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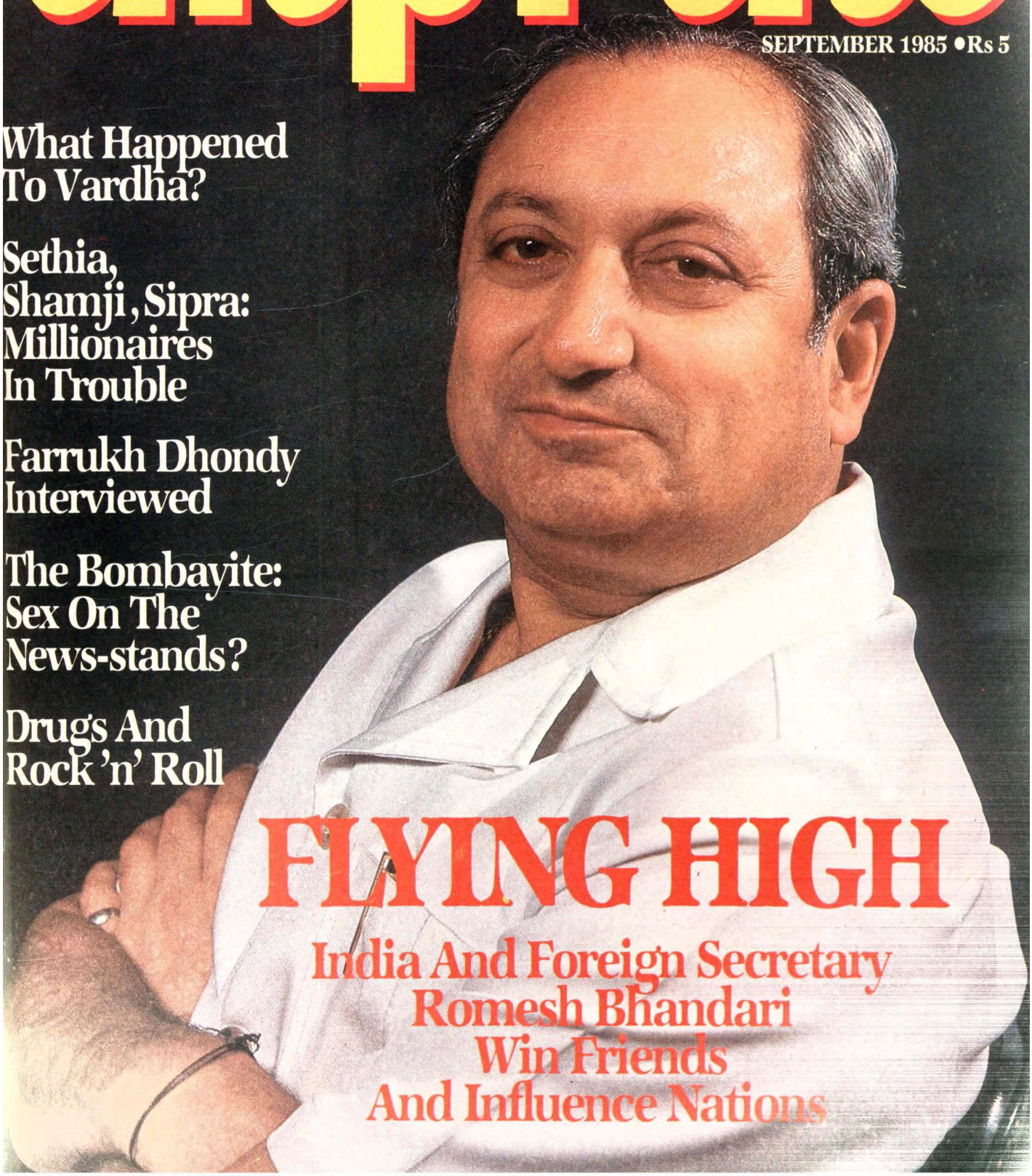
What Happened To Vardha?

Sethia, Shamji, Sipra: Millionaires In Trouble

Farrukh Dhondy Interviewed

The Bombayite: Sex On The News-stands?

Drugs And Rock 'n' Roll



FLYING HIGH

India And Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari Win Friends And Influence Nations

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ON THE MARQUEE

THE ASSASSINATION OF SANT LONGOWAL – at the hands of Sikhs – and the earlier assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi – also at the hands of Sikhs – are the consequence of the politics of fire that we, in this country, seem to have opted for. Attributing Sant Longowal's murder to the machinations of Pakistan or to the conspiracies of expatriate Sikhs will not do. The killers are from within, from among us. And they are the product of grievous errors of judgement, of tragic mistakes, of short-sighted strategies and of deliberately devised divisive politics.

The Sant's assassination is the latest, and among the saddest, of the killings that seem to have become an inseparable part of the Punjab agitation: killings of Hindus by Sikhs, of Sikhs by the security services, of political figures by terrorists, and of Sikhs by enraged mobs during the communal riots. It is time, now, for all of us to strive to end the killings, to put this sorry chapter in our nation's history behind us, and to make amends to each other. We must seek to undo the damage done to the Sikh psyche and to end the havoc it has caused. Pointing a finger at certain Sikhs has the inevitable result of branding the entire community and alienating its youth. The dignity and self-respect of India's Sikhs has been gravely damaged and, until it is restored – until we can convince them that we don't see them all as threatening our well-being – there can be no dousing of the politics of fire.

From the beginning of the Punjab agitation, we have consistently failed to understand the Sikh psyche and, consequently, have behaved in a manner that seems almost calculated to wound and to belittle. Consider the background of our attitude towards the Sikhs in the first three decades of our Independence. Then, we hailed them as our bravest on the battlefield, most imaginative on the farms, and innovative in small-scale industries. The image of a Sikh with a Sten gun in the snowy Himalayas became the symbol of our resistance to China. During the wars with Pakistan, ordinary Sikh families, located on the border, functioned as virtual army kitchens, feeding our troops at considerable risk to their own lives.

During the agricultural crisis, we held the Sikhs up as harbingers of the green revolution and examples of the economic miracle that hard work and a scientific approach could bring about. Abroad, we sent them as emissaries of Indian skills and goodwill – as champion hockey players and athletes, as *bhangra*-dancing members of cultural troupes. Milkha Singh was for a long time our only Olympic hope. Such adulation, coupled with the prosperity that flowed into Punjab in the '60s, made an already proud people even prouder. Sikh pride has always been second to none – how many Sikhs do you ever see begging? – and the unity engendered by their religious and cultural identity has given them a distinctive ethos. The very act of keeping a beard and wearing a turban in the Punjab summer is an extraordinary act of faith: a symbol of the daily discomfort that a Sikh is prepared to suffer for the sake of his religious convictions and identity.

When such a community felt – rightly or wrongly – that it had been discriminated against economically, and slighted politically, we did not consider the grievances against this background. Instead, we ignored the demands, scuttled the possible solutions and played divisive politics. Anybody with any understanding of Sikh psychology should have been able to see that this proud community would react to these snubs by resorting to the martial spirit that we ourselves used to praise and employ in our own national security considerations. When this did happen, we still did not realise what we had done. Instead, we allowed the violence to grow till it assumed fearsome proportions. Then, we sent the tanks in, destroyed their Akal Takht and littered their Golden Temple with the corpses of extremists and pilgrims alike. When this action stunned, humiliated and horrified even moderate Sikhs, we still did not move to stop the spread of alienation. Instead, we began to treat all Sikhs as potential secessionists and our security forces combed their villages searching, and humiliating nearly every Sikh youth. Thousands were indiscriminately detained.

That all of this would lead to intransigence, to a never-ending chain of death, was inevitable. The assassinations, the bombings, the massacres in the November riots – the fire had spread almost too far. Then, last month, with the Punjab accord, and with the government's change of stance, it seemed, at last, that sanity had begun to prevail.

The assassination of Sant Longowal must not cause the sanity of reconciliation to be replaced by the madness of hate. The Sikhs must realise that most of their demands have now been conceded, and that the violence has gone too far. And we, in turn, should give their faith the accommodation it deserves. We must strive to douse the anger of Sikh youth, to tend to their wounds, to end their alienation. We must not fight shy of accepting that we misjudged their mood and desecrated their Temple. It is a time for making amends. For saying sorry and for grand gestures. Let us in peace, show the imagination we have so sorely lacked in this near civil war.

R. V. Pandit

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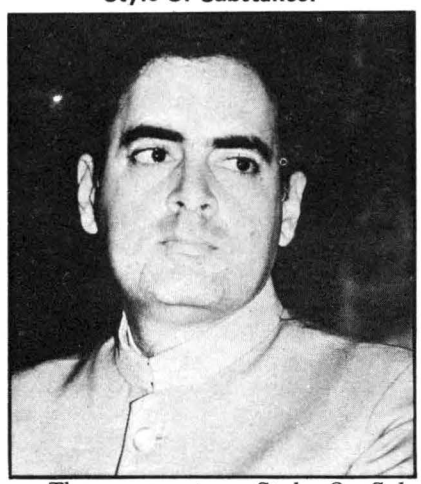
LETTERS

Style Or Substance?



The cover story *Style Or Substance?* (July 1985) made interesting reading and questioned the achievements of Rajiv Gandhi in the past six months. He started off optimistically as the youngest Prime Minister with the support of the whole nation.

The Punjab solution, if it proves a solution, was delayed. The so-called 'growth-oriented' budget was really a benediction to big businessmen. And for all his attempts at improving foreign relations, the US has not diffused arms supplies to Pakistan.

It would seem, then, that Rajiv has been over-rated. People have started hero-worshipping him. Some predict that he will be a better Prime Minister than his predecessors, Nehru and Mrs Gandhi. Can Rajiv live up to their expectations? Only time can tell.

K Chidanand Kumar
Bangalore

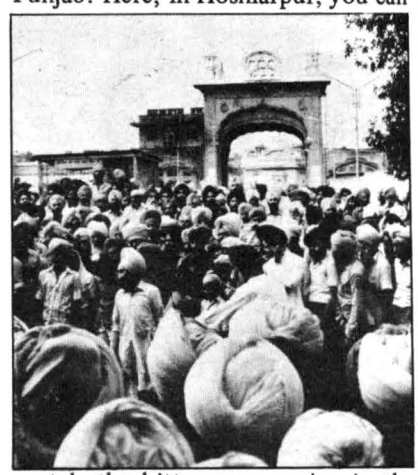
How Safe?

As Sheela Barse rightly points out, the philosophy of quantity rather than quality continues to prevail, even in the security arrangements of the PM (*How Safe?* July 1985). So far, only the number of security personnel has been enhanced and the PM's home has been made a fortress with further security improvements. But the question of the expertise of our Intelligence men looms large and the answer is discouraging. It is ironic that the KGB, CIA and FBI possess more information about events in our country than our own Intelligence.

Essaykay
Hyderabad

Punjab Journey

Jugnu Ramaswamy's article, *Punjab Journey* (July 1985), has presented an accurate picture of present-day Punjab. Here, in Hoshiarpur, you can



watch the bitterness growing in the hearts of Hindus and Sikhs. Undoubtedly, this bitterness will soon find expression in personal vendettas.

Jaskaran Singh Dhami
Hoshiarpur

Reserving Judgement

Subramaniam Swamy's suggestions for streamlining the reservation policy (*Reserving Judgement*, July 1985) are fallacious and mostly self-contradictory.

He argues that the economic criterion for reservations should be rejected, the policy being meant to compensate a community for the social oppression it has undergone over the years. But if one agrees that it is prolonged economic backwardness that has caused the social oppression, then are not the two factors inseparable?

Why should the Muslims and Christians be denied the benefit of reservation? For instance, the Harijans of Meenakshipuram, who are victims of social oppression, have converted to Islam. Can this sudden change of faith compensate for the years of injustice? What about the

LETTERS

tribals in the North-East, who are being converted to Christianity?

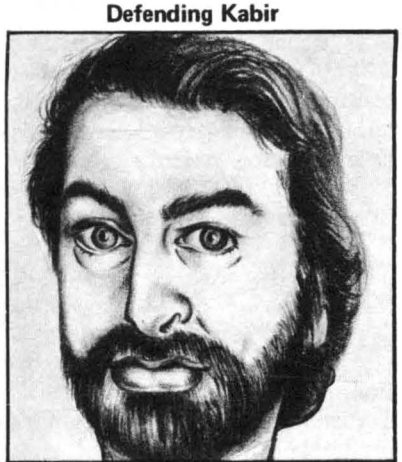
S Padmanabhan
Calcutta

The reservation policy, as it is practised, is inconsistent with our Constitutional principles of equality and justice. It is also at variance with the Preamble which is committed to a reconstruction of society along casteless and socialistic lines.

The time has come to review the criteria for identifying backward classes, ignoring caste labels. The issue must be tackled with courage and imagination.

H K L Gandotra
Gurdaspur

Defending Kabir



Vidhushak's scathing criticism of Kabir Bedi (*Paper Tigers*, July 1985) was uncalled for. It is surprising how many foibles he has been able to detect in Kabir. The writer derisively calls him a 'magnificent-looking specimen'. Well, what's wrong with that?

Though unsuccessful in India, Kabir has done reasonably well in Hollywood. In Italy he is deified. He recently saved the New Delhi Film Festival from total disgrace by his excellent compering. His 'Share' Project Fund, which he initiated in the US, was praised by our PM. Vidhushak alleges that our press has been projecting Kabir as a major star; I feel our press is sensible enough not to give undue importance to non-entities.

Arvinder Singh Walia
Calcutta

Star!

Amrita Shah's article on Dev Anand (*Star!* July 1985) was interesting and informative.

Dev Anand was once a legend, a superb actor. But it was another generation that accepted him as a hero.

Those brilliant songs from *Guide*, *Patita* and *Johnny Mera Naam* are unforgettable.

P Ramesh
Bombay

Premature Epitaphs

The idea of starting the *My Own Obituary* series is quite repulsive. How will the relatives and friends of the people who write their own epitaphs feel on reading them?

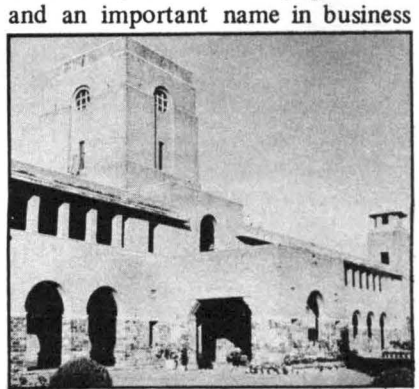
Anyway, the idea is not new. Khushwant Singh mooted the idea in 1972, when he was editing *The Illustrated Weekly Of India*. Justifying the idea, Khushwant Singh had written: "Death is no laughing matter, but surely what is inevitable need not necessarily be taken with such morbid grimness."

What about the old superstition that authors who put themselves or their characters in calamitous situations often suffer the same fate themselves? The Keralite poet, Kumaran Asan, died in a boat accident, in exactly the same manner as one of his characters.

Krishnan S Aiyar
Bombay

The St Stephen's Network

Malavika Sanghvi in *The St Stephen's Ethos* (June 1985) has stated that not much has been achieved by the college in the field of sport. She has probably forgotten that Ranjit Bhatia was an Olympic runner and that Sanjit (Bunker) Roy, besides being a social worker, was one of the most outstanding squash players of his times and national champion more than once. Besides, there were Y M Chaudhary, Ranji Trophy player and, if I remember correctly, he also played in a Test match; Bharat Avasthi, another Ranji Trophy player; Anil Sood, an outstanding sportsman and an important name in business



circles; L C Parija, Ranji Trophy player; Chanchal Singh, cricket; Prem Kishore, brilliant tennis player (also Vice-President of Kirloskar); and Yoginder Singh, one of the most stylish squash players today.

Kanwar Manmohan Kishan Kaul
Delhi

There was an error in Malavika Sanghvi's write-up on St Stephen's College.

The college moved from Kashmere Gate to its present site beyond the Ridge in 1943-44 and not 1939. The architect employed for the new building was the late Walter George, who had also served as an assistant to Sir Edwin Lutyens.

Raj Chatterjee
Delhi

I hasten to point out an error in *The St Stephen's Ethos*. It is my brother, Bhasker B Mundkur, who was at St Stephen's and not I. The omission is understandable as we both share the same initials – B B.

Bal B Mundkur
Bombay

LETTERS

RECALLING THE EMERGENCY: GOOD OR BAD?

While every other magazine in the country conducted a memorial service to the Emergency, **Imprint** was refreshingly different (*Recalling The Emergency*, July 1985).

I was reminded of a joke I read during the Emergency in some pamphlet, probably published by the RSS. Apparently Mrs Gandhi and her two sons were taking off in a small Piper twin-engined plane. Sanjay Gandhi rolled down a window and threw out a ten rupee note. "Let's make some poor bugger happy," he said. Mrs Gandhi pulled out a bundle of notes from her purse, threw them out of the window and remarked: "Let's make 100 people happy with Rs 100." Finally, when the plane was fully airborne, Rajiv Gandhi turned from the pilot's seat and said: "Listen, if I throw both of you out of the window, I can make 600 million people really happy."

Dr T A Philip
Bombay

Your cover story made interesting reading, specially Viren Shah and Datta Samant's accounts of the Emergency. And R K Karanjia's, of course. Subramaniam Swamy's treatment of *Bogus Heroes?* was quite characteristic.

Raj Kumar Siddharth
New Delhi

I was around eight years old when the Emergency was imposed ten years ago. It's obvious I wasn't aware of the truths behind it. So I must say that your cover story was very enlightening.

And today, ten years later, when the people directly involved in the imposition of the Emergency, justify it, I feel they should be made to realise that there is no justification for a dictatorship, which is what the Emergency was.

Gautam Singh
Ranchi

I am glad you published an opinion poll in your July 1985 issue (*Emergency Nostalgia*) revealing that more than 60 per cent of all Indians now feel that the Emergency was justified and that another Emergency might usefully be clamped down now to set things right.

The fissiparous state of affairs of the nation then demanded nothing short of an Emergency. The Congress old guard had fallen one by one. The emerging politicians were second-rate, opportunistic and corrupt to the core. They had joined the bandwagon merely for power, prestige and, of course, money. Trade unionists posed a threat to production as well as to a citizen's normal life. White-collar efficiency had plummeted. Chauvinism raised its head in some states, especially the border states.

The only people who wanted to get the maximum mileage from the imposition of an Emergency were a few inept, loud-mouthed Opposition leaders, rabble-rousing politicians, corrupt trade unionists, and a motley mixture of intellectual punks, capitalist-indoctrinated professors and business-backed journalists. It was this minority, thanks to its dubious connections with the foreign media, that discredited the Emergency both inside and outside India.

Only fools would say that an imposition of another Emergency is not needed to root out evils like smuggling, hoarding and black marketing, which are strangling the Indian economy. All ordinary citizens would welcome it. The earlier, the better!

K N Ninan
Bombay

On The Marquee, July 1985, was bursting with a palpable Emergency phobia, when it was expected to be a rational appraisal of the results of the **Imprint**-MARG opinion poll. In the first place, you conceived and carried out a survey because you considered the views of a random cross-section of the urban population worth ascertaining; not because you wanted them to agree with 'what we thought we already knew' (page 20). Your tirade against the people, represented by the respondents, brought on because their views did not tally with yours is, to say the least, likely to leave a bad taste in their mouths.

An analysis of the people's reasons for saying what they said, rather than an angry response, would have been more rewarding.

You say that the holding of the first election in the wake of the Emergency depended solely on the mercy of the government. Even so, the people, having chanced on the discovery of their own strength, must now be confident of securing an election, if need be, from an erring ruler. But, they do not flinch from giving a promising government, about whose democratic credentials they are reasonably satisfied, a little more rope in the interests of discipline and development.

No, it is not that the people are eager to sell themselves to slavery. Not that they do not value the dignity of the right to vote. They do. But they value the dignity of a decent human existence no less, for which anarchy is not the ideal environment. They feel that tyranny is less hard to contend with and correct that anarchy. In tyranny, the enemy is one, the tyrant; in anarchy, they are legion. In tyranny, the people, united and highly motivated, are pitted against a despot. In anarchy, the people, sorely divided, are pitted against themselves!

M T Devasia
Nagpur

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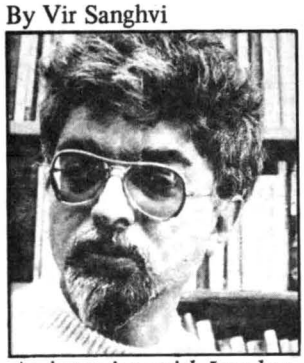

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LONDON DIARY

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SUMMER DAZE

Princess Michael, Robert Maxwell and a man with a hotel on his head.

AS SOUTH AFRICA declares an Emergency, Ronald Reagan has the least malignant bits of him removed, and Carol Thatcher's appalling *Lloyd On Lloyd* reaches the top of the bestseller lists, is there any reason to rejoice?

Well, perhaps not. But there is cause for a *little* celebration. The great British electorate seems finally to have realised that Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government is simply not working. If the results of the latest opinion polls and one parliamentary by-election are anything to go by, then this government is in worse trouble than anyone dared hope for. No matter that the by-election was won not by Labour, the principal Opposition party, but a representative of a claret-swilling, Volvo-driving, muesli-munching, middle class outfit called the Social Democratic Party: at least, the Tory candidate (a close associate of Mrs Thatcher's) lost.

It is not difficult to see why the government should be unpopular: its economic policies don't work, military adventures like the Falklands expedition do nobody any good in the long run, and class divisions, always Britain's biggest problem, have got much worse under Attila the Hen. Unfortunately, the British electorate failed, somehow, to perceive this.

Lydia Lewis lives in London. This is her fourth London Diary *for* **Imprint.**

Princess Michael: Fleet Street delight.

And so, Mrs Thatcher's particularly nasty brand of upwardly mobile Poujardism continued to be popular.

Till now. If this trend continues (and there is every reason to believe that it will), then the simmering discontent in the Tory back-benchers may at last burst out into the open. The Tory party has a traditional hatred of losers. And if the Blessed Margaret seems like an electoral liability, then the chaps might well decide to give her the chop.

* * *

ONE REASON for Mrs Thatcher's unpopularity could be her tendency to cram her front bench with thrusting, self-made men, who regard those less fortunate than themselves with acute contempt. Unfortunately for her, two of her favourite ministers have now been sidelined.

Norman Tebbit, a skinhead-like former airline pilot (perhaps, she ought to make him High Commissioner to India), won fame as the Employment Secretary who told the unemployed to get on their bikes and go looking for jobs. Sadly, Tebbit was in the Grand Hotel in Brighton when the IRA blew it up, and was only rescued hours later, from under a pile of rubble. (Bad taste joke: What do you call a man with a hotel on his head? Ans: Norman Tebbit.) Since then, he's never been quite the same.

Cecil Parkinson, Mrs Thatcher's favourite walking advertisement for Brylcream was, of course, felled by a scandal. His secretary conceived, the story was leaked and our Cecil, still struggling to keep his accent intact, resigned after a bit. Now there are rumours that Mrs Thatcher, feeling that she has nothing left to lose, might rehabilitate the virile Cecil. This could prove to be the best thing that has happened to the scandal rags of Fleet Street in years.

* * *

THE SECOND-BEST THING to have happened to Fleet Street has been the emergence of an obscure royal called Princess Michael of Kent. Princess Michael is the wife of the Queen's

Nothing excites the British more than sex, scandal, spies and royalty. This simple formula keeps the tabloids of Fleet Street in business, while the quality newspapers struggle to survive.

SUMMER DAZE

semi-articulate cousin and the current Fleet Street rage. In part, it is her unusual background that explains this. The daughter of an obscure Nazi, she was brought up in Australia, married and divorced an Old Etonian banker called Tom Troubridge, and then landed the grinning, grunting Prince Michael.

The royal family is said to hate her pushy ways (according to *Private Eye*, they call her 'Our Val') and she in turn, resents them. (She thinks that Princess Diana is stupid, which rather misses the point.) This makes her a perfect target for the tabloids who first unearthed her father's goose-stepping, *Sieg Heil*-ing origins, and now claim that she is seeing rather a lot of some American millionaire.

All of this may or may not be true. The question is: Why should anyone care? Nobody really knows the answer to that one. All we know is that the British *do* care: nothing excites them more than sex, scandal, spies and royalty. This simple formula keeps the tabloids of Fleet Street in business, while the quality papers fight for readers. (It is said that Rupert Murdoch fires the editor of the *Sun* if any news is smuggled into the paper.)

* * *

OF LATE, Fleet Street has been invaded by a large, booming figure who must be the most colourful personage in the history of the newspaper business. Robert Maxwell, the new owner of Mirror Group newspapers, is a Czechoslovakian refugee (real name: Hoch), who has made, and lost, several fortunes in British publishing. In the late '60s, after some of his ventures ran into financial trouble, a Board of Trade report said he was not the kind of person who could be trusted with the management of a public company. (Hence his *Private Eye* nickname: The Bouncing Czech.)

In the late '70s, however, Maxwell made a comeback and a year or so ago, he bought Mirror Group and promised to turn the *Daily Mirror* into Britain's bestselling daily.

What was most extraordinary was the manner in which he proposed to do this: by carrying large photographs of himself on the front page. His staff were encouraged to call him Captain Bob, and his readers were exhorted to join in all his crusades. So far, the *Mirror* has not caught up with Murdoch's tit 'n bum *Sun*, but Maxwell has become nationally famous.

Stories about his loud, flamboyant manner abound. One day, it seems, he strode into his office, instructed his secretary to make 270 telephone calls, arrange 74 appointments, book tables for lunch at several different restaurants, cancel plane tickets to three different cities, inform 12 journalists that they had been fired, organise seven different parties and type 280 letters. Finally, at 8 p m, the poor girl could take it no longer and burst into tears.

