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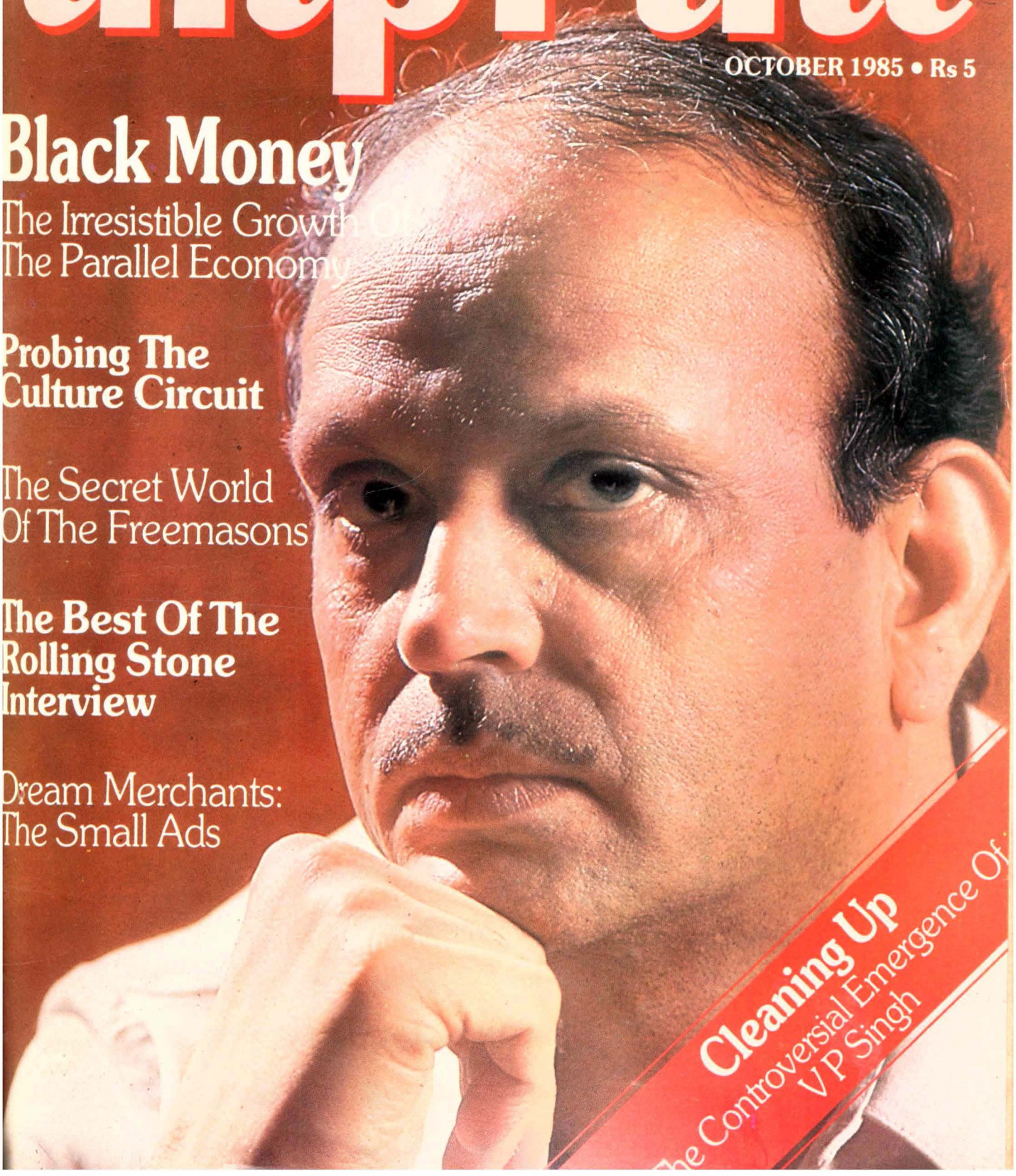
Black Money
The Irresistible Growth Of The Parallel Economy

Probing The Culture Circuit

The Secret World Of The Freemasons

The Best Of The Rolling Stone Interview

Dream Merchants: The Small Ads



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ON THE MARQUEE

THE SECURITY AND THE PERSONAL SAFETY OF MR RAJIV GANDHI, the Prime Minister, transcend departmental responsibility. Since the palpable threat to the life of the Prime Minister comes from within India, his safety is the responsibility of all Indians. Many Indians worry about this problem as if their own lives were in extreme danger, so deep is their concern. Yet, the sight of the Prime Minister of India, flanked by several commandos on either side, two with machine guns on the ready is unedifying. The machine-gun-toting commandos, in the security towers erected at the site of election meetings in the Punjab addressed by the Prime Minister, are a grotesque sight in a democratic country. And the cage-like podiums from which the Prime Minister addresses his meetings add nothing to the dignity of the office of the Prime Minister (although it is in his capacity as the President of the Congress-I that Mr Gandhi was electioneering). There can, of course, be no compromise where the security of the Prime Minister is concerned. But surely those around the Prime Minister can persuade him to avoid exposure if it has to be accompanied with such extreme security? And if such visits are unavoidable, then can his advisors not secure the co-operation of the media to desist from publishing or televising pictures of the Prime Minister in the undignified situations described above? And is there no one sensitive enough in the Prime Minister's Secretariat to put an end to the monotonous (and hence potently challenging to the mentally retarded) reference, in the national media to the *bullet-proof vest* of Mr Gandhi every time they attempt to describe his meetings and visits? How inane we are!

In a democracy, nobody gets into the seat of power unless he or she wants to. And in accepting a position of power, the office-holder also accepts the risks involved. The British royal family refused to leave London during the German blitz of World War II. Jawaharlal Nehru strode directly into frenzied mobs several times on different occasions. President Ronald Reagan of the United States of America has been shot at and severely wounded in 1981 while serving his first term. Yet, he campaigned for and won a second term for his presidency without turning Washington D.C. or the places he visits into fortresses. Mrs Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was sleeping in her bed in a hotel room in Brighton last October when a bomb badly injured her colleague Norman Tebbit and maimed his wife, severely damaging the hotel. Yet, she continues to often walk, accompanied by only an unobtrusive detective, to the nearby Parliament from her office and residence at 10 Downing Street in London. This lady is on the hit-list of the IRA. Any President of the United States is a target for the mentally disturbed as well. Mrs Indira Gandhi sacrificed her life before us all. The most powerful office in India has, now unfortunately, for the present at least, risks to life. Nobody can be more aware of this than the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi himself. Yet, we are confident, he would not like to set precedents where his passage through his own country becomes a military convoy or resembles the excursions of Baby Doc of Haiti. *Pucca* security is security least seen.

*

WE HAVE AN EXTRAORDINARY TRADITION OF BEING CERTAIN about what is uncertain. In upholding this tradition, the press vies with authority, no matter how off the mark authority may appear to be. It was thus that in the columns of the Indian press, New Delhi stood denuded of all its secrets in the aftermath of Kumar Narayan's shenanigans with South Block clerks. It was thus that in the Indian press, dollars 1,000 million (only the American dollar is spoken in our country) were lost to the Indian banks in London; did not CBI – the authority – give that f-a-n-t-a-s-t-i-c figure? Further upholding this tradition of being certain about what is uncertain, the authority has tilted in favour of the theory of sabotage in the heartrending crash of *Kanishka*, the Air-India Boeing 747 which took 329 lives to the bottom of the Atlantic off the coast of Ireland. The government has tilted – and we have accepted as fact what is merely a possibility, that a terrorist bomb destroyed the Boeing 747. Investigations which are in progress now may eventually confirm to our shame that it was indeed a bomb that killed 329 passengers and destroyed the Air-India plane.

But in the meantime, in interest of *Satyameva Jayate* and even more importantly, the return to normalcy in the Punjab, it is necessary we back, officially, with money if necessary, the IATA (among whose members 640 Boeing 747s are operated) call for faster progress in investigating the cause of the crash. "The current uncertainty must be cleared up urgently, if necessary by bringing up as much of the wreckage as possible from the seabed," an IATA statement pleads. The plane crashed on June 23, and the IATA statement was issued on September 16. In the name of our country and our honour, we ought to pursue this matter with speed.

R. V. Pandit

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Vol. XXV No 7 October 1985
A BUSINESS PRESS PUBLICATION

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MADRAS: K DEVARAJ: Business Press Private Limited, 332, Khaleel Shirazi Estate, 6th Floor, Pantheon Road, Egmore, Madras 600 008.
NEW DELHI: N DAS: K-3, DDA Flats, 1st Floor, Safdarjang Development Area 'C', Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110 016. TEL: 660136.

Cable: **IMPRINTMAG** in each city.

For Editorial And Accounts Correspondence: IMPRINT, Business Press Private Limited, Maker Tower 'E', 18th Floor, Cuffe Parade, Bombay 400 005. TEL: 212825/215056/211752.

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LETTERS

The Final Reel

The cover story, *The Final Reel* (August 1985), consummately summed up the deplorable state of the Bombay film industry, which is receding into oblivion these days. The films currently produced in India are deteriorating in terms of creativity and entertainment. Despite TV and video, the success of films like *Ardh Satya* and *Pyar Jhukta Nahin* demonstrate that good cinema will always be a crowd-puller.

The interview with Shabana Azmi made delightful reading. What can one say about an actress who is perfect in every sense? Indian cinema will miss a great actress if Shabana decides to bid adieu to films. The cover really knocked the breath out of me.

K Chidanand Kumar
Bangalore

Recalling The Emergency

In *Recalling The Emergency* (July 1985) Ramrao Adik is reported to have remarked: "What is wrong if fundamental rights are suspended? Who has conferred them? If they are conferred by the Constitution, they are subject to other provisions of the Constitution."

I am afraid Adik has got his assumption wrong. The Constitution has not 'conferred' these rights; it has only *recognised* and *guaranteed* them. Rights are 'fundamental' in the sense that they need not be conferred by anyone; everyone is born with them. This does not mean, however, that people are always free to exercise them.

One thing we can be sure of: the 1975 attempt to suspend fundamental rights was not the last in India.

Y D Altekar
Pune

Swamy: Bogus Claims?

Subramaniam Swamy's claims, in his article *Bogus Heroes?* (July 1985) are contrary to facts that I personally know of, having been in the midst of the anti-Emergency underground movement.

My association with the late Madhavrao Muley, the then General Secretary of the RSS, whom Swamy has mentioned with some respect, was old, and very close all through, even during the Emergency. To utilise Muley's name after his demise to eulogise himself and malign A B Vajpayee, though not very unlike Swamy, is most immoral.

Muley's relations with Vajpayee were close and of great mutual confidence. Vajpayee, during his internment in his house on medical grounds, was kept in constant touch with the movement. Swamy, at his own discretion or because of the apprehension of being detected and arrested, did not go to meet Vajpayee.

In the article, he has described himself as an Emergency hero. He came into prominence primarily because he had been smuggled abroad. Swamy's exit was planned and executed by RSS organisers in India and their contacts abroad.

I can say with full knowledge and confidence that Madhavrao Muley had never warned Swamy against Vajpayee as he has claimed in the article. Swamy has also said that his enthusiasm for the RSS died with the death of Madhavrao Muley. This is an indirect confession that he was not inspired by the cause but by the desire to get recognition in public.

I wish Swamy would be truthful even in his desperate attempt to keep himself alive in the press.

J P Mathur
New Delhi

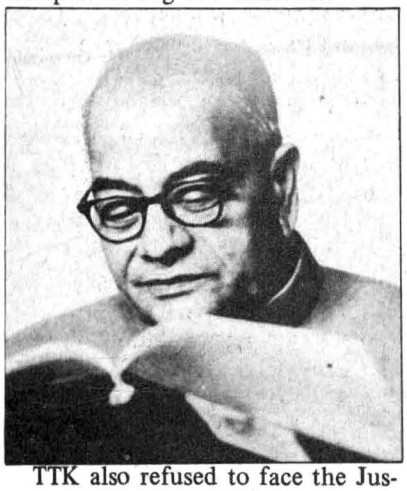
LETTERS

The Lies Of TTK

I was shocked by P Ramamurthy's letter entitled *In Defence Of TTK* (August 1985).

As one who has observed T T Krishnamachari from certain vantage points in New Delhi, Bombay and Washington, I know that TTK was guilty of several acts of corruption, revenge, dishonesty, nepotism and falsehood. Despite Nehru's crude pressure tactics, the late Justice M C Chagla had highlighted TTK's complicity in the Mundhra conspiracy.

Again, TTK had changed an estate duty provision in a particular year in order to ruin a Madras industrialist who refused to provide him with transport during the elections.



TTK also refused to face the Justice Gajendragadkar Commission which was to have been set up by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. For TTK enriched his company (manned by his sons) through several deals which he wangled during his many official trips to America. In fact, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had no alternative except to dismiss him in January 1966 – a New Year gift to the nation. And the country cannot be adequately grateful to Lal Bahadur for this splendid act – the beginning of the removal of corruption in high places.

Ramamurthy's letter is not a disinterested one. Public memory is proverbially short, but this inspired spokesman of the TTK establishment cannot try to make it shorter!

Dr Lakshmi Mohan
Madras

RESERVATIONS : TIME FOR A REVIEW

Vir Sanghvi's timely and candid remarks on the principle of reservation (*On The Marquee,* August 1985) will not go down well with our khadi-clad villains who only espouse the cause of reservation to capture power and remain in power. The only thing that the policy of reservation has achieved is the creation of a new class: that of sub-standards. If this country is going to sacrifice merit and recruit idiots in the fields of medicine and engineering, and in the IPS and IAS, what is its future?

Gujarat is nothing compared to the state of affairs in Tamil Nadu. Here, virtually everybody is 'backward' except the brahmins. The state government might as well declare its aim to annihilate the brahmin community.

U S Iyer
Madras

On The Marquee puts the problem of the harijans in perspective.

A cut-off date for props like reservation is a must for the progress of the nation. People like M S Solanki, whose actions caused bloodshed and untold misery in Gujarat, should not have been allowed to get away with loss of office as the only punishment.

Rajiv Gandhi's massive mandate was due to the firmness with which he handled the question of integrity of the nation, and the outbreak of violence after Mrs Gandhi's death. He must, now, be equally firm in ensuring that reservation does not become a tool that politicians can use to exploit the votes of 'backward' communities.

Akshai C Bansal
Ghaziabad

Reservation, which was originally to be limited to 15 per cent for a maximum of 30 years, is already in its 38th year. Reservations are increasing geometrically, and the de-reservation process is nowhere in sight.

In some states, reservations exceed 50 per cent of the seats in educational institutions. In effect, reservation means that the privileged reserved class is eligible for both reserved and unreserved seats, while unreserved candidates are only eligible for the unreserved seats, thereby further reducing the opportunities for the latter.

I, personally, know the anguish and despair one feels when a promotion is lost to a candidate of lesser merit but belonging to a reserved class, having suffered twice in this regard.

Politicians like Rajiv Gandhi never suffer as they go to Cambridge for further studies. However, it is pertinent to note that all political parties – whether Congress or Janata – which vehemently defend reservation, never field a proportionate number of reserved candidates during elections. How come these defenders of reservation have never put forward a candidate from the reserved class for the Prime Ministership? Jagjivan Ram is the only one from the reserved class who came close to being PM.

It is about time the de-reservation process, and the process of creating a classless and casteless society was begun. Otherwise, as job opportunities decrease, more people from the unreserved class will convert themselves to the privileged reserved class with the aid of false certificates.

Ultimately, our goal will be achieved: a casteless society where everyone claims to be backward.

Dr B S Rawat
Bombay

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VOLUME XXV NO 7 CONTENTS OCTOBER 1985

By Arun Chacko

SRI LANKA DIARY

How have a gentle, docile people got so worked up?

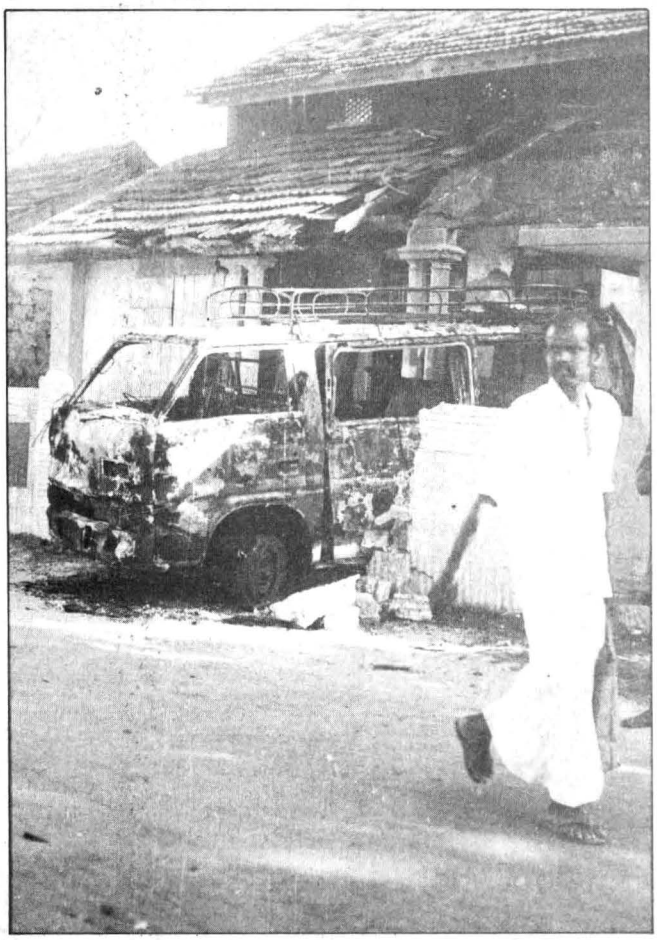
WHILE Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict waxes and wanes, with an end in sight only if India cracks the whip and makes both parties see reason, those with some experience of the emerald isle can only feel great sadness about the turn of events.

It is not for nothing that Sri Lanka gave the world the word 'serendipity'. With its lush tropical beauty and lovely beaches, everyone knows that 'Serendip' is only a hair's breadth short of paradise. What's more, it has, undoubtedly, the nicest people in this part of the world – both Sinhalese and Tamil.

The only place in the Indian subcontinent which bears comparison is our own little paradise – Goa. We would all be extremely shocked if tomorrow the Hindus and Christians started slaughtering each other for whatever reason. That kind of savagery may be possible in the rest of the country. But not Goa.

So it comes as a bit of a shock when the Sri Lankans, basically gentle, docile and decent people, manage to get so worked up and land themselves and their wonderful island in such an almighty mess.

There are obvious benefits to being cut off from the Indian subcontinent, even by a strip of water 20 miles wide. It certainly alters the character of the people. The Tamilians and the Jaffna Tamils are currently displaying great solidarity. But, without wanting to devalue our own, the Jaffna Tamil is in a completely different class.



To begin with, he is highly educated, cultured and industrious, partly because his land was never much good. Towards the end of the British raj, he dominated the island to an overwhelming extent. What is more, he is hospitable and gentle, and often, being more westernised, is fond of the good things of life. Bogus abstinence is not a virtue in his society, and begging is not an industry, as it is here.

THE SINHALESE, if anything, are even nicer people. Less aggressive, more laid-back, possibly lazy, they, too, are fond of the good life. Only, they are less inclined to work for it, and prefer short-cuts, like dispossessing the Tamils.

Strangely enough, thousands of Indians permanently living in Colombo, have nothing but praise for all their Sri Lankan neighbours, especially the Sinhalese.

Most of the enormous Indian community permanently settled in Colombo – some for generations – are in the retail trade, other businesses and even manufacturing. They have lived through the anti-Tamil and sometimes anti-Indian Colombo riots of 1983. But if you ask them if they would rather live in India, or indeed any other country, most say that they're very happy where they are, thank you. They continue to have great affection for, and great faith in, all the people of this multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural island.

If everyone is so friendly, gentle and decent, why is there such a horrendous problem in the first place?

The answer is that the Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese have clashed, on and off, for over 2,000 years. But the seeds of modern Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict can be traced to the last century. In the Sri Lankan context, the Tamils have been industrious and have achieved a great deal, while the Sri Lankans are lazy and have achieved little.

Arun Chacko is Associate Editor of Boston's The World Paper *and Associate Editor of World Report.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY SUNDAY OBSERVER

The Buddhist clergy has its own vision of Sri Lanka: an exclusively Sinhala, Aryan country, the last bastion of Buddhism in this part of the world. Everyone else is an intruder.

SRI LANKA DIARY

Just as people around India's Presidency towns had the benefits of an early Western education, and dominated the country until, say, the Punjabis got the same facilities and clouted them, so it was with the Jaffna Tamils.

The American missionaries came to Jaffna first and set up several top-grade educational institutions. Then came the Roman Catholics, followed by the Hindus who set up their institutions. The upshot was that early this century, Jaffna had proportionately more high school graduates than any other part of the British empire. Not surprisingly, the man from Jaffna went on to Colombo and dominated the available jobs.

However, indigenous Sri Lankan Tamils form only 13 per cent of the island's 15 million, though, by trying to make common cause with the exploited Indian Tamil plantation workers, Sri Lankan Tamils claim to make up 20 per cent. This, unfortunately, the Indian Tamils don't accept. Their problems are different, and they live in the Central Province, not the 'Tamil homeland'. Besides, they feel that the Jaffna Tamils treated them as low castes and never paid much attention to their problems. So, in fact, 13 per cent of the population came to dominate most of Sri Lanka's best jobs.

But the Sinhalese formed 75 per cent of the population. Once independence came, with universal franchise, naturally, they determined who would govern the country. They also demanded a proportionate share of jobs and educational opportunities.

Any reduction in the number of jobs the Jaffna Tamils got would have been tantamount to discrimination, since now the best man would not be selected.

In Sri Lanka, any kind of affirmative action on behalf of the larger, more deprived sections of the population, is fraught with danger. (We have seen this happen in various parts of our own country.) The Sri Lankan police and army atrocities that followed the Sinhala-dominated government's refusal to concede genuine Tamil concessions made matters intolerable for the Jaffna Tamil. So it was not surprising that they opted for militancy after the democratically elected Tamil United Liberation Front failed to deliver the promises made to them by President J R Jayewardene before that fateful 1977 election. That was also when Jayewardene declared the cow and calf lost on both sides of the Palk Strait, earning Mrs Gandhi's and Mrs Bandaranaike's undying hatred and greatly entangling the Tamil issue.

But there were other complicating factors, foremost being the militant Buddhist clergy, which has an inordinate political influence. Their vision of Sri Lanka is of an exclusively Sinhala, Aryan country, the last bastion of Buddhism in this part of the world. Everyone else is an intruder, only there on the majority's sufferance.

The Buddhist factor can hardly be underestimated because only they make it big in Sri Lankan politics. This the island's Sinhalese and Tamil elite, which had largely become Christian in colonial times, quickly realised. Aspiring politicians, President Jayewardene and former Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike quickly gave up their family religion and adopted Buddhism.

Given the Tamil dominance in the early part of this century, and their continuing intellectual and educational ascendancy, the monks are not willing to concede anything more than autonomous District Councils. This is quite unacceptable to even the moderate Tamils.

On the other hand, there is an imminent danger of the Sri Lankan government conceding a level of provincial autonomy acceptable to moderate Tamil opinion, but which will not be easily implemented. For the Buddhist clergy will certainly make it hot for the present Sri Lankan UNP government, and put a damper on any plans it might have to implement such an accord.

Then, while being basically sympathetic to some Tamil demands, the crafty Mrs Bandaranaike is currently making common cause with the monks on purely tactical grounds. And thoroughly enjoying President Jayewardene's discomfiture. Her Sri Lankan Freedom Party still enjoys considerable support and, with the clergy, becomes an overwhelming Opposition.

But there is tremendous pressure on the Sri Lankan government to settle, especially from the eminently sensible Finance Minister, Ronnie de Mel. Defence expenditure has increased eight times since the UNP came to power, and is still going up.

The pressure on the economy is crushing, especially since this has coincided with crashing tea prices, and led to depleted tourism and slackening foreign investment. Ronnie de Mel feels that Sri Lanka has only another six months, before the real crunch comes

Hopefully, both sides can be made to see reason before that happens. The prospect of a continued civil war is too horrifying to contemplate. If it does continue, there can be no winners. Certainly not the Jaffna Tamils, who have suffered the most, especially from the ethnic conflict. ♦

CINEMA

By Ajit Duara

MEN AND MACHISMO

Women collaborate with men to perpetuate sexual inequality.

IT IS NOT inconceivable that cinema is an instrument of communication created by the male animal and, subsequently, sustained and developed for the perpetuation of the many myths surrounding the same species. I mean, just look at an Arriflex camera, or a tripod, or a microphone or even a 35 mm projector. Phallic symbols all; hard pieces of metal projecting into the sky or the earth or the screen, declaring intentions and celebrating the creator. Let there be light said the father (D W Griffith); and then there was light and then camera and then action.

And so women began their careers as part of the equipment. For Eisenstein, in the East, a woman with a parasol came in handy as a symbol of the decadent bourgeoisie (*October*, 1927) and for Griffith, in the West, a woman was a necessary prop as she had to be rescued – without a damsel there could be no distress (*The Lonedale Operator*, 1911). To be sure, there was Lillian Gish in America and she was the first heroine on celluloid and she was quite a beauty and she did act marvellously. But, from the most benign feminist perspective today, she does appear a bit of a wimp. Look at her in *True Heart Susie* (1919); a paragon of virtue sacrificing everything for a prematurely pompous young man. But the director wanted her so and the audience loved her so and so it was.

Aaj Ki Awaaz: ***propagating the ideology of machismo.***

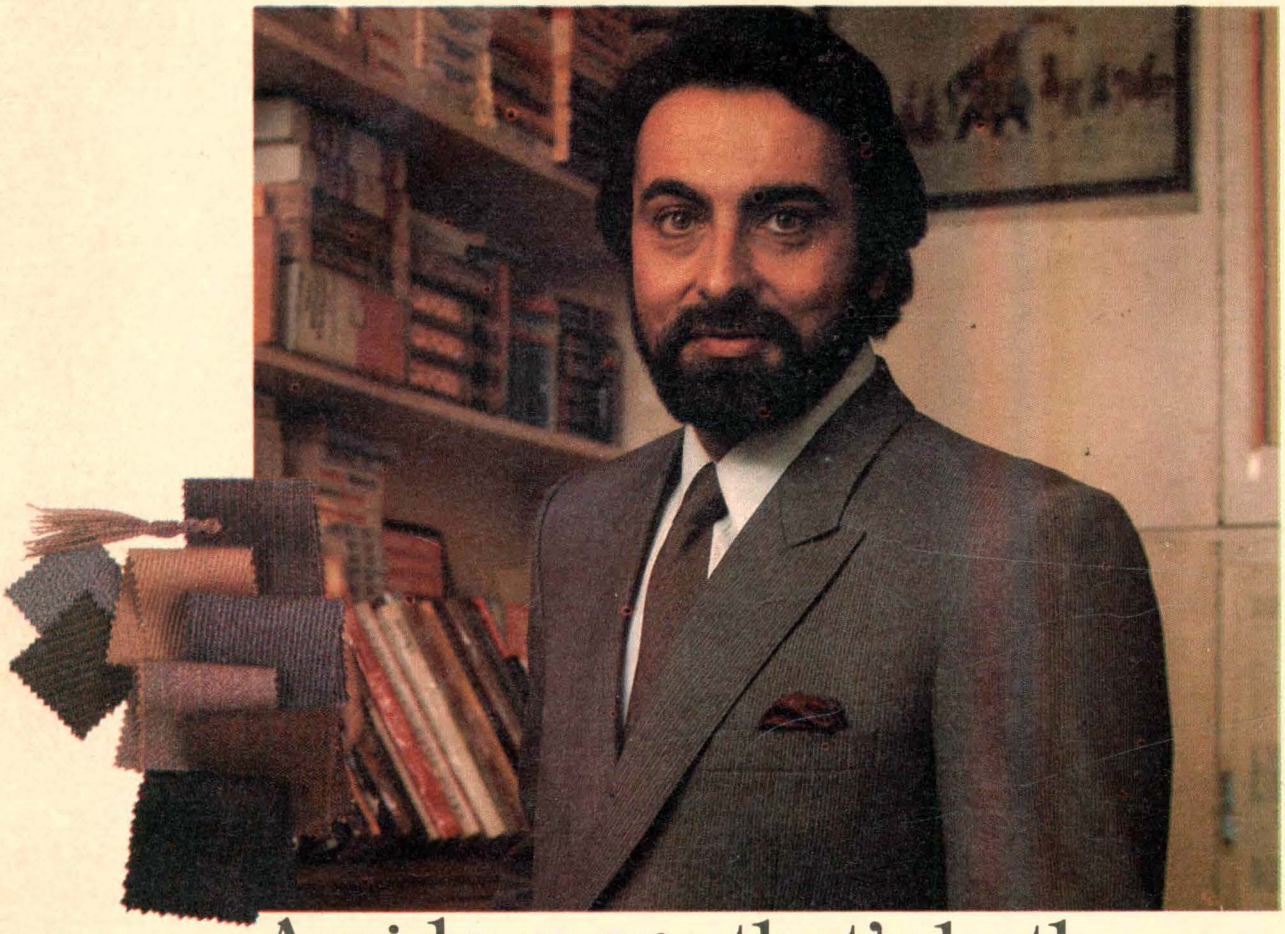
For Gish, and many heroines after her, the cinema did provide a steady, sometimes generous, living, but it also created, through these actresses, stereotyped images of women (sacrificing, domestic) that functioned as further cultural reinforcements of the prevalent male-dominated value system. In other words, women had been conditioned to participate in the creation of images, ranging from reverence to rape, that celebrate the position of that sex in the world-view of machismo. For machismo is not just a Latin word. It is an ideology. It is a gospel that has no book but is accepted all over the world by all manner of people. And since the language of cinema is the most universal language in the world, it is this medium that becomes, inevitably, the greatest propagator of the ideology of machismo.

Take our own cinema, for instance. Take *Aaj Ki Awaaz*, one of the biggest hits of 1984. The film is about Sanskrit professor Prabhat Verma (Raj Babbar) who arrives in Bombay from Allahabad. What does he discover in the city of sin but ruthless gangsters obsessed by rape. They rape his friend's sister. The professor objects to this arrogantly outrageous behaviour and reports the matter to the police. Needless to say, the cops are in league with the hoodlums and take no action. Meanwhile, the crooks decide to teach the meddling Sanskrit teacher a lesson. They gang rape his sister and murder his mother. The sister commits suicide. Prabhat, forced to watch the proceedings, decides to take revenge.

It is the classic plot structure of the original genre of machismo film-making – the 'Western'. The lone ranger's women have been dishonoured and he is made acutely aware that destiny leads him in only one uncompromising direction – vengeance and retrieval of honour. Rape, in the cinema, is not seen as a criminal act rooted in social and psychological instability within the community. It has to be viewed in only one light; as

Ajit Duara is the Hindi film critic for Debonair. *This is his first article for* Imprint.

WINTER Weaves



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No woman in India, to date, has been an outstanding film-maker. You can count the good (and perhaps, only) women film-makers on your fingertips — Sai Paranjpe, Aparna Sen... and that's it.

MEN AND MACHISMO

an insult to a man's honour.

And observe director Ravi Chopra's cutting during this vital rape sequence. An agonised Prabhat, bound to a chair, is the protagonist. Rapist-in-chief Dalip Tahil is the antagonist (villain). The battle is between these two. The woman on the bed, the victim, is the object of their war of honour. Make-up, lighting and camera positions are used to maximise the dramatic effect; for this is Chopra's big scene. He isn't interested in telling the audience that rape is synonymous with the most brutal violence a human being is capable of. He is celebrating the event. It's a scene where Prabhat, Tahil and the audience are being initiated into the whole bloody macho ritual of honour. So that the culture of machismo is preserved.

One is not merely indulging in feminist rhetoric. It must be emphasised that machismo is not just an attitude towards women but a way of looking at life. It is a perspective which implies that power and aggression are all-important factors in a world where doubt, sensitivity and morality are signs of weakness.

What is the point we are making? Simply this: women collaborate with men to ensure the perpetuation of inequality between the sexes. And they do this by taking an unequal part in culture. In almost every society in the world today, most of the major art forms are dominated by men. In music, painting, sculpture and cinema – the abstract arts – the giants are all men. Is it because, as Virginia Woolf once said in *A Room Of One's Own*, women are not allowed creative outlets? Perhaps, in the Elizabethan age. Is it because women are not financially independent? Perhaps, but then how many struggling artists can claim to have started their careers with financial independence? Art is very rarely a career choice. One creates because one has to. Because one would be unhappy not creating. And unhappiness, surely, is not the preserve of men.

Why must it be Satyajit Ray who, over 30 consistent years in the cinema, portrays women with sensitivity, grace and honesty? "Although they (women) are physically not as strong as men," he says in an interview, "nature gave women qualities which compensate for that fact. They're more honest, more direct and, by and large, they're stronger characters. The woman I like to put in my films is better able to cope with situations than men." Why couldn't a woman film-maker have said that? She could have, but then she would never be heard because no woman in India, to date, has been an outstanding film-maker. Aparna of *Apu Sansar*, Arati of *Mahanagar*, Charulata of *Charulata*, Karuna of *Kapurush*, Aparna of *Aranya Din Ratri* and, finally, Bimala of *Ghare Bhaire* have all been remarkable women of the Indian cinema. And all of them are the creation of one man. You can count the good (perhaps the only) women film-makers on your fingertips – Sai Paranjpe, Aparna Sen . . . But then women, perhaps, are better writers.

Are they? Advertising agencies welcome clever women copy-writers and a lot of publications are fond of methodical women at their subbing desks. The offices of most of Bombay's periodicals are littered with excellent female sub-editors and assistant editors. But how many of them are immediately recognisable as outstanding journalists? You can count them on your fingertips – Amrita Abraham, Tavleen Singh. But then, perhaps, it is the male-dominated elite of the press that frustrates the creative instincts of talented women. There must always be an outlet, and not just a creative one!

It is, I believe, an established result of considerable research that has indicated, that women have a weaker grasp of spatial and temporal relationships than men. This is manifested at an early age when boys show a quicker understanding of abstract situations while girls demonstrate a superior verbal command. This, perhaps, indicates why separate chess championships are held for women (they simply cannot compete with men) while a game of Scrabble between the sexes is played with some risk to the male ego. But great writing, like great film-making and painting, requires a superior spatial and temporal co-ordination. Perhaps it has something to do with the left (logical, reasoning) and right (abstract) side of the brain. Perhaps a connecting link is required. I don't know. All I know is that good cinema demands an incredibly sound grasp of space and time, and of the relationship between the two. Is it that women don't have this? Is the machismo of cinema, indeed, a biologically caused inevitability?

In a way, yes. But it is absolutely clear, or should be, that the culture of machismo can and must be fought only on a cultural level – by greater participation of women in cultural manifestations such as the cinema. Especially the cinema, because of the increasingly audio-visual world that we live and communicate in. If men continue their domination of film-making, it would contribute (and already has) to the severe retardation of not just the women's movement but Indian culture as well. ♦

ENIGMA

By some accounts, Vishwanath Pratap Singh is the second most powerful man in India. He is also the most daring and innovative Finance Minister in years. But what is Singh like as a person? Why has he attracted so much controversy?

BY AMRITA SHAH

DURING THE EIGHT MONTHS that Rajiv Gandhi's government has been in office, the star of the Cabinet has been the Prime Minister himself. Virtually every major decision is said to have been taken by him personally and nearly every significant policy initiative has been associated with him. His Cabinet colleagues are not the ciphers and yes-men of the Indira era, but few of them have emerged as personalities in their own right, or have given the impression that they are actually making policy, not just implementing it.

The one exception to this trend has been Vishwanath Pratap Singh, the shy, soft-spoken Finance Minister. Almost from the day he took office, Singh has demonstrated that he is not to be taken lightly. He has launched drives against tax evasion, called for a national debate on black money, indicated that he is reluctant to socialise with businessmen, reshuffled the senior echelons of bank management and of the income tax department, introduced a precedent-breaking budget, and personally accepted the responsibility for the recent rise in prices.

This reforming zeal is accompanied by a formidable reputation for personal honesty and a phenomenal capacity for hard work. Unlike many of his predecessors, Singh cannot be discredited through his links with individual businessmen or accused of sloppiness. Thus, when he talks of jailing dishonest industrialists, he can do so without worrying about any skeletons in his own closet.

Considering his relatively high profile, it is not surprising that Singh has become the most controversial member of this Cabinet. His budget has been attacked for causing inflation, his anti-corruption and black money drives have been condemned as 'witch-hunting', and his own somewhat reclusive style has been termed 'isolationist'.

Some of the criticism of Singh comes from outside the party: from industry and from the press. But some of it comes from within the Congress (I), where a strong faction is implacably opposed to him and resents his growing stature. To the country at large, however, Singh remains something of an enigma. How did he suddenly emerge to become the second-most powerful man in Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet? Is he a potential successor to the Prime Minister? Why does he attract so much controversy? These are not

PHOTOGRAPH BY GAUTAM PATOLE

easy questions to answer. To begin to understand Singh and his unique personal style, one must first understand his background as a politician in Uttar Pradesh.

BARAUT, a prosperous township in the heart of Western UP, burns under the mid-day sun. Despite the heat the market-place, dominated by statues of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sanjay Gandhi, bustles with life. Bullock-carts amble along on hubs of which the little town is a big manufacturer. Shops sell garish nylon saris and plastic chappals, around the fenced enclosure in which grandfather and grandson stare at each other, through stone eyelids.

There is little respect, however, in the eyes of the local turbaned citizenry shuffling across the square. For the only politician acknowledged in this Jat-dominated region is Charan Singh. And efforts of other politicians to break the Jat leader's stranglehold have generally gone unrewarded.

In the mid-'70s, for instance, when Bansi Lal tried to organise a rally for Sanjay Gandhi in Baraut, Charan Singh's supporters broke the embankments of a nearby canal and flooded the area. The rally could not be held. And Morarji Desai, on his visit as Prime Minister in 1978, was heckled vociferously by the crowd.

But for V P Singh, or 'Raja Saab' as he is known in Uttar Pradesh, the Jats have a special regard. "He was a good Chief Minister," concedes Chowdhury Charan Singh, former *pramukh* of Khatta village and a follower of his namesake, the ex-Prime Minister. In Eastern UP, the regard borders on reverence. "Raja Saab is a *sant*," maintains a cycle-rickshaw driver in Allahabad. In Phulpur, Kakore and countless other districts of the state, this sentiment is reiterated. For V P Singh – the dark horse who was foisted on the state by Sanjay Gandhi in 1980 – this widespread popularity is an entirely personal achievement. To begin with, the odds were tremendous. The Congress (I) had returned to power at the Centre and in the state. The brahmin lobby, which has always dominated UP politics, tried to ingratiate itself with the Centre by demanding that Sanjay Gandhi be made Chief Minister. Mrs Gandhi refused. Instead, she sent her former Deputy Minister for Commerce and MP in the newly-elected Lok Sabha, to head the state government. Virtually unknown in UP, even to his own partymen – of the 306 Congress (I) MLAs, 250 had never met him – V P Singh's only qualification for the job seemed to be that he was a Sanjay Gandhi protégé. The fact that he was a Thakur weighed heavily against him in the brahmin-dominated state, but fitted perfectly with Sanjay's plans to break the traditional caste-based monopoly in various states.

When Singh was foisted on UP by Sanjay Gandhi in 1980, the odds against him were tremendous. Of the 306 Congress(I) MLAs, 250 had never even met him and the brahmin lobby was against him.

Predictably, Singh faced hurdles all the way. His hold over the state unit was so weak that he was not allowed to select the Speaker of the UP Assembly, but had to accept Sripat Mishra, the brahmin lobby's candidate. Unfazed, Singh concentrated on weeding out corruption and improving efficiency in the state administration. He led raids on Lucknow's ration shops, unearthed cases of corruption in the medical and fertiliser departments, suspended hundreds of corrupt government officials, and managed to get the university examinations held on schedule for the first time in four years. He even persuaded the Centre to raise the state's budgetary allocation by 30 per cent.

Decisions were taken quickly, even hastily (civil servants used to comment that he was a man in a hurry), but Singh was far from secure. Members of his own party were particularly critical of him. This was partly attributable to the fact that Singh gave only two of the 54 sought-after state corporation posts to his own partymen. "We want a strong Chief Minister, not a sadhu," complained one Congress (I) MLA. Others maintained that Singh was incapable of facing the Opposition in the Assembly. His frequent trips to Delhi (he was in Delhi for 31 of his first 100 days in office) also caused people to comment that he was living in the capital and coming to Lucknow only on 'visits'. It was no secret that Singh derived his power from Mrs Gandhi and had little contact with his party colleagues in UP. "The Chief Minister depends solely on bureaucrats and has no time for the 340 MLAs, as long as he has the backing of one individual – Indira Gandhi," remarked one legislator bitterly.

Perhaps there was some substance to the criticism – towards the end of Singh's first six months as Chief Minister, the state administration almost ground to a halt. Over a 45-day period, only one decision was taken and important files piled up, awaiting attention in his office. "It is in our interests that he remains in office," a Lok Dal MLA chortled gleefully. "He is the most inefficient Chief Minister the state has ever had."

UP, too, was undergoing a bad phase. There had been unprecedented floods and communal violence. The Moradabad riots, which occurred in November 1980, were followed by Shia-Sunni clashes elsewhere. One lakh government employees went on strike, and the death of a student in police firing at Phulpur resulted in a virtual shut-down of the eastern part of the state. Despite 118 arrests under the National Security Act, law and order deteriorated.

Organised dacoity was partly responsible for the prevailing lawlessness. For several years, dacoits had operated fearlessly all over Central and Eastern UP and in Madhya Pra-

desh. Protected by politicians, these gangs were well-entrenched. In November 1981, the killing of 24 people in Dehuli, a large village in Mainpuri district, caused an outcry. The Chief Minister offered to resign, as he had after the Moradabad riots, the preceding year. And as before, he changed his mind, saying: "I don't want it to be said in history that two murderers threw out my government."

Nevertheless, Dehuli marked the launch of a determined anti-dacoity drive. Singh gave himself a month to complete this task. By the end of the year, nearly 300 dacoits had been killed in what came to be known as 'encounters'. One hundred and thirty-three policemen also died in the crack-down. All the major gangs were eliminated. A triumphant Singh declared his mission accomplished.

Unfortunately, the dacoits did not allow Singh to continue in office. In March 1982, his brother C P Singh, a High Court judge from Allahabad, and a nephew, were killed by dacoits. And in June, 21 people were killed by Mansingh of the Phoolan Devi gang. In view of his earlier promise, Singh felt he had to resign on moral grounds.

Though the politicians in UP hated V P Singh, the people liked him. "He stayed out of petty politics and came to us," is the general refrain. Farmers at work always stopped to watch the speck in the sky which meant that the Chief Minister was touring. Frequently, the helicopter suddenly landed on wheat fields, and the man himself would step out to talk to the gaping villagers. Surprised, they related their various problems. Generally, these had to do with fluctuating electric current and the mismanaged wheat control centres. And to their amazement the soft-spoken, bespectacled *mukhya mantri* admonished the babus at the centres and fired the electricity officials. He is even known to have flown off in his 'copter, having abandoned in the Bulandshaher fields, an official who had lied about the hours of electricity received by the region.

But the story most often told over hookahs at dusk in the villages of Western UP is about the time Raja Saab landed in Chapprauli to inspect the wheat fields. A crowd gathered immediately and took him instead to the local school, which was left incomplete for lack of funds. The hookah is silent as the old men recall how Singh sanctioned Rs 50,000 on the spot.

The problem was that the mild-mannered Singh did not look like a Chief Minister. He went unnoticed at functions because people could not believe that he was the Chief Minister.

The constant touring of Western UP and the grand gestures were not accidental. Mrs Gandhi had set out to diminish Charan Singh's influence in the Jat strongholds of that region. V P Singh, she felt, was the man for the job. The Jats appreciated his simple, down-to-earth manner, and admired his humility. The story is still told about the time Singh visited the Janata Vedic College (JVC).

Hoshiyar Singh Chauhan, a teacher at the JVC, had been deputed to receive the Chief Minister and waited, at the head of a crowd, a garland in his hands. When, after a while, no impressive entourage arrived, he turned to a slight, bespectacled man who walked in, and said: "I was expecting Raja Saab." Much to Chauhan's discomfiture, the mild-mannered man turned out to be V P Singh. To Chauhan's further astonishment, the Chief Minister did not seem to object to the mix-up, and even asked Chauhan to visit him when he was next in Lucknow.

FIFTY KILOMETRES of tarred road lie between Allahabad and V P Singh's hometown, Manda. The road passes through the industrial area of Naini, dissects a couple of settlements, and crosses the river Toss to arrive at Manda, a picturesque village with narrow, winding lanes. A little boy points the way to Raja Saab's ancestral home. The old palace looks deserted and the tall iron gates which link the white walls appear to be locked. The only sound audible is that of a few stray horses in the stables below. Not a bird flies in the elaborately constructed bird-house flanking the wall.

Closer inspection reveals a smaller gate which swings open easily. Through the door, shadowy figures are visible in a room near the entrance. One of them is Shivdev Singh, *purohit* to the Manda royal family for generations. The ageing priest has vivid memories of Vishwanath Pratap, both as a child when he arrived from his birthplace, Daiya, to be adopted by the childless Rajah of Manda, and as a young man, when he married a princess from Udaipur's Rana family. "He was always very innocent," the priest recalls.

The ground floor, where the priest lives, is occupied by old retainers and their families. Dark, precarious stairways lead to empty rooms above. The balconies provide a view of what was once part of Lal Bahadur Shastri's constituency. Partially blocking the view is a low-lying building which houses a school established by the former Prime Minister. It was on this occasion that Singh first met Shastri, who was then Railway Minister, and was greatly impressed by him.

The rooms are dusty and dilapidated. Old, fading portraits are their only decoration. Queen Victoria gazes majestically from one wall, a testimonial to the British, whose protection the Rajah of Manda enjoyed.

The terrace looks onto the family temple with its delicately-wrought spire of pure gold. A mass of trees on one side denotes a forest. "Raja Saab's sons used to go hunting there," says one of the younger residents of the palace. Surrounding the palace on the other side are the acres and acres of land which Vishwanath Pra-

tap donated to the Bhoodan movement when Vinoba Bhave came to Manda.

The overwhelming impression is one of a grand feudal manor that has been allowed to slip into desolation and disrepair. V P Singh may still be Raja Saab to the peasants of UP, but this rajah has long since moved away from his kingdom. "I don't go to Manda much," Singh concedes. "In fact, my political career has always been outside that region. When I became Chief Minister, people from Manda and the surrounding areas acted as though one of their own had taken power. I had to tell them that I was Chief Minister of all of UP, not just of Manda."

Manda still claims Singh as its favourite son and popular rajah but the people have learned not to expect any special favours: that is not Singh's way. This principled stand has not met with universal approval. At Aish Mahal, Singh's house in Allahabad, the magnificent porch is dark and deserted, the blue paint is peeling from the walls, and rats scurry around. The caretaker is conscious of Singh's lack of interest in his heritage, but is cautious enough to express neither admiration nor criticism. "The world is not going to change because of one man," he says finally. "To be so principled in such a world is foolish."

Singh is not unduly bothered by this criticism. He rarely visits his palaces and homes and in recent years has made only a fleeting visit to Manda while campaigning for the 1984 Lok Sabha elections. His immediate family, too, has no real link with Manda. His two children are both male – a doctor and an engineer – and both live abroad. He himself lives modestly with his wife in an apartment in suburban Delhi. As a landlord, he has some money, but by today's standards he would not be regarded as wealthy.

He has more faith in the computer on his desk than he does in advisors. He slashed the Finance Minister's personal staff from 14 to three and trusts data, rather than opinions.

"YOU KNOW," says V P Singh, "what I really wanted to be is a scientist." He is sitting in the Finance Minister's enormous, wood-panelled North Block office. A shy, slight figure in a light bush shirt and loose-fitting chappals, he looks out of place amidst the governmental grandeur. He seems more like the sort of junior scientist, who, briefcase in hand, takes the contract bus to the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre early each morning.

The image is not inapt. "I wanted to work in Trombay, or at least, that is what I had hoped," Singh smiles. It must have seemed a strange ambition for a young rajah but then, as Singh points out, he spent most of his childhood away from Manda. He studied first in Benaras and then went to Allahabad to complete his graduation in Arts and Law. Six years after studying Law, he decided that he wanted to be a scientist after all. His principal at Allahabad's Inter College refused to let him enrol. Desperate, Singh obtained a *sifarish* and persuaded the principal to let him attend the science course. He did his intermediate in Physics and Chemistry there, and then went on to do a BSc from Poona's Fergusson College.

