Singh recalls how Parkash Narain, accused of corruption, came to see him. "You can't believe all this," he said. "I'm a Stephanian."

The corridors of newspaper and magazine offices, too, are littered with Stephanians: Ajit Bhattacharjea, George Verghese, Khushwant Singh, Prem Shankar Jha, Swaminathan Aiyar, Suman Dubey, Arun Shourie, Gautam Vohra, Shashi Tharoor, Sunil Sethi, Inderjit Badhwar and Karan Thapar.

There have been Stephanians who have found fame in other careers (even films: Kabir Bedi, Parikshit Sahni, Shekhar Kapur and the like). But there's one obvious exception. Few Stephanians have made it in politics. As Mani Aiyar says: "St Stephen's acquired its civil orientation – becoming a kind of brown man's Haileybury – in the days of the ICS, when to rule and to run things was one and the same thing. But in a parliamentary democracy, bureaucrats only run things. It is the politicians who rule. But there are no Stephanians in politics. Which makes one wonder if the class of '61 has not betrayed its generation, by keeping out of the fray."

It probably has. The best and the brightest owed it to India to enter politics. But then, why single out Stephanians? In a sense, the entire middle class meritocracy has made the mistake of neglecting politics. And at least St Stephen's has done its bit, providing the country with men of character who, even if they don't rule, can, and do, run things well.

Sceptics may say that all Stephen's does is produce a particularly self-satisfied breed of Punjabis, but even the smugness of the Stephanian has its advantages. Stephanians expect each other to be honest; they try and live up to the high standards of their Alma Mater. And from those expectations emerges a certain trust and, it must be conceded, a certain self-satisfaction.

The Stephen's bond is an enduring one. Khushwant Singh remembers how the *Hindustan Times*, which he then edited, had accused Chief Justice Parkash Narain of corruption. Finally, the Justice dropped in to see the editor. "Do you really believe I could have done all this?" he asked. "After all, I am a Stephanian."

No more needed to be said. ♦

KNIFE-EDGE

Why Ahmedabad Burns

BY AMRITA SHAH

Every few years, the people of Ahmedabad forget their Gandhian traditions and turn to violence. What makes Ahmedabad so volatile? And what are the implications of its rapid slide into chaos for the rest of India?

FOR THE LAST three months, the city of Ahmedabad has been poised on a knife-edge. What started in January as a student agitation, against the reservation of seats for the backward classes, has grown out of control. First, the agitation turned violent. Then, the violence grew to encompass anti-Harijan riots. Next, the situation took a communal turn. After that, the police force revolted and ran riot. While each outbreak of violence has been controlled a few days after its occurrence, all declarations of a return to normalcy have seemed premature. Over the last 14 weeks, violence has broken out again and again and there seems no telling when it will stop.

Violence is no stranger to Ahmedabad. Agitations, too, have become part of the Gujarati way of life. It is these facts, along with this seemingly unstoppable pattern of agitational violence, that raise several vital questions – many of which are difficult to answer.

How does one explain why the land of Gandhi's birth has experienced four violent agitations since the formation of the state in 1960? What makes the Gujaratis throw the Gandhian values of non-violence and tolerance out of the window, to commit the fifth highest number of atrocities on Harijans in the country? And why do regular communal riots break out in Ahmedabad, including the 1969 Hindu-Muslim riots which left 2,500 people dead?

Any spark seems to set the ordinarily mild and peace-loving Gujaratis on a rampage. In fact, over the last two years, even minor incidents – such as a disputed decision in an Indo-Pakistan match and a quarrel over kites during the kite-flying season – had Hindus fighting their Muslim neighbours. Almost any issue seems to hold the seeds of a full-scale conflagration in Ahmedabad.

Yet, Ahmedabad, despite its history of agitations, can be one of India's most disciplined cities. If it can erupt into chaos so quickly and violently that even a state government, elected by a majority of 55 per cent – the highest in the recent Assembly elections – fails to control it, what about the rest of the country?

The implications of this question are potentially terrifying. The last five years have been the most violent in the history of post-Partition India. An anti-foreigner agitation that began quietly in Assam in the late '70s, took only two years to turn bloody. A low-key demand for Sikh rights grew into a virtual insurrection in Punjab. Even Bombay – long regarded as India's most civilised city – witnessed a police revolt in 1982, and bloody communal riots in 1984. There has also been communal violence in Hyderabad; chaos and curfew in Kashmir. And the days after Indira Gandhi's assassination saw virtually all of North India go up in flames, as Sikhs were massacred on the streets of Delhi.

BRIEF

Thirty-eight years after Independence, India's cities seem to plunge from order into violent chaos with remarkable suddenness.

SOME PEOPLE feel it is unfair to emphasise the Gandhi-Gujarat connection. "Gandhi could have been born anywhere in the country," claims Uma Shankar Joshi, the noted Gujarati poet, disparagingly.

The assertion, notwithstanding, Gandhism does pervade the dry air of Ahmedabad. The Sabarmati Ashram established by the Mahatma in 1915, on the bank of the Sabarmati river is a major tourist attraction. Most office walls bear his photograph and one of the reasons behind a relatively peaceful textile labour populace is the Gandhian union – the Majoor Mahajan.

Moreover, it is the only Indian state that has consistently maintained prohibition over such a long period. As former home minister Prabodh Raval points out, "Despite the violence, a little of Gandhi still persists in Ahmedabad."

But perhaps Raval has missed the point.

In a sense, the violence in Ahmedabad is not despite Gandhi as much as because of him. For, along with non-violence, Gandhi also taught the Gujaratis to agitate. The motivation to fight for one's rights, and the attitude of not taking things lying down, are largely Gandhi's contribution to the Gujarati ethos.

This characteristic has surfaced time and again in post-Independence Gujarat, starting with the 1956 Maha-Gujarat agitation, where eight lives were lost on the first day of disturbances. The demand for a separate state was finally granted in 1960, but trouble followed soon after when the authorities refused to erect a memorial to the martyrs of the agitation.

Then, in September 1969, the Hindus reacted violently to rumours of a Muslim attack on the Jagannath temple in Ahmedabad leading to the worst post-Partition communal riots in the country.

The 1969 riots were followed by disturbances of a very different kind. The Navnirman movement which, in 1974 ousted a corrupt chief minister – Chiman Patel – and ushered in a non-Congress government, was a movement against inflation, scarcity and corruption. In view of the Emergency that followed, this agitation has been seen by many as the first expression of democratic India against an authoritarian government.

But after a period of political upheaval, when Gujarat finally seemed to be settling down under a popularly elected government led by Madhavsinh Solanki, trouble erupted again in 1980-81, in the form of anti-reservation riots which soon assumed casteist overtones.

Not surprisingly, the Solanki government's decision to hike the reservation quota five years later was an invitation for a repeat performance of the 1980-81 riots. In the circumstances, the late labour leader Indulal Yagnik's description of Ahmedabad as a stone-thrower's paradise couldn't have been more apt.

A SIGNIFICANT FEATURE of the Ahmedabad agitations since 1969 is the prominent role played by the middle class and the relative indifference of the working class.

What makes this such an unusual phenomenon is the fact that with 64 textile mills, Ahmedabad has a large labour population which is a conglomeration of various castes and communities.

The Majoor Mahajan, which has as its members 90,000 of the total of 1,20,000 workers, is largely responsible for the non-agitating nature of the working class. "We are politically non-aligned," says Arvind Buch, the khadi-clad President of the Majoor Mahajan. "We function according to Gandhian principles."

Interestingly, while the labour force is still strongly influenced by Gandhi, the middle class has openly repudiated Gandhian non-violence. "Gandhi was talking about non-violence because he was wearing a *langoti,*" said a youth leader at a public meeting in Bardoli during the Navnirman movement. "We have terelene clothes and therefore, cannot follow Gandhi's advice."

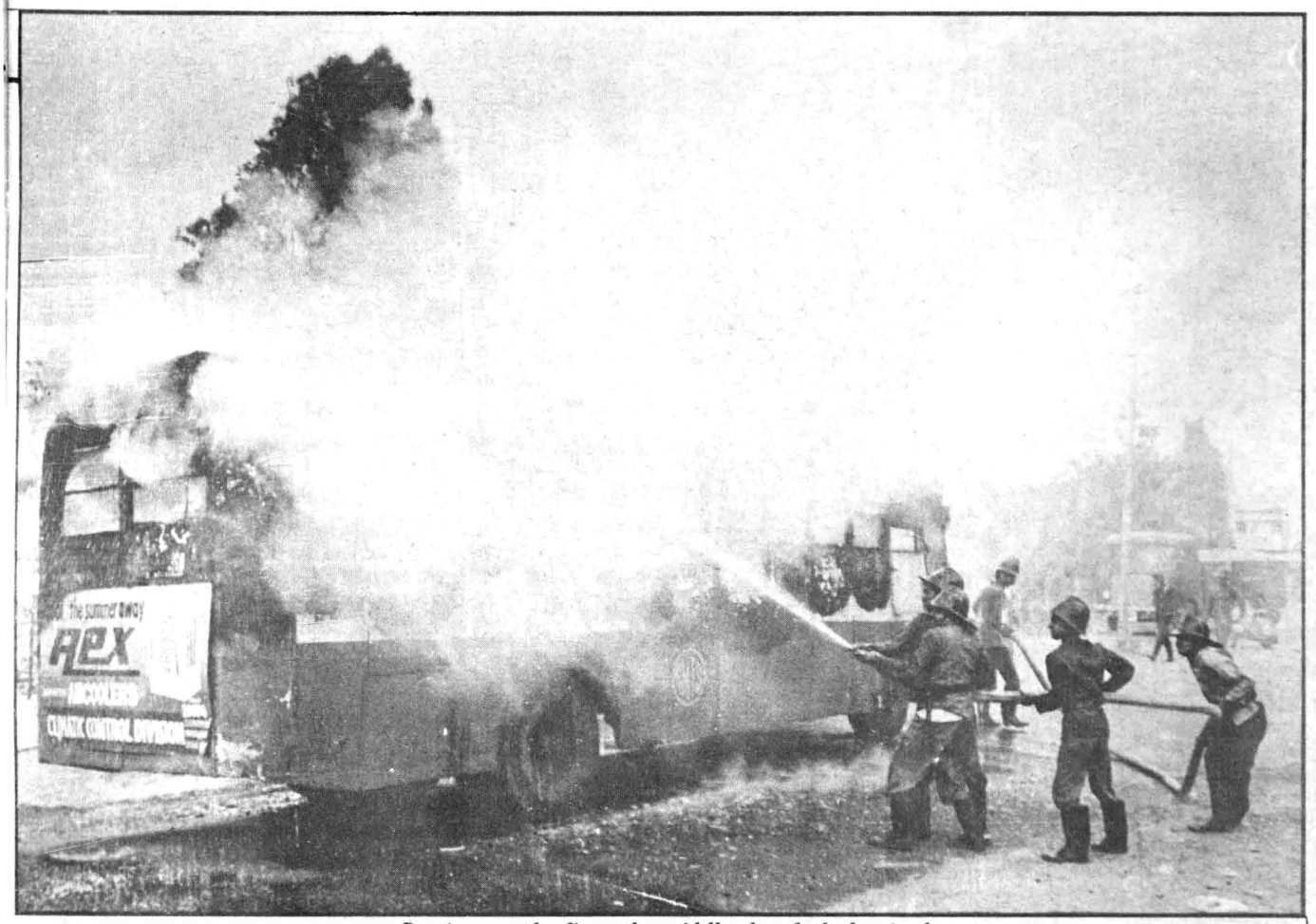
The picture of an agitating Gujarati is sharply at variance with the normal image of the middle class Gujarati, who is still perceived as an enterprising businessman preoccupied with economics. In that sense, the agitations are not totally out of character, for they have rarely been ideological and frequently economic.

There were small agitations like the Mongvari Hatao movement, led by Indulal Yagnik in 1964, which had their origins in economic factors. But it was in 1974, with the Navnirman movement, that the middle class rebelled in force. The period was one of country-wide scarcity, and when the Centre decided to cut foodgrain supply to Gujarat, the middle class felt the pinch. In November and December 1973, the Centre supplied the state with only 15,000 tonnes of wheat against the normal requirement of 100,000 tonnes. The effect was felt most strongly at urban centres, where 28 per cent of the state population resides – eight per cent more than the all-India average. Added to this was the general perception that large-scale blackmarketing was responsible for the steep price rise.

A strike in L D Engineering College in Ahmedabad against mess charges and the quality of food became the starting point for a middle class-based protest movement. For the first time, professionals, businessmen and white collar workers gave vent to their dissatisfaction by taking to the streets.

Similarly, the 1981 and 1985 agitations have been the result of a middle class reaction against a system of reservation which the middle class perceives will soon deprive it of professional opportunities and jobs in government institutions – hitherto, its traditional preserve.

For the typical Gujarati middle class family, sending a child to an engineering or medical college is like making an investment. As V Ganga-



Putting out the fires: the middle class feels deprived.

dhar, journalist and ex-professor at Gujarat University points out, "For the average Gujarati, education is just another business."

With successive hikes in the reservation quota for backward students, the feeling of deprivation has spread among the middle class. Their increased participation in the 1985 disturbances was a corollary of this feeling. While in 1981, most of the agitators were students of the post-graduate medical courses, this time even school children, and more importantly, their parents and guardians, joined in the movement.

Students voluntarily discontinued attendance and parents picketed schools. At C N Vidyalaya and Sharda Mandir, two of the largest schools in Ahmedabad, parents were seen preventing children from attending school. That the Akhil Gujarat Vali Mahamandal, an association of parents, has been at the forefront of the present agitation is a symptom of the insecurity of the Gujarati middle class.

Most agitations, even if they are communal, tend to have an economic base. In Assam, for instance, resentment against the Bangladeshi refugees would not have been so strong had it not been accompanied by economic frustration. Similarly, in the Bhiwandi riots of 1984, the underlying cause was the Hindus' resentment over the increasing prosperity of the Muslim weavers. But what makes the Ahmedabad riots so distinctive is the middle class nature of the participants, and the fact that economic insecurity is a middle class insecurity.

THE STUDENT COMMUNITY, traditionally the most organised component of the middle class, has formed the vanguard of protest in Gujarat. Gujarat University has been shaken time and again by rumblings within its 100,000 strong student community. Many of its 152 colleges – including the B J Medical College, which initiated the 1981 riots, and the L D Engineering College, where the Navnirman movement was born – are situated in and around the University campus in Ahmedabad.

Most riots have economic origins. What makes the Ahmedabad riots so distinctive is the middle class nature of the participants. These are people who previously had no need to riot.

"When L D Engineering College sneezes, Gandhinagar catches fever," claimed Ahmedabad student leader, Dr Gaurang Shah, at a meeting organ-

ised by the Hindustani Andolan in Bombay. Although his adaptation of the old cliché is a bit of an exaggeration, it is true that the Ahmedabad colleges have been a source of regular political tension.

The highly volatile nature of the Gujarati students can partly be attributed to the history of student participation in Gujarat politics, starting with the Freedom Movement. Many of Gujarat's present day politicians, such as Prabodh Raval, Janata leader Brahm Kumar Bhatt and ex-finance minister Harihar Khambolja, played a prominent role as student leaders during the Maha-Gujarat agitation. In fact, it was his past role as a student leader that enabled Khambolja to escape with minor injuries last month when a mob of striking government employees attacked him. A member of the public diffused the situation by reminding the crowd of his role in the 1956 movement.

Predictably, the values of the former student leaders have been inculcated in their children who now carry on the tradition of agitation. Vinod Dave, ex-student leader and founder of the Gujarat Vali Mandal who finds his son opposed to him on the reservation issue, recounts: "When I question my son, he says, 'You fought for what you thought right, now you cannot stop me from doing the same.' "

Of course, it cannot be denied that many of the students fuelling the agitation have a vested interest in doing so. According to Dave, who is also a former school principal, in a board examination the majority of students are either certain to fail or are border-line cases. Postponement of examinations or mass promotions work in their favour.

CASTE AND CLASS have always been strongly linked in Ahmedabad. The professional class of lawyers, doctors and engineers has generally consisted of upper caste Brahmins, Patels, Mehtas and Baniyas.

In recent years, this class has experienced tremendous social upheaval. It has seen the fortunes of its sons decline because of the reservation system. The decline began with the Bakshi Commission report, implemented in 1978 by the Janata Front government, which identified 82 communities as backward classes and recommended the reservation of ten per cent of seats in educational and government establishments for them. This was in addition to the 20 per cent already reserved by the Constitution for scheduled castes and tribes. The Rane Commission, set up in 1981, recommended a further hike in the quota of reservations for the 82 Bakshi Commission communities which comprise 40 per cent of the population.

The expanding reserved quota coupled with the Supreme Court's order to keep 30 per cent of seats in professional colleges aside for students from other states, vastly narrowed down professional opportunities for the upper castes, and bred resentment.

At the same time, the upper castes also found themselves being progressively sidelined in the political sphere.

Till 1980, Gujarat had been ruled by the upper castes. The Baniya-Brahmin style of politics dominated the Gujarat Congress party till the mid-'60s.

The first threat to the upper caste supremacy came from Indira Gandhi's populist policies. Mrs Gandhi broadened the base of her Congress and came to rely less and less on the upper castes. Instead, she found new allies among the backwards. In 1980, the Congress followed the KHAM formula of giving wide representation to Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims. This was disastrous for the upper castes who found themselves reduced to a minority in the state Assembly. The Congress won with 140 seats, of which 125 were filled by the KHAM castes and their allies.

When Indira Gandhi chose Madhavsinh Solanki, the son of a landless Kshatriya farmer, as Chief Minister, the humiliation of the upper castes was complete. Solanki added insult to injury by reducing the number of upper caste ministers. Today, seven of the nine members of his Cabinet belong to the backward castes. As one of them, Home Minister Amarsinh Choudhary, notes of the upper castes: "Till 1980 they ruled; now it is our turn."

The frustration of the upper castes over the existing political situation has frequently manifested itself in attacks on the lower classes. The initiative in this regard has generally been taken by the Patels, among the most militant of the Gujarati communities. The Kadwa Patels of North and Central Gujarat, distinguished by their meat-eating habits, are the most violent of the lot. Having risen up the social ladder themselves, they strongly resent efforts on the part of Harijans to improve their lot.

And with the new consciousness among Harijans, brought about by the efforts of the Gujarat Dalits and people like Jeenabhai Darji and Shantaben Makwana, conflict has become inevitable.

A team sent by the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, after the 1981 riots, pointed out that while regular Patel-Harijan clashes occurred that year, the lowest classes such as the *bhangis*, who had made no attempt to improve their position, were not harmed.

Middle class/upper caste influence in other areas has also diminished. The Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, a once-powerful body, is now ineffectual. As they comprise only 20 per cent of the population, the upper castes find it difficult to regain their lost clout.

In the circumstances, street agitations have seemed the best means of reasserting upper caste/middle class power.

What, perhaps, makes the middle class take to the streets so confidently is the fact that their efforts in 1974 succeeded in toppling a popularly elected government.

Thus, in 1981, halfway through the agitation, a demand for Solanki's removal was voiced. This year, too, agitators stopped vehicles, wrote

'Solanki Hatao' on them before allowing them to proceed, in spite of the fact that he had just been elected with a massive majority in the last elections.

It is, however, unlikely that the middle class can repeat its Navnirman success. For, as Prabodh Raval emphasises, in 1974 the Congress at the Centre was partly responsible for Chiman Patel's removal. "He had removed Ghanshyam Oza without the Centre's approval and the Centre did not like it," he explains. Further, Gujarat Congressmen, including Raval, are believed to have had a hand in destabilising the Chiman Patel government from within. Without these factors it is unlikely that the agitation would have achieved the same results.

Predictably, the Opposition which has a large number of Patels, has cashed in on the middle class discontent. The Students' Action Committee, which was active during the recent agitations, is dominated by Patels and strongly influenced by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the student wing of the BJP.

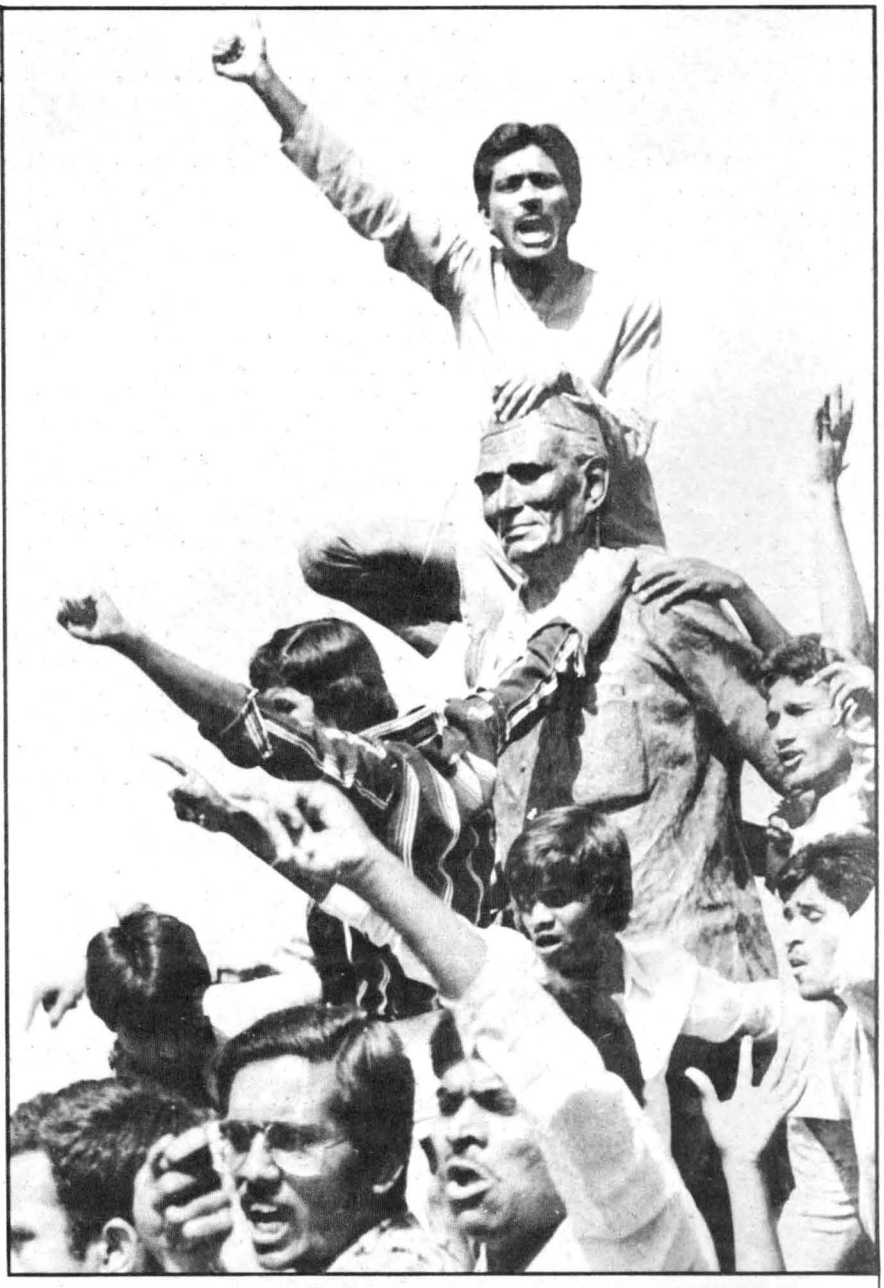
Similarly, the President of the Akhil Gujarat Vali Mahamandal, Shankarbhai Patel and its General Secretary, Balubhai Patel, are reportedly close associates of ex-chief minister Chiman Patel. Chiman Patel, who eventually joined the Janata party after his ignominious exit in 1974, is alleged to have played an active behind-the-scene role in this agitation.

Characteristically, the ruling party holds the Opposition responsible for the 1985 disturbances. The Prime Minister, after his visit to Ahmedabad in March, made the now familiar statement about an Opposition hand in the riots. The state government too maintains that the whole agitation is a last ditch effort by the Opposition to capture power after being totally routed in the last election. "This is what George Fernandes meant when he said, 'If we don't get seats in Parliament we will take to the streets,' " insists Solanki.

To substantiate the allegation, the government points to the clashes between the public and the SRP in Khadia which, it claims, were instigated by the local BJP MLA, Ashok Bhatt.

"Burning and inciting killings are all fascist methods – and the BJP's creed is fascist!" Solanki proclaims. Bhatt, who promptly went into hiding as soon as rumours of his impending arrest under NSA spread, has replies to the allegations.

"It is the habit of the Prime Minister to blame the Opposition," he retorts. "Violence has occurred in places where the Congress has won,



Sloganeering anti-reservationists: strong demand for Solanki's removal.

Mrs Gandhi reduced the political influence of the upper castes and left them with no alternative but to take to the streets. This has led to riots.

too. Why aren't those MLAs also blamed?" he asks.

All things considered, it is not surprising that Ahmedabad should burn so often. With a populist government, an angry middle class and an opportunistic Opposition constantly in conflict, there are enough sparks to set fire to the city which, with its several castes and communities, is a virtual tinder-box.

IN A YEAR OR SO, the details of the Ahmedabad agitation will probably be forgotten. What will remain in public memory is that a popularly elected government failed – a mere two months after it had been returned to power – to prevent a students' agitation over a specific issue from turning into a bloody free-for-all. The significant question that the Ahmedabad agitation raises is not about the nature of the reservation policy, but about the nature of governance in India. As the flames of the Gujarat conflagration begin to die down, it is perhaps appropriate to ask if democratically elected governments in India are equipped to deal with agitations by a violent minority.

In many ways, Madhavsinh Solanki was the strongest Congress (I) Chief Minister when the agitation broke out. He was the first Chief Minister to complete a full term at Gandhinagar and had helped the Congress (I) win an astonishing 53 per cent of the popular vote in the Lok Sabha polls in Gujarat. In the Assembly elections which followed, Solanki did even better: the Congress (I) won 149 out of 182 seats. Thus, he was in no way comparable to Chiman Patel, the unpopular chief minister the Navnirman agitators had toppled in 1974.

Yet, despite all his popularity, Solanki proved incapable of controlling the violence and by May, the national press was calling for his resignation. What had gone so badly wrong?

Solanki's critics make specific allegations about the government's performance. Firstly, there seems little doubt that the announcement of the new reservation policy in January was aimed at winning backward class votes in the Assembly elections. Considering that there had been anti-reservation-inspired violence in 1981, Solanki should, perhaps, have expected an angry response to his new policy. Secondly, once the agitation had begun, he refused to negotiate with the student leaders and went so far as to have three of them arrested. And finally, when it was clear that the police could not maintain law and order, he waited too long before calling for the army.

Remains of public property: the government failed.

All three allegations are not without substance; but two of them sound better with the benefit of hindsight. As Solanki sees it, the mere threat of minority-inspired violence should not be enough to halt the introduction of a popular policy, and it is not incumbent on a Chief Minister to negotiate with agitators should he feel that their demands are unreasonable. And anyhow, if the violence had been aimed solely at reversing the new reservation policy, then the government's announcement, that it was postponing its implementation by a year, should have brought peace to the city. In fact, things got worse from that point.