Re-enter Maxwell, who emerged from his panelled sanctum on hearing her sobs. "Sarah," he said, leaning his portly frame on her desk, and putting on his most avuncular manner, "who has done this to you? Just tell me, and I'll fix him."

Maxwell claims this story is apocryphal though his insensitivity is legendary. However, even he has not denied the following story.

Apparently, during his time as head of the British Printing Corporation, Maxwell launched several efficiency drives and promised to fire anyone found idling. Imagine his surprise, therefore, when he found, while touring his empire, that a sallow youth in an ill-fitting suit was lounging in a chair reading a magazine.

"You!" bellowed Captain Bob. "How dare you sit around in my office reading a bloody magazine? What is your designation?"

"Salesman," the cowering youth stuttered.

"And how much do you earn?"

"£ 9,000 a year."

At this, Maxwell pulled a wad of notes out of his pocket and peeled off a few. "Here's £ 2,250," he shouted. "That's three months' salary. Now get out. I never want to see you in this office again."

The bemused youth took the money and scurried away. He's never been back to Maxwell's British Printing Corporation since then. And, indeed, he has no reason to. He worked for an office-equipment firm, and had only gone to Maxwell's office to see if he could sell them some typewriters. He's kept the money, though.

* * *

I HAVE WRITTEN in previous *London Diaries* about the great AIDS scare. This phenomenon shows no signs of abating. Every homosexual is now regarded as an AIDS-carrier and the social discrimination has intensified. (Very bad taste joke: What's AIDS? Ans: A disease that turns fruits into vegetables.)

The tabloid press regards its hysteria as having been justified, now that a fading Hollywood star has revealed that he has the disease. It is sad that Rock Hudson had to get AIDS to reach the front pages of the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*. As for the *Daily Mirror*, I suppose it is still waiting for the perfect AIDS headline: 'Robert Maxwell Saves Princess Michael From AIDS While Russian Spies Cower'. ♦

COUNTER-VIEW

By Subramaniam Swamy

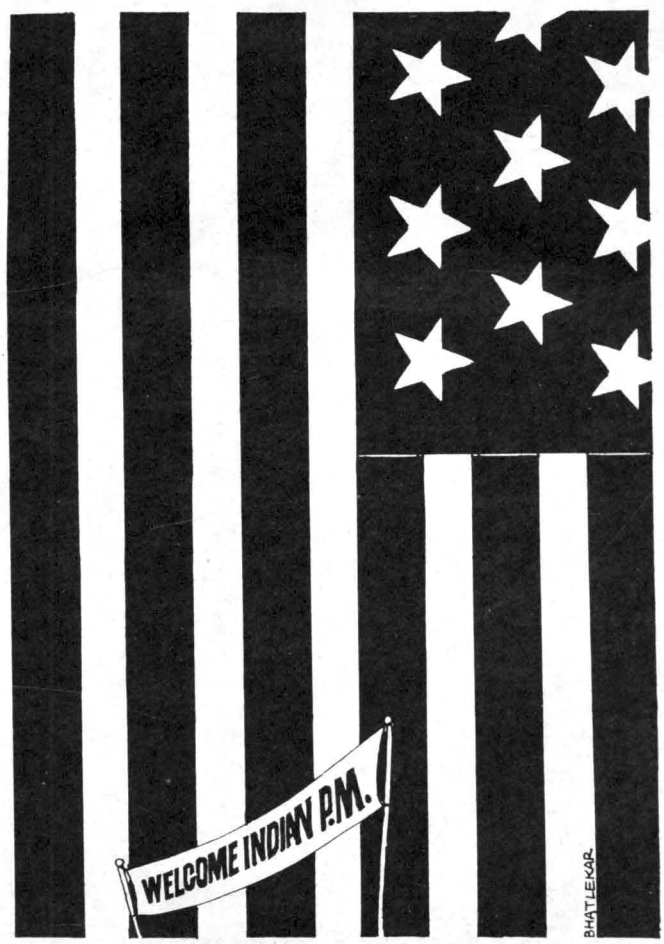
AMERICAN LETTER

The Americans don't care too much about India.

MY DEFEAT in the last Lok Sabha election has been, in some ways, a blessing in disguise. It let me take time off to return to my Alma Mater, Harvard (from where I got my PhD), and to teach once again.

Harvard is a famous university, and its Economics department is probably the best in the world. The University is intensely loyal to its former students and professors and, on learning that I had lost the elections, Harvard wasted no time. They telephoned me in Bombay to offer me a Visiting Professorship. I have been publishing papers in professional journals even while I was in Parliament and, therefore, I was never out of touch with Economics.

And here I am, once again, as a professor – if only for a short period. I landed in USA the day Rajiv Gandhi left. The media management in India was so good that while there, I felt that the Indian Prime Minister had been received in the US as though he was the only worthwhile leader in the world. But, on reaching here, I got an entirely different perspective of Rajiv's US visit. During his entire four-day stay here, Rajiv Gandhi never made it to the front pages of any of the prominent newspapers in the USA. During his four-day visit to the US, Reagan spoke to him for just half an hour! Except for those Americans who are 'India-watchers', the rest of America barely knew that the Indian Prime Minister had visited their country. The 'credit' for this terrific media management in India should, perhaps, go to Mani Shankar Aiyar, the Press Advisor to the PM. Although Aiyar is from the IFS, he can fit any role with ease. I had once stayed with him while he was Consul General in Karachi. He had the whole city mesmerised. Everywhere I went in Karachi, Pakistanis raved about Mani as if he were some popular *maulana* from Saudi Arabia, and not a blue-blooded brahmin from Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu.



Now, that same talent has gone into managing the news. That is dangerous because Aiyar can make black look white. Journalists should be perpetually on the alert where Aiyar is concerned.

Whatever little attention Rajiv Gandhi did get in the US was because there has been a revival of interest in India. While this has not yet reached a peak as in 1952-53, it is much higher than it was in the '70s.

The common American, who would not take notice of me when I was here in the '60s, now stops me in shops or even on the street to ask questions about Mahatma Gandhi or about life in India, or to tell me that he or she had been to India last year as a tourist. The film *Gandhi* is largely responsible for this upsurge. *Gandhi* focused attention on the power of an individual determined to achieve his social goal. It is this message that has touched the average American who, by inclination, is an individualist.

Despite a penetrating media system in the US, the average American believes that Rajiv Gandhi is the grandson of the Mahatma and that Indira Gandhi was the daughter of the same Mahatma. Nehru seems to be a forgotton figure. Older Americans remember him especially as a patron of Krishna Menon. After 18 years with Nehru as the head of the government, and 16 years of his daughter's reign and now with his grandson in the

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ILLUSTRATION BY BHATLEKAR

American officials firmly maintain that Reagan did not invite Rajiv to the US. His visit was in connection with the inauguration of the Festival of India.

AMERICAN LETTER

same chair, the fact that the Mahatma still symbolises India is evidence of the power of his personality. This, despite the constant reminders of the Nehrus about how much they have sacrificed for the country.

When I landed in the US, I dutifully called the Indian Ambassador Shankar Bajpai, who was Ambassador when I visited President Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, and Deng Xiao Ping in China. So I was acquainted with him well enough. He is one of the sharpest diplomats I have known, and I still do not understand why he was not made Foreign Secretary. Anyway, my friend, Commerce Minister Sangma, was also in town that day, so I was invited by the Ambassador to join them at lunch. There was a lot of the hail-fellow-well-met feeling, but a good deal of speculation about Rajiv Gandhi's visit, too. I mentioned that, in the American set-up, atmospherics (the atmosphere of *bonhomie* in the Reagan-Rajiv get-together) had little value in determining policy. Rajiv had given no indication of correcting the pro-Soviet tilt, either in Moscow or in Washington (or *en route*, for the fourth time since he became PM, to Geneva. Question: Why does he go to Switzerland so often?). And since Rajiv was not going to correct India's pro-Soviet tilt, the Americans were not going to correct their pro-Pakistan tilt, no matter how charming and witty Rajiv may have been at press conferences or at private meetings. Our Ambassador reacted violently to my suggestion.

But now we know. President Reagan has used his special emergency powers to give Pakistan ground-to-air and air-to-air missiles which even allies like Jordan have been denied. These extraordinary powers have been invoked to bypass the authorisation of the US Congress. Now, at least, I hope the media in India will wake up to reality and stop misinforming the public.

Another indication of the failure of the Rajiv visit to the US is the near total news black-out about India in the US press. The press in the US is undoubtedly free, but it is sensitive to the popular mood. The Americans were fascinated by Mahatma Gandhi, but the colossus's pygmy namesake made no impression on them. Hence, news about India, other than museum shows, did not find space in the press.

I am not suggesting that Rajiv Gandhi should change his foreign policy, but he should tailor it to suit India's national interest as he sees it.

But the conduct of foreign policy shows a great deal of immaturity on Rajiv Gandhi's part. If the Prime Minister did not want to improve Indo-US relations, he need not have visited the US. American officials firmly maintain that Reagan did *not* invite Rajiv to the US. His visit here was in connection with the inauguration of the Festival of India as arranged by Mrs Gandhi in 1982. President Reagan did not accompany Rajiv to the inauguration as did Mitterand in Paris.

It was the height of immaturity on the part of the PM to go to Moscow, denounce the US and justify the Russian invasion of Afghanistan just before a visit to the US. Even on the way, in Cairo, Algiers and Paris, Rajiv tactlessly denounced the US.

Denounce the US, if you must. But then, stay at home and attend to Punjab, Assam, Gujarat, inflation and numerous other problems. Or visit Havana, Sofia, or Hanoi in addition to Moscow. Or even Italy for a vacation, with a trip to Geneva and maybe Zurich on the sly. ♦

FLYING HIGH

Rajiv Gandhi and his Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari win friends and influence nations.

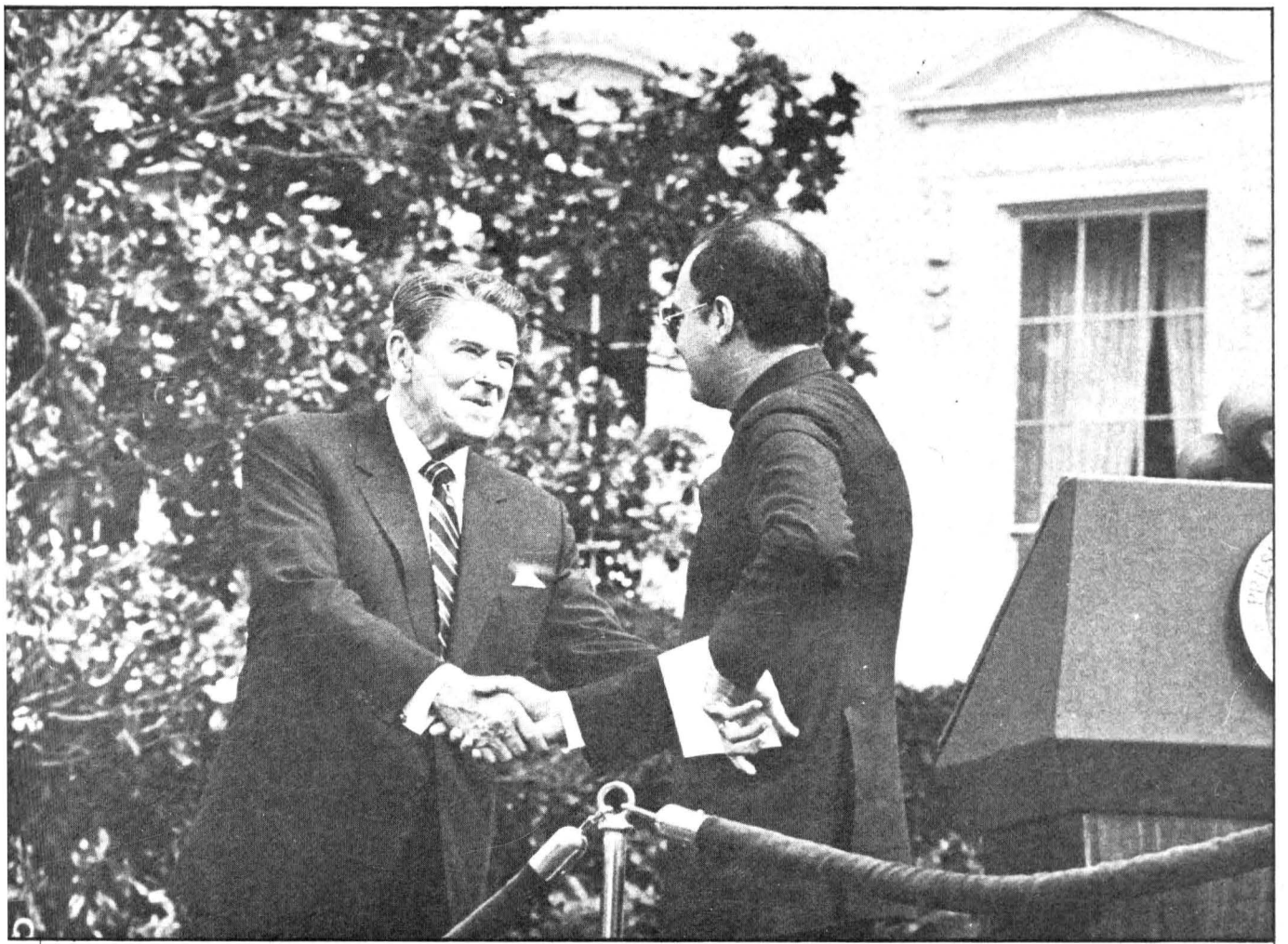
PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi has spent most of 1985 setting right India's problems. But while his Punjab accord and the Assam settlement have received the credit they deserve, relatively little attention has been paid to another area in which Rajiv Gandhi has achieved significant breakthroughs: foreign policy. As Prime Minister, he inherited a foreign policy that was narrow and destructive. We were considered antagonistic towards our neighbours, regarded, and were regarded by, the United States with suspicion and distrust, and chose our friends and foes alike without any real consideration of India's long-term geopolitical interests. The style of our foreign policy was bureaucratic and ritualistic, with no room for flair or for personal initiatives. Faceless bureaucrats negotiated with their counterparts in foreign countries and expensive shows like the NAM summit took precedence over the advancement of our real interests.

Surprisingly, for a man with little experience in the field of foreign relations, and whose early pronouncements had suggested that he was content to toe his mother's line, Rajiv Gandhi has begun to change the style of India's foreign policy. Among his major achievements:

- Relations with Sri Lanka, at an all-time low in 1984, have improved dramatically. It was India's efforts that brought the Lankans and the Tamil rebels to the negotiating table in Thimpu. And when the talks broke down, the Prime Minister personally intervened to salvage them.
- Despite the war hysteria of the last two years, relations with Pakistan have improved considerably. There is no more war-talk, ministerial visits between the two countries are more frequent, and the Prime Minister and General Zia telephone each other frequently.
- We have not changed our stand on such issues of vital interest to the Americans as the Star Wars scheme and Afghanistan, but have still earned their respect. The old distrust and suspicion appear to be disappearing.
- The improvement in relations with the US has not been at the expense of our traditional relationship with the Soviet Union. During the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow, a billion rouble credit for infra-structural development in core sectors was signed, along with a new co-operation agreement that lasts till the end of the century.

WHAT ALL OF THIS suggests is that Rajiv Gandhi has decided that, unlike his mother, he cannot treat foreign policy as an adjunct of domestic policy. For Indira Gandhi, foreign policy was a legitimate tool to advance the goals of domestic politics. When things did not go too well at home, then she was not above encouraging speculation over a possible war with Pakistan to divert attention: hence the war hysteria of 1983-84. To appease the Tamils of South India, she also took an unnecessarily harsh line on Sri Lanka's Tamil problem, alienating the government of that country. When the Punjab situation got out of control, the familiar foreign hand was invoked. Ritualistic invocations of the CIA as the root of all evil became a regular part of Indian pronouncements. To mask our increasing isolation from the countries that really mattered to us, jamborees that did comparatively little to advance India's interests were organised: NAM and CHOGM, for instance.

This attitude has now changed. Priority is being given to establishing India's pre-eminence in the region through diplomacy and not through arm-twisting. Needless tensions have been eliminated from our relations with our neighbours. The personal element in foreign policy, missing from India's approach for two decades, has now been restored to its rightful place. Partly, it is the Prime Minister's own charm that has made the difference. His six-nation tour was largely a triumph of his own personality. And partly, it is his realisation that much more can often be achieved by a spontaneous gesture than can be achieved by endless bureaucratic



Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi with President Ronald Reagan: earning their respect.

paper-pushing. His gift of *mithai* to General Zia, and his sudden decision to fly over the flood-affected areas of Bangladesh along with President Jayawardene show that he has the flair and confidence required to make a difference. He also has the decisiveness. When the Thimpu talks broke down late last month, he personally summoned the Tamil leaders to Delhi and urged them to return to the negotiating table.

Not only has the Prime Minister taken personal initiatives, he has also freed our Foreign Office from the bureaucratic shackles that Mrs Gandhi had bound it in. There was no place, in her scheme of things, for diplomats with charm and flair. She had no time for an Indian version of a Harriman or a Kissinger, let alone a Girija Shankar Bajpai or a Gundevia.

That Rajiv Gandhi does not share this approach is demonstrated by the emergence of Romesh Bhandari, the charismatic Foreign Secretary. A suave, Cambridge-educated officer, Bhandari is the antithesis of the low-key bureaucratic type that Mrs Gandhi favoured. Rajiv has allowed him to become the representative of India's foreign policy abroad and has encouraged him to practise the high-flying, personal diplomacy he excels in. Since he took over as Foreign Secretary on February 1, 1985, he has constantly been on the move, closeted with Foreign Ministers and Heads of State, trying to improve India's relations with the rest of the world. His staff have lost count of the cities he has visited but, according to one estimate, he has made 24 visits to national capitals in the six months that he has been Foreign Secretary.

GIVEN this style and his personal friendship with world leaders, Mrs Gandhi was reluctant to appoint him to succeed Maharaj Rasgotra, even though he was the obvious choice for the Foreign Secretary's job. She was said to prefer K Natwar Singh, who was, however, much too junior while G Parthasarathy, Chairman of the Foreign Ministry's Policy Planning Board, had his own candidate. Bhandari, who has always been popular with the younger Foreign Service officers who appreciate his easy, informal manner (some critics say he has achieved this eminence only by stepping on senior colleagues' toes), was apparently informed unofficially that his chances were slim, when fate intervened on his behalf.

Last year, extremist Sikhs hijacked an Indian Airlines aircraft and took it to Pakistan. From there, they went on to Dubai and refused to release the passengers until their demands were met. As the tension

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SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

NJ NANPORIA on the relationship between the world's two most populous nations.

OFTEN, on the issue of the Sino-Indian border dispute, the 'ball' is spoken of as being in the Indian or the Chinese court. But the fact is that, as things are, there is no ball at all. A metaphorical ball can come into being only when there is a basis for negotiation. No basis exists at present. So, the first question is whether it is New Delhi or Beijing that is more obliged to provide this basis. Plainly, the Chinese are under no compulsion to change the *status quo*, if only because they remain in physical occupation of 14,000 square miles of territory in the Kashmir-Ladakh region and have no intention of vacating it.

In theory, the position is that the dispute is 'negotiable' but in practice, Beijing has given the specific border issue a very low priority, preferring instead, to shift the emphasis to improving trade and cultural relations. Reacting to this, New Delhi has taken the line that the border issue is, for India, the dominant consideration; and that it is for China now to determine the pace of improvement in relations. If New Delhi has second thoughts about this, it must decide whether the Chinese 'package', involving an Indian surrender of Aksai Chin in return for a Chinese recognition of the McMahon Line, is acceptable as a basis for talks.

The key question today is whether it is in the Indian interest to keep relations with China in the deep-freeze or whether we should take the first step.

ONE FEATURE is the McMahon Line which, according to the official Indian view, has been clearly delineated by tradition, custom, history and treaties. The Chinese view is that before China was unified and India became independent, border arrangements were made by the imperialists to suit their own convenience. Why cannot India and China, liberated now from colonial oppression, take a fresh look at the Line and reconsider it in the light of current Sino-Indian relations? This was the pan-Asian approach which might have been acceptable to India if the Chinese had not erred badly in slaughtering the Indian patrol in Aksai Chin in 1962. This, rather than the surreptitious construction of the Aksai Chin road by the Chinese, was responsible for the outcry in India and for driving New Delhi to see India as the legal inheritor of the border dispositions the British had dictated in a rather casual way.

There are three points which the new Gandhi regime more than any other, might be willing to concede. First, that the doubts which Prime Minister Nehru himself had, were justified. In September 1959, he said: "The Aksai Chin area is in our maps undoubtedly; but it is a matter for argument as to what part of it belongs to us and what part of it belongs to somebody else. I have frankly to tell this House that the matter has been challenged for 100 years. There has never been any delimitation there." Second, that documentary evidence is strongly in support of the claim that the Line was never regarded as a valid international boundary, and the circumstances in which it acquired some plausibility were murky, devious and questionable. Third, that the watershed principle which has been made much of in the Indian case is not in New Delhi's favour in Aksai Chin. India, rather than China, has tended to rely on documentary support though the result has been more equivocal than the External Affairs Ministry has been prepared to admit. China has been inclined to favour forgetting the past and concentrating on the present. Will this, both as a sentiment and as a policy, appeal to Rajiv Gandhi? China's 'unilateralism', first in building the Aksai Chin road and second, in attacking India, caused New Delhi to take stands that would not, otherwise, have been taken.

The matter is further complicated by the Karakoram highway, built through Pakistan-held Kashmir territory. The situation cannot be resolved without this territory being regained, but a retrieval of this territory without the use of force must be ruled out. In relation to China, this is a non-issue since it is beyond redemption. But it can be conceded, while extracting diplomatic mileage from this, that the highway is of strategic and commercial value for China. All of which suggests that without compromise on both sides, there can be no movement. And this, in turn, means that New Delhi must embark on the exercise of clearly defining what can or cannot be conceded.

There is little to indicate, as of now, any recognition of the need for such an exercise. For example, is New Delhi willing to consider the Chinese package if the Chumbi Valley is thrown in as a Chinese concession with India reciprocating with an acknowledgement that China had never formally accepted the McMahon Line in the past? It might help to admit that under Deng Xiaoping, no resurgence of Chinese unilateralism is likely. It might also help to appreciate the Chinese viewpoint of the

N J Nanporia, former Editor of The Times Of India, *is an expert on China.*

attack of 1962, as not so much aggression as an exercise in 'chastisement', a peculiar Chinese concept which it is in the Indian interest to try and understand.

YET, ALL THIS places Sino-Indian relations in the narrow context of the border issue. It is also necessary to see it in the larger context of China's relations with the United States, the Soviet Union and Pakistan, the recovery of Hong Kong, the economic and social reforms, and the seemingly open door to a great many outside influences in the cause of 'modernisation'. What seems worth noting is that the improvement in its relations with the United States and Russia will be much less ideologically motivated than in the past; and there is a reflection of this in Beijing's spokesmens' commendation of non-alignment since the take-over by Deng Xiaoping. There is, here, a deliberate identification with the Third World and, despite adjustments with the Big Two, an equally deliberate distancing from them, that brings Beijing into closer alignment with New Delhi.

Beijing's support to Pakistan over the Kashmir issue and China's involvement in the development of the Islamic bomb, have recently shown signs of running out of steam. Beijing apparently did not hesitate to repudiate or soft-pedal its nuclear obligations to Pakistan, if any, to facilitate its negotiations with the United States on its own nuclear development programme. Nor has Beijing unduly exploited Indo-Pakistan differences beyond reaffirming its ties with Islamabad. There is a new element of fluidity in all these relations which suggests that the time is right for an Indian initiative on the border issue. For it is a breakthrough on this issue alone, that will revivify Sino-Indian relations in general. The key question today is whether it is in the Indian interest to keep these relations in an indefinite freeze; and whether the Indian obligation to take the first step towards a thaw is not greater than that of the Chinese.

mounted, Bhandari flew to Dubai and negotiated for the safe release of the passengers and the surrender of the hijackers. Then, he used his personal friendship with the Dubai government (a former Ambassador to Iraq, he is known as Sheikh Bhandari in the Middle East), along with his considerable charm, to have the hijackers returned to India for interrogation and trial. This was the first time in history that hijackers had been returned to India in such a manner, an achievement made more remarkable by the fact that India and Dubai have no extradition treaty.

"Romesh Bhandari and Rajiv Gandhi are," says a diplomat, "on the same wavelength." This might explain the growth in the Foreign Secretary's role.

After that coup – and its attendant lesson in the merits of personal diplomacy – Indira Gandhi had no alternative but to appoint him Foreign Secretary. (Though he took over in February 1985, it was Mrs Gandhi who had approved his appointment before her assassination.) But even as Foreign Secretary, Bhandari was not expected to play a role very different from the one that M K Rasgotra, his predecessor, had. At the time, G Parthasarathy (who has Cabinet rank) was Mrs Gandhi's chief foreign policy advisor. It was Parthasarathy who, along with Mrs Gandhi, actually made the policy. The Foreign Secretary merely oversaw the workings of this policy. As Rasgotra himself says of his period as Foreign Secretary: "The Foreign Secretary doesn't make foreign policy. He collates the judgements and assessments of his colleagues. The decisions are finally made by the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister at the Cabinet level."

Strictly speaking, Rasgotra is right: those are the Foreign Secretary's official functions. But it is possible to transcend that role (rather as Henry Kissinger did when he was National Security Advisor to Richard Nixon from 1968 to 1973), to become more than a mere bureaucrat. Much depends on the personality of the Minister and of the Foreign Secretary himself. As it happened, by the time Bhandari became Foreign Secretary, there was a new Prime Minister. And Rajiv Gandhi did not share his mother's approach.