Singh's approach to his ministry owes more to his scientific education than it does to his princely birth. He is meticulous, thorough and much prefers working on his own to holding court and granting audiences to visiting businessmen. His aides marvel at his capacity for hard work and the dedication he brings to his job. He starts work at seven a m on most days and works till late at night. He even keeps a *chattai* in his office in case he needs to spend the night there.

While such devotion to duty is laudable, it also reflects an unwillingness to delegate, which is not nearly so laudable. He has slashed the Finance Minister's staff from 14 to only three, and relies on Personal Assistants who have been with him for years. (His critics call this dependence on old retainers 'needlessly feudal'.) Like the scientist that he once wanted to be, he seems to trust data rather than opinions. He scrutinises each file and letter himself, unconcerned by the extra work this necessitates; and appears to have more faith in the computer on his desk than in his advisors.

V P Singh's is a different approach to the Finance Ministry. He has Pranab Mukherjee's mind for figures, but is free from Mukherjee's biases. He has Morarji Desai's austere style, but has none of Desai's self-righteousness. It is not an approach that industry and business have taken too easily. There is widespread resentment about Singh's self-imposed 'isolation', though Singh himself denies that he is inaccessible to businessmen (see interview). To his supporters, much of the criticism is prompted by the fact that Singh is too 'principled' for Indian business.

STRANGELY, for a principled politician, V P Singh has done surprisingly well in the cut-throat world of politics. In the past, the press has often commented on Singh's lack of Machiavellian guile and predicted that it would prove his undoing. But Singh has proved them wrong. His political career demonstrates that a sense of timing and the ability to back the right horse are far more important to the survival of an Indian politician than guile. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than the fact that the wily H N Bahuguna – who claims to have introduced V P Singh to politics and to Mrs Gandhi in 1969 – is today a mere cog in an ineffectual Opposition party while his one-time protégé is probably the second-most powerful man in the

country.

Singh's standing in the Cabinet is elevated by the faith the Prime Minister is said to place in him. It is this much-envied support that has generated so much resentment in the Congress (I). Some of this bitterness was vented at a Parliamentary Committee meeting where Singh was lambasted for rising prices. The criticism is particularly surprising for it comes from within the Congress (I) – a party not ordinarily known for its democratic functioning. Singh himself admits: "There has been a price rise." But the source of the criticism suggests that the anti-V P Singh drive has the approval of some powerful party functionaries.

Arun Nehru, the ambitious Minister of State for Power, is widely suspected to be instigating this campaign. Apparently, Nehru, who was in charge of UP affairs, has joined forces with his fellow brahmins from the state: the octogenarian Working President of the Congress (I), Kamalapati Tripathi, and AICC (I) General Secretary, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai. Tripathi's son, Lokpati, was a contender for the UP Chief Ministership in 1980, and is known to resent V P Singh's emergence in UP politics. His wife, Chandra, led the anti-V P Singh lobby during the latter's tenure as Chief Minister. Relations between Singh and N D Tiwari, also a brahmin – which were good when the two were sent to UP by Mrs Gandhi in 1984 as UPCC (I) Chief and Chief Minister respectively – are now believed to have deteriorated.

Bajpai's son, Ashok, an ex-MLA from Allahabad, who was the chief organiser of Amitabh Bachchan's election campaign, blames Singh for denying him a ticket for the 1985 Assembly elections. "Singh saw to it that every vociferous brahmin was eliminated from the legislative scene," he maintains. Bajpai's group has put it about that Singh felt threatened enough by Bachchan's popularity in his home territory of Allahabad, to do his best to ensure his defeat in the 1985 Parliamentary elections. "Singh, despite being the UPCC (I) Chief, did not visit the constituency even once," claims Ashok Bajpai. The speculation has been further strengthened by Sant Bux Singh's attack on Bachchan following the latter's description of politics as a 'cesspool'. As Sant Bux Singh is V P Singh's step-brother, efforts were made to identify V P Singh as the prime instigator of this attack. Singh denies the allegations. His links with his step-brother are tenuous. Sant Bux Singh is the son of V P Singh's real father (though they have different mothers), and not of the Rajah of Manda who adopted V P Singh when he was a child. "I campaigned in Allahabad for two days," Singh claims. As for the well-publicised rift between him and Bachchan, he is dismissive. "It is all humbug," he says. "We are on the best of terms."

It is believed that Arun Nehru is behind the anti-Singh campaign. Singh's relations with N D Tiwari, which were good in 1984, have now also deteriorated considerably.

And what about the various attacks on him by members of the UP brahmin lobby? Singh feigns ignorance. "I am not aware of any such attack," he maintains. Nor does he see anything strange in the open criticism voiced against him and his 1985 budget in Parliament and elsewhere. "There *has* been a price rise. The criticism is understandable," he says.

NEVERTHELESS, rumours abound that Singh will be removed from the Finance Ministry. In addition to the complaint that he refuses to meet industrialists individually, there is the criticism that he takes his clean image far too seriously. Singh is not worried by the rumours. "I was not born into the Finance Ministry, it is not a cadre posting," he says. "So, why should anyone think one will continue in a particular ministry forever? In any case," he concludes, "whatever post I have, I never think about it – as long as there is an assignment."

This unquestioning willingness to accept any position given to him by the party leader seems an integral part of Singh's personality. "I have never known why I was made a minister, and have never asked," he says. In fact, in 1974, when Mrs Gandhi appointed him Deputy Minister for Commerce unexpectedly, he had packed his bags and was all set to leave for Allahabad. "My wife had stopped the milk and newspapers when the message came," he recalls, "and we had to go without them the next morning."

But, for all his humility, even Singh's most ardent supporters do not deny he is ambitious. Which is why he has always taken care to back the right horse at the right time. Usually, that horse has been whoever is leading the Congress (I). "I don't like shifting," he explains. "And I have always had very strong personal regard for Mrs Gandhi." Which is not surprising, considering she gave him a break in politics despite considerable opposition.

In 1969, when Singh was a political novice and Mrs Gandhi wanted to give him a ticket for the Assembly elections, UP Congressmen vetoed the idea. Manga Prashad, a local heavyweight, even walked out of her room in anger. "But she took a risk and placed her trust in me," Singh says gratefully. In 1971, Singh contested the Phulpur Lok Sabha seat – which had in the past been held by Jawaharlal Nehru and Vijayalakshmi Pandit – and won. In 1977, Singh, who had been Deputy Minister for Commerce at the Centre for three years, was defeated by the Janata wave. Temporarily retired, he spent the next few years painting and travelling around UP.

In 1980, the Congress (I) returned

to power. Singh, who had come into contact with Sanjay Gandhi during his Deputy Ministership, had taken care to cultivate him. And, along with other Sanjay 'loyalists' – such as A R Antulay, Gundu Rao and Arjun Singh – V P Singh was rewarded with a Chief Ministership. But Sanjay died soon after, and Singh needed a new mentor.

At the time it was not clear whether Rajiv or Menaka would take Sanjay's place. Sanjay appointees, like Madhav Sinh Solanki, who had strong bases in their states, kept silent, while the rest wondered whom to back. Singh was shrewder than most. He made frequent trips to Delhi to persuade Rajiv Gandhi – then still a pilot – to join the Congress (I). He also paid court to Arun Nehru, who was fast emerging as a powerful figure in UP. Later, he switched his loyalties from Nehru to Arun Singh, when he realised who called the shots at the Centre.

Certainly, Singh has always followed a leader. For Mrs Gandhi, he claims a personal regard; for Sanjay, he uses adjectives like 'quick', 'firm' and 'sincere'; and Rajiv, he feels, is 'an asset'. Singh's habit of devoting himself to his superiors in the party sometimes misleads people into believing that he is weak. After all, the impression he gives is that he derives his power from the party leader. "He has no constituency to look after," sneers Ashok Bajpai, "but is only keen on saving his position in the corridors of power."

The facade of weakness and dependence on his superiors is, however, somewhat deceptive. When it comes to the crunch, Singh has always delivered. While he was Chief Minister, for instance, Mrs Gandhi offered him a seat in the UP Legislative Council. The offer provoked widespread criticism in the state, for that made Singh the only unelected Chief Minister in the country. Hurt by suggestions that he was a Central puppet who was afraid to face the electorate, Singh decided to contest the Assembly by-elections from Tindwari, in the backward area of Bundelkhand. He turned the entire campaign into a successful low-budget spectacle, much to the embarrassment of his party workers. He went by bus to file his nomination and conducted the whole campaign on foot and on two-wheelers, while the others used scores of cars and jeeps. To general consternation, he won easily.

Singh's facade of weakness and dependence on his superiors is somewhat deceptive. He has always put his faith in a leader but has often proved his own electoral and populist credentials.

Efforts by Congressmen to discredit him over the dacoits issue, too, misfired badly. By resigning on moral grounds, Singh boosted his image considerably. And he lost nothing, for a few months later he was included in the Central Cabinet.

SINGH returned to Delhi in February 1983 as Commerce Minister. He was familiar with the job, having been Deputy Minister in the same ministry from 1974 to 1977. But, whereas, then he had been a low-key figure who attracted little notice, he was now a seasoned politician with a distinctive style of his own.

This style was immediately apparent. He discouraged businessmen from calling on him and set up the system of 'open houses' that he still favours. Essentially, these were relatively informal meetings with representatives of trade and industry during which various demands and requests were considered. Singh's trademark was that he took quick decisions at such meetings. For instance, at an open house in Madras in September 1983, he decided on the spot to grant exemption from Customs duty on the import of spares, consumables and office equipment to 100 per cent export-oriented units, and agreed to investigate the possibility of setting up a free trade zone in Madras.

The policies of the Commerce Ministry during Singh's time were virtually indistinguishable from the policies of the Finance Ministry and of Mrs Gandhi's government in general. Nevertheless, there were signs that Singh wanted to do something different. He was particularly concerned with exports and with India's minuscule share of world trade. He often spoke about planning for the export of food, and set up a special cell in the Commerce Ministry to prepare for the export of agricultural products during the Seventh Plan. He also geared up the Minerals and Metals Trading Corporation and tried to make it a major trading house in the world market.

During his tenure as Commerce Minister, Singh faced only one major crisis: the beef tallow scandal. In July 1983, the Punjab police seized tins of tallow from the premises of the Bhatinda Chemicals and Vanaspati Works. A week later, more tallow was seized from another *vanaspati* unit. The seizures proved that at least some of the beef tallow that had been imported for the manufacture of soap, was being used to adulterate *vanaspati.*

During the monsoon session of Parliament, the Opposition, led by Jagjivan Ram and H N Bahuguna, attacked the government for failing to prevent the adulteration and for hurting the sentiments of Hindus. As Commerce Minister, Singh was at the receiving end of the criticism.

He weathered the storm by taking quick action. He banned 193 firms – including such big names as Godrej Soaps, Ashok Leyland and Texmaco – from importing tallow for six months and asked the CBI to launch its own inquiries. As for the Opposition, he was scathing: "To them, every *vanaspati* tin appears to be a ballot box. In fact, they are opening the Pandora's box of their own policy lapses."

The strategy worked. By August

1984, when Mrs Gandhi sent him back to UP as chief of the Congress unit, the issue had died a natural death.

WHY WAS V P SINGH made Finance Minister? One view is that the Prime Minister wanted an honest and competent but uninspired administrator who would do as he was told.

And indeed, during Singh's first few weeks as Finance Minister, both the press and industry regarded him as a puritanical, colourless man who would do what his leader told him to. When he introduced his budget, it met with widespread (and perhaps excessive) acclaim, but most commentators held the Prime Minister responsible for its innovative provisions and Singh's role was played down.

All of this began to change a month after the introduction of the budget. First of all, the Leftists in the Congress (I) objected to what they considered a Rightward shift in its philosophy. As the Congress (I) has a golden rule that its leader is never attacked by name, the deviation from socialism was laid at Singh's door and not at Rajiv Gandhi's. At an intra-party meeting a few months ago, the Prime Minister loudly proclaimed his faith in the public sector and in socialism in response to such attacks, leaving the critics free to concentrate their energies on Singh and 'his' Rightist budget.

Next came the post-budget inflation. It should have been obvious that some of the budget's provisions were inflationary. The rise in the administrative price of petrol alone was enough to trigger inflation in a wide range of sectors. Moreover, India's distribution network is such that hoarding and profiteering often ensure a post-budget price rise. Yet, few commentators remarked on this when the budget was introduced – they were too busy congratulating the Prime Minister for having introduced pragmatism to Indian fiscal policy.

Once prices began to go up, the budget suddenly began to seem like less of a good thing and fewer attempts were made to attribute all its provisions to the Prime Minister and his aide. Now, it became 'V P Singh's inflationary budget' and the Finance Minister began to be attacked in the press and from within his own party.

His first year as Finance Minister will be remembered for three things: an innovative budget, a price rise that had not been expected and a controversial personal style.

While such attacks may seem inconsistent – if he's responsible for the inflation, then he's responsible for the pragmatic provisions as well – they had the unforeseen effect of turning V P Singh into more of a national figure: the most written about man in the Cabinet after the Prime Minister. Around this time, the puritanism and spartan personal style that had once seemed so laudable began, at last, to backfire on Singh.

When he was Commerce Minister, Singh had begun to refuse to see industrialists on their own – he would insist on a third person, usually a bureaucrat, being present in the room. Then, this didn't seem like a bad thing. But now, industrialists who had customarily been used to calling on the Finance Minister and building up a personal rapport with him, began to resent Singh's reluctance to meet them. While he avoids answering direct questions about his attitude to personal meetings (see interview), Singh generally handles visits of individual industrialists by talking to them for five minutes and then sending them off to see a bureaucrat. This may demonstrate his honesty, but it also prevents him from sensing the mood of industry, which is a serious drawback. And in a sense, it reinforces the stereotyped view that ministers who consult with industrialists are also on the take – a view this government was expected to bury.

What really turned Singh into a controversial figure, however, was his zeal in ordering raids. Singh has his own views on this subject. He holds the distribution sector responsible for the inflation that has become his biggest problem and feels that only systematic investigation can prevent hoarding. He claims that there is no point in reducing tax rates, if measures to stamp out evasion are not stepped up at the same time.

These are not unreasonable views, but the problem is that he is perceived as thinking that everything can change overnight. Unfortunately, black money has become an integral part of Indian business and this has been done with the active connivance of politicians and the bureaucracy. It is absurd to believe that businessmen can now suddenly restructure their businesses to eliminate the role of black money only because the new Finance Minister is an honest man. Obviously, as the licence-*raj* begins to be eased and as politicians and officials stop expecting pay-offs, industrialists and businessmen will have less of a justification for dealing in black. But it is naive to think that this can happen in the first eight months of his tenure.

In private conversation, Singh concedes this. Despite his puritanical streak, he is a thoughtful individual who is willing to be criticised. His problem is that there are too many people gunning for him at the moment. Should this government's economic policies fail or falter because of unavoidable circumstances – bad monsoon, a rise in the world price of oil or whatever – then he will take the blame.

He must know this. He must know also that people have already begun to speak of him as Prime Ministerial material. Experience has shown that this is not a happy position to be in – especially in a Congress government. ♦

"WE MEAN BUSINESS"

The Finance Minister talks about his portfolio, assesses his major achievements and defends himself against allegations of witch-hunting. He concedes that his budget had an inflationary impact and reveals his long-term priorities.

BY AMRITA SHAH

Imprint: *Can we start by talking about the editorials that have appeared in a section of the press, accusing you of witch-hunting?*
V P Singh: Not all the press. Only a section. There's been support from other papers.

But, after all, we are only enforcing the law. And we are not witch-hunting the taxpayer. We are only clamping down on the tax evader and that is what we are supposed to do.

Nobody disputes that. The criticism is that there are ways and ways of enforcing the law, and you are going about it the wrong way: by creating a climate of fear.
No. If there's an offence being committed, you have to act. Either you change the law or, if you have the law, you implement it. This is what I said right in the beginning and I would stand by it.

Generally, what we want is to have a reasonable tax structure which is easier to comply with. But having done that, have a tougher implementation. Earlier, what we had was a tougher tax structure and softer implementation. Now we want a softer tax structure and tougher implementation. That's fair enough.

We are not harassing anyone, but it should be clear that the government means business.

When you were appointed, people praised your capacity for hard work, your devotion to duty and your personal integrity. Now, people are beginning to say that it's gone too far. For instance, would it be fair to say that if an industrialist came to see you, you'd refuse to see him unless he was part of a delegation? *(Laughs.)* No, I wouldn't refuse to see an industrialist – or anyone, for that matter. But if you are short of time, shouldn't you put it to the best use? My function is more to make policy and, certainly, I do give preference to delegations. In open house I invited all the industrialists. They gave suggestions and right on the spot we took 28 major decisions.

When a delegation comes to see you, issues that affect a large number of industrialists are discussed. And it is those issues that are important, so, of course, I give priority to delegations.

As for personal meetings, this is a large country. Even if you were to solve 500 individual problems per day, it doesn't really help solve the

problems of the country. But I do ask industrialists to give me memorandums, explaining why they want to see me. And that, I think, is good enough.

If, after that, there are issues that can be sorted out personally, then I always direct them to the concerned official.

Have you been surprised by the recent press criticism?

I always use criticism constructively. When I was in the Commerce Ministry and in UP also, I set up a system for dealing with criticism. Every morning, all critical press comments are put on my desk. If the criticism relates to a department, I always mark it to the Secretary concerned. If it relates to me, I take note of it.

So I always use the newspaper as part of my administrative structure. When I started in politics, I used to be personally hurt by criticism, but now, I've learned to respond constructively to it.

Moving away from the criticism, what do you consider your major achievements at the Finance Ministry to be?

The policy initiatives that we have taken. Then, we have systematized our monitoring systems. We have set targets for every sector, for every quarter, and we work as a team.

We have launched ourselves on forging a long-term fiscal policy and a major reform of indirect taxes.

I could go on but I think that these are the major achievements.

Two criticisms of your budget seem to have stuck. The first is that you didn't go far enough in reforming personal taxation. And the second, that you seriously underestimated its inflationary impact.

I think the criticism is particularly vociferous because it comes from the urban middle class which is not only the class with access to the media, but is also the class that has actually lost out when you measure how little it has gained from tax reform, compared to what it has lost to inflation.

The budget did contribute to inflation, but there was more to it. You have to see it in perspective. The middle class has been hit because the administrative price of petrol has gone up. So, the cost of running a car has gone up. In quite a few places, electricity charges have gone up. In Bombay, the railway budget had an impact.

Sugar prices went up. Vegetable and fruit prices went up substantially. So, they have been hit by inflation.

But it is a peculiar phenomenon. If you see the wholesale price index – the macro picture – it has not gone up at a higher rate than it has always risen in the last seven years. And if you are going to examine budgetary impact, it is the wholesale price index you should really be looking at.

Of course, the index is an average. There have been sectional rises in prices – sugar, for instance – and that we accept. But look at other commodities. The prices of food grains have not gone up. Edible oils have not gone up. Coarse cloth has not gone up.

Our analysis has shown us that of the price increases, around 25 per cent are directly attributable to the budget. And 25 per cent are due to the hike in administrative prices – petrol, for instance. But the other half of the price rise is not due to the budget. The causes are either profiteering or distribution bottlenecks.

> **"I wouldn't refuse to see an industrialist, but if you are short of time, shouldn't you put it to the best use? I much prefer to see delegations rather than individuals."**

Of course, there were inflationary trends before the budget. In August 1984, prices had begun to go up. Then, after imports of sugar, fertiliser, etc, they came down. In February 1985, they started going up again.

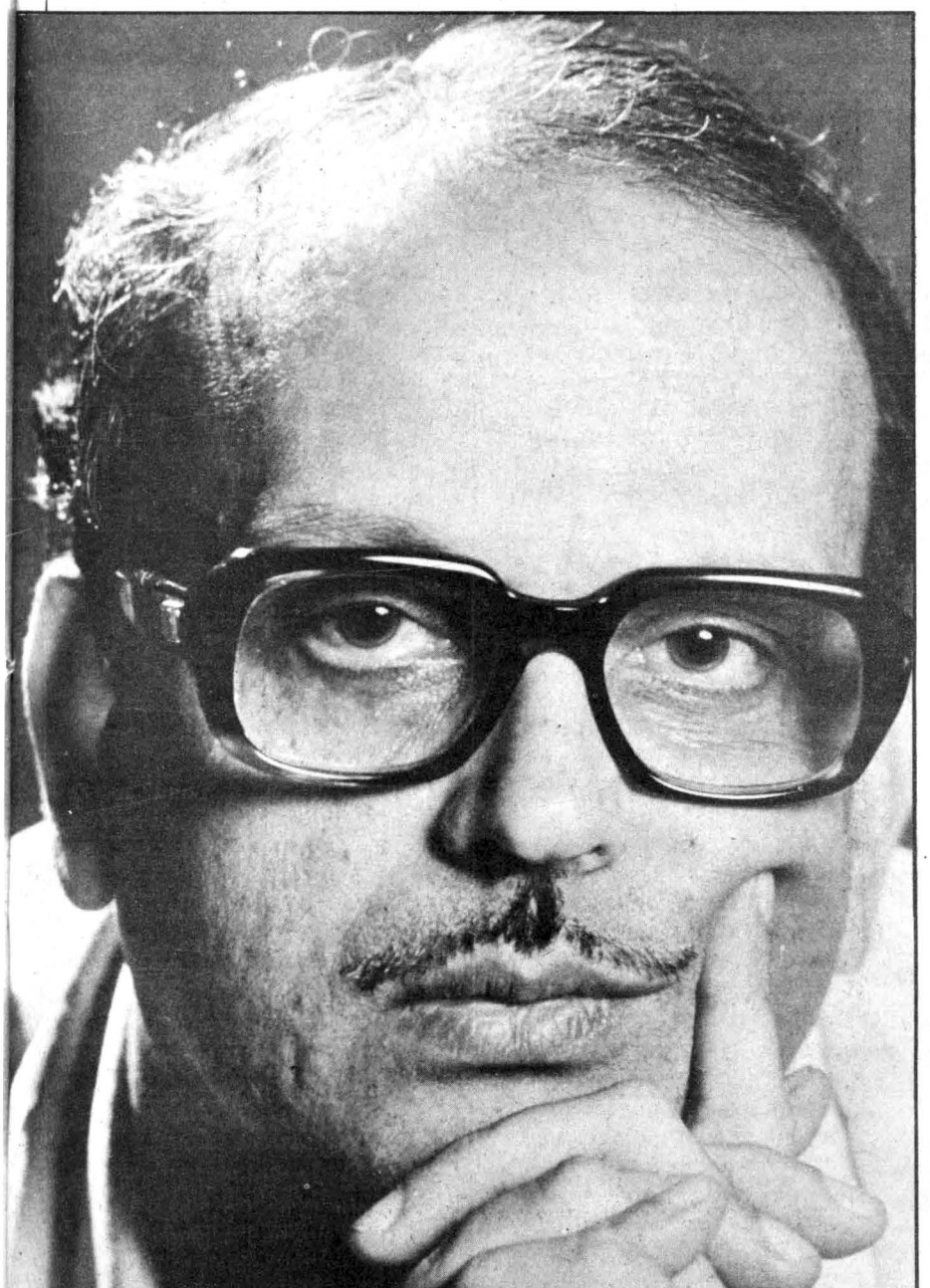
There is another factor. Increases in administrative prices were never announced with the budget. And the Opposition used to accuse the government of cheating it by keeping administrative prices out of the budget. This year, administrative prices were raised along with the budget.

So, the post-budget inflation was a combination of many factors. The inflationary trends, that had been controlled by imports, reasserted themselves. The administrative price increases came at the same time. And then, profiteers started raising prices.

Now, looking at it all quite coolly, I think we will be able to manage a single-digit inflation rate. When you consider the vehemence of the attacks on us over inflation, you would think that we should have double-digit inflation by now.

Coming back to what you said about increases in certain sectors, something like coarse cloth doesn't really affect the middle class, so even if those prices remain stable, the family budget is unaffected. It's the other things: transport costs, electricity, sugar, tomatoes, etc, that push their expenses up. And so, your budget has hit that section of society quite hard.

Yes. But we had very little choice. Our resource-raising was from crude. With the dollar appreciation, it was costing us Rs 1,000 crore extra in rupee terms. We could have kept petroleum prices down but then, the Rs 1,000 crore would have had to



"Economic discipline is necessary."

come from somewhere else. And had we raised it from the common taxpayer, it would have meant that a person on a rickshaw or on the footpath would have been subsidising a person who was in a car. Our view was that if you were going to make somebody pay for the petroleum, it was best to make those who use the petroleum pay for it themselves.

This was the pressure. And in future, we are going to have the same pressure because of our petroleum imports. As the domestic demand for petroleum goes up, we are going to have pressure on foreign exchange, particularly when the IMF loans are due for repayment.

In this scenario, is it sensitive to signal to the country that we can merrily go on using these sources of energy or is it time that we say: "This is costly energy. Let us try and conserve it"?

That makes sense. But why were the income tax reliefs so cautious? There's no real revenue aspect there.
The way we had calculated it, the exemptions we gave to taxpayers were enough to absorb the inflation the budget was going to cause. But what happened was that there were so many distortions within the distribution set-up, that inflation exceeded our calculations.

Take the case of sugar. We have sugar. And still, the prices went up due to profiteering. Finally, we were able to bring that price down but it used up all our energy.

That is one of the problems with fiscal policy in India. There are so many distribution distortions, that calculations cannot predict everything. And this is precisely why economic discipline is necessary. You need a firm hand to stamp out all this.

But then, of course, you are back to witch-hunting. *(Laughs.)*

What are your long-term priorities?
Coming to long-term fiscal policy, we want to give an assurance to the country. We want to say: this is going to be the tax structure. So long-term investments can be made. Nobody should have to wait every year to see who the Finance Minister is and to work out what rabbit he is going to pull out from his hat. Then, we want to move from discretionary controls to non-discretionary, so one doesn't have to run to the government for everything. So, you have a structure which is neutral or impersonal, but still has a direction. Then, on the Customs side, there's no sense in making investments costly right at the beginning, because of tax. Then, the product becomes permanently high-cost. And we can't go on protecting indigenous industry without some limit. It is time we told them: "You owe a duty to the people. You can't go on making

PHOTOGRAPH BY GAUTAM PATOLE

profits under government protection."

You are taking steps on black money too.
The Report has come and I want it to be the basis of debate. There are two or three packages in it. One is that the *mens rea* principle be replaced and that the law be made tight. On this, there's broad agreement. The disagreement is on three issues: the amount by which tax rates should be reduced. How many controls should go. And the third is the suggestion for unearthing black money and using it for slum clearance.

There have been weighty arguments on both sides. One is on voluntary disclosure. Those who are against it say that it hasn't worked in the past, and that the honest taxpayer suffers. I have told the House that we will weigh all the arguments.

In the long-term, is it really possible to eradicate black money or is it too deeply entrenched within our system?
It will never be totally erased. Black money is everywhere, abroad also. But because a human being is a composite, your measures have to be composite. On the one hand, you make the rates reasonable. And on the other, you make the cost of evasion high. It may never come to zero, but we have to reduce the level. It is something like shaving a beard every day. The Indian Penal Code does not eradicate murder, for instance, it just reduces the level. It is the same thing here.

How significant can the reduction in the level of black money be?
At this stage, it will be too tall a claim to make, and I'm not given to tall claims. We can try economic measures.

There is also the political aspect. As long as elections have to be financed, can we ever stamp out black money?
That element I will concede. The financing of elections is a national issue on which we should all put our heads together and try and find a solution. One effort that the Prime Minister has made is of legalising company donations, but I think that more should be done.

What exactly that is, I can't spell out. As Finance Minister, I can't say off the cuff that the government will finance all elections. *(Laughs.)* But we should all try and find a solution.

"Some industrialists get licences and then they get concessional financing and a market in which they are protected. Of course they do well! They claim to champion a market system without knowing what it is."

Do you believe that a lot of black money now is going abroad?
Yes. I think it is. Some of the raids we have conducted have shown this. For instance, the one on the *hawala* syndicate in Bombay showed that Rs 146 crore was its turnover.

And that money is lost to India.
Not necessarily. It also comes back. *(Smiles.)*

Non-Resident investments?
Yes. *(Laughs.)*

This government talks a lot about the 21st century. What kind of economy do you see India having by the time the 21st century comes around?
By then, we would have to resolve some of our basic infrastructural problems. Then, we have to keep up with the rest of the world in technology. Otherwise, we are not going to be competitive in the export market.

Technology does not only mean industry. We need agricultural technology to step up our production. For instance, we spend Rs 1,500 crore on imports of edible oil. If we had the technology, we could boost our oil-seed production.

Do you see the relationship between government and industry changing substantially?
By the 21st century? Oh, yes. We should be able to achieve quite a bit by then. After all, what is the purpose of controls? They are there to give direction. Now, if you think about quota licences, we did need them once. But, today? Someone gets a licence. He gets all the benefits from abroad. He gets concessional financing from institutions, and then, armed with this, goes to a market where we've already protected him from competition. Of course, he does well. Then, he says that he's now a champion of a market system! This, without even knowing what a market is! *(Laughs.)*

The government carries these people on our backs and in our laps, and we keep pandering to them. And then you have uneconomically viable units which become financial gold-mines. Who pays for all this? Finally, the consumer.

It is to this consumer that we owe a duty. The rest of the economy has paid for this for too long.

Governmental bureaucracy also does its bit to retard the growth of a market system.
That is a valid criticism. We've moved quite a bit on policy measures, but I agree that we haven't moved enough yet.

This is a result-oriented government headed by a result-oriented Prime Minister. Something will get done. The bureaucratic procedure will go. A new, more efficient system will replace it. ♦

So Far So Good, But...

BY R V PANDIT

THE EXTENSIVE media attention which Mr V P Singh, the Finance Minister, is receiving, is an indication of how much what the Finance Minister says or does affects the people. His first budget was businesslike – he delivered what people were expecting of Mr Rajiv Gandhi, in light of various statements the Prime Minister had made in his first few weeks in office.

What comes now, and in the two to three years ahead will matter even more in light of the promising start Mr Singh has made. Some areas for action:

☑ There is no such thing as inflation-free growth – the next budget will have to be inflationary. But the Finance Minister can take action *now* to keep ready a price-freeze structure of reasonable limits for those sectors where his next year's proposals are most likely to fuel inflation. There is no point in moaning about greed: more important is his responsibility to confine greed to acceptable levels of profit. In India we have a history of prices moving upwards only. There are areas where prices can be brought down. Some achievements in this direction are necessary if we are to introduce a necessary new culture in business behaviour and to make economic progress without upsetting our sensitive socio-economic structure too much.

☑ Many of the Finance Minister's statements are fastened to the 'we' and 'you' syndrome from which this country has suffered disastrously. Part of the mandate for governance is a responsibility to bring all people together in common effort. The Finance Minister (the Prime Minister and his other colleagues, too) must give up the temptation to appear to be arm in arm with the poor and the downtrodden, and eternally in conflict with businessmen and the industrialists. There can be no progress without an active, faithful partnership between the government and industry and business.

If we are to assure any kind of worthwhile future to our poor, then all of us – government, business and industry – should be marching arm in arm against poverty and backwardness.

☑ The Finance Minister needs to urgently lend credibility to the government's resolve to reduce black money. He should consider admitting, preferably in Parliament, that black money in this country is the result of the partnership between politics and business, and that the politician (and consequently the administrator) is as responsible as the businessman for this anti-national activity. Then there is this need to say, in so many words what many people now believe: that the party in power is not asking for, or receiving, any money in black, nor is the administration encouraging its generation. Such a categorical pronouncement will be several times more effective than any number of raids or veiled threats the Finance Minister may make. To substantially reduce the generation of black money, its employment in trade and industry, and to reduce the evasion of various taxes, the Finance Minister needs to hand-pick half a dozen cases involving prominent offenders, and fine them to the extent, and more, of their estimated illegitimate gains. Yes, our legal processes are cumbersome, but the Finance Minister does not lack the means to achieve this goal. A few successful prosecutions, widely publicised, will be more effect-valuable than the 2,879 raids the Finance Ministry has conducted during April-August this year, yielding Rs 15 crore. If top enforcement officers are to be believed, each one of the more than hundred plus top offenders ought to be coughing up that much to make amends for their ill-gotten wealth. However, in view of the earlier participation of politicians and bureaucracy with the offenders, there should be no punishment other than financial, and no future harassment of those successfully prosecuted for offenses committed earlier. In the changed atmosphere, hanging future offenders, even from the lamppost, will be justified. Any reduction in generation of black money will automatically curtail smuggling.

The Finance Minister should consider admitting, preferably whilst speaking in Parliament, that black money in this country is a result of the partnership between business and politics...

☑ Nobody in the government is happy with much of the public sector. Yet, we need a public sector. But let the Finance Minister categorically state which units in the public sector must carry on regardless and are entitled to even more money for modernisation – for public good, and which of the units must survive and swim purely on commercial merit and profit within a fixed time limit, or face liquidation or privatisation. A clear and firm policy on public sector

enterprises and the Rs 53,768 crore invested in them for so many years is very necessary if the investment is to be secured and the social purpose of the public sector achieved. As we industrialise, as we will, there will be need for the government to get into even more select and complicated areas via the public sector, and this will be smooth and rewarding only if we have an intelligent, firm policy for the existing units.

☑ The Indian banks need to be closely looked into. Presently it takes three to four weeks for the proceeds of an outstation cheque to be credited to the depositor's account. Not a single nationalised bank can stay in business if the auditing standards the banks legitimately insist their clients comply with are applied to scrutinise the banks' lendings, recovery and operations. Their boards are mostly illiterate in banking; many chairmen are in their positions because of considerations other than merit in banking. Sample consequence: A leading nationalised bank has produced a profit of Rs 5 crore for its 1,800 branch network for the year 1984-85. An operation of this bank in a foreign country produced a profit of Rs 12 crore for the same period, in difficult conditions. Yet, the officer responsible for this performance has been recalled home because he has already spent many years abroad! And while producing this profit and building a deposit base of Rs 500 crore there, his salary and allowances (yes, he got free accommodation and transport) amounted to much less than his secretary's net takings. Banking is business. Is what we have described above a businesslike practice? And are loan-*melas* a banking function? Is giving loans on orders from above or on dictates of government policy, loans which the loan officer knows will not be repaid, helping build sound banking? In poor India, there is scope even for outright gifts and grants, and certainly an important need for concessional loans to agriculture and to small-scale industry even when some of the loans may appear to be doubtful lending. But for these specific welfare requirements, we need specialised banks, and bankers trained to be constructive in outlook and humane in concerns. The continued mixing of welfare lending (*read* bad loans) with commercial banking is destroying the structure of banking we have built over so many years. And what kind of bankers do such confused practices and environment train? The Finance Minister ought to be looking at this problem with the urgency and the seriousness it deserves.

☑ Not surprisingly, many of the practices on the Indian Stock Exchanges will attract several punitive provisions governing stock exchanges of even gambling towns like Hong Kong and Kuwait. Now that the government has seen the strength of the private purse in pursuit of profit – and what a boon it is to the capital market, and an incentive to saving – even in a very narrow market which the Indian Stock Market is, the Finance Minister must consider securing the interest of the investing public and help build a sound tradition by demanding an urgent reform in the manner the quoted companies, the brokers and the investors conduct themselves. Any delay in reforms or a continued neglect of this problem can lead to a disaster.

Not a single nationalised bank can stay in business if the auditing standards that are applied to their clients are applied to the operations and balance sheets of the banks themselves.

☑ Inequality is inherent in life. In the considerably aware world of today, it is the government's responsibility, by fiscal measures where necessary, to reduce this inequality as much as possible. God has made all men equal in death. Over a period, even the most capitalistic governments have used Estate Duty to acknowledge this divine design. John Stuart Mill (1806-73) considered only Estate Duty a morally justified tax. In light of all this, Mr V P Singh's abolition of Estate Duty was surprising, and all kinds of motives are being attributed for the abolition, where there may be none, except as the Finance Minister said, the administrative cost of collecting it was higher than the receipts. In the socially troubled times we live in, the government has to be *seen* to be taking measures always to reduce inequality. The Finance Minister might want to carefully review this tax the next time around. The Estate Duty of Rs 6,65,000 on Rs 20,00,000 plus 85 per cent of the amount by which the principal value of the estate exceeds Rs 20 lakh, on the highest bracket as charged until its abolition, was not an equaliser: it was punitive. Streamlining of the collection machinery, and a drastic reduction in the rate charged are, however, a precondition to any reintroduction of the Estate Duty.

☑ This Finance Minister is not going to need any prompting from anyone to further reduce taxes gradually. But we also need more and more resources. The time is right to tax big agriculture. This is a good time to look at a Value Added Tax also as an alternative to the messy Sales Tax impost.

☑ The press reports the Finance Minister to be putting in a gruelling 18-hours a day, seven days a week. His simplicity is well-known. He is also, by most accounts, clean. Obviously, he is imaginative, and courageous. So far so good, but his reluctance to meet businessmen and industrialists individually may not be all that wise. Of course, many Indians spend much time flattering and then seeking something for themselves whenever they see a minister, but if a minister sets the tone and tune, it is possible to restrict the visitor's conversation to substance, and yet be brief. Indian business, industry and management has many brilliant minds and it will be unfortunate if the Finance Minister is to keep them all out of access to him because of some bad odour of the past. ♦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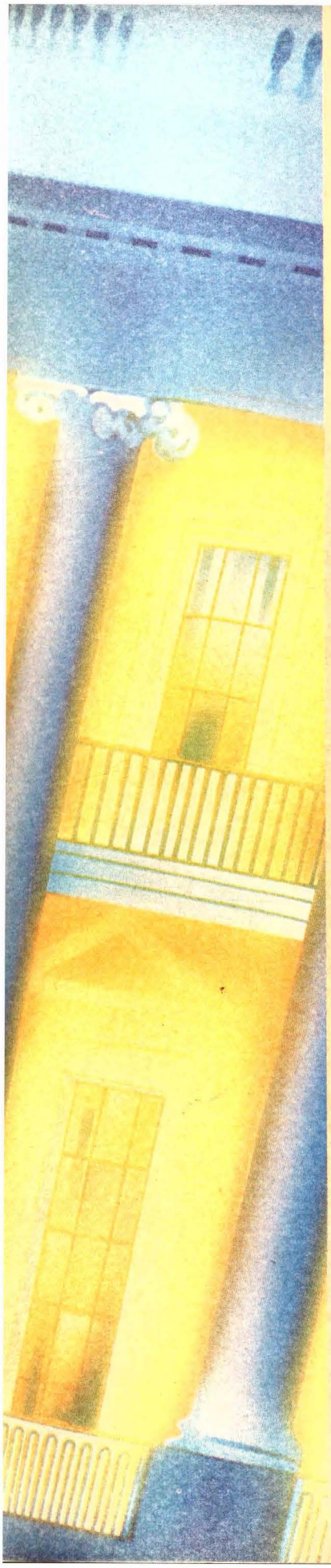

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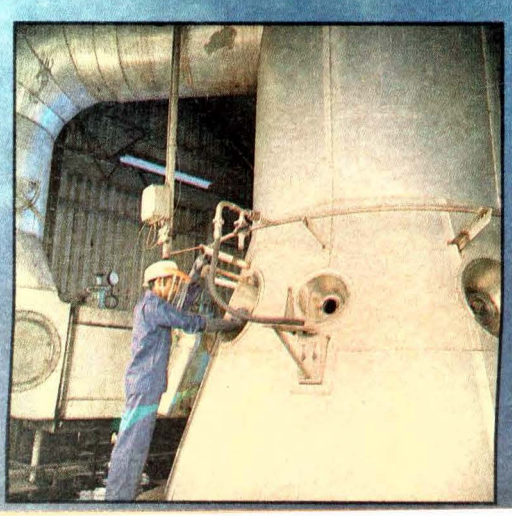

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BLACK MONEY AND V P SINGH

The Finance Minister has announced his determination to clamp down on black money. But, says DR JAY DUBASHI, there is a deeper issue at stake here: What should the relationship between government and business be?

BLACK MONEY was not born yesterday and one fails to understand why Vishwanath Pratap Singh is making such a big fuss about it, as if he had stumbled upon its existence only after he took office as Finance Minister. Singh and, for that matter, his chief, Rajiv Gandhi, could not have been what they are today but for the crates full of currency notes that were collected and spent by their party for fighting the elections. In the last general election, the ruling party is reported to have spent over Rs 500 crore on the Lok Sabha poll alone – roughly a crore a candidate. Singh obviously knows where the money came from, for he was one of the top party bosses who handled the election. It is, of course, possible that he did not go, hat or cap in hand, collecting the money, but scores of other leaders did, and they are known to him and to Rajiv Gandhi. Why, then, such a big fuss six months after the poll?

The issue of black money is essentially a political issue, not an economic one. The report by the National Institute of Public Finance Policy, a body of technicians, is therefore of no more than academic interest, for their estimates are as good or bad as yours or mine. If the Institute says that black money accounts for 20.87 per cent of the Gross National Product, one can pretend to be an expert and say that the last figure is not what it should be. What it should be, however, is open to question – the same kind of question as when you say that the huge banyan tree around the corner has 22,395,879 leaves and dare your friend to disprove it.

THE BASIC ISSUE here is one of the relationship between business, particularly big business, and government. Businessmen are close to the government everywhere, except in communist countries where there are no businessmen as we know them, and the government itself is in business. But in most other countries, businessmen and government leaders generally work together, though not always in close company. In India, the distance between business and government has varied from time to time, from mutual suspicion during the Nehru regime to a *bhai-bhai* kind of chumminess during Mrs Gandhi's days. Over the years, however, the nexus between big business and big politics has been something of a problem, both for the health of big business as well as that of the political system. Whenever the government has tried to dominate the scene, it has done so through controls, and these have affected growth adversely – industrial as well as overall economic growth. The consequent stagnation in the economy has affected the polity.

The last two general elections, 1980 and 1984, were not fought on economic issues. The former was fought on the issue of stability – the Janata government was branded unstable – and the latter on the issue of national integrity. It is unlikely that the next election, admittedly not due until 1989 or 1990, will be fought on the same issues, unless it suits the ruling party to do so. Chances are that the issues will be bread-and-butter issues like food, poverty, jobs and housing, activities that are inextricably linked with the health of the economy, particularly the private sector.

The government has realised that it has lost control over the economy, the kind of tight control it exercised

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until about 1975, that is, until the Emergency. Too many things are happening which the government is increasingly at a loss to explain. As, for instance, rising prices after the budget which was certified as non-inflationary, or the failure of industry to pick up its growth rate despite so-called liberalisation.

Before the Emergency, businessmen virtually ate out of the government's hands and went hungry if the government could not feed them. The worst period was the early '70s when, after Mrs Gandhi's palace coup of 1969, the economic levers were virtually captured by Leftists in the name of *Garibi Hatao*. It was soon clear, however, that the mini-revolution was turning counter-productive and that the economy was slowing down, if not virtually coming to a halt. Mrs Gandhi tried to stem the rot by imposing the Emergency which was, in effect, the last attempt by the political class in India to re-establish by force its dominance over the faltering economic system. It was, however, too late. The economy had not only become too complex to be manipulated by a few people at the top, but the private sector had realised its strength and also acquired a certain degree of autonomy from the government through the creation of its own source of finance: black money.

Black money may or may not be immoral but, to a hard-pressed businessman with the government breathing down his neck all the time, it was the only form of money on which the powers that be had little control. He shared it with politicians at the time of elections, and also with bureaucrats, but it was his own money, to do with as he pleased, no questions asked. Most of the money was used in business but it also helped him keep politicians and bureaucrats at bay, giving him a measure of freedom for manoeuvre.

In the meantime, the government's own public sector, the sheet-anchor which was expected to acquire commanding heights and dominate the economy, was rapidly turning into a sick animal which could be kept alive only through periodical injections of resources from the exchequer. Since the exchequer had no resources of its own, except what it collected through taxes, this virtually meant that the public sector was being kept on oxygen by the taxpayer and, since the bulk of taxes are indirect and channelled through industry and trade, by the business community. The dominance of the public sector is now a myth. It is, in fact, the private sector which keeps the giant state-owned units in business – the electricity and transport undertakings lose over Rs 1,500 crore a year, the losses being made good through taxes and the Nasik press – and the government knows it. You thus have a catch-22 situation: a public sector which is anything but self-reliant and has to be bailed out through taxes collected from the rest of the economy, mainly private trade and industry; and you cannot do this unless you allow the latter to grow; and it cannot grow unless you free it of all constraints and give the public sector a back seat. Call it 'liberalisation', call it 'new economic policy', but the impression that it is something that is being gifted to private industry by the government is not only misleading but false. It is the only way the government can get the economy moving, for anything else would not only be counter-productive but, in fact, suicidal for a party that, four years from now, may be judged by its economic record.

Businessmen should try and get closer to the market they supply and to the cunsumer who will ultimately decide whether they will live or die.

VISHWANATH Pratap Singh would do well to give up the pretence that he or his colleagues are running the economy. They are not, and they stopped doing so ten years ago. They are only running, or trying to run, their own government, which is not the same thing. There has been a big qualitative change in India's economy which is now running, as Ghanashyam Das Birla used to say about his own group, on an automat. The government, too, seems to have realised this, for it is now no longer as greedy as it used to be to load its plate with goodies. It has recently turned over a couple of oil refineries to the joint sector, something that would have been unthinkable ten years ago, and may allow the private sector to enter the field of telecommunications. This is not an act of grace, only one of wisdom, for it is wise to let someone else do what you can do only half as well.

The business community on its part would do well to keep its distance. It is in a position to call the shots, but it can do so only if it doesn't get too close to the powers that be. The talk of building India Inc, and from people who ought to know better, is not only dangerous but suicidal for business. Nothing could, in fact, be more diabolical than a ganging-up of politicians and businessmen, which is what India Inc implies. Businessmen should try and get closer to the market which they supply, and to the consumer who will ultimately decide whether they will live or die. Politicians and governments come and go but, in an open society, and an open economy, one being impossible without the other, it is the consumer – the man in the street – who goes on forever. He is also the man who votes, which is why Vishwanath Pratap Singh wants to keep him happy, even if, contrary to the party's high doctrine of socialism, he has to turn Right to do so. He is not doing a favour to big business – or small – by doing so; he is saving his own neck, for nothing is more precious to a politician than the right vote at the right time, and there are times when even money, whether black or white, cannot buy a vote. ♦

BLACK MONEY

What it is, how it is generated, what it is used for and what can be done about it.

BY SEEMA GUPTE

BLACK MONEY is the concubine of Indian business and politics: nearly everybody who attacks it from a public platform finds some use for it in private. Consider its phenomenal growth over the last 25 years. In 1960-61 it was estimated to comprise 6.5 per cent of the economy. By 1975-76, this figure had nearly doubled to 11.4 per cent. And earlier this year, the National Institute of Public Finance Policy estimated that black money comprised between 18-21 per cent of the economy: a staggering Rs 36,786 crore!

That black money should exist at all is not surprising. Most economies have a black component. In the United Kingdom, it is estimated that the black economy accounts for roughly eight per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and this is probably true of most other advanced economies, too. But, black money in those countries is generated from only one or two sources. In the UK, it is small shopkeepers and self-employed persons (such as plumbers, mini-cab drivers and the like) who tend to evade tax. And in the US, the black component of the economy consists mainly of income generated by transactions that are, themselves, illegal; i.e., the organised crime which, with an annual turnover of US $ 150 billion, is the US's largest single industry.

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What makes India's black economy different is, first of all, its size: 21 per cent of GDP is a much higher proportion than in most other countries. And second, the manner in which it is generated. Black money in India is not a phenomenon attributable to the mafia or to mendacious plumbers who file dishonest income tax returns. It is, instead, an all-encompassing phenomenon that touches nearly every aspect of the economy. If you run a business, at least some of your payments (if not a chunk of your income), will be in black. If you want to buy or sell a flat in Bombay, then part of the price will be negotiated in black. If you wish to get a phone installed, obtain a gas cylinder, procure a ration card or do any one of a number of things that you are perfectly entitled to do, the chances are that you will still have to pay a premium (regardless of what it is called: 'bribe', '*bakshish*', 'speed money', etc) to an official who will pocket it but not declare it to the income tax authorities. If you are having dinner at a plush restaurant, it is probably safe to assume that at least a third of your fellow diners are paying their bills with money they have hidden from the tax-man. It will be equally true to assume that the restaurant will not account for upto one-third of the diners.

What makes all of this even more outrageous is that there is no longer any attempt at pretence. Black money has long since ceased to be regarded as a manifestation of dishonesty. There has been such a fundamental shift in the country's values that tax evasion is now not regarded as cause for moral censure, and those with substantial black incomes can dispose of them in the most conspicuous manner possible. Even that other prime generator of black money, corruption, while still subject to some moral disapproval, has now been resignedly accepted as something that everybody just has to live with.