The question to be asked is not why Solanki's ministry bungled but whether any state government is equipped to handle violence on the streets.

Perhaps most significant, is the allegation that Solanki waited too long before asking for army help. Despite the Chief Minister's protestations to the contrary, it seems clear that his administration was totally ill-equipped to handle the violence. Amarsinh Choudhary, the state's new Home Minister, was forced to rely on the advice of his predecessor, Prabodh Raval, a controversial figure who had been denied a ticket in the Assembly elections; and the police first failed to control the situation and then, actually turned on the people they were supposed to protect. The stories of police excesses, the well-publicised burning of the

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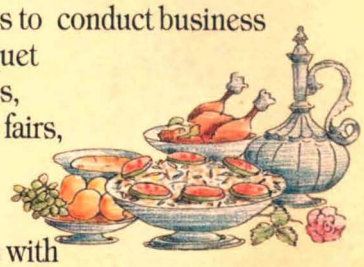

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Gujarat Samachar building by plain-clothes policemen and the enmity between the police force and the populace, are reminiscent of a police state. Certainly, there seems nothing to suggest that the police were perceived as the guardians of law and order acting on behalf of a popularly elected government.

This collapse of administrative machinery (specifically the police) in the face of a riot, has disturbing parallels elsewhere in India. In 1982, the Bombay police force revolted and ran riot, after the state government cracked down on an emerging union. Then, too, it was suggested that the army had been called in too late, and there were calls for Chief Minister Babasaheb Bhosale's resignation. In 1984, communal riots broke out in Bhiwandi and then spread to Bombay. Once again, the army was called in (too late, if the critics were to be believed), and the press (specifically *The Times Of India*) blamed the Chief Minister for first, not expecting the violence and then, failing to control it. In November 1984, as mobs roamed the streets of Delhi slaughtering Sikhs, the administration waited too long before asking the army to restore order and Lieutenant Governor P G Gavai was dismissed.

The failure of the Solanki government to correctly gauge the intensity of the violence and to then move to handle it, fits this pattern. (There were other instances too in 1984: G M Shah in Kashmir and Bhaskar Rao in Hyderabad, but perhaps these administrative failures had more specific reasons.) The pertinent question about the Gujarat agitation is not the local one: "Did Solanki bungle?" but the national one: "Is any state government equipped to handle this kind of violence?"

THE FAILURE of the police force also fits a national pattern as does the welcome deliverance by the army. However, while in the past, the police have simply stood by (as in Delhi or Bhiwandi last year), this time they actively participated in the violence. There are two worrying aspects to the role of the Gujarat police. The first concerns the excesses committed by policemen while on duty; and the second concerns the destruction and looting indulged in by revolting policemen in their personal capacities.

The allegations of police brutality relate mainly to the role of the State Reserve Police (SRP) in the *pole* locality of Khadia. The SRP is a para-military force, called in only when the local police are unable to cope. As a result, its training, method and attitudes have more in common with the commandos than they do with policemen on the beat. On April 17, an SRP company under the command of R K Vasisht, its controversial Commandant, was sent to Khadia to restore law and order. According to Vasisht, his men were attacked by the local residents who flung stones, petrol bombs and Molotov cocktails at them. They reacted by opening fire, killing four people, and breaking into houses to track down their assailants.

Ashok Bhatt, Khadia's popular BJP MLA, does not deny that the people of Khadia may have thrown stones (he disputes allegations that Molotov cocktails were used) but argues, "Throwing stones and getting bullets – what kind of justice is that?" Bhatt moved the High Court and obtained an order restraining Vasisht from entering Khadia; and his supporters allege that SRP men assaulted women and children, destroyed property, exposed themselves and the like.

It is difficult to say who is telling the truth, but certainly Vasisht's perception of Khadia ("These people are not civilised. They enjoy causing bloodshed") suggests a growing gulf between the police and the populace. In such circumstances, when an adversary role has been adopted, there is little hope of para-military forces ever being able to quell civilian violence. When civilians move the courts to restrain the para-military forces, the entire police force becomes demoralised and stops doing its job. In this situation, there seems no way for the state government to maintain order – short of calling in the army.

After Bhatt moved the High Court, a constable accompanying a Court party touring Khadia, was waylaid and murdered in cold blood. This was enough to set the demoralised police force off on a rampage against those they perceived as their enemies – primarily the *Gujarat Samachar*. Solanki was clearly unprepared for this. A fortnight later, he was still defending his policemen: "Even the police are human beings. They couldn't take it when their wives and children questioned them about the excesses." It wasn't much of a defence, but it did show the impotence of the state government. The Chief Minister is now in a situation in which he has to depend on that same police force that revolted. Were he to disown the police or dismiss many of them, he would be left with no law and order machinery. So, he has to walk a tight-rope between admitting that the police did misbehave and avoiding criticising them too strongly, for fear of further demoralising the force. It is an impossible situation – but it is one that state governments find themselves in time and time again.

The only solutions – at the national level – to this growing criminalisation and demoralisation of the police force are long-term ones. Police salaries need to be raised, political interference must be minimised and the other measures suggested by the Police Commission must be implemented. Only then, can one trust the police force to effectively maintain the peace. And yet, even after Bombay, Delhi and Ahmedabad, there is no move to do any such thing.

THERE ARE other serious consequences and implications of the Ahmedabad violence. In November 1984, **Imprint** wrote: "Most worrying is the tendency to

(Continued on page 41)

BRIEF

Women To The Fore

BHAWNA SOMAYA on the agitational role of Ahmedabad's women.

"WOMEN ARE the root cause of all the unrest and panic in Ahmedabad," says G C Shah, ex-editor of *Jansatta*, Ahmedabad. According to him, a major part of the agitation has been intentionally or unintentionally provoked and fought by strong-willed, fearless women. Even the anti-reservation issue, he adds, is fiercely supported by the students' mothers, rather than their fathers.

During the recent riots in Pakhalani *pole* the women sent their husbands and children out of the city, and stayed back alone to face the police. Today, only about ten per cent of the male population remains in the terror-struck locality. Aren't the women frightened, too? They are, they say, but they are also practical. Since the husband is the provider, it is better that he survive with the child instead of the wife.

To an extent, the moving spirit behind this peculiar tradition was Mrs Bhatt, the mother of the present Opposition leader and MLA, Ashok Bhatt. Popularly known as *Ba*, she believed that help of any kind was at the end of her arm – her fist. So, every time injustice had to be fought, *Ba* would take a *danda* in her hand and march to the trouble spot. There, she would scream, yell and provoke a riot until justice was given. Gradually, fighting for justice and asserting their rights became a habit with the women of the walled city of Ahmedabad.

Slowly and unobtrusively, women became an organised force in the city. A towering figure amongst them at the time was Gangaben Vaidya. Today, at 107, Gangaben still feels passionately about human welfare, only her contribution these days is less physical. When she heard about the recent riots in Khadia, Raipur and Naranpura, she was deeply distressed. "What is happening is wrong and someone has to put a stop to all this immediately," she protested.

On April 17, this year, a group of social workers, led by Veenaben Modh of the Mahila Parishad, went on a tour of the *poles* of Raipur and Khadia to distribute milk packets to women and children. But the policemen on duty did not allow the women to enter even though they carried curfew passes. A complaint was lodged with the Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki, who promised immediate action. The next morning, newspapers were full of atrocities on the women in Gomtipur and Naranpura. Since the violence seemed to follow a pattern, groups of social workers, accompanied by four police escorts, went to visit the affected areas. The minute the *pole* people saw the police entering their gates, they fled into their houses, locked the doors and refused to come out. "Take them away from here," the women shouted from inside. "Our doors will open only when the police have left this place." Their terror of the police seemed to be complete.

The interesting aspect of the Ahmedabad agitation is the role played by the women. They are not scared of the police and ask their menfolk to hide behind them.

Women's organisations like the Jyoti Sangh, Vikas Griha, Akhilya Hindu Samaj and AWAG got together and decided to stage a *dharna*, outside the Town Hall. "Our motive," points out Uday Prabhaben, "was only to show opposition. We were not fighting on the anti-reservation issue. We were fighting women's exploitation."

On April 22, the day of the *dharna*, women from 27 organisations congregated. The arrangements had already been made: a canopy had been set up and mats strewn. The women spent the morning singing *bhajans*. But a little after one, five policemen arrived in a van and without warning, started hitting the women with their lathis. The women fled in panic.

This year, on April 25, as alarm spread over the city, the women social workers got together. By now they had lost their patience. They decided that this time they would not stop at *dharnas* and meetings with the Chief Minister. Instead, they decided to take legal action and presented a memorandum to the government, despite the threatening phone calls received by some of them.

Years ago, when Gandhi would not allow his women disciples to take part in the salt-satyagraha, because he did not want them to face lathi charges, Mridulaben Sarabhai had argued, "After walking more than half the way, we cannot go back. . ." Today, the attitude of these women social workers seems more or less similar. Says Sarojben Zaveri, "The police carried *dandas*, not lathis. But we were not scared, we did not flee. . .we came back to hunt for our chappals, to help the older women. It is a pity that our government should rely on *goondas*. But the Chief Minister's behaviour has been unbelievable." Kumudben Shukla, trustee of the Vikas Griha, is grieved that after all that has happened, the Chief Minister has not had a word of sympathy for the women. Says Ila Pathak, "The Chief Minister has been heartless and insensitive towards the exploitation of women." ♦

Navnirman leader Umakant Mankad: beaten for joining the Congress (I).

(Continued from page 39)

use the army as a sort of super-police force. From 1981, the army has been deployed 369 times," and noted that 'the long-term consequences of using the army can be unpalatable'. Our concern seems even more relevant today. And yet, until something is done about the police force there is no other alternative.

Two other implications of the Ahmedabad violence bear thinking about. As Minoo Masani notes, Gandhi was against reservations. The Constituent Assembly agreed to introduce reservations for scheduled castes and tribes only for ten years, and it was intended to phase out all reservations eventually. Instead, the concept of reservation has now become a crucial part of Indian political thought. While the original ethical justification for the practice was 'positive discrimination', as a means of promoting a disadvantaged minority, reservation has now become a means of ensuring that the caste-composition of educational institutions conforms to the caste-composition of society: something it was never meant to be. There is no telling where such a practice will end.

There are many states in the cow-belt with a greater proportion of reserved seats than Gujarat. Similar agitations could well break out there. During the last election, the Prime Minister spoke of reassessing the reservations policy. He appears to have since changed his mind; but nobody is betting that anti-reservation feeling will remain confined to Gujarat.

The other potentially worrying aspect of the Ahmedabad agitation is the role of the middle class. That the agitation should be spearheaded by students is not unusual – student revolts are a world-wide phenomenon. What is most significant is that in Ahmedabad, parents joined their children – something of a historical first. The Indian middle class has seen its standard of living drop and its political power crumble. Despite this, it has somehow made do with whatever it has got. Should the middle class in other cities respond to the diminution in its economic and political status by following the Gujarat example, then the consequences for India are potentially terrifying. ♦

The only solutions to this growing criminalisation of the police force are long-term ones. And yet, there is no move to do anything.

READY TO TAKE-OFF?

An Imprint Panel Discussion

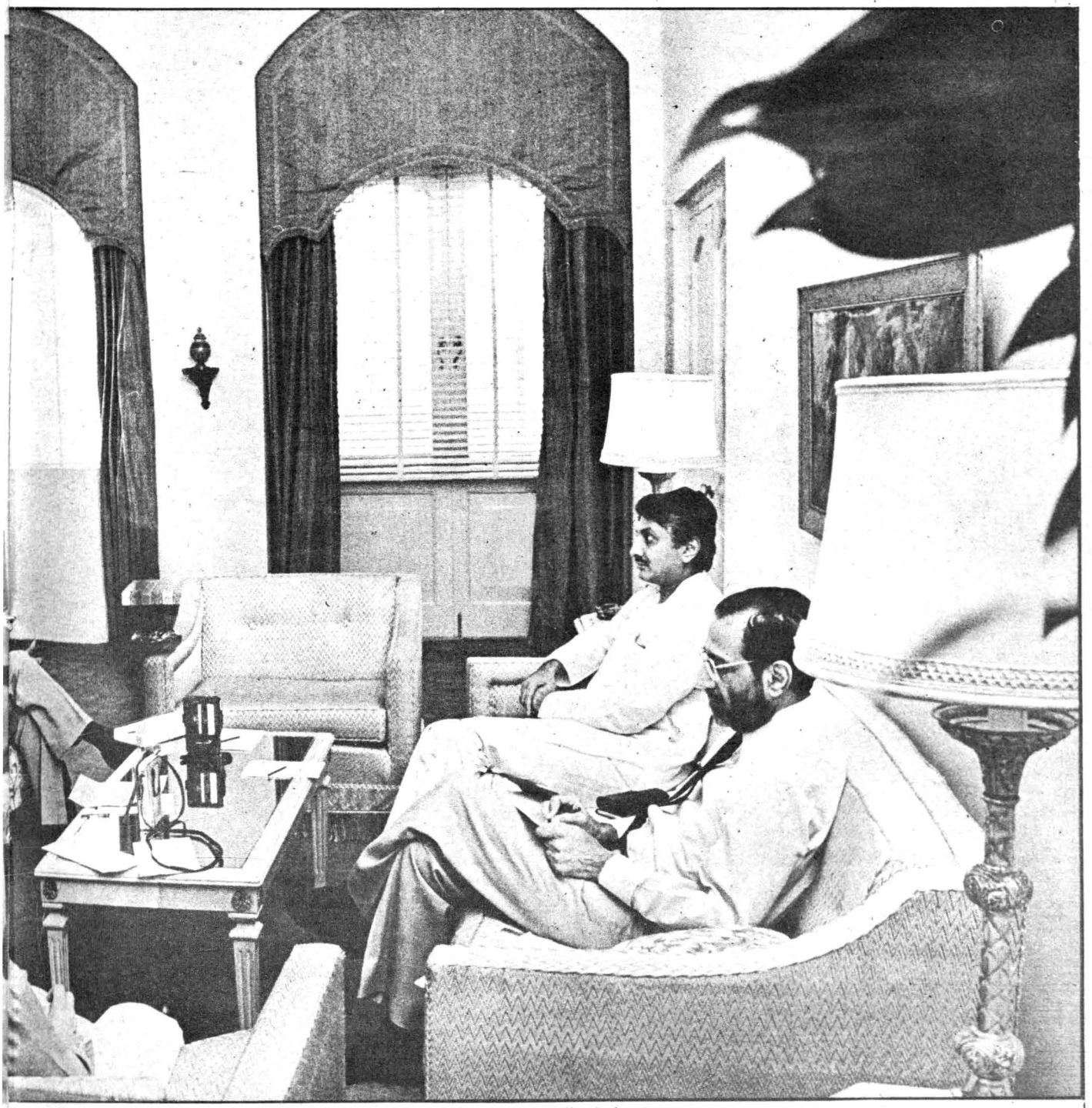
Is the Indian economy set for greater growth? What should be done? Imprint invited Dr. Subramaniam Swamy to moderate a discussion on the subject. The participants included Dr. R K Hazari, the economist, Viren Shah, the Chairman of Mukand Iron and Steel, Dr B P Godrej, the Managing Director of Godrej Soaps and Ajit Gulabchand, Managing Director of Hindustan Construction.

Subramaniam Swamy: Has there been a change in economic policy? A departure from the past?

Viren Shah: There is a clear indication of change – a complete U-turn from Mrs Gandhi's policies. If you look at the statements made by the then PM and the Congress MPs and others from 1971 till say, 1975 middle, and those made since Rajiv became PM – there is a total contrast. In 1971-75 the emphasis was anti-multinational, anti-capitalist and on nationalisation – there were severe restrictions on any growth in the private sector. Take, for instance, the cement industry. In that period, there was a shortage of cement and yet repeated requests for expansion or modernisation by cement companies like ACC were denied. Two, take the scooter industry. Bajaj Auto's request to manufacture more than 30,000 scooters per annum was declined. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, then industry minister, said that the government would set up a scooter plant and encourage joint sector enterprises. Nothing has been done despite wait-listing of 10-12 years. Tata Power Company applied for a 500 MW power station to be put up in the Bombay area when there was an acute power shortage – it was a great brake on growth that the government sat on it for six years. Also, there was much talk about socialism and the CIA. Today, you hear exactly the opposite – not mere sounds, but categorical policy statements being made by the PM and others.

R K Hazari: It depends on what one means by policy. Noises were made against multinationals and the CIA, it's true, but it was an anti-capitalist stand, in the sense that it is in those years that the base of capitalism was broadened as it never has been before. All the programmes for small industries, small business, for increasing the inputs for farmers, including small farmers, were interpreted as policies for broad-basing further development of capitalism. Furthermore, even the public sector can be considered a device more for state capitalism than for socialism. That's a more ideological dispute. If one is thinking of the very basic policies – about growth, about regional balances, about attention to difficult sectors of the economy – I don't think there's any change in that basic emphasis, at least on those basic policies. But I would quite agree, the attitudes appear to be different, specially when it concerns the multinationals or the larger units. The greater emphasis is now on the performance of the public sector rather than mere investment in it, on

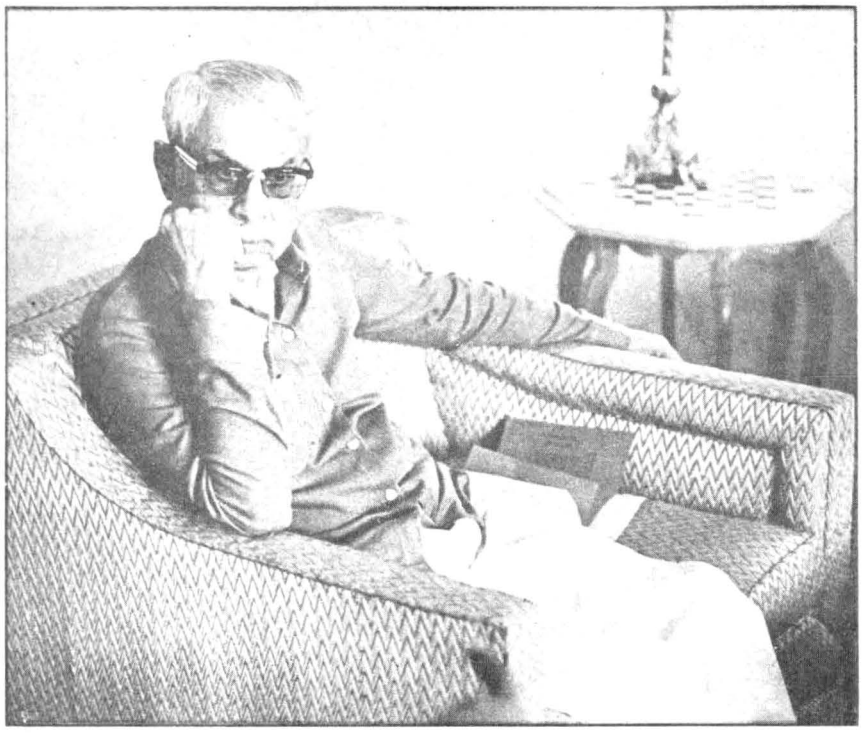
This discussion was held on April 24, 1985. The short forms used are – BPG: B P Godrej; AG: Ajit Gulabchand; RKH: R K Hazari; VS: Viren Shah; SS: Subramaniam Swamy.



the getting back from nationalisation instead of threatening nationalisation when the performance is good, as it was in the case of Indian Copper or bad, as it was in the case of many of the cotton mills. In keeping with the old Hindu standard of values and the way they are expressed, Mrs Gandhi was almost consistently an exponent of the non-non-non view — everything being expressed negatively rather than in a more positive form. I hope – one has yet to see – that the attitudes now and the behaviour patterns would be expressed in more positive terms. Certainly when there's a question of licencing or the MRTP exemption limit, I wouldn't say it's so much a change of policy, though there is some dose of realism evident. Those who've been talking about a plan holiday and so forth, I think are quite misplaced.

SS: Dr Godrej, would you agree that there has been no real, substantial change in attitudes?

B P Godrej: There has been a great change for the better. But if corruption continues and corrupt people get industrial licences, the quality of growth will be very poor. It would be like three steps forward and one step backwards. If some of the industries are established only on the basis of money power where there is no merit, then there will be problems. That kind of negative growth should



"Some of our industrialists are more to blame for corruption than anybody else. And it looks as though corruption will continue even if the scope for production goes up."
— DR B P GODREJ

be prevented.

SS: Has the scope for production gone up or gone down, or is it the same?

BPG: It appears that it may go down, but it has not stopped corruption. It looks as if corruption will still continue.

RKH: I suppose quantitatively, corruption is bound to grow as do incomes, but one hopes that the proportion will go down.

BPG: Some of our industrialists are perhaps more to blame than anybody else. You know who I mean.

Ajit Gulabchand: The national or economic policy doesn't seem to have undergone any change. In fact, it has remained almost the same since 1956, when the first industrial policy was chalked out in conjunction with the basic format of the economic policy. What has happened ever since is that the emphasis of various governments has changed substantially. It seems that many have used this emphasis as a means of changing the policy rather than deriving a new policy. For instance, Mrs Gandhi undertook nationalisation of a variety of industries, bringing about change, even though this aspect is not spelt out very clearly in the industrial policy. We do, today, seem to have a more pragmatic approach to our problems. This is just the beginning of a new period – it's very difficult to say how long it will last. It remains to be seen whether the government takes a tough stand on what it has started. Whether Mrs Gandhi did good or bad, she had to go back several times on what she started. Whether this government will do that is very difficult to say. But a more pragmatic approach should yield results. Besides, our situation is not very different from the rest of the world's. In France, you have Mitterand talking a very different language in spite of being a socialist. In China, they are talking like hard-core managers – about job cuts, improved efficiency – anything but socialism. Even the US, which is the most liberal state in the world, has shown a more conservative and pragmatic approach than it did before. Whether this is good or bad is immaterial but it seems to be everywhere. I think the change was already in the offing. The new PM, being young, has given this phenomenon some impetus. I thoroughly disagree, however, with Dr Godrej about where corruption begins – the Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh of corruption is the politician. We are seeing a bit of Shiva in this aspect.

BPG: They might have copied the politicians, who knows.

SS: Is there going to be a spurt in growth? What is the growth rate we should aim at? It appears that the growth rate has been 3.5-4 per cent. This is not to be decried. The question is whether we can solve our problems and aim at a higher growth rate and expect it. Also, do we sacrifice income distribution for growth – the much talked about social justice? Should we speak about growth following the South Korea pattern and go in for a high growth rate? Can this be achieved?

BPG: You cannot plan income distribution. You have to plan growth and then expect income distribution as a matter of policy and as a by-product. No country has ever done that and it would be an experiment if we do it. Many experiments in India have failed one after another – it would take a genius to experiment with such things.

RKH: I would agree with Dr Godrej. I think one can, realistically speaking, apart from making announcements, plan for growth much more than for income

distribution. Partly because, if one is thinking of policies and planning, it is relatively easier to say that one will invest more, or remove the bottlenecks involved. Income distribution is a far more difficult thing to arrange. One can create an apparatus for it. One can make either the present distribution pattern or the proposed distribution pattern more legitimate or acceptable.

VS: Dr Hazari, in the last 25 years, hasn't there been an attempt, or at least a declared intention, to achieve income distribution by at least reducing the income of the upper income brackets?

RKH: I should think so, and the attempt was very seriously pursued. I would say that in the light of the experience here as well as in many other countries, if at all, it has been a very limited success. As I said earlier, I think it is possible to attempt a wider distribution in terms of numbers, in terms of regions, in terms of systems; but I think it's extremely difficult to do it in terms of classes and castes. Particularly in India, where both society and the economy are very flexible. In the advanced economies, wages and profits between them account for the bulk of the income. In India, it is not so. The earnings of the self-employed are a very substantial element of the total – you can't call them either wages or profits.

SS: Since 1980, the rupee to the dollar rate has gone quietly from Rs 8 to about Rs 13 and it's come pretty close to the black rate: Rs 15-16. Secondly, in places like Singapore or even Bombay, you can buy and sell the rupee openly. It would be a great source of encouragement for foreign depositors if the rupee was convertible – floating might be too big a shock.

RKH: Looking at it more professionally, I would say that the first step has to be that the Reserve Bank should accept the balances of foreign Central banks. Secondly, some of the more stupid things in exchange controls will have to go.

"It's very interesting to hear people who are out of government express such views. At the EMF meeting, people like L K Jha and K B Lall seemed very pragmatic and forward-looking."
— VIREN SHAH

After that there is the question of how we will ensure convertibility – is it only on small amounts? Is it only on current accounts? Should it also extend to capital accounts? One should, I think, promote a lot more of the conversion of smaller amounts. For instance, why should one get only $ 20 at the airport while leaving the country? Let us say that if this was $ 100-200, a lot of the retail unofficial market would be removed. Then come the other things – I would say that the more reasonable rates of income tax, wealth tax and the abolition of estate duty would take away some of the incentive to send money or assets abroad. One has to do a fair lot of house-cleaning before one can think of convertibility. And there is no such thing as free conversion, anywhere. It is not as if anybody is saying that there will be absolutely no exchange control at all.

SS: How does the private sector feel about the convertibility of the rupee? Would you say that a rupee which is easily convertible is favoured?

BPG: I'm in favour – I think all the other policies will improve as a result. It's like aiming high.

VS: I'm very ignorant about this rupee-foreign exchange thing. Our basic economy is not external-oriented, or based on exports like Japan's or Korea's. In that context, is making the rupee freely convertible a relevant factor in the Indian economic scene?

RKH: I would say that when you point out that exports are relatively small, it indicates that the risks are also relatively small, as compared with an economy that is highly dependant on export. The gains are

many. It would let out a lot of black transactions and a lot of blackmail and privatisation of law and order. We have talked about the public sector getting the commanding rights while the basic functions of the state, I'm afraid, have been privatised, whether it is law and order or the judiciary. This is thanks to the kind of economy we've been fostering.

AG: Wouldn't there be a tremendous flight of capital to begin with if the rupee is made convertible?

RKH: No more than what you have now.

AG: You don't notice it today, though it is there. When Britain allowed pound convertibility, they lost almost £ 10 billion in the first stages.

RKH: I don't think you have to lift it on capital.

AG: If you don't lift it on capital, I fail to understand how – if instead of $ 20 I got $ 200 – it is going to reduce our problems.

SS: Dr Hazari is talking about a phased way of doing it. The English might have tried it overnight.

RKH: They could do it also because London is an international market. I don't think we've been on the international market for quite some time.

AG: I think it's time for the government to call different sectors to some sort of a round-table conference, to develop a meaningful fiscal policy. You have various interest groups in the country today – the farming community, the industrial community in the public and private sectors, you have the labour. These are pulling at each other. I think somewhere, each one, in order to take the economy from place A to place B, will have to make some sacrifices and some commitments. For example, the farming sector may have to allow some taxation on itself if it is to

"Most countries are being more pragmatic about their economic problems. It is not just India."
– AJIT GULABCHAND

contribute. Ultimately, whether you raise NRI funds or World Bank funds, they have to be paid back. Brazil and others got into trouble because they were not able to pay back.