FOUR FACTORS have contributed to the transformation of the Foreign Secretary's role and to the remarkable rise of Romesh Bhandari. First of all, Gandhi chose to retain the Foreign Ministry for himself. This gave the Foreign Secretary direct access to the Prime Minister. Today, Bhandari is one of the few officials to see Rajiv Gandhi every day when they are both in town. Secondly, the new Prime Minister chose to evolve his own foreign policy and sidelined G Parthasarathy, his mother's chief advisor (the Policy Planning Board has produced relatively few papers in 1985). Thirdly, because Rajiv lacked foreign policy experience, he relied more on the advice offered by the Foreign Secretary though, of course, he still makes up his own mind.

It is the fourth factor, however, that has made the most difference – the personality factor. Unlike his mother, Rajiv is open, friendly and impatient with bureaucratic ways. Bhandari has the same attitudes. Ram Sathe, a former Foreign Secretary, describes him as "an outgoing person, forthright without being abrasive. He has a ready laugh, a friendly approach and works hard." It is the personal chemistry between Rajiv Gandhi and Romesh Bhandari that, more than anything else, has contributed towards the elevation of the Foreign Secretary's role.

The two men share an easy rapport. As one Foreign Service official puts it: "They are on the same wavelength." Rajiv phones Bhandari when-

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INDIA AND THE SUPERPOWERS

Our relations with them must be based on logical considerations, says RANJAN GUPTA

INDIA'S RELATIONS with the superpowers are a contradiction. We have excellent relations with the Soviet Union with whom India has almost no emotional links and limited contact, and an extremely fragile relationship with the United States with whom there is extensive people-to-people contact and interaction in a variety of fields.

Why? India's policy towards the Soviet Union and the United States is not based on any well-thought-out long-term policy but a terrible *ad hoc*ism. Delhi's attitude is motivated by several extraneous factors which sometimes have nothing to do with Washington or Moscow but rather depend on how one of them is behaving towards another country, say Pakistan.

This *ad hoc*ism in India's relations with the superpowers has taken a heavy toll over the years. What this has, essentially, demonstrated to the world is that India does not have the confidence to deal with the superpowers. Now, there are plenty of countries the world over that cannot deal with either Moscow or Washington except as client states. India, because of its size, technology and clout, is not in that category. Then why cannot India act, instead of always reacting?

INDIA'S DRIVE towards the Soviet Union under Nehru was motivated by ideological factors. The Soviet pattern of socialism and industrialisation fitted in with Nehru's world vision and to lean towards them in the immediate post-colonial years was a rational choice.

Not even the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 shook Nehru's vision of a socialistic foreign policy, though it seriously damaged his concept of Asian solidarity.

The different systems of the Americans and the Soviets impose different yardsticks on how they deal with foreign governments. In their own ways, both the Soviet and American systems are very intense. The Soviet system is bureaucratic, nationalistic, and sees every outsider either as friend or foe. There is no middle ground in the Soviet perception of the world. The American system, on the other hand, seeks identification through a free-wheeling culture, belief in trade and wealth, and faith in anti-communism.

To get on in the American system, no foreign leader can be too dogmatic, too nationalistic or too rigid. There is a fluidity of style. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was, unfortunately, all these things, and added to that was her own lack of confidence, which brought her to a head-on collision with the Americans. On the other hand, the Soviets could be dealt with through the bureaucracy, through state enterprises, through the rather obsolete churning wheels of the Government of India. Mrs Gandhi could do business with the Soviets without being too exposed to them. And that suited her shy style.

Yet, it was a policy of drift. It was not based on ideology, nor on consensus, nor on any long-term projections – it assumed national interests. It was a clerical foreign policy.

THERE IS NO REASON for India to swing from one side to the other. Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy appears to be doing just that. In the classical Indian short cut style, Rajiv Gandhi has tried to correct the tilt towards Moscow by cutting a good image in Washington. But can a TV personality make a policy?

The corner-stones of Rajiv Gandhi's Washington policy are non-resident Indians and his own personality, which is expected to cut ice with the Americans. Perhaps it will. But then what? Can Indians in the United States, already insecure in an alien environment, really be a bridge between India and the United States? How much can Festivals of India really achieve? The whole exercise of the second Gandhi government is filled with lacy frills.

In a funny sort of way, Rajiv Gandhi is fighting shy of real issues just as Indira Gandhi did. If Mrs Gandhi's foreign policy was rooted in psychological factors, Rajiv Gandhi's stems from his inability to formulate policy on intellectual projections. There is a lack of rationality in the making of policy with regard to the superpowers.

India must be clear about what it stands for and what its objectives are. Once this is clear, the bits will fall in place, including India's relations with Moscow and Washington. The Chinese have shown this: they wanted modernisation so they went to the West. But it did not affect their ideology or system. That's because they have a system and policy. If China can, there is no reason why India cannot. What is required is a clear-cut, well-analysed policy towards the superpowers. First and foremost must be the realisation of India's interests in the world, how it sees its place in regard to the power blocs, and what it can give to them and take from them. Only then can there be a well-executed foreign policy, something that will survive Prime Ministers and governments, because it will be intrinsically Indian.

It's about time Rajiv Gandhi took a fresh look at India's relations with the superpowers. More is needed than just smiles and handshakes, even though they may be useful in thawing a freezing relationship. This is the proper time to begin working on a long-term policy in our relations with Washington and Moscow. ♦

Ranjan Gupta is a commentator on foreign affairs. He is currently working on a historical novel.

President Zia with Rajiv Gandhi: replacing antagonism with friendship.

ever he needs any clarification, and is said to laughingly use such terms as 'Flying Secretary' and 'Foreign Shuttle' while referring to his globe-trotting work-style. Bhandari also has the freedom to phone the Prime Minister from wherever he is – Thimpu, Moscow or wherever – and must be one of the few senior bureaucrats in recent memory to have enjoyed this degree of access to the PM.

This rapport has certain distinct advantages. For one, Rajiv is not resentful of Bhandari's own success. Last month, when the Thimpu talks showed signs of failing, Bhandari called Rajiv and then President Jayewardene. A Foreign Secretary in Mrs Gandhi's time would have thought twice about calling a foreign Head of State directly: Bhandari knows that Rajiv will not mind. As a consequence, when Bhandari negotiates with foreign governments, they know that he enjoys his Prime Minister's trust and understands his way of thinking. So, they respond more readily to what he says, aware that he does not have to clear everything with Delhi, in the manner in which Indian officials earlier had to, which increases his negotiating clout.

WHILE THERE IS MUCH to applaud in the Prime Minister's new foreign policy initiative, and his willingness to allow Foreign Service officials to shine is to be lauded, much still remains to be done. For a start, the administration of the Foreign Ministry must be overhauled. Says Bharat B Wariawala, a foreign policy analyst at the Institute of Defence Studies: "Whenever hard decisions have had to be taken, there has been total confusion in our Foreign Ministry. Take the example of Afghanistan. On the one hand, we say that the Soviets were invited. And on the other, we say that we oppose all foreign interference. Similarly, we have fudged on Kampuchea."

To Wariawala, part of the problem lies with the Foreign Service: "There is no net impact of professionalism at any stage. The IFS is a mediocre service. Compare the writings of our retired Foreign Service bureaucrats with those from other countries, and you will find how much ours are lacking in quality and depth." Such a view is hotly disputed by the IFS. Says Rasgotra: "Our Foreign Office compares with the best in the world. We have people whose brains compare with the best in the world."

Even so, there can be no denying that many of India's 136 missions abroad can be better run, or that the 3,716 members of the IFS cadre (including IFS – B) can be better trained. (One instance: Despite the importance of Vietnam as a factor influencing our relations with China, only three IFS officials speak Vietnamese!) Our missions abroad have a terrible reputation for inefficiency: India House in London being the most notorious.

Frequently, Ambassadors are made to function like mere post-offices, carrying messages to their host governments from the powers-that-be in Delhi. Many of them also find that all financial decisions – even those pertaining to something as small as the purchase of a doormat – have to be cleared with the Ministry in Delhi.

Worse still, Indian missions often fail to accurately gauge the mood of their host countries or to recognise the constraints under which foreign governments operate. For instance, the Indian High Commission in London has continually yelled itself hoarse about the air-time given by the BBC to such Khalistanis as Jagjit Singh Chohan. When the British government has explained that it has no control over the BBC, the High Commission has not accepted this explanation. Last month, when BBC journalists went on strike over an attempt to ban an interview with an IRA terrorist, the High Commission, presumably, recognised that the British government had been telling the truth, after all.

Of course, there are some aspects of the Foreign Ministry that are praiseworthy. It is much less bureaucratic than many other ministries. Unfortunately, these merits are merits only when you compare the Foreign Ministry to other Indian ministries. Once you start comparing it to the Foreign Ministries of other countries, these advantages seem less impressive.

The government's next priority, now that its foreign policy initiative has got off to a flying start, must be to overhaul the machinery that oversees the implementation of foreign policy. Bhandari is due to retire in March, if he does not get an extension, and the choice of his successor is of vital importance if India is to continue to win friends and influence nations as it has begun to in 1985. ♦

"The Logic Of Co-Operation Outweighs Everything Else"

Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, talks about the new foreign policy initiative and discusses India's priorities for the future.

Imprint: ***Has there been a definite effort on the part of the Government of India to improve relations with our neighbours?***

Romesh Bhandari: God knows how many days I have spent travelling from one capital to the other! How many official visits are taking place! You can see the improvements for yourself. There's already been a marked improvement in relations with Sri Lanka. Pakistan: there's been the second ministerial meeting of the Joint Commission, and three visits of the Foreign Minister to India. Bangladesh: there's been the visit of the PM as well as a meeting of the Joint Review Commission.

How would you characterise our relations with the superpowers?

I think a number of factors are relevant here. Number one is the progress we have made on the economic front: in the context of the world recession, India is now an extremely important potential market for the industrial world. Secondly, India has shown that we do have a very vibrant and very virile democracy. This has won us a tremendous amount of respect internationally. The third factor is the Rajiv Gandhi factor. A young man who comes in with such a massive mandate! The outside world now sees the country with somebody who is going to be able to lead it in the foreseeable future. There's the factor also of India being Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Flowing from all this, our relationship with the two superpowers has always been based on its own logic. We have a relationship with the US and a relationship with the USSR. Each is perceived on its own merits.

The relationship with China is a complex one. The boundary is a very major aspect – but it goes beyond that. It is very much a part of the global interplay of forces: Washington-Moscow, Moscow-Beijing etc. It is related to how we fit into this picture.

China is willing to pursue a policy whereby they would totally normalise relations, with the boundary question put on the shelf. We would like to see a normalisation of relations with the boundary question resolved. We've had some talks and will have more.

What is our attitude to Tibet vis-à-vis China now?

You know this is an issue not only of political but of spiritual significance. We are all for Tibet resuming the role it has played in the Buddhist world, with support from the Chinese. Lhasa should, in fact, become a sort of spiritual centre, with the Dalai Lama playing a role for the benefit of his own people and to inspire the peace-loving people of the world.

Why do you think there has been so much suspicion and tension between India and the US?

We have a lot in common but, unfortunately, only the problems get highlighted. We are on different sides on some things. We are non-aligned. On economic matters, we are with the South. And so, naturally, we can't always vote with the US.

There are also differences in perceptions. We have to speak out very strongly when we feel that our national security interests are adversely affected. We feel that we are being forced into an arms race unnecessarily while we would rather use our scarce resources for development.

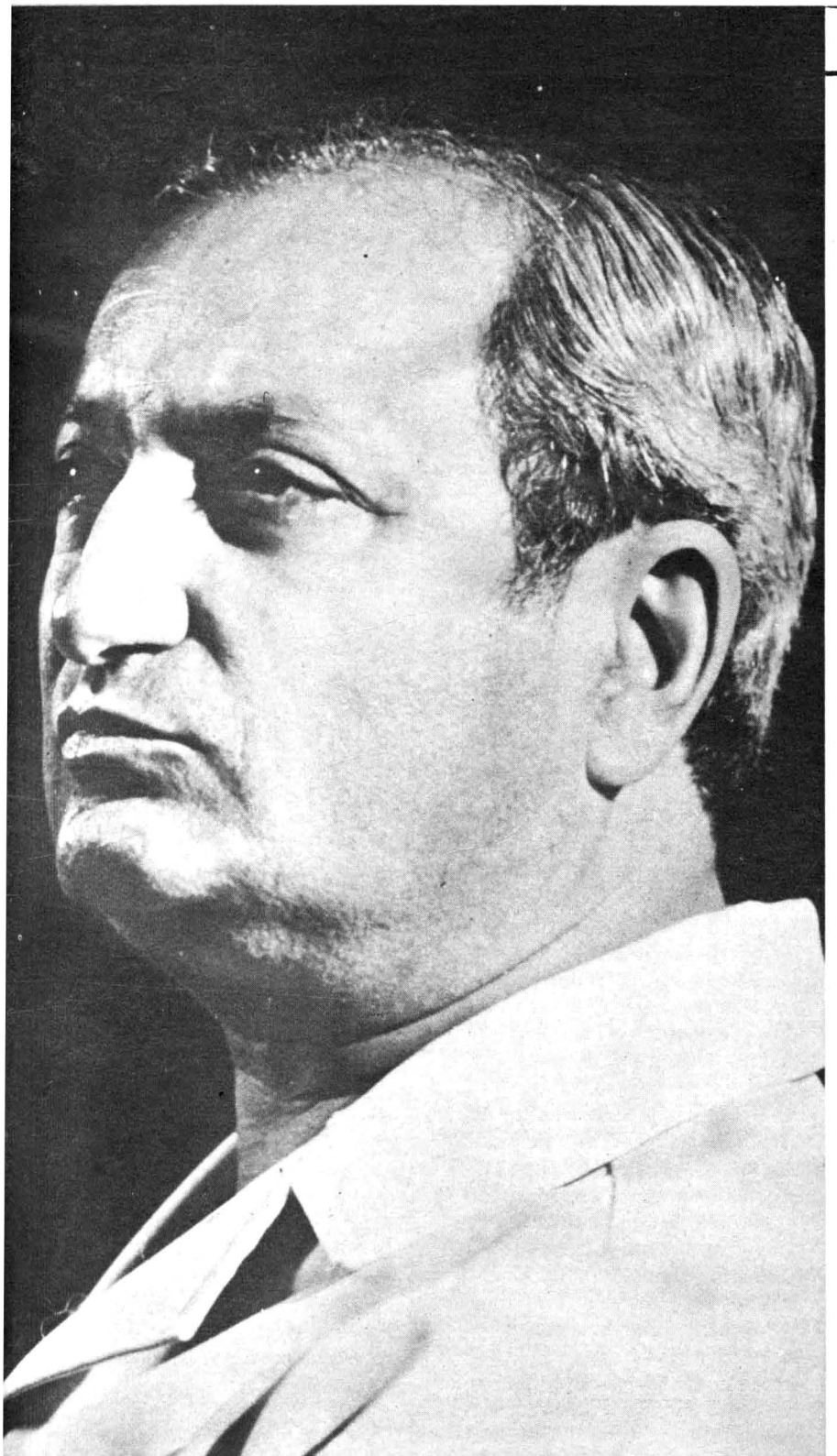
However, we are both democracies who accept that friends may differ and that these differences have to be taken in our stride. We can respect each other's positions without agreeing with them.

There is still a degree of suspicion on our side; a tendency to blame the CIA.

Some is real. Some derives out of perception. We feel that there is outside interference because many things do happen in India which are not indigenous.

For instance?

Well, the situation in Punjab. There are more proponents of Khalistan abroad, than in India. But the



government does not say that the CIA is involved.

Would you say that Canada and the UK are the places where most of the extremist Sikh organisations are based?

By and large, the support is coming from the West: USA, Canada, UK and, to a certain extent, the Federal Republic of Germany. The Sikhs in those countries are more active than the Sikhs in India. They run secessionist movements. This makes one feel that there is some other party behind this whole movement. What could be the objective of those who are already living abroad, and are doing extremely well abroad, who have no intention of coming back to India? Why should they be talking in terms of Khalistan?

But that's like American Jews and Israel. They don't necessarily want to live there, but support it nevertheless.
But there *is* an Israel. There *isn't* a Khalistan. That is the difference.

So, are you saying that the Khalistanis are backed by foreign powers?
Well, there have been all these instances in the press where they say that certain extremists have been trained in Pakistan. On Guru Nanak's birthday, a lot of extremists came over through Pakistan. We have the evidence of people who've been arrested that there are training camps in Pakistan. Plus other evidence, that our agencies have collected, that I cannot really tell you about.

At the moment, though, activity from that side has lessened and now we are giving the highest priority to improving our relations with Pakistan.

How would you characterise the state of Indo-Pak relations at the moment?
We have had well nigh 38 years of confrontation. Several wars have been fought. We've had differences in international forums. There's been a lot of hostility.

Now, I think, there is a realisation that confrontation has not served our interests and it is better for the two countries to start learning to live with each other. The problem is that, because of the past history, there is a lack of confidence and this has to be demolished.

I do believe that among the people of Pakistan, there is a desire for friendship. So, we are trying to increase co-operation at various levels: travel, tourism, music, culture, ex-students' reunions, that sort of thing. Don't forget that there is

PHOTOGRAPH BY GAUTAM PATOLE

perhaps no family in Pakistan which does not have a relationship with families in India.

India, of course, has no ambitions as far as any territorial, ideological or economic domination is concerned. And I think it is a question of reassuring them, because they keep feeling we do.

Why do you think they are so suspicious?
It is all the big neighbour-small neighbour complex. It is not peculiar to India.

Do you believe that Pakistan would have anything to gain from attacking India?
I don't think so.

Then, why do we keep acting as though they might?
Well, we've had these three wars. And sometimes, they've taken place because the Pakistani regime has wanted to gather public support. And there's no better way of unifying a country than the threat of an external aggression. It always works.

Now, their leaders *are* assuring us that they would like to normalise relations. General Zia has been phoning the PM and we have said that we are keen to normalise things.

How do you see our relations with Pakistan developing over the next five years?
That's difficult to say. The situation in Afghanistan is a relevant fact. It is the justification for arming Pakistan, and that must be taken into consideration.

But, given the trends now, I think both countries realise that they have a lot to gain by co-operating. The logic of that will outweigh the negative trends.

Moving away from Pakistan, relations with our other neighbour, Sri Lanka, seem to have improved.
Until the beginning of this year, there was so much ill will and antagonism about India in Sri Lanka.

"India has no ambitions as far as any territorial, ideological or economic domination is concerned. It is a question of convincing our neighbours: they seem to think that we do."

There were charges that we were responsible for all that was happening.

Our first task was to convince Sri Lanka that we had nothing to do with the situation. In fact, it has affected us adversely. We have 100,000 refugees. Secondly, a united Sri Lanka is in our national interests. We have no reason to encourage secessionist forces. Thirdly, the greater the instability in Sri Lanka, the more it will look to outside powers. That is exactly what we don't want.

So, we had to first clear the air. Then, we had to see if there was any way we could help solve their ethnic problem. Now that the air is clear, we have to see if a solution can be found. And to ask if there's any way India can help them find a solution. It is not adequate to just say that the violence must end; you must also seriously work towards a political solution. That is exactly what has happened and the cease-fire is holding.

Is the government still denying that there were training camps for the Tamils in Tamil Nadu?
There aren't any. There are refugee camps, that's all. The reports are concocted. Fabricated, as far as I know.

Burma was an administrative province of British India until the Japanese invasion in 1942 and many Indians had settled and prospered there. After Independence, we had excellent relations with the Burmese, but, as is well-known, the Burmese chose to isolate themselves from the early '60s. It is also obvious that Burma has suffered economically because of the isolation. Are we going to do anything to bring Burma back into a new era of more active co-operation among South Asian nations?
Yes, of course, that is very much on our minds. We have friendly relations with Burma, and we hope to persuade them to end the isolation.

Some months ago, you went to Iran and Iraq and that visit and the PM's references to the tragedy of the Gulf War created the impression that we were trying to help end the war. Are any new initiatives being planned?
Yes, yes, now that the Presidential election in Iran has been held, we will move in actively to bring the two warring parties together, in bilateral approaches as well as under the auspices of NAM and, if necessary, other relevant bodies.

There have been reports that we have taken some initiatives on Afghanistan?
We have. The situation, as it has developed in Afghanistan and its environment, concerns us very much as it increases areas of tension and conflict. The Prime Minister has this problem on his list of foreign policy priorities and, with the improving climate for wider perception in the East and West, we hope there will be speedy steps to end the conflict in Afghanistan.

Do we plan to use food as an instrument of foreign policy aims and goals?
As our food situation goes on improving, of course we will offer grain to enhance mutual co-operation with the needy. We also expect to offer our agricultural expertise to those who ask for it. ♦

WHAT SHOULD INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY BE?

BY R V PANDIT

THE PRIME MINISTER, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, has understood the place India has in the world and the role we must play, much faster and more astutely than anybody had expected he would. The steps he has taken to strengthen our relations with the two superpowers, with Europe, but especially, with our neighbours, are a clear indication of his understanding of the scope and the challenge of India's role in the world.

We are almost a continent. We are surrounded by countries which were once administrative parts of India. Until not long ago our cultural and spiritual influences had spread as far as Bali in the East, and Mauritius in the West. Despite the historical separations and partitions on the subcontinent, in geopolitical terms nothing much has really changed: India is the dominant power in South Asia, something we must ourselves constantly bear in mind, so that our affairs at home, and our relations with other peoples and nations are conducted from a relative perspective. In terms of people, economic power and industrial potential even all the other South Asian nations together do not come anywhere close to India.

It is on account of this dominant position that we enjoy that we have very legitimate aspirations, concerns and also, responsibilities. This position also requires us to be generous and judicious in our attitudes and actions. It is in the face of such reality that we must firmly enunciate a foreign policy which everyone will clearly understand. Such a policy must be aimed at securing the unity and integrity of India at all times. It must be aimed at developing and expanding commercial and political relations with major countries of the world and with our neighbours. It should help secure stability in our neighbourhood, and justice for those who are not yet free. Such a policy must help reduce tension and danger of war, and thus save expenditure on avoidable arming. It must earn for us the friendship and respect of the world at large.

BEGINNING with our neighbours, we must declare that the integrity of the kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan is as inviolable as that of our own. Both these countries must remain as free and independent as they are now, but they must also remain within India's sphere of influence, with India discharging the responsibility and obligations such a relationship entails. We should guarantee the integrity of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Burma and do all we can to help these countries, not only to remain united and independent, but also to advance agriculturally, economically and industrially.

With reference to Pakistan, Kashmir must cease to be an issue. The present line of actual control should be frozen as the international border. We must not allow the Kashmir problem to impede the betterment of our ties with that country. We should assure Nepal and Bhutan that we are their friend forever: their geographical location alone makes such a statement plausible. To all these neighbours, we must become a source of confidence, of generous help, and of mutually beneficial trade.

Indians and Pakistanis should get together at several levels and work diligently to remove the suspicions and the 'grey' areas which mar our relations. We should boldly commit ourselves to Pakistan's well-being and in no way allow third-country relationships to interfere with development of bilateral relations. We should help Pakistan whenever we can – if they need food and we have it in excess, as now, offer it to them without conditions save commercial, on a return basis if necessary – and increase commercial, and cultural ties. How ridiculous for Pakistan to be importing even consumer durables from Japan, Europe and America when road transport can take over what they need at four-fifths the cost from just across the border! Pakistan can be a good market for the numerous new cars India is tooling for. In return, we must give Pakistan a preferential treatment. Both India and Pakistan have enemies within and as such, a pact, to take care of the 'grey' areas and avoidable suspicions, should be at once contemplated. On the new concern and controversy over the nuclear bomb our policy should be simple: neither country needs atomic weapons for any conceivable eventuality, and this wisdom needs to be

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concretised in a bilateral pact, preferably with international guarantees.

We should have no hesitation in openly telling Sri Lanka that while we do agonise over the fate of the Tamils, we regard the racial integration and the integrity of that island republic as being of paramount importance. We must make every possible effort to bring Burma back into the international mainstream.

OUR ATTITUDE to the United States need not be ambiguous at all. Our two countries share an honoured commitment to democracy. We should have no hesitation in acknowledging the supremacy of the United States. Nor should we hesitate to acknowledge to it, its global interests, especially its security concerns in Central and Latin America, in Europe and in the Pacific. We have to recognise that nearly a quarter million Indians constitute a virtual who's who of medium-scale businesses and of middle management in American business, industry and medicine. Ten times that number in India have close links with those quarter million in America.

We should not allow any complexes to deter us from acknowledging the help and encouragement that the United States has given us, both before Independence, and for several years after 1947. Only this will give us the confidence – with honour – to seek the things we need from that bountiful nation. We need their technology. We need their know-how. We need their financial assistance. And, above all, we need their markets if we are to fruitfully use the new technologies which could be available to our own industry. Simultaneously, America must be made to recognise that we are a developing nation of 800 million people, supreme in South Asia, determined not to miss out on the technological revolution. And that we have logical interests in the peoples and the markets of South-East Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

We should be telling the Americans how deeply we are affected by the Russian presence in Afghanistan and how their short-sighted policy of encirclement of the Soviet Union has resulted in pushing the Russians almost to our borders. And why this complicates our relations with Pakistan. We should work to obtain American guarantee for a neutral Afghanistan (which, in turn, we could present to the Russians).

The trouble with our relations with the Soviet Union is that they rely too much on bureaucrat-to-bureaucrat contact and on the Kremlin's personal equation with whoever is in power in India. No purpose will be served in pretending that there is much in common between their system and ours or between our free people and the Russians. Today, a Soviet citizen is an alien almost everywhere outside of his own environment and only people-to-people contacts can infuse a human touch in our relationship with the Soviets. Still, there is great scope for our two countries to expand even more trade and economic cooperation; but we have to cautiously ensure that this trade does not become an *entrepôt* trade for the Soviet Union. Only an openly publicised understanding by us of the Soviet Union will qualitatively strengthen our ties with that military superpower.