And the government, whose responsibility it should be to stamp out black money, has, so far, acted more to encourage the growth of the parallel economy than to curtail it. Elections are won and lost on black money, licences are awarded against black money payments, official contracts generate their own black money with kickbacks, and many government employees – including those whose job it is to uncover black money – accept bribes, paid out of black incomes.

There are signs now that this atti-

tude may, at last, be changing. During the campaign for the Assembly elections, the Prime Minister spoke of his government's determination to attack the problem and his Finance Minister V P Singh, has launched his own drive against tax evasion. Singh has also called for a national debate on the subject, and has suggested that the National Institute of Public Finance Policy (NIPFP) report on the subject be used as the basis for such a debate. Of course, such official rhetoric is not new. But this time it does seem to have captured the country's imagination, and it seems possible that this government will do what its predecessors have shied away from.

WHAT exactly *is* black money? A simple answer is that it consists of income that has been under-reported for income tax purposes. While all such income is, of course, black, the evasion of income tax is not the main motive for under-reporting of incomes: after all, over 80 per cent of tax revenues in India are raised through indirect taxes. One motive for under-reporting of earnings is the desire to evade sales, excise or customs duties. Another is that the transactions that generate black money may themselves be illegal: black-marketing, corruption, kickbacks, etc. A third is that many enterprises need black money (or cash income) if they are to survive: to pay off government functionaries, to purchase property or to make political contributions. Even honest people who wouldn't mind paying taxes, find that they have to withhold some cash to make such payments. And finally, black money is often the by-product of actions taken to flout economic controls – for instance, exported goods that are under-invoiced to generate a foreign exchange kitty abroad. A better definition of black money is that it is money generated by an activity not reported to the authorities and thus not accounted to the fiscal authorities.

Obviously, one aspect of the black money problem is the high rate of direct taxation. Till recently, both personal and corporate tax rates were extremely high. Until a decade ago, the marginal income tax rate was as high as 75 per cent and when it was combined with wealth tax, the combined marginal rate of tax on income from wealth reached 97.5 per cent, for persons with a net wealth of Rs 12 lakh. If their net wealth exceeded Rs 18 lakh, then the marginal tax rate exceeded 100 per cent. In such a situation, the incentive to evade tax was considerable.

WHILE HIGH TAXATION plays a part in making evasion seem more attractive, this high level of taxes should be seen in context. Since 1957, the socialistic pattern of society has ensured that large areas of the economy do not operate under a free market system but are regulated by a multiplicity of controls. It is this permit-quota-licence *raj* that has really contributed to the growth of black money. On one level, there is the corruption – the bribes, the kickbacks and the 'speed money' – so integral to this system. And on another, there are artificial shortages created by governmental control of the economy. These shortages have led to 'scarcity premia', (an economist's term for what most people would call the black market) on a variety of goods, ranging from imported raw materials to manufactured products. The money paid over and above the official price for such goods helps swell the black economy.

The government has traditionally played down this most significant cause of the growth of the black economy. Instead, official statements and the pattern of tax raids have combined to suggest that the parallel economy is kept going by the film industry and by such illegal traffickers as smugglers. The significance of recent statements by Finance Minister, V P Singh and of the NIPFP report is that they both reject this easy, but erroneous, view. The major centres of the black economy are business and industry – both in the private and in the public sector.

The NIPFP report pulls no punches in highlighting the importance of the public sector in the generation of black income. It points to the massive kickbacks that have become a part of public expenditure and notes that even if such leakages amount to only ten per cent, then this sector alone generated a black income of Rs 900 crore during 1975-76. (This is the last year for which full figures are available!) Assuming the same level of leakage, the leakage during the Sixth Plan should amount to a mind-boggling Rs 17,000 crore! Lest one question these figures, NIPFP said that it had found that 'for most substantial public sector contracts, whether placed at home or abroad, significant cuts and kickbacks to key decision-makers have become the rule rather than the exception'.

NIPFP also analysed in detail another sector that contributed greatly to the growth of the parallel economy: urban real estate. Its study of that sector shows clearly how important government regulations are in nurturing the black economy. When it comes to the buying and selling of real estate, both the buyer and the seller have substantial incentives to declare a lower price on the sale deed and to settle the rest in cash. For the seller, there is the opportunity to evade capital gains tax and wealth tax. For the buyer, there are opportunities to evade wealth tax, stamp duty and house property tax.

Even when property is not being sold, there are other factors motivating black transactions. The operation of rent control leads to the familiar phenomenon of 'scarcity premia', and the difference between the controlled price and the market clearing price is made up by a *pugree* payment which is usually made in cash and is never declared. When it comes to construction, the variety of government permits required for construction or transfer of urban property, once again provide an incentive for black money transactions.

Though the NIPFP report does not examine it in detail, there is no doubt that crores of black money are gene-

V P Singh: will the Finance Minister's measures work?

rated by the evasion of excise duties. After all, indirect taxation is the government's most important source of tax revenue: customs and central excise duties account for 80 per cent of all tax revenue. According to the NIPFP's commodity-wise studies of excise evasion, the sectors where it occurs the most are copper, cotton fabrics and plastics. The report suggests that underestimation of production and sales (to evade tax) is most pronounced in manufacturing, trade, hotels and restaurants.

It might as well have added the cigarette and liquor industry. There are crores to be made in the manufacture of cigarettes and liquor by the simple expedient of underreporting of production. As the price paid by the consumer reflects the excise component – even though no excise has been paid – the manufacturer gets to pocket this amount. This might explain, in part, the rush to take over cigarette companies during the FERA divestations.

Sales tax, an important source of revenue for states, is also routinely evaded. A 1981 evaluation of the sales tax system in Bihar showed that in most years, revenue collections were half, or less than half, of the estimated tax potential.

Studies of the structure of indirect taxation in India suggest that the complexity of this structure invites evasion through various forms of misclassification and a complicated system of rates. As a result, there are serious problems with any estimates of production – so great is the evasion.

CONSIDERING that black money has become such an integral part of the Indian economy, it could well be asked. Why is it such a bad thing? Admittedly, its possession by certain individuals does lead to some vulgarity, but otherwise, is it really a major problem?

The answer is an unequivocal 'yes'. There are several things wrong with black money and the vulgarity it engenders is the least of them.

Economists will tell you their biggest problem with the parallel economy: it throws all their calculations out of joint. Because around 20 per cent of the economy is concealed, it is impossible to accurately monitor the economic health of the country. Essential indicators such as the savings-income ratio, the estimate of national income and its sectoral composition, the foreign trade figures and the like, all become guesstimates. This has more serious consequences than is immediately apparent. In the absence of accurate data, economic policy becomes a shot in the dark and it is difficult to control inflation, generate extra employment and the like.

Even more serious is the distorting effect that the prevalence of black money has on income distribution and, therefore, on the structure and fabric of society. Government employees and other salaried persons find that their taxes are deducted at source so that there is little scope for evasion. On the other hand, businessmen and self-employed professionals file their returns and pay taxes on the basis of whatever incomes they choose to declare. Obviously, they have much greater scope for evasion. Those in business also have the benefits of the licence-quota-permit *raj*: the selling of scarce raw materials in the black market, etc, and therefore, the extra income which they do not, and cannot, declare. Their advantage over a salaried man is glaring.

This distortion in real income is clearly unfair. The way it works now, a Secretary to the government earns much less, even when you include his house and other perquisites, than the average small shopkeeper in Bombay or Delhi. Obviously, the Secretary then has a greater incentive to be corrupt. Worse still, many talented young persons opt for business, and give service a miss – a trend that has significant long-term implications for the future of the country.

Once people start having black incomes what do they do with them?

Economist D R Pendse estimates that Rs 4.6 crore of black money is generated every hour. Obviously, all of this money cannot be put back into business or invested in 'normal' assets. At least half (though some estimates suggest two-thirds) is spent on consumption of goods and services. The most important means of holding black money is in the form of undervalued real estate (this leads to inflation in property prices) but it is also held in gold, silver, diamonds, gems and similar unproductive assets. Much of it goes abroad (through elaborate *hawala* networks), to numbered accounts in Swiss banks. All such money is lost to the productive part of the economy.

The money that is spent on manufactured goods and services tends to be directed into conspicuous consumption. Soon, white (tax accounted) resources are re-allocated to meet this black demand. As Manu Shroff, Editor of *The Economic Times* points out, the growth of hotels, many of which thrive on expenditures of undeclared income, is a case in point. Once a local (i e black) demand asserts itself, the sanctions and approvals for further investment in those sectors is secured and justified on various grounds, such as tourist promotion in the case of hotels. This mis-direction of scarce resources, because of the pressure of black demand, has occurred in other sectors as well.

There are also other undesirable consequences of the growth of the black economy. Among the most important is the moral effect its spread has on society. Once there is a large stock of undeclared income, which cannot be used for legitimate purposes, it is certain to be used for illegitimate ones. Corruption is the obvious instance. As economist Gangadhar Gadgil says: "This leads to the creation of lawless power centres, and extra-governmental authority. The virtues of honesty and hard work are undermined and are replaced by attitudes that place individual material gain above all else." The detrimental effect black money has had on Indian morality is difficult to quantify.

ARE THERE any effective solutions to the problem of black money? The government has favoured three different approaches at various times. The first is the raid-investigation approach directed at exposing tax evaders and seeking to penalise them. The second is the 'special scheme' approach. This involves such schemes as Voluntary Disclosure. And the third is the taxation approach, based on the principle that if you reduce tax rates, then the incentive to evade is correspondingly reduced.

Of the three, the 'special scheme' approach has been tried most often. The government announced variations of a Voluntary Disclosure scheme in 1951, in 1965 (twice) and in 1975. The 1951 and 1965 schemes uncovered a total of Rs 267 crore, while the 1975 scheme – announced during the Emergency – netted Rs 727 crore. These amounts were small compared to the total amount of black money in circulation and, in many cases, those making the disclosures were people against whom investigations and proceedings were already in progress.

In 1978, the Janata government demonetised 1,000-rupee notes. This measure, too, was not a success. It was estimated that such notes accounted for Rs 145 crore of total money supply; and Rs 125 crore was duly handed in for reconversion. The missing Rs 20 crore, was the black component – a paltry sum again. In 1981, Mrs Gandhi's government launched a Special Bearer Bond scheme, which also met with only limited success. Partly, it was the low return the bonds offered and partly, it may have been the fear that a non-Congress government would not honour the bonds, that worked against the scheme.

The trouble with most manifestations of the 'special scheme' approach is that they are one-offs. They allow the government to recover some part of the pile of black money but fail to prevent its flow and generation once the scheme is over. Secondly, most of them (except Voluntary Disclosure) affect only the cash component of black money. Black assets held in gold, jewels, real estate and the like, are not affected.

It could be argued that the recent Non-Resident Investment scheme has also served to recycle black balances held abroad but that was not its intention and the amounts repatriated to India are still not very significant.

The Finance Minister opposes most 'special schemes'. He is on record as saying that they benefit the tax evader and are unfair to the honest taxpayer. He prefers a combination of the raid-investigation approach and the taxation approach – a sort of carrot-and-stick method. Accordingly, he has reshuffled the income tax department and asked it to step up its raiding activities. This has yielded some results. During April-July 1984, there were 280 seizures in Bombay and Rs 1.18 crore was seized. The figure for April-July 1985 is much higher. There have been 450 seizures and Rs 6.92 crore has been seized. (Figures for seizures refer to cash and assets actually confiscated. If documentary proof of evasion is uncovered, then the extent of that evasion is not included in these figures.)

There are some problems with the raid-investigation approach. No system can work in the long run if it relies solely on fear. Business and industry cannot be expected to flourish if they are constantly harassed by investigators and the tax authorities are, in any case (at least in the past), open to corruption themselves.

On the other hand, few people would deny that the investigating machinery needed a thorough overhaul. In 1981-82, there were 4,282 raids and Rs 30.66 crore worth of assets were seized. In 1982-83, the number of raids rose marginally to 4,291, but the value of seized assets dropped to Rs 27.96 crore. And in 1983-84, the number of raids and the value of seizures increased only marginally to 4,332 raids and Rs 27.99 crore worth of assets. As most economists are agreed that the level of black money in the economy rose substantially

during this period, clearly something was wrong with the raiding pattern, if both the frequency of raids and the value of seizures did not increase considerably.

The Finance Minister seems to feel that the taxation approach represents our best hope for a substantial decrease in the black money level – provided that it is backed by the stick of the raid-investigation approach. Many experts share this view. Economist D R Pendse, *Commerce* Editor, Vadilal Dagli, and taxation expert Nani Palkhivala all believe that personal income tax should be totally abolished. Even those who disagree, like tax expert H P Ranina and economist Gangadhar Gadgil, believe that personal income tax should never exceed 50-60 per cent of income.

Of course, income tax evasion is only part of the story. Perhaps more important is the undervaluing of assets to evade capital gains tax. In certain sectors, such as real estate, a substantial reduction in – if not abolition of – capital gains tax is necessary to reduce the generation of black money. If capital gains tax is reduced, says Manu Shroff, then 'the incentive to hide real values of assets will be greatly reduced and a major distortion in the economy corrected'.

WILL THESE MEASURES work in the long run? There are problems with most of them and nearly all will have only a limited effect unless their scope is widened. Take, for instance, the raid-investigation approach. Few would deny that evaders need to be punished, but as long as the raids are directed solely at uncovering evasion they cannot have more than limited success. A major source of some of the black incomes that these raids uncover is government expenditure. Since 1951, government expenditure has increased 50 times and kickbacks and bribes have become routine. Unless this corruption is stamped out, raids directed at uncovering evasion will only force those who need black money for dealing with the government to hide their cash better.

Similarly, there can be no doubt that the reduction of tax rates in the budget was long overdue and that they need to be reduced even further. But, high tax rates are only one manifestation of the licence-*raj*. As long as this system of rigid economic controls continues, black money will still be generated in scarcity premia, speed money and the like. Until this entire system is overhauled, black money, which is such an integral part of its workings, will not be substantially reduced.

There is also the problem of attitude. It is true that the causes of black money have to do with economic controls and high taxes but the fact is that the black economy has now gone beyond mere motives. There are now so many advantages in dealing in cash that much of business and industry prefers black transactions. The attitude now is that there is nothing immoral in evading tax and that black dealings – which bring much higher returns, free of any kind of taxation at all – are to be preferred.

IT NOW SEEMS LIKELY – judging by the Finance Minister's recent pronouncements – that the government will further reduce tax rates, and loosen the structure of controls. These moves will be very welcome but they will not, on their own, succeed in removing the motives for black transactions. Industry and business are so used to the zero-tax advantages of the black economy that cash transactions will seem more attractive than white transactions – even if these are taxed at reasonable levels. After all, no tax is better than a little tax when it comes to making money.

The income and corporation tax collections for April-August 1985 show an increase of Rs 191 crore over the same period last year (Rs 948 crore as against Rs 757 crore). This increase is due, in part, to the more equitable system of rates, but it would be futile to pretend that the Rs 948 crore represents anything like an evasion-free collection. There is still a lot of evasion and unless the government fosters a moral climate in which the generation and retention of black incomes is perceived as being reprehensible, all its fiscal measures can meet with only limited success.

The problem, of course, is that no Indian government can condemn black money without seeming hypocritical. The politician is the fountainhead of the black economy. He earns his bribes from it and survives on the kickbacks and pay-offs it generates. There are signs now that Rajiv Gandhi's government is trying to be different. Industrialists report that pay-offs are becoming less common and that Central Cabinet ministers have stopped demanding considerations.

This is good news, but three problems remain. Firstly, this government's reluctance to deal in black money has not yet been clearly established. Until the Prime Minister makes an example of corrupt politicians and puts his determination to end corruption on the record, people will not know what to believe. Secondly, this new 'clean government' psychology is restricted to the Central government. In the Congress (I)-run states, it is still business as usual. And while only big industrialists ever needed to pay off Central ministers, even medium-sized businessmen find it difficult to deal with state governments without resorting to bribery. Until that changes, nobody will take the government's rhetoric seriously.

It is the third problem that has the most worrying long-term implications. It is impossible to fight an election in India using only white money. Even the Prime Minister, despite the Mr Clean propaganda, must know that his party spent over Rs 500 crore of black money in the last general election. The Finance Minister concedes that there are no easy solutions to this problem – state financing of elections is not yet a practical possibility. And yet, until this problem is solved, no Indian government can talk about cracking down on the black economy – and really mean it. ♦

ALL THE CULTURE PEOPLE

With the Festivals of India and the institution of a Ministry of Culture, the 'in' people in Delhi are the culture people. MALAVIKA SANGHVI toured the culture circuit.

SNIP-SNIP went Sonal Mansingh, the nationally and internationally celebrated classical dancer. Snip-snip, scattering the entire cultural fabric of Delhi, like pieces of rag, all around her living-room.

It was 8 a m and Sonal Mansingh was having a ball. Ladling dollops of honey into her *tulsi*-flavoured tea. Freshly-bathed and oiled, her floral perfume mingling headily with the fragrance of *agarbatti* in her room, she resembled nothing as much as a well-fed, well-groomed cat.

A flamboyant gesture from the well-photographed arms, a narrowing of the famous eyes in glee, peals of laughter rising like silver bubbles to the ceiling – and it was all over.

The Delhi cultural mafia had been eaten before breakfast.

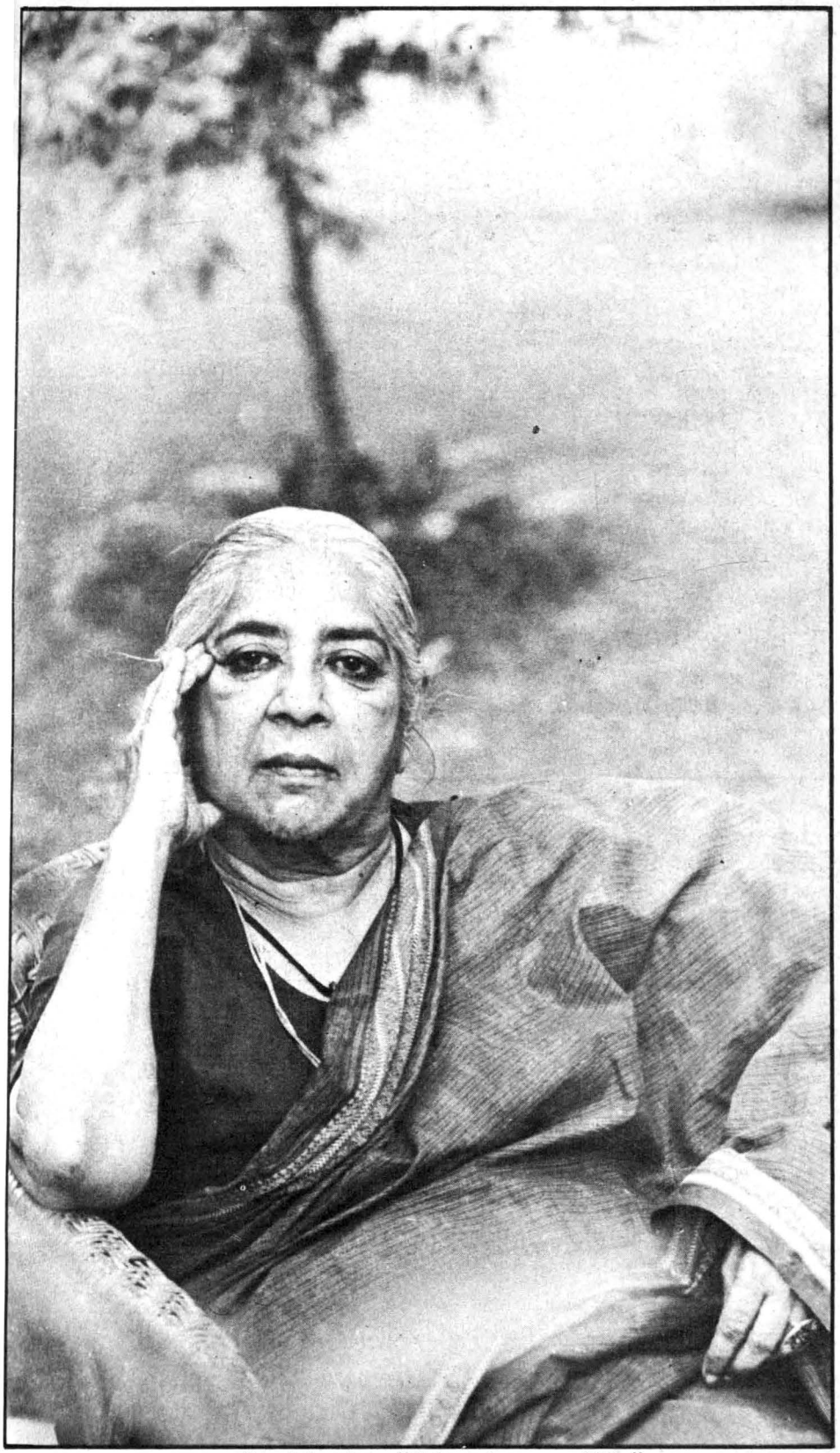
IMAGINE, FOR A MOMENT, the gasp in the Sangeet Natak Akademi auditorium, and you will understand a little of Sonal's glee. The low hum of air-conditioners. The wives of important bureaucrats in the first rows, in their Kanjeevarams, eyeing each other appraisingly. The backstage panic, the scramble for garlands, speeches, mikes. The rituals that help glorify the event.

And then, the gasp, when Sonal Mansingh, slated to dance that evening to honour the great Balasaraswathi, chose, instead, to do a little number of her own. One that was not on the programme. Reading carefully from a paper, in her little-girl voice, Sonal explained on behalf of her colleagues, why they were not going to dance that night. What it amounted to, was this: If we're not good enough to dance at your Festivals, then we're not going to dance at your shows. Next, all but sticking their collective tongue out at the horrified face of officialdom, the dancers waltzed out, arm in arm.

"And before all this happened, they wouldn't even talk to each other!" wailed an insider. "They hated the sight of each other." "Silly girls," sniffed Dr Narayana Menon, Director of the Sangeet Natak Akademi and committee member of the Festival of India, at whom the walk-out was directed. "They made complete fools of themselves."

In his younger days, Dr Menon worked for the BBC. Later, he helped run the Tata-funded National Centre for Performing Arts in Bombay. He is also an authority on Indian music and has written a book on the Irish poet, W B Yeats. Now, transported to Delhi, he seemed to be enjoying the foibles and fickleness of bureaucracy. "What is all this nonsense about exorbitant costs?" asks the erudite doctor, his mathematical South Indian self-righteousness aroused. "The budgets of both Festivals

Malavika Sanghvi, a frequent **Imprint** *contributor, wrote our cover stories on the Doon, Oxbridge and St Stephen's networks.*



Pupul Jayakar : "Culture is a way of life."

put together, would not buy us one fighter plane!"

Now, Dr Menon is getting into his stride. The dancers are foolish, misguided souls who have been too used to being fêted and fatted on the international performance circuit. The Director of the National Museum, Dr Laxmi Sihare, who called Pupul Jayakar a liar (twice!) in public, and created a storm in a Mohenjo Daro cup by pointing to the risk of shipping priceless Indian art to faraway locales, must be mad. And, as for the other Sunday critics of the Festival, well, nobody who has been included is a critic. So there!

No, the Festival is old hat these days. What interests Dr Menon, what puts the glint back in his eye, and his tongue firmly in his cheek, are the high jinx of the bureaucratic game.

The official status of culture and art, as it stands in the capital today, is an immensely complicated thing, and it boggles the very people it rules. Dr Menon and two aides try and untangle the knots as they plough through official documents, letters and stationery. But, in the end, they can only take hopeful snipes at wresting culture away from the grip of 'governmentese'.

FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL and until recently, culture piggybacked on the Ministry of Education as a bright-eyed, but neglected, younger sister. The new government elevated it to a separate Ministry and further indulged it with a Minister of State. The Prime Minister himself retained the Cabinet portfolio. Culture, then, became legitimate. The word spread: not only did the good and handsome Prime Minister retain a special corner in his heart for culture but, what's more, his wife shared his interest too. Soon, culture became big business and canny die-hard culture vultures suddenly found it worth their whiles to look for higher branches of the culture tree to perch on.

It was decided to get grandiose. Why not have a real national centre

for culture in Delhi? Libraries, art galleries, studios, maybe a 3,000-seater auditorium, and a couple of mini-theatres thrown in. The culture people got really excited. Nine acres of land were hastily acquired at Rajpath, and it was decided to call the complex the Indira Gandhi Centre for Arts. It was to be officially opened on the late Prime Minister's birthday in 1989.

Then, working committees sprang up. One such, to discuss the building of the theatre, had as its members, the chief architect of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD); Shankho Chaudhari, Chairman of the Lalit Kala Akademi; Mohan Mahirishi, from the National School of Drama; Allan Nazareth, the Director-General of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR); Dr Kapila Vatsayana, Chairman of the Indira Gandhi Centre, and the well-known architect, Charles Correa. The committee couldn't find the time to meet Correa who had flown down from Bombay. But, besides that, things were, in government terms, about to happen.

And then, just when Dr Menon had allowed himself the luxury of imagining a 45-member Italian opera company singing *The Barber Of Seville* at one of his theatres, he heard that everything had suddenly been revised. It was all over between the Ministries of Culture and Art. They had got divorced, and now, everything was up for grabs again.

Not that, as Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Dr Menon was directly involved. The Akademi, along with two other government agencies for culture – the Sahitya and Lalit Kala Akademi – was an autonomous body, even though, as Dr Menon said blithely, it was hard work ironing the '*babu* mentality' out of his staff. No, Dr Menon had not been put out of joint at all.

But you know Delhi! The domino principle. One file is removed, and 20 projects collapse. Hidden motives. Defining, redefining and re-redefining *ad nauseum*. God knows what this new move meant. Maybe, nothing at all. In the light of all this bureaucratic tangoing, it was small wonder that a little tantrum on the part of a few dancers was, for Dr Menon, no more than just a soft-shoe shuffle.

NOBODY WHO HAS ANY CLAIM to being acquainted with Delhi's culture circuit can have missed running into its top stars – the female columnists. Each of the capital's press institutions has its own version of the *Grande Dame*. Some have more than one.

Sauntering regally through embassy cocktails, international film festivals, foreign junkets, and official functions, they dispense their views and reviews like manna. A single sentence about a hapless newsreader's *pallav* gone awry can, and will, kill. A brief favourable mention of a struggling artist can, and will, sell out an exhibition. Such is the power of these high priestesses of print. And the grandest *dame* of them all, the veteran, nonpareil, is Amita Malik, columnist for *The Hindustan Times* and the *Express Magazine*.

Nobody does it better than 'Oh-mitt-a' (the *rosogolla*-in-mouth Bengali enunciation). For over 27 years, she has covered every film festival worth covering, from Karlovy Vary to Cannes, and panned every cultural event worth panning. The Yugoslavs want her, the Russians woo her, the Hungarians court her, the Chinese invite her. Through it all, she remains unimpressed. With a dogged dedication and persevering zeal, she spits out the hype and puts the meat through the grind of her exacting standards.

Over shrimps, Bloody Mary and bloodier talk at The Tea House Of The August Moon, she is in turns tough and vulnerable. Why has the Governor of Assam's daughter been taken on as a consultant to the Festival in Paris? Does the fact that she is a Foreign Service officer's wife not preclude her from accepting such a job? Ms Malik wants some answers.

Why was Pupul Jayakar interviewed on television by the Festival's PRO? In a country as large as India, wasn't there other talent to pick? When it is pointed out that perhaps the lady in question was not the PRO at the time, Ms Malik snorts. "Ha, that's even worse! That's how she got the job, then."

And have I met this character called Nazareth? Have I noticed the way he drops his Minister-sister, Margaret Alva's name incessantly, or the way he grovels before Mala Singh? Am I aware that a top official's brother, who is a very minor poet, is sent to represent India in Festival after Festival even though he writes in English? And do I know of a particularly upwardly-mobile character called Saloni Kaul who Ms Malik runs into at the oddest of places – Warsaw, for instance?

Ms Malik draws on her phenomenal knowledge for a list of who's In and who's Out. The Holy Trinity these days is composed of Pupul Jayakar, Dr Narayana Menon, and the afore-mentioned Allan Nazareth. Of the rest, Aruna Vasudev, Chidananda Dasgupta, Kavita Nagpal and Shanta Serbjeet Singh are In. Amjad Ali Khan, Ustad Vilayat Khan and Krishen Khanna are Out. Pritish Nandy and M J Akbar are In. Utpal Dutt is Out. Hussain is Out, but he's too big to care. Malati Tambe-Vaidya is In, but she may be on her way Out soon.

But, so much for the names. Do I want to know how the mafia works? Well, she'll tell me, then.

All right. Why wasn't Ms Malik included in the press party for the Prime Minister's American tour? Was I aware that not a single female journalist went? Isn't this a scandal? And when Ms Malik's name did come up, do I know what Mani Aiyar, the PM's Information Advisor, said? He said, "Oh not her. She's too difficult."

If, after 27 years in the business, Ms Malik can be dismissed as being 'too difficult', then she snorts, she can't understand what kind of person they're looking for! "Besides, if the entire Prime Minister's Secretariat can't handle me, then what kind of men are they, anyway?" she guffaws, expertly trapping a hapless shrimp between her chopsticks. If a big fish like her can let the piranhas of the mafia nibble at her reputation, then what of the lesser

Sonal Mansingh : the lady who would not dance.

minnows? I wonder.

SHANTA SERBJEET SINGH is another Delhi *Grande Dame*. She does not tell me *her* views on Ms Malik, but would much rather ponder the state of culture and the newly-proposed plan to set up regional centres for the propagation of culture.

This pains Ms Singh deeply. "Culture is a very fragile thing," she says. "It has kept India together in times of great trouble. There has been a mobility of culture even within a completely integrated pattern. Now, the government has embarked on a scheme whereby each state shall donate a crore of rupees to nurture and protect its cultural identity. This is too simplistic a view of our cultural identity crisis," the tall, striking Ms Singh feels. "In view of its past it could lead to further suspicion, with each state resenting the one crore it has had to put up to support cultures it wholly does not approve of," she continues, sipping tea in the shadow of her husband's gargantuan canvasses, in her Defence Colony drawing-room.

"While, in principle, one can agree that the government must support regional efforts to advance culture, and that its setting aside Rs 35 crore out of its Rs 155 crore budget for these centres is right – is not its first responsibility towards the upkeep, efficiency and output of its own institutions like the National Archives of India, the National Museum, the three central Akademis, whose workings leave a lot to be desired?"

Ms Singh has no real quarrel with the Festival. "The only question to be asked in such matters is: Should there be a Festival or not," she wrote in one of her articles in the Sunday section of *The Hindustan Times*. "For if it is, then something, for both better and worse, will automatically happen."

The better in that sentence is, according to Ms Singh, the pride in things Indian – a natural outcome of the Festival. More money for artists. A ground for culture to breed on. A rethinking of cultural policies.

The worse is the minor irritant of Opposition parliamentary members, like K P Unnikrishnan, who attacked the sending of antiques abroad. "No, Mr Unnikrishnan. One wishes you would look a little nearer home and take some action in, say, the Mathura Museum, where museum functionaries connive with vandals to carry on personal Tantrik practices on the silent, helpless stone-faced Apsaras and Yakshis," admonished Ms Singh, in her article. ('Personal Tantrik practices' on statues of Apsaras? The mind boggles!)

No, culture was alive, well and flourishing in 1985. Mrs Jayakar had a Leviathan view of culture and, of course, the Festivals were a grand idea.

But yes, Ms Singh *had* noticed that suddenly the culture business had become more vicious. Perhaps, that was because the stakes were higher these days. An exhibition at the Pompidou Centre and you were set up for life. And yes, now that I'd mentioned it, Delhi *was* a friendless city, with each for himself, and power had corroded *all* its values. You couldn't, said Ms Singh, be at a Delhi party and not be aware of the back-biting and bitching that went on.

Ms Singh's voice grew low and the interview went Off The Record. The Festival had, she confided, given rise to gang wars in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, to nepotism, and to the odd adulterous affair. There were names, details, and facts. But all, alas, Off The Record.

On The Record, the only real criticism of the Festival,

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY

that she would make was of the decision to send Munna the performing bear to Paris. Now, *that* was Very Wrong.

Ah, the wiles of Delhi; an On The Record, Off The Record city, where everyone's got something on someone. Except Munna the bear. And look what happened to *him*!

MARTAND SINGH KAPURTHALA, a fragile beatific man in khadi, is running himself ragged in two cities, talking, talking, talking; shovelling large spoonfuls of *paan-masala* into his mouth, when he ought to be having lunch. Over two days, I find Martand Singh, in Bombay and Delhi, explaining things to assorted groups of huddled men till he seems to be dropping from fatigue.

Singh is the scion of a princely North Indian family, a designer who is passionately involved with the growth of handlooms. He is credited with setting up the Calico Museum of handlooms in Ahmedabad; is a Secretary and the moving spirit behind INTACH, a high-profile environmental and archaeological preservation group; and is involved with putting up an exhibition for the Festival. He is also Pupul Jayakar's blue-eyed boy, Arun Singh's brother, and a messiah-like figure amongst weavers. He is also a bit of a pedant, tends to be obscure, and of course, runs himself ragged wearing all his different hats at the same time.

"Culture is irrespective of policy," says Singh in his sparse INTACH office, with all its doors open, revealing diligent clerks and secretaries working right through the after-lunch lull. "The role of the government is to deal with culture gently, to nurture its institutions. A Festival such as this, is not a manifestation of culture.

"If a man spits on a wall," says Singh, "it is his cultural attitude, which rises out of the economic theatre. May I suggest," he continues, "that a weaver who is poor may have more skills than a matriculate, and unless you recognise the cultural pattern of his skills you are not nurturing his self-respect.

"Our single most fragile resource is the individual, and we have to carry him with us," Singh explains. "Until this attitude of 'us' (government) against 'them' (people) stops, we will not be able to do without this umbrella of the Festival. Next time around, perhaps we might be able to build enough managerial capabilities to do what we've done without the government."

Singh talks about precision and passion. About myths and the oral traditions of an agrarian society. About museums as *bhandaars*, and a weaver's *izzat*. About the sari as the fabric of court and temple, and the central structure for cultural expediency.

The irrepressible Mallika Sarabhai who sits in on the latter half of the interview, fresh from her triumph as Draupadi in Peter Brooks's *Mahabharata,* and who will be off soon ('to join my five husbands') again, perks up when Singh discusses the need for documentation and a basis for criticism. "In Bombay," says the attractive dancer, eying me accusingly, "I am often reviewed by a sports writer!"

INTACH, explains Singh, was set up in January 1984, with headquarters in Delhi, Rajiv Gandhi as Chairman, and 33 regional centres. It plans to create and stimulate an awareness among the public for the preservation of the cultural and national heritage, to undertake measures for the preservation and conservation of those natural resources that have a high archaeological, historical, scientific or artistic value, and to undertake documentation of the cultural and natural heritage, amongst other things.

Amongst its many schemes is the clearing of the Ganga, a project that caught the imagination of the government and has now been included in the Seventh Plan, as a Rs 250-crore enterprise. It has also launched preservatory offensives on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Doon Valley and seeks to nurture and preserve the longevity of the Red Fort.

Martand Singh speaks of these projects with a zealous fervour and one wonders if it is at all pertinent to ask who will preserve this fragile-looking man, while he is busy preserving everything else.

"OH, YOU MET MAPU," says Maura Moynihan, daughter of the Senator and former US Ambassador to India. "I was once at a lecture that Mapu gave and it was like a hen-festival. All the women kept going, 'Oh Mapu, Mapu, Mapu.' "

Maura is young, exuberant, wears *kurta-pyjamas*, Indian bric-à-brac, speaks Hindi with a guttural relish, does devastating impersonations of people, and says she could stay on in India forever.

Maura works with Rajiv Sethi, the other angelic-looking, blue-eyed boy of Pupul Jayakar and the designer of the hugely successful Aditi exhibition which officially opened the Festival of America. She was liaison person for the Smithsonian, on Aditi, and is now involved with setting up the Golden Eye exhibition to open at the Cooper-Hewitt in November 1985.

Maura loves India, and all things Indian. She's worked on Broadway productions, and declares the performing artists of Aditi to be infinitely more talented and dedicated than most Broadway actors. "They were treated as stars," she says. "They got the due applause they deserved! They're great artists in their own right. They were judged on a universal level with other jugglers, acrobats, dancers."

Rajiv Sethi was wonderful, he had the common touch, he had an extraordinary eye, he stood by the Bhulebisri-*wallahs* in Shadipur when no one else did and, according to Maura, he even sat in on panchayat meetings, helping the village elders take decisions on matters important to the community.

Yes, Maura is aware that the Delhi culture scene is rife with jealousy and battle camps. But no, there is nothing in

Acrobats at Aditi: artistes in their own right.

the stories about a Rajiv-Mapu race for Pupul Jayakar's mantle. Whereas culture vultures are a vicious lot, even by New York standards but, she insists, a Mapu-Rajiv collision is just so much Delhi gossip.

Mapu, Pappu (Navin Patnaik, co-author with Jackie Kennedy of a book on Indian costumes) and Rajiv are workaholics. They have absolutely no time for rivalry. They care deeply about bettering the lot of the common man. Besides, Mapu and Rajiv are both in different fields. Mapu is in handlooms, whereas Rajiv is into crafts; there is no basis for rivalry. It is people, who try and group them into camps. "I've seen them together and they're so gracious about each other. They're so positive, and enthusiastic about what they're doing. It's wonderful to see them at work."

THE AMERICAN PART of the Festival seems to be largely manned by bright, insightful young women. Maureen Liebl, Conference Co-ordinator with the Indo-US Subcommission, is in charge, specifically, of putting together seminars and seems to know a surprising amount about the culture circuit. Maureen's room at the Claridges has been converted into a makeshift home: Fab-India quilts taking away some of the impersonality of hotel furnishings, and a village-made cane rattle lies on a monstrous TV set, softening the effect.

Of course, there are papers, papers and more papers, strewn around. It's Maureen's job to raise funding from America for different seminars back home, and to then co-ordinate various conferences for the best results. For instance, Maureen thought it was a shame that people like Gieve Patel and Romila Thapar would come all the way to America, for a single seminar, and then go back. So she scouted around for other universities and smaller cities and platforms and got the likes of Gieve and Romila to talk there.

Over a light lunch of tepid tomato soup, Maureen enthuses about the Indians she has met through her job. "It's incredible, their devotion to work." It exceeds anything she has seen in people in similar jobs in America. "These people will think nothing of putting a full day's work into their careers, and then going home to work on their thesis, or write a paper," she says.

In her personal capacity, Maureen senses a change in the attitude of Americans. "People ask me 'When are you next going to India? Can we come along with you?' whereas earlier it was 'You're going to India, don't drink the water,' " she laughs.

THE SEMINARS that are going to take place in America throughout 1985 and 1986 include speakers like Bipin Chandra, Nikhil Chakravarty, Geeti Sen, Dilip Chitre, P N Haksar, L K Jha, E Alkazi, Aroon Purie, Rajiv Sethi, Haku Shah, Satyajit Ray, Gulam Sheikh, J R D Tata, and Raja Ramana.

An eclectic list. I remember what Charles Correa, also slated to talk, told me. "The government proposes to put all its lists of intellectuals onto a computer," he laughed. "It sounds like a Nazi hit-list."

In Bombay, such a list causes hyper-acidity in many souls. At a decidedly cultural party, a buxom artist complains to me about Bombay's sad representation at the

Festival. *Bombay's so out of it*. She is bitter about the cliques, the Delhi mafia of Festival functionaries, and the Baroda mafia of Left-wing artists. Between the two, the artist wails, Bombay's been forgotten. The artist's bitterness is contagious. The party turns into a Festival-bashing bash. Soon, everyone has a hard-luck Festival story, and I am reminded of what Narayana Menon told me: "Nobody who's been included has complained – yet!"

Elizabeth Bumiller, the stylish Delhi-based writer for the *Washington Post*, captured some of the bitterness. In a longish piece in her newspaper, she wrote: "The Festival is a story of high expectations and large egos, of jealousies and hurt feelings and of the still uneasy relationship between the United States and India."

Bumiller telescoped it all. The dancers' walk-out, the hassles over the bronzes in Madras, the demonstration by 400 quarry workers in the lobby of Delhi's Taj Mahal Hotel, the complaints that India is once again getting the cold shoulder from the West, the fears that the US has no intention of reciprocating its forays into cultural diplomacy. And, of course, the Laxmi Sihare saga.

BUT ALL SUCH MINOR IRRITANTS come to naught before Pupul Jayakar's firmness. "Culture is not entertainment. It is a way of life. It is a capacity to commune with nature. To understand space and time. To concern oneself with the mind, with behaviour, and values." So, that's what it is all about!

What is most striking about Pupulben's living-room is how comfortable it really is. A *chattai* on the ground, huge sofas, an air-conditioner humming in the background. It is only later one realises that the chairs are priceless Lazarus originals, the drapings immaculately understated, and the comfort a culmination of a lifetime of precise aesthetic discipline. "Before I came to India I thought all Indian homes looked like this," Elizabeth Bumiller had told me. She had seen the Jayakar home, reproduced in lavish detail in an issue of *Town And Country*, and thought that it was, well, typical.

To be sure, a lot of Indian homes aspire to look like this. But, this is the real thing. For Jayakar is the closest that India has come to a cultural Czarina. The last word on taste, style, trends, cultural perceptions. And when you were Mrs Gandhi's closest friend, and are still a favourite aunt and cultural mentor to the inhabitants of Race Course Road, there's not much further you can go.

Pupulben knows that, of course. "I am not part of the race," she says. "Because I don't want to get anywhere. And if you don't want to get anywhere then you do what is right."

For the last 45 years Mrs Jayakar has been doing just that. Starting out with working in the Kasturba trust, the National Planning Committees, various refugee camps, then going onto her special area of interest, as Chairman of the Handicrafts and Handloom Exports Corporation of India, Chairman of the All India Handicrafts Board, Chairman of the Central Cottage Industries Board, Chairman of the Governing Body of the National School of Design, Vice-Chairman of INTACH and Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Festival of India.

For over three decades, Pupulben has dominated the field of culture with the force of her beliefs, and little (if anything) gets done in the culture world, without her knowledge or approval. The Festivals in England, France and America were conceived by Mrs Jayakar in tandem with Mrs Gandhi, and arguably, 1985 is her finest hour.

So, it is understandable that, at this stage, Pupulben has only lofty disdain for the controversies.

"If you are concerned with quality, if you are concerned with the depths of the creative, then how are you concerned with other vested interests?" But somewhere lies a hurt. "Everyone is talking about how much money has been spent on the Festivals. But this money was spent amongst craftsmen, amongst workers, amongst musicians, amongst dancers. It's been spread out to the people of India."

And about a certain museum director who chose to call her a liar, Pupulben is summarily dismissive. "I don't want to take names, but people who have been in cultural administration since Independence are now waking up, when there must have been 50 exhibitions since Independence. If they didn't object in 1948, in 1950, then it must be with some other motive that they are doing so now."

Mrs Jayakar is swathed in shades of brown, her white hair is pulled sternly off the forehead, and a single huge ring of beaten silver shines off her smallest finger. Arranged comfortably on her sumptuous sofa, she looks like the kindly matriarch of a well-settled Ahmedabad family, one who has retired from active life.

But Mrs Jayakar has never retired, never rested. She has chosen to travel to far-flung continents, to take responsibility for shipping priceless objects, to frame the cultural doctrines of the country, to work a nine-hour day, and to tend the affairs of her undisputed cultural kingdom.

So, it is a measure of her power that she can say, "I am not part of the cultural scene. I don't participate in it at all." Perhaps it is yet another manifestation of Delhi's elusive, intangible, swiftly-shifting cultural existence.

MADLY ENRAGED MUSEUM DIRECTORS and disgruntled dancers. Chuckling chairmen of Akademis enjoying the chicanery of bureaucracy and a performing bear. An unwritten list of who is In and who is Out, and a computer print-out on intellectuals. Young men who carry the weight of our cultural heritage, and long knives at the dead of night. Street acrobats as stars, and gang wars in high places. Thirty-five crore, 33 regional centres, nine acres of land, the newest amphitheatre to house culture, yet another department to enshrine art. And a queen who refuses to acknowledge the length of the kingdom. ♦

CLICHÉ FOLLOWING CLICHÉ

Perfectly reasonable books are ruined by sloppy, ungrammatical introductions. Cliches are piled on each other, words are misspelt, and metaphors are mangled.

CAN A BOOK be ruined by an introduction?

It can.

I am referring to *Forty Poems* by Kostis Papakongos, Navyug Publishers, Delhi, 1984. This revolutionary Greek poet, now living in Sweden, has been excellently translated by Irene Larson and Renuka Singh. But the introduction by Sati Kumar is marred by poor grammar. 'The Greek Poetry' is itself ungrammatical. Sometimes, we are unable to write three words correctly! The first sentence of the introduction reads: "It seems that Greece, more than any Mediterranean country, has difficulty to survive without poetry." Later, he talks about the wonderful Greek songs created by 'the anonymous people'. Clearly, Kumar does not know how to handle his articles.

Metaphors? Talking of an old Greek poet, Solomos, he says that he 'created a new literary style, melting together romanticism and classicism and so opened up the broad avenue of Greek lyricism'. If you can create avenues by melting anything, I suppose it should be tar. In the end, Kumar says that his poetry is considered 'an engraftment of Mediterranean flame in the veins of Nordic poetry'. Whether flames can be grafted onto veins I leave for the reader to decide.

Recently, when I picked up a Canadian book called *Anti-War Poems* edited by Stephen Gill, I was not sure whether the editor was of Indian origin or an Anglo-Saxon. His writing will tell, I said to myself. Sure enough. The first two sentences of his introduction set my mind at rest. They ran: "We are breathing in an exceedingly perilous atmosphere, which is deteriorating at an alarming speed. One single factor that is responsible for this impending peril is the (*sic*) nuclear warfare, hanging over our heads like the sword of democles (*sic*)." (Notice the lower case and the incorrect spelling of Damocles.) Any one who used the Damoclean cliché still, has to be an Indian. But it takes a special brand of cliché-pedlar to compare the nuclear threat hanging over the human race with the sword which King Dionysius of Syracuse caused to hang by a single thread over the head of a wretched flatterer. Notice also, that while in the first sentence you are in the midst of peril, breathing the perilous atmosphere, in the next sentence the peril is still 'impending', that is, threatening, hovering over, menacing.

Cliché follows cliché: 'more sophisticated engines of destruction', 'deadly weapons of massacre'. Where language is clichéd, thought cannot be of any higher quality.

And there is a dream of a scrambled metaphor. It made my mouth water! "The politicians have been given a long rope. Consequently, the world has become a ship that is being pulled in different directions by greedy leaders." That must have been a real long rope they gave, enabling the politicians to tie the ship up in knots (as the reader has been, I am sure) and then pull in different directions.

The poetry included is boring and predictable:

"From Afghanistan to Zaire, the
generals are having a ball
The hounds of war are baying louder than ever
While the doves of peace are silent
and out of sight."

Most of the stuff is in this vein, fit to drive any man, woman or eunuch to tears. This book did not need an introduction to ruin it!

However much one may favour anti-war literature, this book should teach us that mere sentiment is not enough. There is an abundance of pacifist passion these days but I doubt if this will lead to any great poetry or fiction. Give me the heroic any day:

"Go tell the Spartans, thou that
passeth by,
That here, obedient to their laws,
we lie."

This two-line poem, *Thermopylae*, is credited to Simonides (556-468 BC) after the famous battle of that name.

Or take *The Persian Version* (of the battle of Marathon, that is, by Robert Graves):

"Truth-loving Persians do not
dwell upon
The trivial skirmish fought near
Marathon.
As for the Greek theatrical tradition
Which represents that summer's
expedition
Not as a mere reconnaissance in
force
By three brigades of foot and one
of horse,

Keki Daruwalla is India's foremost English language poet. This is a regular column.