SS: Resources from the farm sector are not necessarily raised through taxes – there may be other instruments.

AG: The government will also have to come forward and say that they will cut down on bureaucratic expenses. Labour will have to say that this direct linkage to the cost of living index will have to have some ceiling. Each one of us will have to make some sacrifice. Industry (the private sector) will have to accept some foreign competition. You cannot remove the shelter in this country overnight. The private sector would collapse. But we have become fat, lethargic.

BPG: The focus should be on growth, not on sacrifice.

AG: Sacrifice will lead to growth.

BPG: When this foreign exchange shortage started, we were told it was temporary.

AG: The objective is growth, for which we need *x* resources. Whether we do it by cutting costs or whether we do it by raising the resources, it amounts to the same thing. What will each sector contribute? For instance, I have a company that's gone fat and you're going to remove my shelter. I take a look at its various aspects. I will want its selling to go up, its costs to come down. I will want different parts of the company to contribute to that particular growth or remove the malady. Something similar could be attempted, and as we move towards the slightly non-sheltered economy, perhaps the convertibility would add that extra touch. But convertibility in a truly free sense of the word is one thing; the Japanese have used it with ingenuity. While you have the pound and the fluctuating interest rates in the US and elsewhere going from 22 per cent to 13 per cent, their parity with these currencies has somehow remained the same. I think that has given them a great advantage. I'm sure the government can help industry to keep equity in a different way.

RKH: I think the point is well taken. . . After all, in a democracy, participation and consultation are fundamental. But there has to be something more than that.

AG: I make this statement on the basis of what should be done, and I also feel that the present government is showing some signs of pragmatism, and therefore I feel that perhaps such a suggestion is workable more than ever before.

BPG: If you compare Indian prices with international prices, you'll get a shock. Prices are at least double – fuel oil, high speed diesel, steel. In 1940, Tata Steel prices were the lowest in the world. This reflects policies more than anything else.

SS: But is the high cost due to the

protected nature of our economy?

AG: Yes, it is. All the inputs – coal, electricity, even labour – are protected. Both capital and labour are protected in this country.

SS: If we were to move towards a new market policy as the government seems to indicate, how would we go about it in a phased way? Would the Industrial Relations Act have to be enacted? Would that come first, or the licencing systems?

RKH: I think the first thing that has to be dismissed is values and attitudes. Over the years, we have been saying that the *babus* are more protected than the *baniyas*. There has to be some change, in that, while the *babus* are not going to be abolished, the *baniya* will also have to contribute. Second, we have never, after all, emphasised competition, nor have we talked about productivity. We have talked about subsistence; we have talked about employment; we have, at the most, talked about production.

VS: Mrs Gandhi declared a year of productivity.

RKH: But that was about all. Productivity has never been stressed as a value. After all, the *Gita* can be interpreted in many ways; but the *Gita* says that your motivation is more important than your performance. I'm sure we could find another quotation to counter that, but this has been the basic value. Change has to come about. Maybe this loud thinking that has been taking place in the government is useful. I agree that there are too many shackles. First, one has to get away from the shackles, then, certainly, one can have more manoeuvrability.

VS: It's very interesting to hear people who have been with the government, but are not now, expressing views which appear to be very pragmatic, very forward-going. People like L K Jha, K B Lall,

"The base of capitalism was broadened in the years after Independence as never before."
— DR R K HAZARI

Dr Hazari. I attended the European Management Forum in New Delhi where L K Jha spoke openly as a private individual. But when Manmohan Singh and P K Kaul talked, they displayed a more conservative attitude. I have a feeling that if these individuals were to retire tomorrow, they would have views nearer to Jha's than what they're expressing today. How can we make it possible to have these views accepted and then implemented?

RKH: There is, behind the bravado of those in authority, a feeling of great nervousness. For instance, despite what might be said by anybody in public, there is the fear that they might be out of the flock. Since more than 20-25 years now, if you say anything against the public sector, you are straightaway labelled a reactionary. The fact is that today it is very difficult to get up in public and defend the public sector's performance. We have not been able to produce a philosophy or any systematic thought which would justify a mingling of planning and market controls. More specifically, there is a fear that the controls will be abused. Therefore, in the name of plugging every possible loophole, you don't open the door.

AG: Is this a mechanism to bring the population under control by creating rules that ensure that we can never be honest and therefore will always be under their control?

SS: What are the steps the government should take to improve the market?

VS: One problem that needs tackling immediately is policy implementation. Implementation doesn't belong to the levels of policy-makers. It is the section officer who decides, and even the minister will not be able to change what he does. Today, the section officer, the deputy secretary, the under-secretary, because of 30 years of conditioning, operate in a different atmosphere. You have to bring them round to your way of thinking – the PM's way of thinking. Administrative streamlining is the most important thing. There will be resistance to begin with. When Gorbachov, who was in charge of agriculture three years back, introduced a new idea, the lower level bureaucracy sabotaged it. If it could be done in the Soviet Union, it could be done much more effectively here. Second, the government talks about single-window clearance, which means that inter-ministerial references should be reduced to the absolute minimum. There are millions of reports available to the government about what to do. There should be no more committee reports – only implementation. They could use people like L K Jha to oversee the implementation. Talking about protection, today all public sector enterprises have to make purchases at a 15 per cent price preference from another public sector enterprise. Ultimately, you and I and the poorest man bear that burden.

BPG: Much will depend on the PM's

aides. He alone cannot do anything. There is dishonesty everywhere. I would not put the blame on the Indian people – people around the world are more or less the same. If your policies are bad then you create dishonesty.

SS: What change would you like, Dr Godrej?

BPG: Rajiv has introduced great changes. But still, much more has to be done. If you suspect somebody, let them investigate and get him expelled. That will make a world of difference.

AG: As far as the basic framework of the Indian Constitution and its philosophy of having an industrial economy goes, I think it's doing very well. It needs a new orientation, for which the government must pick out different interest groups, put forth to them the tasks they have on hand and demand suggestions from them as to what they are ready to contribute in order to make this workable. Until we improve our quality and productivity, exports are not going to go up. Because nothing that India produces is cheap. This contribution from various sectors of the economy will go a long way in ultimately setting growth targets which each one will have to contribute towards. The government's policy would be based on that. For example, today we have come up with an automobile policy that is going to lead to a different concept of marketing, to make vehicles better and more available. But have other policies changed? Anybody who wants a collaboration has to go through the same old gambit – rushing to Delhi for every little thing. I agree, though, that some amount of control in a planned economy is needed. *Ad hoc* policies as well as the procedures involved must be streamlined. A while ago, cement was free, and anybody in MRTP could go and buy cement. But there was a small precondition to the letter of intent. You had to get an

"It would be a great encouragement for foreign depositors if the rupee was convertible."
– SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY

attachment to a colliery before your letter of intent was converted into a licence. This is fine in a free economy, but in an economy like ours, it is again the government that has to grant this.

RKH: And what meaning does it have even if you get that *purchee* to say you have the linkage?

AG: And now you have an announcement that from January 1, 1985, those who have not got colliery tie-ups will not be granted licences. The government, desirous of economic growth and more freedom to operate, is the first one to have made this sort of announcement. This is really what a resource crunch means. If you say free economy, make it really free. Once a colliery has made a commitment to someone, and if he doesn't come up with his plan even in five years, I can't put up more, because his commitment on paper is officially valid. Procedures must be revamped and simplified.

The removal of procedures, even at places like toll gates and Customs counters will go a long way in removing corruption. And if corruption is to be removed, it is the ruler who has to be held responsible.

SS: Do you think that with some feasible changes we could double the growth rate?

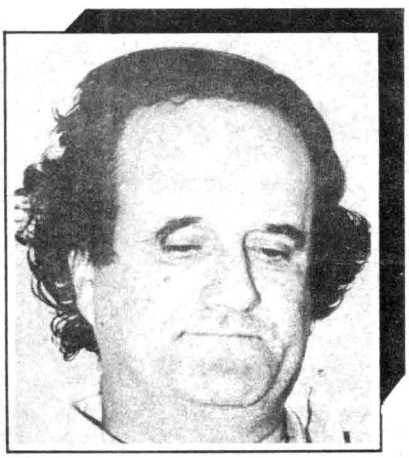
BPG: Better factories and better farms is the *sine qua non* of doubling the growth rate.

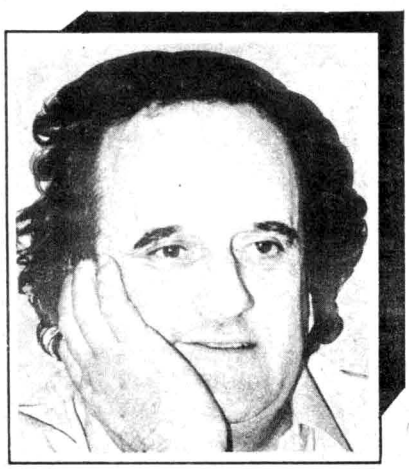
RKH: If you are quantifying it, doubling would mean some nine per cent per year – I don't think that would be feasible. Let's say five to seven per cent is not impossible. For that, productivity in the Ganga valley must be much higher and I am not pessimistic on that score. I think the signals from agricultural productivity in UP are very good. Secondly, costs are totally out of hand. One of the minor blessings of the situation is that people in business have also realised that inflation is not good for them. There has to be some curative for this. I think there has been a lot more confidence in the *babus* since the '30s because of an earlier period when the *baniyas* were an unmitigated curse. I think, even among the people at large, there isn't the same confidence in the *babu* as there was then.

VS: At the macro level, though we have continued Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence and the Anglo-Saxon system of government, we have degenerated it to such an extent that the legal protection given now to a government or public sector servant is such that it would take 30 years to convict a man. We must remove this kind of undue protection which has to be reduced to the proper level whether the man is a *patwari* in a village or a police officer. Protection has been provided without any corresponding responsibility. This has to be thought about if these changes have to really become effective. If a man knows that he is going to be held responsible for something and punished, things would change. ♦

MARK TULLY

The Voice Of The BBC





TWO MONTHS AGO, when **Imprint** asked a jury of distinguished observers to select the most powerful people in India, we were surprised that Mark Tully came 27th on our list. We were even more surprised that the BBC's Delhi Bureau Chief had come out ahead of such media heavyweights as Girilal Jain and Rusi Karanjia.

The respect Tully commands and the influence he wields are, in part, a tribute to the credibility of the BBC. But they also have to do with the excellent quality of Tully's own reporting. Born in Calcutta, he left India when he was ten and didn't return till 1965 when he was made Assistant Representative in the BBC's Delhi office. It was not a broadcaster's job, but Tully soon displayed an instinctive feel for the complexities of India, taught himself Hindustani and switched to broadcasting.

Since then, he has covered India non-stop. From 1969 to 1972, he was Chief Talks Writer on South Asia for the World Service in London, and in 1972 he came back to Delhi as Chief of Bureau. In his 20 years of broadcasting, his has become a familiar voice in many Indian homes, and his reputation for fairness – despite the government's frequent complaints – has ensured that he has the most credibility of anyone broadcasting about India today.

Imprint: ***Did you find it difficult adjusting to India in 1965? What struck you most about the country?***
Mark Tully: Well, it seemed a very old-fashioned country in a lot of ways. Things were still being done in a very old-fashioned way. We used to have a *babu* in the office who still did his accounts by hand. And the telephones in the office wouldn't always work. There was no STD in those days. I remember looking up a train time-table thinking, "Gosh, I'd like to go to Simla for the weekend," and finding that it would take me almost the whole weekend to get there and come back again!

The closed type of economics of the country was also very fascinating. The bureaucracy was as frustrating then as it is now.

I wanted to learn an Indian language – it seemed a sensible sort of thing to do – but one of the problems with learning an Indian language, that most Indians don't realise, is that you don't speak it yourselves. I mean, here am I speaking English to you. So you are not surrounded by Hindi-speakers. And among a certain kind of Indian it is almost an offence to speak to them in Hindi. We had a clerk in our office and I asked if I could speak to him in Hindi – it would, I said, help my Hindi. He said, "Yes sir," and then he went away. He came back an hour later and he was back to talking to me – in English! This went on till finally I asked my

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHAL S GIROTA

"When the Director-General told her that he was born in India, Mrs Gandhi looked at me and said: 'Is that a requirement for working with the BBC?' "

driver why he thought this should be so. And the driver, who spoke excellent English said, "*Saab,* it is all right for you to speak to me or to the peons in Hindi, but a clerk thinks it is very bad that you should want to speak to him in Hindi."

Did you have any of the usual reactions that foreigners have to India given that you covered a famine in your first year?
You mean poverty and that sort of thing? Well, my view is that every society is basically callous; every society is basically unequal. It is a matter of resources.

And you know, I've always believed that you never see among the rich in India the kind of conspicuous consumption that you see in a lot of developing countries. You see some very poor people but I don't think that India is anything like a banana republic. You do see some very rich people but I don't think that there's an unnatural gap. I don't think the wealthy of India are any more callous than the wealthy in any developed country.

The poverty of India didn't really shock me because that was one of the most vivid memories of my childhood – beggars, people sleeping on railway stations, that sort of thing. Calcutta's Howrah Station used to be much worse than it is today and I remember as a child seeing starving people on the streets of Calcutta during the Bengal famine.

I wouldn't like to say that poverty doesn't shock one; but I was always aware from the start that every society is an unequal one and the problem is one of resources. Having read a bit of History at Cambridge, I was always aware of the fact that the reason why India's resources were not very great was not simply India's fault. It was also the fault of the people who'd been governing it and colonising it.

Do you have many pleasant memories of that first stint in India?
Well, I enjoyed working on films with such remarkable people as Malcolm Muggeridge. I remember working on a film on the centenary of Gandhi with great affection.

And, presumably, you had nothing to do with the Louis Malle films?
Let's get one thing straight. The Louis Malle films were not made for the BBC. The films were not shown first by the BBC. They were shown first by French television. And after it was shown on French television with no comment, as far as I know, from the Indian government, we showed them and got booted out.

Of the films that have been made specially for the BBC, are there any that you are particularly proud of?
Yes. I'm very proud of two films that I was involved with. One of them was on Morarji Desai and I wrote and presented it. I'm rather proud of it because we managed to show Morarji Desai – for whom I have a deep respect and affection after five hours of interviews – as a man of great good humour. Why I liked this film was because Morarji has, as you know, certain peculiar personal habits. Now, obviously we couldn't talk about it, you know, this business of drinking his own urine. And there was a danger that in talking about it, we would diminish and trivialise the man. In fact, the film got excellent reviews, not in the sense that they said what a good film we had made but that they said, "What an amazing and incredible man Morarji is."

Did you get on as well with Mrs Gandhi as you did with Morarji?
I remember interviewing Mrs Gandhi during the Bangladesh crisis. I'm not sure if I'd interviewed her before that. And the last time I saw her was in January last year when the Director-General came out. And it was quite funny because the Director-General said he was born in India and Mrs Gandhi looked at me and said, "Is that a requirement for working with the BBC?"

The last time I did a long interview with her was just before the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' conference.

Have you found that Indian politicians are accessible?
Yes. I sometimes ask myself why they are so accessible. One of the things that politicians here have to face is that if politician A is accessible to the press, then politician B must be because politician A is probably slagging politician B off.

Perhaps some politicians are over-accessible to the press – I don't know! I sometimes wonder if the ease of access that some people in the Indian press have to politicians is an entirely useful way for politicians to spend their time.

Of course, I think it is a good thing that they should meet ordinary people every morning. I remember D K Borooah telling me after the Emergency that one of the things that went wrong was that Mrs Gandhi lost touch because she nearly destroyed the party machine and so she wasn't getting that feed of information that came through these channels and was therefore dependant on police and the government Intelligence.

Coming back to 1969, did you sense during the Congress split that Mrs Gandhi was going to emerge as such an important figure?
No, I'd be telling a lie if I said I was certain that she was going to come out the victor during the split. I certainly believed that it would be much harder to destroy the influence of the Congress bosses. I think she was enormously helped by events in Bangladesh. But even so, I was surprised by the performance of the syndicate in the 1971 elections.

Was the government as sensitive about what the BBC said in 1969 as it is today?
Yes. They were sensitive about our coverage of the 1965 war. There was a feeling that the BBC had sided with Pakistan. We take solace in the fact that we get equally abused by Pakistan in these circumstances.

Why, do you think, does the Indian government care so much about what the BBC says? Much more than it does about the Voice of America or French radio or whatever?
There is one obvious reason. You – well, **Imprint** – have done this survey that shows that I'm an influential man in India. Well, obviously, it's not me personally, but the BBC. I'm not a man who appears in public very often. I'm not like some of the other people on your list – Girilal Jain and R K Karanjia for example – who have opinions of their own and put them in their newspapers. I am just the voice of the BBC – nothing more – and as your magazine rightly says, it is a tribute to the credibility of the BBC that some people have found me an influential person.

The BBC does have a great deal of credibility. Perhaps I could be snide and say that VOA did not appear on your list. Nor did Radio Moscow. Obviously this gives the government good reason to be sensitive. If a whole lot of people are believing what the BBC says. . .

"I am not like R K Karanjia or Girilal Jain. I don't broadcast my own opinions. I am just the voice of the BBC – nothing more. It's not me that's influential, it's the BBC."

Yes, but they don't just object to what the World Service says. They object to what BBC TV says, even though nobody in India sees those programmes.
Yes. Well, I personally think that in the case of Jagjit Singh Chohan, whilst I wouldn't like to enter into the rights and wrongs of what the BBC allowed Chohan to say, I feel that the *hangama* that was created with the televising of demonstrations outside this office and outside the High Commission was totally counter-productive. The Government of India itself made Chohan into a very important person. If they had protested quietly or they had said, "Okay, Mr Tully, leave the country quietly," (though I had nothing to do with the broadcast), then it would have been forgotten. But to go on telling your own people about this for three weeks seems to me the height of idiocy.

They made the same mistake with Louis Malle. After the Government of India objected, every classic cinema in England got hold of the films and screened them. A lot of people must have been very disappointed. They probably expected blue movies.

We, in the BBC, suffer from having such a high profile sometimes. We get into controversies, and there are misunderstandings. We do make mistakes – any journalist who says he never makes a mistake is a liar. But many of the controversies we get involved in are quite unfair.

Can you give me an example?
Yes, I can certainly give you one very good example. We were accused of doing obscene filming amongst tribals and one Hindi newspaper headlined the story. In fact, we were not doing obscene filming at all. We were filming with the permission of the Government of India. There was not a single frame that could be considered to be obscene. And yet all this was done by certain interested elements in Madhya Pradesh and, I think, particularly by Vidya Charan Shukla, and I think he did it because he wanted to embarrass the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr Arjun Singh, who had given us permission to do it. And in that controversy we weren't helped by some extremely inaccurate reporting from the press. We were, in the end, helped by the MP government, which gave us full co-operation, and by the Central government in the end. But it was a very unfair controversy because there was never any question of doing obscene filming.

When you came back to India the second time, in 1972, did the BBC come back with you?
Yes, I brought the BBC back. *(Laughs.)* How's that?

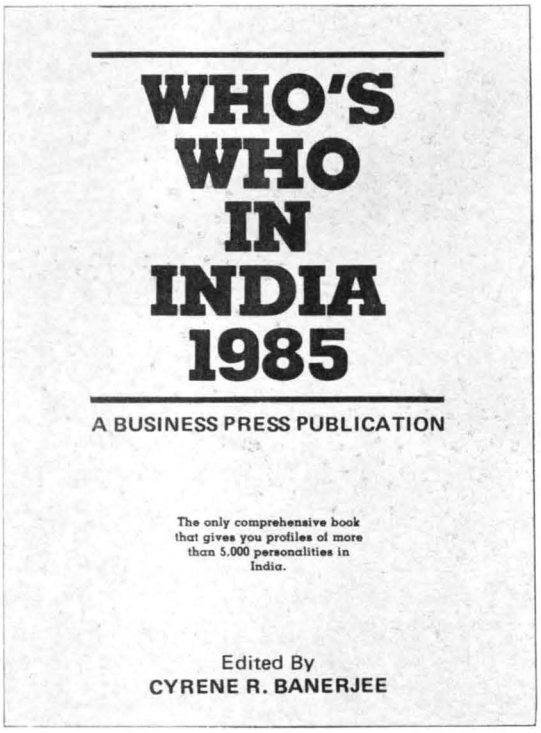
So how long was the BBC out for?
Just about 18 months.

Why were you given permission to reopen the office?
Because we managed to convince the Indian government that it is better to have communications with the BBC, to allow the BBC to operate here. The problem with any country with the foreign press – especially with the BBC – is that it will carry on covering your country, whether it is represented or not. If it is represented then the coverage is more accurate and responsible.

NEW

WHO'S WHO IN INDIA 1985

Edited By Cyrene R. Banerjee



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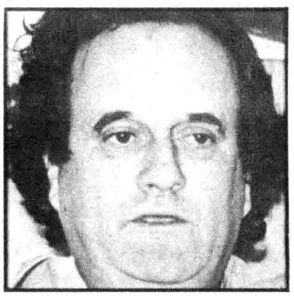
"I told V C Shukla that he could throw me out of the country but he couldn't stop the BBC from broadcasting. And I was right. India got an appalling press during the Emergency."



Because if the BBC has an office here, and we make mistakes or we appear to be blamed too much in favour of the Opposition or we appear to be playing up the famine – you can call the guy there and say, "This is the point of view of the government," and you can have a discussion, at least. But if you're in a position of hostility with the organisation, then there is a tendency for the organisation to say, "Well, your bad luck." I hope we don't do that but. . .there is that tendency.

Did you think India had changed a lot when you came back?
No. I didn't. Well, I think if I look back on India now and look back on it in 1965, yes, I would say there have been enormous changes. . . . .but I think the changes have been a gradual progress.

What kind of changes do you think are most remarkable?
Well, I said earlier that it was old-fashioned – it's much less old-fashioned now than it was before. Your communications have improved though your telephones could do with a lot more improvement. *(Laughs.)* Indian Airlines has at last got a computer. There is much less xenophobia – many Indians are travelling. When I came down in 1965 there was this craze for foreign – I find much less of that. In 1965, some diplomats' wives used to sell used lipsticks. I haven't heard of anyone doing that lately. India has become a more open society. The cities have grown enormously. The food situation has taken a dramatic turn for the better.

Do you think that the gap between the rich and the poor has lessened in the last 20 years?
I think many more people are coming into the cash economy, the modern economy of India. People at the bottom end of society are getting more and more opportunities. But I think the two articles in the *Indian Express* recently, put in more scientific terms than I can – because I'm not an economist – what I've felt for a long time. Actually, slowly, slowly, the battle against poverty is being won. I've always seen India as the tortoise in the developing world, the tortoise which will eventually win the race by going about it patiently and steadily. You can't do everything overnight. There is no patience in this country – if you believe your newspaper writers, everything can be solved overnight – which of course it can't.

I think the world in general took a very pessimistic view of the prospects for India in 1965 whereas now, the world takes an optimistic view. I certainly share that optimism myself.

What about Pakistan? Do you think it has changed much?
Oh yes. When I first went to Pakistan in 1965, it was very like India – especially at the upper levels of society. The Sind Club was like the Gymkhana Club in Delhi: a lot of socialising, a lot of drinking. Now it has become a very Islamic country on the surface. But the military rule of Ayub Khan was nothing like the military rule of Zia.

I haven't been back to Pakistan since the elections so I can't say how much the situation has changed.

Did you get on with Bhutto?
'Get on with' is a strange phrase.

A lot of British journalists seemed to like Bhutto as an individual.
No. I didn't get on with Bhutto. He attacked me in Parliament. Bhutto thought that the BBC was actively encouraging demonstrations against him, which was completely untrue. The problem was that Pakistan radio was putting out stories that did not reflect in any way what was happening in the country. So he didn't like me because he knew that lots of people were listening to the BBC and the BBC was saying, "Yes, this is a strong movement against Bhutto."

Coming back to India, the government here also took the line that the BBC was not covering India properly during the Emergency, didn't it?
Well, we had an awful lot of trouble covering India during the Emergency. We were thrown out after the first month. We were accused by the government of having said that Jagjivan Ram had been placed under house arrest. We had never said it and I challenged V C Shukla to produce any evidence that we'd said it – after all, they monitor everything the BBC says.

Basically, we got thrown out not because of anything we broadcast but because a system of censorship had been introduced in which you had to sign a document saying that you were prepared to tell lies. We were not willing to do that. It wasn't just the BBC – *The Times, The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* all left India on those grounds.

I had many rows with Shukla during this period. There was the Jagjivan Ram thing. And then he called me in and said, "How did you know that there had been an explosion in an All India Radio station?" And I said: "I didn't know. But thank you for telling me." And he said, "But haven't you broadcast it?" And I said, "No. But now that you've told me, I will broadcast it."

My attitude to Shukla was summed up by something I said to him during this period. I said, "Mr Shukla, you can throw me out. You can close the BBC down. But you can't stop the BBC from broadcasting." And I'm certain that what I said to him was right. India got an appalling press during the Emergency. Mr Shukla's policy backfired.

When you came back to India in 1977, did you sense that Mrs Gandhi was going to lose?
I sensed she was in deep trouble. I travelled a lot and the most interesting thing I noticed about that election was how the crowds were not responding to Mrs Gandhi at all. I remember the two big rallies she held in Delhi: on the Boat Club lawns and at the Ram Lila grounds.

Did you find that Mrs Gandhi personally objected to what the BBC said about her, or was it just the position of the Indian government?
I don't think that she was as sensitive to criticism herself as those around her were sensitive to criticism of her.

Was Janata less sensitive?
Yes. I think Janata was a very open form of government. I also had a much closer relationship with Morarji than I ever had with Mrs Gandhi.

The Emergency did – in a sense – boost your audiences, don't you think?
Well, I think our audiences were boosted tremendously with the Bangladesh War which coincided with the rapid expansion in the number of transistors. Then we got another boost during the Emergency. There is this funny thing – that if you throw the BBC out, more people start listening to it. *(Laughs.)*

Then last year, we had the Golden Temple action which again increased our audiences. Events in India have kept interest in the BBC alive.

What is going to change is that television is going to become a much more popular medium. So, as the years go by, there are not going to be so many people who fiddle around with a short-wave radio in the evening. And then – though this is only my personal view – the BBC is going to have to pay more attention to breakfast-time programming.

"Every Indian I met in London – in shops, in pubs, on the street – came up to me and said, 'You are Mark Tully, aren't you? We saw you on television. Congratulations.' "

Also, if the liberalisation of your media continues, then that will be another challenge. After all, what makes people turn to the BBC – which is a foreign organisation with not that good audibility – is that they believe they are not getting as good a service from their own media.

To come back to what you said earlier, why do they turn to the BBC and not Radio France or the VOA or whatever?
(Laughs.) We like to think that it is because we do it better! But there are two other factors. The first is that India has historical links with Britain. And secondly, we are not a department of the British government. We have government funding but we say what we like. The VOA – on the other hand – is a department of the government.