The fact that the Russians stood by us when President Nixon was wilfully tilting against us in 1971 put us under an obligation to the Soviet Union. We have carried this burden for several years now and it should not prevent us from being blunt about Afghanistan, about Indo-China, and about nuclear armaments. We have to tell the Russians that their invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is as legal and as 'popular' as the American invasion of Vietnam at Diem's invitation was. President Zia is successfully using the Russian presence along his western borders to extract more and more military aid from the United States. Even more dangerously, the conflict in Afghanistan has strenghened his intransigence with his own people, making the splintering of Pakistan, as a consequence, a possibility. Their occupation of Afghanistan has created disturbing security problems for us. We have traditionally regarded the Oxus River as marking a strategic buffer, and the effect of what they are doing in Afghanistan is the demolition of this buffer. The Russian occupation destabilises the entire region, and the passage of time will make the problem even worse for all.

Within Russia, people have now started asking questions about their occupation of Afghanistan. Even members of the Supreme Soviet are reported to have asked if their country is not betraying an imperialistic attitude. The Russians are not sending any soldiers from Central Asia to Afghanistan, although their Muslim population is more in the dark than Russians about what is really happening there. It is estimated that 10,000 Russians have already been killed in Afghanistan and many more have been wounded. Russia must now be in a mood to welcome mediation efforts. Once we make our stand on Afghanistan clear, whatever clout we enjoy in the Kremlin must be used to get Moscow out of Afghanistan.

Our position on Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos should be obvious: the Russians have no business to be there. The perception that a strong Russian presence in Indo-China serves as a buffer against the Chinese is not a valid notion and is also inimical to our more important interests in South-East Asia. Our logical, cultural and commercial interests are with South-East Asia: there we have no need of buffers.

MR GANDHI needs to spread his charm and goodwill to Malaysia and Singapore, where there is a sizeable Indian population. And to Thailand and Indonesia with whom we have traditionally enjoyed friendly relations. Today, the ASEAN countries represent a powerful economic force and there is scope for much two-way trade between them and us.

There is an urgent need to establish wide-ranging trade ties, and to rebuild our friendship with China. We

should have no hesitation in categorically accepting a Chinese sphere of influence in SE Asia, just as we want the world to accept our hegemony in South Asia. Their concern about Russia is genuine: the Russians have, in the past, seriously considered destroying strategic parts of China. We should openly share China's genuine anxiety, and work towards lessening of tension on the Sino-Soviet borders.

There are areas in South-East Asia, in Africa, and in the Middle East where China and India can co-operate. In the near future, the Chinese economy will be performing in a manner that is almost similar to ours. If we went our separate ways now, we might clash in several places later. Only a heightened understanding of each other's aspirations, ambitions, interests and capabilities will avoid the build-up of such tensions and, in fact, promote co-operation.

IN EUROPE, the long friendship we have with many nations can only be strengthened in order to make our produce and products more acceptable. Europeans have begun to recognise that trade is a two-way street and we must make every effort to build on that. We must get the EEC to help us win our legitimate share of its markets. We must impress upon Europe and, particularly the UK, that they need to appreciate more our capability and potential as an industrial power. They must be persuaded to realise that we can only buy with what we sell.

Our role in Africa must go beyond commerce. The experience we have gained, and the expertise we possess, in agriculture and in small-scale industries must be offered to our co-members in NAM. Our political credentials are sound enough for India to be accepted as a friend and a partner in economic progress. We owe it to the African nations to demonstrate that we are able, capable and in much harmony with their aspirations to be a factor in their development. Such a role will even lead us to play a part in avoiding a bloody catastrophe in South Africa.

We need to heighten our efforts at building friendships with the peoples and countries of West Asia and North Africa. We have the second-largest Muslim population of any country in the world and can, therefore, legitimately expect to broaden the areas of co-operation. The time has come for us to sit with the governments of this region and to draw up imaginative long-term plans for expanding relations. For example, to exchange our excess food today and tomorrow for their oil, 20 years or so, later. A kind of economic diplomacy is required to cement our relations with the Middle East. Apart from trading links, we also gain valuable foreign exchange from the Gulf through the homeward remittances of the several hundred thousand Indians who work and live there. Located as we are, we should be the natural partners of the Middle Eastern countries for many of their needs in durable and perishable goods.

AS A NATION which stands to gain nothing from the Gulf war – for we supply offensive weapons to none – we are in a unique position to take the initiative and then work on it with patience and skill to end the suicidal war between Iran and Iraq. With the help of Saudi Arabia, France, Australia and Malaysia or Indonesia, we should sponsor a worldwide education campaign projecting the futility of this insanest of all wars with a view to shame the two parties in the conflict to come to the negotiating table. The blessings of an anguished, and a bored world await any nation which takes such an initiative. The time is now.

Israel is a fact of life in the Middle East. Any efforts we make to help the Arabs and the Israelis live in peace can only be in everybody's interest.

We have excellent relations with Japan and as our industries grow, we will become an even larger market for the products of Japanese innovation and technology. It is because of this eventuality that we must ensure that we do not become a dumping ground for Japanese temptations; mutuality is what the Japanese respect and we must practise this in trade with the Japanese right from the beginning. In the councils of the world we must lend our voice to the current plea that Japan opens up wider, and that South-East Asia, America or Europe are not flooded with Japanese products to a point from which only protectionism can emerge. We should be content with leaving the two Koreas in the active sphere of Japanese influence. The strengthening of Japan's relations with China should be viewed positively.

The nations of Latin and Central America have legitimate expectations of the United States and the closer they all get, the better for everybody. We have, all along, maintained the friendliest of relations with Australia and New Zealand, and in both trade and political perceptions, we can only grow closer to Australasia.

Since the world we live in and the future of the human race are locked onto the many fingers on the various nuclear buttons, India must make it abundantly clear to all and as often as necessary that our voice for nuclear sanity must carry the weight that our numbers entitle us to. An Indian life is no less valuable than an American's or a Russian's. Together with China, we comprise half the world's population. And together with China, we should strive to ensure total nuclear disarmament in the world.

This is a broad prescription. The Prime Minister must, of course, leave himself and India room to manoeuvre within these parameters. But the time has come for us to realise that we have permanent interests, and there is need to define them in the clearest possible terms, and to forge a policy that advances these interests. There is much evil in the world, but also goodness and goodwill. India is in a unique position as a developing, populous nation to explore this goodness. And add the goodwill. A nation which has proclaimed as its motto *Satyameva Jayate* cannot do less. ♦

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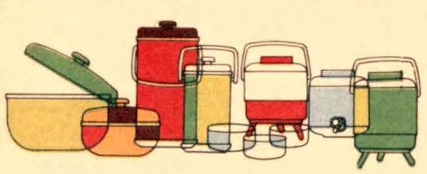

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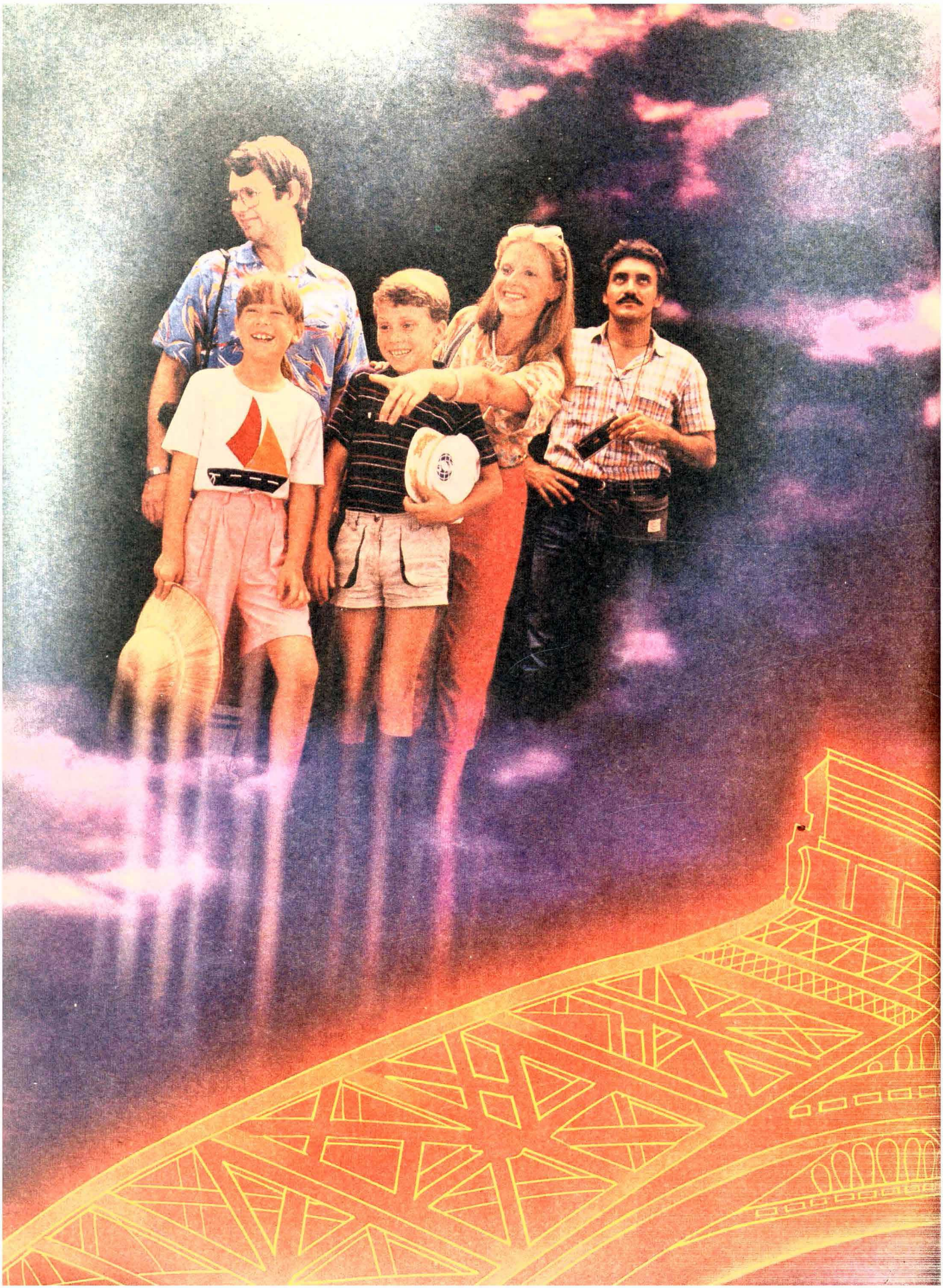

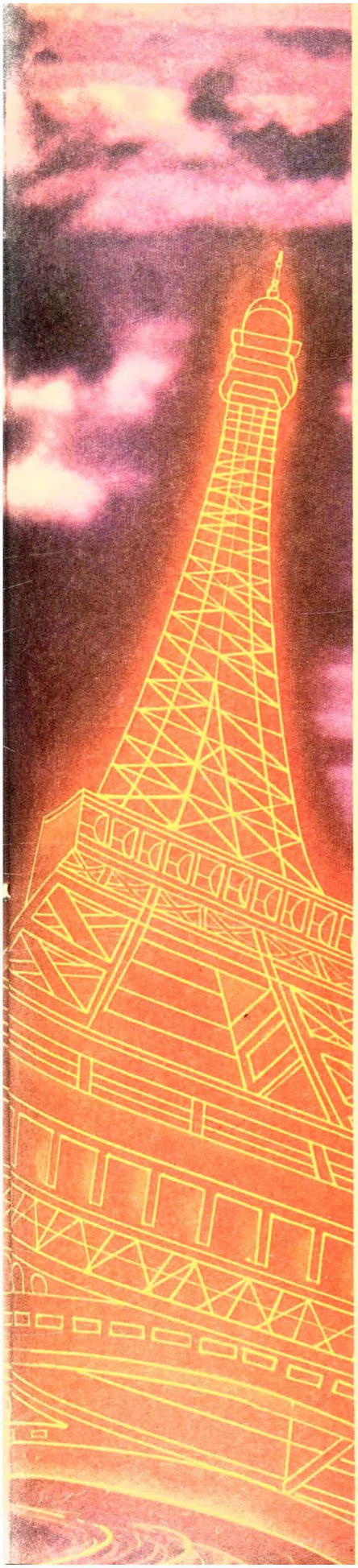

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CRASH!

Two of the UK's best-known expatriate millionaires are at the centre of a major row over their borrowing. Mahmud Sipra's empire has already crumbled, leaving behind debts of £ 55 million. And Abdul Shamji seems hard-pressed to repay the £ 25 million he owes. In this special report, we probe the row over their finances.

IN MAY 1985, **Imprint** reported on the unusual public row over the finances of two of the best-known and most flamboyant expatriate Asian millionaires. Mahmud Sipra, the former fiancé of film actress Salma Agha, and a high-living, free-spending, publicity-hungry Pakistani shipowner, had been accused of causing the collapse of Johnson Matthey Bankers (JMB), a British bullion bank. And Abdul Shamji, the high-profile Ugandan Asian Ismaili industrialist and property tycoon, had also been linked to the collapse of that bank.

Our first feature was based on the suspicion that both these men had borrowed substantially from JMB. Nobody seriously disputed that Sipra, whose antecedents were already a subject of some speculation, had done extremely well out of JMB. More surprising was the fact that Abdul Shamji, a pillar of Britain's Asian community, was linked to the bank. In an exclusive interview to **Imprint**, Shamji conceded that his Gomba group owed between £ 15-20 million to JMB, but insisted that the loans were secured by collateral and strongly disputed suggestions that he was over-extended.

Since our story first appeared, the JMB row has become the cause of a national storm in Britain, and the subject of a debate in the House of Commons. Both Shamji and Sipra have been named in parliament by angry Labour MPs who have alleged the two Asians were loaned millions by JMB, in an improper – if not actually fraudulent – manner. This month, we trace the new developments in this long-running saga.

At the centre of the saga is the failure of Johnson Matthey in September 1984. It had been rumoured in the city of London that the bank had lent too freely to various Asians whose financial positions were far from solid. Such reports led the Bank of England to examine JMB's books, and when one major JMB borrower (Mahmud Sipra, if Labour MP Brian Sedgemore is to be believed) defaulted, the Bank mounted a rescue operation. Auditors combed through Sipra's books, JMB froze his accounts and bounced his cheques, while the Bank of England pumped £ 100 million and an indemnity of £ 75 million to keep JMB from going bust.

On October 1, 1984, the Bank took over as the new owner of JMB, converted the £ 100 million injection into its capital and set about recovering JMB's loans. Rumours of fraud kept trickling out as did reports that JMB had made bad loans in excess of £ 200

million. The British government refused to comment on such reports and said it would wait for the official Bank of England report. This report finally appeared on June 20, 1985, and satisfied virtually nobody. Even though it claimed that 'no evidence of fraud by directors and staff has been discovered', reports that the City of London police Fraud Squad had been alerted, persisted.

MPs continued alleging that there was more to the JMB saga than met the eye till July 17, 1985, when it was officially announced that the Fraud Squad had been called in. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, meanwhile, made a surprise statement in the Commons, admitting that there had been irregularities in JMB's lending. He blamed Arthur Young, JMB's auditors, for not noticing this and said that the Bank would sue them. Arthur Young retaliated by suing Lawson for defamation, making him the first Chancellor to be so sued in this century.

MPs from all parties continued to press Lawson for more information and, finally, the government agreed to a debate on the subject on July 26. During the debate, and before it, three Labour MPs made several serious allegations about JMB, its directors and its borrowers. The MPs were Brian Sedgemore, Dennis Skinner and Oonagh McDonald and they suggested that fraud, kickbacks, and the acceptance of lavish hospitality had influenced JMB's lending policies. The allegations severely embarrassed Lawson, and Robin Leigh-Pemberton, the Governor of the Bank of England (whose resignation Sedgemore demanded). But they did the most damage to three businessmen whose names kept being brought up again and again. One of them, Michael Hepker, was a Rhodesian, but the other two were expatriate Asians. They were, of course, Mahmud Sipra and Abdul Shamji.

OF ALL THE ALLEGATIONS made in parliament, the ones against Sipra seemed to have the most substance. It is now widely accepted that Sipra was JMB's biggest borrower. His debts to JMB total £ 55 million (JMB's total of bad debts is £ 248 million), and though Sipra refuses to confirm this figure, he does not deny it either.

NIGEL LAWSON, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, came under heavy fire from MPs who demanded to know how JMB had been conned into lending Sipra £ 55 million.

As **Imprint** pointed out in May 1985, Sipra, a former Pakistani TV commentator, rose to great affluence in the mid-'70s. He started out as a shipowner, and then became a commodities trader. In 1983 the film-bug bit him, and he rescued a stalled British film called *The Jigsaw Man* with a cash injection of $ 5 million. "I sold it to the City as a commodities package," Sipra bragged to **Imprint** in 1983, referring to the source of this $ 5 million. It was an impressive claim because the City is, traditionally, wary of film projects.

Nevertheless, Sipra then secured financing for a multiplicity of film projects including *Pawn To King Three* (in which he would star himself along with fiancée Salma Agha), and *Khyber Horse*. At the time, there was considerable amazement that a star-crazy Pakistani could actually talk the City of London into advancing him millions for such projects.

Now, of course, it seems clear that when Sipra said 'City', what he really meant was 'JMB', whose directors seemed to repose infinite faith in him. This faith was cruelly shattered in September 1984, when JMB realised that it was not going to be easy getting its money back and froze Sipra's account. Sipra promptly went bust, his companies slid into receivership, and he took to claiming that South African interests had conspired to cause his collapse. He soon suffered another blow. Salma Agha left him and told interviewers that he was publicity-crazy.

Since then, the Sipra saga has taken one bizarre turn after another. Labour MP Brian Sedgemore alleged in the House of Commons that Ian Frazer, a JMB director, had been warned about Sipra in 1982. According to Sedgemore, Eric Ellen, Director of the International Maritime Bureau, had told Frazer to be careful about Sipra. Frazer, his faith in Sipra boundless, had apparently retorted: "You chaps are all the same. You never give anyone a chance." In fact, as Sedgemore points out, when JMB gave Sipra this chance, he failed to perform. Since JMB had started looking at his books, seven of his companies had either been wound up or put into receivership.

Worse was still to come. Sedgemore told the House of Commons that Sipra had an unsavoury reputation. His friends, he said, called him The Cobra, and his enemies called him The Devil. These names were inspired by Sipra's involvement in enterprises that were less than above-board, one of which had led a US court to accuse him of 'old fashioned piracy and overwhelming greed'.

This allegation concerned a legal case in the US District Court. In 1978, Intra-Span, a Sipra company, acted as agent for Rascator Marine, a Liberian company controlled by Miles Galin, a business associate of Sipra's. Rascator chartered a ship, the *Ogden Fraser*, which accepted a cargo of steel (from Manuel International) and chemicals (from Dow Chemical), and agreed to deliver it to Bombay.

Dow and Manuel later sued, alleging that Sipra diverted the ship, un-

Mahmud Sipra with Salma Agha: now even she claims that he was a publicity hound.

loaded the cargo at Cadiz in Spain, and considered selling it to Pakistan. Delivering judgement in the case in 1982, Judge Kevin Duffy ruled in their favour. Sipra, he said, was party to 'a larcenous plan' to sell the cargo on the high seas rather than deliver it to its official owners. "There is no question that it was off-loaded at Cadiz for nefarious reasons," said the judge, calling it 'old-fashioned piracy' and referring to Sipra's 'callous indifference to the law'.

Brian Sedgemore cited this case and asked: "How comes it that a British bank, supervised by the Governor of the Bank of England, could be lending money to a man who, throughout the whole period was, according to the judiciary, acting with a callous indifference to the law in relation to fraud?"

So far, Sipra has not issued substantive denials of the facts of Sedgemore's allegations. About the court action, he does not dispute that it took place, but claims that it involved others as well (presumably, a reference to Galin and Rascator) and insists that his group is responsible for under ten per cent of JMB's losses. As these losses are estimated at £ 248 million, that would put Sipra's borrowings at under £ 25 million, less than half of what (£ 55 million) he is believed to owe.

The most dramatic turn to the Sipra saga has been *The Observer*'s revelation that his wife's family was also a large borrower from JMB. When Sipra's marriage broke up, he was at pains to point out that he had made all his money himself and that the Imams, a family of Pakistani shipowners, whose daughter Samina he had married, had nothing to do with his business activities. After JMB collapsed, Samina's brothers, Azam and Amjad Imam, denied that they had any business connections with Sipra or any bad debts to JMB.

The Bank of England's official report into the JMB collapse, issued in June 1985, blamed the debacle on 'loosely associated groups of companies run by businessmen from Pakistan'. At the time, it was assumed that the Bank meant Sipra and Shamji (whose nationality it had got wrong). Now, it seems likely, that the reference was to the Imams who control their shipping empire through a Liberian registered company called Altramar. Despite the Imams' denial in October 1984, *The Observer* insists that they owe £ 27.3 million to JMB. Yet another twist is that Arthur Young, the JMB auditors who the Bank is suing, are the Imams' auditors too.

If *The Observer* has its facts right, then Sipra and his in-laws together,

roughly £ 82 million.

THE THRUST of the attack on Sipra has been that he was the sort of man any banker should have looked quite closely at before agreeing to lend any money to. The same, however, cannot be said of the other businessman who has also been linked to the JMB collapse.

In many ways, Abdul Shamji is the perfect example of the Asian who has made good in the UK. As *The Tatler* noted in February 1985, 'Abdul Shamji has amassed his fortune in less than a decade', adding that his 'assets are worth in excess of £ 125 million'. In August 1984, *South* had taken the same line: "In little more than ten years, Shamji has established Gomba UK as a major trading company with extensive interests in property, manufacturing and shipping. Its turnover is well in excess of US $ 100 million a year." The Indian press said much the same sort of thing. In March 1985, *The Times Of India* referred to him as 'one of the UK's leading businessmen who could count amongst his friends, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Trade and Industry Secretary Norman Tebbit'.

According to legend, Shamji came to England in 1975, when Idi Amin threw him out of Uganda where he ran a huge business empire. He started out with only £ 50,000 and built up his Gomba group in the UK with interests in hotels, property, theatres, luggage and safe deposit centres. That such a man, a friend of Mrs Thatcher's, no less, should be put in the Sipra class, seemed hard to believe.

In May, **Imprint** listed the major allegations against Shamji along with his replies. He claimed, then, that he owed JMB only £ 15-20 million and insisted that the loans were fully secured. He referred to a series of negative articles about him in *The Observer* and said that the allegations contained in those articles were baseless and libellous. He was, he said, suing *The Observer.*

Unfortunately for Shamji, following the publication of the Bank of England's report into JMB in June, most British papers named him as one of JMB's largest borrowers. And in July, Labour MPs Oonagh McDonald and Dennis Skinner made several serious allegations against him. Skinner claimed in parliament that Shamji, 'the friend of the PM', had invested in a factory in Strood, Kent, shortly before the area had been declared an enterprise zone. "Somebody must have tipped him off," said Skinner. "He'd already bought a derelict factory three months before it was declared an enterprise zone on November 16, 1982. Gomba UK turned up early in 1982, in a Rolls-Royce, and took over the factory. Did he get that money from JMB as well? Is that part of the £ 20 million he owes? It has been a litany of scandal from one end to the other."

MRS THATCHER refused requests for an inquiry into the relationship between Shamji's Gomba group and JMB. She was embarrassed by claims that Shamji was her friend.

If Shamji had been tipped off, then the transaction was clearly improper, but this, in itself, does not mean that JMB was wrong in lending Gomba money or that he was overextended. But other allegations focussed on Shamji's links with JMB. Brian Sedgemore claimed that the son of James Firth, a JMB director, had worked for Gomba. Gomba accepted that this was true but denied that this influenced Firth or JMB in its favour.

Worse still was the allegation made by the *Financial Times* on July 20, 1985. The paper claimed that though Shamji's debt repayments to JMB had been rescheduled, Gomba was unable to meet even this new schedule. In fact, the instalment due on June 28, 1985, had not been paid. The *Financial Times* and *The Observer* both seemed to think that Shamji was having trouble finding the money.

All of this caused another Labour MP, Oonagh McDonald, to demand that the government set up a tribunal of inquiry into the relationship between Gomba and JMB. Mrs Thatcher turned down the demand saying: "I see no purpose in the establishment of such an inquiry." Nevertheless, the pressure on the government mounted as Labour MPs kept bringing up Shamji's alleged friendship with the Prime Minister and with Norman Tebbit.

Shortly after this, Shamji spoke to *The Sunday Times* and denied that he was a friend of Mrs Thatcher's, all the publicity to this effect notwithstanding. He had, he said, only met her at a few functions. This claim was contradicted by *Private Eye* which insisted that Mrs Thatcher had, even before she became Prime Minister, given Shamji glowing references. Shamji's statement to *The Sunday Times,* claimed *Private Eye,* was prompted by the government which now wished to distance itself from him and any embarrassment.

Shamji has, however, found an unusual way of retaliating. He has always maintained that he is a target of an *Observer* witch-hunt and early one July morning, travellers at London's Liverpool Street station were surprised to find posters that took this line, pasted on the wall. The posters read:

"Is Oona McDonald, MP, a paid lackey of *The Observer*?

What is her 'special' relationship with Lorana Sullivan?

Was Abdul Shamji attacked in the House because he is likely to be granted certain concessions in Africa, held presently by Tiny

Abdul Shamji: never mind the conspiracies, what about the money?

Rowlands – owner of *The Observer*?

What action is Parliament taking to remove any corrupt misuse of Parliamentary privilege?"