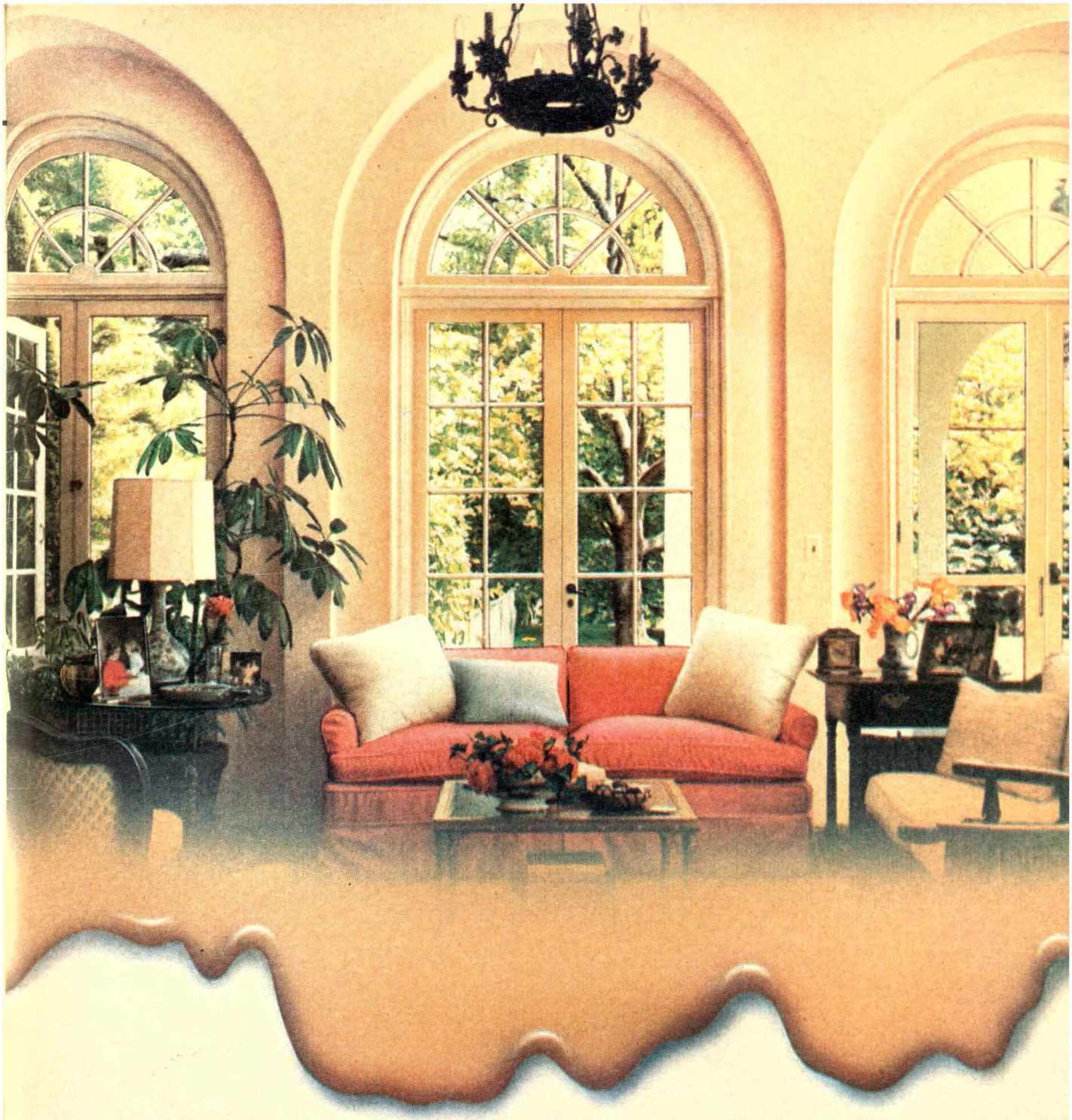
But as a grandiose, ill-starred attempt
To conquer Greece – they treat it with contempt."

Talking of good writing, I was happy to see both Krishnan Chaitanya and Keshav Malik on the same page of *The Times Of India*. Both write critical pieces, one on music and the other on art. Critical pieces tend to be so jargon-ridden that they scare the reader away. That is where both the pieces I am referring to are exceptions. Chaitanya, in *Muted Melody From Medieval Europe* (a bit too alliterative for my liking), writing on the religious feeling of Jean Belliard's singing, instructs as he goes along. "Early religious singing, influenced by the recital of hymns in synagogues, was nearest to the devotedly chanted prayer. Ambrose in the fourth century and Gregory in the sixth laid down rules that conserved the purity of this style. But contact with Byzantium introduced melisma or an extension of a single syllable of the text into many notes in the singing." Note how 'melisma', the one difficult word here, which means melodic embellishment, is explained. This is good, clean wholesome writing.

An editorial in the *Pakistan Times* has talked of the 'bilateral skyline' being murky. This cannot pass muster. You cannot have bilateral or trilateral or unilateral skylines. A South Asian skyline, yes. Perhaps, if you are fond of such phrases and think they add colour to your writing, you could write about an Indo-Pak skyline. But horizons and skylines should be confined to regions and not confused with adjectives which denote country-to-country relations. (The word derives from the Latin 'lateralis' – side, proceeding from or towards the side).

Few handle the language as deftly as Shiv K Kumar, an incisive poet and an eminent professor. I missed being his student by a whisker. He taught in a neighbouring town. The loss was surely mine because we heard some of his lectures and sat spellbound as he talked of Bergson and the modern novel. In a column in *The Hindustan Times* (May 25) entitled *Undercurrents,* he talks about interviewing candidates for a teaching post. "And then suddenly a godsend! A pale grasshopperish creature lumbered into the room. . ." Now elephants and hippopotami can lumber. Grasshoppers are only supposed to hop!

The closing note should be dedicated to God. Preeti Mehra remembers him in her article *Carry On Sponsor* in *The Times Of India* (June 23): "Doordarshan sits pretty, like a God waiting for his disciples to bring him offerings." Maharshi Mahesh, Rajneesh, these are the people who have disciples. Much as God would like to change places with them, He, poor chap, has to make do with devotees or votaries. ♦



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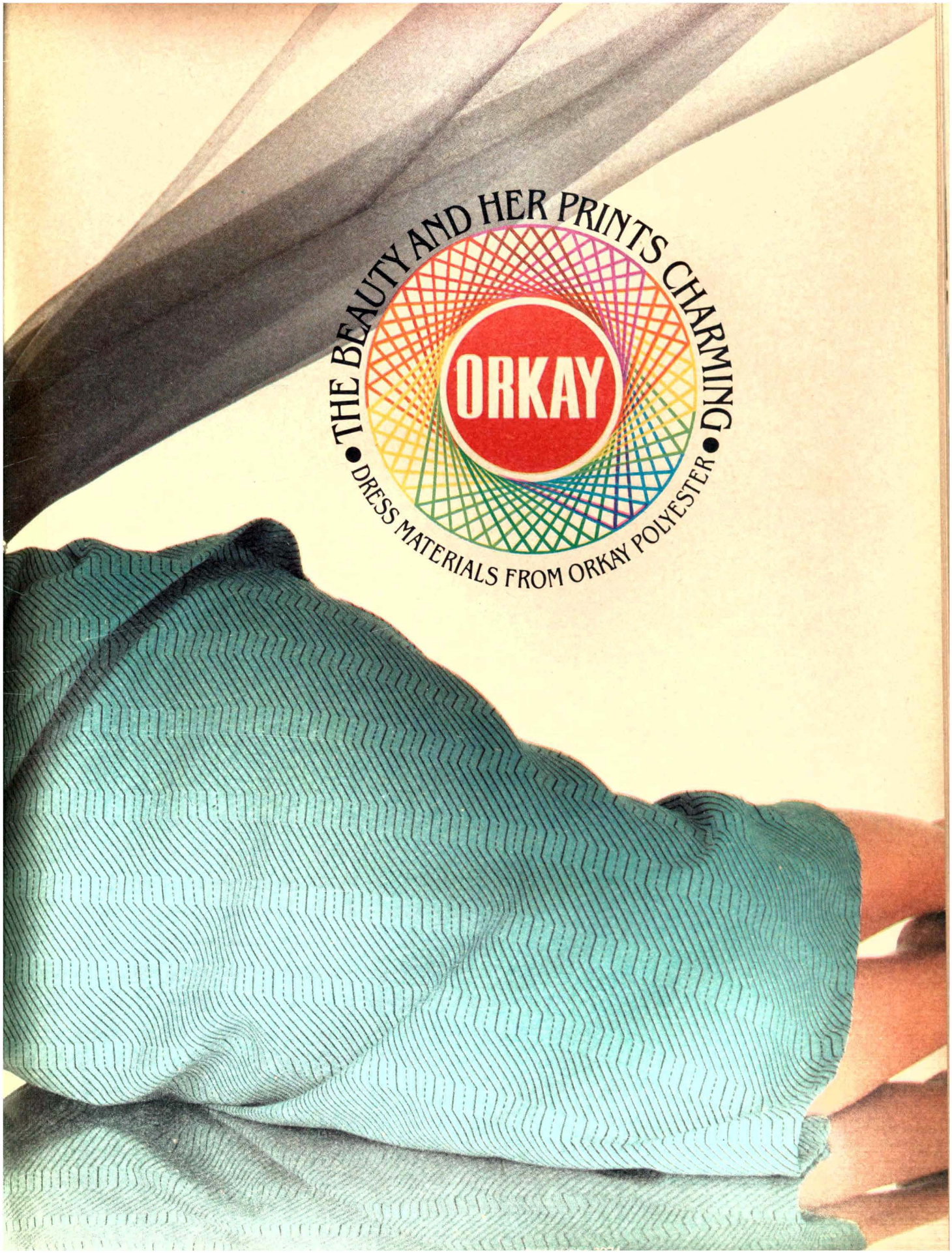
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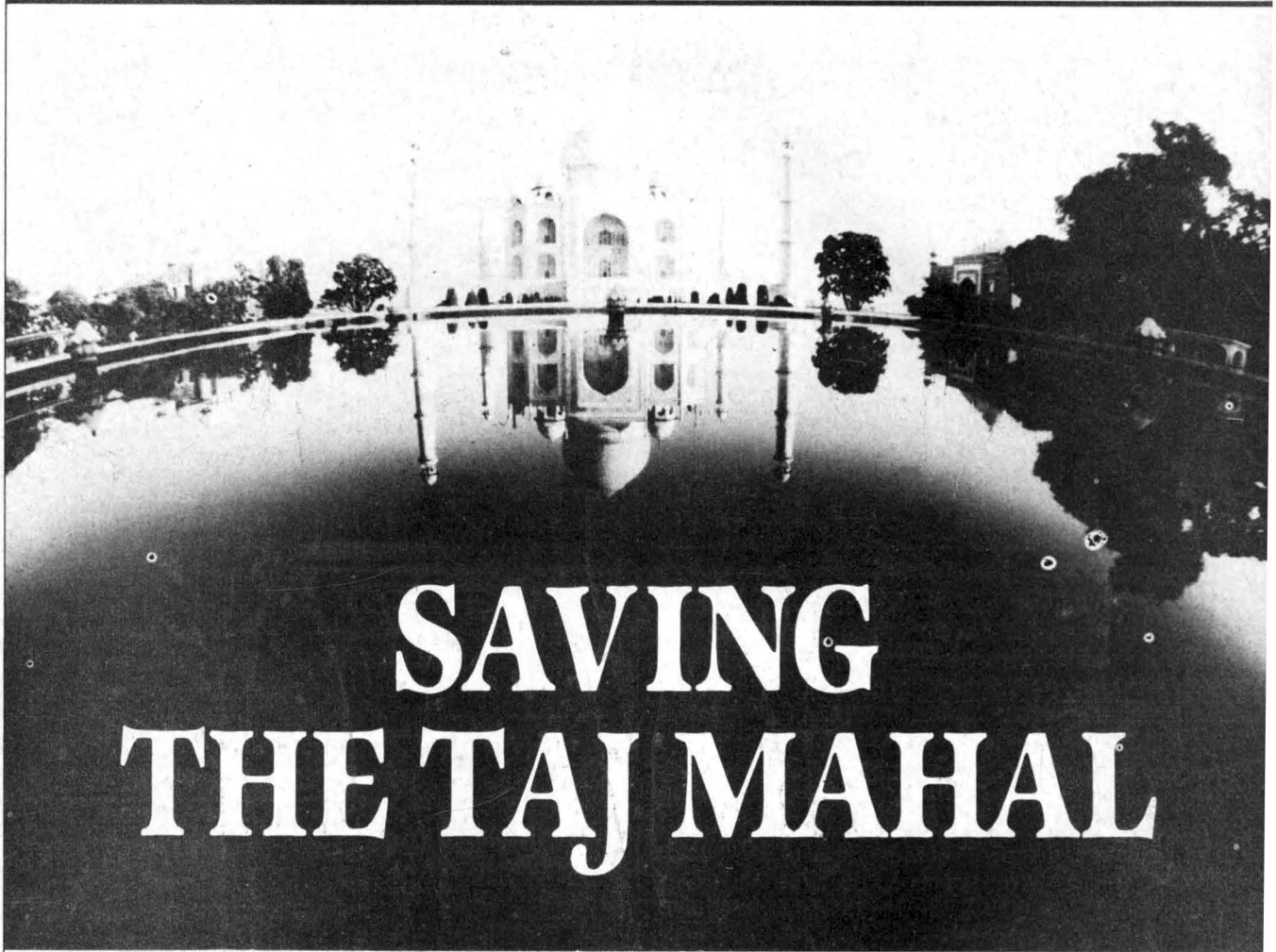


SAVING THE TAJ MAHAL

Does the oil refinery at Mathura pose a threat to the Taj? DARRYL D'MONTE who has researched the issue has come to the optimistic conclusion that it does not.

THREE-AND-A-HALF CENTURIES after the Taj Mahal was built, it still draws sighs of ecstasy from those who behold it. But the Taj has been imperilled on certain occasions. After a century had lapsed, the Jats captured Agra and sacked Agra Fort. They camped in the Taj Mahal itself and burnt hay within the mausoleum to keep themselves warm; they carried away its finest gems and silver gates.

A more gentlemanly but nonetheless sinister threat came from the British. By the 19th century, the grounds of the Taj Mahal were used for open-air 'frolics'. Outdoor balls were held on the marble terrace in front of the main door; the mosques on either side of the Taj were rented out to honeymooning couples! "At an earlier date, when picnic parties were held in the garden of Taj," recalled Lord Curzon early this century, "it was not an uncommon thing for the revellers to arm themselves with hammer and chisel, with which they whiled away the afternoon by chipping out fragments of agate and carnelian from the cenotaphs of the emperor and his lamented queen."

It was Curzon's wife, Mary, who kindled enthusiasm for the preservation of India's architectural heritage in the heart of the person who later became its first Viceroy. Curzon had been to India in 1900 as an ordinary traveller and observed 'with pain and regret' the state of the coun-

Excerpted from Temples Or Tombs? Industry Versus Environment: Three Controversies *by Darryl D'Monte. Hardbacks available from Centre for Science and Environment, 807 Vishal Bhavan, 95, Nehru Place, New Delhi 110 019. Price Rs 125.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NITIN JHAVERI

try's antiquities. He saw the Taj in his first tour as Viceroy in 1900 and, in the words of a biographer, 'embarked upon one of the most energetic hobbies of his Viceroyalty: the restoration and recognition of India's famous monuments'.

One of his predecessors, however, very nearly presided over the liquidation of this noble edifice in the 1830s. Lord William Bentinck, the first Governor General of India, announced his intention to demolish the best Moghul monuments in Agra and Delhi and remove the marble facades. The idea was to ship them to London, where they would be sold in fragments. Writes David Carroll, author of *Newsweek's* coffee-table book on the Taj Mahal: "Several of Shah Jahan's pavilions in the Red Fort at Delhi were indeed stripped to the brick and the marble was shipped off to England (part of this shipment included pieces for King George IV himself). Plans were then made to dismantle the Taj Mahal and wrecking machinery was moved into the garden grounds. Just as the demolition crew was setting to work, word came from London that the first auction had been a failure and that all further sales were cancelled – it would not be worth the money to tear down the Taj Mahal."

THE MOST RECENT THREAT to the Taj is far more serious. It surfaced, unobtrusively, in the shape of what Nehru would certainly have considered one of the temples of modern-day India – an oil refinery at the town of Mathura, 40 kilometres as the crow flies from Agra and 160 kilometres from Delhi. Although no one in the Central government or the public sector petroleum industry had the slightest inkling at the time, the location of the refinery so close to the Taj poses a danger to it. Fumes emitted by its smoke stacks may easily traverse this distance and descend on the monument; over a period of time, these can stain the marble facade.

"The need for an oil refinery in the north-west of the country was talked about since 1964," says S K Nayak, who was General Manager of the Mathura refinery till 1982, right through the controversy over its location; it was fully commissioned in May 1983. It had been officially recommended by a government committee in 1966 and endorsed by another which had to determine the additional refining capacity in the country. The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) submitted a feasibility report in 1971, suggesting that it be located around Delhi – Shakur Basti was suggested – so that existing oil depots and other facilities could be used. Ultimately, it was decided to move the refinery out of Delhi for military and strategic reasons: if the capital was bombed, the oil refinery would be an obvious target. The Centre asked the experts to choose another location between Delhi and Agra. After considering other sites, including Hissar, Sawai Madhopur, Aligarh, Etawah and Agra itself – as well as the possibility of another state, Madhya Pradesh – the experts opted for Mathura.

None of the threats posed to the Taj in the past were as serious as the oil refinery at Mathura. Environmentalists feared that the fumes from the refinery would stain the marble facade.

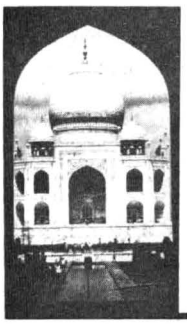
IOC received the green signal from the Central government to go ahead with the refinery in August 1973; it was to cost Rs 97 crore and process six million tonnes of crude a year initially, to be expanded to ten million tonnes eventually.

Mrs Gandhi laid the foundation stone in October 1973. But rumblings against the likely pollution that the refinery would cause were already beginning to be heard: one of the first to raise the issue in the press was a naturalist, Asad Rafi Rahmani, who wrote protest letters to newspapers in Lucknow. Questions were raised in Parliament and the government denied that it was going to do any damage.

It was Professor J M Dave, presently Dean of the School of Environmental Sciences at the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, who first raised grave doubts about the impact of the Mathura refinery. He claims that as far back as 1969, when he was an environmental advisor to the Central government, he wrote a note to Uma Shankar Dikshit, who was Works, Housing and Health Minister, asking him not to go ahead with a petrochemical complex at Mathura.

He also expressed his fears to the Prime Minister, before the foundation stone of the refinery was laid. Her office asked the Petroleum Ministry to look into it. The ministry, in consultation with the National Committee of Environmental Planning and Co-ordination (NCEPC), had formed an informal committee for this purpose: it consisted of M Kurien, the advisor to the ministry, Ashok Khosla and Dr C K Varshney (Associate Professor of Environment at JNU) from the NCEPC, Dr A K Ganguly from the Bhabha Atomic Research Institute (BARC) and Dr P K Das from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD). Dave was informally consulted, too. The committee realised that it had first to find out how to estimate the quantum of sulphur dioxide that would reach Agra from the refinery 40 kilometres away. Das, in consultation with Khosla, worked out a theoretical model to ascertain this.

APPREHENSIONS WERE GROWING about the safety of the Taj Mahal and other monuments in Agra – notably the Agra Fort, Itmad-ud-Daulah's tomb (the resplendent marble edifice erected in honour of the father of Nur Mahal, Jehangir's wife, and said to be the inspiration for the Taj) and Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, on the outskirts of the town – as well as in Fatehpur Sikri (which lies along the way to Bharatpur). Questions were being asked in Parliament and letters were published in the press.



As concern for the Taj mounted, the government felt compelled to appoint a committee to examine the issue. But the committee's role was limited: it could advise on how to reduce pollution.

According to S N Chib, then Vice-President of the Indian Heritage Society (IHS) – which was formed later to save the Taj, among other sites – questions were asked at least six times in the Rajya Sabha by Khurshid Alam Khan, later Union Minister of Tourism. "He was a favourite of ours," Chib recalled. "It was his questions that finally led to the appointment of an expert committee. As a Muslim, he was interested in the safety of Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj." D K Borooah called a meeting in September where officials from the NCEPC, BARC and IOC were present. The consensus was that technology for keeping the emissions of gases within desirable limits was available.

Meanwhile, the Archaeological Society of India (ASI), founded in 1861 and a venerable institution in its own right, also began taking note of the threat to the Taj. R Sengupta, now Director of Conservation in the organisation, was most deeply involved. To dispel its own fears, ASI commissioned the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) to do a survey of air pollution near Agra's monuments. The main fear was of sulphur dioxide, emitted when fuel is burnt for distillation.

It took quite some months for NEERI to get its act together and the survey was conducted only in December 1974. The findings were officially released six months later. It was all too brief and inadequate, extending over 15 days at the height of winter. This is the worst season of the year for air pollution, since winds are very low; by contrast, summer winds are much more gusty and can therefore disperse pollutants. In the monsoons, on the other hand, the danger is least because rains help noxious gases to precipitate quickly before they can travel. Once sulphur dioxide (SO_2) is air-borne, it can convert to sulphurous acid (H_2SO_3) on contact with moisture; with yet more vapour, it turns into the highly corrosive sulphuric acid (H_2SO_4). If this descends on stone like marble, which is calcium carbonate, it can form calcium sulphate or gypsum, rendering what was once bright and translucent – indeed the Taj is luminous on moonlit nights – into a dull, opaque surface. What if the monument lost its lustre?

With concern about the possible damage to the Taj mounting month by month, the government felt compelled to appoint an expert committee to examine the issue. "Perhaps the government thought that since the Taj Mahal was a big foreign exchange earner, there should be a scientific study, so that once and for all the controversy could be settled," observes IOC's Nayak. "Personally, I feel it was the right thing." The committee was constituted in July 1974. Its terms of reference were not to see whether the refinery should be shifted, as environmentalists and other public-spirited citizens were demanding, but "to advise the project authorities on the measures to be taken for keeping the pollution effect (*sic*) to the absolute minimum. The committee was not only to guide the Mathura refinery project in planning and implementing effective pollution measures, but also to advise the ministry on the pollution aspects of other ancillary and downstream units." Thus, the intention of the government was clear: having spent a great deal of time and energy on choosing a suitable site and preparing a feasibility report, it was in no mood to consider going through the whole exercise at another location. At that stage, only Rs 1.5 crore had been spent on engineering works, etc, at the project, according to the IOC.

The committee was to be headed by Dr S Varadarajan, then Chairman of the Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd (IPCL), a giant public sector concern linked to the Baroda oil refinery, one of the biggest such complexes in Asia. Apart from Kurien from the Petroleum Ministry, it had representatives from NEERI, NCEPC, the Indian Institute of Petroleum (IIP), IMD and the UP government. Nayak was to act as the member secretary. On the face of it, given the terms of reference of the committee and the loyalties of its members, its impartiality was highly suspect. Long after the Varadarajan Committee submitted its report three years later, in 1977 (it was only published by the government in 1978), I wrote editorials in *The Times Of India* and the *Indian Express*, questioning how someone in such a key position in India's petrochemical industry could be asked to prescribe pollution control measures in a refinery, the interests of which he was committed to promoting as a leading oil technocrat in the country (he later became the head of Engineers India Ltd, the huge public sector consultancy firm). *The Hindu*, in an editorial page piece, pointed out that half the members of the committee, including the Chairman and Secretary, represented oil interests; the representative of the UP government, too, could hardly be considered neutral since the state authorities – as indeed the entire citizenry of Agra and Mathura – were determined to see the smoke stack of the refinery raised at the site chosen. To add insult to injury, the ASI was excluded altogether and only as an afterthought was a representative inducted more than a year later, in November 1975!

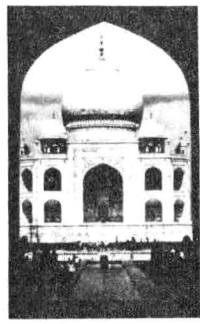
One of these misgivings immediately turned out to be unwarranted: the bona fides of Varadarajan himself. When I did meet him finally, it was apparent that he was no insensitive technocrat. On the contrary, he was as concerned as other members of the committee who had no stake in the oil industry that the Taj remained intact. (He took members of his committee for early morning walks to witness its glory and was full of little-known facts about the monument itself.)

WHEN THE VARADARAJAN COMMITTEE met for the first time in August 1974, it heard how D K Borooah had happened to pay a visit to Italy where he was impressed by the precautions taken against pollution from a refinery near Venice, which has a large number of very old monuments and can therefore be said to be somewhat similar to Agra. One of the plants to control pollution was especially built by an Italian firm called Tecneco, a subsidiary of the state-owned oil conglomerate, ENI. That month, Nayak journeyed to Rome to establish whether Tecneco could help out at Agra. He reported that they had no commercially proven process for the removal of SO_2; that they preferred to limit SO_2 concentrations at different points by raising stack heights. Tecneco announced that its fee would be 185 million lire, the equivalent of Rs 22 lakh.

For most of 1975, the Varadarajan Committee was engaged in trying to find out whether the studies on the impact of the refinery could be conducted by Indian scientific institutions, instead of hiring a foreign consultant. Khosla had discussions with the acclaimed 'alternative technologist', Dr Amulya Reddy from ASTRA in Bangalore, as well as with the National Aeronautical Laboratory in the same city. Khosla felt that such studies 'were more an art than a science' and that it might not be easy to get concrete results to take a 'yes/no' decision. Events proved how prophetic his assessment turned out to be. It was realised at the time that, however desirable, an independent survey would require setting up a separate organisation, since no existing Indian agency could undertake the task.

Dave questioned whether the flue gas desulphurisation process, on which the IOC had presented a technical note, would be able to limit the emissions of SO_2 to one tonne per hour (tph), as the latter claimed. He believed that such claims should be examined more minutely, in the light of the latest technology available in the West. With typical self-assurance he wrote: "We (NEERI) can undertake special work for reducing flue gases with any of the available processes or develop a new one." Such technology, it should be mentioned, is so expensive that it is only in commercial use in America and Japan. At the third meeting, in January 1975, Varadarajan replied that 90 per cent of the SO_2 could be eliminated by desulphurisation; if Dave knew of any other methods, he should inform the committee of it. He also regretted that NEERI had not informed them of its study, commissioned by the ASI. Khosla had written to the IOC that Dave had found that the long-term SO_2 levels were higher than imagined: 10-15 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu g/m^3$) might be closer to the mark and 'he also appears to have seen some damage to the quality of the stone which he feels is due to corrosion from atmospheric pollution'. NEERI's findings were formally presented to the ASI in June 1975 and Dr M N Deshpande, Director General of the ASI, conveyed them to the committee the following month.

In its interim report, NEERI found that of five locations it examined, the Taj had the highest concentration



NEERI's initial findings, alarmed a lot of people. Subsequently, however, it was discovered that the survey was conducted with insufficient funds and that its results were incorrect.

of SO_2, the daily or short-term average was 107 $\mu g/m^3$; by contrast, Agra Fort had only 38 $\mu g/m^3$, and Itmad-ud-Daulah's tomb, Sikandra and Fatehpur Sikri 35 $\mu g/m^3$, or less. There is another index of atmospheric pollution – dust or what environmentalists term 'suspended particulate matter' (SPM) levels. (This is particularly important for the preservation of monuments in North India, which are subject to *loos* or dust storms which bear desert sand, containing chlorides and other particles. Apart from any chemical action on marble or sandstone – the other building material used in all Moghul structures – these winds tend to pit the surface of buildings because of the force with which they blow and can also form the nuclei for molecules of acid-bearing vapour.) Dave's report placed the SPM levels in Agra at 300 $\mu g/m^3$, which is high. His conclusions were that 'significant' pollution levels prevail in the vicinity of the Taj but were comparatively lower elsewhere in Agra, and that the prevailing winds carried pollution from other city sources towards the mausoleum.

Considering that this was the first on-site survey, the results alarmed a great many people, not least its sponsors, the ASI. It reached Mrs Indira Gandhi's ears and at the fourth meeting of the Varadarajan Committee, in October 1975, it was reported that NEERI's findings had 'caused her a lot of concern and she directed that no efforts should be spared in order to ensure the preservation of priceless monuments, especially the Taj Mahal'. Public sentiment over the refinery's impact can be gauged by newspaper articles like one with the alarmist title *A Black Taj?* in the *Indian Express*, which referred to Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia who ordered nothing but DC3s to overfly Angkor Wat in order to safeguard the ancient sculptures. Subsequently, however, there was a great deal of scepticism about NEERI's findings. "Although I didn't see what equipment it used or the mode of calculations," B B Lal, (the Committee's consultant) told me, when I met him in his bungalow in Dehra Dun, "I was shocked but didn't believe it. The study was conducted with just Rs 5,000. These very high values were alarming but later proved incorrect with NEERI's own later surveys." Lal, in the course of his quest for Indian consultants, looked up Dave. When he mentioned the Taj, Dave retorted: "The Taj is already destroyed!" Lal was amazed at this response: "When a scientist arrives at such a conclusion, there is no room for discussion," he recalls bitterly. "I said that you had better see the monument for yourself."

An even stronger assessment was made by Thomas Mathew, who was with the NCEPC and replaced Khosla on the Varadarajan Committee. "There are so few scientists who have the support and wherewithal or even the experience to conduct studies here that the crime of fabricating data goes unchecked, unlike in the US," he said. "Dave's was the word of God in many situations. In fact, he's doubly dangerous because he has a bright mind."

The findings of another study, the 'Dispersal of Pollutants from a Refinery Stack' by Dr P K Das and two other scientists from the IMD, were also made available at this stage. This theoretical exercise was to prove highly controversial in that some experts contested the alleged jugglery with certain mathematical values in it. Basically, such a technique employs the Gaussian plume model, a statistical device, to estimate how much SO_2 emitted from a source will reach a distant spot, given the prevailing winds. In other words, this is a purely abstract mathematical model – unlike the monitoring of actual pollution levels done by NEERI. IMD reported that the maximum long-term concentration of SO_2 at a distance of two kilometres from the refinery would be 28.1 $\mu g/m^3$ at 40 kilometres downwind, for a stack 80 metres high, it would be a mere 0.44 $\mu g/m^3$.

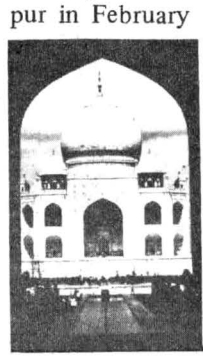
Paradoxical though it may seem, humans have a higher tolerance to air pollution than many buildings: their bodies are able to adjust and counteract these impurities in the air, whereas marble or stone is inert and the damage to stone is cumulative rather than self-correcting. In fact, experts are agreed on one thing pertaining to the controversy over the Mathura refinery and the Taj – that no one knows what the permissible SO_2 limits for monuments are!

THE VARADARAJAN COMMITTEE decided to sign Tecneco on. Tecneco's brief was three-fold: to determine the typical meteorological conditions in the Mathura region and calculate the long-term ground level concentration of effluents (particularly SO_2) at Agra on account of emissions from the refinery; to determine the existing level of pollutants in and around Agra, and finally, the present status of preservation of monuments, as well as the maximum pollution which these could be exposed to. As far as the first requirement was concerned – atmospheric diffusion – this once again involved the use of mathematical models on the lines of the IMD study. The second task was quite straightforward: a simple monitoring of pollution levels of the kind that NEERI was equipped to do. The third concerned corrosion damage. It was realised that the extreme weather in North India, coupled with the poor preservation of stone itself, were responsible for the deterioration of monuments rather than pollutants. However, their presence in the atmosphere could accelerate the damage.

It was a brief news item in October 1975, announcing that Tecneco had been appointed, that caught the attention of Professor T Shivaji Rao, Professor of Civil Engineering at the Andhra University College of Engineering (now its Principal) at Waltair (Visakhapatnam). The next month he wrote to the President, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, with a copy to Mrs Gandhi, and sent them a 'general note' on the problem. He pointed out that the area was prone to inversions during winter and dust storms in summer. "These processes must surely accelerate the tarnishing, abrasion and deterioration of the Taj Mahal and other monuments." Quite correctly, he noted that most modern pollution control techniques did not function as they were supposed to because of human, electrical and mechanical failure: this was the experience in Barauni, Rourkela, Durgapur and Bombay. He made a plea for the shifting of the refinery to another site.

Towards the end of 1975, the government realised that it had to act to silence the growing number of critics of the Mathura refinery, after finally giving the project the go-ahead in September – a delay of two years. It was now slated for completion by mid-1980. The Petroleum Ministry announced that it had decided to meet half Mathura's crude requirements of six million tonnes a year from the Bombay High offshore field, following the discovery of low sulphur crude there at that time; the rest would come from Iraq, as originally planned. This would limit the emissions of SO_2 to only one tph or 24 tonnes a day. The Varadarajan Committee also okayed two proposals – one from the IMD to establish two first-class observatories at Mathura and Agra so that they could make up deficiencies in data used in the previous calculations, and another from NEERI to continuously monitor pollution levels for 15 months. These would be paid for by IOC.

ANOTHER ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT was discovered at this stage: to the world-famous Bharatpur bird sanctuary, a little more than 40 kilometres west of Agra. The Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary, to give it its proper name, had seen literally hundreds of birds shot by the maharajah and his hunting parties till this was banned a couple of decades ago. Salim Ali raised the spectre of this magnificent 30 square kilometre expanse, the home of some 2,50,000 mainly migratory birds, being contaminated by fumes from the refinery, an equal distance away. Like the Lion-tailed Macaque of Silent Valley, the threatened species in this case was the rare Siberian Crane. He wrote to the President of India, in his capacity as head of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), and at Bharatpur in February 1976, asked for scientific studies to be



By end 1975, environmentalists had a new issue to worry about – the Bharatpur bird sanctuary. Naturalists urged the President to ensure that the bird's habitat was not spoiled.

carried out there to ensure that the birds' habitat was not spoiled. He also deputed Dr A N D Nanavati from the BNHS to visit the sites; Nanavati cleared the refinery. According to Nayak, Salim Ali's view was that the "Taj Mahal can be built again, but birds from Siberia can't!" Because of the immense world-wide prestige of the ornithologist (he won the $50,000 Paul Getty award a couple of years ago for his diligent and dedicated studies), the Varadarajan Committee wrote to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Nature Conservancy Council in Britain to seek their opinion. Both considered the risk of contamination of the water courses 40 kilometres away minimal and the latter even suggested that 'a case can be made out for sulphur as a benefit to water birds. . .sulphur dioxide emissions...when neutralised, act as a significant fertiliser'.

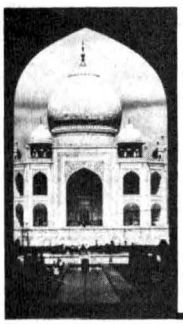
In reply to a question in Parliament, Z R Ansari, the Deputy Petroleum Minister, detailed the steps that the IOC would take to reduce the contamination of the Jamuna river, where the effluent would be released downstream of Mathura. The 'surface discharge' would be treated waste water, containing oil, phenol and sulphides. The treatment would ensure that the contaminants would be reduced below the Indian Standards Institution limits for inland river waters. According to V S More, who heads the IOC's Pollution Control Cell, the total water to be discharged was three million gallons a day; the Jamuna was six kilometres from the refinery and for 15-20 kilometres downstream, there was no habitation. Varadarajan emphasised: "We have a permanent obligation: we can't let the water get bad even for a day." The danger, of course, was that the town of Agra, with eight lakh people, lay 40 kilometres down the river, and this was the source of its drinking water. Nayak took me on a tour of the refinery, which was partly functioning when I visited it early in 1982. He showed me the physical, biological and chemical facilities to rid the effluent of oil and other impurities and vowed that a large fish-pond would be placed at the last stage: if a single fish died, the plant would be closed down till the leak was repaired. Both Varadarajan and he also disclosed how a five kilometre-long effluent channel from IOC's Koyali refinery in Gujarat to the sea was being used 'illegally' for the past 12 years by farmers for irrigation. As regards atmospheric pollution, Ansari stated that the flue gases would be scrubbed to rid them of sulphur and the height of the stack doubled from 40 to 80 metres.

While experts were still debating whether or not to shift the refinery, the government had decided that it was going ahead with the plans.

DURING MOST OF 1976, Tecneco, NEERI and IMD were busy completing the studies they had undertaken. The Varadarajan Committee met just once, in May. This was at Agra itself, where it became apparent after NEERI's first quarterly 'baseline' air quality survey of the town, that more than the refinery, the Taj was threatened by SO_2 sources within the town itself. Three main culprits were identified. The most serious were the two ten MW thermal power stations: a decrepit one near Agra Fort and another at Itmad-ud-Daulah's tomb. The railway yard, which is cheek by jowl with the Fort, was also using coal for its locomotives, and this added to the smoke, as did some 250 iron foundries which are the main industry in the small town. The meeting was attended by Salman Haider, Director in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, (also instrumental in getting Futehally to acquaint Mrs Gandhi with the problems of the Western Ghats) who asked whether the committee had arrived at any definite conclusion as to the necessity or otherwise of shifting the refinery. Varadarajan explained that with the pollution control facilities, less than one tph of SO_2 would be released and even under the most adverse meteorological conditions, the long-term levels at Agra would not exceed 0.4-1.0 $\mu g/m^3$. "This is such a low level that the committee is of the opinion that there is no need to shift the Mathura refinery." This response was in sharp contrast to what Varadarajan told Shivaji Rao, when he attended the ninth meeting in November 1977 as an invitee of the ASI. The Chairman claimed that the terms of reference were very specific and these were to examine ways of mitigating the damage of the refinery, not whether it should be shifted altogether. In July 1977, to compound the confusion, H N Bahuguna, who was appointed Petroleum Minister in the Janata regime, told Nurul Hasan, then only a Rajya Sabha MP, that the question of shifting would have to be considered by the Union Cabinet if the expert committee opined that the refinery was likely to damage the historical monuments in the area!

It was evident that the government was indulging in doublespeak because, towards the end of 1976, IOC finally approved of the contractor for the construction of the refinery – itself a comment on how efficiently things move in the public sector! – and work on it began. There was thus no doubt in the authorities' mind that they were going ahead with the refinery – even a year before the Varadarajan Committee completed its report.

TECNECO FOUND that the actual daily level of concentration of SO_2 – as distinct from the theoretical calculation – was "usually only a few $\mu g/m^3$. Only on some days did it reach values of 10-20 $\mu g/m^3$ and in very exceptional cases higher values (60 $\mu g/m^3$)." NEERI came to similar conclusions: an annual average mean of 10-20 $\mu g/m^3$. Tecneco concluded from the surveys carried out at the Taj between January and July 1976, that 'the Agra zone has a very low index of atmospheric pollution'. It substantiated this by citing international SO_2 standards



The Varadarajan Committee report said that there was no conclusive evidence that the sulphur dioxide fumes would harm the monument.

(beyond which levels should not reach). Thus the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the US prescribes an annual average of 80 $\mu g/m^3$, while various European nations observe 100 $\mu g/m^3$. The World Health Organisation (WHO) lays down 60 $\mu g/m^3$ – ten times as much as Agra's level. By contrast, Tecneco reported that annual levels in some other cities in recent years were very much higher: Milan reported 600 $\mu g/m^3$, London 250, New York 110.

It then turned to the state of the monuments and found that the marble was still in good condition and even the worst samples analysed were only slightly altered as compared to similar marble obtained from Makrana in Rajasthan, from where Shah Jahan obtained his supplies. Sandstone, on the other hand, was not in good shape, with evidence of 'peeling and scaling'. Some areas were marked by white efflorescence caused by chloride and nitrates, which could only have been deposited there by sandstorms. Its measurements of air temperatures and humidity near the monuments indicated that the likelihood of condensation of gases was small. One has to remember that SO_2 in the air is harmless: it only does damage when it dissolves in moisture to form sulphuric acid and can precipitate on stone.

THE VARADARAJAN COMMITTEE met for the last time on December 6, 1977, to finalise its report. It concluded that there was substantial pollution – with SO_2 and SPM – in the Agra region and that effective steps needed to be taken quickly to reduce this. It therefore recommended the closure of the two thermal power stations, the replacement of coal with diesel in the railway marshalling yard and the shifting of existing small industries, particularly the foundries, to an area south-east of Agra beyond the Taj so that their emissions would not blow over the monument. Similarly, no new industry should be located north-west of the Taj and no petrochemical or fertiliser industries should be allowed within the region. Any large project, for that matter, should first be examined for its environmental impact. It suggested the creation of an appropriate authority to monitor emissions as well as the air quality in the town and suggested that the ASI should have a cell to keep an eye on the state of monuments. Yet another precaution was the establishment of a green belt between Agra and Mathura. The use of coal in the refinery's power plant should be deferred till technology permitted its desulphurisation. Finally, it advocated that facilities and expertise in this area of environmental research should be built up within the country. The report also detailed how much the pollution control measures cost the IOC. As far as air pollution is concerned, the biggest cost was Rs 3 crore for a scrubber and sulphur recovery unit. ESPs, to remove coal dust, cost another Rs 50 lakh (these would not be used, eventually). To keep the liquid effluents within tolerable limits, a little over Rs 2 crore would be spent. The cost of handling the ash would be nearly another Rs 1 crore. The total cost, on all measures including studies, was Rs 7.5 crore. Since the refinery at that stage was estimated to cost Rs 195 crore, the expense to be incurred on pollution control came to roughly four per cent of the project cost. Ultimately, when the refinery went on stream in 1983, this rose to Rs 10 crore out of a total of Rs 250 crore.

Only a few days after the final meeting, the members were summoned to the chamber of the Petroleum, Chemicals and Fertiliser Secretary, S Krishnaswamy, along with UP government officials. In response to a query, Krishnaswamy (who played a major role in the Thal-Vaishet controversy) reiterated that there was no proposal to shift the refinery from Mathura. The terms of reference of the committee only related to the identification of measures for the reduction of pollution to the absolute minimum. He then went on to make a telling assessment of the problem: he said that it was clear from the report of the committee that there was no conclusive evidence that the emission of SO_2 and SPM would have an effect on the monument. Equally, however, there was no evidence that these would not. It was apparent that there would be some contribution from the refinery, but more from the railway shunting yard and the use of coal as a domestic fuel in *chulhas*.

'With a view to restore confidence in the public (mind) and in people interested in environmental cleanliness', several key decisions were made. Most important of all, the thermal stations were to be closed down within a period to be agreed upon, which the UP government consented to do. No new industries, including small units, were to be located north-west of the Taj and existing foundries were to be shifted to an area south-east of Agra. If a situation arose where low-sulphur crude was not available domestically – from Bombay High, Koyali or Barauni – the Petroleum Ministry would arrange for imports. To ensure that the emissions from the refinery and the dispersion of fumes were in accordance with IOC's assurances, three monitoring stations were to be set up ten kilometres from the refinery in the direction of Agra at suitable intervals. These had to be operated well before the commissioning of the refinery so that baseline data was easily available 'to ensure no controversy afterwards'. NEERI would manage these, at IOC's cost. The IOC would set up its own monitoring station at Bharatpur as well. The IOC Chairman stressed the need for making an assessment of the actual consumption of coal in the Agra area: Krishnaswamy suggested that kerosene should replace coal as a domestic fuel

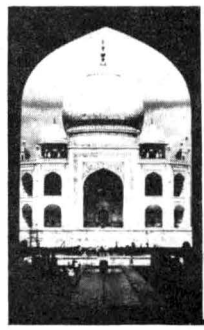
in the town and the UP government's response to such a switch within 12 to 18 months was sought. IOC's efficient *chulha* was commended and all oil companies urged to mount a campaign to promote its use.

Presumably because the Central government was waiting to implement some of the Varadarajan Committee's recommendations and decisions taken at this subsequent meeting, its report was only tabled in both houses of Parliament in August 1978. Bahuguna said that the report was still being examined in consultation with the departments involved and as soon as the government's views were finalised, it would be made public. Several of the recommendations were disclosed then and in several subsequent revelations to the press, but the Centre persisted in behaving as if the findings were highly confidential. This is a pattern that recurs in the environment controversies centring around both Thal-Vaishet and Silent Valley. The state governments concerned sought to capitalise on the fact that the committee reports were not revealed to the public by distorting the findings.

THE VOICES RAISED against the Mathura refinery grew yet more strident, nevertheless. In the summer of 1979, S N Chib, the former Director General of Tourism, called a meeting in Delhi of prominent people like Romila Thapar, D Chattopadhyaya and Rajeswar Dayal, to see what they could do about the deterioration of the Taj. They set up the Indian Heritage Society (IHS) in October and set about trying to save the Taj in right earnest. They saw Mrs Gandhi for the first time in September 1980, held press conferences and a one-day seminar on 'Industrial Development of Environment'. They also went to see Professor M G K Menon, Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology (under whose purview environment then fell). They prudently did not take Dave with them. At one stage, the IHS contemplated suing the government and even had the well-known advocate F S Nariman prepare a brief. (True to type, Shivaji Rao, who was informed of such a move, jumped the gun and announced that it would shortly be filed in the Delhi High Court.) But they thought twice about it because they did not want to antagonise the Prime Minister. Somewhat immodestly and incorrectly, Chib claimed that the IHS was responsible for closing down the power stations in Agra in 1982.

The active members of the IHS were quite different from conventional environmentalists: men like G Naqshband, who is a top executive in Sita Travels, a leading agency in Connaught Place, from where the organisation was run. S K Roy, a former diplomat, devotes himself to several environmental causes in and around the capital. Ram Nivas Mirdha, the President, then a Rajya Sabha MP, is now the Union Minister of State for Communications.

In September 1979, a High Power Committee of Secretaries of various departments, under the chairmanship of Professor Menon, was set up to supervise the measures being taken to protect the Taj. This was one of the last



In spite of the steps taken to counteract the pollution levels a nagging doubt remains: will fumes from the Mathura refinery definitely not corrode the Taj? Fortunately, the possibility is ruled out.

decisions of Morarji Desai's Cabinet, at which meeting the Varadarajan Committee's recommendations were officially accepted. The committee was formally wound up only in April 1980. By March 1982, the Menon Committee was able to report that, thanks to the closing of the power station near Itmad-ud-Daulah's tomb and the dieselisation of the railway yard by May the previous year, SO_2 levels had been substantially reduced. According to NEERI, there has been a 75 per cent drop in SO_2 pollution in Agra as a result. The UP government also announced the creation of a Rs 35 lakh green belt around the Taj to protect it from fumes.

The progress on the refinery remained painfully slow. After being plagued by strikes, floods, disputes with contractors and power cuts (imposed when Charan Singh, as Prime Minister, switched electricity to agriculture), the commissioning of the project kept getting postponed. The country's 12th refinery at Mathura was finally commissioned in May 1983, a full decade after the foundation stone was laid and in twice the time it should have taken.