When you report India for the internal services of the BBC – as distinct from the World Service – does it cross your mind that lots of expatriate Indians are probably listening to you?
My God, yes! I'll tell you something about that. The last time I was back in England a couple of months ago, I happened to win a prize for broadcasting at something called the British Academy of Film and Television Awards. Now, the function is televised and it is very widely watched. Hardly any English people recognised me after that or came up to me except for my old friends. But every Indian I met – in shops, in pubs, on the street – came up to me and said, "You are Mark Tully, aren't you? We saw you on television. Congratulations." When I came back on the flight, all the Indians recognised me.

Perhaps it isn't fair to expect you to answer this in the space of a few minutes, but, as somebody who knows both India and Pakistan, why do you think that democracy survived in one and not in the other?
Well, there's one obvious reason. India is such a large country that it has the capacity to absorb explosions. Pakistan, on the other hand, is much smaller. As Bhutto once said, "You've only got to get riots going in Lahore and Karachi and that's enough to shake the whole government." In India, you can have riots in Bombay and the rest of the country just says: "Oh, these Bombay *wallahs*!" Even now there is a very serious crisis in Punjab, but it is not really affecting life in Bombay, is it? It isn't *really* affecting life in Delhi either.

Are you going to be in India for many years to come? Or, could you be shifted to Ethiopia or somewhere like that next year?
Well, if I have to stay abroad – insofar that India is abroad for me – I don't want to go anywhere else. I feel at home in India and as I'm nearly 50 now, I don't want to go and become the Moscow correspondent. That's my view of my career. The BBC may have different ideas. *(Laughs.)* ♦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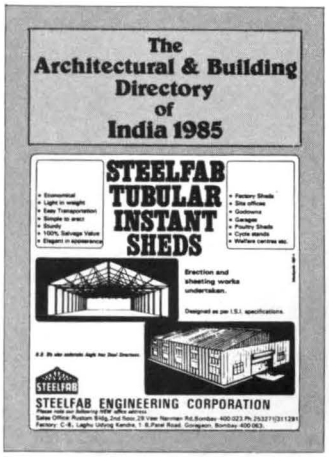

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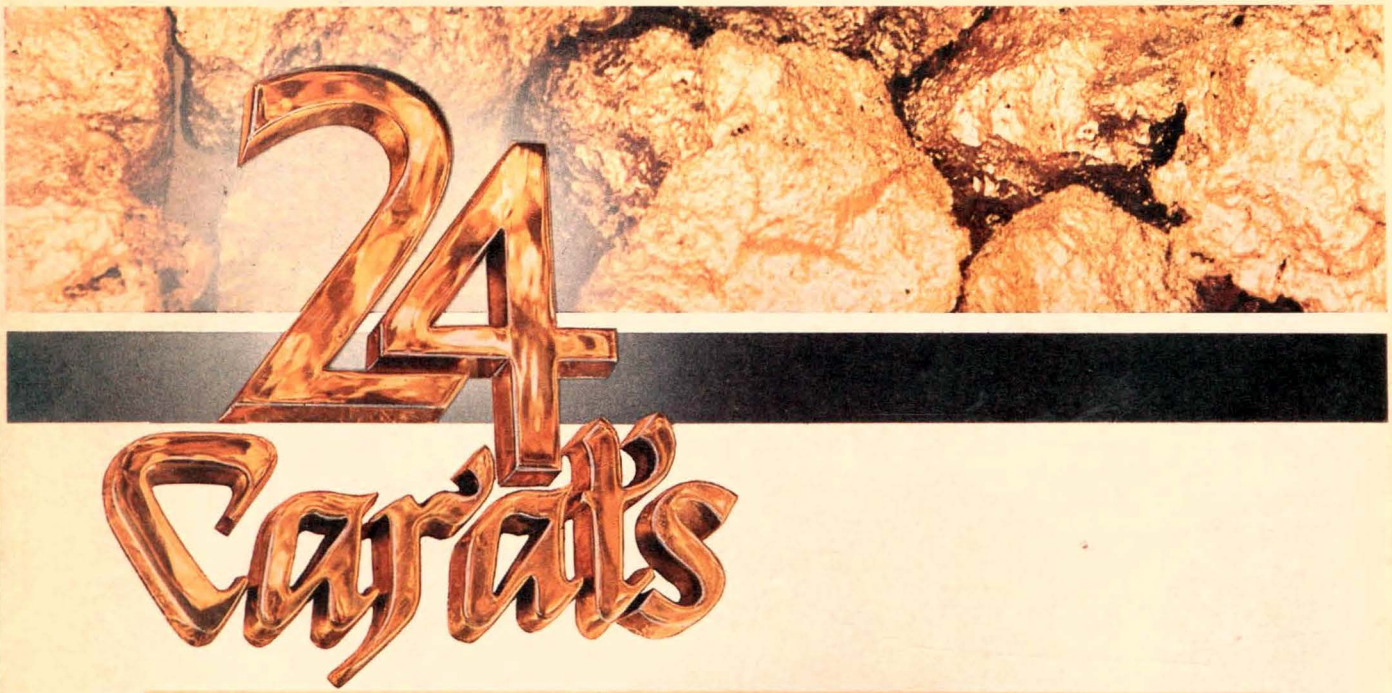

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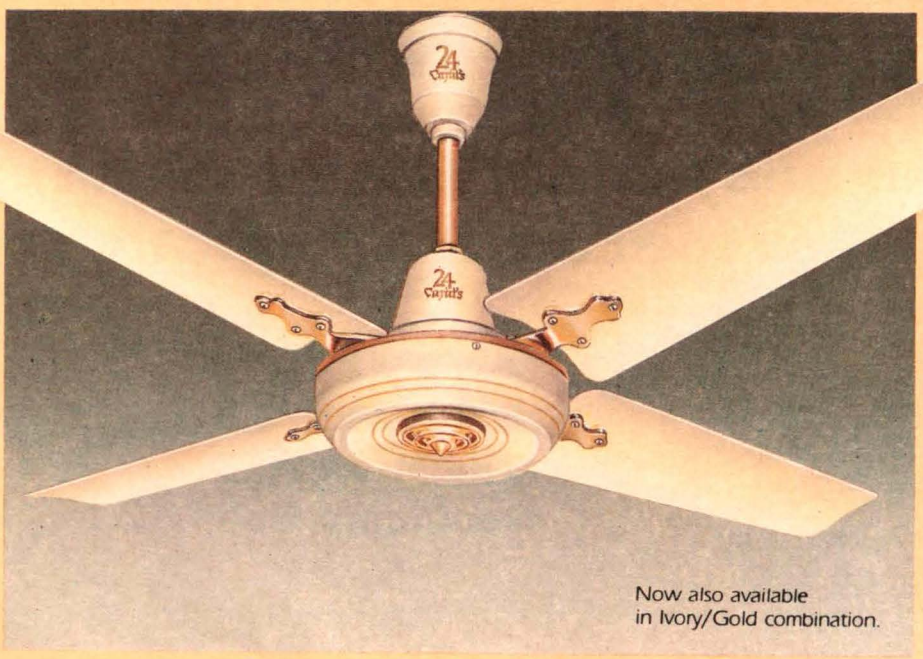

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LOOKING FOR MS KEATON

She is the brightest, most reclusive star since Garbo. She can charm Woody Allen and enthrall Warren Beatty. And still be herself. A sort-of profile, based on a rare interview.

By Dominick Dunne

DIANE KEATON, the most reclusive star since Garbo, does not sit in positions of relaxation. All through our interview she seems poised for flight, one patent-leather-shod foot in constant motion as she goes reluctantly through this chore of stardom. A pile of curls bobs on her forehead when she speaks, and a single purple plastic hoop ear-ring jiggles from her lobe. She is prettier than she photographs, and friendly, but wary. She pushes up, pulls down, then pushes up again the sleeves of her blouse, dying to be finished with the task at hand.

She lives in a glass aerie high above Central Park. Stepping off the elevator into the foyer outside her front door, one is immediately confronted with evidence of her unique style – a large, track-lit artwork, which, on closer inspection, turns out to be hundreds and hundreds of yellow

This article is reproduced from Vanity Fair, *February 1985. Dominick Dunne is a film producer and novelist.*

plastic bananas, piled in a corner by the actress herself. The apartment is white on white on white – floor, ceiling, walls, kitchen tiles, furniture, even the thick diner cups and saucers – its starkness broken by several huge floor vases of flowers and by arrangements of art objects that have caught her eye, such as a plastic bust of Pope John Paul II that she found in a curio shop in Toronto, a trio of reindeer that she saw at a roadside stand while driving through Massachusetts, and a grouping of huge papier mâché boulders that she got in a theatrical-prop shop. "I'm sort of a junk collector," she tells me. "What I really need is a warehouse. I like to change things around. For a while it's fun to look at them, and then I don't want to look at them anymore." For the moment, at least, her critically admired collages and photographs have been packed away in a back room, and she is disinclined to let me see them. There is a sense of fastidious neatness throughout – no clutter, no books or pictures littering the table-tops and, of course, her Academy Award is nowhere in sight. Her home is like an art gallery, with changing shows.

The apartment has a 360-degree view of the city; it looks down 20 floors onto the park's sailing pond on one side, onto the copper-green turrets of the majestic Dakota on another, across the West Side to the Hudson River on the third, and smack into the windows of the matching twin-tower apartment of Mary Tyler Moore on the fourth.

"Do you wave to each other?" I ask.

"Oh, no. We've never met," she replies. "In fact, I've never even seen her."

Since the place is high up, safe, spacious, and very private, I am surprised when she says it is on her mind to move. She explains that the large living-room, with its '30s bamboo-and-canvas furniture, and the dining area, with its huge table and chairs on castors, are pleasant but functionless rooms for her kind of life. "I never entertain," she says. She does, however, share the apartment with three large old cats, each with its own domain. She says she would like to own a loft or a building where she could have more room for work – a studio for her photography, space to edit her documentary films, and an office for her production company, where she could meet with writers to discuss projects. After nearly 20 years in New York, she tells me, she sometimes toys with the thought of returning to California to live.

Keaton is much more at ease talking about other people, like Mel Gibson, the hot co-star of her latest movie, *Mrs Soffel*, than about herself. "It was not difficult for me to imagine what it was like to be hopelessly in love with Mel," she says. "It was wonderful for me to play opposite him. I didn't have any idea how much emotional range he had."

Gone is every vestige of the old Annie Hall character that Woody Allen created. At 39, she is a major star at the peak of her talent.

Mrs Soffel is, according to her, 'a big love story', based on a true event that took place in Pittsburgh in 1901. Keaton, who plays the wife of a prison warden, gives an extraordinary and disturbing performance as a fervently religious woman who falls madly, hopelessly in love with a condemned bank robber. The part is shocking and fascinating and a risky one for a star.

She loved the role. "The idea of playing someone who had never been touched emotionally or romantically in her whole life and then gives way to an urge so strong that she cannot help herself – all the terror and excitement of it was wonderful for me." The smouldering presence of Gibson combines with Keaton's enigmatic and elusive quality to create the kind of sexual sparks that are rarely seen on the screen.

During the long and arduous shooting in Canada in 20-degree weather, the two stars admired each other's talent but did not socialise together in their free time. "I never got to know Mel very well," says Keaton. "I wanted to keep a distance from being friendly with him. If you start hanging out together you lose the kind of tension it takes to play a part like that."

With *Reds, Shoot The Moon, The Little Drummer Girl,* and *Mrs Soffel,* Diane Keaton has put her Annie Hall image to rest forever. Gone is every vestige of the beloved character created by Woody Allen and based on her own skittish and jittery personality. At 39, she is a major star at the peak of her talent.

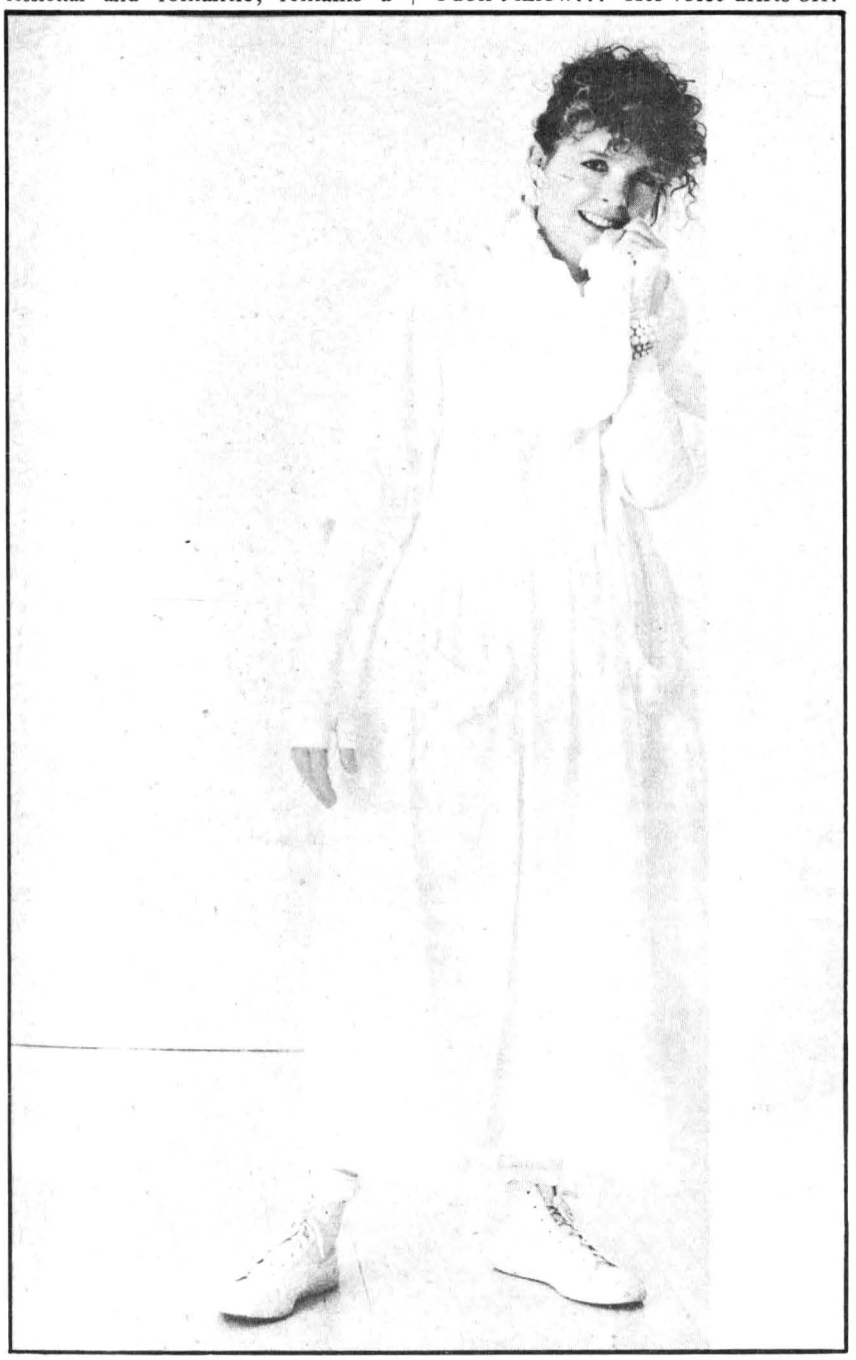
"She is the dream actress that every director should have," says Gillian Armstrong, the Australian director of *My Brilliant Career,* who made her American directorial debut with *Mrs Soffel.* "In a practical sense she is absolutely professional. There's none of that sort of star business about being late or not turning up or staying out all night, or any of those things. She is absolutely dedicated and hardworking, and she gave me the same intensity in take after take."

Working back-to-back on *The Little Drummer Girl* and *Mrs Soffel* meant being out of the country on distant locations for nearly a year. "I don't want to do that ever again," says Keaton. "I don't want to go away and work for months and months and move every two weeks to another hotel in another country and be away from people that I love. I don't want to do that. I felt like I'd left my life for quite some time. I felt alone."

After a series of heavily dramatic roles, she longs to play comedy again, but finding the right script has not

been easy. "I was spoiled by Woody," she says. At the age of 23, she was cast by Allen in the stage version of *Play It Again, Sam,* and she later acted the same role on the screen. She also appeared with him in *Sleeper, Love And Death*, and the brilliant *Annie Hall,* for which she received an Academy Award in 1978. Her relationship with Woody Allen, both professional and romantic, remains a pivotal part of her career and life. Long apart, they have managed to maintain their friendship even through other relationships, including Allen's long liaison with Mia Farrow.

"In the comedy zone there's nobody like Woody," she continues. "I just had great roles. I would love more than anything to do a comedy again. I'd love it. But for some reason, I don't know..." Her voice drifts off.



So far her own attempts at developing a comedy for herself have not been successful. The most promising was called *Modern Bride,* a romantic comedy about a 36-year-old woman who is getting married for the first time just as her parents are getting divorced. She would have co-produced and starred, but after several attempts at a script, including one by Nora Ephron and Alice Arlen and another by John Sayles, the project fell into abeyance.

Another film idea, a comedy about friendship, would star Keaton with two close friends, the actresses Kathryn Grody (wife of actor Mandy Patinkin) and Carol Kane, whom she met when the three of them were in the film *Harry And Walter Go To New York.*

When talking about herself, she sometimes borders on the inarticulate, expressing self-doubt, stopping, starting, changing direction, interrupting her thoughts, advancing in disorder.

"I'm not going to quit," she says. "I'm going to continue to try to be in a movie that's funny. I'd love to do something with Woody and Mia.

"These serious movies are hard on me. I find acting not. . .uh. . .not. . . uh. . .oh, I don't know. It's hard. It's very hard, and it brings out things in me that I don't like, which is. . .uh. . . steady, constant worry. I just worry every day. Am I okay? Am I all right? Look. . .I don't want to say that it's not a privilege, and it's not something I don't want to do, because I do like doing it, really, but I'm glad I'm not doing it right now."

I WENT to see her again in Los Angeles where, the press agent for *Mrs Soffel* told me, she was producing a documentary.

"What kind of documentary?"

"You'll have to let Diane tell you that. It's a private thing she's doing."

"Can't you tell me what it's about?"

"Heaven."

"Heaven?"

"Heaven."

"What about heaven?"

"You better ask her when you get out there."

SHE WAS at a hotel in Santa Monica called the Shangri-La. When I arrived at the Shangri-La, Keaton stuck her head around a corner and called out, "Hi!" indicating the direction of her suite with a head gesture. The sleek grey living-room in '40s-streamline revival suited her. Her clothes have a distinctly rummage-sale/swap-meet look about them, but there is an eye for design in the layering, which is as complicated and of a piece as one of her performances. That day she was a study in black and white: a mid-calf hound's-tooth-check skirt over black leggings, white push-down socks that flopped onto black patent-leather Thriller shoes, a black blouse pushed up at the sleeves, a black-and-white hair rag tied in a bow atop her head in a style somewhere between Carmen Miranda and Cyndi Lauper, and one hoop ear-ring. She is often able to walk unnoticed on the street. Neither needing nor wanting to be recognised, she is assimilated into the anonymity she craves without resorting to the movie star disguise of oversize sunglasses and fur coat. It is perhaps her bizarre manner of dressing that protects her, drawing, as it does, the gaze of passersby to her clothes rather than her face.

"I have this longing to be here again," she said quietly. "I'd like to have a place right here in Santa Monica. I like the whole area. I like the little mall where you walk around. I can walk to a store. I can walk to a restaurant. And, of course, there's the water. I guess everybody loves Santa Monica now, though, don't they? It's the place."

After a pause she said, "Maybe I will come back. My family's out here." Her family, with whom she is deeply involved, consists of her mother, father, two sisters, brother, and grandmother, 93-year-old Grammy Hall. Her family name is Hall, but she took her mother's maiden name of Keaton because there was already a Diane Hall in Actors' Equity.

"Let me put on some water for coffee," she said, going to the bathroom for water. Her coffee machine was brand-new and unfamiliar, and she continued to talk as she tried to make it work, and then apologised for the coffee. "It's not hot enough, is it? It never really boils. Is it too strong? I don't have any cream or sugar."

"Hungry?" I asked.

"Yeah."

Not far from the Shangri-La, in the trendy Venice art colony, is the new restaurant of the moment, 72 Market Street, owned by actor-producer Tony Bill, Dudley Moore, and two partners, and backed by such celebrities as Liza Minnelli. It is the place where everyone wants to go and no one can get a table.

"Do you mind if I drop your name?" I asked before calling for a reservation.

"It won't help," she replied.

"Yes it will."

It did.

Does Woody hate Warren? Is it true that Woody's *Zelig*, with famous people commenting on the nonentity Zelig, was a send-up of Warren's *Reds*?

IN BOTH *Shoot The Moon* and *Mrs Soffel*, Keaton acts motherhood as well as it has ever been acted, but she has no children. Does she want them?

"Yeah, well, sure. . . You know, I'm 39, and I don't know how much time, I mean, there's still time. Early on I made a career choice, and now I hope it's not too late. Sure I do. Yes, I'd like to."

Her personal life remains her own, and intrusions are not welcome. Recently there have been items in gossip columns linking her romantically with a young director whom she was said to be taking home to meet her family. When I showed her the clippings, which she had not seen, she shrugged off the stories with a smile. "Oh, that Liz," she said in mock exasperation, meaning Liz Smith, in whose column one of the items had appeared.

These are areas she does not wish to share. Don't bring up Warren Beatty, I had been told in advance by one of her closest friends. She doesn't want to talk about Warren. Nevertheless, questions about their famous romance, now ended, were churning in my mind, should the moment present itself. Did Warren take her away from Woody? Does Woody hate Warren? Is it true that Woody's movie *Zelig*, with its famous people commenting on the nonentity Zelig, was meant to be a send-up of Warren's movie *Reds*? Questions like that. But where to begin?

"Have you. . .uh. . .remained friends with Warren?" I asked, feeling my way.

She changed her position, breathed in deeply, and withdrew into her privacy. For an endless moment we waited in silence as she moved the carpaccio around on her plate. "Let me say this," she answered finally. "The experience of making *Reds* is one that I will always treasure. I have the deepest respect for Warren, both as a director and as an actor. *Reds* is a film that I am very proud of."

"And that's it on Warren?" I asked, sensing a note of termination.

"Yeah," she answered, drawing out the word.

Pause.

"Let's talk about heaven," I volunteered.

"Oh, sure, heaven," she said with evident enthusiasm for the subject of her new documentary, and our awkward moment vanished.

"I've seen films depicting heaven, and there were extraordinary visual

images. The whole notion of heaven frightened the hell out of me, so I thought maybe it would be interesting to put together a little documentary where you just ask everybody, as many different kinds of people as possible, what they think about heaven and how they feel about it."

She found the people around Hollywood Boulevard, and on the streets, and at various associations and churches. "I think a lot of people are afraid to think about what it's like after death. They hope for something more, but a lot of people are afraid to think about it."

"Who talks to the people and asks the questions?"

"I do."

"As Diane Keaton?"

"Oh, no, just an off-camera voice, although some of the people did call me Diane. It's a talking-heads kind of movie. We shot a lot of film. It's going to be a huge editing job."

"How much will it cost?"

"Oh, gosh, a lot."

"Who's paying for it?"

"One of the cable stations."

"Would you call that one of the perks of fame?"

"Yeah," she answered. "That's the good part, being able to do things like this little documentary, and publishing my books on photography."

IT WAS LATE. Back at the Shangri-La we said goodbye. Watching her retreat into the lobby, I was struck by her walk and by her extraordinary style, which no one else could ever quite bring off the way she does. I liked her. I missed her already.

THE NEXT DAY, before returning to New York, I caught up with family at the hotel for lunch. When Beverly Hills people say 'the hotel', they mean only the Beverly Hills Hotel. At the entrance to the Polo Lounge, talking to Pasquale, the *maître d'*, I saw the back of a woman wearing a black and white hound's-tooth-check skirt over black leggings, white push-down socks falling onto Thriller shoes, and a black-and-white hair rag tied in a style somewhere between Carmen Miranda and Cyndi Lauper. It was Diane Keaton, who, her friends had assured me, never, ever went to places like the Beverly Hills Hotel. We said hello again and goodbye again.

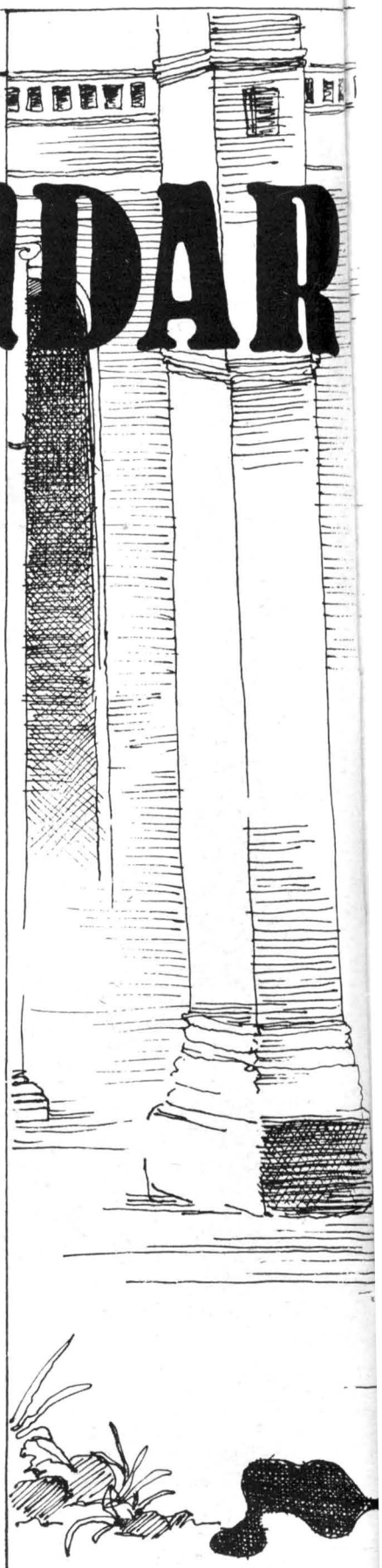
Later, during lunch, heads turned in the Polo Lounge as Warren Beatty entered the room. He has the kind of star presence that even the most sophisticated people do not take in their stride.

"Hi," he said to me in passing. "I hear you had an interesting day yesterday." He continued on through the Polo Lounge to the glass door that opens out on the terrace. At the farthest end of the patio, he sat down at a table where Diane Keaton was waiting. They have, it appeared, remained friends. ♦

the ALAVANDAR

A headless body in a trunk. A brutal murder for jealousy and revenge. A husband and wife team of killers. The Alavandar murder rocked South India in the '50s.