It didn't take much to work out who was behind the fly posting! Even though two names, those of Oonagh McDonald and Tiny Rowland were misspelt, the poster was crudely effective in publicising Shamji's belief that *The Observer*'s Lorana Sullivan was part of a conspiracy against him. The allegations against Rowland were also predictable – three months ago, Shamji supporters had claimed that Rowland hated Shamji for opposing him in a battle to take over Harrods. Now, African concessions had replaced Harrods.

In March, *The Times Of India* had claimed that jealousy and racial prejudice were the causes of the campaign against Shamji. In May, he told **Imprint** that he was on the verge of winning control of Wembley stadium and that his rivals in that battle were planting stories against him. At the same time, his supporters even alleged that as Shamji's rivals were Jewish and some *Observer* staff members were also Jewish, this was all a gigantic Jewish conspiracy.

It is difficult to know what to make of all these conspiracy theories. Clearly, something has gone badly wrong. If Shamji is really worth the £125 million the *Tatler* claims he is, then it is difficult to see how a debt of £ 15-20 million can land him in so much trouble. Few businessmen can expect to come out of a public controversy like this with their reputations intact. Obviously, Gomba would be better off simply paying back the JMB debts, even if it means disposing of some assets, rather than allowing its name to be dragged through the mud.

Though Shamji insists that Gomba has not acted improperly and can pay back its loans, it seems unlikely that the matter will be settled, no matter how many conspiracies and witch-hunts are blamed, until the money is repaid.

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RAJ SETHIA: The Inside Story

Six months ago, when Raj Sethia was arrested, the CBI acted as though it had pulled off a major coup. Now, its case is in tatters and the Indian banks are finding it difficult to recover their loans.

How did Sethia go bust? Will the money ever be recovered? Will he be released? We try and answer these complex questions.

"I MUST BE," Raj Sethia told an interviewer a couple of months ago, "the second most famous person in India after Rajiv Gandhi." Despite the initial flurry of publicity that greeted his arrest in March and typed him as the con-man of the year, little has been heard of the Sethia case in recent weeks. As *India Today* pointed out in its July 31 issue, the Sethia case does not seem to be the big fraud that the CBI had first made it out to be. In early March, the CBI alleged that Sethia had defrauded Indian banks of $ 1,000 million.* On March 27, this became $ 146 million, and on June 17, even this figure was further reduced to $ 10.4 million.

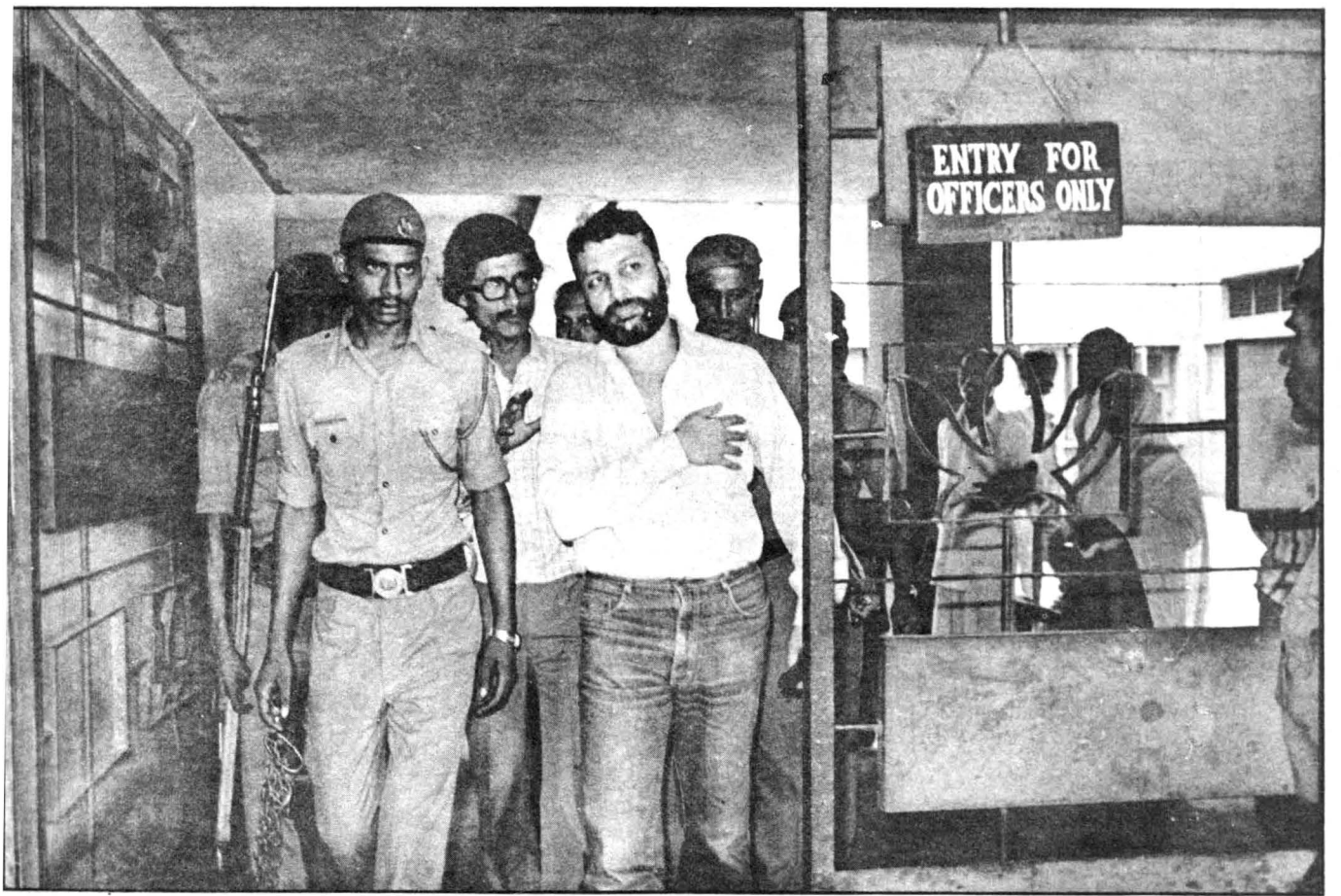
Meanwhile, Sethia insists that he is innocent of all the charges and points out that not everyone whose liabilities exceed his assets is necessarily a fraud. In fact, say his supporters, by trying to frame a fraud case against him, the CBI has actually damaged the Indian banks' chances of recovering his obligations to them. Worst of all, it is now beginning to look as if the fraud charges will be increasingly difficult to substantiate in a court of law.

That Raj (his full name is Rajendra) Sethia is the youngest son of the late Sohan Lal Sethia, the famous jute trader, is now well-known. Sethia's flamboyant life-style and high-risk business techniques have also received much publicity. What is less known is how a man who was well on his way to becoming the world's richest Indian went so badly wrong and ended up sitting in Tihar Jail. **Imprint** talked to Sethia's associates, relatives and rivals, and examined his financial affairs to research this report.

Raj Sethia has always been a gambler. At his peak, he owned 120 racehorses and a string of betting shops. His business methods reflected this love of gambling. While he did dabble in industry, he was essentially a trader. He made his money by buying commodities at one price and reselling them at peak prices. This didn't always work. In 1974, he went bust and had to be bailed out by his brothers. Later, there were constant clashes within the family because Raj (who had an Economics degree from London University) thought that his brothers were too conservative in their trading.

After such clashes broke up the family group, Raj set up his own Esal group of companies. He concentrated on trading and cultivated influential political contacts in several Third World countries, especially Sudan and Nigeria. Luck stayed with him till 1983, and he worked hard for the money, often spending nights at his office on London's Bedford Row. He built up a few assets – the Holland Park Hotel in New York, the Jokai tea plantation in Assam, a small bank in America and real estate in England and Nigeria – but his main business was trading: he invested virtually

*All figures in US $



Raj Sethia in police custody: the coup in Nigeria finished him off.

every penny he could lay his hands on in commodities, and made millions in the process. By 1982, he was the richest of the three Sethia brothers, and well on his way to becoming the richest Indian in the world.

Unfortunately, Sethia was overextended. Because he had got rich making huge profits on commodity trading, using bank money, he thought nothing of borrowing more than was prudent. Indian banks in London, short of borrowers, probably recognised this but lent to him anyhow, appreciating that he had been a good customer in the past. But, because he was so tightly stretched, there was always the danger that one bad period could bring the Esal empire crumbling down. To keep growing, Esal had to hope that commodity prices would not tumble, and that there would be no sustained losses.

Sethia appreciated this and to safeguard his commodity transactions, he began investing heavily in the governments of the countries he traded with. He poured money into Nigeria and Sudan, and bought politicians by the dozen. Unfortunately for him, he neglected to do the same in India, not realising that his dependence on nationalised Indian banks left him extremely vulnerable.

In July 1983, Sethia decided to pour the astonishing sum of $ 40 million into the Nigerian general election. He justified such extravagance by assuming that when the government of his choice was elected, he would earn many times that amount. His friends did win the election but Sethia had made three mistakes. Firstly, $ 40 million represented an enormous drain on his resources and left him without a cash cushion in case of adversity. Secondly, he did not realise that in the period following the election, there would be a delay of six months, because of a financial crisis, before business would resume as usual. And thirdly, it did not strike him that the military would take over.

By the second half of 1983, Sethia was beginning to feel a financial squeeze. The Nigerians were delaying clearing bills and accepting shipments. As a result, many of the goods he had bought could not be shipped. He ended up warehousing them in Nigeria and found that he had $ 40 million tied up in inventory. At the same time, Premjit Singh, a director of the Central Bank of India, Sethia's second-biggest creditors, began to ask questions about his credit-worthiness. Singh's questions erupted into a boardroom row and trickled into the Indian papers.

Worried by this unforeseen turn of events, Sethia considered unloading some of his stocks. But even this did not provide a solution. The world commodities market slumped in the last quarter of 1983 and prices crashed: to have sold then, would have meant selling at a huge loss. Sethia resolved, instead, to sit out the crisis and wait for things to clear up in Nigeria.

This strategy might have worked except for one event: on December 31, 1983, the Nigerian armed forces

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHAL GIROTA COURTESY ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY

overthrew the civilian government and seized control. Their first actions were to freeze payments to suppliers and to search out the financiers of the corrupt government they had deposed. Obviously, Raj Sethia was high on the list. In early January 1984, soldiers went on a rampage and looted Sethia's warehouses. Some stocks were arbitrarily sold off. When it was all over, $ 10 million had been realised from goods that were worth $ 40 million.

Unfortunately for Sethia, there was also a coup in Sudan, another country he traded with. There, too, the new regime began to victimise friends and financiers of deposed President Numeiry, and Sethia found his funds blocked.

Desperate, Sethia decided to unload the stocks he owned, regardless of the price he would get. In the process, he lost $ 50 million. For instance, he had bought sugar at $ 340 a tonne to sell to his buddies in the Nigerian government at $ 420 a tonne. At the time, an enormous profit had seemed assured. Now, he was reduced to disposing of the sugar at a mere $ 150 a tonne.

Suddenly, things had gone very wrong for Raj Sethia. He no longer had a cash cushion, his two principal trading partners had turned against him, and the banks had begun to demand repayment of the millions he owed them. On January 29, 1984, things took a turn for the worse when the Allied Arab Bank filed a criminal complaint against Sethia alleging that he had forged a bill of lading. Scotland Yard sought to interview him, and searched his offices.

Meanwhile, Sethia had escaped to Denmark but still insisted that he could repay his debts. On February 15, 1984, he invited representatives of six banks to Copenhagen to negotiate repayment. They met for 48 hours and ironed out a rescue package. Sethia then shifted residence to Spain, optimistic that the package would go through.

Unfortunately, he had not reckoned on two factors. Firstly, David Dean, an old friend and a small creditor, fell out with him after a visit to Spain. Dean then launched a one-man crusade against the rescue, a campaign that turned opinion in Britain against Sethia. And secondly, the Finance Ministry seemed less keen on the package than the banks had hoped. While the banks argued that it was worth advancing him another $ 5 million in cash and $ 18 million in securities to get their money back, Ministry officials thought they were throwing good money after bad. By August 1984, it became clear that the package would not go through.

PRANAB MUKHERJEE was Finance Minister when Sethia was loaned millions by Indian banks. The CBI has tried — without success — to implicate Mukherjee in the case.

Accordingly, on November 7, 1984, Esal was declared bankrupt. Sethia, still in Spain, announced that he would, nevertheless, repay his debts. Unfortunately for him, Rajiv Gandhi's government (sworn in after Mrs Gandhi's assassination on October 31, 1984), took a completely different view of the whole affair from its predecessor. This government was obsessed with seeming 'clean' and was determined to make examples out of the chairmen of three banks which had lent to Sethia (they were fired), and out of Sethia, himself.

Sethia did not perceive this at all and turned up in Calcutta in December 1984, assuming that nothing had changed. He called on bank chairmen, visited government officials and sent them a letter giving his summary of the situation. ("I feel my moral bound duty to clear whatever big or small indebtedness that may be, to all concerned.") When he received no response, he flew to Delhi to negotiate further. It was then that the CBI arrested him, on March 2, 1985 at the Maurya Hotel and charged him with fraud.

Sethia claims that during his interrogation, the CBI tried to get him to implicate Pranab Mukherjee and R K Dhawan. When he refused, the CBI opposed his bail application. He has all along protested his innocence and claims that the CBI is having trouble substantiating its charges. In his letter to the bank chairmen, he had written: "It has been noticed that realisation of bills from various parts of the Third World where I have been involved, needs personal follow-up, which institutions are incapable of rendering. It is, therefore, of paramount importance, that I, with my team, am allowed to resolve these outstanding problems."

The CBI has rejected this contention, something Sethia takes grave exception to. His associates claim that the pattern of debt recovery supports him. On March 2, 1984, he owed Punjab National Bank (PNB) $ 130.31 million. By February 28, 1985, this was down to $ 91 million. In March 1984, he owed Central Bank of India (CBI) $ 49.55 million. By February 1985, this was down to $ 44 million. In March 1984, he owed Union Bank of India (UBI) $ 17.04 million. By February 1985, this had gone down to $ 15 million. In less than a year, he had paid back $ 54 million. Since then, debt recovery has been much slower. From March to July 1985, only $ 6 million have been recovered. Most of this money comes from the sale of Sethia's assets in the UK: the more difficult recoveries have not been affected.

At the moment, Sethia has the following assets:

a) His 50 per cent of the Jokai tea plantation is worth $ 18 million.

b) His Holland Park Hotel in New

Arrested on charges of fraud: will the CBI be able to provide the evidence?

York is worth $ 12 million.

c) His UK properties are worth $ 15 million.

d) He has *benami* properties in Nigeria worth $ 20 million.

This list totals up to $ 65 million in easily recoverable assets though there are fears about the manner in which they are being disposed of. Sethia's London home, said to be worth £ 5 million, was sold for only $ 1.9 million.

But even allowing for this $ 65 million worth of assets, there are problems. Sethia's total liabilities are $ 150 million, $ 85 million more than these assets. The key to a settlement of his debts is the recovery of $ 125 million worth of Nigerian and Sudanese bills. Should some of these amounts not be recoverable, then he is insured by Lloyd's upto $ 75 million.

Of the three Indian banks, both PNB and UBI are relatively secure. The main unsecured debtor is Central Bank. The banks have taken a totally different line from the CBI, which was called in by the Finance Ministry. Not one has filed a criminal complaint or complained that there is anything wrong with Sethia's accounts. Their only interest is to recover the money from Nigeria and Sudan.

As the banks are not able to provide evidence of fraud and as the money seems recoverable, the CBI sees its case slipping away. As *India Today* notes: "The CBI realises that as more money flows into the coffers of the banks, its case will become progressively weaker." It may not be coincidental that the money has now stopped flowing in with the same speed. In March, Lloyd's seemed ready to pay $ 20 million of its liabilities. It is entitled to meet with the parties concerned before paying, but Sethia was under arrest and the CBI refused the Lloyd's representatives permission to meet Sethia. To the bank's disappointment, Lloyd's refused to pay the $ 20 million.

One course of action would be for Sethia to direct the recovery of funds from Nigeria and Sudan himself. Both these countries have their own financial problems and would gladly not pay their debts. Sethia seems confident that some of the money will turn up if he is allowed to recover it himself. The CBI is concerned that if he were allowed to go to Nigeria and Sudan, he would abscond. Sethia has responded to this by offering to stay in India and still clear his debts. This, too, has been turned down by the CBI.

As far as the CBI's own case goes, the fraud charge is going to be difficult to prove without the co-operation of the banks. All the CBI has is a passport case, the maximum sentence for which is six months. It seems entirely possible now that the Indian government may end up with a scenario in which everyone loses. The CBI may well lose its fraud case, the banks may lose the money they could otherwise have recovered, and Sethia, who has languished in jail for six months now, has seen his reputation crumble, regardless of whether he is finally acquitted or not. ♦

PHOTOGRAPH BY CREATIVE EYE COURTESY SUNDAY OBSERVER

VARDHA: The Don Is Free

The Varadarajan Mudaliar saga continues. This time, away from the glare of publicity.

FOUR MONTHS AGO, organised crime and police corruption in Bombay obsessed the press. Varadarajan Mudaliar, alias Vardha, became nationally famous as did Julio Ribeiro, Bombay's high-profile Police Commissioner. The uproar caused B G Deshmukh, Maharashtra's Chief Secretary, to take a personal interest in the matter, and the state government announced a crack-down. As cassette tapes and video cassettes containing evidence of a police-underworld nexus were leaked to the press, Ribeiro announced that 92 underworld figures would be arrested under the National Security Act (NSA).

The move was long overdue. In recent years, the underworld has come out of the alleys and back streets and into the open. Gang wars are conducted in broad daylight, men are shot in court rooms, and weapons are supplied for communal riots. There was an 11 per cent rise in the murder rate between 1983 and 1984 (from 261 to 293), and links between the police force and the underworld have grown.

Unfortunately, media interest petered out two months ago. The same fate seems to have befallen the much-publicised crack-down. Ribeiro has been transferred, and the criminals continue to walk free. Even Varadarajan Mudaliar, who was arrested in Madras with great fanfare in June, has now been released.

In this report, **Imprint** traces the roots of the national uproar in May, examines its outcome, and investigates what happened to Vardha.

IN MAY 1985, we interviewed and profiled Mudaliar. At the time, he was confident that he would not be arrested. The police, he insisted, had no evidence against him. This confidence was misplaced. Soon after Vardha's links with the Bombay police force became widely publicised, the state government decided it had to act. The two police Inspectors who had been taped talking to him in the now famous Vardha cassette were suspended, and DCP Pawar, who had been conducting a lonely battle against the don, suddenly found that he had the full weight of the government behind him.

On April 29, Ribeiro signed a detention order under the National Security Act and asked the government to confirm it. Presumably, Vardha got wind of this. In late April he had been swaggering around Bombay, posing near the Gateway of India for *The Illustrated Weekly*, and acting as though he had nothing to fear. However, once the police decided to act, Vardha disappeared.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GAUTAM PATOLE

BY AMRITA SHAH

The police, a little put out by this vanishing act, then posted public notices all over Vardha's fiefdom – at his Telang Road residence, at his Matunga Market office, at Varadarajan Nagar at Antop Hill and elsewhere. The notices proclaimed that he was an offender and instructed him to turn himself in.

Vardha ignored these notices for as long as he could. However, his youngest son was due to get married in the last week of May in Madras, and Vardha was determined to attend the wedding. On May 21, he surfaced. His lawyers sought an injunction from the Madras High Court, restraining the police from arresting him. The injunction was granted and the team of officers from Bombay who had been looking for him in Madras went back, empty-handed.

The Bombay police tried again. A second team, headed by Inspector Godbole of the Matunga police station, went to Madras. The team's lawyers told the High Court that its injunction amounted to anticipatory bail which could not be granted in case of detention under NSA. The High Court agreed, the injunction was vacated, and Vardha gave himself up to the police team. On June 5, a triumphant Godbole returned to Bombay with a more restrained, but still defiant, Vardha. The police were convinced that they could keep him behind bars under NSA for many months and sent him to the Nasik jail to distance him from his activities in Bombay.

The police had not reckoned with Vardha's luck with the law. Unlike other hoodlums, Vardha has nearly always managed to get the courts to rule in his favour: when DCP Pawar launched a crack-down on him, he retaliated by embroiling him in a law suit, an unusual course of action for a gangster. (See **Imprint**, May 1985). In June, Mohan Mudaliar, Vardha's son, filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court challenging his father's detention. The Court admitted the writ, but before matters could go any further, luck intervened on Vardha's behalf. The Advisory Board, which reviews detentions under NSA, decided to set him free. The charges against Vardha, it ruled, had not been framed correctly: a criticism that said little for the Bombay police's competence. And so, on July 16, Vardha was a free man once again.

SINCE HIS RELEASE, however, Vardha has not found his old form. He has been faced with two major obstacles. The first is that his period underground and his arrest in Madras damaged the aura of invulnerability that he had so carefully built up over the years. Though he did manage to have the detention order set aside, his old associates seem to feel that the don has lost some of his fabled influence. The second obstacle has been the attitude of DCP Pawar, the hot-headed officer who has been Vardha's bitterest enemy over the last three years. Whereas earlier, Pawar was fighting a lonely battle, the press publicity has now turned him into a heroic figure. The state government cannot stop him from pursuing Vardha now and his transfer to Amravati has also been stalled.

Among Vardha's chief lieutenants were Khaja (the owner of the infamous Janith restaurant) and Parameswaran. Now Parameswaran has left and has set up his own operation, while Khaja, put off by the crack-down, has more or less retired. Khaja's inactivity has adversely affected many of Vardha's operations. It was always Khaja who enforced Vardha's word, and now that he has taken a back seat, the don's authority has diminished. Sometimes, Khaja can still be persuaded to flex a little muscle – recently, he had a video parlour, run by one of Parameswaran's men, vacated – but such instances are rare.

Worse still, Vardha's carefully nurtured image as a social worker has also begun to tatter. Emboldened by his arrest, and supported by the Antop Hill police station (under Pawar), the Central Railway authorities demolished constructions erect-

ed illegally on railway property by the Jai Bhavani Mitra Mandal, a so-called social service organisation of which Vardha and his henchman, Tillu (real name: Darshanlal Dhall), are trustees. The constructions were found to contain arms and ammunition, despite the socially laudable, stated objectives of the Mandal.

Soma (real name: Mohinder Singh Vig), another of Vardha's key men, was also arrested as part of the crack-down and was later released when his brother, Jaspal Singh, filed a writ petition challenging his detention. This was a considerable boost to Vardha because it displayed that his gang could beat the law. Soma lost no time in returning to his old activities.

Unfortunately, Pawar was out to bust Soma's operation. On July 30, the DCP was on his nightly round when he saw a car laden with illicit liquor. Pawar gave chase in his own car and got a wireless vehicle to join him. The bootlegger's car was one of Soma's vehicles and soon two other cars converged on the scene. Soma's henchmen, the occupants of the three cars, then attacked the police party with acid bulbs and stones, but were eventually overpowered.

The next night, Pawar decided to break up Soma's operation once and for all. He went to the Panvel check *naka* but took proper precautions: an ACP and an Inspector were posted at strategic points. Soon, they saw another of Soma's vehicles and followed it to the main liquor godown on the Panvel highway. In the hills, near the highway, was the distillery that produced all the hooch. Soma's driver pointed this out to the policemen and they raided it. The 200 men working there fled, but seven were arrested and the entire distillery was destroyed.

In early August, Soma was arrested along with six of his henchmen. Soma got out on bail, but the henchmen are still in.

SO, HOW STRONG is Vardha now? How badly has he been hit by the reverses of the last four months? It seems clear, in retrospect, that he underestimated the public outrage that would erupt once the extent of his activities was revealed. In March 1985, he was the uncrowned king of the Bombay suburbs. Large sections of the police force were on his pay-roll and the one officer who had opposed him – Y C Pawar – was embroiled in law suits. At the time, Pawar was considering negotiating with Vardha and was about to be transferred.

If it wasn't for Pawar, Vardha would have regained all his powers by now. But even Pawar's campaign can only succeed in the short run. In the long run, it is business as usual.

Then came the famous cassette tape that changed everything. Nobody seriously doubts that Vardha taped his conversation with the two Inspectors and released the tape himself. He seemed to think that by revealing that police Inspectors consorted with him, he could discredit the police force. The suggestion that more such tapes existed, was meant to intimidate and frighten every one of the many policemen who had partaken of his hospitality.

Vardha was right: upto a point. The image of the Bombay police force has still not recovered from the corruption revelations of March-April 1985. Where he miscalculated was in assuming that the press would concentrate on the corrupt policemen and ignore him. Instead, newspapers and magazines decided to probe the underworld and its influence. Vardha then tried to brazen it out, breaking a long media silence (for years, only one passport-size photo of him had been available) to claim innocence. Nobody believed him, and the uproar finally forced the police to act.