THE NAGGING DOUBT remains: Will fumes from the Mathura refinery definitely not corrode the 'miracle in marble'? From all the possible evidence, it appears to be ruled out. In the long run, especially as long as low-sulphur crude is being processed there, the danger does not exist. However, the possibility of using lower quality crude at some future date, cannot be ruled out. In the short-term, despite the cautionary cries of Dave, Sengupta and Shivaji Rao, the possibility of a conjunction of adverse factors – very low winds coupled with high humidity – is too remote. As for mishaps, which can cause a sudden release of a large quantity of SO_2 – rather like the RCF's notorious fertiliser plant in Chembur, Bombay, which has overnight defoliated trees on occasion – these do not happen in oil refineries: if there is an accident, it is shut down immediately. The only lingering uncertainty is the effect of SO_2 on marble which is over 300 years old. But here, too, it is clear that since the emissions of SO_2 from within Agra itself were – and still are – much greater than from the refinery, the Taj and other monuments in the area are still in a very good state of preservation. The marble has yellowed somewhat but it is nothing compared to the havoc wrought by atmospheric pollution to similar structures in Delhi itself. ♦

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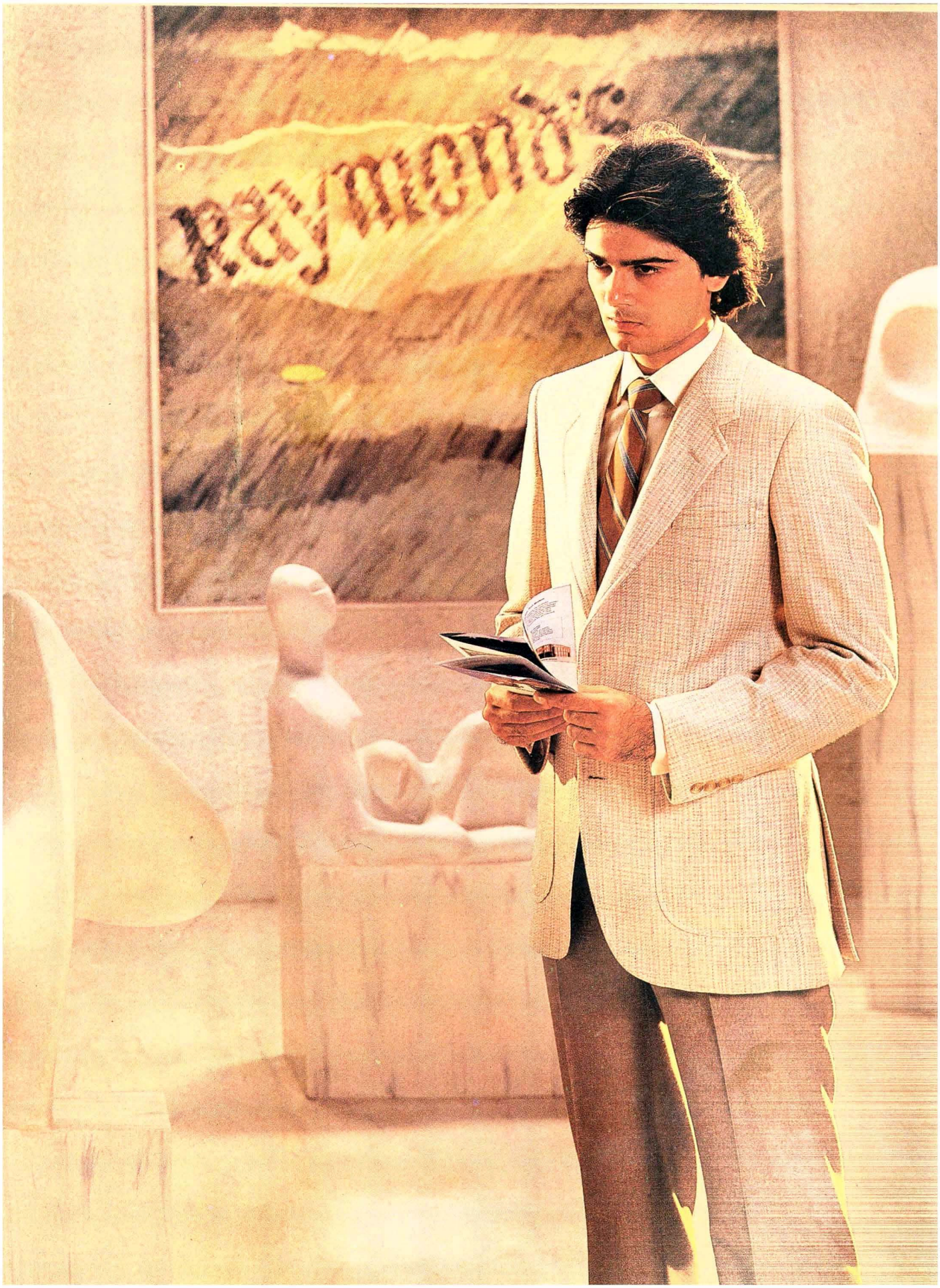
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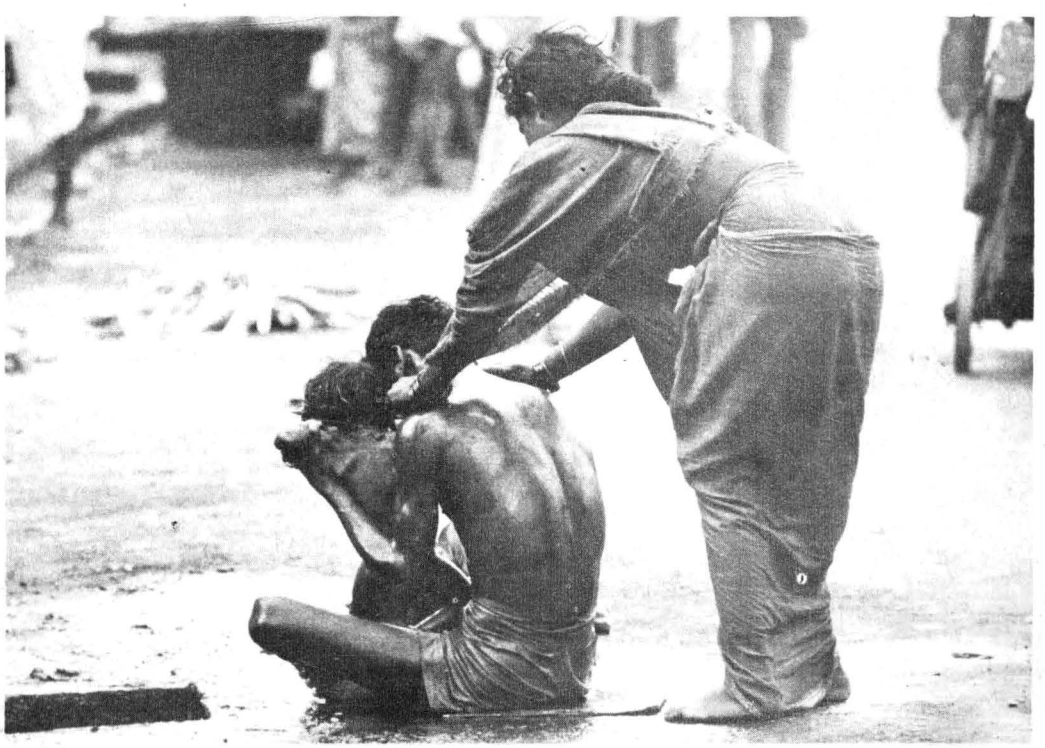
PARAMOUNT 15

PLANNING FOR POVERTY

The government is still solving the problem of poverty by changing its definition. So the people aren't raised, the poverty line is lowered, and millions of people mysteriously rise above it at short notice.



THE ATTENTION lavished by the media, both state and private, on Rajiv Gandhi's meetings with the poor in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa appears to suggest that poverty exists only when the Prime Minister takes note of it.

The nature of Rajiv Gandhi's interaction with the wretchedly poor tribals is now familiar to us. It is good that the plight of even a handful of India's poor should receive front-page treatment in the 'independent' press. It is not so good that, just a short while later, the latest figure of people below the poverty line should either be ignored or relegated to an insignificant position on the inside pages of almost all the national dailies.

P Sainath is Foreign Editor and Deputy Editor of Blitz. *He has written frequently about anti-poverty programmes.*

More so, since the figure does not cover just a handful of poor from two states, but a number in excess of the population of the United States. *The Times Of India,* to take just one example, carried the announcement of the figure on page 14, as the last of 14 briefs under *Lok Sabha Questions,* preceded by such burning issues as *Trade With Tibet,* the *Five-day Week,* and *Extra Flights* for Indian Airlines.

And yet, the fact is that the Indian government has abandoned the abolition of poverty as a fundamental goal. Current official projections estimate that poverty will not only outlast the Seventh Plan period, but be present with us in the first decade of the *next* century. Indian planners now estimate that, by the conclusion of the Ninth Plan period (1994-99), poverty will have been 'reduced' to ten per cent of the population. Great news, if you're not in the ten per cent.

The *Approach Paper* to the Seventh Plan, released in 1984 was, in many ways, a landmark document. Beginning with the First Five-Year Plan, soon after Independence, the professed central aim of Indian planning has been the *abolition* of poverty. Logically inevitable, in a nation where over 50 per cent of the population has long lived below the officially-defined poverty line.

Successive Indian governments never even began to implement that promise. But at least the assurance was there. The government these days does not even promise to eliminate poverty. Indian planning has ceased to talk about the abolition of poverty. The professed aim now is the 'progressive reduction' of the 'incidence of poverty' to a 'manageable' ten per cent of the population by – believe it or not – 2001 AD.

The government is no longer promising to eliminate poverty. Instead, it is projecting anti-poverty programmes into the next century, when poverty will be reduced to a 'manageable' ten per cent of the population. Great news, if you're not in the ten per cent.

This, after scores of anti-poverty and rural development programmes since the '50s. We have had (or still have), the Community Development Programme (CDP), the Green Revolution, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP), to name but a handful.

And now, 38 years after Independence, our anti-poverty programmes are being projected into the next century. Failure is forgivable where at least the intent to succeed exists, but Indian anti-poverty programmes stand out for their cynicism, callousness, falsification of claims and utter ineffectiveness. Even the limited possibilities of action against poverty that the present system permits have not been fully and consistently explored.

The 'ten-per-cent-next-century' solution advanced by the Planning Commission in 1984 did not, of course, mean that the remaining 90 per cent were speedily improving. S B Chavan, then Planning Minister, had admitted even earlier (in *The Patriot,* December 8, 1983), that India was the world's sixth poorest nation, with only Bangladesh, Bhutan, Laos, Nepal and Burma behind us in terms of per capita Gross National Product (GNP).

There are those who will read into this, the failure of planning. But the whole trend seems to confirm E M S Namboodiripad's denouncement of the idea (nearly a decade ago) that India can move forward to socialism through planning, as envisaged by the ruling Congress party.

"After three decades," he wrote in *Indian Planning In Crisis,* "one begins to doubt there is any planning at all, let alone socialist planning." This sort of anarchy leads, of course, to some minor confusion over figures occasionally. Some examples may be found in the sequence below:

"The total number of poor. . . . would be about 290 million. . . About 160 million of these would fall 75 per cent below the poverty line."

– Draft Sixth Five-Year Plan (1978-83).

"The number of Indians below the officially-defined poverty line now stands at 304.61 million people. . ."

– Food and Civil Supplies Minister, Bhagwat Jha Azad (Lok Sabha, April 18, 1983).

"Almost 12 crore or 120 million have been dragged above the poverty line since 1979-80. . . "

– Indira Gandhi, Independence Day Address (Red Fort, August 15, 1983).

"Fifty-seven million people have been dragged above the poverty line since 1979-80. . ."

– Planning Minister, S B Chavan (Lok Sabha, March 21, 1984).

"Nearly 600 million out of about 700 million are living below or near the poverty line."

– Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers, Vasant Sathe, (*Towards Social Revolution,* 1984).

"The extent of poverty in India has probably been over-

estimated. . ."

– Planning Commission Member, Dr A M Khusro
(Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture, May 3, 1984).

"The number of people below the poverty line in the country came down from 307.3 million in 1977-78 to 270.8 million in 1983-84. . ."

– Minister of State for Planning, K R Narayanan
(Lok Sabha, August 7, 1985).

Let us, from this wealth of data, take just two interesting specimens. The Planning Minister's claim that some 57 million people had been 'dragged' above the poverty line since 1979-80 was at variance with the late Mrs Gandhi's own figure of 120 million given in her Independence Day Address to the nation on August 15, 1983.

Since Mrs Gandhi's speech preceded the Planning Minister's by some seven months, this either means that both, in their enthusiasm, were conducting separate anti-poverty programmes, or that 63 million people mysteriously sank

THE GREEN REVOLUTION ILLUSION

Why our godowns are full of grain and our children malnourished.

THE GREEN REVOLUTION initiated in Mexico during the '40s to get more food to the cities, concentrated on the development of new high-yielding varieties of seeds. As Moore and Collins wrote: "The focus was on how to make seeds, not people, more productive." While the Green Revolution undoubtedly saw increases in overall food production in India, it never addressed problems of ownership and distribution, and actually sharpened existing disparities besides spawning a few new ones.

New evidence is constantly surfacing regarding the link between greater profitability of agriculture and the growth in the number of landless. Land-owners mechanise production and evict their tenants. Farms in the Pubjab grew by 240 per cent in three years of the Green Revolution in the '60s, according to a World Bank study. And, as an ILO study (*Poverty And Landlessness In Rural Asia,* Geneva, 1976) noted of South Asian countries: "The increase in poverty has been associated not with a fall but with a rise in cereal production per head, the main component of the diet of the poor."

This is excruciatingly true of India. The Agriculture Ministry boasted in 1982-83: "Indian agriculture has been acquiring strength and resilience over the years. While the rate of increase in agricultural production was 2.48 per cent between 1967 and 1972, it was expected to be 2.66 per cent during the current year."

And yet, simultaneously, per capita availability of foodgrains had fallen to a level ten per cent lower than that which obtained in 1953-54. This was sought to be officially explained with that last apology of the unscrupulous: population. Books recommended by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) often carry a chapter on population to 'generate awareness amongst the children' of this major problem.

According to these textbooks, it is population growth which negates the 'fruits of increasing production' and thus creates poverty. Population is undoubtedly a problem – one which springs in no small measure from acute poverty. The 1982 *State Of The World Population Report* of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) pointed out that an Indian peasant couple 'must have at least six children to be 95 per cent certain of having one surviving son to care for them in their old age'.

Scores of similar studies have also suggested that we are not poor because we are many, but many because we are poor. But it is the population, growth-leads-to-poverty theory that dominates. As Dr Anil Sadgopal once pointed out while delivering a Vikram Sarabhai Memorial Lecture, what the textbooks do not explain is "why India's godowns are full of grain, while the multitudes who, in fact, produce the grain, remain undernourished and even die of hunger. Nor do they refer to the problem of distribution of resources, disparities in society, and the extremely low purchasing power of the people living below the poverty line."

Otherwise, how could it be that the majority of children in a super-surplus district like Hoshangabad, every village of which exports wheat, were found to be suffering from severe malnutrition? Nor do the textbooks explain why the 'fruits of increased production' do not reach the poor, despite their admitted abundance.

The media *melas* accompanying the Prime Minister's visits to villages in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa had, at least, one advantage: they focussed the nation's attention on the existence of acute, death-dealing hunger amongst large sections of Indians. And yet, the Finance Ministry, shortly after the launching of the 1985-86 budget and twice thereafter, reported 'comfortable stocks of foodgrains', with total stocks (in April) exceeding 20 million tonnes – an increase of 45 per cent over the previous year, 1984 (*Financial Express,* April 7, 1985).

Besides, between 1978 and 1984, India exported over 400,000 tonnes of wheat and rice. As the Agriculture Ministry proudly states: "During this period, India has been a net exporter of foodgrains." ♦

back beneath the poverty line (perhaps for the third time) in the intervening period.

BUT WHAT IS THE POVERTY LINE? And how come 63 million people can be dragged above or below it at such short notice every now and then? Simple: you don't raise the people – you lower the line. Especially around election time. For decades now, Indian governments have been solving the problem of poverty merely by changing its definition. The concept of poverty has now been redefined so many times as to make it ridiculous.

By 1978, the Planning Commission had drawn the poverty line at Rs 741.60 and Rs 855.60 for rural and urban areas, respectively (i e annual per capita consumer expenditure at 1976-77 prices).

To get an idea of the magnitude of the deception involved, observe that, according to the Finance Commission's Report (Appendix, 1978): "The all-India per capita expenditure incurred on a criminal prisoner in 1976-77 was Rs 1,732, which includes establishment, dieting

TELEVISION VERSUS REALITY

The Prime Ministerial soap opera doesn't square with the government's actions.

THE AMOUNT OF AIR-TIME and attention cornered by the Prime Minister's MP and Orissa visits have been construed by some as indicative of this government's determination to tackle the problem of poverty. The Prime Ministerial soap opera, however, hardly squares with the actual position and actions of Rajiv Gandhi's government. The 1985-86 budget actually slashed millions of rupees from anti-poverty programmes.

The current budget, which allots a pathetically inadequate Rs 8,655 million to such programmes, has already effected a Rs 80 million cut in special funds for rural development, compared to the previous year. Given this attitude, the 'deep concern' of the government over poverty is more than a little mysterious.

Even the woefully limited suggestions that were contained in the *Approach Paper* to the Seventh Plan have not been heeded. The *Approach Paper* stated that "poverty alleviation will have to be given the required degree of priority. . . . Programmes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) will have to be widened." The 1985-86 budget, however, effects a Rs 60 million cut in the NREP by scaling the allocation down from Rs 2,360 million in 1984-85 to Rs 2,300 million for the current year. The IRDP allocation remains stagnant at Rs 2,146 million as does the Rs 4,000 million allocation for the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). And it is possible that even these amounts will not be fully spent. Or that a significant portion will be either wrongly or fraudulently utilised – as in the case of the IRDP.

According to the *Approach Paper* the twin schemes of the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP) for disadvantaged areas, should have played a critical role in eliminating regional disparities. But while the DPAP allocation in the budget has remained stagnant at Rs 370 million, the DDP figure was slashed from Rs 100 million in 1984-85 to just Rs 20 million. Other schemes for rural development have had their allocations reduced by Rs 10 million.

The extent of the cuts may not, in themselves, be significant. What is significant is that, at a time when such funds desperately need to be increased, at a time when the government seeks to stress its recognition of the problem through the PM's visits, there should be cuts in the very programmes directed against poverty.

Inevitably, the government makes its own unwillingness to make a programme succeed the cause of shutting down that programme. This process has already begun with the IRDP where, after a fraud exceeding Rs 16 crore was unearthed, Rajiv Gandhi began to 'rethink' the whole business. The failure of a project that was never seriously meant to succeed, now presents a good reason to avoid such programmes in the future. Perhaps this was one factor that prompted the *Wall Street Journal* to nickname the Prime Minister, 'Rajiv-Reagan' after the presentation of his maiden budget earlier this year.

The foundation for an assault on *all* anti-poverty programmes has already been laid. Against the Plan allocation of Rs 5,000 million for 1984-85 for the RLEGP, a mere Rs 1,072 million had been utilised till December 1984. And performance in the NREP was so tardy that employment generation until February 1985, was just around half the target fixed for 1984-85. Against a target of 300 million man-days, only some 158.9 million were generated. None of the states have reached the allotted targets so far.

What better admission of failure than the government's stated position that 'some of the beneficiaries aided during the Sixth Plan, who could not rise above the poverty line, will be given further assistance during the Seventh Plan'?

The fact that earlier targets have been nowhere near fulfilled, taken in conjunction with the outlay cuts for present ones, means that even the absurd 'ten-per-cent solution' advanced in the *Approach Paper* to the Seventh Plan is, self-admittedly, not even being attempted by the government. ♦

and other charges."

Who says crime doesn't pay?

At least, the Planning Commission earlier performed the courtesy of promising to abolish poverty. In its document on *The Implication Of Planning For A Minimum Level Of Living*, July 1962, the Commission declared: "The central concern of our planning has to be the removal of poverty as early as possible. . . The target period within which the national minimum should be attained may be taken as 15 years from 1960-61, or by 1975-76."

What actually happened by 1976? Even allowing for a grace period of two years from then, what was actually achieved – by 1978 – was a drastic increase in the number of those below the poverty line to 290 million people – a figure in excess of the entire population of the United States.

But the government can afford to spend vast sums of money on diverse officials associated with the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), launched in 1978-79 as perhaps 'the most ambitious anti-poverty programme in the world'. To take just one example, the Project Director and his colleagues in Karnataka moved into quarters that cost Rs 2.5 million. In just a sample check, the Auditor General of India found that Rs 16 crore has been spent in keeping project officials in whisky, rum, beer, air-conditioners, refrigerators, 1984 diaries and lawn-mowers.

IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, we might even have a Ministry of Manipulative Mathematics, that demolishes poverty on the drawing-board, adding or subtracting the rich, multiplying and dividing the poor, as we rush on towards the nirvana of the Ninth Plan. But there will always be wet blankets like E M S Namboodiripad who, just when poverty has been brought to heel, spoils the whole idyllic picture by demonstrating that the government's claims do not, most of the time, tally with its own figures.

Obstacles will also doubtless be created by over-zealous auditors of these programmes who see only their seamier side. Or by that other killjoy, Professor S Tripathi, of the Benaras Hindu University, who convincingly explains how the IRDP has had no impact on poverty. To think that this man might be teaching our children!

Meanwhile, the rest of us shall march on, a song on our lips, to the promised land of ten-per-cent poverty. Never mind the Namboodiripads. Never mind that ten per cent of the Indian population in 2001 AD could mean over 100 million people with hunger in their bellies, and anger in their hearts. We must have *faith.*

As N D Tiwari so astutely pointed out in a speech during the brief period he was Planning Minister, about all that most of us need is faith. At current prices, it is about all that most of us can afford. ♦

DREAM SELLERS

THE SMALL ADS

Can they really achieve the miracles they promise? An investigation of the claims made by the small ads and the men who run them.

"Wanted new faces for our Hindi movie, all type of film artist male/female and music director. Those who can co-operate apply urgently to Box 4579, Bombay 400 008."

"Start export from home. No investment. Handsome profits, details free. Satish Loomba, C9/5 Krishan Nagar Delhi 110 051."

"New Research. Height can be improved upto 35 years. No exercise. Quite safe. Contact personally or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Dr Bagga, Lal Kuan, Delhi 110 006."

"Wanted ambitious photogenic female to model. Free coloured photographs will be taken at our studio. Write 24 K Films, 501 Embassy Centre, Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021."

THEY OFFER a world where all your dreams can be fulfilled, your problems solved. Nothing is impossible in the world of the small ads – you can gain height, restore your potency, become a film star or a model and, for the really desperate, even get rich quick. Tucked away on the inside pages of the tabloid newspapers, the small ad promises paradise for the cost of a postage stamp.

But can Dr Bagga really increase your height with his 'new research'? Is Dr Agrawal's 'special herbal medicine' guaranteed to work on shorties? Will Dr Chand definitely cure some poor man's impotency? Can Filmways's Mr Kashmiri really make you a movie star even if you are short, fat and ugly? Send your money to the address at the bottom of the ad and wait for the miracle by return post. "No matter who you are or what your problems, we'll do the impossible for you," the ads seem to promise.

Are the men who write in the ads really experts in their field? Or are they hoping to con unsuspecting, eager individuals into parting with their money? If, as the claims go, they really can increase height, restore potency, make you rich or a film star or model, why are they reduced to advertising in this suspicious manner? Shouldn't they be rich and famous themselves?

Imprint decided to find out about these men. On careful scrutiny, the ads seemed to fall into two kinds: the dream fulfilment merchants (they promise to make you rich quick, get you a role or a modelling assignment) and the miracle cure men (they will restore your potency, increase your height and/or deal with a number of other embarrassing problems). Could either category really help you?

I wrote off to several people with different cover stories – and prepared for a long wait. Most of them replied almost at once, sending across their literature or calling me for an interview within the week. I started with the dream fulfilment men. My first halt: Filmways, run by Mr Kashmiri.

"NOW ACT DIRECTLY in films through us," says the small print in the ad in *The Daily*. "Contact the Director." The ad promises a starry future. Who is the Director, Filmways, and how will he make me a star?

Within a week of writing a breathlessly hopeful letter, I get a summons. From the Director himself. The venue is to be Rajpopat School, Juhu; the time, six p m. "Don't be late," the mysterious voice at the other end of the line warns, "or the Director might go away."

Rajpopat School turns out to be the location for Filmways's acting courses. Late, as usual, breathless for having run up three flights of stairs, I almost miss Classroom IV B – where Mr Samar Kashmiri conducts his classes. The general hum and activity in the classrom abruptly cease as I walk in. Mr Samar Kashmiri, inconspicuous in the mêlée, pushes his short, paunchy body forward firmly in his chair. Yes, he confirms. This is Filmways. And he is the Director.

As I settle down thankfully on a small bench, the room hums again, as if on cue. Mr Kashmiri, a man of few words, tells me to watch and listen. This is the acting class and if I'm quick and sharp about it I might even pick up acting by the time the course is through – four days later. I protest. Can I ever really become a film

By Shirin Mehta

star? I ask. Am I not too thin and isn't my hair too short? Mr Kashmiri's leonine head shakes abruptly – once. If I leave things to him, I learn, I will have a role in a movie in no time at all.

Kersy Mehta, a pretty young man, who has had the distinction of actually having acted in an unnamed movie, fills me in on the details in hushed tones. "Sir," he explains, "has a lot of contacts with movie directors and producers. He is very good. He taught me to act." How many years has 'Sir' been doing this? Kersy is amused. "Oh, don't worry. Around 35 years at least. If anyone is going to get you a role, Sir will." I flick a glance in Sir's direction – he is hazily unaware of the chaos and noise he is surrounded by. His bloodshot eyes are half-closed, his mouth slightly open.

Suddenly, a short bark cuts through the noise: "Vijay, what are you doing? Enough of learning your lines. Come on, come up front and deliver your dialogue!" The class falls silent and Vijay, a tall, handsome boy in tight blue jeans, black T-shirt and brown zippered boots struts to the front – slowly – glancing from side to side, his chest pushed out as far as it will go.

Still in the deathly silence, Vijay completes his walk, turns sharply around at the first desk, thumps a booted foot on to the little bench and, eyes gleaming menacingly, launches into his villain's dialogue. It is an impressive performance by a performer who knows his worth. He stops for effect, raises his voice when he begins to threaten and laughs slyly from time to time. All the would-be actors look on – awed.

At the end of the act, Mr Kashmiri shakes the sleep from his shoulders and comes to life. The flaws in the performance are painstakingly pointed out. "Look up, then down and then to the side," Kashmiri instructs Vijay, showing him what he means with his own head movements. "That way the camera can get all the angles. First, the three-quarter profile as you are looking up, then the full face when you throw your eyes down and last – profile shot." Vijay is obvious-

ILLUSTRATION BY APARNA SINGH

ly used to hearing the advice. Chest puffed up again, eyes screwed down menacingly, his booted foot thumps the bench a second time as he begins his dialogue. This time Kashmiri interrupts the flow, checking his head movements, instructing him to step back to look more menacing and telling him what to do with his hands. Many tries later, when the bench is beginning to display a distinct shakiness at the thumping it's taken, Vijay is allowed to go. "Vikas," Kashmiri calls the next student, "*chalo bhai.*"

The next 'villain' looks more like a comedian. Shortish, with green corduroy trousers and a red T-shirt, Vikas is the antithesis of Vijay. For one, he doesn't have the stature. And for another, he doesn't really believe in the lines he has to say. "Sir," he pleads, "*yeh* villain-*fillain sub kuch mujhe nahin achcha lagta hai. Mein to* comedian *banna chahta hoon*, comedian!" lifting his thick eyebrows upwards and squinting his eyes to hilarious effect. But Mr Samar Kashmiri is implacable: a villain Vikas will have to be.

This time round, there are no preenings. Almost from the first word, '*doston*' (which he shouts out in a mistaken bid to impress), Vikas can do nothing right. If he shouts, Mr Kashmiri asks him to try the soft, menacing approach; if he says it softly, Kashmiri is quick to point out that he's ineffective; if he puts his hands to good use, Mr Kashmiri cautions against too much movement; if he doesn't, Mr Kashmiri feels he doesn't have the fluidity that marks a villain. Finally, in despair, Vikas tugs at the thick mop of hair that surrounds his face and mumbles something about being a comedian before he is sent back to re-learn his lines.

Meanwhile, Kersy Mehta keeps up a steady commentary. "Sir is really fantastic," he gushes. "He got me a film role in no time at all. See all these people? They didn't know anything about acting when they came in – and look at them now!" A few more students are dragged up-front to give uninspired performances. All through the class Mr Kashmiri's formula for success is unvarying: look up, then down and then to the side, and you can't fail.

During a brief lull in the lessons, Mr Kashmiri turns to me. "See them," he says with a shake of his head, "they are still scared to come up and act. They are scared of the camera. Now, if you aren't scared you can learn acting within a week. There's nothing to it." Had he ever acted in a movie himself? Mr Kashmiri lowers his eyelids even further and says briefly, "Yes. Many years ago. But then I discovered I could teach better." Any famous film stars who've passed through his school? He nods wisely. "Yes. Sunny Deol. And, of course, there are others.

"Take down your dialogue," he informs me gently. "And then read it out to the class." Hoping my horror doesn't show in my eyes, I quickly decline. But I copy down the dialogue nonetheless. "*Dekho* Gauri, *tum mujhe kissi ke bare me kuch mut kaha karo*," Kashmiri dictates, eyes half-closed. Then suddenly, in a louder voice: "*Tum jhuthee ho! Dhokebaaz ho!* Mohan *se meri burai karte sharam nahin aati?!*" Kashmiri lowers his eyes for front shot. "*Dekho* Gauri, *mein tumhara muh bhi nahin dekhna chahti! Isse pehle ki mein kuch kahoon, tum yahan se chali jao.*" Profile shot. "*Ab phir aaj ke baad mujhe muh kabhi na dikhana.*" It takes Mr Kashmiri two to three minutes to return to normal.

SAMAR KASHMIRI'S formula for success is constant: look up, then down, then to the side. Within this three-angle technique he can act out any dialogue. I find out later that Mr Kashmiri himself was not successful as a Hindi film hero.

The rest of the class files to the front, slowly, each one delivering his dialogue in a distinctly different manner, trying wherever possible to do the three-angle technique to please the finicky Mr Kashmiri. The villains are an assorted bunch, some so small and emaciated that even drawn up to their full height they are far from menacing. I learn, from hurried whispered conversations with Kersy Mehta, that the boys have to pay Rs 1,500 or 2,000 for the course; the girls are given the education free of charge. After the three-week course is over, Mr Kashmiri himself arranges a screen test and only when you get the role does he take a commission on it.

The 'class' ends abruptly at 7.45 p m and everyone goes home chatting about recent hits, flops and their stars. On the way out, Mr Kashmiri bumps into a man with a cloth shoulder-bag and starts talking to him earnestly. Kersy Mehta, my informed source, tells me admiringly that he is a producer. Then, eyes shining with enthusiasm, he hustles himself into the group which surrounds Mr Kashmiri and the producer.

Who knows, there might be a role going, somewhere. . .

WHEN I FIRST SEE Shyam Mashruwalla, a bespectacled young-looking businessman in a blue safari suit, he is alone in a large room, sitting behind a huge desk which has no papers on it. I have replied to his advertisement in *Mid-Day* ("Wanted ambitious photogenic female to model"). I am intrigued because the advertisement had categorically stated: "Free coloured photographs will be taken at our studio." Why would a successful businessman waste time on this – and that too free of charge?

Mashruwalla scrutinises my face in the late evening light. "Your face definitely has possibilities," he informs me. "I always shoot at my studio on Saturday. Come there any

(Continued on page 75)

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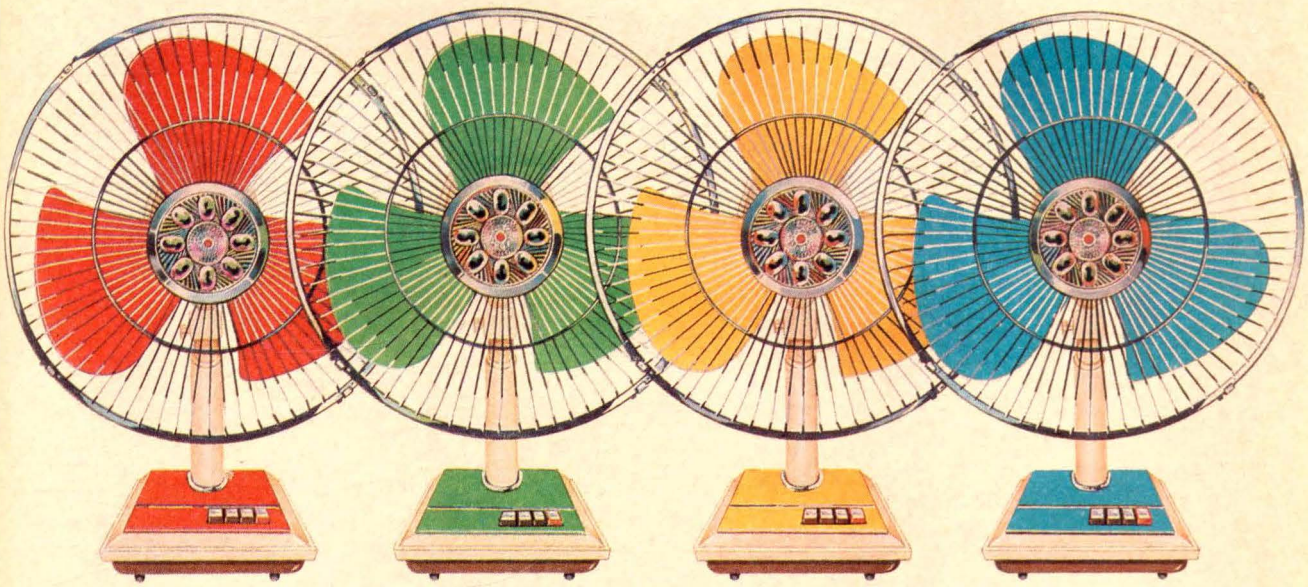

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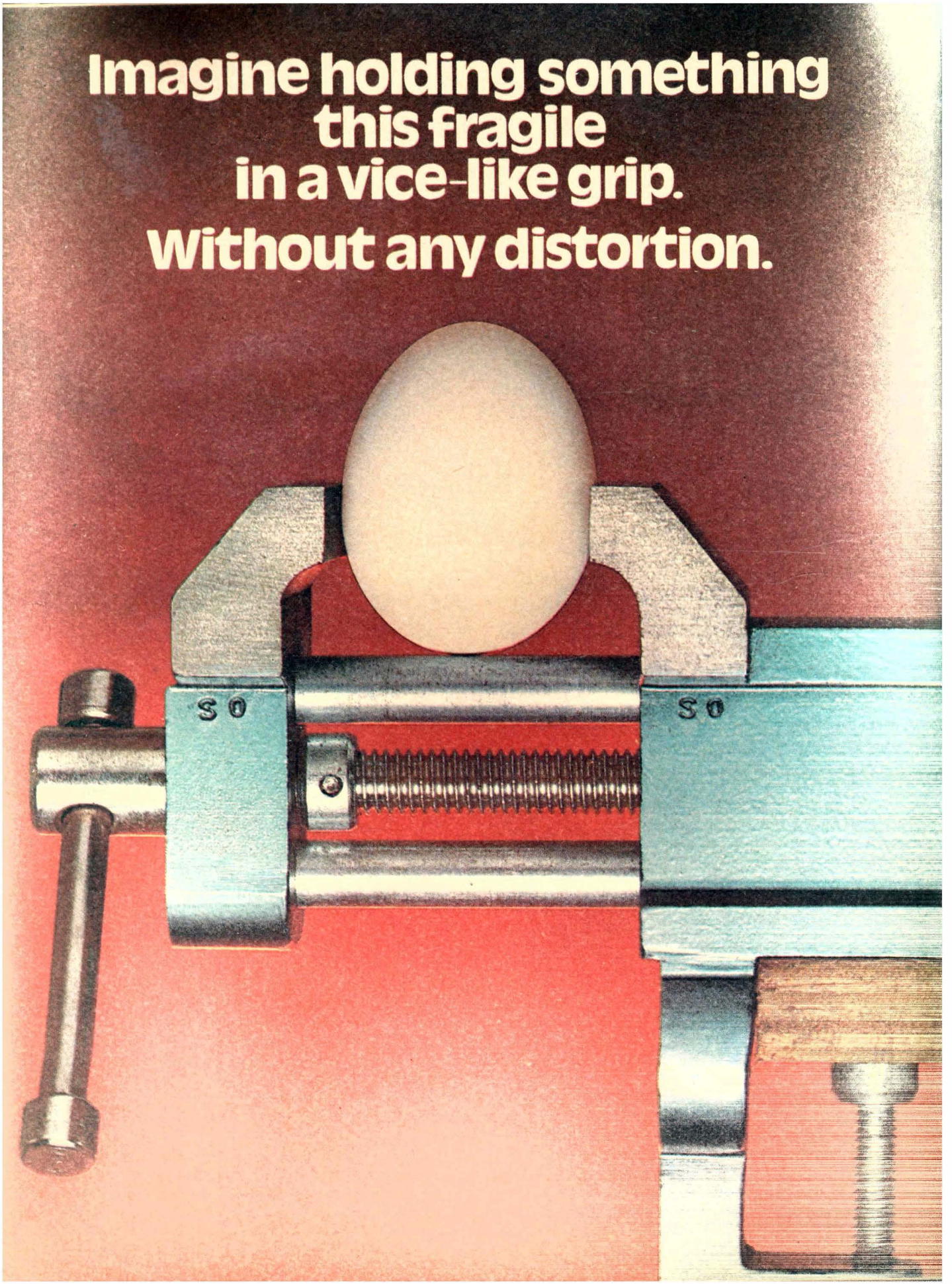
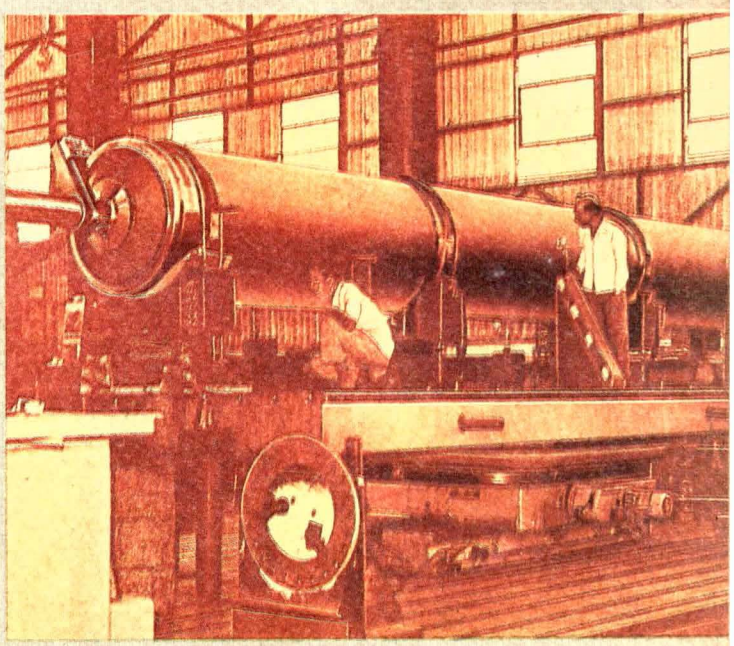
APEX-INN-605-CE

Imagine holding something this fragile in a vice-like grip. Without any distortion.



That's dead easy compared to the designing of the machining set-up for a 9000 mm long hollow vessel for a Satellite Launch Vehicle. A job Walchandnagar has completed for space research.



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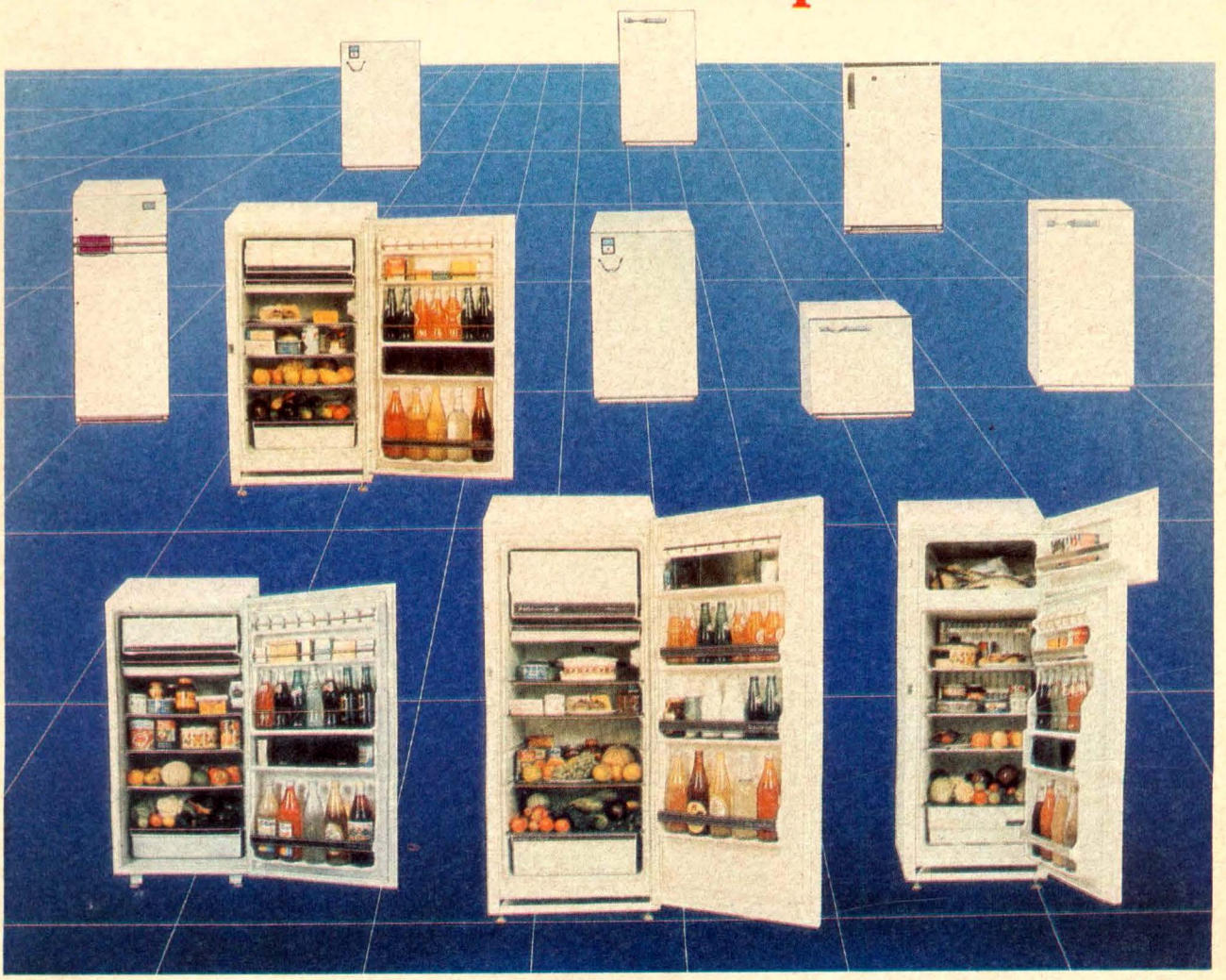

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Mutual-4105

(Continued from page 70)
Saturday you want . . ." Where is his studio? At Marine Drive. "Wear a sari," he says.

At three o'clock on the specified Saturday afternoon I ring the bell at the Marine Drive studio (having refused his secretary's invitation to go over to his house first). A man in a blue *churidar-kurta* opens the door. I almost don't recognise Mr Mashruwalla without his glasses. I step into a huge flat – totally empty and eerily silent. As he follows me into the dust-covered living-room, Mr Mashruwalla asks if I've brought along different costumes. I look astonished. Nothing of the sort had been mentioned, I point out. Mashruwalla is upset. "You should have brought different dresses," he pouts. "Then you could have changed here and we could have taken different photographs." I apologise. Mashruwalla is magnanimous. Rubbing his hands together, he says: "Don't worry. You can always come another time. There will, after all, be a lot of sessions."

After some nervous pacing up and down, during which he doesn't seem quite sure what to do with his hands, he ushers me to the studio. "It's at the back of the house," he explains. "Let's go there and wait while my partner, Subodh Chandra, arrives. He'll shoot the black-and-white pictures; I only shoot in colour."

The 'studio' has lights, backdrop paper, a stool ('to photograph on'), a bed ('to sit on'), a dressing-table and an attached bathroom ('to change in'). Mashruwalla resumes his pacing while he talks. First and foremost, he wants to assure me, he only chooses girls who he thinks can make it as models and, as he's already told me before, 'my face has possibilities'. He has a lot of contacts in ad agencies and after shooting, he prints two sets of photographs – one for the model, one for himself – and takes them around. I want to know why he does it. What's in it for him? I ask. Why take photographs of girls you don't even know, to launch them in a career you're not even involved in?

Mashruwalla stops his pacing and rubs his hands together. "You see, this is my hobby," he explains. "I have a lot of money and I don't need any more. I look on it as a kind of favour to the girl. Maybe she's a really pretty girl looking for a break and if I can help her, why not?" A bell rings in the distant recesses of the huge flat. Mashruwalla does not hear it. "One day if you become a model you'll understand what pleasure I get out of it. It is my way of relaxing and doing creative work." The doorbell rings again – more obtrusively. Mashruwalla goes out to let Subodh Chandra in.

Chandra, a bespectacled, white-haired man of about 60, is a professional photographer. A man of few words. As he starts pushing the lights into position and changing the backdrop colour, Mashruwalla proudly tells me of Chandra's achievements. Subodh Chandra has worked for foreign magazines, has been shooting since he was about 21 and has toured all over India. Chandra, himself, is businesslike – taking light meter readings, studying my face with a cold, impersonal scrutiny. I touch up my make-up and the session begins.

SHYAM Mashruwalla proves within five minutes of the 'modelling' session that he is no photographer. He turns to his partner for advice on everything. In spite of that, the pictures are fuzzy and overexposed.

Within five minutes it becomes startlingly clear that Mashruwalla is no photographer. He turns to Chandra for advice on everything: what f-stop to choose, the angles to take, if he needs to change his lens for a close-up and whether the lighting is okay. In contrast, Chandra does the positioning, gives the angles, changes the lights and asks for the expressions. I wonder, cynically, if there is any film in either of their cameras.

The whole 'sitting' takes one hour from start to finish with Mashruwalla running up a commentary on how I look, what a first-class shot he's just taken, and quipping about his other models. He emphasises that we must grow to be friends, because only after friendship would the sessions become more relaxed and free. Later, the quips acquire distinct sexual overtones: "My models trust me enough to change in front of me," he boasts once, and then when Chandra wonders aloud what else he can make me do with a sari, Mashruwalla jokes: "She can take it off."

After an hour of this tiresome posing, I am free. But Mashruwalla does not want me to leave just yet. "It's only 5.40," he says. "Sit down with us, have tea and let's get to be friends." Together, we trudge back to the sitting-room while Mr Chandra stays behind to settle the studio and bring us the tea. Mashruwalla talks on, incessantly. This time about his other models, how pretty they were, how some of them brought along their boy-friends or their mothers for the shooting – and how that cramped their style.

I ask if any of the girls have actually taken to modelling full-time and Mr Mashruwalla tells me, enthusiastically: "Have you seen the girl in the Halo shampoo ad? That's Sarika, my secretary. She also started with me. Very pretty girl." In the meantime, Subodh Chandra has made the tea and brought out his published photographs.

An hour later, even Mr Mashruwalla has run out of excuses for lingering on. He urges me, however, not to go home but to come to his flat. I decline. He keeps insisting and I keep refusing. Mr Mashruwalla is not pleased. "How will we become good friends? A good model needs to be on good terms with her photographer." However, he drops me to Churchgate station.

A week later I call him to ask

about the photographs. Mashruwalla sounds sheepish: "I'm sorry, but there was a mistake. I shot a 1000 ASA film on 100 ASA and as a result the pictures are quite fuzzy. Let's arrange another shooting session – this time there will be no mistake." A few days later he calls back to say that some of the pictures have come out quite fine – why don't I come over to his flat and we can see them together.

I agree, but say that I will send someone to collect them. That evening Mr Mashruwalla contrives not to be at home. The next time I send a friend of mine. The photographs turn out to be what was expected: overexposed, blued out, imperfect versions of the actual art.

MR ARUN SANYAL's podgy figure leads the way into the sitting-room of his Santa Cruz flat from where he runs Blue Chip Investment. He shakes his long lanky hair loose from the constricting clasp of his collar and turns his large eyes onto me, head held to one side, attentive. "Yes. Now, tell me. What can I do for you?"

I tell him that his small ad in the papers had promised me 30-60 per cent revenue on shares, if I followed the tips given by Blue Chip. I was interested. Could he tell me how I could earn this extra money? What did I have to do?

Mr Sanyal's hand goes up in midsentence to stop the flow of words. "Now, I will tell you," he says, launching into an explanation. "Investing in shares is very simple business – for those who know what it is about. Now, all you have to do is to follow my tips: if I ask you to buy some shares, you buy them. In no time at all the company will give you bonus shares, or declare a right's issue and your investment will increase by 40 per cent." Carefully he extracts his paunch from behind the desk and pads, barefoot, to the verandah. "Now, see this letter here – I have stated that the best buy in the share market right now is Tata Chemicals. You will get the bonus shares they have declared."

The paper I am looking down at has the logos of several large companies displayed in a confusing hotchpotch. In large letters above is the slogan: "Best pick up for this month" and below that the words TISCO and TELCO. The other companies mentioned: Best Crompton ('sure bonus'), DCM Toyota, Escorts, Burroughs Wellcome and Ingersoll-Rand ('by end of this year or early 1986'). Thirty-three names are listed in all – from what I can see, all blue chip companies in which one can't really go wrong. The last section ('Few Advices To Follow') lists truisms like "Don't invest your running capital in shares; while the market is dull don't sell; go only for good shares you will never lose"; and "Don't buy shares from private placement."

ARUN SANYAL'S BLUE Chip Investment runs on the simplistic advice he hands out on shares. He informs me proudly that he's been in business for a year, has thousands of clients and spends Rs 20,000 a month.

"This is the newsletter we give to all our clients," Arun Sanyal says, round-eyed. "Now, let me tell you. If you invest in any of these shares, you can't go wrong." I ask him if he is specially qualified to judge the stock market trends, if he has any training in it, and if he's ever gone wrong. In answer, Arun Sanyal pads across the room and gets a bunch of newspapers. "See, all this I am reading every day to keep in touch with the news. Also, I used to work in a company that was dealing with the stock market."