By Shiraz Sidhva



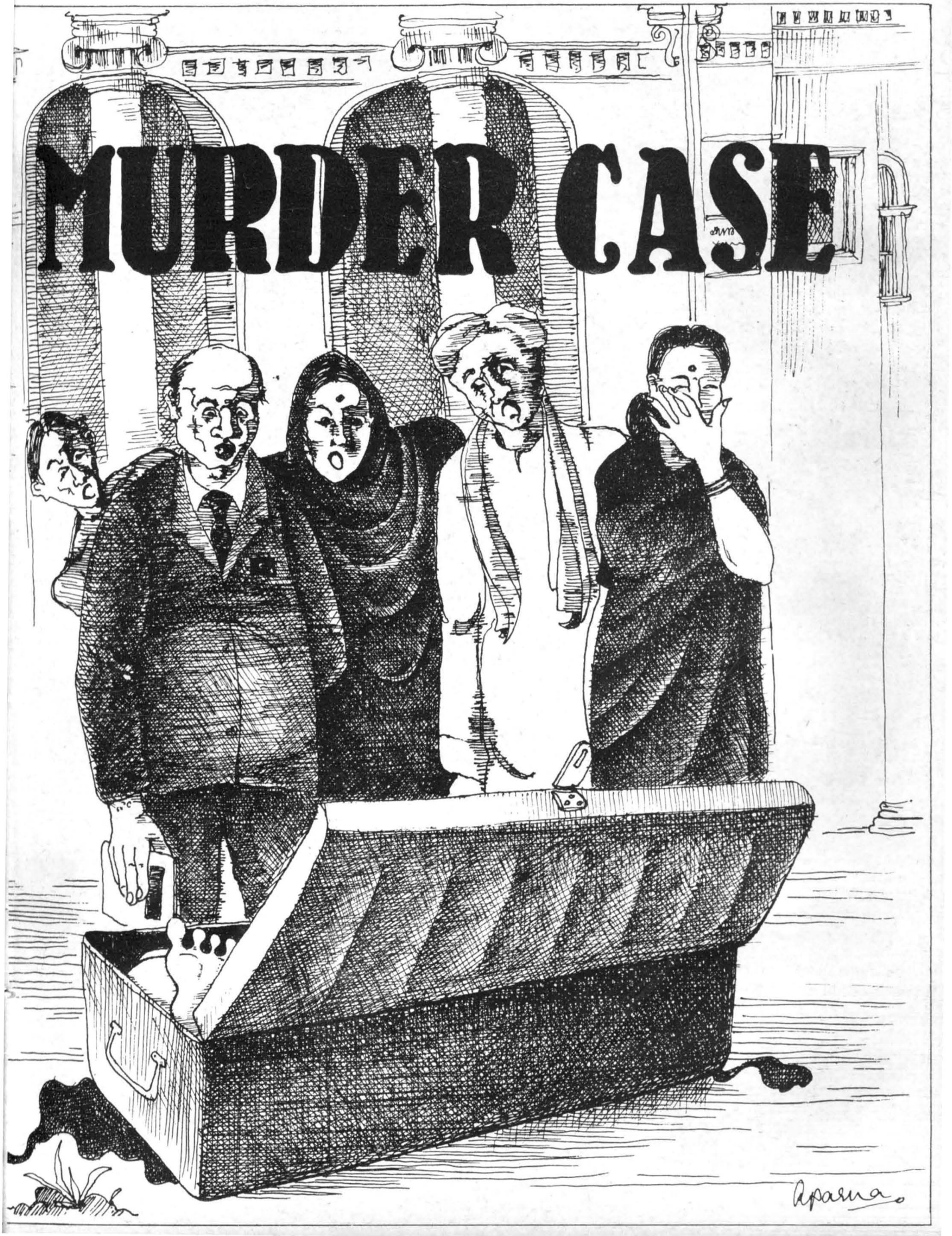
ON THE MORNING of August 29, 1952, travelling ticket-collector J Alexander Fleury boarded a third class compartment of the Indo-Ceylon Express at Tiruchi. He screwed up his Anglo-Indian nose in disgust. The smell that assailed him was nauseating. These Indians! Always being sick in public places! The smell of death, he thought irrationally, as he bustled about checking tickets.

None of the passengers had thrown up, so there was no one to admonish. As the day wore on, the stench in the overheated compartment became unbearable. Women fanned themselves as their stomachs churned. The ice pedlar did brisk business: when his stocks were exhausted, he retired to an empty seat to doze a little.

And then his bare toes touched something. A trail of red, viscous liquid oozing sluggishly from under a seat. He called Fleury who, not stopping at anything when it was in his line of duty, took a little on his finger and smelt it. His worst suspicions were quickly confirmed – it *was* blood. They traced the trail to a large black tin trunk which, when lifted onto the bench, left crimson clots on the compartment floor. Naturally, no one claimed the trunk. A wave of disgust swept over the entire compartment; there was nothing they could do until the train got to Manamadurai at dusk.

At Manamadurai, the station master and the railway police detached the bloody carriage, and prised open the trunk. The crowd that had gathered quickly scattered as curiosity gave way to revulsion. A headless human torso along with its severed arms and legs, had been crammed into the trunk, chest downwards. The legs, which had been sawn off at the groin, still had green socks on them, and a black cord was tied around the waist. The skin was grazed in some places, smeared with blood in others. After a hurried post-mortem, the body was buried in a six-foot-deep pit; the police surgeon was careful to retain the topmost vertebra where

Shiraz Sidhva's last article for **Imprint** *was a profile of Cho Ramaswamy.*


MURDER CASE
Aparna

the head should have been.

In Madras, the same day, police were investigating the disappearance of C Alavandar, a petty merchant who peddled cheap fountain-pens and plastic goods on the front verandah of Messrs Gem and Company on the city's busy China Bazaar Road. The 42-year-old pen dealer had last been seen leaving the shop at noon the previous day, with Devaki Menon, a young woman who often stopped by to chat with him. He had promised to return within an hour, but there was no sign of him all day. When he failed to come home that night, his wife called the police.

Since the missing merchant was last seen with Devaki, they went to her residence at 62, Cemetry Road in Royapuram only to find a lock on the door. They were told by Devaki's father, who lived nearby, that Devaki and her husband had left by the night train for Bombay. Prabhakar, Devaki's husband, had landed a plum job there. The papers pertaining to the Alavandar case were filed away along with hundreds of others in the 'Missing' file.

AT DAYBREAK on August 29, K Ekambara Mudaliar, the watchman at Loane Square Park in Broadway (Madras), stopped in his tracks. About ten feet from the park gate on the east side, lay a bundle of cloth. He examined it gingerly with his stick; the foul smell stopped him from touching it. In the faint light of early morning, he could see that it was a black sari with red and white dots, mottled with blood. The remnants of some wretched woman's abortion, he thought, as he pushed the bundle out of sight, under a bench.

When he returned that evening, Mudaliar saw the offending bundle where he had left it. In a gesture of generosity, he beckoned to Ammani Ammal, a beggar woman who frequented the park, to take it away. The poor woman was only too happy to wash the bloody sari and replace her tattered one with it.

On August 30, Inspector Ramanatha Iyer, who had tried in vain to locate the missing Alavandar, was putting down his Tamil paper when an item about the discovery of a headless torso at Manamadurai caught his eye. Something told him that the two cases could be related. The Menons had left so suddenly; he decided to break open their flat and investigate.

A rickshaw-puller led the police to the spot where Menon had disposed of the severed head. Now the hunt for the Menons began in earnest.

Iyer's hunch was not off the mark. On the walls of the hall and the kitchen in the crummy first-floor dwelling, there was a profusion of blood-stains. Forensic experts found a clear palm impression on one of the walls. The hunt for the Menons and the missing head was on.

In the street below, police, desperate for clues, started questioning *paanwallahs* and shopkeepers. They also scoured the city for evidence of a recent burial. The head had got to be found somewhere. Only then would Iyer know for sure that the headless torso belonged to Alavandar.

And then a rickshaw-puller led the police to Bower Kuppam, where the sewage meets the sea at Royapuram Beach. On the evening of August 28, he had taken Menon and a large pumpkin-shaped parcel there in his rickshaw; Menon had walked towards the sea, returning half an hour later, without the package. A posse of 15 policemen combed the area, but there was no sign of the contents of the package. Just as they were about to give up the search, Inspector Jayaraman saw a giant wave wash the severed head ashore.

Though four days had passed since the crime, the sea had preserved the head remarkably well. Though the eyeballs were missing, the tongue was intact. Two distinct features quickly helped confirm that the head was indeed Alavandar's – an overriding canine tooth on the right side of the upper jaw and a right ear lobe punctured twice. The post-mortem revealed an oblique gaping wound, seven inches long, and an incision in the upper portion of the neck.

Soon there was little doubt left that the headless body at Manamadurai belonged to Alavandar too. The cervical vertebra on the severed head corresponded with that on the torso, and 13 other points of similarity were identified – the presence of opium in the stomach, the green socks, the black cord, and fingerprints that tallied with the missing man's.

But where were the Menons? After what seemed like a wild-goose chase across the country, they were arrested in Bombay on September 10. Menon had in his possession a Parker pen and a Longines watch belonging to Alavandar. Tooth marks were clearly visible on the thumb, index and little finger of Menon's right hand. He was remanded to police custody, and subsequently charged with the murder of C Alavandar.

What followed was probably one of the most sensational murder trials in the country. Thriving as it does on sensationalism, the regional press splashed every lurid detail across its front pages. Paradoxically, it was Menon, the murderer, who excited tremendous public sympathy and not Alavandar. He became a phenomenon overnight.

IN THE SUMMER of 1952, Prabhakar Menon met Devaki, a social worker who gave Hindi tuitions in her spare time. She was a year younger than him, the fourth of eight children, and pretty enough. She found him good-looking too. He flattered her with his attention and told her stories about his life in

Burma (his father was a lieutenant colonel in the army), the family property in his native Kerala, and his days as a post-graduate student in Calcutta.

They were married in a month, and though the invitation made much of his exalted parentage, Menon's family was not seen or heard of at the wedding. Devaki didn't really mind when she discovered that Menon was not a superintendent as he had claimed, but just a clerk. They were comfortable enough on his Rs 75 salary. Before she knew it, Prabhakar had accepted a job as advertisement manager of a monthly, *Freedom First,* which paid him Rs 100. The Menons moved out of Devaki's father's house – they could afford a home of their own now.

They were happy, to begin with. Devaki no longer worked. A servant boy, Narayanan, fetched and cleaned for her; she had plenty of time on her hands. She was often seen leaving the house in the afternoon, flowers in hair, handbag in hand. Sometimes she used her contacts at the Hindi Prachar Sabha (she was a member) to help Prabhakar secure advertisements for his magazine. She suggested he go see an old acquaintance of hers, a pen dealer in China Bazaar.

C Alavandar was always nattily dressed. He looked younger than his 42 years, with his cropped hair combed back in 'American style'. He enjoyed running his pen business – a lot of college students visited him regularly, and it paid better than his earlier job. He had been married to Symanthakumari ten years ago, and they had three children – the youngest was only 15 months old. He had a weakness for opium, which he professed kept his asthma in check and he was something of a ladies' man – he doused himself with a strong perfume each morning, often leaving the shop with one of his women customers. According to friends, he was 'a genial and gentle man, and an excellent conversationalist'.

When Menon, introducing himself as Devaki's husband, approached Alavandar for an ad, he was promised

When Menon learned that Alavandar had seduced Devaki he threatened to 'finish him off'. Devaki agreed to bring him home. The scene of the crime was set.

one immediately. But he did not like Alavandar's tone when the latter said he was lucky to have married Devaki. Suspicion lurked at the back of his mind.

WHEN, on August 26, Devaki got home as late as 7.50 p m, Menon was in a rage. She had gone out with a man, he aspersed. She insisted that she had only been giving tuitions to a friend, but he kept at her. "I have had intercourse with other women," he confessed, falling at her feet and begging her pardon. "Won't you tell me about your experiences too?" He promised that all would be forgiven and forgotten.

When Devaki still resisted the question, he told her he knew of a mesmerist who would be able to tell him whether she had been chaste before they married. "I am dying for you, but you do not love me," he accused. The nagging reached a climax while they were watching a night show at the Minerva theatre. "Educated girls like you always have boy-friends," he kept insisting. She finally relented, and told him that she had been seduced by Alavandar and that they had spent an afternoon making love at the Grand Hotel before she discovered he was a married man who went out with other women too. Recently, he had tried to lure her into a hotel room when she visited him.

Menon sprang up like a man possessed and dragged Devaki home. His breathing became irregular and hurried, as he exhorted Devaki to tell him all. "I will forgive you if you tell me everything," he said. From where he slept in the hall, the servant boy, Narayanan, could hear every word of the loud quarrel. Most of the argument was in English, but there were occasional lapses into Malayalam. When Devaki insisted that there was nothing more to be said, Menon growled, "You should bring him here – I shall finish him off or put him to shame!" Devaki agreed. Her sobs echoed through the silence of the night.

The following morning, Narayanan was roused at 5.30 a m and ordered to finish the cooking and other work for the day. Menon was not preparing to leave for the office as he usually did. He sent the boy to a cycle shop nearby, to borrow a knife, ostensibly to chop wood. Narayanan was a bit puzzled – they used a charcoal fire. When he returned with the knife, he was asked to eat his lunch (at 9.30 a m) and leave for the day. "Don't you return before four o'clock this evening," Menon instructed menacingly, flinging a four anna coin in his direction.

Khader Mohideen, the cycle shop-owner, was surprised that Menon had come to return the knife so soon after it had been borrowed. "What man, I don't want this," Menon said, looking at the small knife contemptuously. "Bring me one large enough to chop wood." Mohideen disappeared into the back of his shop, returning with a foot-long chopper with a broad, heavy eight-inch blade. Menon looked pleased.

The scene of the crime was set. We only have the Menons' (highly conflicting) versions to rely upon. Devaki's version, which was recounted to the courts and seems the more authentic of the two, follows:

"On my husband's insistence, I went to see Alavandar on the morning of August 28 (later she modified her story, saying that Alavandar had asked to see her earlier). He was there at the shop, in his brown Havana

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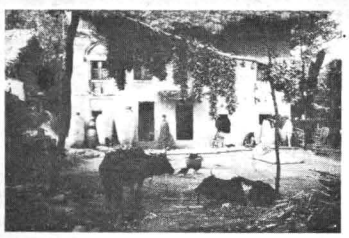

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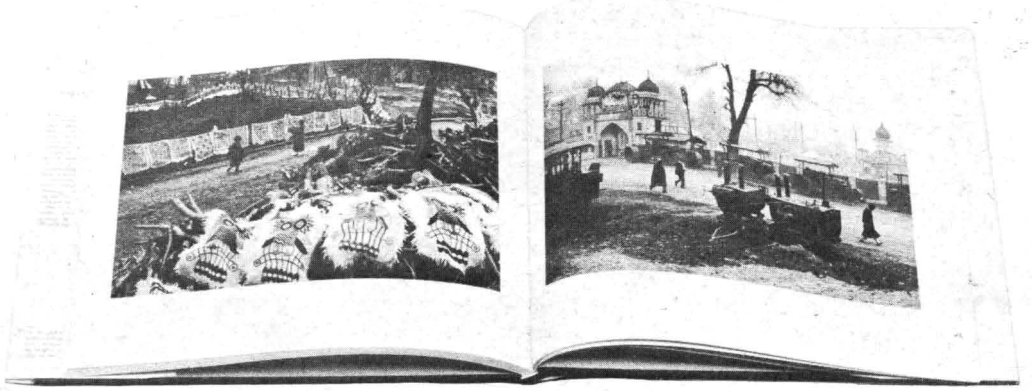

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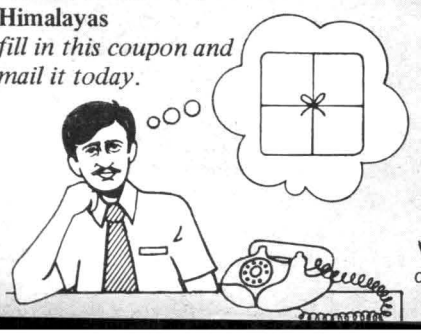

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trousers and a half-sleeved bush-shirt of the same material. Earlier, I had warned the man not to meddle with my married life. I had shown him my *tali* (*mangalsutra*) and said, 'I am a Hindu girl, and I cannot prove untrue to my husband.' Alavandar asked me, 'Can you cheat me like that?' I said, 'You already did!' I had seen him in the bus with other girls. I had discovered what a rogue he was, and stopped seeing him. He used to seduce girls by giving them concessions on their pen purchases.

"Alavandar left the shop with me at 12 noon. I had asked him over for a chat. We parted ways then, heading separately for my house. My husband let me in through the street door before hiding in the kitchen. Alavandar, smartly dressed as always, stepped out of an autorickshaw and knocked at the front door. I let him into the sitting-room, and bolted the door.

"After exchanging the usual pleasantries, he asked, 'Are you alone at night? If so, why don't you inform me?' He moved closer. At that point my husband burst in and asked how Alavandar could dare seduce a married woman. He pulled down the clothesline and tied the visitor to a chair. 'Do you cheat my wife?' he screamed. Alavandar said, 'I have already done so (seduced her), and you are jealous,' kicking out at Menon. 'You kicked me before my wife!' he yelled in a rage, bringing out the meat chopper in a flash and hitting him on the head. Alavandar bit viciously at Menon's hand. As he staggered from the blow, his mouth was gagged with a dhoti. 'Keep away, or I will kill you too,' my husband threatened, seeing me cower in a corner.

"In the other room, I could hear a 'kerr kerr' sound. He spotted me as I tried to steal a look. Alavandar had fallen flat on the floor—face upwards. Stripped to his underwear, my husband sat astride him, shoving the dhoti up his throat and stabbing him with a penknife. I could hear a gushing sound as his lungs were pierced.

"All of a sudden, my husband was all tenderness. 'Do not be afraid,' he said. 'Come near.' He then began to strip the corpse of its belongings—a leather purse, a plastic purse with Rs 15 in it, a scent bottle containing marble chips, the key to an Ajax cash box, a paper with *buspam* (sacred ash) in it, a laminated Parker Major pen and a West End Bijou Steel Longines watch. Dragging the naked body into the kitchen, he proceeded to hack it to pieces. Blood was gushing out uncontrollably. When I cried, he laughed at me. 'You are feeling for that notorious rogue,' he taunted."

Alavandar's body, viciously stabbed and hacked to pieces, had still to be disposed of. Unfortunately for the Menons, they left a trail a mile wide.

AFTER the dismembering was done, Menon left the house, returning with two chilled Vimtos. As the couple mopped up the blood on the floor, more oozed out of the hunks of flesh. The severed head was wrapped in a piece of cloth and then in brown paper; the torso, with its limbs dismembered, was crammed into a tin box with a black lid. As the blood oozed out, Devaki plugged the holes with her sari.

Clutching the pumpkin-shaped parcel containing the head to his chest, Menon hailed a rickshaw-puller, directing him to Royapuram Beach. Later that evening, another rickshaw took him and a large trunk to Egmore railway station. When coolies rushed forward to grab the trunk, they were told to keep off. He asked Kathavarayan, the rickshaw-puller, to help him unload the trunk; finding it too heavy, he called a porter to take it to a third class compartment of the Indo-Ceylon Express. After buying a platform ticket, he rushed after the porter. Together they crammed the trunk under an empty bench on the train. Kathavarayan waited for Menon outside.

When he returned, the rickshaw-puller could no longer contain his curiosity. There was blood in the rickshaw and on Menon's hand. "I got hurt while loading the trunk on to the train," Menon lied, transparently. "I'll give you an extra fiver to keep your mouth shut," he offered. "If the police question you, tell them you took me to Mount Road."

By the time Menon got home, Narayanan had already returned. When Devaki answered his knock, her sari was wet, as if she had been washing clothes. The floors of the hall and the kitchen were wet – the perfumed hair oil and the Lux soap that had been used to scrub it down did not conceal the foul smell of flesh that lingered strongly in the little house.

The next morning, Menon had his moustache shaved off, while Devaki wept. He returned the butcher's cleaver to its owner and left for the market to buy a jacket and a sari. Hardly had he returned than he left again, muttering, "I have not got money yet—I must go again." This time he returned with a trunk and his office car. Wearing a silk dhoti instead of his usual shirt and trousers (in an amateurish attempt to disguise himself), he packed the meagre household items into the trunk. They dismissed Narayanan's services, giving him a rupee, before they left for Devaki's father's house, and made sure they had put a heavy padlock on the door.

Devaki's father helped the couple unload their belongings into his spare room. He was never one for words—he hadn't spoken much to the Menons since they were married.

The two travelled to Bombay via Bangalore where Devaki had a friend whose husband, Nair, was a subedar major in the Indian army. They stayed with the Nairs till September 11, when Devaki was arrested and whisk-

ed off to Madras. The night before, Menon had not returned—he had been arrested and taken to the Princess Street Police Station.

IN MADRAS, Menon argued that he was the Editor of *Freedom First* and demanded preferential treatment. The police insisted that he would be handcuffed like other undertrials and that he did not deserve to be placed in the Special Class because he was a clerk from an ordinary family. Besides, he was just a matriculate and not a graduate as he had claimed in his statement. Taking his 'social status, education, and habits of life into consideration', he was placed in the Ordinary Class. Devaki rejected, unequivocally, the pardon that could have been hers had she agreed to give evidence against her husband. The pair were imprisoned in the penitentiary, and tried together.

In the course of the courtroom drama, the prosecution established that the torso and head belonged to the ill-fated Alavandar, even though the radiologist insisted that the body belonged to a 24-year-old. Alavandar's wife identified the dhobi mark on some clothes which were found under some rocks at Bower Kuppam, along with Alavandar's shoes. The dead man's Parker pen and Longines watch were seized from Menon; they became part of about 100 exhibits, which included Alavandar's skull, his tooth, and Devaki's sari seized from Ammani Ammal, the beggar woman. In the course of seven days, over 50 witnesses were examined – these included the ice vendor whose toes had been soiled with blood, the various rickshaw-pullers who had helped dispose of the body, ticket-collector Fleury, Narayanan, and the barber who shaved Menon's moustache.

Though it was clear that Menon had done Alavandar to death, and the motive, 'the green-eyed monster, jealousy', was established beyond doubt, the public, as well as the courts, showed a distinct tilt in favour of Menon. The puny clerk had become a knight in shining armour,

In the courtroom, Menon lied unabashedly, denying he had anything to do with the murder. Yet he aroused public sympathy, becoming a phenomenon almost overnight.

who had rescued his wife by slaying the dragon of sin! Every morning, as the police led him to the witness-box, he would greet the clamouring audience like a typical *neta*, his hands folded. Alavandar didn't stand a chance. Especially when it was discovered that he wore lace underwear (his wife was required to hold up one of these in court), and that he had contracted syphilis 11 years ago.

JS ASTHANIUS, Chief Assistant State Prosecutor held that it was "a murder undertaken with the utmost deliberation and preparation and committed in a ghastly, gruesome and treacherous manner. Devaki had taken advantage of her friendship with Alavandar and had led him like a lamb to slaughter. His body was then butchered, dismembered and disposed of in various places, probably in the hope that they would never be brought together again. The circumstances of the crime," he said, "were horrible, frightful and unusual."

Menon lied as unabashedly as he had snuffed out the life in Alavandar. In the face of overwhelming circumstantial evidence, he denied that he had anything to do with the murder, even contradicting his own confessional, which differed vastly from Devaki's. He had only defended himself, he claimed.

Of course, nobody believed him, but the court had little sympathy for Alavandar, the womaniser, either. Justice A S P Aiyer in his sensational ruling before the High Court, termed the dead man, 'a veritable Satan'. He blamed Alavandar for 'having tried to seduce Devaki and for threatening to divulge her past unless she yielded to future immoral acts'.

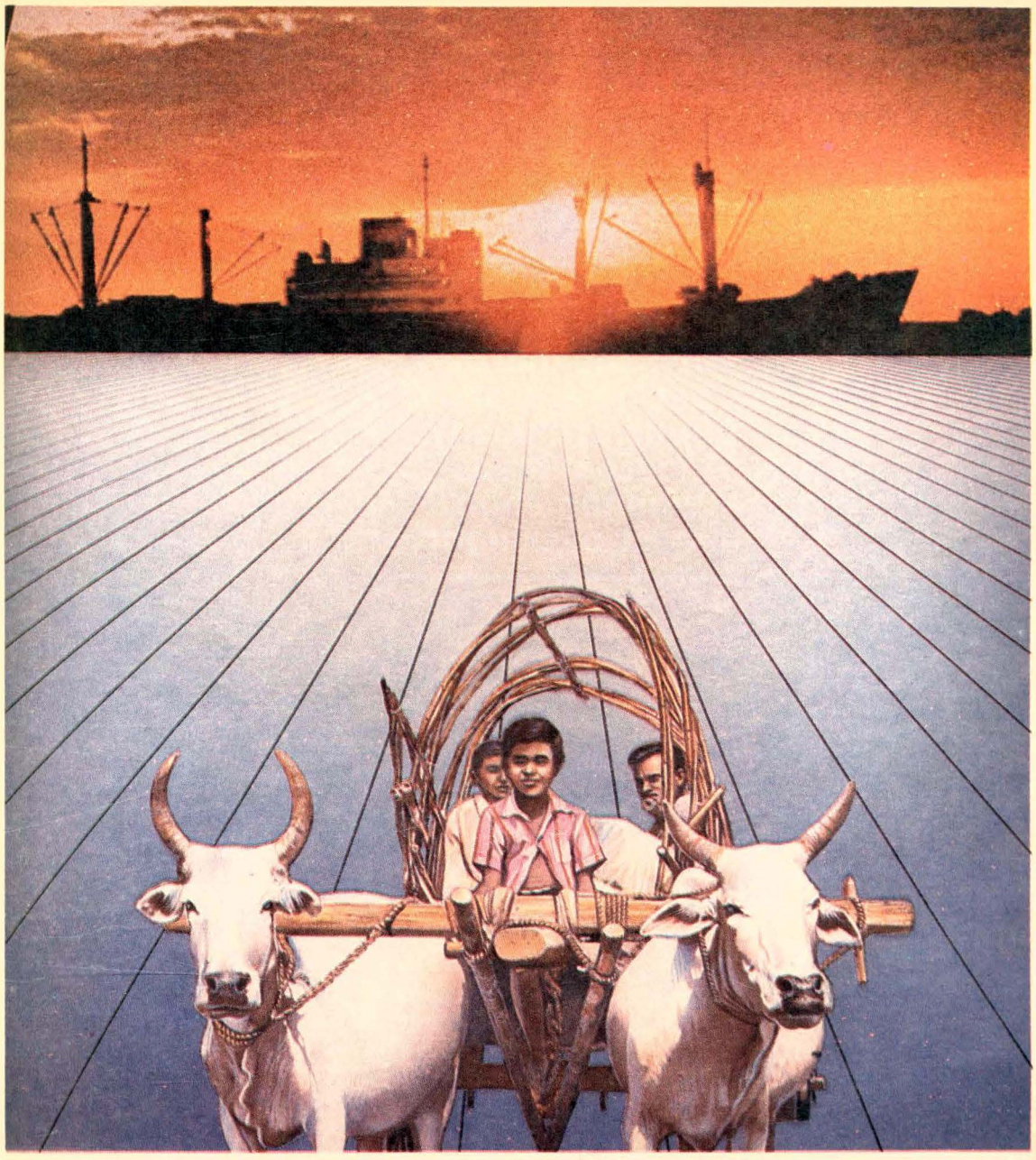
His Lordship also held that Menon merely wanted to put Alavandar to shame, when he said, "Let us finish him off," to Devaki. He rationalised the borrowing of the chopper thus: "It (the chopper) might have been merely needed there in case Alavandar grew restive and tried to attack the accused. And people like Alavandar might not take such putting to shame coolly and they might also resist."