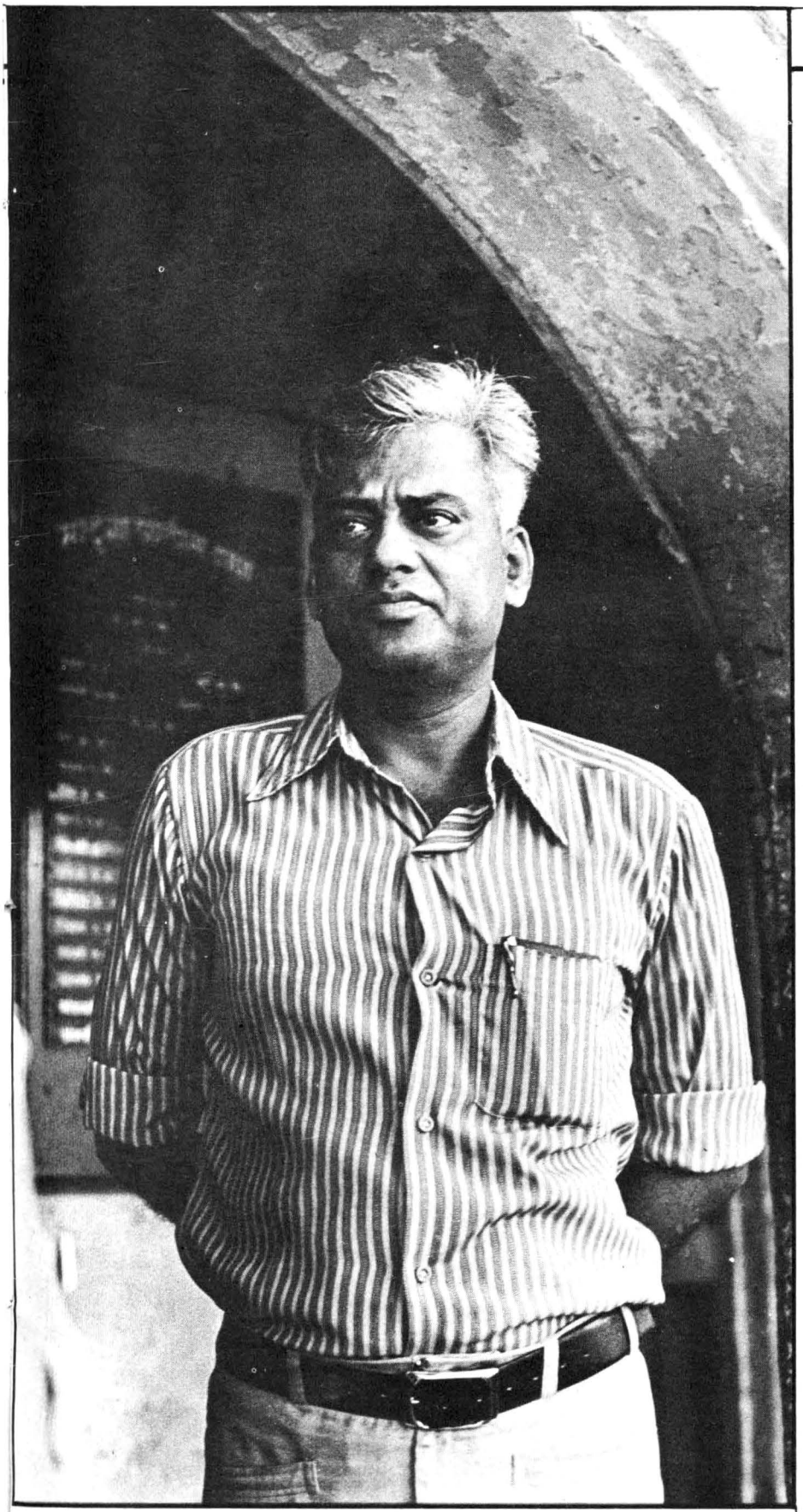
How much damage the police force has done him remains to be seen. Pawar claims that by smashing Soma's distillery, he has destroyed the source of 60 per cent of the hooch that used to be sold in South Bombay. Even if this is an exaggeration, it is indisputable that since Pawar went on his rampage, many of Vardha's operations have suffered. It is also true that after the arrest, Vardha's lustre has faded somewhat in the eyes of the criminal fraternity.

But these are temporary phenomena. Had the police succeeded in locking up Vardha, Khaja, Tillu and Soma for a year or two, then it is conceivable that the organisation Vardha had painstakingly built up over the last decade, would have begun to crack. With all of them still free to tend to their businesses, this is not going to happen. At the most, the organisation will lie low for a while.

There is also a limit to what Pawar can do. He can only smash a certain number of hooch stills or assist in the demolition of a few illegal constructions. Vardha's activities, however, go much beyond this. He collects protection money from thousands of slum-dwellers and shopkeepers involved in innumerable smuggling operations (he is said to be the Indian link in international drug smuggling), and operates several gambling establishments. If a few distilleries are smashed, then it will hurt Vardha's finances, but in the long run, he can always rebuild them once Pawar is transferred.

Vardha also has close links with police officers at virtually every level. (Some of them were named in **Imprint**, May 1985.) At the moment, they are lying low but, as no action has been taken against them, there is nothing to stop them from assuming that it is business as usual once memories of this episode fade. Even in the famous cassette tape incident, only a preliminary inquiry has been completed: there is no talk of publishing its findings, and it is expected that the two Inspectors will soon be reinstated.

In April, when media interest in Vardha was at its height, Ribeiro had announced a major crack-down on



Y C Pawar: finally getting his own back on Varadarajan Mudaliar.

organised crime. Nothing like that has actually taken place, apart from the botched arrest of Vardha. The 92 criminals who were on the police list have not, in fact, been detained and, apart from Pawar's battle against Vardha, there has been no let-up in organised crime in Bombay.

The unofficial police line seems to be that after the fiasco of Vardha's arrest, the government has appreciated the need to tread carefully. Officially, all the police will say is that Vardha is under surveillance; off the record, officers say that they are preparing a new detention order. There is also talk of externing Khaja, Soma and Tillu.

It remains to be seen whether anything will come of this talk. Past experience suggests that little action will follow. It is relatively easy to arrest Vardha and then blame the courts when he is released for lack of evidence. If this police force is serious about stamping out organised crime, then what it needs to do is launch an investigation into police corruption. Until that is done, Vardha's men in the force will scuttle any move against him.

Unfortunately, the police force is reluctant to launch any such investigation. On the heels of the Vardha cassette came another disclosure: a video cassette showing policemen at a party allegedly hosted by an underworld figure. Ribeiro transferred the policemen but many of them went to court and had the transfers stalled. Next, the video cassette saga turned into a brawl between Ribeiro and the then Home Secretary B K Chougule, who had allegedly leaked the cassette to the press. Finally, the Chief Minister intervened and Chougule and Ribeiro were both transferred.

Now, a new team of law enforcement officials is in charge of Bombay, and while the new men are not fighting with each other, they seem reluctant to take on organised crime. So, in a few months, Vardha's men in the police force will reassert themselves, Pawar will be transferred, and Vardha will resume all his old rackets. ♦

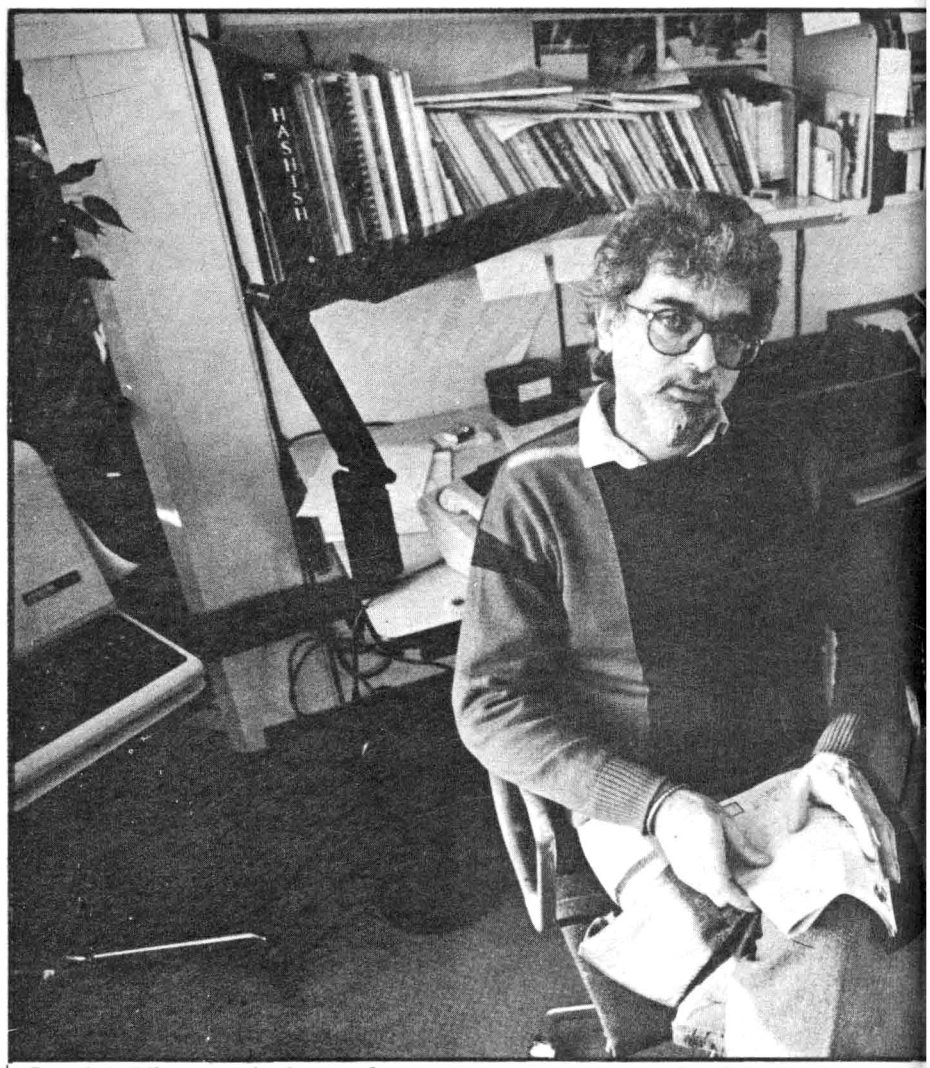
PARSI

FARRUKH DHONDY is best known in India as a writer (two of his short stories have appeared in **Imprint**) and as a former 'Debonair' columnist. He has won fame in England too, as the author of three highly regarded collections of short stories and one well-received novel.

Dhondy moved into television full-time last year when he was appointed Commissioning Editor for Multi-Cultural Programming on Channel Four. Among his first acts was the cancellation of 'Eastern Eye' and 'Black On Black', two popular ethnic TV magazines. He also encouraged people like Darcus Howe and Tariq Ali, who shared his left-wing political perspective, to make films for television.

The disquiet over these actions finally exploded when 'The Painter And The Pest', the first of Tariq Ali's TV documentaries, was broadcast. The film, narrated by Salman Rushdie, whose idea it originally was, concerned a college lecturer from Bangalore who went to America and discovered an outstanding painter called Shapinsky. The film was criticised as being hype-ridden and manipulative. The art critic of the 'Guardian' even questioned how great a discovery' Shapinsky really was.

Dhondy says he found the entire episode quite amusing. He is similarly unaffected by the other criticisms of his programming policies. In this interview he talks about his perception of ethnic broadcasting.



Imprint: ***What exactly do you do at Channel Four?***

Farrukh Dhondy: I'm the multi-cultural Commissioning Editor. There are 12 commissioning editors of which I am one. The others are responsible for things like art, sport, etc. When Channel Four was set up, three years ago, it interpreted its role – of putting on stuff the other channels didn't have, of partly catering to the ethnic minorities. And so, they called it multi-cultural, but really it's mono-culture – to represent the people of the black community in Britain.

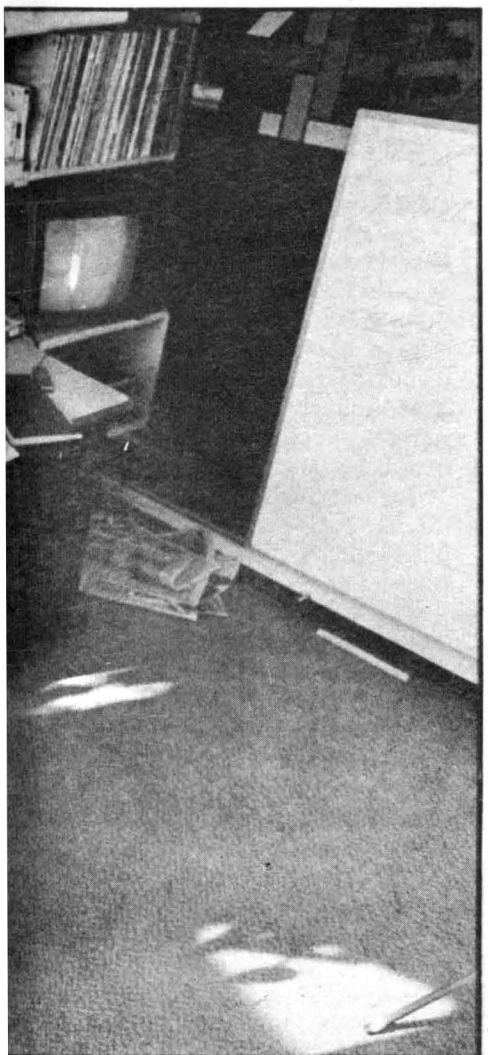
So, I'm here to commission programmes, of, from and for – not necessarily by – the black community.

Was there a Commissioning Editor for Multi-Cultural Programming before you?

Yes, there was. A person called Sue Woodford who had worked as a producer before and was part of the lobby to see more black

BY VIR SANGHVI

TV MOGUL



programming on the national channels. When she left, I was encouraged to apply for the job. I'd worked quite extensively with TV before, primarily as a writer, but also as a conceiver of programmes. Because I was an Asian writer and producer, directors and set designers weren't familiar with the territory I was exploring. I was pulled into production more and more.

That was my experience. But, basically, it was that I'd written so much for Channel Four and I seemed to be the only person who had a foot in both communities: African and West Indian, as well as the Asian.

Are you the only Asian writer who also writes about the West Indian community?
I think so. I think I'm fairly unique in that respect. I'm the only one who has lived and socialised with West Indians and understands something about them.

There won't be this divide between the two communities in future, but the first generation of writers that Britain has nurtured came from the middle classes. And, unless, as a student or through your politics, you picked up some connection with the West Indian community, there would be absolutely no reason for an Asian to have anything to do with West Indians.

What kind of programmes do you intend to commission?
I think there is a massive task to be done. First of all, you have to continue the presence of blacks on TV. Then you have to give that programming some depth and diversity. For instance, one would commission a classical arts series at the same time as any Bombay movies series. That, I think, would interest the population I want to address.

There are other things I want to do. There is the Raj mania and I've resolved to turn it on its head. We'll do a small series – which Partap Sharma is researching – called *The Raj Through Indian Eyes*. There are other very relevant documentaries that I've just got back. One on the families of Bhopal and another one on the *dabbawallahs* of Bombay. A third one is about the schisms within the Catholic Church in India. There's a documentary on the memories of the older generation on Partition.

I think it is also time that we did some investigative documentaries into Asian life in Britain. So far, our entire Asian output has been a public relations exercise directed at the white population of Britain. First, we wanted to be seen as good, hard-working sorts who contributed to the economy of Britain. Then, the younger generation wanted to be seen as strong, tough, dynamic – the Tarzans of the Asian community. A feminist lobby wanted Asian women to be seen as strongly reactive against the traditions of the Asian community: a superwoman syndrome.

I feel we've done all that. The job of an editor on a national channel is not a public relations brief. If I thought that the jargon was positive images and non-stereotypical – if we wanted that, all I would do is hand over my entire programming budget to Saatchi and Saatchi. If they can make Margaret Thatcher look presentable, they can do a better job for the Asian community. So I'd call in Saatchi and Saatchi, take my salary and go and live in Jamshedpur. *(Laughs.)*

Why Jamshedpur?
It's my ideal spot in the world.

You could always be a good Parsi and work for the Tatas there.
No, my sister's husband who lives in Jamshedpur is a Punjabi. But, yes, he works for the Tatas. Who doesn't work for the Tatas? Everybody works for the Tatas.

Back to Channel Four. . . .
Ah yes, I could just call in Saatchi and Saatchi! But no, I don't want to do that. I want to commission documentaries on the violence

within the Asian communities here and examine how cross-cultural tensions breed that violence. People beat their wives, they set fire to their own families. The second most prevalent crime among Asians in this country is violence within the family.

What's the most prevalent crime, then?
I don't know. Car theft, or fraud or something. But I'm told that this is the second most prevalent crime. Anyhow, we want to say that this kind of violence may not have broken out, had they been in Jullundur or Dhaka or Karachi.

That's getting under the skin of the Asian community and that needs to be done.

It has been said that you are trying to forge a bogus unity between two completely different groups, the blacks and the Asians, and that this unity is based on nothing more than colour.
It isn't a bogus unity. Our political destinies are so tightly intertwined that I am going to take a risk. The programme that will replace our two magazine programmes, *Black On Black* and *Eastern Eye*, is going to be a joint Afro-Caribbean and Asian programme.

Black On Eastern?
So far, the provisional title is *Bandung File* because of the Afro-Asian meeting at Bandung.

Considering that Tariq Ali's new film company is called Bandung Productions, is it safe to assume that he is involved?
Yes, that's right. Tariq Ali and Darcus Howe are the editors. They are pretty formidable figures. If one was looking for people with three qualifications – one, an overview of Afro-Asia; two, a regularly informed perspective; and three, the stamina to produce a weekly programme – then you couldn't do any better. I think we've got the best.

"I haven't seen Salman Rushdie and Tariq Ali being called ignorant, stupid bullshitters before. Tariq has a broad back, but Salman was hurt. He doesn't like people calling him ignorant."

Does Tariq have much TV experience?
Tariq has been consultant to this, advisor to that, commentator on this. I've just given them, and they've completed, six short documentaries. The Shapinsky one was a special which gave them the opportunity of filming in New York, London and Bangalore.

They've done really well. The films are cracko!

Why did you scrap* Eastern Eye*?
Eastern Eye was stage one. It established a presence. It said we are here. It had at its centre a young audience. When it engaged in nostalgia, it was supercilious. So you had young presenters who couldn't pronounce Amitabh Bachchan. They didn't know who Rabindranath Tagore was.

My feeling was that *Eastern Eye*'s perspective was that of the Indian subcontinent's middle class. I think it is time we had an Asian perspective that was born in this country. I think that Tariq is closer to that than *Eastern Eye*'s Karan Thapar.

Well, to borrow your terminology, they are both from the subcontinent's middle class. The only difference in background is that Tariq was President of the Oxford Union, while Thapar was President of the Cambridge Union.
Was Thapar at Cambridge? *(Laughs.)*

My point is really that even if you have a different political perspective, you still end up picking the same middle class Oxbridge type.
Well, I'm Cambridge, too *(laughs)*. There is a kind of articulacy that British television demands and this kind of person tends to be most articulate. But the team we're fielding now is not Oxbridge. Tariq is an exception.

How do you react to the whole Shapinsky row?
It was great fun. We did the film as a piece of mischief. Akumal Ramchander discovers a good, not great, abstract expressionist in America, though Ramchander is from Bangalore.

The fact that we had Salman Rushdie doing the commentary was filled with irony and good humour. It made cracking good TV.

That the *Guardian*'s TV critic objected, added to the fun. I haven't seen Salman and Tariq being called ignorant, stupid bullshitters before.

Tariq has a broad back. It was a laugh. But Salman was hurt. He doesn't like people calling him ignorant.

What has happened with Salman is that, on the strength of the Booker Prize, he gets on TV and attacks the white nation. And there are a lot of storms.

I think people were unhappy when he used his literary fame to make political statements. But I think everyone got used to that. The criticism now is that he is using an undeniable literary talent to make artistic judgements.
Well, Salman knows about painting. He is a very well-read fellow.

And Tariq, too?
I think Tariq knows less about it *(smiles)*. But Salman is not an ignoramus. He talks a lot about culture and philosophy. And he knows about painting.

I agree with you, but you can't really be surprised by the row. It does sound rather as though a lefty Indo-Pak mafia has taken over Channel Four. Look at it in perspective. Farrukh Dhondy who has never made a TV film is appointed Commissioning Editor. He at once calls up fellow Marxist Tariq Ali, who has also never made a film. Ali at once sets up a whole film company to feed Dhondy's channel. Next, Ali makes a film about art and uses as a commentator a writer with similar political views, who is not widely perceived as a man with artistic credentials. Then, the film is hyped.

I didn't know Tariq before I got this job. The first time I met him was when I rang him up and asked him to make films for Channel Four. Salman wasn't my friend either. I sought them out because we have a similar outlook.

Is the story true that you were having dinner and Salman told you about Shapinsky and you said, "Right, why don't you make a film about it, Tariq?"

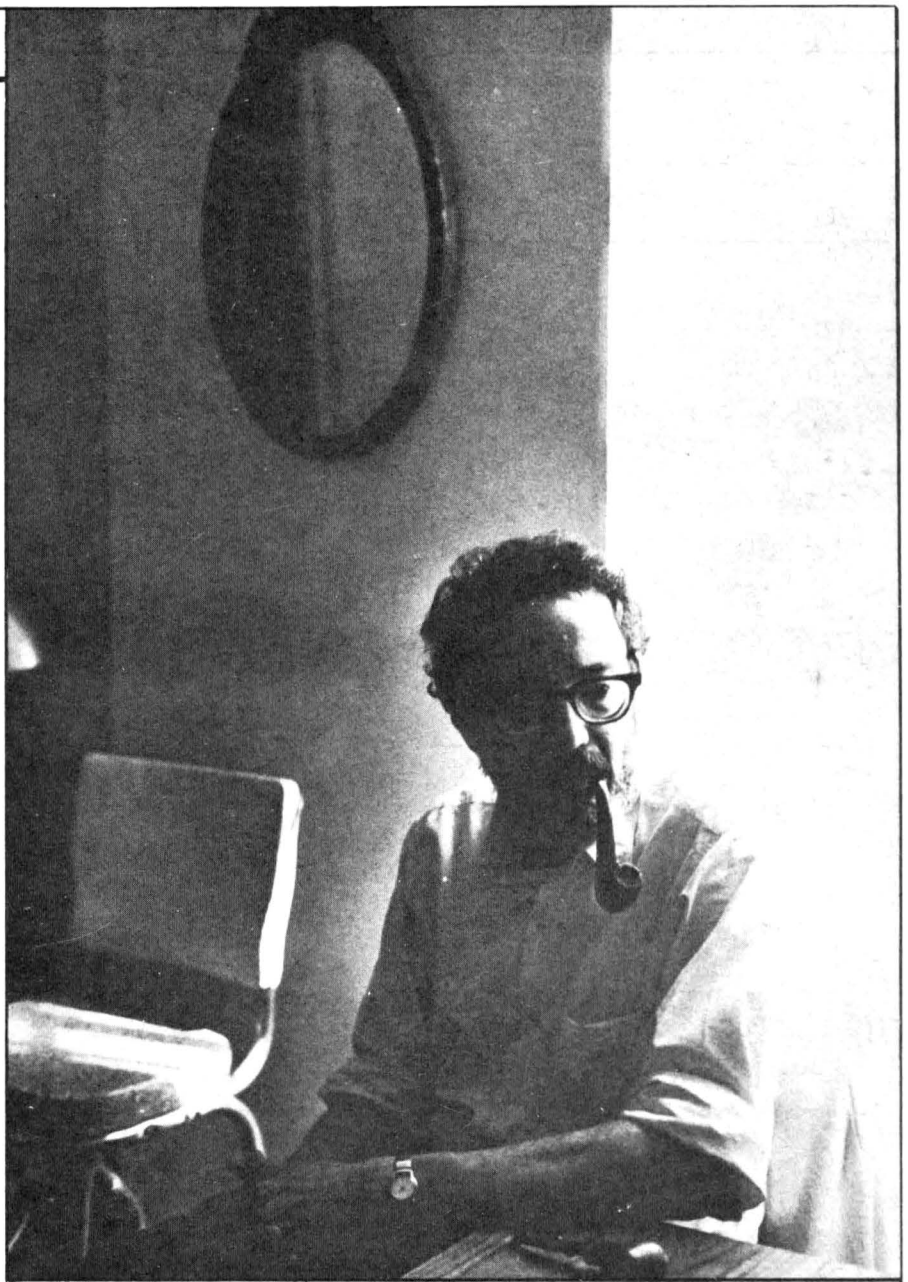
Oh, worse than that! Much worse *(laughs)*. Actually, Tariq is a very good cook. We were sitting and having dinner. The story came up and Salman said he was going to the BBC with his idea. So, I thought about it and said, "Make it for us." These things happen. You are a journalist – you know that.

Are you writing anything yourself for TV?

Well, I've got a series on TV at the moment called *Tandoori Nights* with Saeed Jaffrey. It's been very well reviewed. It's a comedy. We've shot six episodes but there probably won't be a second series because I can't commission myself to write it.

I've got four one-hour dramas on the BBC as well. It's a serial about the rise of an Asian political mafia in the East End of London, and about the other political figures around the Asian community.

Are you working on any books?



Shapinsky: star of the controversial TV documentary made by Tariq Ali.

I don't know if I'll get the time. I'm working on some short stories, some set in India, and some set here. I've had some books published already: *Come To Mecca, East End At Your Feet,* which is a book of short stories.

Have you had any difficulty finding a publisher?

No. In fact, I've always been approached by publishers. And after each book, they've asked for another one.

If it isn't so difficult to get published, then why aren't there more Asian writers getting books published here? Or is it that there aren't that many Asian writers?

There aren't that many. There are a lot of young – or sometimes old – writers who want to be recognised as Asian rather than as writers, so they don't write anything but they say they're Asian writers. The only way to be an Asian writer is to write.

What people do – and I've had dealings with them recently – is they say, "We are Asian, so we have the right to get some funding in order to write." And you simply say that

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Channel Four is not in that business.

I find it interesting that the best Asian writers in England are still those who were born in India. Salman, of course, is a great writer, but his subjects have – at least till now – had to do with the subcontinent.
Yes, I agree. Salman is head and shoulders above the crowd in Asian writing. He is a man with an inventiveness that far surpasses anything an ethnic category in Britain can give him.