For this 'exclusive monthly share letter' which gives you advice on the 'ten best fast-moving shares of the year' Arun Sanyal charges a flat rate of Rs 200 for six months and Rs 360 for a year. Blue Chip has apparently been in business for over a year now – and is growing stronger every day. "You can guess how much I earn," Mr Sanyal tells me coyly, "when I tell you that I spend about Rs 20,000 a month." On what? "On my advertising, postage, newsletters – everything. People from abroad ask my advice. It's not easy, eh. Now I'm telling you." He carefully loosens a strand of hair from his collar.

As with most of the small ad merchants, Mr Sanyal is eager to establish his bona fides. He informs me he's never been wrong, has got thousands of clients, and does give 'special advice' at the rate of Rs 30 per company. I promptly ask him if Reliance is a good investment. Arun Sanyal shakes his head slowly. "Now I am telling you. Reliance is a good company but it's got too many investors. If you have one cake and many people to share it, how much will each one get?" he asks, rhetorically. Surely, it depended on the size of the cake? Mr Sanyal shakes his head again. "Not a very good company. It's too high – share prices are bound to fall."

As I begin to ease my way out, Mr Sanyal detains me by producing his latest ad in *The Times Of India*. 'Earn 60-90 per cent or more' in shares, it announces. "See this here," Mr Sanyal says, evidently pleased at the size of the ad and its prominent position. "Such papers like the *Times* never give any ads, unless they are sure of their clients. . ."

I agree, pay him Rs 100 for his hot tips and leave.

FROM THE MEN who promise to make your dreams come true, I graduate to the miracle cure men. The ones who have a cure to almost any medical problem that exists. My first halt: the Ayurvedic Centre. . .

Kaviraj Dr Khazan Chand is a tall, trim man of 73. His eyes peer out at me from behind thick bifocals and

it's impossible to tell their expression. Right now, Dr Khazan Chand is very busy indeed. With my problem. Or rather, the problem of my husband's impotency. Outside this Delhi residential area of Nizamuddin East it is very quiet – and still.

Dr Khazan Chand's ad had stated: "Pleasures of married life (large type) can be enjoyed. Virility can be gained. Trial will convince even the hopeless." I am, ostensibly, the hopeless case. I look at Dr Chand hopefully as he ponders my problem.

"Hmm!" Dr Khazan Chand says, pushing his thick spectacles up his nose out of sheer force of habit. "Now, impotency can be of two kinds: one is physiological, one is psychological. Again, the physiological impotency can be due to lack of erection or lack of retention. What exactly is the problem with your husband?"

I am not prepared for this. Ad libbing desperately, I tell him that the problem seems to be chronic. As my letter said, we have not been able to share the 'pleasures of married life' ever since we were married two years ago. Dr Khazan Chand looks back at me steadily. "Hmm! Now, you say that he is only 28 years old. This is very unusual case. Do you think the problem is psychological?" I say I don't know, but Dr Khazan Chand seems to have come to a decision. "In that case," he tells me confidently, "he needs the super-special treatment."

How exactly does his medicine act? I ask. Is it to be swallowed or applied? Chand's eyes look back, expressionless. "There are certain sex centres in the body, usually in the mind," he explains. "My medicine acts internally – curing the psychological problems as well as the physical ones." I press for more details. Dr Chand is vague. "There is no way to tell you how it will work. The only way to know is to try it out. One thing is definite – your husband will be cured permanently within two months. No longer will he have an impotency problem and I will guarantee you full satisfaction." I point out that Rs 2,000 is a bit steep, especially since we are not sure the medicine will work.

Dr Chand rises from his chair, walks out of the room carefully, and slowly returns with a file. "I have cured over 2,000 patients since I started," he claims. "If you have read my book *Sex Guide* which I sent to you before, you will know that I am famous. (I look into the wells of his eyes.) Nobody has ever failed with my treatment. See here (he points to a paper he's holding), this case for example: he was a man 45 years old. I cured him. See, his name and the amount. I have also written books on sex. Haven't you see *Sex Guide*?"

I have indeed. Kaviraj Dr Khazan Chand appears to be a man of many talents. Curing impotency is only one aspect of his miraculous cures. In addition, he can treat (and cure) a variety of ailments ranging from syphilis (acute and chronic) to gas and baldness. Author of *Indian Sexology*, *Conjugal Harmony*, *Nature Cure Of Sex Disorders* and *Menstruation*, Dr Chand does, indeed, seem to be the self-proclaimed national expert on the subject. The book *Sex Guide* for instance begins with the sentence: "Nowadays there is hardly any young man who solemnly considers himself to be sexually fit," and goes on to warn these young men not to be taken in by 'dishonest physicians'. The book undertakes to guide them through their various misconceptions and promises them advice on how to solve the problems.

KAVIRAJ DR KHAZAN Chand's medicine guarantees a miracle cure for impotency. And, for that matter, for any other sexual problem that exists. jBut Dr Chand, I soon discover, is not as learned as he would have you believe...

What follows is a horror account of Dr Chand's views on sex. For instance, Dr Chand on masturbation: "There is hardly any part of the body which is not impaired by masturbation. . . the whole body becomes an abode of diseases and weakness. The eyes become sunken, the cheek-bones protrude and there is a black rim round the eyes. . .Vision becomes dim, the tongue begins to stammer, ears tend to become deaf, and so on. At last, phthysis *(sic)* or insanity or some other serious disease steps in and puts an end to the evil practice by bringing their victim's life to a close. . ." Dr Chand on impotency: "Every young man should make it a point to get himself examined and obtain a certificate of sexual fitness to insure a happy conjugal life of co-operation, love and devotion. . . Every woman expects her husband to be virile and when at the very outset her hopes are frustrated she begins to despise her husband. It is virility that accounts for man's mastery over women. . ."

Considering his views on sex, I'm not too sure about the cure. But I would like to have the medicine tested, if possible. So I ask Dr Chand if I can take home a one-week course. Dr Chand is emphatic: "If your husband does not do the two-month course he will remain impotent for life. But after two months all normal sexual vigour will be regained." He does not want to see the patient or talk to him personally. I am not surprised.

I ask him if there will be any side-effects. Dr Chand shakes his head. "Our treatment is absolutely immune from any adverse effects as they are prescribed on scientific principles." Was there no case at all where the medicine had failed to work? Dr Chand shakes his head again. "No. We have a cent per cent cure. You see all these men (pointing to the file in his hand) they have all been cured. We take on special cases as well – those whom the other doctors have not been able to cure. Of course, in those cases, the charges are higher.

About Rs 2,500-3,000."

I tell him I'll talk it over with my husband and then ask for the treatment. When I come back to Bombay, I send off for a sample. It takes a week to arrive.

DR P C AGRAWAL is a very nervous man. As I look across at him, he shuffles, for the hundredth time, another tiny slip of paper from one crowded part of the desk to another. "Of course, there is no problem," he assures me. "I will cure your brother – absolutely."

"A special herbal medicine prepared by Dr P C Agrawal increases height," his ad had promised. Now, I want to know how his medicine will work – if it works at all, for my brother is already 27. Dr Agrawal shakes his head at my misconceptions. "It has been scientifically proved in the West that height can be increased by exercise. Another thing – it has been discovered that a certain tribe in Africa, which makes women wear several thick neck-bands, has produced people with elongated necks. So it is not true that height can't be increased."

I ask again how his medicine will work. Does it, also, elongate the bones? Dr Agrawal shifts a few papers back and forth in nervous agitation. "No, no," he says, eyes lowered. "My medicine affects the internal centres of the body – the ones where the glands are. Once the glands are activated, the height increases. I have even got success in the case of a man who was 57 years old."

What was the 'special herbal medicine' he prepared? And how did he hit upon the formula? Dr P C Agrawal's eyes look downwards. "I didn't make it," he says, hands on the alert to pick up another scrap of paper. "This medicine I sell is not my own. It has been listed in the Ayurvedic books hundreds of years ago. I read about it and decided to market it." How had he known that the formula *would* work? What if there had been major side-effects which he was not trained to handle? Dr P C Agrawal's gaze never rises above my shoulders as he says, with evident relief: "There were no side-effects. The only complaint that people have had is that it makes them feel vomity for some time. Now, if such a thing happens, then I recommend that they take the dose only once a week – otherwise, daily dose (meaning one taken every alternate day) is also good."

Suddenly, he gets up, a tall, paunchy man who dominates the tiny room, and takes one step to the bed behind my chair. He scrabbles around under the curtained storage space below the bed and comes back with a plastic bag full of his medicines. After emptying the contents on the already untidy table, he comes up with the right bottle. Labelled 'Herb for Height', it contains a beige-coloured powder, packed and sealed by Sharda Pharmacy.

P C AGRAWAL'S 'Special herbal medicine' increases height by a special formula he discovered in ancient Ayurvedic texts. He markets the herb without checking out if it has any side effects, using his first few patients as guinea pigs.

"See this herb?" he holds it up. "Your brother's height is guaranteed to increase within a week. All he has to do is swallow the full dose with a cup of milk (no sugar), preferably early in the morning. Then he shouldn't sit or sleep for at least two hours." Why? "Because then the herb has a chance to act on the glands I was talking about." What does the powder contain? Dr Agrawal smiles. "Now, that is the secret formula. How can I tell you? But see here, your brother has nothing to worry about."

I am not reassured. What if my brother did, after all, turn out to have a violent reaction to the drug? What would Dr Agrawal do then? "You must understand the drug can have no side-effects," Dr Agrawal confides. Then, as if to reassure me further: "You see, when it first started, I used to give the drug away practically free of cost so that I could find out whether it had any side-effects. Then, once you've done that, you can increase the price ten times as much and people will always be willing to pay." He pushes the medicine bottles to one side of the desk and searches around in the mess until he unearths a plastic folder. "See these people. They have all been cured."

Dr Agrawal is holding out the folder with loose dog-eared sheets. Page after cyclostyled page contains the names and addresses of Dr Agrawal's clients with various dates below and heights marked alongside. "See this person. His height increased three centimetres in the first three weeks. And this one – he put on two inches in one month!" I point out that most of the people seem to have discontinued his medicine within a month. Why? Especially if, as Dr Agrawal claimed, it worked so well?

Dr Agrawal's eyes remain lowered as he admits, defensively: "Yes. Many of them don't come back. But is that my fault? As I showed you, my medicine works! But see this patient. . ." This time he pulls out a small slip of paper which has, on the flip side, four numbers on it. "This patient increased his height four centimetres in two weeks. He was taking daily dose. Now you tell me, why did he not come back for further treatment?"

Should any exercises be done to augment the effects of the herb? Dr Agrawal's frame dominates the room once again as he shows me a simple waist limbering exercise. Is that all? "Yes. I have discovered that this is the most important exercise, for it strengthens your spine and that is where the growth takes place."

We chat for a short while about Dr Agrawal's miracle herb which people are not willing to give a trial to – the full course is seven months – and he confides that his main business is curing leucoderma patients. (He

stumbled onto the secret of the herb for height quite by accident.) The story is the same: Dr Agrawal read in ancient Ayurvedic books about a possible treatment for leucoderma, advertised immediately in the daily papers and tried out various potency combinations on unsuspecting victims for free. "Now, I have a medicine which can be applied to the skin and it will immediately show a 16-20 per cent improvement. The idea is to convince them the medicine works so that they don't get discouraged." How does it work – by burning the skin? Dr Agrawal's eyes and hands flutter in unison. "Of course not. These are all secret formulas written in the Ayurvedic texts of old."

The price for a bottle of the herb – a one-time dose – is Rs 10.50. And if the patient takes the medicine for seven months as Dr Agrawal suggests, the cost would be close to Rs 1,000. "That is why I only need to sit here two hours every day," Dr Agrawal says, showing off the shabby claustrophobic room in which he sits. "I often take Rs 100 for consultation. Recently, a mother brought me her eight-year-old child, who all the other doctors say won't grow at all. She's only two feet tall. I told the mother I'll treat her free of charge; after all, these unusual cases only come once in a while. But the mother has not come back. . ."

I leave after having bought one bottle of his Herb for Height. Dr Agrawal asks me to bring my brother next time around. "Not that I need to see him – the dose is the same for everyone. But it might give him confidence."

Considering how low my confidence has ebbed after talking to him, I'm not so sure.

AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS of pursuing the dream-sellers, I am now the proud possessor of a small bottle of herbal medicine that is 'guaranteed to increase height'; a box of multi-coloured pills that will restore potency; several fuzzy, bluish photographs of myself that will help launch my modelling career; an invitation to join Mr Samar Kashmiri's acting school and become a star; and a sheet of paper containing the sure-fire tips of Blue Chip Investments.

None of the men behind these remedies and opportunities have impressed me greatly, but I am ready to give them the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps the medicines *do* work. Perhaps stardom and a modelling career *are* just around the corner. I decide to check out Mr Mashruwalla's claims first. I phone Sylvester da Cunha, head of Da Cunha Associates and ask if his agency has ever found models through Mr Mashruwalla. He has, it turns out, never even heard of Mr Mashruwalla. I persist. Surely he must have heard of Sarika, Mr Mashruwalla's secretary and the girl in the Halo Shampoo ad film. Sylvester da Cunha hasn't heard of her either. But he *must* know the girl in the Halo ad, I insist. "Well, yes," he says, "but that was a girl called Audrey Casmiro."

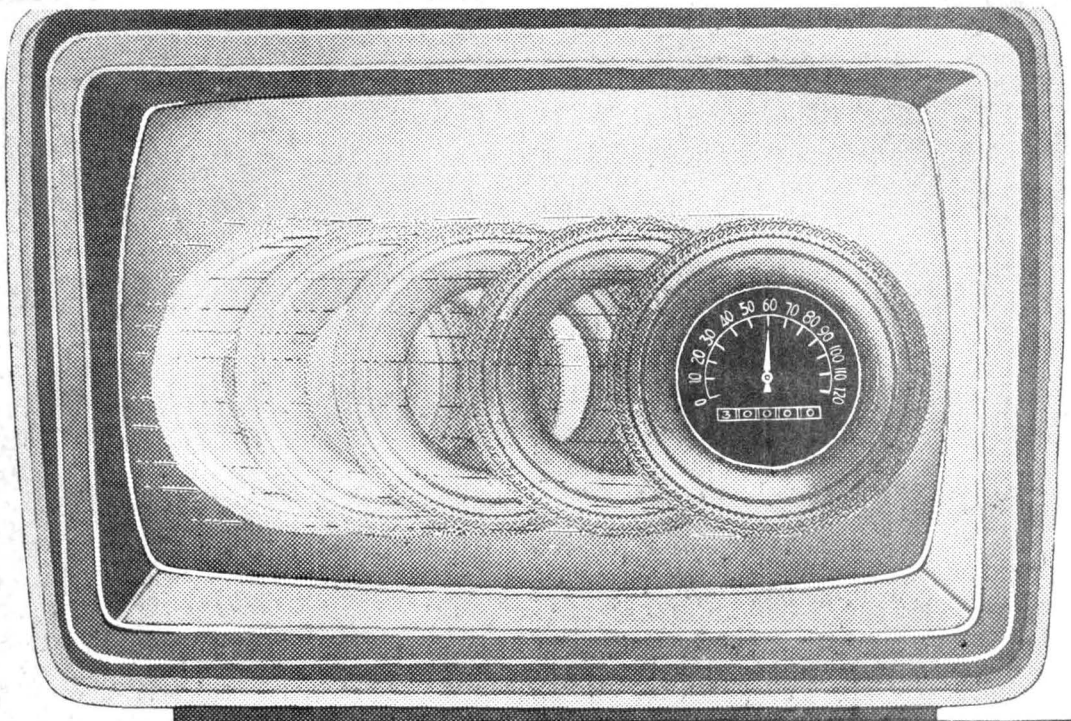
NONE OF THE PEOPLE I'd met had impressed me. But the question remained unanswered: Were they all charlatans trying to make a fast buck? I decide to check out on their promises...

So, was Mr Mashruwalla making excessive claims for himself? Kersy Katrak, the veteran ad-man, who I call next, seems to think so. No, he hasn't heard of Sarika and Mashruwalla either. Should aspiring models respond to such ads? I ask him. "No." Katrak is emphatic. "It sounds dubious to me." What *should* they do? "Go and see an agency and leave some pictures of themselves. There's no need to bother with all these intermediaries."

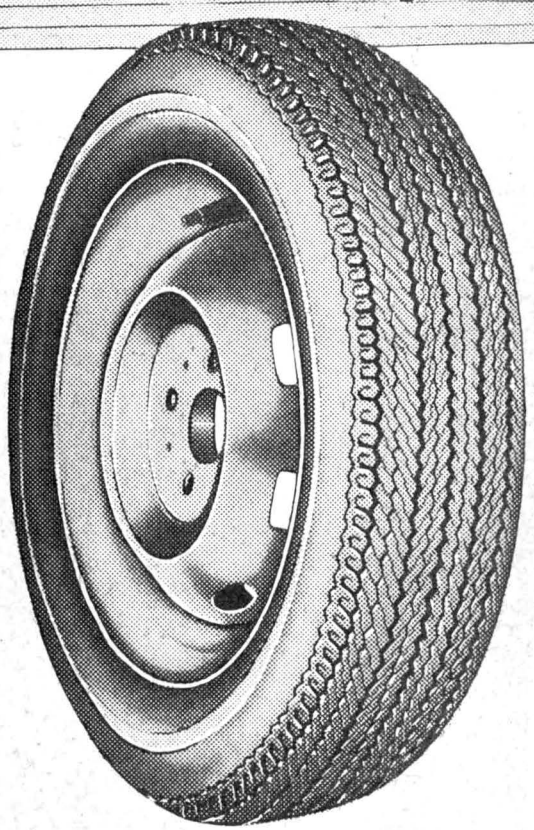
I ask Gulshan Rai, Bombay's biggest movie moghul, what he thinks of Mr Kashmiri. He has never heard of him or his school. Does he think that such schools are worth joining. "The ones that advertise in the papers are hoaxes," Rai is emphatic. "The best way to enter films is by visiting a producer." There is no need to ask an expert about Mr Sanyal's excessive claims on behalf of Blue Chip, but I ask two doctors about the potency and height medicines. Dr Prakash Kothari, India's leading sexologist, says that Khazan Chand is probably a quack: impotency can be cured but not by a miracle drug. Endocrinologist Dr S D Bhandarkar pooh-poohs Dr Agrawal's claims. It is impossible, he says, to increase height once a man or woman is sexually mature. What about the claim that the medicine works on a certain gland? "That's nonsense," Dr Bhandarkar says. "The body doesn't work that way." If he had said that he could increase the height of a 12-year-old then I wouldn't have dismissed the claim out of hand. But not of a 27-year-old by any stretch of the imagination."

SOME CONCLUSIONS now seem inevitable. The first is that every one of the dream-sellers is unable to live up to the claims made by his advertising. The second is that some of them seem to be outright frauds. Dr Bhandarkar tells me that there is a Miracle Remedies Act which categorically states that it is illegal to promise such cures. Yet, the authorities have no interest in investigating the small ads.

But it is the third claim that is the most worrying. In many cases there are alternatives to the solutions and opportunities offered by the dream merchants. There *are* straight-forward ways of becoming an actress or a model. There *are* cures for impotency. The real danger with the small ads is not that some crooks will profit from the gullible, but that sincere men and women who could probably turn their dreams into reality and overcome their problems, will be prevented from doing so. ♦



MORE MILEAGE. From the COMPUTER created car tyres



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Modistone Compumiler range— premium nylon tyres that are just right for this computer age. **With safety, comfort, reliability and longlife engineered into every fibre, every component that goes into making the tyres.**

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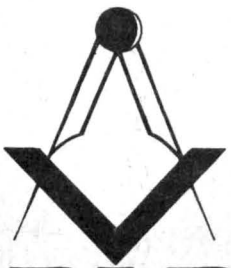


THE WORLD OF THE FREEMASONS

They've been accused of devil worship, terrorism and ritual murder. Their rites are bizarre and their oaths, gruesome. But, divested of the mystery and secrecy, is Freemasonry just a benefit society with more ceremonials and less publicity than the Rotary or Lions?

BY HUTOKSHI DOCTOR

STRANGE TALES are told about the Freemasons. And little is known about them. Except that they have a temple with a checkered floor, a sun, a moon, planets, and an All-Seeing Eye. That wands are crossed and swords unsheathed. And that the most terrible oaths swear members of this brotherhood to secrecy.

A pamphlet dated 1698, addressed to the Pious People of London, reads: "This devllish sect of men are meeters in secret which swear against all without their following. They are the Anti Christ which was to come, leading men from fear of God. For how should men meet in secret places and with secret signs, taking care that none observe them, to do the work of God?" The *Dictionary Of Catholic Theology*, even in 1924, stated: "Hatred of Jesus Christ reigns in Freemasonry. Apostasy is obligatory for reception into the more lofty degrees." Though the Catholic ban on Freemasonry has been lifted, the popular impression still is that they meddle with the spirit world and conduct the Black Mass (perverted rituals of Satanic cults).

Freemasons, rather amused by the tales, recount some more: "Some people accost me with claims that we ride across the temple, naked, on goats! And there is the story of an old peasant woman who went for an auction of furniture at an old lodge, walked up to the Worshipful Master's chair and asked to see the slot for the devil's tail, every time he took his seat!"

Sometime in the late 19th century, Freemasonry came to be viewed as a massive Jewish conspiracy, 'proved' by the Jewish origin of Masonic symbolism.

Other people felt that Freemasonry was a cult of terrorism and ritual murder. Recently, in his book *Jack The Ripper: The Final Solution*, Stephen Knight linked the Ripper murders of five prostitutes in London in 1888 to the ritual of third degree Master Masons:

the symbolic re-enactment of the murder of Hiram Abiff, principal architect of King Solomon's temple, who was struck down by three masons. The three masons, known in Masonic ritual as Jubela, Jubelo and Jubelum, (collectively known as the Juwes), tried to extract the secret of the Master Mason from Abiff. While Hiram Abiff was resurrected, the Juwes were executed "by the breast being torn open and the heart and vitals taken out and thrown over the left shoulder' – a method that was closely paralleled in the Ripper murders.

Knight detected, also, a cover-up of the murders by Sir Charles Warren, an eminent Freemason, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Sir Charles allegedly wiped out traces of the only evidence the Ripper left, a Masonic message that read: "The Juwes are the men that will not be blamed for nothing."

This was by no means an isolated example. The Masonic network is also firmly established in the judiciary, civil service and church in the UK (where there are seven million Freemasons and, in the past, several British monarchs), and in the US (with 12 million Freemasons today, including Ronald Reagan).

THE FIRST INDIAN to join the Brotherhood was Manockjee Cursetjee, in 1860. He was followed by several members of the elite: Motilal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Dr P V Cherian, K R Cama, B G Kher, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Ali Yavar Jung. Masonic brochures and newsletters proudly carry photographs of these illustrious members of the brethren. Masonry spread to the remotest Indian towns with the railways and the army. When the British left, several lodges continued to function, while some closed down. But an air of mystery lingers in the old lodges, and the locals still call them *bhootbanglas*.

Undaunted by the whispers and curious gaze of by-standers, Freemasons in dark lounge suits congregate at the Lodge Hall in Bombay every evening. About 120 lodges in Bombay meet once a month at the shuttered and quiet building – four every evening – in each of the four temples. Small-time traders; businessmen, some rich and powerful; doctors, lawyers, judges; armymen and cashiers; old men, retired men; young men, looking for a break in life. Between them all, a secret bond, secret signs, secret passwords. Everywhere the golden temple of King Solomon and the compass-and-square symbol of Masonry. Around them, dozens of portraits of Freemasons in full regalia – lambskin aprons with rosettes, ears of corn, sprigs of acacia and seven-fold tassels, medals and pins glinting on collars. Portraits of Edward VII, K R Cama, Manockjee Cursetjee, Sir Roger Lumley, Lord Sandhurst, Sir Leslie Wilson, hollow-cheeked Parsis, robust Parsis, still more Parsis, a paunchy Shah.

These are the men who are engaged in the metaphorical building of the ideal humanity. For, divested of the rumours and conjecture, Masonry is not a satanic cult, not a conspiracy to topple governments and take over the world, and not a sect engaged in ritual murder. What has set these rumours afloat is the fact that, despite thousands of books on the subject, certain rituals, passwords and signs remain unknown to the 'profane' – those without the brotherhood – probably as a result of the gruesome, though symbolic, oaths that swear Freemasons to secrecy. (While the Entered Apprentice, accedes to the penalty of having his tongue torn out, the Mason of the second degree agrees to have his heart torn from his breast and the third degree Mason to his bowels being burnt to ashes.)

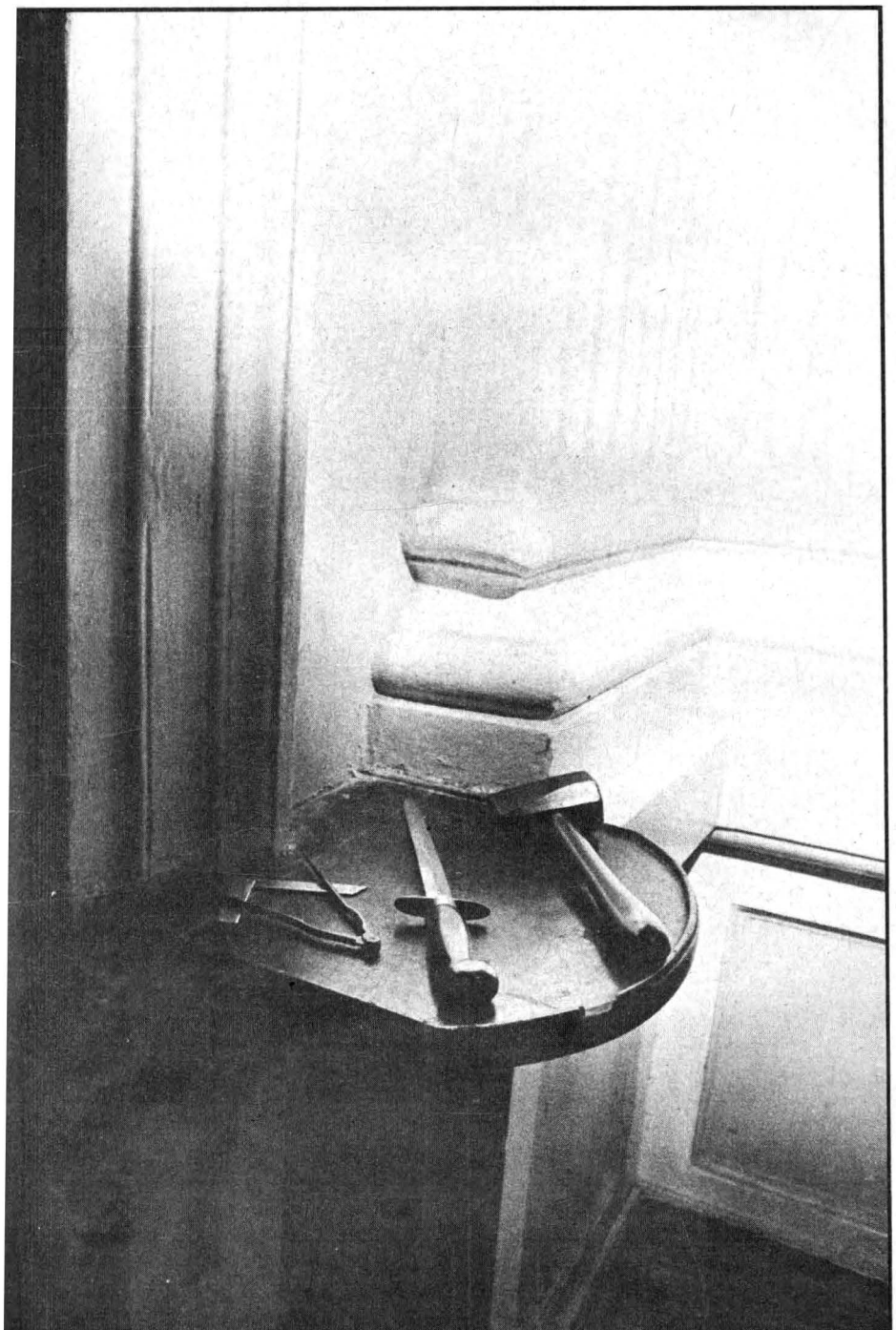
And yet, Freemasons argue that theirs is not a secret society at all, since any man over the age of 21, who believes in a Supreme Being, can join the brotherhood. What is secret, they insist, is only the ritual, not the purpose of Freemasonry.

Masonry is widely perceived as a club that is based on the three principles which are first explained to the initiate: Brotherly Love (the desire and need to help fellow Masons); Truth (interpreted as honesty); and Relief (the half-million dollars that are given away every day in Masonic charity in the US, and the paltry Rs 2 and Rs 5 that are collected from Freemasons at the end of meetings in India).

A more accepted definition among Freemasons is: 'a system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'. Often, the allegories are lost upon Masons themselves, and the symbolism passes for ritual, unrecognised. Several Freemasons who are initiated as Entered Apprentices of the first degree, 'passed' as Fellow Craft Masons of the second degree and 'raised' to the third degree of Master Mason, are unaware of the existence of higher degrees – Knight of the Sun, Prince of Mercy, Knight of the Brazen Serpent, Secret Master, Grand Pontiff – all the way up to the 33rd degree – that of Grand Inspector General.

What all Freemasons *are* strong on is the origin of the Craft. Though some eagerly link its birth to the beginning of creation and some to the Isis-Osiris cult of Egypt, the most plausible explanation is that Freemasonry derives from the secret cult of stonemasons in Europe who travelled around the Continent building churches and cathedrals in the 15th and 16th centuries. To protect their highly-skilled profession from interlopers, they devised ways to recognise each other – signs, grips, passwords. Religious and moral elements accrue, in time, to all secret societies. And so it was with the stonemasons' cult. Soon, membership of the cult became a fad with the gentry and aristocracy in Britain, who began to see the potential of a democratic, secret society that laid no bars on religion, caste or economic status. And with the setting up of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, Freemasonry was established.

IT IS in the interpretation of the rituals and ceremonies – most of which allude to the building of King Solomon's temple in the *Old*



The Inner Guard's dagger, gavel, compass and square: symbols of Freemasonry.

Testament and the descent of the Lord when the temple was perfected – that the true meaning of Masonry is to be found. For Freemasons had passed from the 'operative' to the 'speculative' – from the 'building of stone' to the 'building of the ideal humanity'. And the ideal humanity would be built when every Mason had made the transition from the merely natural state and standards of life (that of the Entered Apprentice in the initiation ritual) to a regenerate state (that of the Master Mason).

Man comes from the mystical East, spends his life in the material West and returns, upon his regeneration, to the East. So the initiate finds himself in darkness, in the West of the temple, when he first enters it. He feels the point of a dagger against his naked left breast, hears the ritual knocks of the Outer and Inner Guards. He stands in one shoe and one slipper, with one sleeve rolled up, and one trouser leg flapping at the knee. He cannot see the flashing blade of the Tyler's sword or the solemn faces turned towards him as he is led, blindfolded, before the Worshipful Master. Light from the simulated sun, moon and planets reflects off the magenta velvet on the altar, the pipes of the organ, the insignia on the aprons of the brethren. The All-Seeing Eye glares balefully from the wall above the Master's head as the initiate kneels before the Worshipful Master and the Deacons cross their wands above his head. The initiate is led in a ritual procession around the temple – to the Junior Warden, the Senior Warden – and then to the pedestal before the altar where the Volumes of Sacred Law lie open. He kneels on his left knee, right foot forming a square, right hand on one of the volumes, left hand holding the point of a compass to his breast, a hangman's noose around his neck to take the Obligation:

"I . . . .sincerely and solemnly promise and swear that I will always hele, conceal and never reveal. . .the secrets or mysteries of or belonging to Free and Accepted Masons . . . Under no less penalty, on the violation of any of them, than that of having my throat cut, my tongue torn out by the root, and buried in the sand of the sea at low water mark, or a cable's length from the shore, where the tide regularly ebbs and flows, twice in 24 hours. . ."

In the course of the ceremony, the initiate is asked: "As a Mason, whence come you?" And he replies: "From the West."

The question is the same, after the most elaborate ritual of them all:

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GAUTAM PATOLE

the symbolic death and resurrection of the third degree Master Mason.

The Fellow Craft Mason walks into a temple that is dark except for one light that burns in the mystical East. As he approaches the checkered floor of the sanctum sanctorum, he is 'murdered' by the Juwes – just as Hiram Abiff was felled with a blow from a rule, a square and a mallet that struck his forehead. The Fellow Craft Mason takes three steps over the black cloth on the checkered floor that represents the grave. 'The Word' of the Master is lost forever, for Hiram Abiff never revealed it. Abiff was resurrected with the 'five points of fellowship' – and here the brethren stand, right foot to right foot, knee to knee, chest to chest, fingers of the right hand intertwined, left hand upon another's shoulder.

Now comes the question again: "As a Mason, whence come you?"

"From the East."

Thus ends the symbolism of Freemasonry for 90 per cent of Masons who never progress beyond the third degree. Regenerate men. And The Word still lost.

Decades ago, R Le Forestier wrote: "Always hoping to find in the degree above the one which they had attained, the supreme revelation which had been promised them, and disillusioned every time, the pilgrims of the ideal pursued from degree to degree an ever-changing objective. They had reckoned to discover in the lodges the 'True Light', and they were confronted with a new mystery. After so much searching, so many disillusioning initiations and so much money paid out for fees and diplomas, they were still at the stage of wondering about the meaning of the Lost Word and what was concealed in the Masonic secret."

ALL THIS, it would seem, establishes Freemasonry as a religion with its own rituals and philosophy. But Freemasons are quick to point out that what they call The Great Architect Of The Universe (TGAOTU) – symbolically represented by the letter 'G' suspended from the ceiling above the sanctum sanctorum – is the Universal God. Except that TGAOTU created the universe with one sweep of his divine *compasses*. Also, they argue, the initiate takes his oath upon the Volume of Sacred Law that is personal to him, and in Bombay, at least, the *Zend Avesta* must be the most worn-out volume of all the ones that lie open upon the altar.

But TGAOTU has another name. This name is communicated to the initiate to the Holy Royal Arch, an extension of the third degree where, supposedly, the regenerate Master Mason rediscovers the Lost Word. "The assurance given to candidates that the name Great Architect Of The Universe can be applied to whatever Supreme Being they choose is worse than misleading; it is a blatant lie," writes Stephen Knight in *The Brotherhood*. According to him, the Lost Word is finally revealed as JAH-BUL-ON which, a member of the Grand Lodge in Bombay informs, is not quite right, but closely approximates to the actual word. Knight maintains that JAH-BUL-ON is a compound word, representing a compound deity: JAH for Jahweh, god of the Hebrews; BUL for Baal, Canaanite god of fertility; and ON for Osiris, Egyptian god of the underworld.

Baal, Knight claims, is described as a 'false god' in the *Old Testament* whom Jahweh fought for the allegiance of the Israelites. The 16th century demonologist, John Weir, identifies Baal as a manifestation of the devil, in the form of a spider with three heads – that of a man, a cat and a toad. De Plancey's *Dictionary Of Witchcraft* describes Baal as a raucous-voiced creature that taught its followers guile, cunning, and the ability to become invisible.

A Grand Lodge member in Bombay responds to Stephen Knight's contention with: "Rubbish! Nonsense! The man doesn't know what he's talking about! Baal was the chief deity in the Egyptian pantheon." Larousse's *Encyclopaedia Of Mythology* refers to Baal as a Canaanite divinity known variously as Lord of the North, Lord of Lebanon and Lord of the Atmosphere, but nowhere links him to the devil. And when you look at this pious old Parsi gentleman, or the stout, genial accountant of a publishing firm, or the retired armyman sitting with a cat rubbing itself against his legs, and all those 'luminaries' up on the walls of the Lodge Hall, you find it hard to believe that these men could be engaged, knowingly or unknowingly, in demon-worship.

IF THE WOGS joined the lodges to be seen with the white sahibs in the British days, what is it that makes the ordinary, middle and upper-middle class man join today?

Some join as curious young men, and stay on, aspiring to the higher degrees. Like Burjor Gimi, Secretary of the Bombay Lodge Hall, who spends his days supervising arrangements for the four lodge meetings to be held every evening (the arrangements for the rituals differ slightly for lodges governed by the Scottish, English, Irish or Indian Constitution), showing off the portraits in the great dining-rooms to curious visitors, unlocking the doors to the temples with reverence.

"I keep reading the rituals of Freemasonry," he says, "and in them I find something new to learn every day. But these younger members – the monotony is killing them!" Unlike the latter, Gimi is happily absorbed in the mystery and timelessness of Freemasonry.

Some men are attracted by the democratic nature of Masonry, the Grand Leveller. Freemasons are full of stories about how Theodore Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, Elihu Root, once visited a country lodge where a gardener sat as Master and they as side-line members. And how King George VI, when he was heir to the throne, took his Obligation kneeling before the postman in Glamis, a small English town. Eulogistic essays have been written to Freemasonry as the greatest demo-

The checkered floor and the Senior Warden's chair : inside the temple.

cracy of them all: "Their aprons and mine are made of the same cloth; their dreams and mine are similar; their pulses beat to the same inspiration and we are all at peace. Rich and poor, high and low, make no difference here. The pomp of life is thrown aside."

Colonel P Choudhuri (Retd) suggests that Freemasons love the sound of the Old English language – unadulterated by colloquialism – that has been spoken during Masonic rituals for centuries. Where else, today, would you be able to speak in 'awe-inspiring poetry'? On the other hand, there are Freemasons who grumble incessantly about having to mug up their lines, and 'awe-inspiring poetry' must be tough to remember. In fact, some Masons refuse to accept the offices of Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, Senior Deacon, etc, because that means more lines to learn and more ritual movements to master.

Colonel Choudhuri also claims that many men who join the lodges and advance in the various degrees are men who love ceremonials, just as men love war.

For here, a little man in a limited world can don an apron that grows increasingly cramped with rosettes and ribbons, silver tassels and gold trimmings. Here, the knock of his gavel shall open the lodge in the first degree, then in the second, then in the third, as the symbols of these degrees are laid in position in the magic confines of the 'Long Square'. Here, he leads the singing of hymns, leads the initiate into an esoteric world. Here he delivers lectures on Masonry, watches the brethren be transformed from Rough Ashlars to Perfect Cubes. He can grow, spiritually. He can enact the drama that was missing from his life. He can command respect. Toasts shall be proposed to him. A lodge shall, perhaps, be named after him, his portrait shall hang in the Hall of Fame.

BUT MASONRY has become, now, more than ever, a password to business and professional contacts, a benefit society with more ceremonials and less publicity than the Lions or Rotary. The Masonic network is not as pervasive in India as in the UK – there are only 12,000 Freemasons here – but the principle of Brotherly Love still ensures that a Freemason helps his Brother from the lodge. Freemasons of an older generation recall the days when a Mason's widow would be looked after by his 'lodge brothers' till the end of her days. When money would be unstintingly provided to a

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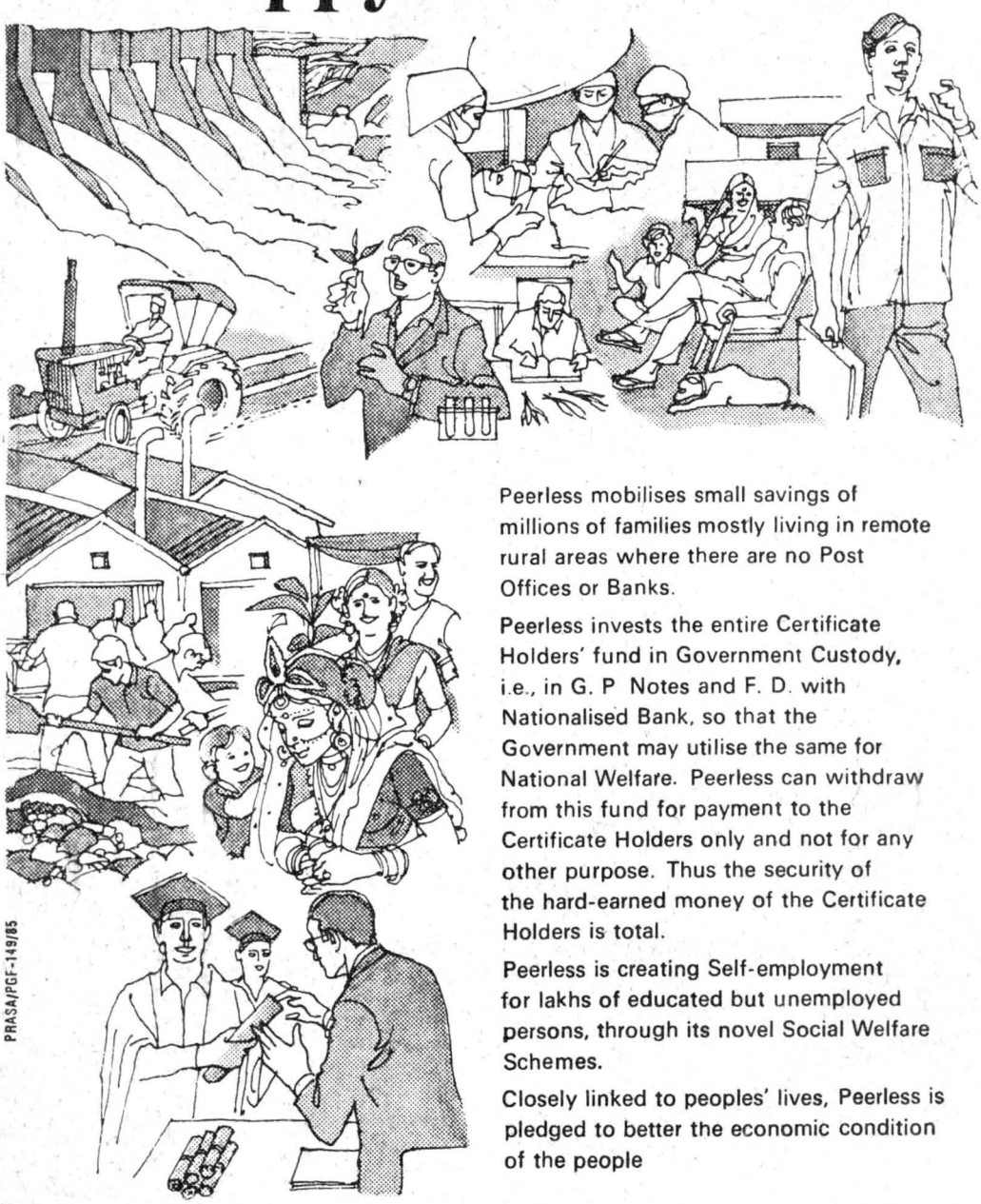

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Brother in need. When the exchange of the Masonic handshake would ensure absolute co-operation, and Freemasons were part of a true brotherhood.

The old spirit has gone, however. "I was a young man, with nothing to my name, trying to make ends meet. My boss was a Freemason, and I joined, hoping it would get me a promotion," says one Freemason.. He stopped attending the lodge after three years, convinced that Masonry was just a 'farce'. And he had a new job anyway. "There is no solemnity in the workings of the rituals. You don't even have to learn your lines any more – you can be prompted. There are people who have been passed to the second degree and raised to the third within a day! Treasurers have been taken to court for embezzling lodge funds, there is petty rivalry between brothers aspiring to office. . ."

"Men are given three degrees within a month," writes Captain Khambatta in an issue of the *Grand Lodge Of India Newsletter*. "Within a month, the man knows nothing. He never wanted to know. All he wanted was to be called a Mason – a sufficient passport, with the aid of his diploma, for admission into the best of lodges."

"When I was initiated at a lodge in Kashmir in 1948," says another third degree Mason, "there used to be discipline, and a serenity and peacefulness that stayed with me until the next lodge meeting."

What stays with several Masons these days, is the lure of the banquet and toast that follow each meeting. "Too many banquets and immoderate drinking have also brought our institution into great disrepute. Masonry is a by-word for drunkenness," writes Captain Khambatta. William Hogarth had already illustrated this trend in his painting, *Night*, where, among the characteristic elements of a London street at night, appears a Freemason, still in his apron, staggering home drunk, assisted by the Tyler (Outer Guard) of the lodge.

Masons who attend the lodge just in time for the toast and banquet have come to be called 'fork-and-spoon Masons'. Then there are the 'button' type – the ones that like to parade Masonic emblems, the more elaborate, the better; the 'benefit' type – the ones that join the lodge instead of the Lions; and the 'bona fide' type – and there are not so many left.

THERE'S A LOT that feminists would find objectionable in the reasons advanced by Freemasons for keeping Masonry a male preserve. The theory that women cannot keep secrets is often advanced. And, traditionally, all ceremonies have been performed by men. One Freemason has gone to the extent of saying that women are, by nature, 'weak-minded'. (Why else would they be called *abala* – without strength – in Sanskrit?) Besides, some feel, a woman's 'attractive conversation might perchance prevent us from pursuing the high objects of Masonic acquisition in our assemblies'.

Despite all this, the first woman was initiated into Freemasonry at a lodge in Paris in 1882, and in 1893, the first Co-masonic Lodge was established. In 1902, Dr Annie Besant was initiated into the order, and she took Co-masonry to England and to the Commonwealth countries, including India.

A slanging-match has been on since then – between Freemasons and Co-masons, who accept both men and women, though the membership in India is predominantly female. Though Co-masonic temples are exactly the same as Freemasonic ones, with the same rituals and symbolism, Freemasons refuse to recognise Co-masonry as a society as serious as theirs and dismiss it with one remark: "They just dabble in spirits." Co-masons, for their part, maintain that they retain the spiritualism that Freemasons have lost over the years.

The beliefs of the Theosophical Society have certainly coloured Co-masonry – since Dr Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky were proponents of both the Theosophical Society and Co-masonry – but Mrs Mehramai Dhalla, thirty-third degree, and a Co-freemason of 50 years standing, denies reports that they spend their time calling up spirits.

"Write that Freemasons don't know the meaning of any of the rituals," Mrs Dhalla says, bristling somewhat. "We know that a perfectly worked Masonic ceremony becomes a reservoir of spiritual force similar to a religious sacrament," she says, opening a book to an illustration of a Masonic temple. Between the columns and the celestial canopy a circle has been drawn, and strange, obscure faces and forms are confined within the circle. "These are the elementals," Mrs Dhalla says. "When the lodge is opened, these spiritual forces descend and we pour out these forces to the sick, and poor and needy."

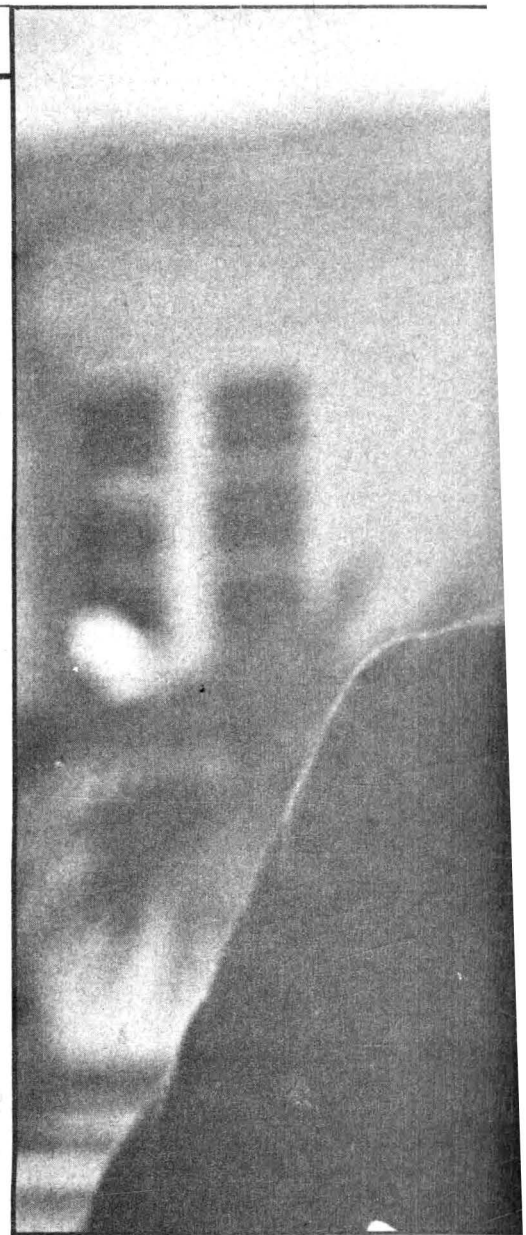
Mrs Dhalla is old and bent but she is still working towards the building of human character, she is still dreaming about building what she calls 'that glorious temple, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'.