His treatise on adultery was also enlightening: "One of the commonest motives to kill a man is adultery with one's own wife. In oriental countries like ours, adultery is considered a very great sin, worthy of punishment. It is still a crime in India. In ancient India, severe punishment was awarded for the offence. Ideas die hard," he concluded. Was he condoning the crime?

Prabhakar Menon was unanimously declared guilty by the jury under Section 304 (1) (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), and Section 201, (causing disappearance of evidence) of the Indian Penal Code. He was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment. Though 'scant evidence' was available against Devaki, she was held guilty under Sections 201 and 114 of the IPC (abetment), and sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment.

Even before the year was out, Devaki was freed for exemplary behaviour. Menon, too, served less than half his stipulated term. The Menons, now in their mid-50s run a small, well-kept hotel in Palghat.

Though nearly 35 years have elapsed since millions of people choked the busy streets around the Madras High Court, memories have not blurred. And every once in a while the Menons hear a hushed whisper or notice a look of recognition on visitors' faces, sometimes furtive, sometimes blatant. ♦



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CORRUPTION

Is There A Way Out Of This Mess?

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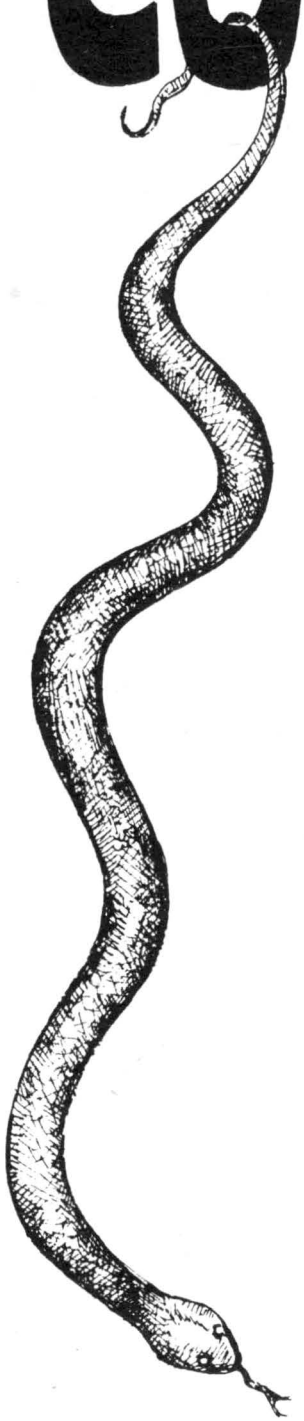

By Sundeep Waslekar

CORRUPTION is at last being derecognised in India. Until last year it was the noblest virtue patronised by the Indian leviathans. Indira Gandhi herself was an apologist of corruption, justifying it on the grounds that 'it is a world phenomenon'.

There seems to be a sudden change in the value system. What was once a noble virtue is now a scurvy vice. There is, at least, talk about cleaning up the country. And some of Rajiv's actions demonstrate that he is not in a mood to stop at rhetoric, that he is really anxious to work for the eradication of corruption and black money. The question is whether it will be possible to root out a disease that has afflicted not only the Indian economy and Indian society, but the Indian psyche.

But why should corruption be eliminated? Merely because it is bad in an abstract, philosophical sense? The real problem with corruption and the black money it generates is that it makes life difficult and costlier for a majority of Indians, particularly those belonging to the fixed income group. It makes several goods and services unavailable although they may not, necessarily, be scarce. Had it not been for the parallel economy, we would have the resources – or

Sundeep Waslekar teaches Politics and International Relations. He is a regular contributor to **Imprint**.

access to resources – to satisfy our basic needs. It is not too difficult to buy accommodation in Bombay; institutions like the Housing and Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) give up to 80 per cent credit. The problem is in paying large amounts as 'development charges' in advance and without receipts. Similarly, it is not so expensive to educate children. School fees are not really prohibitive, but the donations that most schools demand, are. It costs only Rs 1,000 to obtain a telephone connection but 'the expenses' are often 10 to 20 times as much. Corruption makes it difficult to obtain public utilities and public services which should be easily available. Anyone who doesn't know a minister or a senior civil servant will be lucky to be treated with respect in a government office or a police *chowki* without offering a bribe.

If corruption is to be eliminated, then reforms must be aimed at enabling the common people to get what is due to them. Mere high-level changes will be irrelevant for most people. If a defence contractor has to pay Rs 1,000,000 as a bribe, it's unethical, but it will not deplete his resources. But if a construction labourer is required to pay Rs 1,000 for his ration-card or police protection, it will. Eliminating corruption is not just abolishing a few malpractices in big business. Eliminating corruption is delegitimising a system which has become an expansion tactic for the rich and the powerful at the cost of those who are poor and weak. The question therefore is: will it be possible to create an order where the poor and the weak can live in comfort and with self-respect?

THERE IS A TENDENCY in India to regard corruption as an economic phenomenon. It is attributed to three sources: private sector assistance to political activities, particularly elections; licences and permits for the regulation of economic behaviour; and excessive doses of taxation. If these economic processes are responsible for corruption, then the remedies proposed are also of an economic and legal nature. There are proposals to limit the transmission of finance from business to politics; there is a growing consensus on the need to simplify and reduce economic controls; and there is a debate on the rationale of the present tax structure.

Corruption is not the economic phenomenon it's made out to be. In actual fact, it is the politicians who perpetuate the system, and the solutions must also be political.

Having accepted corruption as an economic crime, offenders are sought in the economic sector. In the pre-Assembly elections swoop on black money hoarders in Bombay, anti-corruption squads raided merchants and contractors. It is convenient to hit out at such people. The support of the lower classes, who form the numerical majority, can easily be mobilised. As far as the common man is concerned, it is the fat merchant who makes his life difficult by raising the prices of essential goods while the merchant himself, lives in luxury.

That economic agents are partners in corruption is beyond doubt. But they are at the giving end. Those at the receiving end – and hence primary beneficiaries of the system – are the bureaucrats and politicians. Who is the real culprit, the businessman who gives bribes, or the politician who forces the former to give bribes?

The problem of corruption is, therefore, a political problem, and its solutions must also be political. If Rajiv Gandhi is serious about eliminating corruption, he should begin by raiding politicians – particularly ruling party leaders – and bureaucrats. If the unaccounted wealth of the leaders of all political parties is confiscated, it would create a tremendous psychological impact on the public.

Swoops and raids can be organised in the beginning, but they cannot be resorted to every now and then. Mandatory declarations of statements of income and assets every six months or a year by political organisations and their leaders is a more civilised idea. A party which cannot account for what it spends could be barred from contesting elections. And the MP, MLA, corporator or organisational office-bearer who fails to declare his financial position periodically, should be prevented from seeking re-election.

Indians are very good at finding loopholes, and it is entirely possible that parties and their leaders will make false declarations, if at all they agree to publicise their accounts. This measure will, therefore, be effective only if citizens have the right to question the financial position of their elected representatives and their parties in a court of law. Those politicians who do not wish to confer such a right on the citizens are probably not sincere about eliminating corruption.

SINCE A POLITICIAN'S ultimate end is to seek the highest elected office possible, the question of election funding has attracted considerable debate.

There are limits on the amount that a candidate can spend on his election campaign. The rationale of imposing a ceiling on election costs is simple: The lower the expenditure of a candidate, the less incentive he would have to make a fast buck, thus reducing the menace of corruption. It is a good theory. But it rests on certain assumptions, the most important being the fairness of human beings. In the practical world, however, men are not very fair. Corruption is rampant in the municipal elections where not much money is required. Assembly elections cost more than the corporation elections, but corruption at the state level is less,

especially as far as the layman is concerned. Parliamentary elections are most expensive but corruption at the national level has little direct bearing on the man in the street. There is thus an inverse relationship between election costs and the extent of corruption from the viewpoint of an average citizen. This is not to say that corruption resulting from Parliamentary polls does not affect the common people at all. It does, particularly through an increase in the prices of essential goods. The point is that limiting election expenditure does not automatically minimise corruption. The solution, therefore, does not lie in aborting the system of ceilings. It lies in not being complacent with merely curtailing poll outlays.

It is necessary to stop the present mockery of the idea of economic ballots. There is a limit on how much a candidate can spend but not on how much a party should. It permits straightforward manipulation of the ceiling legislation. The candidate claims to have expended less than Rs 35,000 in the Assembly elections and less than Rs 2 lakh in the Parliamentary elections, the rest of his funds being drawn from his party's coffers. If a ceiling is to be imposed, it should be on the costs incurred by an individual candidate *plus* those met by the party, with reference to the total number of candidates fielded by that party.

A more pertinent question is not how much a candidate spends but how much he obtains, since it is on the latter basis that he is obliged to offer something, in return, to his donors, thus initiating corruption. There have been reports lately of quite a few candidates making profits during elections regardless of whether they win or lose. Elections provide a good excuse for collecting funds. Promises are made in abundance and money flows in as rapidly. Whatever is procured need not be used for what it is given. Some politicians have no trouble finding other uses for the funds collected. A few promptly think of posterity.

State funding of elections is not feasible in India. For political parties are not divided on ideological lines. And we vote for personalities, not for party programmes.

A SECTION of the intelligentsia believes that politicians need not depend on the private sector at all. State funding of elections is their panacea. According to this section, intervention by the public exchequer would rule out the need of trading favours with businessmen – the decent ones as well as the smugglers.

These intellectuals are obviously influenced by the prevalence of this system in Europe. But the Italian or German government's funding of political parties is compatible with the proportional representation system in those countries. Clear ideological rivalries and the division of society into a few broad groups with the political parties representing the interests of those groups, are essential for the success of a proportional representation system. Indian society is not divided on ideological lines. And there is a general consensus on the socio-economic objectives of almost all Indian parties. Under these circumstances, we vote for personalities, and not for party programmes. Why should the public exchequer finance parties when the people do not really vote for their programmes?

State financing of elections is also likely to invite several other difficulties. If the German example is to be followed, contributions should be made on the basis of votes polled in the general elections. This system would benefit the party that is already strong, impairing the functioning of parties like the BJP which may have both, national appeal and potential, but not many votes. If the principle of equality is to be followed, it would be ridiculous to treat the Shiv Sena or Muslim League on par with the Congress (I).

The most important argument is that there is no evidence of public exchequer funding actually limiting ballot costs. German parties, except for the Greens, have set up foundations which are used for laundering private sector assistance. Indians are even more imaginative in this respect. If the government treasury offers to make any contribution, it would only prove to be *one more* source of political finance.

Instead of hoping for a new disorder, it would be more sensible to establish order in the present structure. Several scholars had proposed that corporate donations should be legitimised. This suggestion has finally been accepted by Rajiv's administration. It is a very welcome step.

But legitimisation of company donations is likely to be futile unless it is accompanied by a provision for mandatory publicity. Making large donations subject to shareholders' approval would mitigate the possibility of politicians harassing business managers. More important, it would result in public information, since discussions in shareholders' meetings are unlikely to remain secret.

REGULATION of financial transfers could be one aspect of the anti-corruption drive. Suggestions have been made time and again to institute some machinery to supervise political behaviour. Mrs Gandhi introduced a Lok Pal Bill in 1968, which lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha in 1970. Politicians of all shades lost interest in the ombudsman with the advent of the '70s. The Bill, again considered in the House in 1971, was quietly forgotten by 1977.

Whether there ought to be a Lok Pal is a question of marginal importance. The government can easily reintroduce the Bill, get it passed with a majority or unanimity (like the

Anti-Defection Bill), provide the Lok Pal with a fancy office and then forget all about him. Lok Pal or no Lok Pal, it is imperative for the government to have the political will to bring its members to book if it wants to remove corruption.

During the '60s, when there was no supervisory machinery, quite a few ministers lost their jobs following judicial inquiries. T T Krishnamachari had to bow out when his involvement in the Mundhra scandal was proved by the Chagla Commission, Pratap Singh Kairon, Chief Minister of Punjab, and Biren Mitra, Chief Minister of Orissa, were displaced on the recommendations of the Justice S R Das Commission and a Union Cabinet inquiry sub-committee respectively. This was possible precisely because the government had the political will.

On the other hand, with the changing political culture of the '70s, the available machinery was ignored, insulted and misused. The Central Vigilance Commission recommended in 1978, the termination of the services of a senior executive of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for abusing official position to grant undue favours to certain private firms. The officer was back in the company next year on promotion. The Commission's reports are full of such incidents. The Commission itself has been manipulated by various governments. When it was set up on the Santhanam Committee's advice, by Gulzari Lal Nanda, it had been decided not to give any of its members other jobs in future in order to ensure the Commission's independence. Yet, Subimal Dutt, the very first Commissioner, was appointed India's envoy to Bangladesh. R K Trivedi, who joined the Central Vigilance Commission in 1980, was given the prized job of Election Commissioner in 1982.

SINCE the official machinery cannot be relied upon, the media have a very responsible role to play. Indian journalists have lately exposed many cases of political and social corruption. In fact, since Arun Shourie's Antulay exposé, investigative journalism has become the fashion.

Though the media have exposed large-scale scandals, many journalists actively concur with vested interests. How can a journalist write honestly when his subjects are also his patrons?

Unfortunately, the media have so far concentrated on large-scale scandals involving top businessmen and top politicians. The quiet but tortuous processes that the man at the bottom has to undergo have been paid little attention. It makes sensational copy if tea or sugar barons are forced to pay Rs 100 crore to a political organisation but not if an ordinary worker's family is evicted from an ancestral home under pressure from builders.

Even more unfortunately, many journalists actively concur with vested interests. Scribes can be purchased in the market like potatoes, onions, policemen and tomatoes. How can a journalist write honestly if he allows his subjects to become his patrons? Some national dailies never publish a word against certain businessmen and politicians. Should a junior reporter dare speak the truth, he would get the boot from his editor or managing director. So much for the freedom of the press and the moral authority that mediamen can claim.

Two structural reform proposals are the favourites of the intelligentsia. One relates to the plethora of controls and regulations through which Indians have to find their way. The Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms has already called for a review of the licence-raj. It has argued in favour of Central and state governments shedding functions of peripheral importance and simplifying rules and procedures. The Department has powers to implement its suggestions. It enjoys prestige, a high profile and prime ministerial attention following its divorce from the Home ministry. It is now up to the Department to display the necessary honesty and courage in translating its own suggestions into action.

Taxation is the other obsession of professionals and intellectuals. It is easy to argue against high taxation. And it may be justifiable to do so. But what about alternative resources to finance development?

Subramaniam Swamy recently proposed that all savings in regular channels such as bank deposits, shares and government bonds should be exempted from tax. This measure would lead to a substantial increase in government resources as an additional Rs 15,000 crore would be made available for extending loans, through the banking system, to various economic sectors.

Swamy's ideas may be accepted or rejected. It is important to think of the alternatives. We Indians are good at passing the buck. Economists crave for lower taxation but they have hardly done any research on the options. If their pleas for reducing tax rates are to be meaningful, they must work on new fiscal measures.

The search for alternatives cannot be left to the intellectuals. If the common man wants his interests to be safeguarded, he must be on guard all the time.

If the common people want to live in a clean environment, they have to wield the brooms themselves. If they cannot resist the temptation of paying or accepting bribes at the private level, there is little that they can do at the macro-level. If they cannot organise themselves in suitable public forums, there is little that they can do to monitor frauds at the micro level. The odds are against them. And the options are tough. But the alternative to strong will and courage is corruption. And the alternative to corruption is more corruption. ♦

EXTRACT BY NED SHERRIN

HUMOUR IN POLITICS

"Ronald Reagan," said Gerald Ford in 1974, "doesn't dye his hair. He's just prematurely orange." It was probably Ford's only joke, but politicians have been the butt of much humour.
A collection of the funniest lines.

"Politics is not the art of the possible. It consists of choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable."

– J K Galbraith

A DEFINITION is a convenient corset. It can bring a certain shapeliness to wild, overblown or over-imaginative ideas. The neatness of the effect is often in direct proportion to the ease with which the thought can be stuffed into the strait-jacket. In *The Real Thing* Tom Stoppard compares the craft of writing with a properly sprung cricket bat: the beautifully made instrument sends valuable thoughts hurtling over the boundary into a debate to score six. Perhaps in politics, a divisive profession, a nicely weighted boxing glove sending a man down for the count is a more appropriate metaphor.

Not all political wit comes wrapped as a definition but the temptation to be quotable is, for many, irresistible:

"All political parties die of swallowing their own lies" – Swift, *Thoughts On Various Subjects.* "In politics there is no honour" – Disraeli, *Vivian Grey.* "How can anyone govern a country that has 246 different kinds of cheeses?" – Charles de Gaulle.

The danger with too compact a definition is that it will distort the truth. Examine a few: What is an ambassador? "An honest man sent abroad to lie for the Commonwealth," said Sir Henry Wotton. A diplomat? "A baby in a silk hat playing with dynamite," said Alexander Woollcott. (Snappier is Sidney Brody's, "A person who can be disarming, even if his country isn't.") Diplomacy? "Lying in state," said Oliver Herford (probably 'out of state' would be more precise). Politics itself? "Nothing more than a means of rising in the world," said Dr Johnson dismissively.

The great Doctor's definition is not, however, quite so cynical as Sir Ernest Benn's: "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedy." Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* supplies cynical but neat and lasting definitions: 'a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles', and 'the conduct of public affairs for private advantage'.

To Winston Churchill politics were "as exciting as war. . .and quite as dangerous. In war you can only be killed once. In politics – many times." Lloyd George was more personal: "A politician is a person with whose politics you don't agree. If you agree with him, he is a statesman." Peter de Vries is more literary: "A politician is a man who can be verbose in fewer words than anyone else" (an echo there of Lincoln's verdict on a certain lawyer: "He can compress the most words into the smallest ideas better than any man I ever met").

And what is democracy? In France it is 'the name we give to the people each time we need them' (Robert de Flers, *L'Habit Vert,* 1912). But, after all, in France, according to Paul Valéry, politics is also 'the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs which properly concern them'. In America it is 'the theory that the common people know what they want and deserve to get it good and hard' (H L Mencken, *A Book Of Burlesques*). Clement Attlee, prime minister from 1945 to 1951, is better re-

Extracted from Cutting Edge *by Ned Sherrin, with the permission of UBS, the book's distributors in India.*

membered for brevity than for wit, but his definition of democracy sums up his own way of making it work: "Democracy means government by discussion, but that is only effective if you can stop people talking."

It is a happy coincidence when the *mot* embodies the man. Oscar Wilde hit a fortunate, frivolous note: "Democracy is simply the bludgeoning of the people, by the people, for the people." But a formula used by Wilde can be light and magical, whereas a formula introduced in desperation can soon be the death of a smile. Compare Wilde's comment with Winston Churchill's tired saw on socialist governments: "Government of the Duds, for the duds, by the duds." Churchill fortunately got onto surer ground when he, too, defined democracy: "The worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

A GREAT DEAL OF WIT survives because it sets its own tone of graceful flimsiness and does not invite detailed examination. In politics, wit can be a trap. On the old BBC *Tonight* programme, we once had to dissuade Norman St John Stevas from summing up the appointment of Lord Dilhorne as Lord Chancellor with the phrase, 'At last we have a woolsack on the Woolsack'. Cruelly accurate; but it would not have been good for Norman's career. "Those who cannot miss an opportunity of saying a good thing. . .are not to be trusted with the management of any great question," said William Hazlitt. Disraeli knew the dangers, too: "Men destined to the highest places should beware of badinage. . .an insular country subject to fogs, and with a powerful middle class, requires grave statesmen." Fortunately he continued to take the risk. Nor was he the first. Two thousand years earlier, when Demosthenes said to General Phocian, "The Athenians will kill you someday when they are in a rage," Phocian replied, "And you someday when they are in their senses." The attention of Talleyrand, the French statesman, was once drawn to Fouché, who ran Napoleon's Secret Police. "He has," said the informant, "a profound contempt for human nature." Talleyrand agreed: "Of course, he is much given to introspection."

WHEN EVA PERON was in Barcelona, she complained that the crowds called her a prostitute as she drove through the streets. "Why," said an old general, "I've been retired 12 years and they still call me General."

Adlai Stevenson kept notebooks of such 'good things' over 40 years of political life in America, and had certain favourites. For example: "When Evita Peron was in Barcelona, and complained that she had been called *puta* (prostitute), as she drove through the streets, an old general apologised, saying, 'Why, I've been retired for 12 years and they still call me General.' "

Adlai Stevenson's own most quoted epigrams include: "An independent is a guy who wants to take the politics out of politics"; "Someone must fill the gap between platitudes and bayonets." Of Eisenhower's political crusade he said, "The General has dedicated himself so many times he must feel like the cornerstone of a public building," and, "If I talk over people's heads, Ike must talk under their feet." On Republicans he commented, "I like Republicans. . .I would trust them with anything in the world except public office," and "Whenever Republicans talk of cutting taxes first and discussing national security second, they remind me of the very tired, rich man who said to his chauffeur, 'Drive off that cliff, James, I want to commit suicide.' "

CYNICISM is a regular ingredient of political wit – at least in the stones thrown by people who live outside the political glasshouses of Parliament and Congress. Shaw set it out clearly in *Major Barbara:* "He knows nothing; and he thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career." Those inside may demur. "I reject the cynical view that politics is inevitably, or even usually, a dirty business," Richard Nixon said in 1973 – only to sink in a tidal wave of jibes when he retired in disgrace to California, taking only one walk a day, 'to go and launder his money'. Even on his better days, Nixon had a bad time with wits. As far back as 1970, the critic and journalist I F Stone was writing: "The Eichmann trial taught the world the banality of evil. Now Nixon is teaching the world the evil of banality." And Adlai Stevenson's verdict was: "Nixon is the kind of politician who would cut down a redwood tree, then mount the stump for a speech on conservation." "Nixon's farm policy is vague," said Stevenson on another issue, "but he is going a long way towards solving the corn surplus by his speeches"; and in a mixture of prophetic accuracy and inaccuracy, he also commented: "Mr Nixon's defenders insist that although there are certain things that aren't very pretty, he has, nevertheless, shown the capacity for growth and, if elected, will develop the character for the job. I think it unlikely, however, that the American people will want to send Mr Nixon to the White House just on the chance that it might do him a world of good."

At least Stevenson employed a little more art than Harry S Truman on the subject of Nixon: "I don't think the son-of-a-bitch knows the difference between truth and lying," said the former president. But Truman then had another go at defining Nixon – same matter, more art: "Richard Nixon is a no-good, lying bastard. He can lie out of both sides of his mouth at the same time, and if he ever caught himself telling the truth, he'd lie just to keep his hand in" – or tongue in, to be pedantic. Nixon was such a conformer in duplicity that he now lends himself to formulae – Laurence Peter has coined "The Nixon Political

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Principle: If two wrongs don't make a right – try three." Art Buchwald was a fan of President Nixon: "I worship the quicksand he walks in" (later, he was a fan of the luckless Jimmy Carter, using the same phrase). In the end, the bitter Nixon joke exhausted itself. As Gore Vidal said, "Everyone is so anaesthetised by scandal that if it turned out that Richard Nixon was the illegitimate son of Golda Meir, it wouldn't make the front pages."

The strain of political cynicism is now most marked in America. Gore Vidal discerned a difference between English and American political scandals: the English scandal involved sex, the American, money. ("Have you ever seen a candidate talking to a rich person on television?" asked Art Buchwald.) But as with most Anglo-American distinctions, there is some blurring at the edges. H L Mencken's view of politicians ("A good politician is quite as unthinkable as an honest burglar") and George Jean Nathan's opinion of the craft ("Politics is the diversion of trivial men who, when they succeed at it, become important in the eyes of more trivial men") still ring true. So does Mencken's more rueful observation, "When I hear a man applauded by the mob, I always feel a pang of pity for him. All he has to do to be hissed is to live long enough." (Churchill lived long enough to hear the newish members of Parliament whisper behind their hands, "Poor old Winston, he's gaga"; and to turn to them and say, "Yes, and he's deaf too.") Gary Wills, the American academic and journalist, also has a sense of pity for the profession: "There is a kind of noble discipline in politicians, in persons prepared to devote a lifetime to discourse on a single subject, over and over, with anyone who will listen, anywhere. It inspires a goofy awe, this sight of them ringing a single bell all their lives, hammering at their own heads."

RICHARD NIXON had his own political principle: "If two wrongs don't make a right — try three." No wonder then that Art Buchwald, a fan of Nixon, worshipped the quicksand he walked in.

IT IS IN INVECTIVE, though, that political wit breeds its lushest foliage. A debating chamber is a forcing house for the vivid phrase. Old chestnuts abound in the history of English political cut-and-thrust, pre-eminent among them being that 18th-century classic in which Lord Sandwich, mulling over his put-down for John Wilkes, said, "Pon my honour, Wilkes, I don't know whether you'll die on the gallows or of the pox." "That must depend, my lord," Wilkes replied, "upon whether I embrace your lordship's principles, or your lordship's mistress."

In comparing a great man to a minnow, Canning coined another famous phrase, "Pitt is to Addington as London is to Paddington." Five years earlier, Shelley dismissed Canning's rival, Castlereagh, after the Peterloo massacre of 1819, "I met murder on the way! He had a mask like Castlereagh."

Lady Astor excited Winston Churchill to one unconquerable chestnut:

Lady Astor: "If you were my husband, I should flavour your coffee with poison."

Churchill: "Madam, if you were my wife, I should drink it."

(Dirtier, later and less funny is the comment of the Labour MP, Jack Jones, on one of Lady Astor's passionate temperance speeches. She had taken in Jones's fat physique and made several references to 'beer bellies'. Jones rose at the end to say, "I will tell the noble and honourable lady that I will lay my stomach against hers any day.")

Another Churchillian target was Sir Stafford Cripps: "There but for the grace of God, goes God." And God came into his estimate of the chances of getting through the Yalta Conference in five or six days: "I do not see any other way of realising our hopes about a world organisation in five or six days," he cautioned the optimistic Roosevelt. "Even the Almighty took seven."

There are degrees of invective, to be sure. Recent classic examples are much more savage. Also in 1963 Jeremy Thorpe's verdict on Harold Macmillan's night of the long knives – "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his friends for his life" – is surely destined for a classic career. Macmillan himself could coin a dismissive phrase. Of Aneurin Bevan he said, "He enjoys prophesying the imminent downfall of the capitalist system and is prepared to play a part, any part, in its burial, except that of mute." In 1956, during the Suez crisis, Aneurin Bevan was questioning the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, but stopped when he saw the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, enter the Chamber. "Why," he continued, "should I question the monkey when I can question the organ-grinder?" (Presumably the organ-grinder had come straight from his drawing-room through which, as his wife sadly but wittily said, 'it seemed as if the Suez Canal was running'.)