Apart from this one brilliant writer, there aren't too many others, are there? Sasthi Brata doesn't write much.
Sasthi says he is waiting for people to catch up and then he'll wipe the floor with them. *(Laughs.)* That's what he told me. And I said, "Yes, Sasthi, we'll wait for that day." *(Laughs.)*

I saw a TV programme about* Borderline *in which Hanif Kureishi went to great lengths to distance himself from the immigrant community in Britain.
Yes. I don't know what he sees himself as, but he's a reasonably good writer. He's written two or three things after *Borderline* and a very good thing for Channel Four called *My Beautiful Laundrette.* It has an Asian character being homosexual which is, of course, what makes for great fun.

Are there* any *Asian writers worth reading that you can think of, apart from the ones we've mentioned?
I can't think of anyone with a high enough profile. This is difficult to say but I believe that a group of well-meaning people has ruined the stamina of Asian writers.

What do you mean?
When young Asians who want to write are picked up and told to write about racism by schoolteachers, social workers, the Greater London Council which hands out money – then, they get cushy. And you are led by pseudo-critical criteria. You want to shine as an Asian and not as a writer. You stop getting insights into people. And if you don't have any insights, how can you write?

And then, they demand that their stories are published because of the themes, rather than their characters being interesting or their narratives being unusual.

And that, for the last ten years has been the enemy of promise in Asian writing. I actually get people who say, "If you did it the hard way, why should we? We want £ 9,000 to live, so that we may produce a story or two. And we want the money from Channel Four!" To me, that's £ 9,000 down the drain.

"Though I was at Cambridge at the same time as Rajiv Gandhi, I didn't really know him.There were two sets of Indians at Cambridge. His set was full of smart, very self-confident people."

Do you find it hard to explain that there are more people writing well in English in India than there are here?
No. I find it quite natural. The middle classes in India are very well developed and have been for the last 100 years. Whereas the Asians who came to Britain mostly got on with their work. They were workers. They transplanted themselves here to earn a living, not to write or to further their culture. That generation takes time to spawn the next generation that might take to writing.

Could this explain why people like Salman, Gita Mehta and yourself. . . That we're all outsiders?

Yes, and that you come from the same kind of Indian middle to upper-middle class background.
I'd place my background as slightly different from both Gita Mehta and Salman Rushdie. My dad was in the army and my family never owned a house in their lives.

That's not unusual, surely. The army provided you with accommodation. Plus, you are a Parsi, which already removes you from the Indian proletariat and lumps you with the bourgeoisie.
Well, it gives you a certain distance from Hinduism and Islam, and their prejudices.

Moreover, you went to Bishop's, an upper-middle class Poona school and then to Cambridge. Salman went to Cambridge. Gita went to Cambridge. I mean, there* are *parallels. So, in what sense, is your background really different?
I don't think I ever had a pedigree. I think Salman is part of the Kashmiri aristocracy.

He was brought up on Bombay's Warden Road and went to Cathedral. That's very upper-middle class.
Umm, I somehow think my background is not the same.

As we are on the subject, were you at Cambridge at the same time as say, Salman or Rajiv Gandhi?
Well, Salman is younger. But Rajiv was there at the same time. I didn't really know him, though. There were two sets of Indians at Cambridge. There was one set that was very smart and self-confident. People like Darryl D'Monte and myself didn't belong to this set.

Have you ever considered living in India?
Many times. But I don't know what I could do there. What would I do for a living?

The **Eastern Eye** *team: Dhondy cancelled the programme shortly after he took over.*

Write books.
Yes, but I wouldn't be sure of who I was writing for. I started writing here when I was a schoolteacher. And I thought I'd write for teenagers who I came into contact with. But in India, who would I write for?

The only way I would go back to India is not to write – that would come incidentally – but to do a job.

What kind of job?
Perhaps a broadcasting job. Perhaps a political job. Perhaps a teaching job.

I've always wondered about racism in this country. Does it ever get so bad that you want to leave and go back to India?
I don't think that there is that much racism. I think there is a central race question. And the cry of racism has stopped that debate. The real question is: What is the future of the black community in the context of the future of Britain? One doesn't ask oneself: Where is the black community going? One asks oneself: Where is Britain going? And how do blacks fit into that?

People who go on about racism without answering that basic race question are indulging in conmanship.

The black communities of Britain have made some progress in their years here. Yes, there is higher unemployment among blacks than among whites. There is still a fight for democratic representation. There is still the vexed question of Britain's injustice in its immigration laws. On the margins, there is still murder because of race. That sort of thing goes on. That sort of question is in the hearts of every black person here: you send your child to school, you don't want it stoned.

But that is not the central question. It is not the question that is historically going to shape the future of Britain. What blacks are going to contribute to Britain is the central question. And that progress is not going to be an off-shoot of anti-racism programmes.

Do you think this 'conmanship' is one reason why Asians haven't got very far in British politics?
Yes. The problems with the Asians in politics here is that they are too busy saying, "We are black." They don't go beyond that at all. And that is not enough. You've got to have views on where Britain is going. This is politics. In the Labour Party, you can't just say, "I'm black." You've got to say, "I'm right," or "I'm left." ♦


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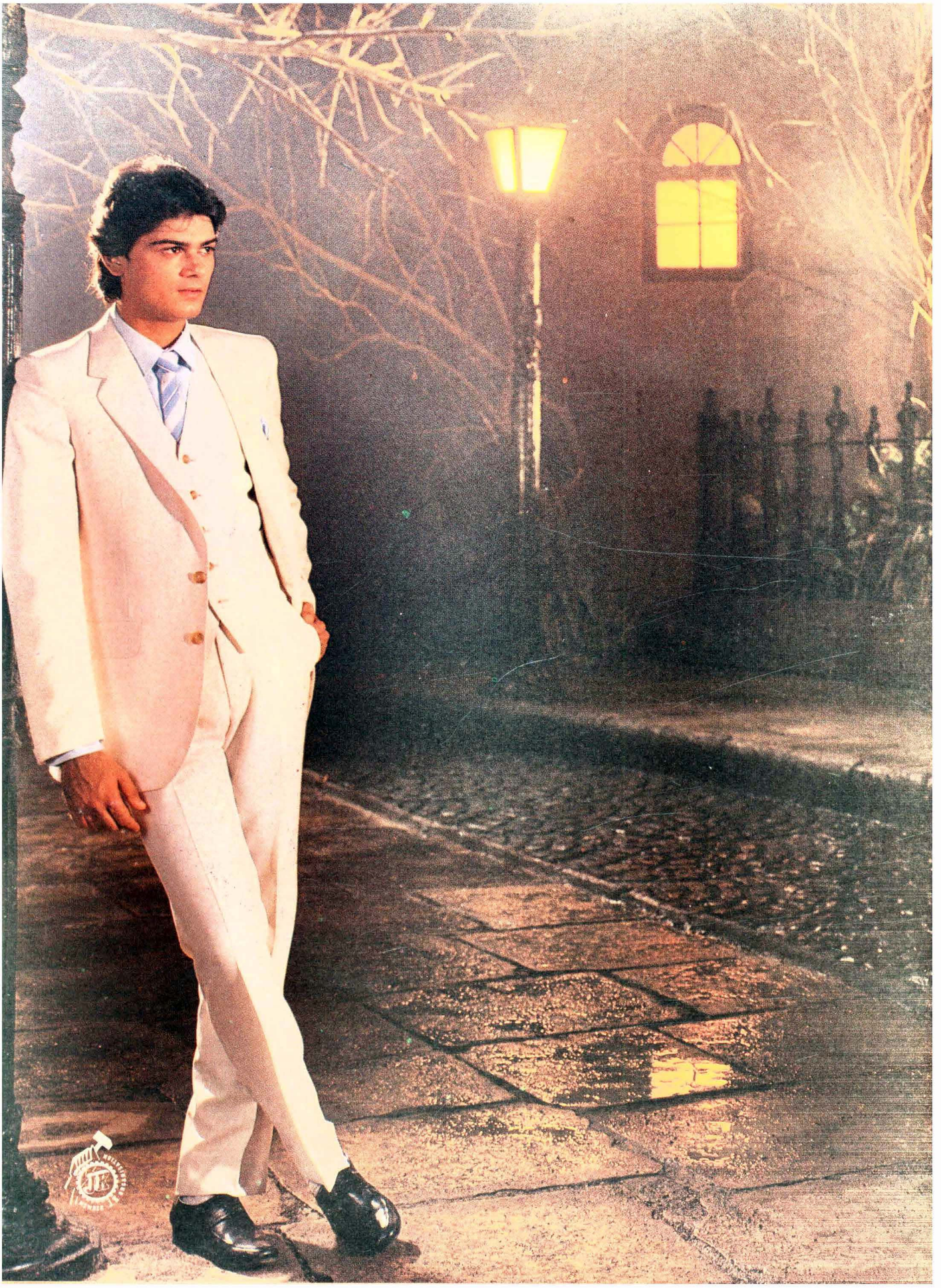


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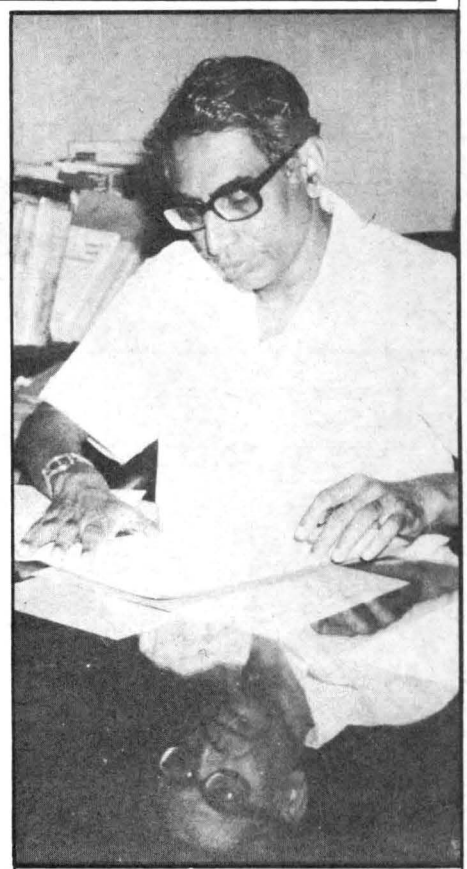
Guest Column / by Iqbal Masud

SPONSORED TV: TRIUMPH OF THE MIDDLE CLASS



TIME WAS when 'middle class' was a four letter word. In the '40s, at college, we disdained Dickens, Galsworthy, Trollope (unspeakable) and went for Proust, Eliot, Pound and, most of all, Joyce. Joyce's passage was stuck to our mast: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience, and to forge in the smithy of my soul, the uncreated conscience of my race."

That happy, blissful, youthful dawn has gone – perhaps forever. What we then hated most – the clichés; the glorification of vicariousness of existence in art; the compulsion to say 'yes'; the conformism; the ratty behaviour prompted on the one hand by the desire to 'play safe' and on the other by the impulse to 'get on', doing the other chap down, if necessary; the careful balancing of evens and odds in moral situations; and, most important, the instinctive, deep yearning for power of the middle class as a class and as individuals – are now the virtues of the ruling class. Middle class is not merely a specification based on money, class or caste (though it is all of these in a vital way). It is also a cultural condition and it is in this sense that it dominates politics, administration and the arts. I am concerned here with its most visible manifestation – the TV soap operas.

I am not concerned basically with the quality of *Hum Log* (egregious), or with the pretensions of *Khandaan* (hollow), or with the comedy of *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* (desperately clawing at funniness), or the place of *Ados Pados* in Sai Paranjpe's *oeuvre* (way down), or with the relevance of *Rajani* (yes, limitedly relevant). I shall not explain why I really liked only one soap opera –*Idhar Udhar*. My rather narrow concern will be to tentatively chart the triumph of the middle class (rampant since Independence), on TV.

Iqbal Masud is a writer and critic. This is his first column for **Imprint.**

MEDIAWISE, our situation today is comparable with that of middle class Americans from the late 19th century to the '50s and later. During this period, the most vital part of the American middle class – the WASPS (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) – "confronted," as Fox and Learn say in a brilliant book, *The Culture Of Consumption,* "labour struggle, financial uncertainty, and the even more severe threat of self-doubt. They felt cramped, over-civilised, cut off from real life, threatened by a sense of physical atrophy and spiritual decay."

How was this crisis met? "A new professional-managerial corps appeared with a timely dual message: a new managerial efficiency; a new regime of administration by experts for business, government and other spheres of life; a new morality that subordinated the old goals of individual morality to new ideals of self-fulfilment and individual gratification."

I think that passage is eerily applicable to our time. The old Gandhian values of abstinence, self-abnegation and self-discipline, modified by Nehruvian emphasis on socialist group effort, is on the wane. Politically, its failure led to disruptive trends. Culturally, it led either to a stultification of individual self-expression or to manipulative populism like *Sholay*. The rise of Rajiv Gandhi's 'managerial politics' is the best thing that could have happened to the Indian middle class. This class (or some members of it) had been enriched in World War II and on that unaccounted or 'black' money, reaped further profits in post-Independence years. Black money percolated downwards – to professionals, civil servants, agricultural middlemen and landholders, the urban lumpen proletariat. At the same time, the middle class felt threatened by labour disorder, urban lawlessness and crowding; internally, it felt increasingly cut off from its roots, while at the same time developing a craving for consumer goods.

The present TV spectrum must be seen as an interplay and product of all these forces and drives. Four elements must be isolated. First, a panic-stricken adoration of 'order' and 'rationality'. This is perfectly exemplified in the mythisisation of Rajiv Gandhi – a middle class knight errant of TV, winning victories in Delhi, Moscow and Washington. Second, the

'Khandaan' is all knowingness, contrivance and calculation. It is a rich man's programme, directed at the lower middle class.

consumer culture exemplified in TV ads – among the most sophisticated of their kind – and in serials like *Khandaan* and *Mr Ya Mrs*. Consumer culture is more than a leisure ethic. It is a standard of living, and a power structure. It imposes on the viewers a pursuit of the 'good life' and reduces them not only to buyers of goods but to recipients of instruction on all aspects of life. The viewers themselves become commodities. But they also demand a kind of release, a worldly or material satisfaction, a resolution of hidden neuroses, nostalgia or fantasies. They thus become a party to their subordination. This important element is common to all the soap operas.

The third element in the middle class TV culture is the celebration of celebrity. Richard Schickel (film critic at *Time* magazine), in his recent book, describes a celebrity as an 'intimate stranger' and says of these figures: "They are turned into representations for much more inchoate longings; they are used to simplify complex matters of mind and spirit."

When I say that our TV represents the triumph of a middle class culture, I do not mean that the entire class has triumphed. India is, today, a liberal capitalist state. The ruling groups – industrialists, ex-landlords, top politicians, top bureaucrats – exercise both coercion and hegemony (to use Gramsci's expressions) over the masses through the co-opting of publicists, writers, literati – all members of the middle class. One of the groups' main instruments is TV, and in TV, the most prominent weapon is the creation of a 'celebrity culture'. Rajiv is the top celebrity TV product. But there are others – primarily stars co-opted by TV serials and those whom serials have made stars – the *Hum Log* family and Priya Tendulkar are just two examples. David Thomson's remark might have been written for *Hum Log*: "Domestic voyeurism makes every next-door idiot another's celebrity."

The last element of TV's middle class culture is revivalism, which includes everything from chauvinism ("India has done it") to more sophisticated signs and symbols sent out by *Hum Log, Khandaan, Paying Guest* etc.

NOW TO AN EXAMINATION of specifics. *Hum Log* is the richest of all the series for case study. It has so many angles, one does not know where to begin. Let us commence with its director, Kumar Vasudev. He once worked full time for Doordarshan and made the first TV film, *Guru.* Looking back from the timid reformism of *Hum Log, Guru,* a sympathetic study of a gang leader, is radical fire. However, it drew such critical fire that Vasudev withdrew from TV. He made a film, *Kunwari Bahu,* in 1984, which combined suspense with the sufferings of a beautiful but poor girl. Elements of both the earlier efforts haunt *Hum Log.*

Let us trace some of its main features. One, the locale is a lower middle class home. This has the advantage of securing a vast audience at low cost. But there is one more vital point. The *Hum Log* drama of domestic or domesticated space is the perfect home for scenes of intimacy and confrontation. "The formula of Hollywood adventure movies persists in the attenuated form appropriate to middle class life to the extent that combat alternates with love" (Dennis Potter). This is as true of the various twists and turns of *Hum Log*'s labyrinthine tale as of *Khandaan.* Second, one must add to this sociological note, a personal note of poignancy. The low roof of a Janata Colony house, the claustrophobic interiors, the eternal love-hate of the inhabitants, all summon up, like a great, agonised sigh, the basic traits of the middle class family: womb, trap, battlefield. It is because *Hum Log,* for all its inanity, carries within it the germ of this tortuous truth, that it goes to the heart of millions. As it goes on, I develop a special affection for Dadiji (Sushma Seth) and the 'loser', Basheshar (Vinod Nagpal). Dadiji lives in the past and will die in the past; Basheshar's Eden is in the past but he is tortured by the present. However, my nostalgia dissolves when I think of the other side of the coin: Vasudev's continuous punishment or taming of the rebels and the escapers – Lallu, Nanhe, Badki and Manjhli. The last element I wish to note is a special quality of bleakness well described by a critic speaking of the work of Diane Arbus, the American photographer of despair: "The people here are people without power and with too much credulity." *Hum Log* is about such people and, sadly, it is aimed at millions of such people.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY GENTLEMAN

I had high hopes for Kundan Shah after the Leftist anarchy of 'Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron' but 'Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi' is totally bourgeois.

Sreedhar Kshirsagar's *Khandaan* is the rich man's *Hum Log* but is meant, like the latter, for the lower middle classes (as *Dynasty*, its original, is in America). However, *Hum Log*, despite its gaucherie, has a certain innocence. *Khandaan* is all knowingness, contrivance and calculation. Sreedhar once made a film about Indian cinema called, if I remember rightly, *Great Film Bazaar* which disclosed an ambivalence in Sreedhar about popular Indian cinema – half love, half patronage. The ambivalence persists in *Khandaan*. The dignified macho conflict of Seth Premchand and Verma is crossed with rape, beatings and melodrama. Like Blake Carrington of *Dynasty*, Seth Premchand, too, is harassed, ruthless and righteous. But all these qualities appear laboured in *Khandaan* because real power cannot be enjoyed by the Premchands of India. Second, *Khandaan*, unlike *Dynasty*, has middle class inhibitions about showing the real cowardice and sordidness of the Indian capitalist class. Third, certain essential traits of our middle class – mediocrity, lack of invention and of individuality – are spreading like a blight over *Khandaan*.

Sai Paranjpe comes with great credentials to TV. As the maker of *Sparsh*, *Chashme Buddoor* and *Katha*, she had staked her claim as satiriser/singer of the middle class. Her position became impregnable with this effusion of the Joshi Working Group on TV software: "*Katha*. . . (is) an example worth emulating; it educates through entertainment and entertains through education. How far Doordarshan is from this integrity of sound and sense, of beauty and truth, of form and content!"

My already diminishing respect for the liberal minded waffle of the Report was destroyed by this statement. But it zoomed up Sai's stock in the I & B. She is already into her second serial, despite the comparative lack of popular success of *Ados Pados*.

Ados Pados is *Katha*, continued by other and inferior means (to parody Clausewitz). The rabbit warren existence of *Katha* was viewed with a certain in-joking, but it had (not 'beauty and truth') a deliberate touch of the acid that placed it apart both from 'education and entertainment'. *Ados Pados* lands up in the cesspool of middle class sentimentalism – the charming vacancy of Chintamani (Mahadevan), the facile lugubriousness of Amol Palekar, the meaningless reserve of Rameshwari, the unbearable cuteness of Harindranath.

I had high hopes for Kundan Shah, after the Leftist anarchy of *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron*. TV tamed him into middle class fun; *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi* offers reel after reel of 'conciliatory laughter binding together TV's social role model types into an idealised and comfortable conformity' (Douglas Kellner). Yesterday's disturber of the peace has become the bourgeoisie's ultra-sanctioned humourist.

Basu Chatterjee, of course, is the ideal middle class celebrator of them all. After a regrettable straying into raw truth in *Saara Aakash*, Basu has celebrated the middle class in fun, frolic and satire, from *Choti Si Baat* to *Laakhon Ki Baat*. How odd that he should father the fire-eating fighter, Rajani? Not so odd. For Rajani, fighting corrupt selection boards, *taxiwallahs*, hospital staff, private schools and gas distributors, is a Hindustani Andolan fighter. Her targets are petty. For correction, she runs to the police or to the minister. *Those* corrupt targets she dare not attack though she may laugh at them for being ignorant or inefficient. And that famous smile, how middle class that is: smug, self-satisfied, sexy, yet lacking human warmth.

The point is, even if Rajani proved me wrong, she would still work within the system. V N Gadgil praised her. For any other 'changer', ministerial praise would be the kiss of death. For Rajani, it is the breath of life. Her contract will go on and on.

TO SUM UP. The words of Todd Gitlin, expert media watcher, apply to our, as much as to American, TV: "The hegemonic system is not cut-and-dried, not definitive. It is continually negotiated and managed, in order to override the alternative and oppositional forms, which are framed into compatibility with the dominant system."

In other words, you (whoever you are – king or coolie) cannot fight the mid-culture of Doordarshan. You can only join it.

Unless, of course, you switch off the set, or devise some means, like Ulysses, of remaining immune to the siren song. ♦

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY STAR & STYLE

LOVE, SEX AND The Bombayite

An investigation into a 'lonely-hearts' magazine.

By Shirin Mehta

"You. Yes, you. I am telling you dear. I am searching you dear. I am in search of my friend of whom I have dreamt as someone around 5' 4" tall, fair complexioned lady in 20s or 30s who is well educated, broadminded and soft-natured. Let's enjoy every moment in life. As for me I am affluent and very respectable businessman in my 30s with a simple loving caring heart yearning for an understanding heart."

THAT WAS THE AD that started it all. Prominently displayed in what *The Bombayite* magazine called its VIP People's Gallery, it seemed more than a simple request for pen-friends. A glossy 31-page magazine, *The Bombayite* sells for Rs 20 at news-stands all over Bombay and in other cities. All it contains is advertising of the 'lonely-hearts' variety: the current issue has over 800 such ads. Most of these promise 'broadminded friendship' with 'like-minded' individuals.

Obviously, there is more to the ads than meets the eye. The language used hints at a lot more than it discloses: "Highly experienced gentleman having varied tastes and unusual aptitudes seeks warm friendship from ladies-couples upto 70 years. Divorcees, widows most welcome." Very few of the ads seemed to be genuinely above board: "I am a simple and humble schoolteacher, a widow aged 33 years, willing to correspond with gentlemen-ladies and couples without age bar."

The ads come with a code number to which interested people can reply. About four pages – in the front and back of the magazine – explain, in painstaking detail, the procedure for replying, the short-forms made use of, the method of becoming a member in the various categories listed, and the 'rules' that govern the people involved. All replies have to be forwarded through *The Bombayite* – a ritual that allows the owner to milk the person of Rs 11 per reply sent.

It is intriguing. Who are the people who wrote out these ads? How did they come to hear of *The Bombayite* and why did they advertise in it? Were they really looking for 'friendship' or were they after sex? Did they expect to pay the girls who replied? What kind of responses had they had? What kind of girls did, actually, reply to these kinds of advertisements?

Two of us from **Imprint** decide to reply to a few ads and find out. Cautioned in advance, by well-meaning friends, that the editor of the magazine, Kishor Meswani, vetted all correspondence that reached him, we decide to assume two different personalities with different cover stories. Amita Shah became Anju Mehta, the young, foreign-returned 'fun-loving friend', looking out for the good things in life. I became Shiraz Tata, the lonely, friendless soul, new to Bombay, who can't keep pace with the city's demands.

Would any of the men reply? Would anything really happen?

We soon found out.

"YOU WILL HAVE no difficulty finding me, Seeraz," the soft lispy voice at the other end of the line assures me. "I look exactly like Sharad Pawar."

Ramesh Jain* the first of the men to answer, is the author of the "You.

* All names, except the owner's, are fictitious to secure anonymity.

ILLUSTRATION BY APARNA SINGH

Yes, you. I am telling you dear. . ." ad. Our phone conversation is brief. We agree to meet at the President Hotel and exchange notes on what to look for.

When he walks into the lobby, 20 minutes late, there is no mistaking him. Ramesh Jain *does* look like Sharad Pawar, is tall, dark and paunchy, and is wearing a blue safari suit. He greets me quickly after a furtive, preliminary glance around to see if anyone is looking. I notice that he's very nervous and smiles a lot. We decide on The Trattoria for lunch.

Mr Jain, it soon turns out, hides his nervousness behind his consistent chatter. Hardly have we sat down, at right angles to each other, than he leans forward confidentially. "I really liked your reply, Seeraz," he tells me swallowing his 'sh' sound. "Tell me, why did you choose my ad? Did you think it was well-written?" I assure him that I found his ad extremely interesting.

Over the next 15 minutes, while our pizzas arrive, he tells me he is a businessman who runs the western side of his family business, travels a lot and has a family. In return, I give him my well-rehearsed cover story.

By the time the pizzas arrive, Mr Jain has become expansive. "You know, Seeraz," he says, leaning closer, a gesture that usually accompanies any confidential statement, "I have always wanted one good friend in life. Somebody I can talk to, share things with; somebody who will know what I feel and think."

I remind him that he does have a wife, but he is dismissive. "I have nothing to do with her," he says, leaning back on the cushions. "I tell her, 'You go your way, I'll go mine.' I give her everything she wants, Seeraz. Sometimes we even go on trips together. (A regretful shake of the head.) But she is not my friend. I cannot share things with her."

Suddenly he leans forward, close to me. "Why don't you do computer programming, Seeraz?" he asks. "I hire computer programmers who work for me. I pay them Rs 15,000 for every programme. Why don't you join us?"