FREEMASONRY is slowly changing from a secret society with esoteric rites to a meeting-ground for socialites. In many lodges the rituals grow shorter, and the oaths of old have undergone changes which make them less gruesome.

But still, every lodge has men who are credited with a deep study of the Craft. There are men who wear the compass-and-square symbol upon a ring at all times, men who travel all over the world for Masonic seminars and conferences, and men for whom Freemasonry is a family tradition. There are also Freemasons who are members of various lodges, so that almost every week one evening is spent in the dim and quiet temple. And Masons for whom Freemasonry *is* a religion, providing them with a code of ethics and a philosophy of life. For, every Mason, whether he takes the Craft seriously or not, shares a secret that takes him away from the everyday world, and every Freemason, in the end, interprets for himself, the symbolism of Freemasonry. ♦

OFFICER AND GENTLEMAN

Shiraz Sidhva meets Sam Manekshaw.

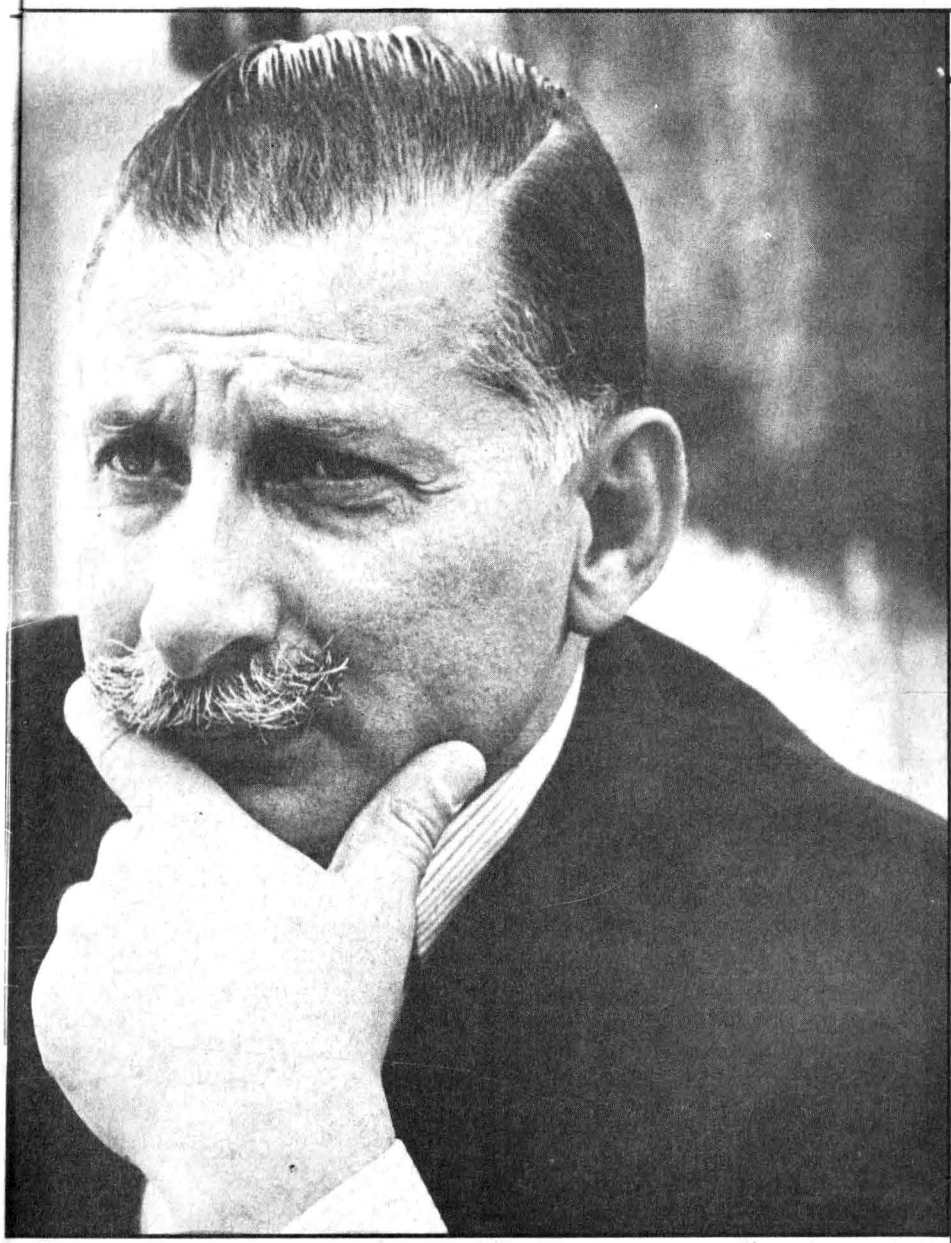


ON A COLD December night, an Indian army outpost reverberates with the sounds of merry-making. Soldiers gather around a crackling bonfire to drink a toast to a very special guest. As they raise their tin mugs of piping hot coffee to his health, the tall, fair figure in Gurkha side-cap and khaki, his shoulders emblazoned with ribbons and medals, is completely at ease. He laughs, jokes and dances with the others. Though there is nothing in his demeanour to suggest it, this man with the prominent nose, the luxuriant moustache, the grey-green eyes and the disarming smile, is not part of the crowd.

Only two weeks earlier, Sam Hormuzji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw had led the Indian armed forces in a devastating victory over Pakistan. It had been a gruelling 12-day war, but Manekshaw's men had fought well. Avoiding main roads and key access points, they advanced through dense thicket and knee-deep marsh to encircle Dhaka, taking their Pakistani adversaries unawares. As Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Manekshaw had devised what Brigadier Kenneth Hunt of the International Institute of Strategic Studies called 'one of the most minutely detailed counter-offensives in recent military history', to win the war.

More crucially, Manekshaw had been responsible for making every soldier feel that it was imperative that India won. Earlier, as Army Chief, he had travelled over 50,000 kilometres each year, visiting troops in far-flung corners of the country, preparing them for the possibility of war with Pakistan. While explaining to his soldiers that India could not provide indefinite shelter to the ten million refugees who had poured in from East Pakistan, he warned his soldiers that he would be uncompromising when it came to discipline. Everywhere, he mingled freely with the men, chatting to them in their own tongue, urging them to write home to their wives and mothers. And everywhere, Manekshaw's sense of humour and personal contact helped him gain the confidence and support of his soldiers. A British defence expert, who first met Manekshaw in Burma during the war, in 1942, once remarked: "Immediately I recognised that extremely rare capacity to keep troops' morale at a peak – however badly things may be going."

The victory over Pakistan meant many things to many people. For Sam Manekshaw, it meant 'yet another job done well'. It also meant that he would become the first and



only Indian to have reached the rank of Field Marshal since the country's independence. In recognition of 'his outstanding service to the country', he would remain active for life.

Hours after Pakistan had surrendered, Manekshaw set off across the country to commend his front-line troops. "You have made the entire world sit up and take notice," he told them.

But there was a darker side to the war that Manekshaw did not forget. Over 10,000 Indians had been killed, injured, or were missing. For days together, he visited them, distributing gifts and cheering up men, women and children as he went along. For those who had lost their kin or been handicapped in action, he secured sizeable increases in army pensions and disablement benefits. "I regard it as my personal responsibility to see that none of the families of my soldiers goes short," he said.

His concern, typically, extended to his Pakistani prisoners of war as well. Visiting a prison camp with nothing but a swagger-stick to protect him ("An armed escort in my own country?" he had scoffed, throwing protocol to the winds), Manekshaw mingled with soldiers who had every reason to dislike him. On hearing that a Pakistani soldier had lost his *Koran* in battle, he quickly arranged to have one sent to him with the compliments of the Chief of Army Staff.

"Now we know why your side won," one Pakistani had remarked grudgingly. Coming from the enemy, this was high praise indeed.

THE 1971 WAR was the culmination of a scintillating 40-year career in the course of which Manekshaw awed and charmed almost everyone he met, from generals, statesmen and politicians, to *jawans*, women and children. "They don't make men like him any more," comments a retired army Colonel who once worked with Manekshaw. "Add to that: 'They don't make soldiers like him any more.'"

India's First Soldier was born in Amritsar on April 3, 1914, around the time World War I broke out. He was the fifth child of a Parsi doctor who, unable to eke out a modest living in his native Bombay, migrated to greener pastures in the Punjab, where he established 'a roaring practice'. Manekshaw was barely five years old when his father returned in full uniform from Egypt and Mesopotamia, 'having risen to the giddy rank of Captain'.

School was at Sherwood College, Nainital ('which has produced celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan'), where he grew up wanting to be a doctor, like his father. He then returned to Amritsar to spend a year at the Hindu Sabha College there, passing his Inter-Science 'with the greatest of difficulty'.

For a lark, the young Manekshaw appeared for the army entrance exam later that year. "Twelve hundred applicants vied for 15 vacancies; I was curious to see if I could make it," he reminisces.

"Fifty years ago, the army attracted a different sort of person," explains Manekshaw. "My father paid to support me there – today our boys send home money, instead." If soldiers came from a different strata of society in those days, the army was different too. "Nowadays, forces are deployed for all sorts of reasons," he

admits. "The soldier's life is tougher than it used to be."

In 1934, the 20-year-old Manekshaw graduated with the first batch of officers from the Dehra Dun Military Academy. His first posting was at Lahore, with the second battalion of the Royal Scots. These Glaswegians taught the young Indian officer a valuable lesson, one that he never allowed himself to forget: "If you don't take yourself too seriously, and can prove yourself even tougher than your men, you can get them to do anything."

Even in those early days, Manekshaw had no illusions about the true function of a soldier. "All this talk about soldiers fighting for the motherland is nonsense," he says. "They fight because they are disciplined for it and for no other reason."

For Manekshaw, each assignment was a job like any other – whether it took him to the treacherous mountains of the North-West Frontier where, as part of the fourth battalion of the elite Frontier Force, he fought plundering Pathans and tribesmen, or whether he was sent to Rangoon (in 1941) to defend Burma against Japanese attack. "We arrived there the day the Japs attacked, just in time to receive the thrashing of our lives," he recalls cheerfully.

The young Captain's first battle came to an abrupt end when seven bullets from a Japanese tommy-gun perforated his innards. Characteristically, he laughs off the incident and belittles the role that won him the Military Cross. "I would have liked you to believe that I won the medal for an act of bravery. But the truth is that a sub-machine-gun burst when I was loitering around," he jokes. "They decorated me immediately because they were certain that I would die!"

Contrary to expectations, Manekshaw made an amazing recovery at a Madras hospital, where he spent nine months 'getting patched up'. After a short spell at the Staff College in Quetta, he was pleased to find himself back with his old battalion, the North-West Frontier Force Regiment. "This time it was the Japanese who were at the receiving end," he says, rubbing his hands. "We had the time of our lives chasing them as far east as French Indo-China."And then, as an antidote to all that excitement, he was sent on a relatively colourless assignment to Australia 'to educate Indian soldiers there'.

After the war, Manekshaw was one of the first Indian officers to join the Gurkha Regiment, those proud legendary warriors of the Indian army. He has endeared himself so much to these men, that he has become their living God. They called him 'Sam Bahadur' and composed a song of the same name in his honour. (It is still sung each year at the Republic Day extravaganza in New Delhi.) He was one of them, and he spoke fluent Gurkhali to prove it.

Manekshaw's reputation for charm did not end with his soldiers. His superiors, too, thought highly of him. General Sir Roy Bucher, then British Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army, is on record as having described Manekshaw as "the very best staff officer I ever had. He would stand up to full generals and fight for what he believed to be the best plan, rather than meekly suggest what was expedient."

It is still remembered how, as a Lieutenant Colonel, Sam Bahadur had stood up to one of the greatest officers of all time, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, for what he believed to be right. "Naturally, I was terrified when Sir Claude summoned me to his chambers after I rejected one of his proposals," recalls Manekshaw. ("Who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army? Lieutenant Colonel Manekshaw or myself?" the Field Marshal had remarked in a note to Sir Arthur Smith, then Chief of General Staff, India.) After asking the Indian officer who knew more about military operations, the Commander-in-Chief's stern face had broken into a smile, as he admitted the junior officer had been right after all.

DURING THE TENSE, critical period that followed Partition, the 34-year-old Brigadier was the first Indian to become Director of Military Operations. From army headquarters in New Delhi, he masterminded the operations to take over the Indian princely states of Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir.

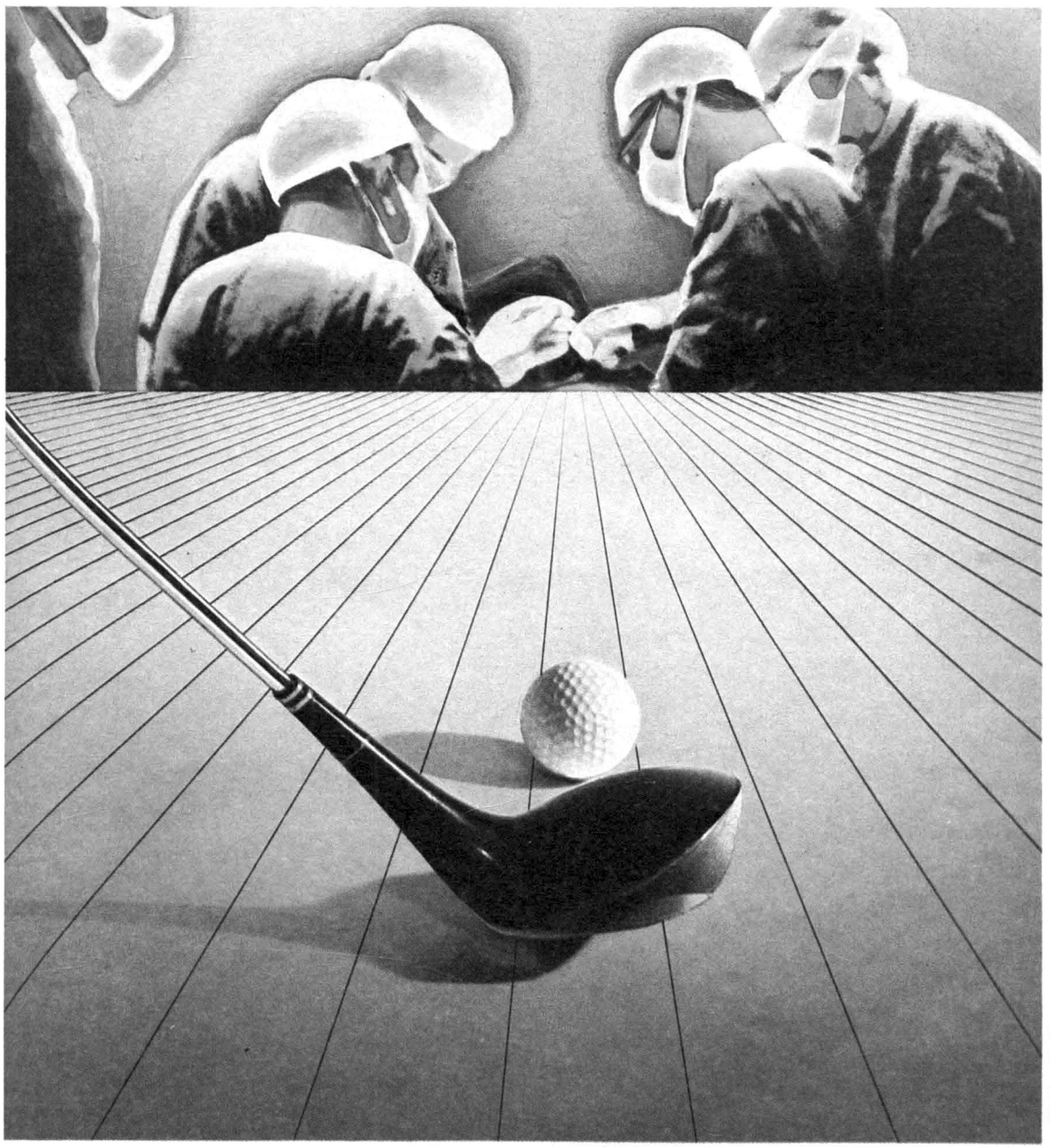
Manekshaw went on to become Director of Military Training and Commandant of the military school at Mhow, after which he did a stint at the Imperial College, London. On his return in 1958, he was made Commandant of the Wellington Staff College for four years – it was the beginning of his tryst with the Nilgiri mountains that are now his home.

When in 1962, the Indian army 'made a complete mess of things' on the Chinese front, Manekshaw was hand-picked by his superiors to boost the soldiers' flagging morale, and was hurriedly promoted to Lieutenant General. Using his inimitable capacity to make a joke of even the most adverse situation, he managed to convince his soldiers that they could withstand attack from any quarter, days after their crushing defeat at the hands of the Chinese.

In 1964, Manekshaw was promoted to the command of India's entire Eastern sector. "I had a lovely time for four-and-a-half years," he says, making light of that trying period when he was called upon to quell serious internal disturbances. "There was never a dull moment then, what with rioting in Calcutta and guerrilla attacks from the Mizos."

Even when he dealt with guerrilla intrigue, Manekshaw insisted that his men fought by the rules in the book. The Intelligence officer who hoped to obtain crucial information by hanging a suspect upside down, got into serious trouble when he was found out. When, on December 16, 1971, Manekshaw appealed to the Pakistanis to surrender over All-India Radio, he had promised that he would give the Pakistanis 'the treatment befitting a soldier'. Senior Pakis-

(Continued on page 95)



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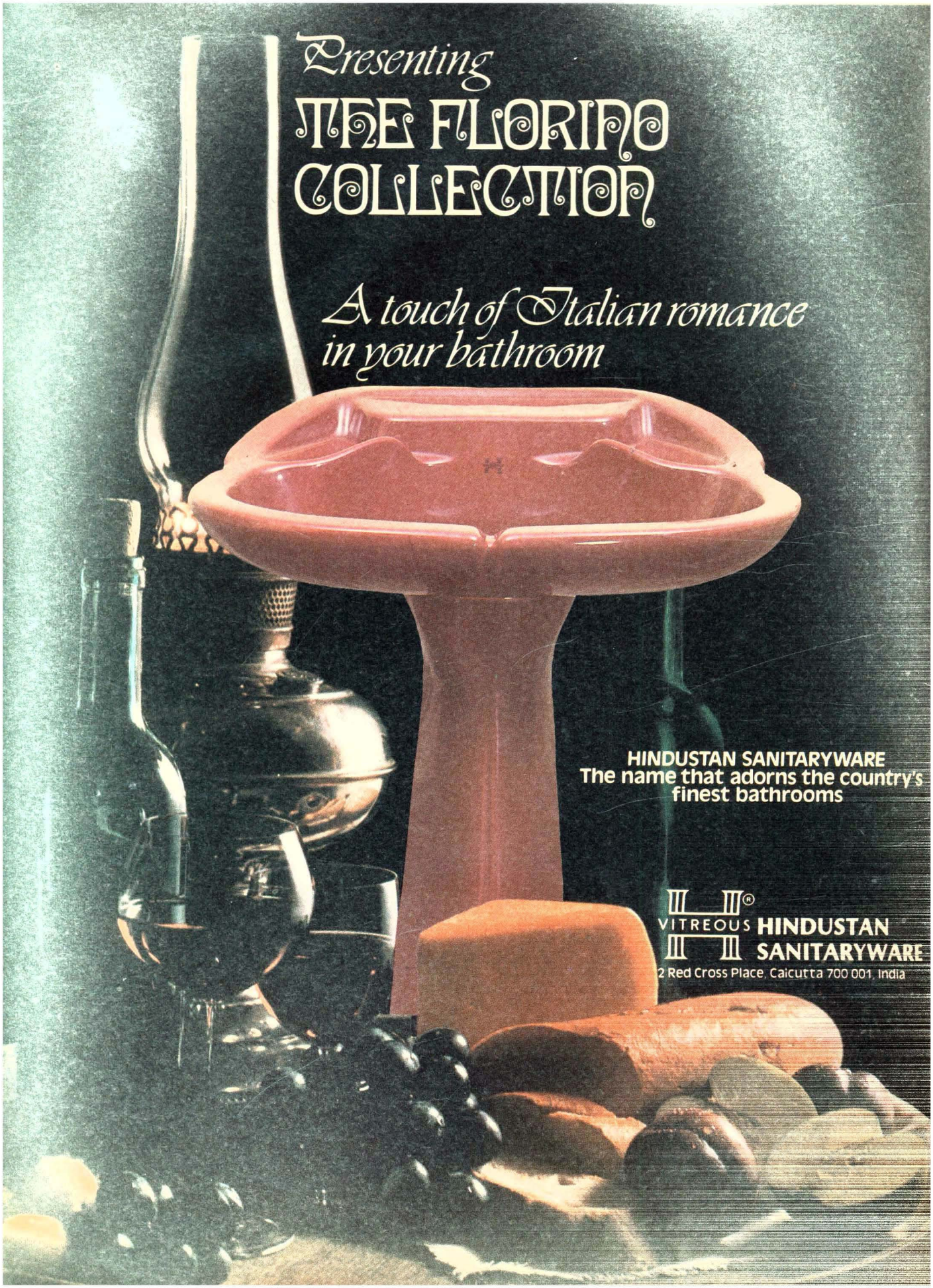
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'Sam Bahadur' with his wife Silloo: They don't make men like him any more.

(Continued from page 90)

tani officials who had served with Manekshaw in India in the pre-Partition days, remembered that he was a man of his word. The treaty of surrender was signed by the Pakistani General without further delay.

In 1968, Manekshaw was awarded the Padma Bhushan for his commendable work in the Eastern theatre. Later, he was to receive the coveted Padma Vibhushan 'for signal service to the nation'. A year later, Manekshaw moved to New Delhi as Chief of Army Staff.

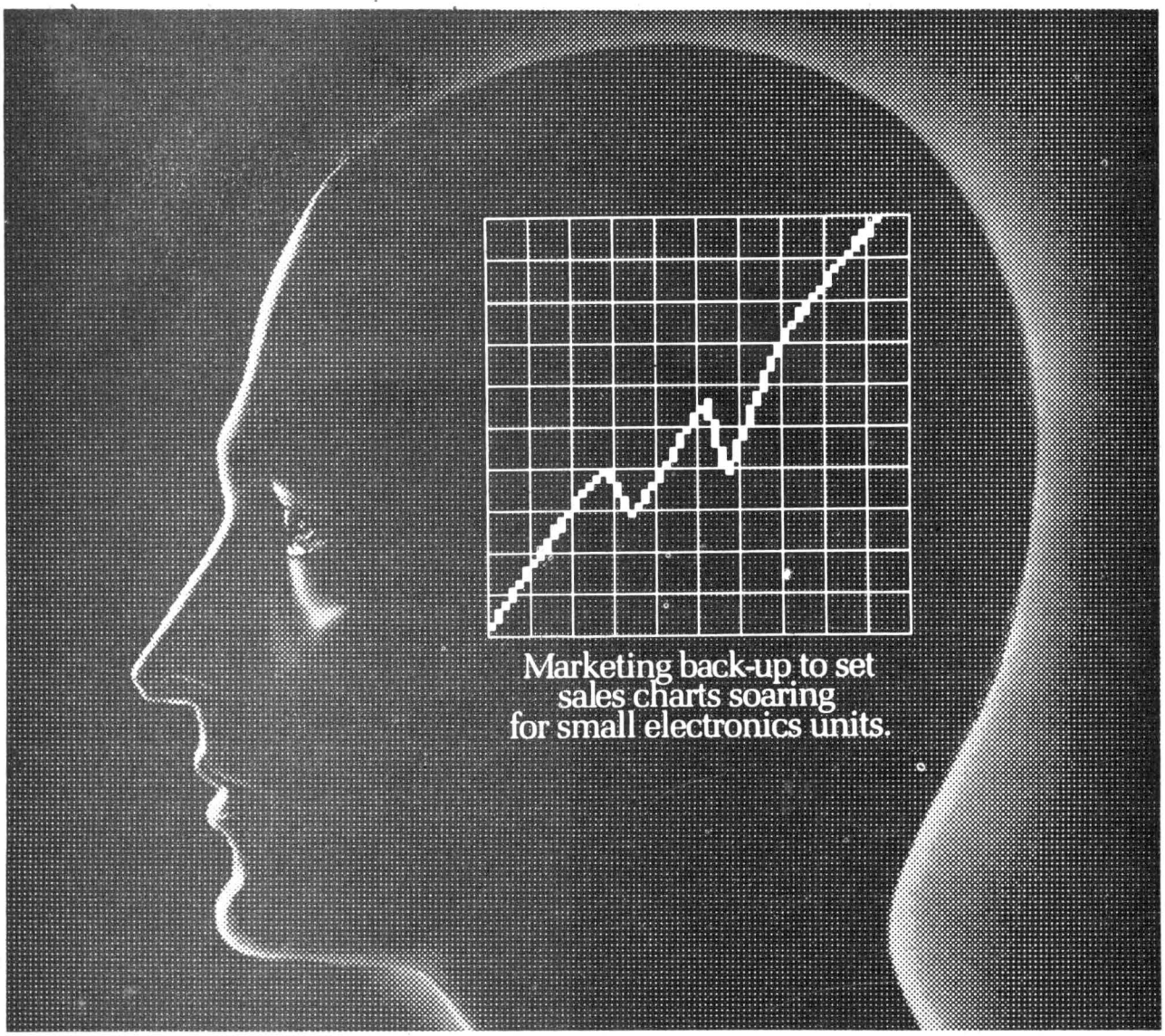
On January 1, 1973, at a glittering ceremony in New Delhi's Rashtrapati Bhavan, Sam Manekshaw became the first Indian to reach the rank of Field Marshal. Few could have disagreed with the President's choice. Manekshaw had become a public hero overnight.

Ironically, Manekshaw's new appointment coincided with his laying down the sword, as it were. Before he 'retired' from active service (technically, a Field Marshal remains on the active list for life), he availed of an invitation from Her Majesty's government, to visit the UK. One of the first things he did there was to visit his old regiment, the Royal Scots, in Scotland. "There were many jokes about how I would never have made it to this rank, had they not trained me," recalls Manekshaw. But what pleased him most was a letter from one of his old officers who was not present on the occasion. "He wrote to tell me that I was not the first Field Marshal the regiment had produced; England's first Field Marshal had belonged to the Royal Scots too!"

MANEKSHAW'S NEW HOME is tucked away in the Nilgiris near the little village of Kotagiri. A Gurkha leaves his gardening to lead you up the steep, winding drive to a beautiful white mansion hewn into the hillside amidst acres of terraced garden. Aptly, it is called Stavka, the Russian for army headquarters.

"Come up, young lady, whoever you are," booms a sonorous voice from the French windows above. Standing there, looking very *soigné* in a grey-green pinstripe shirt and crocheted cravat to match, is the Field Marshal himself. You saw him last as a schoolgirl, over 12 years ago, on the spacious lawns of his New Delhi home. Only, he had been in full uniform then.

He apologises for not having come downstairs to receive me – he is nursing an injured foot ("I'll tell you the story behind that later," he says). And then promptly settles down on a grey suede sofa to interview me. Did I actually travel to Coonoor only to see him? (He can't believe I did.) Where was I staying, and what did I do? The old charm, the ability to make anyone he meets seem all-im-



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portant, is still there. You answer his questions, he takes in every word. He is not so patient, however, when it is his turn to talk about himself.

And yet, though he has done it a hundred times before, he talks of his life in the army, the various battles he has fought, and how the Nilgiris came to be his home. He talks of his passion for gardening ("Every single tree, every single flower you see here, I have planted with my own hands"), of his wife's passion for antiques, which is very obvious, judging from the proliferation of *objets d'art* around.

Manekshaw is no septuagenarian (he turned 71 in April this year) mountain recluse, living a retired life, tending his cows, bees, poultry, prize dahlias and tea bushes. Three weeks out of four, he leaves Stavka to jet around the globe on business. He is on the board of a dozen large companies, including Escorts, Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation and various Southern-based tea plantations. He has only just returned from Geneva, and in another week he will be there again, as Chairman of Harrisons Malayalam, a Kerala-based tea export firm. He has brought back Swiss watches for his Gurkha orderlies (there is no need to wind these, he tells them).

Much as he would like to spend more time in the Nilgiris, he loves his new life. "There is no reason to stop working until you have to," is Manekshaw's attitude. For this disciplined man, life is as purposeful as it always has been: the job before him must be done well, whether it be on the battlefield or in a boardroom. His supreme confidence in his ability to excel in a task assigned to him, whatever it be, was displayed when, after the Pakistan war, he remarked in all seriousness that the Pakistanis could have won, had he been on their side.

You would believe that here, at least, in the high, blue mountains, a man could be far from the madding crowd. But there is an incessant stream of visitors: the tourists (the pitfalls of being the only national

Manekshaw: India's First Soldier.

celebrity in this part of the world); the young recruits from the Wellington Staff College nearby asking his counsel; various donation-seekers ("I'm pulling out money all the time," he grumbles as he hands over a 50-rupee note); and 'curious journalists like yourself'. He says he values his privacy and yet, characteristically, he allows anyone who comes knocking at his door, in.

And now, though he is tired and a trifle bored of the ritual of showing visitors around the house, he offers to. He hobbles along, with his gout-affected foot dragging across the parquet floor. (He'd just been joking: there is no story behind his 'injury', he tells you, smiling.) His part of the house is blue, hers is pink, and he is particularly proud that every room has a magnificent view. "Even the cook has a view," he enthuses.

And indeed, outside the kitchen window, there is a profusion of well-tended rose-bushes before the green valley falls steeply at your feet.

"This is where I sleep. This is where I work," says Manekshaw, pointing to the oversized bed and the handsome mahogany desk with neatly stacked papers on it. There are pictures of his two daughters, Sherry and Maya, with their husbands and children. And pictures of Manekshaw looking dapper in his uniform. He has just received the allotment letter for a spanking new Maruti in the morning post, and he is as excited as a child about it. His sophisticated audio equipment and Western classical music occupy one large wall – another is lined with paperbacks and bestsellers ("I read all this muck when I travel"). In the corner of his dressing-room with its rows and rows of bottles and cans against a huge mirror, there is the fitness paraphernalia ("I work out whenever I'm here") that helps him maintain his 'not-a-day-over-50' looks.

The entire house, even the period furniture, has been specially designed by his wife, Silloo, he tells you with ill-concealed pride. "I wish I were here more to enjoy it."

But besides the long hours that he spends travelling, reading 'muck' on the plane (which he hates), this kind old man who calls everybody 'sweetheart' has no complaints about his new life. And every so often, the grand old man of the Indian army is called upon to preside over a function here, a gathering there. His advice on military matters is still much sought after. After all, he is still India's First Soldier.

It is over two hours now since you invaded Stavka. As you are about to leave, an army jeep spews forth still more visitors. "Who could that be now?" wonders the Field Marshal. Three men in Gurkha uniform jump out. They have brought with them a large wooden crate. As Manekshaw talks to them animatedly, in Gurkhali, they brush aside the hay that has served as packaging, to uncover a large, gilt-edged frame. It is the portrait of a fair, handsome man with kind eyes. They have brought it over many thousand miles to present to their beloved leader. ♦

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ERIC CLAPTON

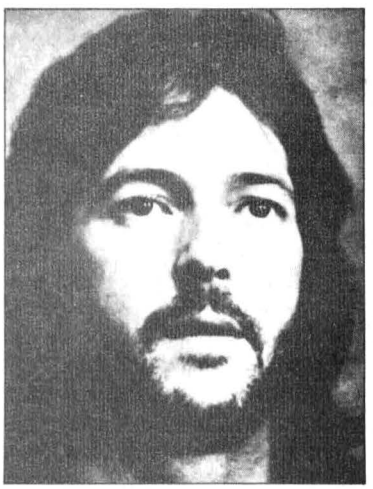
(1968)

ROLLING STONE: Locally you are known as one of the world's top blues or rock guitarists. Do you think that they've found you lived up to this?
CLAPTON: Everybody seemed to be pleased. I haven't met any major criticism of our group. Musically we seem to have done very well.

ROLLING STONE: Where do you get your energies?
CLAPTON: Well, it's a vicious circle thing. I mean, if I hadn't ever played an instrument, then I wouldn't ever need to play one. But now that I've been playing, I need to play. I'll make it clearer: When I come off the stage, you know, I've just expressed myself as much as I could that particular time. And I know that if I've got a gig the next day that somehow or other I've got to store up enough energy to play the next day. It's like, you know, you spend it, then you get it back again, then you spend it, then you get it back again. You've got to do this. It's like a basic reaction that goes on subconsciously the whole time. . . . I'm taking note of things, I'm expressing myself about them. It's almost forced a lot of the time when we have to work really hard.

ROLLING STONE: Who do you feel are the best groups in the British scene, excluding the Beatles and Rolling Stones?
CLAPTON: The Pink Floyd is one I like very much among

Extracted from The Rolling Stone Interviews (1967-1980), *published by Arthur Barker Limited, London.*



"The Pink Floyd is one group I like very much among live groups... They're unambitious and they give you a nice feeling watching them. They're not trying to put anything over."

live groups.

ROLLING STONE: What about the Who?
CLAPTON: I haven't seen them for a long time, but that did impress me at one time, that kind of act.

ROLLING STONE: Aside from that thing?
CLAPTON: If I can't see the Who, then I'm not really bothered, and I won't listen to them very much. They're tight and they're all very heavy, but musically I don't think they are going in a very extreme direction. They stick to their records and things like that.

ROLLING STONE: What does the Pink Floyd do?
CLAPTON: Very strange group. The nearest thing you would have to them here – well, I can't even think of a group you can relate them to. Very freaky. They're not really psychedelic. They do things like play an hour set that's just one number. They are into a lot of electronic things. They're also very funny. They're nice, they really are a very nice group. They're unambitious, and they give you a nice feeling watching them. They're not trying to put anything over.

PETE TOWNSHEND

(1968)

ROLLING STONE: Performers like Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, the Who, all are tremendously physical, tremendously sensual, tremendously involved with very sexual things. Does this characterise rock 'n' roll?
TOWNSHEND: It must! It must. I mean, it does. Period. It embodies it, it's part of its life. Life revolves, if not around it, within it, if not within it, without it, but definitely along with it. Something about rock 'n' roll has to do with sex and everything to do with sex, like becoming together and the parting and this kind of thing. The whole thing about pulling a chick and then waving goodbye. The whole process of sex is embodied in just the rock 'n' roll rhythm – like gospel music or like native chants or something. Just banging the table is like it's the demand, and it's also the satiation as well. You bang on the table and in the same process you masturbate, you know. At the end of the show you're finished, you know, you've had it. You've come your lot, and the show's over.

"Rock me baby until my back ain't got no bone." That is the line. Man, it's such a funny line, I can never believe it. I imagine some very skinny, wizened old Negro blues singer singing that in a very frail old voice: "Rock me baby 'til my back ain't got no bone."

ROLLING STONE: I forget if I read this or whether it is something Glyn Johns told me. You and the group came out of this rough, tough area, were very restless and had this thing: You were going to show everybody; you were a kid with a big nose, and you were going to make all these people love it, love your big nose.
TOWNSHEND: That was probably a mixture of what Glyn told you and an article I wrote. In fact, Glyn was exactly the kind of person I wanted to show. Glyn used to be one of the people who, right when I walked in, he'd be on the stage singing. I'd walk in because I dug his group. I'd often go to see him, and he would announce through the microphone: "Look at that bloke in the audience with that huge nose," and of course the whole audience would turn around and look at me, and that would be acknowledgement from Glyn.

When I was in school the geezers that were snappy dressers and got chicks like years before I ever even thought they existed would always like to talk about my nose. This seemed to be the biggest thing in my life: my fucking nose, man. Whenever my dad got drunk, he'd come up to me and say: "Look, son, you know, looks aren't everything," and shit like this. He's getting drunk, and he's ashamed of me because I've got a huge nose, and he's try-

"The biggest thing in my life was my nose, man... I know it's huge and I had to get over this thing. I've done it. I don't think about my nose any more."

ing to make me feel good. I know it's huge, and of course it became incredible, and I became an enemy of society. I had to get over this thing. I've done it, and I never believe it to this day, but I do not think about my nose any more. And if I had said this when I was a kid, if I ever said to myself: "One of these days you'll go through a whole day without once thinking that your nose is the biggest in the world, man" – you know, I'd have laughed.

(1980)

ROLLING STONE: Is there any point to the Who carrying on, as a touring band, any point beyond pandering to an audience that has become so conservative, so fearful of new experiences, that latching onto a rock legend – and whatever else the Who is, it is that – can become a reactionary, defensive way of resisting new and challenging music? That isn't to say – or to deny – that your music today is unimaginative, old-fashioned, or whatever – that's irrelevant. I've been struck, over the last few years, by the fact that the great bulk of the American rock 'n' roll audience will do almost anything to avoid having to deal with something that's radically new.

TOWNSHEND: Me too – I think you're absolutely right. It's very, very strange: In Britain, at the moment, we've got 2-Tone, we've still got punk, we've got mod bands, we've got heavy-metal bands, we've got established supergroups, we've got all kinds of different *families* of music – *each* of which takes an enormous amount of adjustment. They're intense and very socially. . . jagged. They don't fit neatly into existing society: They challenge it. And yet in America, kids seem to be quite happy. Rock, to them, is enough: Establishment rock is enough. That seems very peculiar to me. There are obviously lots of subdivisions of music in America, but I think that's something record companies dream up. In reality, whether it's black music or white rock music, I think the truth of the matter is exactly as you've said. It's not necessarily something as big as fear – it's fucking *uncomfortableness,* listening to a Sex Pistols record. It worries you, because somebody is speaking the truth.

People in the States don't necessarily refuse to admit that problems exist but it's a country that believes in success – that ultimate success lies in the hands of man. Whereas, rock doesn't. Newer rock, particularly, actually affirms the futility of man in all respects but one. It says, in a word, in a sentence, what Meher Baba said: "Don't worry – you're not big enough to deal with it." It's just gone too crazy. Do your best and leave the results to God.

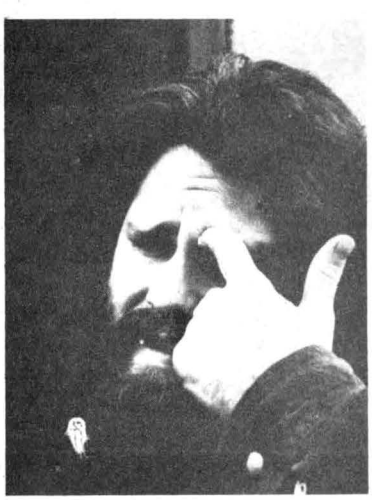
When you listen to the Sex Pistols, to *Anarchy In The UK* and *Bodies* and tracks like that, what immediately strikes you is that this is actually happening. This is a bloke, with a brain on his shoulders, who is actually saying something he sincerely believes is happening in the world, saying it with real venom, and real passion.

It touches you, and it scares you – it makes you feel uncomfortable. It's like somebody saying, "The Germans are coming! And there's no way we're gonna stop 'em!" That's one of the reasons a lot of new music is harder to listen to. So you get a band like the Clash, and they come out with a nifty little song like *Clampdown,* and you can't hear the words, and they'll play it on the radio in LA. You read the fucking words, they scare the shit out of you. Or the Pretenders – Chrissie Hynde's got a sweet voice, but she writes in doublespeak: She's talking about getting laid by Hell's Angels on her latest record! And raped.

And yet it's only because it's disguised that it's getting played, and getting appreciated. To some extent, both the Clash and the Pretenders are getting played because their music is slightly more palatable, slightly closer to the old form. I saw so many new bands go down in England, so many great bands, because unless you were in exactly the right frame of mind, felt the same way, felt as abandoned, felt as anarchistic and felt as I-don't-give-a-shit as they did, you just couldn't enjoy it. And in fact – to answer the question you asked at the beginning of all this – for the Who, at the moment, to go out as an established band requires a lot of that don't-give-a-shit attitude. We don't give a shit whether the audience has a problem or not. All we know is that for us, to go on a stage, get instant communication, know that people have done their homework, have an instant connection with the audience, go backstage afterwards into a dressing room full of the most beautiful women you can ever hope to lay your eyes on, never have anybody say anything nasty to you, everybody's friendly, everybody's wonderful, people don't throw us out of hotels anymore.

JIM MORRISON

(1969)



"I could be a journalist. I think the interview is the new art form. I think the self-interview is the essence of creativity. Asking yourself questions and trying to find answers..."

ROLLING STONE: What do you think of journalists?
MORRISON: I could be a journalist. I think the interview is the new art form. I think the self-interview is the essence

CBS 5

MUSIC NEWS

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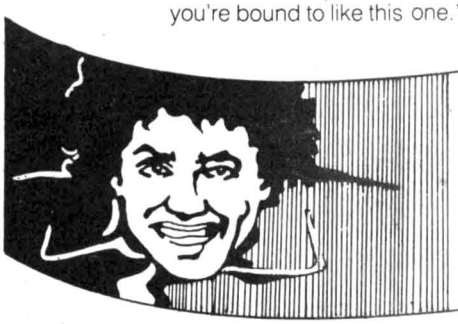
REO Speedwagon : Wheels Are Turnin'

The new album marks the group's return to the summit of the pop music world. Lead singer Kevin Cronin says the band's new material is"... meatier music — because that's us! So, if you liked the last album, you're bound to like this one."



Kelly Brown: Kelly Brown

With a starring role in Amsterdam's version of HAIR and a successful tour of Europe's club and disco circuits behind him, Kelly Brown's new album suggests a return to his native Kenyan roots. The new material has much of the promise of Brown's earlier African hits — 'I Want You' and 'Can't Get Enough'.

Eddy Grant: Going For Broke

Publicity-shy Grant just wants to sit in his studio at home and make music. "My wife and kids ... the music, and being around people with manners." No such luck for Grant who is back on the U.S. pop scene with the title song from the film '**Romancing The Stone**' and his latest hit album 'Going For Broke.'

Barbra Streisand: Emotion

After exhausting most of it on her mega-production YENTL, Barbra still has more to offer — Emotion, that is! Out of the 10 tracks on her latest LP, **'You're A Step In The Right Direction'** on Side II seems to sum up the material well!

Neil Diamond: Primitive

Artistes may come and go through pop's fickle stardom — but a Diamond is forever! His latest offering contains 11 gem-tracks — mainly written by Diamond himself. **'Turn Around',** title song **'Primitive'** and **'One By One',** have been singled out by critics for special attention.

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of creativity. Asking yourself questions and trying to find answers. The writer is just answering a series of unuttered questions.

ROLLING STONE: You've twice said you think you successfully manipulated the press. How much of this interview was manipulated?
MORRISON: You can't ever get around the fact that what you say could possibly turn up in print sometime, so you have that in the back of your mind. I've tried to forget it.

ROLLING STONE: Is there some other area you'd like to get into?
MORRISON: How about . . . feel like discussing alcohol? Just a short dialogue. No long rap. Alcohol as opposed to drugs?

ROLLING STONE: Okay. Part of the mythology has you playing the role of a heavy juicer.
MORRISON: On a very basic level, I love drinking. But I can't see drinking just milk or water or Coca-Cola. It just ruins it for me. You have to have wine or beer to complete a meal (*long pause*).

ROLLING STONE: That's all you want to say? *(Laughter.)*
MORRISON: Getting drunk . . . you're in complete control up to a point. It's your choice, every time you take a sip. You have a lot of small choices. It's like . . . I guess it's the difference between suicide and slow capitulation. . .

ROLLING STONE: What's that mean?
MORRISON: I don't know, man. Let's go next door and get a drink.

BOB DYLAN

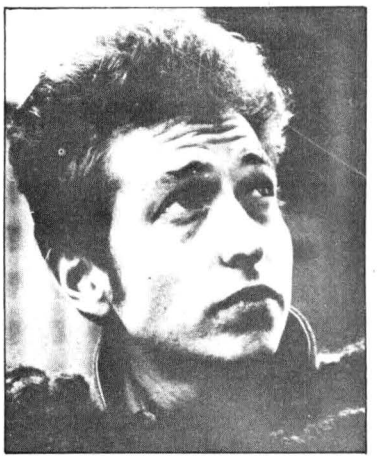
(1969)

ROLLING STONE: Do you have any particular subject in mind, or plan, for a book?
DYLAN: Do you?

ROLLING STONE: For yours or mine?
DYLAN: *(Laughs.)* For any of them.

ROLLING STONE: What writers today do you dig? Like, who would you read if you were writing a book? Mailer?
DYLAN: All of them. There's something to be learned from them all.

ROLLING STONE: What about the poets? You once said something about Smokey Robinson. . . .



"I think Allen Ginsberg did influence my songwriting at a certain period. That period of... *Desolation Row* when all the songs were just 'city songs'. His poetry is city poetry."

DYLAN: I didn't mean Smokey Robinson. I meant Arthur Rimbaud. I don't know how I could've gotten Smokey Robinson mixed up with Arthur Rimbaud (*laughter*).

ROLLING STONE: Do you see Allen Ginsberg much?
DYLAN: Not at all. Not at all.

ROLLING STONE: Do you think he had any influence on your songwriting at all?
DYLAN: I think he did at a certain period. That period of . . . *Desolation Row* that kind of New York-type period, when all the songs were just 'city songs'. His poetry is city poetry. Sounds like the city.

(1978)

ROLLING STONE: There are lines in your new songs about the one you love being so hard to recognise, or about feeling displaced and in exile. It seems as if the tyranny of love makes people unhappy.
DYLAN: That's the tyranny of man-woman love. That ain't too much love.

ROLLING STONE: What's your idea of love?
DYLAN: *(Pause.)* Love like a driving wheel. That's my idea of love.

ROLLING STONE: What about Cupid with his bow and arrows aimed towards your heart?
DYLAN: Naw, Cupid comes in a beard and a moustache, you know. Cupid has dark hair.

JOHN LENNON

(1971)

ROLLING STONE: What do you think the effect was of the Beatles on the history of Britain?

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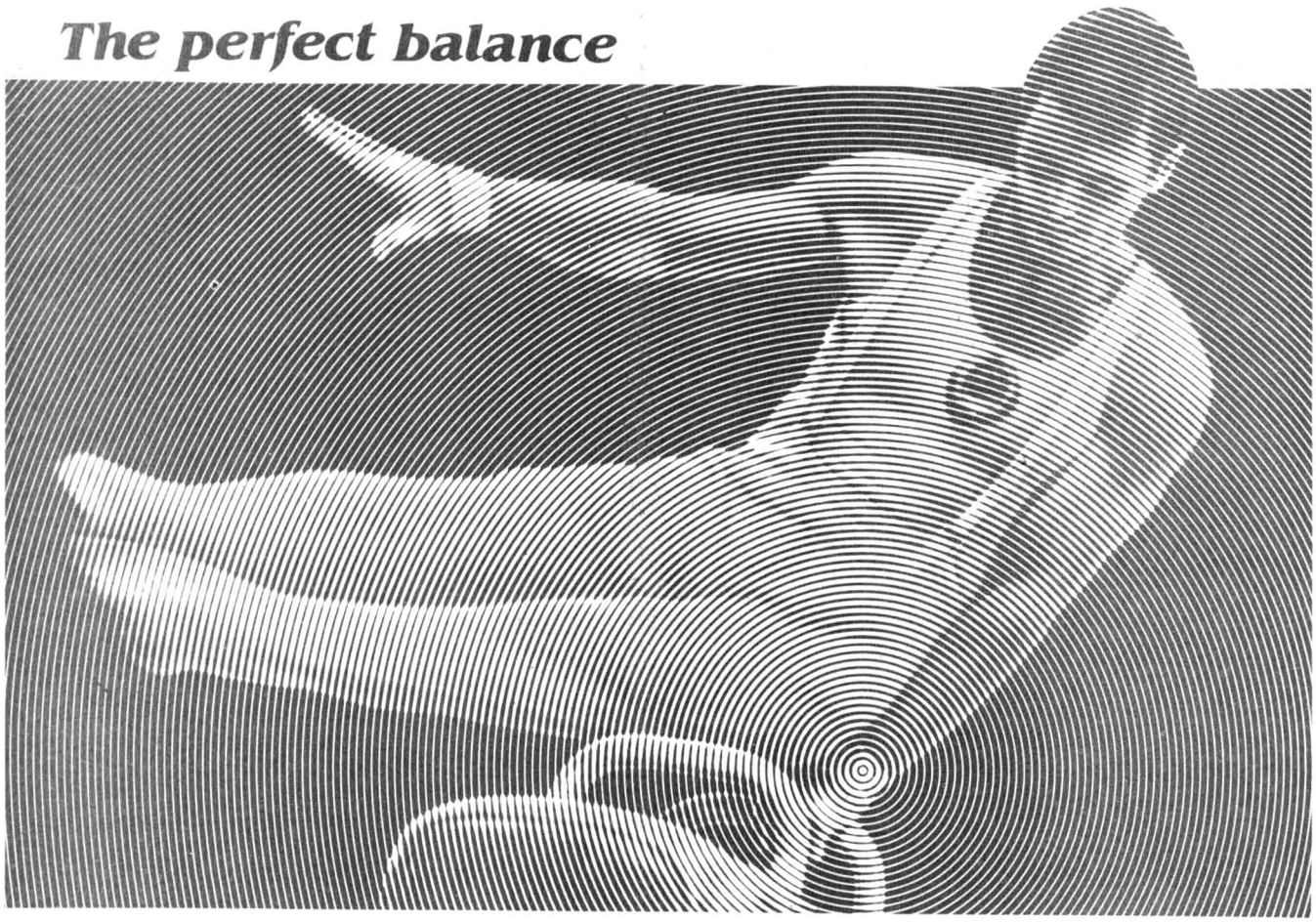

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"The dream is over. It's just the same, only I'm 30 and a lot of people have got long hair. Nothing happened, except that we grew up, we did our thing – just like they were telling us."