Across the Atlantic, John Foster Dulles was not faring much better at the hands of his critics: "A diplomatic bird of prey smelling out from afar the corpses of dead ideals," said James Cameron; while Adlai Stevenson reckoned he was an expert on 'the positive power of brinking'. (Neither remark, perhaps, was *quite* as vicious as Sam Houston of Tennessee in the 19th century on Thomas Jefferson Green: "He has all the characteristics of a dog except loyalty.")

SOME POLITICIANS automatically attract abuse because they are too ineffectual, too shifty, too unlucky, too mediocre or too sanctimonious. Winston Churchill said of Stanley Baldwin, "He occasionally stumbled on the truth, but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened," and said on Baldwin's retirement, ". . .Not

dead. But the candle in that great turnip has gone out." Lord Curzon dismissed Baldwin as being 'not even a public figure'; while the pseudonymous Kensal Green wrote in *Premature Epitaphs:* "His fame endures; we shall not forget/The name of Baldwin until we're out of debt."

Harold Wilson was usually assailed for his sharpness – on TW3 David Frost compared him and Sir Alec Douglas Home: 'Dull Alec versus smart Alec'. Duncan Sandys was Minister of Defence and it was at him that Wilson pointed as he said, "We all know why Blue Streak was kept on although it was an obvious failure. It was to save the Minister of Defence's face. We are, in fact, looking at the most expensive face in history. Helen of Troy's face, it is true, may only have launched 1,000 ships, but at least they were operational." (Helen of Troy had been used before in the House of Commons when Florence Horsburgh, Minister of Education, was accused of being 'the face that lost a 1,000 scholarships'.) Wilson's open admiration for Harold Macmillan's style was saved for Macmillan's retirement. Earlier he had given currency to 'Mac the Knife' as a nickname and borrowed Disraeli's attack on Lord Liverpool: "The archmediocrity who presided, rather than ruled, over a Cabinet of mediocrities. . .not a statesman, a statemonger, peremptory in little questions, the great ones he left open." Harold Wilson's own favourite example of political invective is reported to be John Burns's dismissal of Joseph Chamberlain: "To have betrayed two leaders – to have wrecked two historic parties – reveals a depth of infamy never previously reached, compared with which the Thugs of India are faithful friends and Judas Iscariot is entitled to a crown of glory."

CHURCHILL'S put-downs of Attlee were legendary and always good for a laugh at the right club: "A modest little man with much to be modest about." "An empty taxi arrived and Mr Attlee got out."

In more recent years, the journalist Hugo Young found James Callaghan 'living proof that the short-term schemer and the frustrated bully can be made manifest in one man'. While in Australia, Gough Whitlam's politicking was neatly encapsulated by a local politician, Barry Jones, who said, with uncharacteristic Australian understatement, "He is not well suited to the small-scale plot."

The mediocre certainly get short shrift in politics, and often the modest and unassuming are mistaken for the ineffectual. Churchill delighted in building the myth of Attlee as a nonentity. His phrase, 'a sheep in sheep's clothing' – sometimes surely misquoted as 'a sheep in wolf's clothing' – quickly gained currency while "An empty taxi arrived and Mr Attlee got out" was usually attributed to Churchill and was always good for a laugh in the right club. There was also, "A modest little man with much to be modest about." Attlee seems invariably to have been unmoved. On one occasion his simple retort to a Churchill broadside was, "I must remind the Right Honourable Gentleman that a monologue is not a decision." Of Kenneth Harris's biography of Attlee in 1982, John Vincent was to write, "The result is a well-proportioned portrait of an annoyingly uninteresting paragon. Blamelessness runs riot through 600 pages." Attlee's own epitaph on himself was terse and neat: "Few thought he was even a starter/There were many who thought themselves smarter./But he ended PM, CH and OM./An Earl and a Knight of the Garter."

MEDIOCRITY HAS THIS HAPPY KNACK of bringing out wit in those confronted by it. President Warren G Harding was 'not a bad man, just a slob', according to Alice Roosevelt Longworth. But H L Mencken's verdict was much more considered: "He writes the worst English that I have ever encountered. It reminds me of a string of wet sponges; it reminds me of tattered washing on the line; it reminds me of stale bean soup, of college yells, of dogs barking through endless nights. It is so bad that a sort of grandeur creeps into it. It drags itself out of the dark abysm of pish, and crawls insanely up the topmost pinnacle of tosh. It is rumble and bumble. It is flap and doodle. It is balder and dash."

Ramsay Macdonald drew dismissive epithets from Churchill's tag, 'The Boneless Wonder', inspired by a boyhood visit to the circus, through to Lloyd George's pot-calling-the-kettle-black–"He has sufficient conscience to bother him, but not enough to keep him straight" – back to Churchill again, after a string of defeats which still left Ramsay Macdonald in power, who said, "He is the greatest living master of falling without hurting himself."

Calvin Coolidge is another American president whose mediocrity made him a target. Walter Lippman's comment was formal and considered: "Mr Coolidge's genius for inactivity is developed to a very high point. It is far from being an indolent inactivity. It is a grim, determined, alert inactivity which keeps Mr Coolidge occupied constantly . . . Inactivity is a political philosophy and a party programme with Mr Coolidge." Alice Roosevelt Longworth, as usual, shot straight from the lip: "Though I yield to no one in my admiration for Mr Coolidge, I do wish he did not look as if he had been weaned on a pickle." (Alice Roosevelt Longworth's best put-down was, perhaps, her rebuke to Senator Joseph McCarthy: "The policeman and the trashman may call me Alice. You cannot.") The Coolidge chestnut, of course, variously attributed to Wilson Mizner and Dorothy Parker, when one or the other heard he had died, is, "How do they know?"

In recent years, Gerald Ford has been the undisputed champion butt. Here again the chestnuts ripened early for the accident-prone President: "Jerry's the only man I ever knew who couldn't walk and chew gum at the same

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time," said Lyndon Johnson; and on another occasion, "Jerry Ford is a nice guy, but he played too much football with his helmet off." The New York politician, Bella Abzug, neatly tarred Nixon and Ford in one phrase: "Richard Nixon impeached himself. He gave us Gerald Ford as his revenge." But the amiable Ford, or one of his writers, hit back: "Ronald Reagan doesn't dye his hair," he said in 1974. "He's just prematurely orange" – a complement to Gore Vidal's description of Reagan as 'a triumph of the embalmer's art'. Ford's verdict on Nixon in 1974 was, I am sure, unconscious humour: "President Nixon," he intoned, "represents a cross-section of American ethics and morality."

Like the mediocre politician, the holier-than-thou politician quickly breeds in his opponents an instinct for the jugular. "I don't object to Gladstone always having the ace of trumps up his sleeve," spluttered Labouchère, "but merely to his belief that God Almighty put it there." Holier-than-thou carries its own booby traps. How quickly a chestnut loses its conquering power. Once 'The Church of England was the Tory Party at prayer'; not in the '80s after the Falklands Thanksgiving Service, the revised National Anthem and the Church report on Nuclear Disarmament.

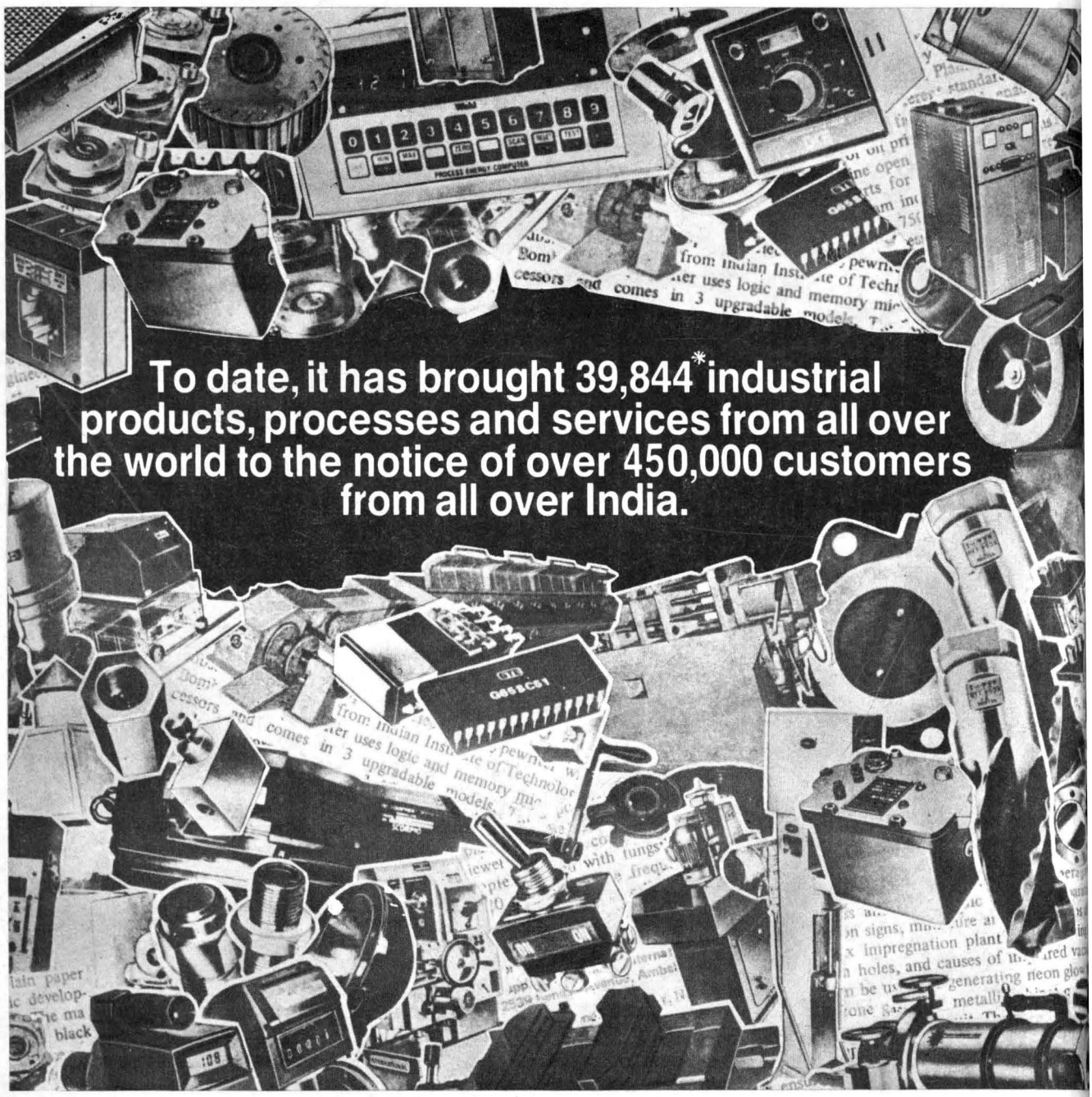
LYNDON JOHNSON said of Ford that he was a nice guy but he'd played too much football with his helmet off. And Bella Abzug added: "Nixon impeached himself. He gave us Gerald Ford as his revenge."

Eugene McCarthy, one of Jimmy Carter's opponents in the 1976 campaign for the democratic nomination, had two bites at the vein: "I would not want Jimmy Carter and his men put in charge of snake control in Ireland," and "Jimmy Carter has the potential and proclivity of a despot." Carter came to the presidency as an obscure Georgia politician whose heart appeared to be in the right place. His emphasis on human rights, nuclear arms control, world peace, honesty and a more humble Oval Office was immediately popular. Before long 'humble' became Uriah Heepian and Carter began to show that 'he knew a lot about how to get there, but not much about why he wanted to, or what to do when he did'. "I have seen Mr Carter's future," Barry Goldwater prophesied. "It is Lyndon Johnson's past." "We're realists," said the trade union leader, Lane Kirkland. "It doesn't make much difference between Ford and Carter. Carter is your typical smiling, brilliant, backstabbing, bull-shitting, Southern nut cutter."

Woodrow Wilson had the aura of sanctity. Lloyd George referred with despair to his position at the negotiating table with Wilson and Clemenceau: 'Well, it was the best I could do, seated as I was between Jesus Christ and Napoleon." J M Keynes also had a disrespectful view of Wilson: "Like Odysseus, he looked wiser seated." And Clemenceau, not to be left out, said, "Mr Wilson bores me with his Fourteen Points. Why, God Almighty has only ten."

IN A COUNTRY full of people as proud of their identity as the Americans, folksy parables have had a potent appeal. Lincoln told so many stories that not only did nuns (as well as cartoonists) complain of his lack of seriousness, but he was credited with innumerable jokes which were not his – just as Coward, Wilde, Shaw and others have been since. Long before *The Wit And Wisdom Of Prince Philip*, and similar collections, America was peddling *Old Abe's Jokes* or *Wit At The White House*. Unofficially he was 'the American Aesop'. Lincoln was also a tireless re-treader of old tales to run the road in his latest campaigns. Caught in debate by a hell-fire opponent who asked everyone to rise who would follow him, give their hearts to God and go to heaven, and then observed Lincoln sitting alone and asked where he was going, Lincoln was quiet, brief and reasonable: "I am going to Congress," he said, which is where he went. His speech-making stock-in-trade was sows and pigs and $ 10 a day and two stacks of hay, travelling preachers and Mississippi steamboats, chin-flies and whisky. Early in his career he was worsted by Senator Douglas who recalled his first speech in the Illinois Legislature, during which Lincoln said three times, 'I conceive. . .' and got no further. "Mr Speaker," Douglas pointed out, "the Honourable Gentleman has conceived three times and brought forth nothing." Lincoln got his own back some years after when Douglas referred to Lincoln's store-keeping days. Lincoln had sold Douglas whisky, and was not above a low blow: "Many a time have I stood on one side of the counter and sold whisky to Mr Douglas, but the difference between us now is this. I have left my side of the counter, but Mr Douglas" (whose fondness for drink was well-known) "still sticks to his as tenaciously as ever."Even sharper was his response to a judgement on another public figure. "It may be doubted," pontificated the proposer, "whether any man of our generation has plunged more deeply into the sacred fount of learning." "Or come up drier," added Lincoln.

Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky once interrupted a long, dull speech by an American General who turned on him to say, "You, sir, speak for the present generation; but I speak for posterity." "Yes," said Clay, "and you seem resolved to speak until the arrival of your audience." Clay clashed with John Randolph of Roanoake on occasion. A story, perhaps apocryphal, commemorates their encounter on a narrow pavement – mud seeped all around. "I, sir," said Clay, loftily, "do not step aside for a scoundrel." Randolph took his cue and stepped straight into the mud, saying, "On the other hand, I always do." It is fair to say that partisans of Clay and Randolph claim the last word for their champion and award the feed line to the man for whom they have less sympathy. ♦



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FICTION

The Library Girl.

By Vishwapriya L Iyengar

TRIPPING ON THE TORN SEAM of her *ghagra* she ran quickly through narrow paths that turned into corners every few steps. Quickly, before the corrugated ripples came down and the eye shut. "The eye of the *basti*," Talat thought fancifully. A sore or a showpiece, but eye? Ridiculous. The library was the most incongruous place in the *basti.*

The *basti* was many centuries old and the grave of an honoured poet and a famous saint gave it a historical authenticity. No, they would rather the eye was in the tomb.

Asad Baba removed the tin tray from the oven. The soft smell of freshly baked rusks spilt out into the open road. *Va'al-e-qum*, Baba. Asad Baba shook his head: No, not even the rusks would tempt Talat to pause for a conversation. The fire in his oven and the hot tray – black with years of baking – made him feel lonely. . . He would have liked to share the evening batch. Zahir and Ali called Talat the 'library girl' as did many others in the *basti.* They flocked to secret corners watching her go and return.

"Quickly, quickly, before the library closes and my book is lost in. . ." *Va'al-e-qum,* Baba. *Va'al-e-qum,* Baji. *Va'al-e-qum,* little brother. *Va'al-e-qum,* little goat. Tomorrow they will dress you in chillies. A tiny rat lay dead on the circular iron lid of the sewer. The powerful smack of a broom. Talat laughed. *Va'al-e-qum,* pest.

Aziza Baji was not just a librarian, thought Talat, she was a social worker. She was important. But what she liked best about Aziza Baji was that she never smelt of cooked food. The library was like a palace with so many beautiful books. She liked to sit on the cold white steel chairs and open the pages. She liked to become a tiny ant that moved between the letters of the words.

Karim Baba sat in his closet-like shop surrounded by a dozen century-old clocks encased in rosewood coffins. Only one worked but it did not have an enamel dial. On his white paper disc it was a quarter to six. His hands had shaken when he had written 'Made in England'. He could sell it for Rs 200 if the paper disc was not discovered. *Va'al-e-qum,* Baba. *Va'al-e-qum, beti.* His temples throbbed against the stiff skull-cap. She ran like a bolt of sunshine, 'little library girl' with her book clutched to her tiny bosom. He watched her disappear around the corner with

Vishwapriya Iyengar is a freelance journalist based in Delhi.

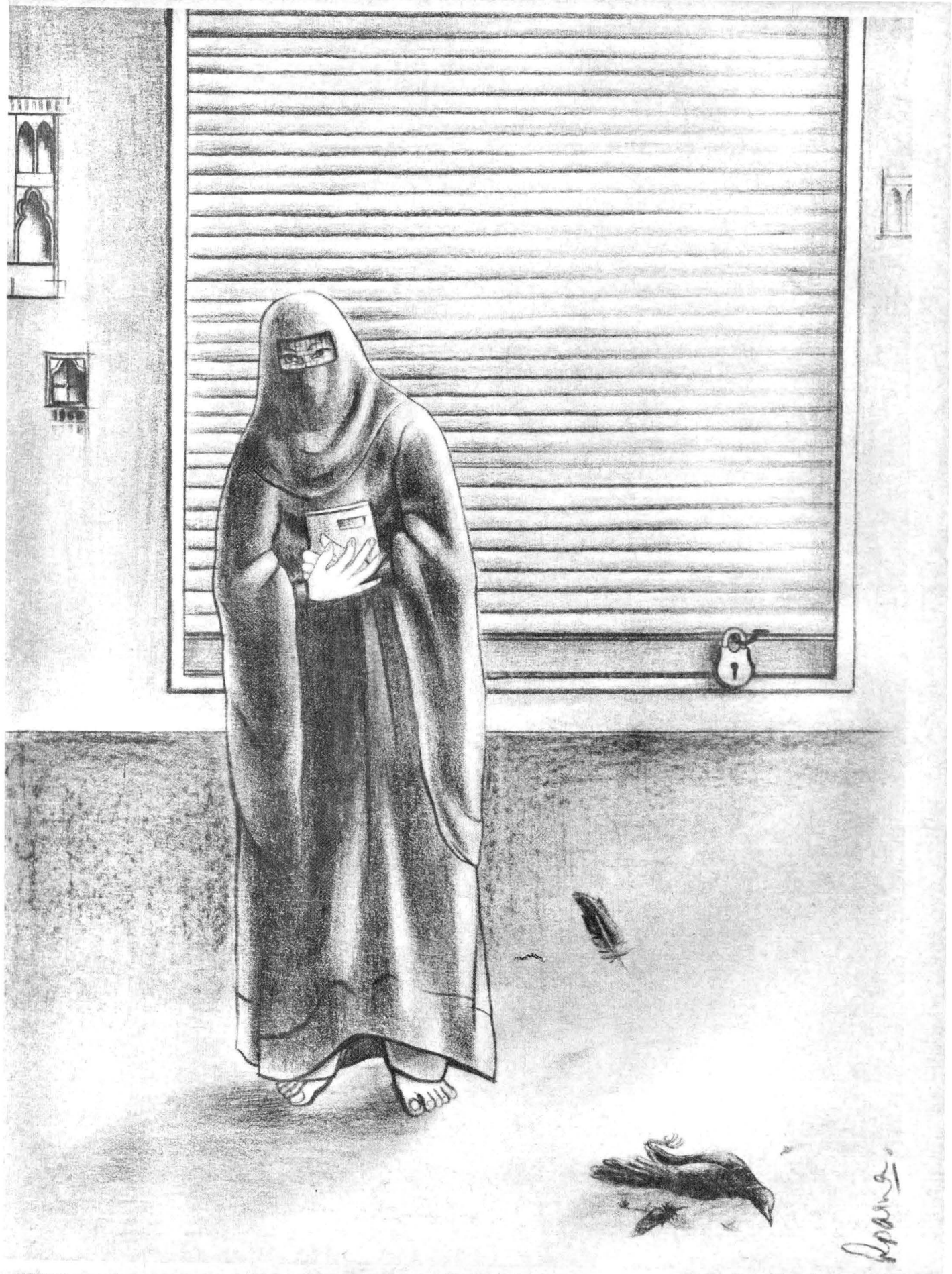


ILLUSTRATION BY APARNA SINGH

immense sadness: some buds would never blossom in this *basti*. Eventually there was never enough sunshine and the soil was too old. She would have reached the library now. He closed the door and fixed the padlock. He pressed the cold, tarnished brass key to his lips and put it in his pocket.

Talat was 16 or 17 years old, she did not know for sure. When she was younger, she used to go to school and then one day it had stopped abruptly. Maybe father had quarrelled with mother about money for school fees or mother had quarrelled with the school teachers about money, she did not know for sure.

But only two days after she had left school, Ammi had taken her to the bazaar in a cycle-rickshaw with the promise of a wonderful expedition. Ammi wanted yellow satin, the colour of the noonday sun. The shopkeepers had laughed at this ghost-woman in a *burkha* who spoke so intensely about yellow. But they had found the exact shade that Ammi sought and along with it they had bought silver star-shaped sequins. Sun and stars, thought Talat, feeling a mixture of exhilaration and despondence as she sat watching an azure twilight and listened to the cycle bells of the rickshaws.

For many days Talat prayed desperately for a wedding in the family that she could wear her new *ghagra*; but there had been none.

Ammi sat up all night sewing the *ghagra-kameez* for Talat. The kerosene lamp had become black and smoky but Ammijaan had sewed like a possessed woman. Towards dawn she began fixing the stars and Talat fell asleep reciting her numbers. It did not matter if she awoke late for there would be no school for her the next morning.

Another day she had heard Ammi and Abba quarrelling bitterly and it had frightened her. Ammi was asking how, if there was money for Tahir's education, there was none for Talat's. Her father had laughed and then shouted. She stood at the edge of the ditch outside their house and overheard: "Buy her silk, satin, velvet, silver – but, fool woman, don't compare her with Tahir." Even now when she remembered the low, husky voice of her father droning those words, Talat shuddered. When he left the house she had slipped in with the shadows.

Ammijaan's eyes were red and her face covered with tears. Her hands were shaking as she slashed the meat with her long iron knife. *Keema*, thought Talat, will she put peas in it? Ammi had screamed when she saw Talat creeping in: "Go wear your new *ghagra* and go out and play." Talat felt bewildered; she wanted to ask, "When will the *keema* be ready?" She had worn the *ghagra-kameez* and stood a long time before the mirror. She could see Ammi in the kitchen and knew that Ammi too could see her. Her long, thick fingers were a little blood-stained and she stroked her cheeks. Mother and child gazed at each other through the mirror. But her mother had frightened her. Her eyes were like crows trapped in the cage of her face.

Talat had gone out to play. In the giant-wheel of mirth she had forgotten what she had played and where. But someone had been jealous of her yellow satin suit because many sequins had been torn and ugly hand prints of grease had been smudged on it instead.

She did not know why, but whenever she thought about school, there came before her a picture of her grease-stained suit.

The library was opposite a hide shop. Hides hung in neat rows from the beams. Brown, dry hides in the exact shape of a goat. The neck and four legs all sewed up. They made good water-bags. But the library had a curtain that was always drawn. It was the only place in the *basti* that did not have to exhibit its wares. A red curtain like the skirt of Anarkali.

Talat parted the curtain with restrained excitement: "*Salaam al-e-qum*, Aziza Baji," and smiled in triumph. She looked shyly at Aziza and then went to the book-shelf. Her arms filled with books, she sat down on the steel chair. There were pictures in the library that she loved to see: aeroplanes, trucks and women working in the fields. The walls in her home were bare. But there were many marks on the walls and when Ammi's lamp moved its flames to the wind's music, these marks would become pictures, but she did not like the story they told.

Today, she read a story about a dancer who tried to escape death. She asked death to dance in her shadow and sang to the sun, asking him to kill all shadows. But the sun told her, "How can I kill death if there is no death?" Then the dancer told the sun to create night and the sun agreed. In the night the dancer lost her shadow and danced forever. The attenuated cries of 'Allah *ho* Akbar' froze her fantasy. The tick of the library clock became the pricking of a sewing needle upon her flesh. Abba would soon be returning from the Azan and it was time for her to be back. Tomorrow Aziza Baji would give her a book about a famous doctor who had helped the poor people of China. Aziza Baji had told Talat many stories about this man. Talat liked to read about people who could change things that appeared unchangeable. "Until tomorrow, *khuda hafiz*." Talat ran through the narrow road that twisted and slipped into a darkness called home. The book about the dancer was well hidden in the folds of her *kameez*. Little lights burned on the road as the library girl returned. Old eyes, young eyes, men and women's eyes: in curiosity, in envy and in desire these lights burnt, unseen by the library girl who ran in trepidation as the name of Allah rose and fell on the ear-caves of a bleak evening.

And then it was a month of festivities. Fragrant vapours escaped from checkered pores of jute curtains. Women bought with gusto and men belched with satisfaction.

Talat sat on a low divan, her arms propped against a velvet blue bolster and she read about the doctor in China. The velvet too, smelt of curry and her fingers curled around the fabric with hesitant sensuality.

They heard the crunch of gravel beneath thick boat-like leather soles and the rubbing of the soles on a mat. Ammi wiped the moisture from her upper lip with a cloth kept for clean-

ing the kitchen. Abba lifted the curtain and stepped in. Above the doorway was some ornate Persian lettering, in praise of God, Talat presumed. She did not understand Persian. Abba had a bulky brown-paper packet underneath his black coat. Today he had been to Jamma Masjid and he must have shopped. Talat gave him a glass of sweetened water. Rose petals floated in the water. He stared at the child with mocking seriousness. His dark, sensuous lips pursed in a taut smile. He drank hastily and little droplets clung to the hair of his beard. Talat gave him a towel but he did not wipe the water away. Instead, he sat down on the divan, exactly on the spot where she had hidden her book. It was safe underneath the mattress but she was still afraid. "It's Persian," he said, pointing at the mysterious package with a dark, dry finger with a long nail. "Open it, it is a gift for you, child."

Ammi watched through the mirror. Grandmother, who was crocheting a white skull-cap on her knee, jutted out her neck and Talat delicately eased the jute twine out. She put her hands into the paper packet and shuddered with delight: "Ooh, it's as soft as a new-born kitten." "It's Persian," her father repeated. He would never say 'Iran'. She pulled out a long black cloth of silk. It slipped from her hands and fell. A black cat slept on the grey cement floor. Grandmother's old fingers knotted the white thread. Ammi rubbed rock-salt on the goat's leg.

Talat picked up the black fabric and she exclaimed with delight: "Why! It is the most perfect *burkha* ever!" She lifted it up against herself for all to see. The face mask was a fine net mesh. "See," the child cried out to her mother, "the net is as fine as the lattice-work in Fatehpur Sikri." Her mother rubbed salt into the goat's breast and did not know if glass crystals were not being rubbed into her own. The old woman dropped her eyes onto a crocheted flower.