LENNON: I don't know about the 'history'; the people who are in control and in power, and the class system and the whole bullshit bourgeoisie is exactly the same, except there is a lot of fag middle class kids with long, long hair walking around London in trendy clothes, and Kenneth Tynan is making a fortune out of the word 'fuck'. Apart from that, nothing happened. We all dressed up, the same bastards are in control, the same people are runnin' everything. It is exactly the same.

We've grown up a little, all of us, there has been a change, and we're all a bit freer and all that, but it's the same game. Shit, they're doing exactly the same thing, selling arms to South Africa, killing blacks on the street; people are living in fucking poverty, with rats crawling over them. It just makes you puke, and I woke up to *that*, too.

The dream is over. It's just the same, only I'm 30, and a lot of people have got long hair. That's what it is, man, nothing happened except that we grew up, we did our thing – just like they were telling us. You kids – most of the so-called 'now generation' – are getting a job. We're a minority, you know; people like us always were, but maybe we are a slightly larger minority because of maybe something or other.

KEITH RICHARDS

(1971)

ROLLING STONE: Do you and Mick still write now the way you used to?
RICHARDS: Well, I haven't seen him for a couple weeks because he went and got married, but basically, yes. We do bits that we hear, and then we throw them all together on a cassette or something, and listen to it. Mick writes more melodies now than he used to.

The first things, usually I wrote the melody and Mick wrote the words. It's not gotten like the Lennon-McCartney thing got where they wrote completely by themselves. Every song we've got has pieces of each other in it. The only thing in *Sticky Fingers* I don't have anything to do with is *Moonlight Mile*, 'cause I wasn't there when they did it. It was great to hear that because I was very out of it by the end of the album, and it was like listening, really listening. It was really nice. We were all surprised at the way that album fell together. *Sticky Fingers* – it pulled itself together.

ROLLING STONE: How about *Satisfaction*?
RICHARDS: I wrote that. I woke up one night in a hotel room. Hotel rooms are great. You can do some of your best writing in hotel rooms. I woke up with a riff in my head and the basic refrain and wrote it down. The record still sounded like a dub to me. I wanted to do . . . I couldn't see getting excited about it. I'd really dug it that night in the hotel, but I'd gone past it. No, I didn't want it out, I said. I wanted to cut it again. It sounded all right, but I didn't really like that fuzz guitar. I wanted to make that thing different. But I don't think we could have done; you needed either horns or something that could really knock that riff out.

ROLLING STONE: With *Satisfaction* people start to wonder what certain phrases mean, like 'smoke another kind of cigarette'.
RICHARDS: A lot of them are completely innocent. I don't think that one is. It might have been, I don't know if it was a sly reference to drugs or not. After a while, one realises that whatever one writes, it goes through other people, and it's what gets to them. Like the way people used to go through Dylan songs. It don't matter. They're just words. Words is words.

ROLLING STONE: John Lennon said that the Stones did things two months after the Beatles. A lot of people say 'Satanic Majesties' is just 'Sgt Pepper' upside down.
RICHARDS: But then, I don't know. I never listened any

"Usually I wrote the melody and Mick wrote the words. It's not gotten like the Lennon-McCartney thing got, where they wrote completely by themselves. Every song we've got has pieces of each other in it."

more to the Beatles than to anyone else in those days when we were working. It's probably more down to the fact that we were going through the same things. Maybe we were doing it a little bit after them. Anyway, we were following them through so many scenes. We're only just mirrors ourselves of that whole thing. It took us much longer to get a record out for us; our stuff was always coming out later anyway.

I moved around a lot. And then Anita and I got together, and I lay back for a long time. We just decided what we wanted to do. There was a time three, four years ago, in 1967, when everybody just stopped, everything just stopped dead. Everybody was tryin' to work it out, what was going to go on. So many weird things happened to so many weird people at one time. America really turned itself round, the kids. . . coming together. Pushed together so hard that they sort of dug each other.

PAUL SIMON

(1972)

"In those days *(Sounds Of Silence)* it was easier to write because I wasn't known, and it didn't matter if I wrote a bad song... Now I have standards. Now I sift."

ROLLING STONE: What was Simon and Garfunkel's vocal style?
SIMON: S&G's vocal sound was very often closely worked out harmony, doubled, using four voices, but doubled right on, so that a lot of times you couldn't tell it was four voices.

ROLLING STONE: Not four-part harmony?
SIMON: No. Four voices. *The Boxer* is four voices.

ROLLING STONE: You're each singing your part twice – doubled back?
SIMON: Singing it twice. *Mrs Robinson* was four voices.

ROLLING STONE: Harmonically, was there a lot of progression?
SIMON: There wasn't a lot of harmony on it. The thing that I learned at the end of S&G was to let Artie do his thing, and let me do my thing, and come together for a thing. All of the other albums up until then, they're almost all harmony on every song. How much can you do with two voices? You can sing thirds or you can sing fifths or you can do a background harmony. Something like *The Only Living Boy In New York*, where we create that big voice, all those voices in the background. That's my favourite one on that whole album, actually. The first time those background voices come in.

ROLLING STONE: *Sounds Of Silence* is a morbid album. It has suicides and . . .
SIMON: That's right. I tend to think of that period as a very late adolescence. Those kind of things have a big impact on an adolescent mind, suicides and people who are very sad or very lonely. You tend to dramatise those things.

It depends on the song. *A Most Peculiar Man*, which dealt with a suicide – that was written in England because I saw a newspaper article about a guy who committed suicide. In those days it was easier to write because I wasn't known, and it didn't matter if I wrote a bad song. I'd write a song in a night and play it around in the clubs, and people were very open then. No attention and so, no criticism.

Now I have standards. Then I didn't have standards. I was a beginning writer then, so I wrote anything I saw. Now I sift. Now I say, "Well, that's not really a subject that I want to write a song about."

PAUL McCARTNEY

(1974)

ROLLING STONE: In songwriting technique, how did you compose with John? How did you compose yourself, and then with Linda?
McCARTNEY: Well, first, I started off on my own. Very early on I met John, and we then gradually, started to write stuff together. Which didn't mean we wrote everything together. We'd kind of write 80 per cent together, and the other 20 per cent for me were things like *Yesterday* and for John things like *Strawberry Fields* that he'd mainly write on his own. And I did certain stuff on my own. So I've *done* stuff on my own.

ROLLING STONE: When I said how do you compose, I meant actually sitting down and doing it. Did you use guitar, or did you use piano?
McCARTNEY: When I first started writing songs I started using a guitar. The first one I ever wrote was one called

"John and I didn't write everything together. We'd kind of write 80 per cent together and the other 20 per cent were for me things like *Yesterday* and for John, *Strawberry Fields.*"

My Little Girl which is a funny little song, a nice little song, a corny little song based on three chords – G, G7 and C. A little later we had a piano, and I used to bang around on that. I wrote *When I'm Sixty-Four* when I was about 16. I wrote the tune for that, and I was vaguely thinking then it might come in handy in a musical comedy or something. I didn't know what kind of career I was going to take.

So I wrote that on piano, and from there it's really been a mixture of the both. I just do either, now. Sometimes I've got a guitar in my hands; sometimes I'm sittin' at a piano. It depends whatever instrument I'm at – I'll compose on it, you know.

ROLLING STONE: Do you start with a title or a line, or what?
McCARTNEY: Oh, different ways. Every time it's different. *All My Loving* – an old Beatles song, remember that one, folks? – I wrote that one like a bit of poetry, and then I put a song to it later. Something like *Yesterday*, I did the tune first and wrote words to that later. I called that *Scrambled Egg* for a long time. I didn't have any words to it. *(Paul sings the melody with the words 'scrambled egg . . . da da da da . . . scrambled egg. . .')* So then I got words to that; so I say, every time is different, really. I like to keep it that way, too; I don't get any set formula. So that each time I'm pullin' it out of the air.

NEIL YOUNG

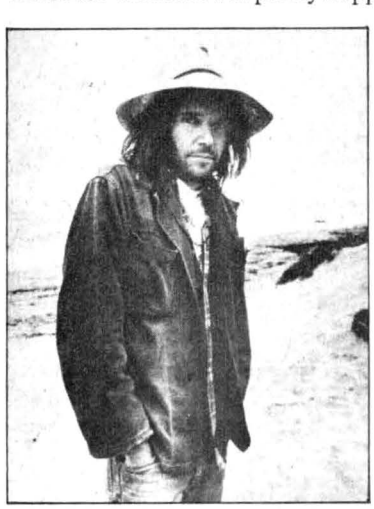
(1975)

ROLLING STONE: Why did you join CSNY? You were already working steadily with Crazy Horse.
YOUNG: Stephen. I love playing with the other guys, but playing with Stephen is special. David is an excellent rhythm guitarist, and Graham sings so great . . . shit, I don't have to tell anybody those guys are phenomenal. I knew it would be fun. I didn't have to be out front. I could lay back. It didn't have to be me all the time. They were a big group, and it was easy for me. I could still work double time with Crazy Horse. With CSNY, I was basically just an instrumentalist that sang a couple of songs with them. It was easy. And the music was great. CSNY, I think, has always been a lot bigger thing to everybody else than it is to us. People always refer to me as Neil Young of CSNY, right? It's not my main trip. It's something that I do every once in a while. I've constantly been working on my own trip all along. And now that Crazy Horse is back in shape, I'm even more self-involved.

ROLLING STONE: How much of your own solo success, though, was due to CSNY?
YOUNG: For sure CSNY put my name out there. They gave me a lot of publicity. But, in all modesty, *After The Gold Rush*, which was kind of the turning point, was a strong album. I really think it was. A lot of hard work went into it. Everything was there. The picture it painted was a strong one. *After The Gold Rush* was the spirit of Topanga Canyon. It seemed like I realised that I'd gotten somewhere. I joined CSNY and was still working a lot with Crazy Horse . . . I was playing all the time. And having a great time. Right after that album, I left the house. It was a good coda.

ROLLING STONE: How did you cope with your first real blast of superstardom after that?
YOUNG: The first thing I did was a long tour of small halls. Just me and a guitar. I loved it. It was real personal. Very much a one-on-one thing with the crowd. It was later, after *Harvest*, that I hid myself away. I tried to stay away from it all. I thought the record (*Harvest*) was good, but I also knew that something else was dying. I became very reclusive. I didn't want to come out much.

ROLLING STONE: Why? Were you depressed? Scared?
YOUNG: I think I was pretty happy. In spite of everything,



"I joined CSNY because I knew it would be fun. I could lay back. It didn't have to be me all the time. And I could still work double time with Crazy Horse."

I had my old lady and moved to the ranch. A lot of it was my back. I was in and out of hospitals for the two years between *After The Gold Rush* and *Harvest*. I have one weak side and all the muscles slipped on me. My discs slipped. I couldn't hold my guitar up. That's why I sat down on my whole solo tour. I couldn't move around too well, so I laid low for a long time on the ranch and just didn't have any contact, you know. I wore a brace. Crosby would come up to see how I was; we'd go for a walk, and it took me 45 minutes to get to the studio, which is only 400 yards from the house. I could only stand up four hours a day. I recorded most of *Harvest* in the brace. That's a lot of the reason it's such a mellow album. I couldn't physically play an electric guitar. *Are You Ready For The Country*, *Alabama* and *Words* were all done after I had the operation. The doctors were starting to talk about wheelchairs and shit, so I had some discs removed. But for the most part, I spent two years flat on my back. I had a lot of time to think about what had happened to me.

PAGE & PLANT

(1975)

"*Stairway To Heaven* crystallised the essence of Led Zeppelin. Every musician wants something that will hold up for a long time and I guess we did it with *Stairway*."

ROLLING STONE: How important was *Stairway To Heaven* to you?
PAGE: To me, I thought *Stairway* crystallised the essence of the band. It had everything there and showed the band at its best . . . as a band, as a unit. Not talking about solos or anything, it had everything there. We were careful never to release it as a single. It was a milestone for us. Every musician wants to do something of lasting quality, something which will hold up for a long time, and I guess we did it with *Stairway*. Townshend probably thought that he got it with *Tommy*. I don't know whether I have the ability to come up with more. I have to do a lot of hard work before I can get anywhere near those stages of consistent, total brilliance.

I don't think there are too many people who are capable of it. Maybe one. Joni Mitchell. That's the music that I play at home all the time, Joni Mitchell. *Court And Spark* I love because I'd always hoped that she'd work with a band. But the main thing with Joni is that she's able to look at something that's happened to her, draw back and crystallise the whole situation, then write about it. She brings tears to my eyes, what more can I say? It's bloody eerie. I can relate so much to what she says. "Now old friends are acting strange/They shake their heads/They say I've changed." I'd like to know how many of her original friends she's got. I'd like to know how many of the original friends any well-known musician has got. You'd be surprised. They think – particularly that thing of change – they all assume that you've changed. For the worse. There are very few people I can call real, close friends. They're very, very precious to me.

ROLLING STONE: How about you?
PLANT: I live with the people I've always lived with. I'm quite content. It's like the remnants of my old beatnik days. All my old mates, it lends to a lot of good company. There's no unusual reaction to my trip at all because I've known them so long. Now and again there will be the occasional joke about owing someone two dollars from the days in 1963 when I was a broke blues singer with a washboard, but it's good. I'm happy.

ROLLING STONE: Do you have any favourite American guitarists?
PAGE: Well, let's see, we've lost the best guitarist any of us ever had, and that was Hendrix. The other guitarist I started to get into died also, Clarence White. He was absolutely brilliant. Gosh. On a totally different style – the control, the guy who played on the Maria Muldaur single, *Midnight At The Oasis*. Amos Garrett. He's Les Paul-oriented, and Les Paul is the one, really. We wouldn't be anywhere if he hadn't invented the electric guitar. Another one is Elliot Randall, the guy who guested on the first Steely Dan album. He's great. Band-wise, Little Feat is my favourite American group.

The only term I won't accept is 'genius'. The term 'genius' gets used far too loosely in rock 'n' roll. When you hear the melodic structures of what classical musicians put together and you compare it to that of a rock 'n' roll record, there's a hell of a long way rock 'n' roll has to go. There's a certain standard in classical music that allows the application of the term 'genius', but you're treading on thin ice if you start applying it to rock 'n' rollers. The way I see it, rock 'n' roll is folk music. Street music. It isn't taught in school. It has to be picked up. You don't find geniuses in street musicians, but that doesn't mean to say you can't be really good. You get as much out of rock 'n' roll artistically as you put into it. There's nobody who can teach you. You're on your own, and that's what I find so fascinating about it. ♦

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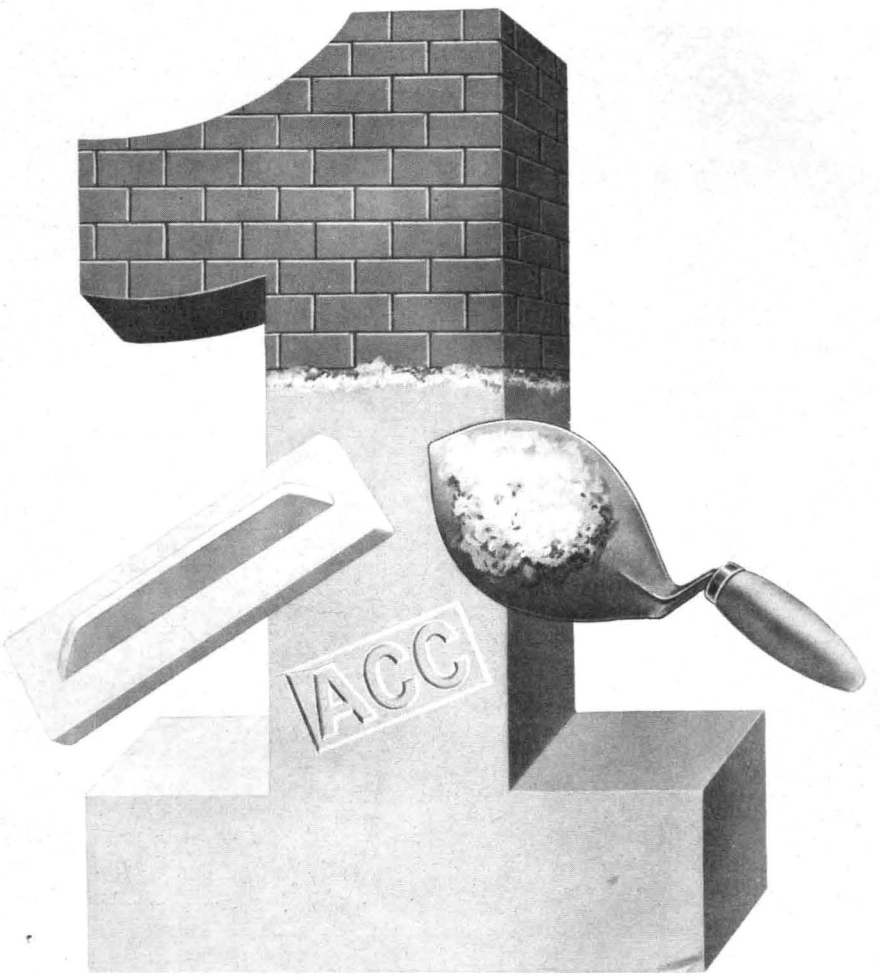

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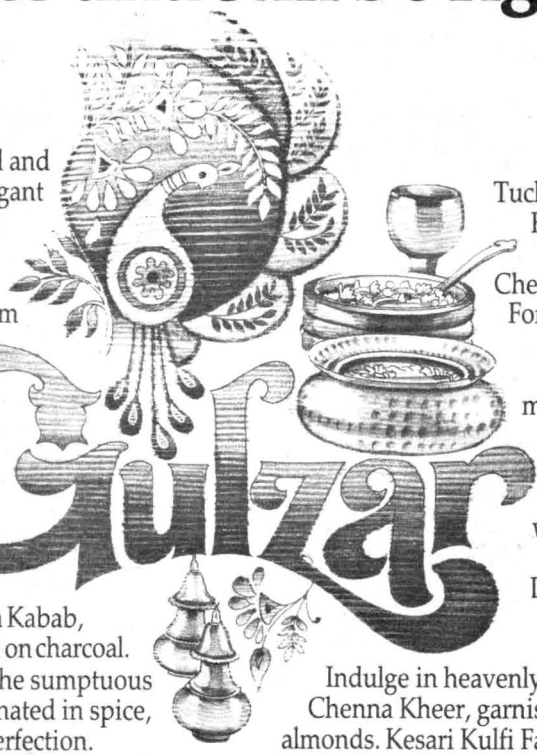

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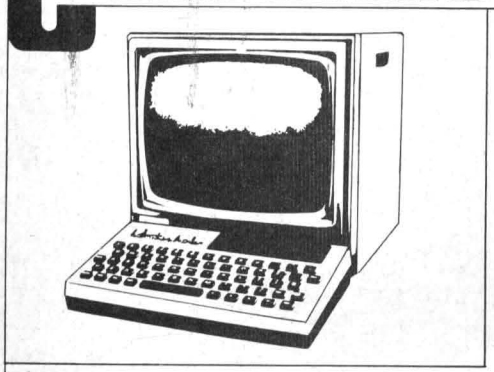
COMPUTERS



BY MICHAEL CRICHTON

GETTING TO KNOW THEM

Computers are not as complicated and horrible as they may seem. The start of a new series to acquaint you with this modern marvel.

EVERYBODY is afraid of computers.

The computer is a new machine. It requires new skills, new orientation, new ideas. It's changing our lives. Nobody in his right mind likes that.

Although we've all been fed a load of psychological pap that says learning is fun and challenges are exciting, human beings are inherently conservative. Change means stress. Change makes us uncomfortable and fearful.

Whoever told you that you're supposed to enjoy new things is wrong. You're perfectly justified in hating new things and finding them frustrating. A certain amount of kicking and screaming is useful.

Fear of computers is normal.

But it is not helpful. People who fear computers cannot use them wisely. Either they reject the machines out of hand, and are deprived of the legitimate benefits of computers, or they accept the machines but remain so intimidated that whatever flashes up on a screen is taken as received truth. You can get into trouble either way.

COMPUTER ANATOMY

Faced with an unfamiliar computer, experienced programmers do an interesting thing.

They do nothing.

They stand and look at the machine.

What they're doing is checking out the anatomy of the machine – finding where things are. This is a logical first step before trying to operate the machine.

Beginners skip this step. Either they throw up their hands in horror and announce that computers are beyond them or they plop down at the keyboard and say: "Okay, what do I do?"

What you do first is nothing. Whether you're in a store or a home or an office, first step back and look. Take your time.

You will probably be looking at a collection of off-white boxes. Your first task is to determine which box contains the computer itself.

Do this by finding the keyboard. The computer is either built into the keyboard box (Apple II, Atari, VIC) or directly attached to it by a cable (IBM, Epson, DEC). Once you've identified where the computer is, you can stop worrying about it for now, and maybe forever.

Meanwhile, the keyboard may have upset you because it has more keys than a typewriter. Don't fret over the extra keys. A computer keyboard is basically a typewriter keyboard, no matter how many keys it has. (And in time you'll learn that the extra keys make things easier, not harder.)

Now find the disk drives. These are boxes with little slots. They may be separate, or built into the computer itself. Either way they work the same. Disk drives store information for the computer.

Even if disk drives are new to you, they're not difficult. Each drive has a little slot with a little latch. The drives take floppy disks of black plastic; you probably see some lying around nearby. Hold a disk with your thumb over the label and slide it into the slot. Close the latch. Open the latch and take the disk out. So much for disk drives.

Next find the monitor. It may be a TV set, or it may just look like one. In any case, it works like a TV. It's got an On/Off switch, brightness and contrast controls. No big deal.

Now find the printer. The printer is just an electric typewriter without a keyboard.

Having located the computer, keyboard, disk drives, monitor and printer, you've identified the essential components of the system. This is all you need to deal with at the moment.

The reason for emphasising this spatial orientation is that a computer is a system of component parts, like a component stereo.

You can think of the computer as the amplifier.

The amplifier just makes music louder. It doesn't care what the music is. Yet by itself the amplifier is silent. You have to provide it with a source of music – either prerecorded records or tapes, or live signals from a radio. In addition, you have to provide the amplifier with an output device, such as speakers or headphones. Without them, the amplifier will remain silent.

Similarly, the computer is silent without a source of information, from prerecorded floppy disks or from keyboard input. And the computer also needs an output device, in this case a monitor or a printer, so you know what is happening.

All this is simple enough. But note one crucial distinction between a

Extracted from Michael Crichton's Electronic Life, *published by Ballantine Books, New York, with the permission of IBD.*

People buy computers with some application in mind. Many people buy them to use as a toy, although few will admit it. The computer is the best toy in human history.

stereo and a computer: a computer has memory and a stereo does not. Because people are not accustomed to machines with memories, the computer memory is the most difficult thing to get a 'feel' for.

APPLICATIONS

Everybody wants to know "Why should I get one? What good is it to me? What do I do with it?"

When they don't get a crisp answer – and they never do – they become discouraged.

Nearly eight million small computers have been sold upto now, so a lot of people had some applications in mind. It may help to know how other people use their computers. There are four main areas of use:

Business. Fifty-four per cent of small machines are devoted to business applications, where they do accounting, book-keeping, inventory, and financial planning.

Personal/Home Management. People balance their cheque-books, plan the family budget, keep track of recipes, and do word processing for personal letters.

Education. Programmes are available to teach a great range of skills interactively; people learn quickly and easily this way. Word processing is valuable to older students, who frequently use a computer for nothing else.

Entertainment. The computer is the best toy in human history. Many people buy them to use as a toy, although few will admit it.

INPUT/OUTPUT

The common abbreviation I/O means Input/Output. It's a subject of considerable importance to users. The way a computer gets its information (input), and the way it responds (output), is the principal determinant of how the machine feels to a user. Input/Output is the equivalent of how an automobile 'handles'.

Most computer users find that they wish for a little more understanding – in all senses of the word – from their machines. They dream of more 'natural' kinds of interaction. A good deal of current effort is directed towards that goal. It takes two forms: mechanical devices, and programmes.

Information is usually entered on a panel of keys. The keyboard is such a familiar device that we do not stop to think how arbitrary it is. The keyboard was invented in 1867. Its present form was pretty well fixed by about 1875. Few things have persisted unchanged from that time. This makes the keyboard rather like a clam – a simple creature that hasn't evolved much over a great span of time.

When the computer was first widely used, in the '50s, it was in effect inserted into the middle of the familiar typewriter. The typewriter keyboard was on one side – the input side – and the paper roller and striking keys were on the other side – the output side. Later, another familiar device, the television, was hooked up to the computer along with the typewriter.

This pattern of handling input and output with machinery adapted from other areas was established during the earliest days of computers. Over the 40-year history of these machines, surprisingly few devices have been invented specifically for interacting with the computer. To be sure, there are graphics tablets, joysticks, light pens, optical character-recognition devices, and so-called mice that control cursors. Yet most users still interact through the familiar keyboard, monitor, and printer.

The next ten years should see a proliferation of new devices. Touch-sensitive screens will be widely used. Machines that speak in limited ways are already common, and machines that accept spoken input will become more common. Within 20 years, optical devices will allow machines to recognise faces and previously seen objects. In fact, a range of sensory devices should give machines the ability to touch, smell, hear and see. And computers will certainly become more mobile after 1990.

Less spectacular developments will affect the keyboard, monitor and printer. Keyboard design is long overdue for change. Monitor screens will be thin, and will display high-resolution lettering in a greater variety of sizes and typefaces defined by user-controlled character generators. Printers will be quieter and faster, and will routinely print in colour. Buffer memories for peripherals will increase in size. For example, there is talk of building memory into monitors, so that you could load text into your thin screen, unplug the screen from the computer, and go sit on the couch to read, as you now read a book.

These mechanical changes will alter the way we feel about computers, as well as the way we interact with them. But they are less important than changes in programming sophistication.

Why can't you talk to a computer in ordinary English? Why can't it compensate for little mistakes? Why can't it know what you mean?

In short, why can't a computer be more like a man?

There are two answers. The first concerns hardware. Since computers operate as a series of On/Off switches, all high-level languages must translate specific commands into specific switching instructions. This requires memory. The more commands you build into the language, and the more flexible you make the grammar, the more machine memory you require.

For most of computer history, memory has been expensive. Scien-

In another 20 years, a range of sensory devices will allow machines to touch, smell, hear, see – even recognise faces and previously seen objects.

tists designed languages that would not take up so much memory that none was left to do any computing work; there was no point in creating a flexible machine that understood everything but could do nothing about it.

But memory has become ever more available and cheap. Desk-top computers will have usable memories of 1,000 kilobytes or more in the next year, or 200 times what is now built into desk-top machines. Large, inexpensive memory eliminates the hardware barrier to creating machines that understand ordinary language.

But what remains is the second, more difficult problem of creating a programme that instructs the machine to understand so-called natural language.

It's not easy. Anyone who has tried to explain a joke to someone who speaks another language knows that languages are laden with cultural assumptions, non-literal meanings, and ambiguities.

It's not surprising that understanding natural languages has eluded programmers for decades. It'll be a while before you greet your machine with "Good morning. Turn yourself on and let's get going."

But even before then, we'll see a great increase in machine tolerance for human error. If you type PPRINT, the machine can easily scan an internal vocabulary, find the closest match, and respond: I THINK YOU MEANT *PRINT* IS THAT CORRECT? If you agree, the machine will fix the error for you. Certainly the days when any computer responds with a cryptic SYNTAX ERROR are numbered.

Furthermore, there is no reason why the machine cannot begin to 'know' your quirks. If you consistently make some error (I frequently type FREUQENTLY, LSIT for LIST, and THJE for THE), the machine can begin to compensate for you without asking. Some computers already do this in a primitive way.

Instruction scanning is far simpler than genuine language comprehension, but it would make computers more lifelike and easy to use. Experimental programmes already perform far more sophisticated text analyses.

It's important to note that every development discussed so far is purely mechanical. A computer that corrects your errors may seem more intelligent, but it's just a more sophisticated mechanical device. You might have given it a more 'alive' quality. But it's still just a machine.

COMPUTER LANGUAGES

Computers carry out their work through thousands of On/Off switches. In mathematical terms they use binary notation, a series of 1s and 0s. This is efficient for a computer but awkward for people. (A few people can programme in direct binary notation but that's beyond most of us.)

To make machine interaction easier for people, computer languages have been developed. A language is a code for talking to a machine. If I want to print out some information, I'd like to tell the machine to WRITE or PRINT it. But machines don't understand WRITE or PRINT; they only understand 1s and 0s. So the code must be provided to the machine, so that it knows what WRITE or PRINT or GET or SAVE means in its own electrical terms. The code can be wired into the machine, or it can be entered as programmes. But the machine must be given the language before I can start talking to it.

There are hundreds of computer languages, each with advantages and disadvantages, advocates and detractors. But computer languages are all pretty similar. They each have a 'vocabulary' of about 100 reserved words; they each have a rigid grammar; they each can be learned in from ten to 40 hours. It's easy to go from one language to another, and a professional programmer will know several.

If you're thinking of learning a language, which should you learn? Three languages were especially designed for beginners – BASIC, Pascal, and Logo.

All personal computers come with some version of BASIC, a language developed in the late '60s by John Kemeny and Thomas Kurtz at Dartmouth College. For better or worse – some say for worse – BASIC is the most common small-computer language.

Complaints about the appropriateness of BASIC focus on the 'unstructured' quality of the language. Newer languages force organisation on you, and assist you to think more clearly. Pascal, developed in 1970 by the Swiss computer scientist Niklaus Wirth, is such a language. The most common version in UCSD Pascal, developed at the University of California, San Diego, by Kenneth L Bowles. A still newer language, Logo, was defined by Seymour Papert and his co-workers at MIT in the '70s.

Then which should you learn? Experts engage in violent disputes, but for the average person it isn't really a problem. If you just want to dabble, or to write short programmes of less than a page to customise purchased programmes – say, to make your printer do something special – then BASIC is the quickest to learn and the easiest to use. And it really is the lingua franca of small computers; all computers speak BASIC, and most magazine articles are written in it. On the other hand, if you want to get serious and write long programmes, you'll be much happier with Pascal. For children, Logo is best.

(To be continued next month) ♦

FICTION

all's fair in LOVE & INSURANCE

BY VEENA SESHADRI

I LIVE ALONE in the small, patched up outhouse of an ageing bungalow near the school where I teach. There used to be a mango tree just outside my bedroom and after the rains I would spend hours leaning on the window sill, watching the grey squirrels sip water from a leaf-lined hollow in its trunk. But the tree's gone now, and instead, there's a pile foundation for a block of 'luxury apartments'.

Like everyone else, I cook and clean and shop for bargains; and all said and done, I've no reason to be unhappy with the way things are – not really.

Only of late the house seems to have grown silent and watchful, as if there is a presence in the shadows, listening to my thoughts, weighing my days and finding them wanting.

Occasionally, I rub my fingers over the scabby walls or the peeling rattan chairs and talk aloud to myself, and wonder fleetingly what I'll do if a hollow, spectral voice joins in the conversation.

Only sometimes, I wish everything wouldn't just flow around me – everything changes and I exist, untouched, unassimilated, and there isn't a thing I can do about it . . . or is there?

Perhaps if I were to lose 30 pounds and stop guarding against split infinitives and attempts on my virginity with equal zeal, things would be different.

"What 'attempts', pray?" sneers my Other Self.

Come to think of it, I can't remember any. But that's beside the point.

Right now, I'm the attendance register, and an authoritative voice expounding the theorem about the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle. . . .

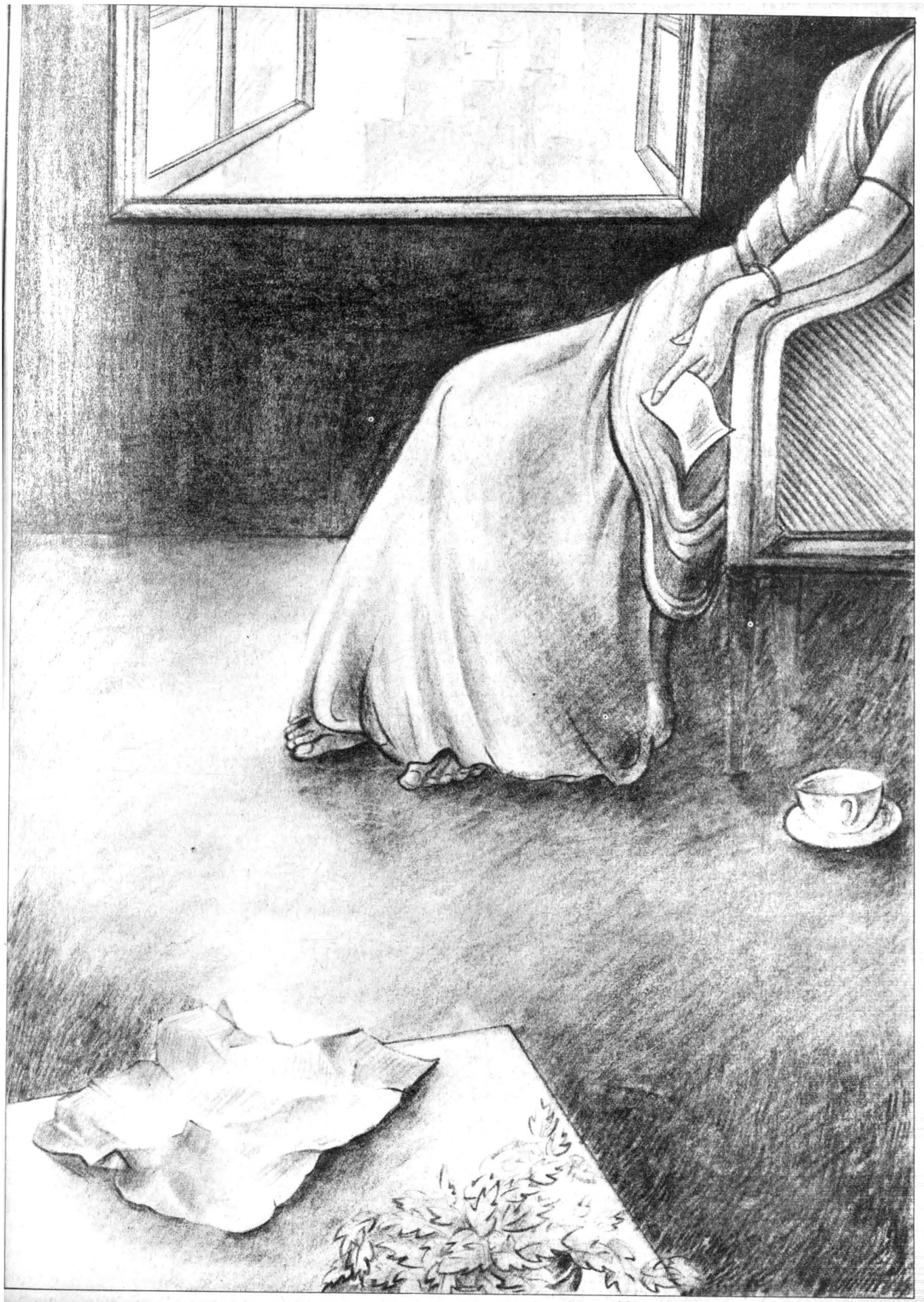
And then?

Then nothing. That's me, at 40.

And I can picture my future so exactly, down to the last details, that

Veena Seshadri lives in Madras. This is her first short story for **Imprint.**

ILLUSTRATION BY APARNA SINGH



it frightens me. Why, I almost live it every day, in Mrs Chandy, next door.

How many times have those callused fingers held out to me those faded sepia photographs which are her only solace and company? How often have I listened to her passionate dissertations on clogged drains and breeding mosquitoes?

You know, I wish I had a dog or a cat, but the landlady has a thing about pets. I would like to hold something soft and furry in my arms when I come home in the evenings. Sooner or later, one gets tired of speaking to the shadows.

I too was young once and there was music in my toes, but that was long ago. The past comes unbidden at night like a pet locked out; it tugs at my mind.

The wind sounds different now that the mango tree is gone and the city folds into strange new shapes in the dark.

I go to the kitchen to cook my dinner and find that the department store has sent the rice wrapped up in a paper cone.

'Classified Advertisements: Matrimonial'. The words catch my eye as I lift the packet off the shelf.

Idly, I glance at the advertisements: "Post-graduate Iyer engineer requires fair, accomplished bride. Same caste. Widows and divorcees please excuse."

"Thirty-five-year-old Protestant virgin needs suitable match. Widowers without encumberances no bar."

A sudden excitement courses through my mind. I pour out the rice, flatten the paper on the table and read the advertisements more carefully.

Couldn't I – I mean just for a lark – send in one of my own?

"You. . . what!" splutters my Other Self.

I uncap my pen, flip over the grocery list and scribble furiously.

My advertisement appears a week later at the end of the Matrimonial column. I read it over and over again, astonished at this sudden spurt of happiness within me. The hours slip by in a daze.

"He loves me: he loves me not," I giggle as I count the chillies for the *sambhar.*

I catch sight of my reflection in the mirror . . . . and my eyes are like glow-worms.

In the evening, I pick up a red, see-through nightie from a trendy boutique swarming with teenagers.

It is only when I try it on at home that the first misgivings stir my thoughts.

"Please God, make me look saucy and sensuous," I squint hopefully at the mirror. "Oh God," I pray a jot more desperately, "at least let me not look so like a pregnant tomato!"

The letters arrive a few days later, not stacks of them as I had half expected, but two slim envelopes forwarded by the newspaper office. My hands are not quite steady as I pick them up.

The first one is from a Mr Mani, who is apparently bedridden with some obscure ailment. His letter is filled with desperate promises of undying love, and in return he wants only my 'gentle care and soothing touch'.

This is the first proposal I've ever received but a chaste cuddle between bedpans isn't exactly my idea of holy matrimony. No, thank you.

The second one is a pamphlet exhorting me to REPENT or get ready to frizzle in the hereafter.

That night I dream that my nameless, faceless husband has turned into a sack of letters.

Another day . . . and then another.

No letters at all.

A grey lethargy creeps through my veins. "Won't someone ever touch me, hold me, reach out to me?" I sob quietly within my head, and continue to spout equations and light Bunsen burners at the appropriate times.

A fortnight passes, and when all hope is gone, I see the letter on the doormat:

Dear Madam,

Apropos your matrimonial advertisement, I am pleased to note that we have mutual interests.

I'm 52, of sober habits, respectable background, and having my own business here.

In order to get to know each other, I suggest we meet at Merrylands at 5.30 p m on Sunday the 14th.

I'll be wearing a light blue shirt and grey trousers, and for identification, please wear blue sari.

Sincerely yours,

M K Sridharan

I take a long walk down to the beach and dig my heels into the sand. The waves lap over the fringes of my consciousness and muffle the wham and whir of the traffic, beyond the clump of casuarina trees.

I am at peace with myself.

On the way back, I gaze at the buses full of unknown, vivid people and pause to drop a coin in the bandaged fingers of a smiling leper. At the bakery I pause to watch the window display and a child with a gappy smile clutches at my knee in passing. Knots of people unravel and hurry by with earnest I-promised-to-do-it-today-and-I'd-better faces. The air is full of jasmine and children's laughter and I feel absurdly happy.

Later, when I return home, I lean against the kitchen door and think fiercely, achingly, of my parents, long dead, of the loves I have never known, of the 30 pounds I cannot possibly lose by 5.30 p m on Sunday the 14th. And the darkness seems to stretch out before me forever.

SUNDAY EVENING. Bathed, scented, bra straps tucked securely in place, I sally forth to begin a new life.

The cafe is practically deserted, so I spot 'him' at once.

Unbuttoned cuffs; pale, nondescript face; 60, if he's a day.

He squints at my blue sari, then rises hesitantly to greet me. (Do I catch a flicker of disappointment in his eyes?)

"Miss Kumar?" he is there in front of me, blocking my exit.

"Yes."

"In that instant, we recognise each other's tenuous, makeshift

foundations.

"Glad to meet you." We sit down gingerly and his fingers keep drumming on the table-top.

"Mature lady teacher of independent means, interested in the fine arts. . . ." suddenly, he quotes from my advertisement. "That's right, isn't it?"

I nod slightly.

"Would you care to try the *idlis*, or perhaps a *masala dosai*?" he asks as the waiter materialises with glasses of water.

"A cup of coffee would do."

"Certainly." He orders quickly and turns to me with an expansive smile. "Where are you teaching, Miss Kumar?"

"At St John's."

"Do you like the job? It's rather taxing, isn't it?"

Is he implying that he doesn't want me to work after The Event? "I'd give it up if necessary."

He veers away, embarrassed, as I gaze straight into his eyes. There is a long pause after that, and he seems quite content to lean back and contemplate the flies crawling over the table.

I know I'll have to do something about it. I mean, I can't just sit there primly and let my whole new life slither away.

"Mr Sridharan, I wonder if you're interested in the fine arts."

He looks startled, as if I've mentioned blue films or touched upon some obscure nuance of Advaita philosophy.

"Oh that," he gestures vaguely, "I'm deeply interested in fine arts, every one of them, but there's such little time for all that sort of thing now." The sunlight skids gently across his bald head as he bends over and attacks his *masala dosai*, my presence apparently forgotten.

I scour my mind for nuggets of sparkling conversation and can think of nothing except 'Mary had a little lamb. . . .'

"Speak about his job," whispers my Other Self.

Yes, of course.

"Mr Sridharan, if you don't mind my being personal, you've mentioned that you're engaged in some sort of business here. Well. . .I thought. . . that is. . ."

A look of relief crosses his face. "I'm glad you asked about that. It makes things so much easier for me," he beams. "I'm an insurance agent, actually. Been in the field for over 30 years now, and let me tell you, if you can sell insurance, you can sell anything. It's no joke, believe me," he laughs. "All's fair in love and insurance. That's my motto."

I offer no comment.

"Might I take the same liberty with you, Miss Kumar, and ask you something?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, you've told me that you're a lady of independent means. These days, one can't be too careful with one's money."

"Mine, I assure you, is carefully tucked away in the bank."

"Ah, but that's a big mistake." I have his whole attention now. "An insurance policy offers so many benefits a bank cannot."

"Sorry, Mr Sridharan, I'm not going to skimp and save to pay my premiums just to make someone happy I'm dead."

He rubs his chin agitatedly. "Oh, Miss Kumar, you're so mistaken. Let me explain. . ."

I let my mind wander and occasional snatches of phrases come through to me like pebbles dropping in a pond. I withdraw deeper and deeper into myself. The longer he speaks, the more are the things that remain unsaid – vital life and death things.

"Mr Sridharan," I cut in very firmly when he pauses for breath, "I don't want an insurance policy."

He continues as if I haven't spoken: "You don't have to make up your mind immediately. Think about it. . . .please.

"Lady of independent means, you called yourself."

"Yes. But my income cannot stretch to cover an insurance premium, I'm afraid."

There is a long silence. The strong new bonds that should have stretched between us are turning into cobwebs.

My last – my one and only chance. . .

Where have I gone wrong? Is he some kind of a kinky fetishist? I mean, I've heard of men fancying black panties or hairy legs, but having to buy insurance to get a man turned on, for goodness' sake!

When the silence begins to vibrate with a sense of something terribly amiss, he stands up abruptly. "I'll be back in a minute," he says and walks towards the 'Gents'.

As I dawdle over my coffee, the minutes tick away. . .ten. . .15. . .35; and there's no sign of Mr Sridharan.

"Oh God," I pray in vain. "Do something, and don't tell me to keep calm or that everything will come right in the end. It's *now* I'm bothered about, and all those smirking waiters and the beau mislaid somewhere in the 'Gents', not some blurred and distant happy-ever-after."

I beckon to one of the waiters. "The gentleman who was with me went there (a discreet nod in the direction of the 'Gents') about half an hour ago and hasn't returned yet. Could you find out if he's unwell?"

"But madam, he left long ago."

But that's impossible! A curious tightness contracts my guts as I crouch over the dregs of my coffee.

This sense of being frozen on the edge of a nightmare lasts for an instant and then I say, in a cold, controlled voice: "Please bring me the bill."

Don't panic, I tell myself, there's bound to be a perfectly simple explanation for it all.

And then it hits me. What was it that he had said earlier? Ah yes, "All's fair in love and insurance."

When I rise to leave after settling the bill, I catch a glimpse of my face, white and drawn and somehow inexplicably alien, in the mirror across the room.

As I step into the road, the wind rises and the fallen leaves bob and rustle in the gutter. Mechanically, I lift my hand to brush back my hair and find my cheeks wet with tears. ♦

Edited by Vir Sanghvi; published for Business Press Private Limited, Surya Mahal, 5 Burjorji Bharucha Marg, Bombay 400 023, by Vir Sanghvi and printed by him at Western India Art Litho Works Private Limited, 107, Marol Co-operative Industrial Estate, Andheri-Kurla Road, Sakinaka...

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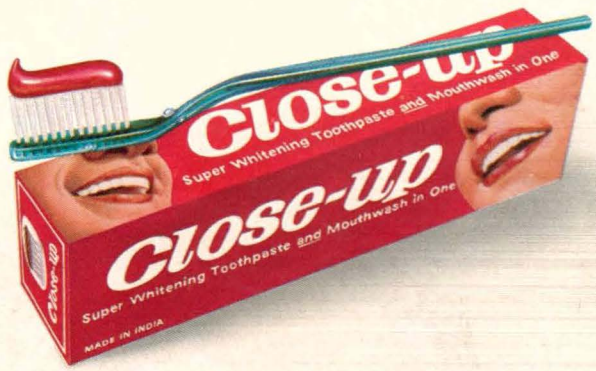

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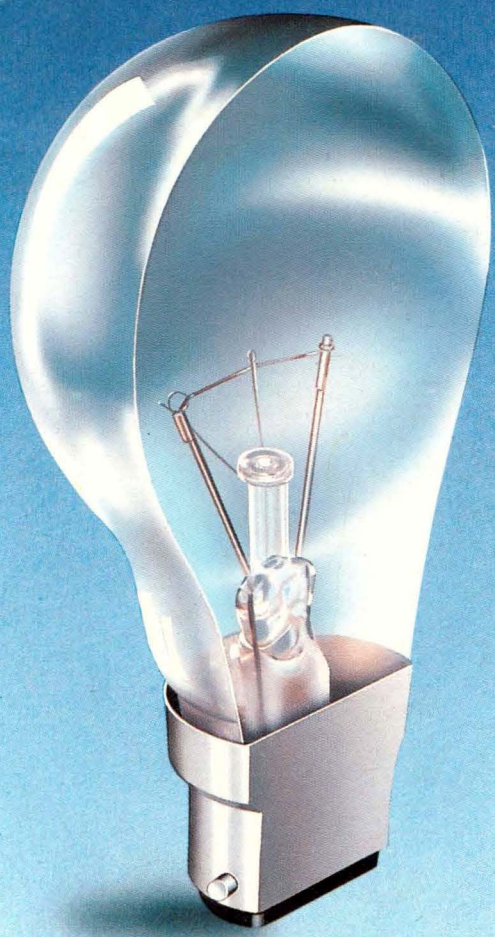

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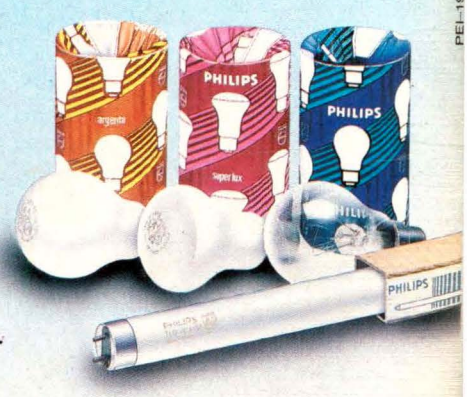

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