Only her father's eyes shone with pride and pleasure. Talat wore the *burkha* for him and smiled. She turned to the mirror. A wooden eagle held the mirror between its claws. Talat laughed. Ammi took out her long black iron knife and began to rub salt into the rusted spots on the tip. She saw her beautiful sun and star child become night in the mirror. In haste she cut the meat that had not yet softened, in haste she cut her thumb.

Talat saw her veiled face in the mirror and felt afraid. She had also seen her mother's face. In the cage the crows had died. "I have business to attend to," her father said and left. The old woman let out a scream of exasperation. The skull-cap had disintegrated into an entangled confusion of knots. Grandmother slapped Tahir hard on his cheeks. He distracted her, she said, asking for star-sweets. There was a mark of her bony fingers on his plump red cheeks. Tahir ran out crying in disconsolate sobs.

Still wearing her Persian *burkha* Talat took her book from under the mattress and ran behind Tahir. She lost him around a corner and when she found him he was with a group of boys. In his hands he held a stick like a gun and was pointing at a horse: bang . . . bang . . . boom. Talat smiled at him. Play with sticks, little brother, but I will cut the meat.

Talat ran quickly, quickly, before the library closed. *Va'al-e-qum,* Baba. *Va'al-e-qum,* Baji. Now she would go to the library and exchange her book. Aziza Baji had promised her a truly wonderful book. *Va'al-e-qum,* little sister. She ran trailing her black Persian robe down the dirty streets. Today she would pause and speak, she thought, as she gathered up her robe. Asad Baba was putting a tray of buns into the oven. Talat smiled. *Va'al-e-qum,* Baba. He thought his old eyes were playing tricks on him and he burnt his fingers as he placed the tray a little too deep inside the oven. The library girl had not come today and he watched instead a *burkha*-ed woman turn the corner. In the little attic room above the bakery, Ali and Zahir played chess. Between moves they glanced at the street through the little window. It was turning dark and the library girl had not come.

Inside the veil Talat felt sick and cold. Today no one had smiled back at her and no one had said her Persian robe was beautiful. Karim Baba stood outside his clock shop. He clutched the key in his pocket. He had waited a long time. He had wanted to tell Talat that he had sold the round clock with the paper dial for Rs 175. He would have liked to have given her a few rupees for an orange *dupatta* or, he smiled distractedly, for a book. Tomorrow would be too late, his begum would have appropriated the money. Why hadn't the child gone to the library? Had the bud already begun to wither?

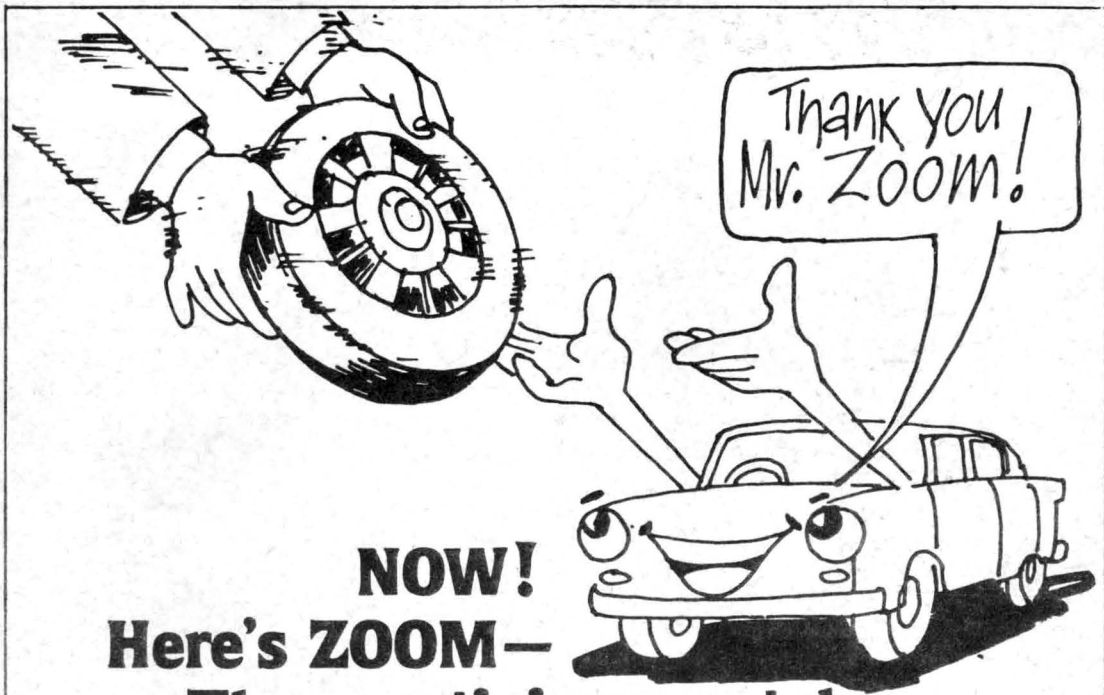
When Talat smiled at him through the black net he had turned his back. The mad dog or the enchanted child had not stalked the streets today.

Within the veil, a darkness had seized Talat. It had bandaged her mouth, her eyes, and sealed her voice. Today her smiles had lit nothing. Blank faces had become ash in her stare. She had wanted to . . . she had wanted to lift the veil and say, "Look . . . it's me. Only me in a Persian robe. It's a joke." But the robe had hands that clasped her mouth.

Quickly, quickly, before the library closes and the eye shuts forever. The eye was in the tomb and had shut a long time ago. Two more corners to turn and she would be there. That wonderful book. What was it about? She had already forgotten. One more corner and she heard the corrugated shutter being pulled down. The clink-clink-clink of Aziza Baji's glass bangles. Turquoise blue? She ran, shouting: "For the love of God wait for me. Do not close the library yet, give me my book." She ran tripping on her black robe.

She could not see the red curtains. Grey metal shone dully, very dully, in the moonlight. Aziza had seen a woman in a *burkha* waving her hands, falling down and weeping. The evening had stretched the emptiness taut and she was very exhausted. Aziza had to catch a bus, she lived a long way from the *basti*.

Talat cried and Talat screamed inside her black veil. But they did not hear or did not see. Long after the name of Allah had torn the evening into night she walked home slowly, very slowly. ♦



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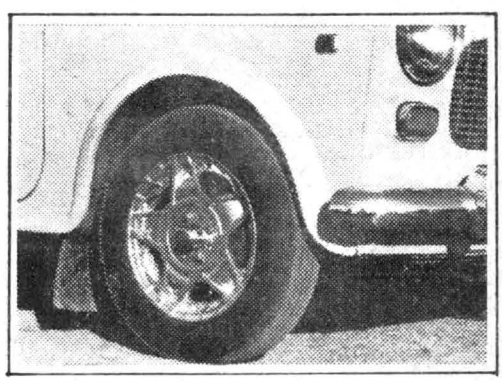

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WILLIAM GOLDMAN

How The Auteur Theory Destroyed Alfred Hitchcock And Other Musings

I REMEMBER the moment I was first told about the existence of the auteur theory. I listened and listened as the explanation went on, and all I could think was this: "What's the punch line?"

Briefly, the auteur theory came out of France, where a bunch of young, then would-be directors – Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, etc – promulgated the notion that the director was the *author* of the film. Andrew Sarris of *The Village Voice* is the leading spokesman for the auteurist view in America.

Maybe it's true in other places. Maybe Truffaut designs his own sets and possibly Fellini operates his own camera and conceivably Kurosawa edits every inch of the films he directs. They are all wonderfully talented men, and where the limits of their talents lie I have no way of knowing. In point of fact, I don't know *anything* about foreign film-making; nothing in this book is meant to cover their method of operation.

But I do know this: It sure as shit isn't true in Hollywood.

I have never met another fellow technician, not a single cinematographer or producer or editor, who believes it.

I haven't even met a *director* who believes it.

Godard, in a recent interview, said that the whole thing was patent bullshit from the beginning, an idea devised by the then young scufflers to draw some attention to themselves.

Well, then, if it's so untrue, why is the idea still around? Answer: the media. Every time a piece of criticism or interview refers to a movie as 'Francis Coppola's *One From The Heart*' or 'Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York*', the auteur notion is prolonged. And I suspect it's going to be with us for a while longer.

I have yet to meet a single cinematographer, editor or producer who believes that a director creates a film. I haven't even met a director who believes it.

The word 'author' has been defined as follows: 'the person who originates or gives existence to anything'.

The word 'auteur' has come to mean this: It is the director who *creates* the film. (None of any of this is meant in any way to denigrate directors, by the way. They serve an important function in the making of a film, and the best of them do it well.)

But creator?

Look at it logically. Studio executives are not stupid, and they are, believe it or not, aware of costs. If the director creates the film, why does a studio pay $ 3,000 a week for a top editor? Or 4,000 for an equivalent production designer? Or 10,000 plus a percentage of the profits to the finest cinematographers?

It's not because they're cute.

And it's not because they want to. They have to. Because that's how crucial top technicians are. Crucial and creative.

One example now, not because it's famous but because it's absolutely typical: This is the way things are. Peter Benchley reads an article in a newspaper about a fisherman who captures a 4,500-pound shark off the coast of Long Island and he thinks, "What if the shark became territorial, what if it wouldn't go away?" And eventually he writes a novel on that notion and Zanuck-Brown buy the movie rights, and Benchley and Carl Gottlieb write a screenplay, and Bill Butler is hired to shoot the movie, and Joseph Alves, Jr, designs it, and Verna Fields is brought in to edit, and, maybe most importantly of all, Bob Mattey is brought out of retirement to make the monster. And John Williams composes perhaps his most memorable score.

How in the world is Steven Spielberg the 'author' of that? Why is it often referred to today as 'Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*'? Am I ever not knocking Spielberg: He did, for me, a world-class job of directing that wonderful shocker.

But there's no author to that movie that I can see.

If I haven't mentioned Dreyfuss and Scheider and Shaw, it's not because they weren't crucial too. But there is a theory put forward by some (Gore Vidal for one) that the true influence of the director died with the coming of sound. In the silent days, Griffith could stand there and, with his actor's voice, he could talk to Lillian Gish or whoever and literally mould the performance with long, heated verbal instructions while the camera was rolling.

Not any more. Now the director must stand helpless alongside the crew and watch the actors work at their craft. Sure, he can do retakes,

William Goldman is an Oscar-winning scriptwriter and the author of the highly acclaimed novel, The Colour Of Light.

ILLUSTRATION BY APARNA SINGH

The auteur critics elevated Hitchcock in their writings. Any Hitchcock movie, even shit Hitchcock, was terrific. *Marnie, Torn Curtain, Topaz, Frenzy, Family Plot* — all awful films — got great reviews. And ultimately they ruined him.

he can talk to them before, but once the shooting starts, he can't move up and verbally be Svengali.

So why does much of the media continue with the notion that the maker of the film is the director? Among lots of reasons, here are a few.

It's convenient. If you want to talk about *Jaws,* you can't mention all the technicians I named earlier. So shorthand is one reason.

Another is that most people who write about movies don't know much about the actual problems of making one. (No reason they should. Our job is to make movies, their job is to write or talk about them.)

Still another is that even if you're involved with the making of a film, it's damn near impossible to say who is responsible for what.

And don't forget publicity – they don't send production designers out on hype tours. It's the star or the director. So when the star says, "I made up my part" or the director explains that he had this vision and *voilà*, it's now up there on the screen for you all to see and admire, that's what gets reported.

As I've said before – and please believe me, it's true (and if you don't believe me, ask anybody in the business for verification) – movies are a group endeavour. Basically, there are seven of us who are crucial to a film, and we all seven have to be at our best if the movie's going to have a shot at quality. Listed alphabetically: actor, cameraman, director, editor, producer, production designer and writer.

In addition, there are times (*Chariots Of Fire*) when the composer is as important as any element. But that varies. I think what made *The Exorcist* work was the remarkable make-up that Dick Smith created for the girl. Truly dazzling special effects are not easy to bring off, and sometimes that department makes the movie wonderful.

To elevate any single element in a film is simply silly and wrong. We all contribute, we are all at each other's mercy. To say that anyone is the 'author' of a film is demeaning to the rest of us.

Besides it's being false, that's another of my chief quibbles with the auteur theory: it's demeaning.

I also think that it's dangerous.

Dangerous to whom?

To the director.

I believe that the auteur theory was responsible, just to take one example, for the collapse of the career of one of my favourite directors: Alfred Hitchcock. (You may not have known that there was a collapse, not from his reviews. But after *Psycho,* in 1960, oh, what a fall was there.) Let me spend the next few pages trying to explain what I mean.

As noted, the notion began in France around 1954, and for a while it attracted all the seriousness of the annual meeting of the Flat Earth Society. But Truffaut and his peers were bright and gifted and energetic; they kept plugging away.

One of the things they had to do, since they were advancing a new theory, was to come up with new heroes – heretofore critically ignored directors who had, in their minds, 'a personal vision'.

Hitchcock, from 1954-60, was on a truly wondrous streak: glorious entertainments. *Rear Window, To Catch A Thief, The Man Who Knew Too Much, North By Northwest*, and *Psycho*, among others.

Because of his skill and his TV programme and his wizardry at personal publicity, Hitchcock became, along with Cecil B De Mille, one of the two most famous directors in the business. In other words, a star.

But not taken very seriously.

He won some Oscar nominations, but never the Best Director award. He was a great moulder of sophisticated thrillers. But not Important.

Just what the auteurists were looking for. Famous but ignored critically. With a personal vision. Perfect.

What they did in their writings was to elevate him. Let's say he was Ian Fleming before they began. Well, they didn't say he was John le Carré, they made him Graham Greene.

Ernest Lehman has been quoted in a recent interview on the subject of *Family Plot,* a 1974 film he made with Hitchcock:

"By mistake a propman had two pieces of wood set up so that they looked vaguely like a cross, and the car goes downhill and crashes through a field, goes through a fence and knocks over the cross. Some learned New York critic commented: 'There's Alfred Hitchcock's anti-Catholicism coming out again.' When I was at the Cannes Film Festival with *Family Plot,* Karen Black, Bruce Dern and I attended a press conference, and some French journalist had the symbolism in the licence plate all worked out: 885 DJU. He had some elaborate explanation for those numbers. When he got through explaining it, I said, 'I hate to tell you this but the reason I used that licence plate number was

that it used to be my own, and I felt it would be legally safe to use.' So much for symbolism."

The sudden fire-storm of *serious* criticism concerning Hitchcock continued, reaching these shores shortly after the release of *Psycho.* I suppose it continues to this day, although for me it peaked in the mid-'60s with the publication of one of the genuinely ego-ridden books of the post-war world, the Truffaut/Hitchcock interview. It purports to talk about directing, but on every page the subtext tells us: "Aren't you fortunate that we're around to tell you these things?"

Anyway, Hitchcock was not unaffected by all this.

My God, who could be? I know if somebody came up to me and said, "Do you know who you really are, you're a modern Dostoevski," I would send him straight to Bellevue. But if people kept coming and coming, bright and serious young critics, and they said, again and again, "Only you, Bill, only you and Fedor really understood the anguish of religious mysticism, look at the number of Christ figures in your novels, count the crosses referred to in *Tinsel,* the torture in *Marathon Man* is only a thinly disguised reference to the blood of Jesus and the torture He suffered –" pretty soon I'd start thinking, "Ah, well, who am I to argue against so many brilliant scholars? They're right. Of course they're right. It's me and Dostoevski all the way."

Following *Psycho,* in 1963, came *The Birds.* Some nice shock effects, period. And from then on it really got bad – *Marnie, Torn Curtain, Topaz, Frenzy* – awful, awful films.

But they got great reviews from the auteur critics.

The reason is this. Once an auteurist surrenders himself to an idol, for reasons passing understanding, said auteurist flies in the face of one of life's basic truths: people can have good days, and people can have bad days.

Any movie by Chaplin, even shit Chaplin, is terrific. (I wish them all a very long life on a desert island with nothing but *The Countess From Hong Kong* for company.) Any John Ford, another of their favourites. And, of course, any Hitchcock.

I think the last two decades of Hitchcock's career were a great waste and sadness. He was technically as skilful as ever. But he had become encased in praise, inured to any criticism.

Hitchcock himself had become The Man Who Knew Too Much.

So yes, I think the auteur theory ruined him – or at least his belief in it. And I think that belief is dangerous to any director. I mentioned before that no director I ever met said out loud he believed in the auteur theory. But God knows what's silently eating away at them in the dark nights of their souls.

Is there, then, no American auteur director? Perhaps there is one. One man who thinks up his own stories and produces his pictures and directs them too. And also serves as his own cinematographer. Not to mention he also does his own editing. All of this connected with an intensely personal and unique vision of the world. That man is Russ Meyer.

I can't wait for Truffaut's book about *him.* ♦

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Bejan Daruwalla's Predictions

ARIES: March 21 to April 20: You will find yourself engaged in controversy, but you come out a winner, thanks to Mercury in your third angle of debate, logic and communication. Also, do look forward to a journey and an important contact this month, specially before the 25th. If appearing for a test or an interview, success is certainly yours. This is a good month for financial gain.

TAURUS: April 21 to May 21: Sun-Jupiter trine suggests buying, selling, renovation, decoration, investments and, maybe, a bargain. The focus is on financial transactions and business deals. Also, after the sixth, it will be possible to reach out to people because Venus transits your sign. This implies travel. You will indulge in drink and merry company.

GEMINI: May 22 to June 21: Mercury-Venus sextile gives you power and punch. A personal problem will be resolved and that's good news in any language. This is certainly a month for money and a time to buy, sell, invest and entertain. June signifies romance and ties, especially during the first 21 days. June, in short, is your month of power. Use it wisely.

CANCER: June 22 to July 22: Till June 13, expect introspection and expenses, as Mercury flits into your 12th sector. But from the 14th, and lasting well into the next month, you win plaudits and score over your rivals. Those in publishing, writing, teaching, astrology, research, travel and medicine, do exceptionally well. Your destiny this month includes a trip or an important link-up.

LEO: July 23 to August 23: Mercury-Saturn trine helps you to socialise, entertain and play the king to your heart's content. This also means that you will be at your best at clubs, institutions, functions and gatherings. A time to show the world your talent and creativity! In the last week your energy level will be a bit low. A deal comes through.

VIRGO: August 24 to September 23: The new Moon in your tenth angle slavedrives you and your colleagues. But the rewards will be ample. A position of responsibility and power will be thrust upon you. This is the month to make your presence felt. The pace will not slacken till the 23rd. After that, and the next month too, fun and games are predicted.

LIBRA: September 24 to October 23: The full. Moon on June 3 operates in your favour with respect to publicity, games of chance, journeys, ceremonies and inspirational moves. Your timing will be just right. Those in publicity, sales, teaching, writing, editing, music and dance, win both approval and recognition. A month to go places and get things done. This is not a time for procrastination.

SCORPIO: October 24 to November 22: Venus-Neptune trine indicates that the emphasis will be on journeys at short notice, especially after the eighth as Mars, your planetary ruler, changes signs. There is a focus on finance. The revival of old customs and traditions will be vital. You face health hazards and a feeling of unease in the first 21 days.

SAGITTARIUS: November 23 to December 21: Partnerships at all levels, from the strictly personal to the purely professional, are spotlighted. A journey with a stopover is fated. You will be recognised and rewarded this month. Paradoxically, the Sun's positioning in your seventh sector could lead to a legal battle. Expect new alliances at the cost of old ties.

CAPRICORN: December 22 to January 20: A slightly rough month as the Mars-Neptune opposition could spell trouble for you in terms of health and finance. Quite a few Capricornians will be in for a job-hop. The unemployed find work now, and that's the silver lining. This is a month when ties will be brittle and feelings get hurt. Be flexible and adaptable. It helps.

AQUARIUS: January 21 to February 18: Romance, courtship and the luck of the devil – that's the way it goes. June is the month for creative pursuits, hobbies, games of chance and sports. Your intuition will be your greatest asset. Rely upon it blindly. Besides, money should fly in through the window. In June and July a job-switch is on the cards.

PISCES: February 19 to March 20: Renovation, alteration and, perhaps, a major shift are your destiny. Health is suspect, but nothing very serious. Mercury and Mars conjunct on the 15th, and this helps you to project your image and carry out your plans. The fall-out will be felt next month. On June 21, the Sun changes signs, making for peace. ♦

Edited by Vir Sanghvi; published for Business Press Private Limited, Surya Mahal, 5 Burjorji Bharucha Marg, Bombay 400 023, by Deepak Sule and printed by him at Business Press Private Limited, care Usha Offset Printers Private Limited, Udyog Mandir Industrial Estate, 7a Pitamber Lane

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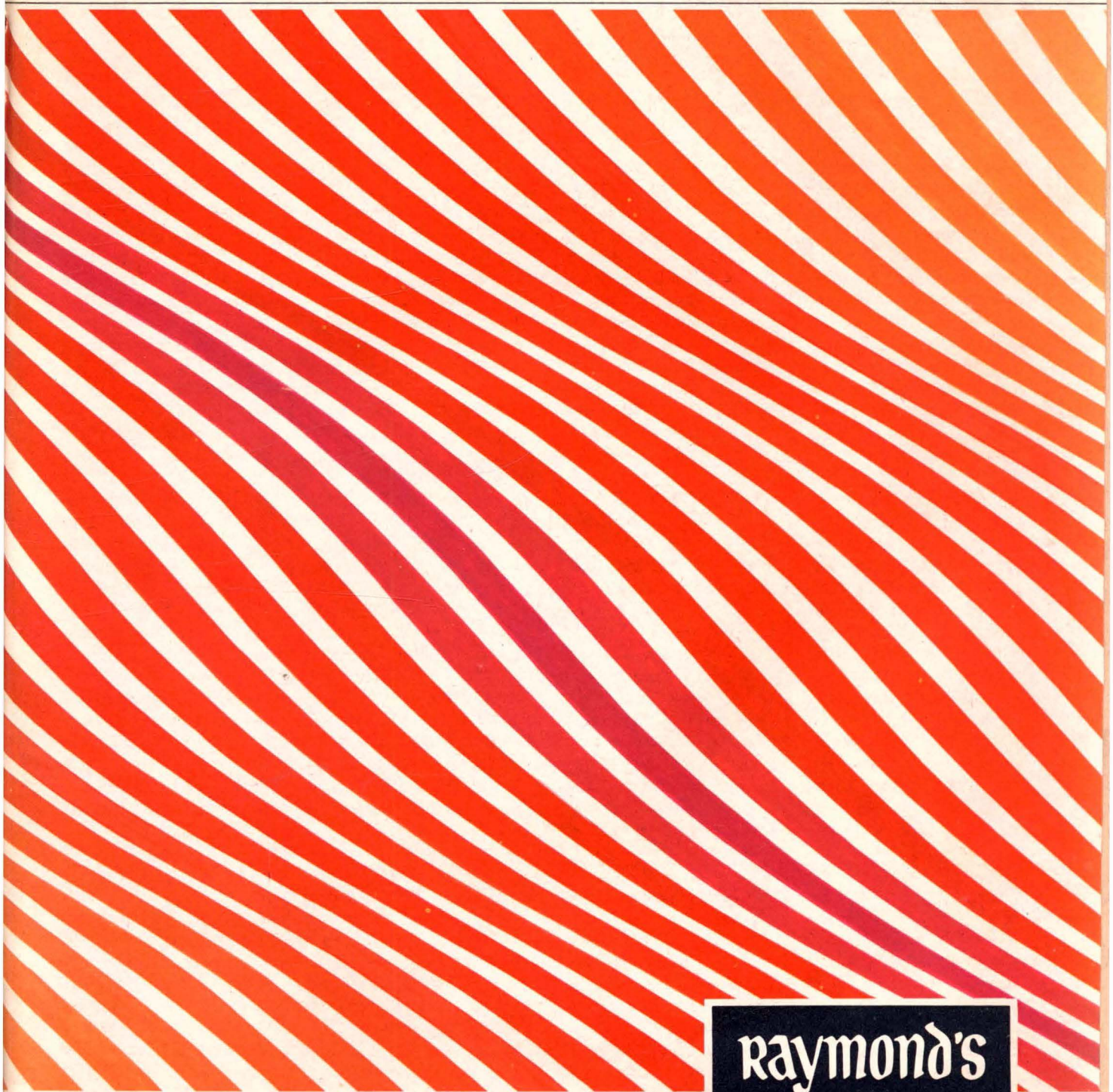

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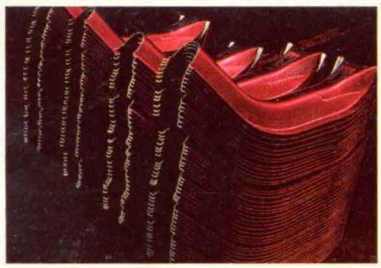
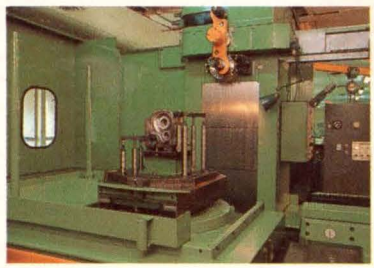
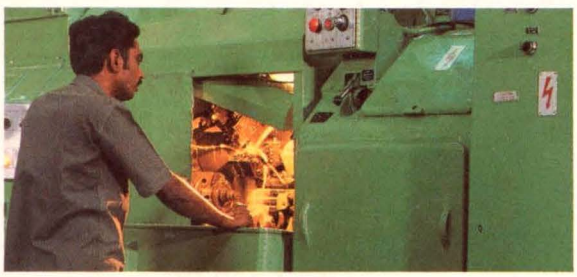
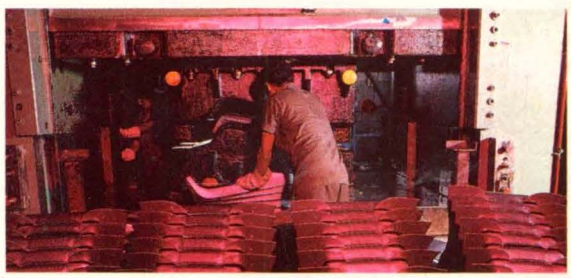
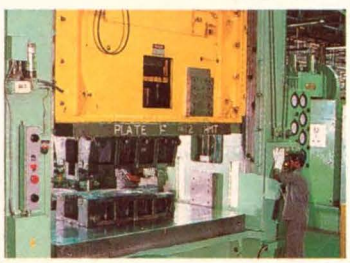
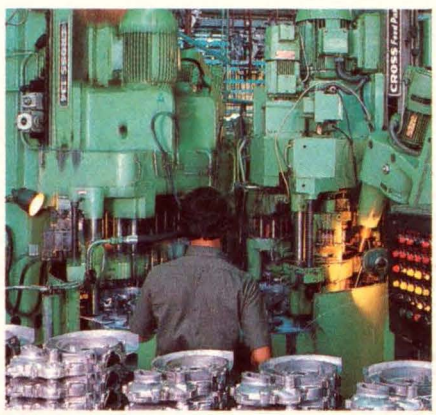


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