"I knew that you weren't like the other girls," Ramesh Jain informs me. "All they wanted was sex — and money." I am intrigued. Who were the other girls?

I demur. Computer courses are notoriously expensive, I say. How would I pay for one on my secretary's salary? Mr Jain is enthusiastic. "Your duty in life, Seeraz," he informs me, "is to enjoy yourself. That is all you have to do. I will look after everything else." He pauses and lowers his small eyes onto the table. "I can take care of the expenses for you."

When I don't seem to react to this, Mr Jain is charmed. "I knew as soon as I saw you that you weren't like the other girls," he informs me. "All the other girls wanted was sex and money, money and sex." It is my turn to lean forward. Who were the other girls? I ask, interested. Have many people answered his ad? Has he advertised in *The Bombayite* before?

Mr Jain settles back again to tell the story. "There have been no other girls who answered the ad this time around," he assures me. "But I had put in an ad one or two years earlier. Just to see how things went. . ." he adds hastily. "At that time, about five to six girls had replied." He pauses, contemplating what to say next and shakes his head slowly. "But they were such bad girls. All they wanted to do was to go to bed. They used to write such dirty letters to me, Seeraz, saying why don't you try out such and such a thing; you'll like it. Really disgusting." His voice peters out in embarrassment.

So what did he do? He shakes his head ruefully. "They could not be my friends. What is there in sex? You can get it anywhere. So I did not continue my friendship with them. But Kishorbhai – (the owner of the magazine) assured me that if I put in an ad this time, the girls who replied would be different. Once I saw you, I knew immediately that I have found a friend." It turns out he has paid Rs 700 for the new ad on the VIP page. Now, it is my turn to look embarrassed.

In one of the abrupt switches of conversation I am becoming used to, he asks me out for a movie the next day. I quickly try to back out, giving my aunt's strictness as an excuse.

Mr Jain is full of advice. "I'll tell you something, Seeraz," again he leans forward. "You should move out of your aunt's flat and find a little place for yourself. Something with a separate entrance so that you can call on who you wish, stay out as late as you want." I explain that rent rates are not affordable – not on my salary at least. Mr Jain gets agitated, leans back and then forward in one abrupt movement: "I have told you before, Seeraz. You only have to enjoy yourself! I will take care of everything else. . ." Seeing the doubt reflected on my face, he continues, "Let me tell you now, Seeraz. If ever you find a boy – a man you want to settle down with – then I will move out of your life as if I had never come into it. Finished. (He thumps the table lightly.) You have nothing to fear. I will never stand in your way."

By now the conversation has become totally unreal. We finish our tea in the atmosphere of Mr Jain's repeated assurances of looking after me, being my friend, arranging everything I need to live life 'fully and well'. He promises to take me abroad so that I can see new places, assures me that if the flat rates sound too high he can arrange hostel accommodation and ends up by giving me his direct number. "Call me tomorrow," he urges *sotto voce* as he hands me the slip of paper, "and we'll go out together." I notice he hasn't brought along his visiting-card. We leave the restaurant together. Mr Jain offers me a lift in his car. I decline.

The next day I call him on his direct line and excuse myself from going to the movie. Mr Jain is understanding. In return, he informs me, so softly I can hardly hear, that he's already set somebody on to the task of looking out for a flat for me.

I inform him, as gently as I can, that I am not interested in being his 'friend'. And hang up before he has a chance to react.

V SUBRAMANYAM, my next date, is as different from Jain as can be. Dressed in a non-de script pair of black trousers and a cream bush shirt with the obligatory, slightly-battered brief-case, Subramanyam is reticent – and wary. Unlike Jain, Subramanyam makes it clear that he's not a soft-touch.

The meeting takes place at the Samarkand days after the obligatory phone calls back and forth. Subramanyam is unwilling to meet in a five-star hotel ("Why should we go to some place that's so expensive?") but gives in reluctantly later on. Walking to the Samarkand, I notice he is of medium height, young and pleasant-looking with thick eyebrows. The look he gives me at the start seems to disapprove of girls dressed in pants.

Subramanyam is an executive – an up-and-coming one, he is at pains to point out. He has worked well, and made a name for himself in the firm, and earns a lot of money. Subramanyam dispenses this information in a flat monotone. He seldom smiles or jokes and responds to any personal questions with a preliminary baleful glare that discomfits. He asks me what I do and, in turn, I give him my story. The conversation stalls for some time.

To draw him out I ask him what his *Bombayite* code number is. He is brusque."Why? Did you write off to several people at once?" Something in his attitude is wary, slightly outraged. I admit this is so. He looks at me from under those thick eyebrows, straight, without flinching. "What was the point? What do you plan to do with so many new acquaintances?"

I am taken aback. And momentarily tongue-tied. In return, I ask him if this is the first ad he's put into *The Bombayite*. He admits that this isn't so. Before I can say anything further he continues: "That's because I've put in my ad on a repeat programme. For Rs 100." Had other girls replied? What were they like?

Subramanyam is the kind of 'Bombayite' advertiser who needs company but is not willing to settle for just anyone. All through the meeting I'm made to feel unsuitable.

"They all wanted money," Subramanyam informs me with the under-the-eyebrows look that is supposed to make me feel responsible for the outrage. What did he mean? Shaking his leg, looking around impatiently, he says quickly, "They all wrote out some story or the other about how badly off they were, asking me if I could help them monetarily. I never replied to those. I met two of them who hadn't mentioned money at all. One girl was dark and fat and ugly. The other girl was Chinese – also fat. Before the movie was through she wanted to know if I'd lend her Rs 10,000. I was disgusted. . ."

We sit in silence. Why had he responded to my letter? Subramanyam looks thoughtful. "Only because you didn't seem to want money." Did he know Kishor Meswani? He shakes his head. "I only put in an ad because my cousin, who had come down to Bombay, said it might be fun to try it out." Did he feel it was worth it? Subramanyam clucks his tongue, once. "Waste of money. I don't think anyone really suitable will come along."

What did he hope to find in the girls who answered? He dodges the question, all the time giving me his straight-in-the-eyes look. "One never knows what one will find, is it? Basically, I need a friend – someone who can give me company over the weekend for it gets very lonely at my Kurla flat then." Wasn't he just looking for a wife? He smiles, the first smile of the evening. "That's what my mother keeps telling me. I need a wife. But I need someone who can help me relax, go out with me during the weekends." His look seems to indicate I'm not suitable.

Subramanyam is obviously the other kind of *Bombayite* advertiser: a person who needs company but is not willing to settle for the first person who comes along. All his subsequent questions are geared to check our suitability: Was I non-vegetarian? (He wasn't.) Did I enjoy my work? (He did.) Did I like to read? (He hated it.) How would I spend an ideal day? (He'd have gone on a picnic.) And even, strangely enough, did I mind being in a room which had no fan? (It turns out, his flat in Kurla is fanless!)

With each revelation of our differences, Subramanyam seems to grow more distant and horrified, staring around the restaurant more often to check if he is being noticed, shifting uncomfortably often in his seat, until, as a last resort, he bends down and puts his brief-case on his lap. And calls for the bill.

Considering his opinion of money-hungry women, I offer to pay. He reluctantly declines. There seems nothing more to be said. He tells me he'll call me up for a movie on Saturday, studiously avoiding my eyes.

I know, even as we say our polite, pleasure-to-meet-you goodbyes, that we will never meet again.

FROM AFFLUENT businessman to hard-working cynic, we move on to the sex maniac. The first person who replies to Anju Mehta's ads; the man she'd written off to because his ad sounded so ordinary: "Fair, married Gujarati, 33 years, engineer-businessman would like to hear from ladies 20-30 who are good-natured and happy. Hobbies:

Friendship. Knows English, Gujarati."

Anju Mehta recalls the meeting: When I spot him outside Kamat's, he looks the decent average gentleman: slim, youngish, moustachioed, dressed in light blue shirt and black trousers. We climb up the stairs into the deserted dimness of the restaurant and, as soon as we settle down to chat, Sailesh Bhatt removes his thin-framed spectacles.

Now, he is myopically more at ease. With hardly a pause, he launches into a detailed description of how much he earns, how much he travels, how corruption is rampant in business, and how disgusted he is with it. To prove the veracity of his statements he often opens one of the files he carries, thrusting forward a bill here, a receipt there. "You see," he states proudly, "all my transactions are made in cash."

His personal life is as openly discussed. He has a a wife, 29-30 years old and three children. His wife, a graduate, is the only daughter in a rich family. "I married her after taking all this into consideration," Bhatt informs me with no compunction. "Because all of her money comes to me now." In return, he is quick to point out, he makes sacrifices. "I'm going to Singapore only because she wants to buy clothes and things."

Talking of trips, he launches into a description of his two-month sojourn in America. Inevitably, he did a lot of business there, but the high point of the trip was the girls. "There it is all free sex," Bhatt announces, apropos of nothing. "You like a girl, you kiss her." In no time at all he's launched himself on the subject of sex. Confidently, as if I don't need to be consulted, he says, "Let's meet on Sunday. Tell me where you live. I'll come there and pick you up in a car. We can drive down to Juhu where there are many good restaurants for eating and sleeping."

There seems to be no embarrassment about his statements. It's almost as if, by replying to *The Bombayite*, I had given my tacit consent to his propositions. Caught up in his scheme, he continues, "I'll book a room in a hotel – that's the best thing. In a movie one feels very much like sex, one feels like kissing and all and we can't do much. There are people around and everyone can see." Suddenly, he confides in a stage whisper. "I am very sexy – I like doing everything. (And then, as an afterthought) I will use Nirodh – so your health won't be harmed."

Anju Mehta's businessman Sailesh Bhatt turns out to be a sex maniac. He wants to take her to a Juhu hotel, assures her he is 'very sexy' and talks about nothing else.

Sex and money seem to obsess Sailesh Bhatt. The more distant I seem to get, the more he tries. He tells me he has collected over a lakh in cash that very day, brags about his high contacts with the Birlas and the ONGC people, and talks with candid ease about 'growing up' sexually in America.

By the end of the hour-long chat he's not prepared to wait for Sunday in Juhu. "We can go to a hotel tonight," he suggests. When I refuse, he calls the next day to fix another rendezvous. I tell him that I had friendship on my mind, but he's obviously after something else. Sailesh Bhatt is apologetic and begs for a chance to meet again, so that he can explain things. I refuse.

A week later, he turns up at the office, ill-at-ease and requests me to return the card he gave me. With that simple transaction we seem to be quits and he doesn't call up again.

"THERE'S JACKIE," says Ketan Joshi, as if seeing an old friend. "He's great (admiringly). He has height and looks."

He himself is short and clean-shaven, check-shirted and booted, wearing a flashy gold chain around his neck (with his name on it). I can make out, even as I approach him in the SeaRock lobby, that he's the Filmi Type. To underscore his importance and worth as a model, Ketan has a slightly supercilious attitude towards the rest of the world. Except, of course, when he sights his obvious superiors. Like Jackie Shroff.

But now that little aside is forgotten and he's come back to telling me all about his experiences with the other girls who'd replied. He didn't think any of them had been worth it. "They were all crap, totally sub-standard, all rubbish," he concludes in his Gujarati-accented English. "It's been an experience for me. I will definitely not do it again." He emphasises that he'd never have put in an ad on his own, but 'Kishorbhai' insisted on writing one out for him.

"Are you interested in Gujarati literature?" he asks me. I shake my head. Ketan Joshi is dismissive. And well might he be. His list of accomplishments is long: "I do folk dances on stage, the *bhangra*, the *koli* dance. I have performed at various auditoriums. I hold *kavi sammelans*. We are four to five friends and we do all these things. . ." Ketan gets lost in his own versatility and continues, with his own brand of candour: "Sometimes I feel: look at me, I am sitting at the SeaRock, modelling, acting, writing poetry. . ." his voice peters out. The list is too long for him.

I try and steer the conversation back to *The Bombayite*. He had not written to *The Bombayite* ever before but when I tell him that I hadn't either, he does not believe me. To test my veracity, he throws in an unrelated statement: "Mr Sharma of *The Bombayite* was here. Have you written off to him, too?" I am mystified. Is *The Bombayite* really a club where members mingle freely and know each other? How does everyone know the owner personally?

Ketan now takes it into his head to test out if I am the same girl who

wrote the reply. So he asks me to write something so that he can compare the handwriting. My heart sinks. My letters had been re-written by somebody else in the office – I know I will fail the test. So, I pretend to be dumb, wasting time, not knowing what to write and then finally escape with an excuse about having to meet someone.

Ketan calls me up after a week, gets my name wrong and asks if I remember him. I say yes. Conversation stops. Ketan has to pretend he's not calling back because he needs to see me. So he asks if I'd be willing to take part in a seminar on dowry.

I refuse.

AS I WAIT at the reception of the American bank, a small man, dressed in brown trousers and a beige shirt, waddles over to me. He is almost a caricature: tea-pot ears, wiry hair, small beady eyes which dart around monkey-like, thin, wizened hands and bow legs. "Hello, Anju," he says in the purr I have come to recognise – and dread – over the phone. "I'm John. It's surely a pleasure to meet you."

I am nonplussed. Through his two letters, and his various phone calls, he had built up a formidable reputation. He wanted to take Anju Mehta out to five-star hotels, he'd promised her a night out with his beat group, bragged about the singing competitions he'd won and said he would sing for her when they met. The various phone calls were always made in a super-polite, cringingly purring tone. There had been no doubt in my mind: John was going to be the archetypal, tight-jeaned, guitar-toting, hep, macho man.

But I find myself dealing with a 35-year-old child. Little John first throws a sulk when I suggest going to the Mocambo restaurant across the street. "Oh surely not, Anju," he pleads. "Why not go to the Sundance Cafe? Or how about Kandeel? What-do-you-say, what-do-you-say?" he jerks out rapidly. We end up at the Mocambo.

John is ill-at-ease. He sits on the edge of his chair opposite me, eyes darting everywhere, a suspicious glance thrown at the next table every now and then. "You know, Anju," he says, beady eyes peering into mine. "I'm so glad you could come. I hope you will excuse me, Anju, but I thought that you would cancel our appointment. So many girls write in to me, Anju," he says eagerly. "So many. Why, just today I received a letter from a girl." He scrabbles about in his leather pouch and eagerly proffers the onion-paper letter.

Ketan Joshi's superior airs and accomplishments seem to indicate he's above advertising in 'The Bombayite'. Yet he's not above checking me out by making me write something.

"Such things they write, Anju," little John says with a blush. He slaps his forehead with his hand. "Sweet Jesus!" His hands begin to tremble. "Such things – I can't even tell you." As he looks down at the table in evident embarrassment I ask him what he means. He blushes. Then fidgets nervously, darting a glance at the next table, and leans forward from his chair so precariously, that I fear he'll fall. "Things like – shameful things, Anju, with what mouth can I tell you? (Then, quickly.) They ask me 'What's your size' and other such things." He blushes again.

Perhaps there is no one as experienced in the ways of *The Bombayite* as John Couto. He informs me that he's been putting in an ad regularly for over five years now. "I've made so many friends, Anju," he says with a misty look. "So many friends. About 35-40, at least! I love meeting people, Anju. I just love it." Suddenly he shifts uncomfortably. Somebody from the next table is looking at us. "Some of the girls are so forward. Holy Jesus! They write all sorts of nasty things. I phoned up Meswani, you know, and I told him, 'What's all this? On page five *The Bombayite* states that no indecent language will be allowed. Then how come I'm getting such replies?' And he told me: 'Oh come on, John, be a sport! Why should you get upset if they write like that?' (By now John is really agitated.) Then he said: 'I'll tell you what, John. Just don't reply to that letter. Okay?' So I don't reply to girls like that." John settles back, his tale finished.

I ask why he continues putting in ads if he's against the kind of girls who reply. John looks reproachful. "Oh come on, Anju," he pouts. "I like making friends. I told you, no? It's not safe for the girls, though. (His voice drops to a confidential whisper.) My good friend Terry once met a man at the Ambassador and he started to do nasty things to her. She was telling me about that, you know, Anju. She was crying. Even another girl was telling me how they do dirty things. Shehh! Now these girls only meet me. (A quick darting look upwards at me.) They say, John, you're the safest." He giggles, childishly. Suddenly, he's full of advice and concern. "So don't go out with anyone, Anju. You never know. *The Bombayite* is not safe. Not at all."

So why then *does* he go on putting in ads? Does he hope to find someone he can get married to? John looks around to make sure no one is listening in, before he says, "No, I'll never get married. I got jilted once. Her name was Irene and she went around with my best friend, men. Ever since then I hate girls. (Then, quickly, to rectify that mistake, he smiles disarmingly.) Now I only have friends. Like you."

For some time the conversation switches to music. John plays the rhythm guitar in a beat group and sings. "I love singing, Anju," he enthuses, eyes closed in mock ecstasy. "What kind of music do you like – huh? What kind of music?" We soon discover we are hopelessly mismatch-

ed: he's not heard of the rock groups I mention; I have never listened to the 'pure heaven' of Hank Locklin. But that doesn't deter John. For a full half hour he regales me with anecdotes about his girls and his music.

He has found out from experience that *The Bombayite* carries many fictitious ads. "The girls often want their names removed from it, but Mr Meswani doesn't take them out," John informs me low-voiced. "That's cheating, men. He'll put in their ads again and again to fill up his magazine. (Suddenly it strikes him I could get in touch with Meswani, myself.) Anju, don't tell him I said this. Please. He's a friend of mine. I often ask his advice on the girls I should meet. Very often he tells me not to answer certain girls. He means to tell me she's a pros." Has he ever met Meswani? Little John shakes his head. "No. But I often talk to him on the phone."

By the time we leave the restaurant he's already begun to urge me to meet him again. "Don't tell me this will be our last meeting, Anju. You will meet me again? Where shall we meet next time? I'll take you anywhere you want to go. . ."

Feeling almost maternal (I'm a head taller than him) I drop him to Churchgate station before I go home. John scrambles out of the cab.

By the time I close the door and look back again, he's been swallowed up in the late evening rush. A little man, with at least 35 'friends' in this lonely city.

THE QUESTION still remains unanswered. Who is the average *Bombayite* advertiser? Is it the affluent, bored businessman who is looking for a mistress? Or the Subramanyam type: a man who needs friendship, but not at any cost? Or again, is Sailesh Bhatt the typical man: sexually starved, looking for an easy lay? Or does *The Bombayite* provide a solution to the lonely, urban dweller like John? A person who might not have been able to boast of so 'many friends', if the magazine didn't exist.

John is not quite the swinger his advertisement suggested. Yes, he does play the guitar and sing but that's where the swinging ends. All little John wants is to be 'friends'.

Two or three conclusions remain consistent. Most of the men who had advertised in *The Bombayite* before, agreed that the girls who answered were of a type. They all craved sex – or money. How they intended to fleece their partners is not entirely clear: Jain seemed to hint that the sex was sold for the money; John, the guy who would do no wrong, was asked for small amounts to 'tide over expenses'. And Subramanyam claimed he was asked even before he'd met the girls! So was it a racket? Were there a number of girls who always replied to the ads in the hope of making a quick buck?

None of the men were too sure. But there was no doubt that most of them knew Kishor Meswani personally. And no wonder. A short time after we'd sent off our replies, he wrote in to me to find out if I'd like to call him up or advertise. Obviously, he took a personal interest in the people who replied to *The Bombayite*: drafting out ads for the likes of Jain and Joshi; dishing out advice to people like John and counselling caution where needed.

So, who is Meswani and what is in it for him?

"PLEASE COME IN, Shiraz," Kishor Meswani tells me with a broad smile, as I stand on the threshold of his room-cum-office. "I have been hoping to meet you ever since you wrote in those replies. I hope you will advertise with us the next time round." He laughs, a short cryptic laugh that sets one's teeth on edge.

I am taken aback at the sight of the paraplegic in a wheelchair. I'd imagined Meswani to be middle-aged, but tough. Instead, I find myself staring at a medium-sized man in a *kurta*-pyjama, with close-set eyes, and a broad, fleshed-out face. A typist is busy clattering off letters on *The Bombayite* letterhead. In the corner sits another girl, tirelessly pushing letters into brown self-addressed envelopes. The formidable *Bombayite* forwarding system, no doubt.

I am full of questions. I have read the rules that govern the types of ads and I want to know which would be the most successful to use. Mr Meswani repeats in painstaking detail what I already know: The ordinary ads cost Rs 30; if you take an ad in reverse, the charges are doubled (for you can see it better); the special membership ad consists of a repeat in four issues for Rs 100; the super special membership gives you the same facilities in reverse for Rs 200. The extra super special membership – the one in which you get a repeat ad with eye-catching borders and colour – costs Rs 300. "However, if you really want results," Meswani tells me, "you should take the VIP People's Gallery page or the Super VIP page. The responses will be fantastic. Beyond anything you can imagine." The cost of such ads can be as high as Rs 600 for 50 words.

What is the advantage of *The Bombayite*? I ask Meswani. How will I know, for instance, that somebody will even reply to me? After all there are 800-odd ads in each issue. . . Meswani gives his short bark of a laugh, wets his lips slightly and says, "For lady advertisers the replies are guaranteed. *Arre*, you will get so many replies you won't know what to do with them!" Meswani wheels his chair closer and says in a confiding wheeze, "Of course, if you put in a photograph, the response will be super-fantastic. (A wink.) Photograph always gets you a good friend." He omits mentioning that black and white pictures are reproduced for

Rs 50 and coloured ones for Rs 400 per insertion.

I am curious. How do so many people come to hear of *The Bombayite*? Or are a sizeable percentage of the ads carried, repeat ads? Meswani is offended. "Of course not. I would say of the 800 ads in the issue about 100 are repeat ones. The rest are all new. *The Bombayite* is famous, Shiraz. We have a 15,000 circulation and it even goes abroad. Haven't you seen our ads for Oman and the USA?"

The placid back and forth motion of his wheelchair ceases abruptly, when he hears my next question. Surely, if about 700 of the advertisers are new per issue he must be making a substantial amount of money? How much does he earn? He smiles his too-broad smile and looks downwards. Then he laughs. "Enough to keep me going," he says modestly. How much would that be? I insist. Meswani doesn't look too pleased. "It's like a woman's age, Shiraz. One can guess but one may not disclose." I make a quick calculation. If one assumes that the 800 ads are put in at a flat rate of Rs 100 each (that's a very low estimate for the rates quoted above are for a minimum of 30 words and some of the ads stretch into 200 words or more) then Mr Meswani's earnings are about Rs 80,000. This does not take into account the Rs 11 he receives from each gentleman, or the Rs 3 he gets from the ladies as forwarding fees. If the advertiser is desperate enough to want his letter delivered to him post-haste then the 'Express-Delivery' charges are Rs 8 extra. Isn't that extraordinarily steep for a person who professes to 'get people together' as his hobby?

Meswani eyes me with distaste. "We started the mail delivery system because our readers wanted it," he explains shortly. "You see when we originally started *The Bombayite* in 1978, we used to print all the addresses. Then people used to land up at the advertisers' offices or residences and harass them. So, originally, we started the mail service for the ladies. Now, even the gentlemen prefer to remain anonymous. We are a decent magazine, Shiraz. We want people to be friends." But shouldn't the forwarding charges be more reasonable? I insist. Mr Meswani doesn't seem to think so.

"For lady advertisers, the replies are guaranteed," Meswani assures me enticingly. "Arre, you'll get so many replies that you won't know what to do with them."

Does he read all the replies that are sent in? Mr Meswani shakes his head. Then how did he know that Shiraz Tata had replied to three different people? He looks nonplussed then explains, quickly, that he keeps records of everyone who replies. "Just in case something goes wrong," he says. In the register, my name and address have been carefully noted along with the names of the people I'd replied to.

Does he keep in personal touch with the people who write in to him? Meswani shakes his head. "Why should I? People advertise because they come to hear of us through someone. I seldom know the people involved." This does not ring true. Of the five people we'd met, four had either put in an ad because Meswani insisted or had grown to know him after they advertised.

"Why don't you advertise, Shiraz?" Meswani asks me eagerly. "Then you can see for yourself. How safe our system is. How many people really read *The Bombayite*. I'm telling you we are famous. . ."

What about the constant refrain from the men that most of the girls who answered the ads were after sex? Mr Meswani can't believe his ears. His wheelchair squeals softly as he pushes it back and forth agitatedly. "Who has told you this?" he asks, disconcerted. I mention names. He is even more upset. "What can I say? I do not know of any such thing. Anyone who must have told you this was lying. We are a decent magazine."

But quite a few of the people *did* send in filthy replies, I point out. Some even asked for money. Didn't he know about all this? Surely other clients had complained to him before? Meswani is unbending. "I do not know about any such thing. Nobody has ever complained to me. Why don't you put in an ad, Shiraz? All your doubts will be cleared. There is so much need for friendship in cities, Shiraz. So many people need good friends. We are doing them all a social service."

An extremely lucrative social service, I point out. Meswani is beginning to get a bit tired of me. "I have to run an office, you know. I bring out a magazine, I hire two people full-time – for all that I need money. Also, if I had so much money why would I be working from my house? I would have shifted to Nariman Point by now."

I am not entirely convinced. I point out that I have heard he set up one of his advertisers in order to blackmail him. Meswani's small eyes have begun to look surprisingly sharp and unfriendly. "Tell me who told you that," he says, pushing his wheelchair so close my knees are pinned to the sofa. "Who told you that? It's all lies. It must have been one of my competitors." I refuse to divulge the name. "Whatever else you may think, this is definitely not true."

There seems no point in proceeding further. I make my excuses and leave, slightly relieved to be through with Mr Meswani and his *Bombayite*.

But I haven't heard the last of my suitors. As this story is ready and about to go to press, a card addressed to Shiraz Tata arrives at the office. I open it with some trepidation. It is from Ramesh Jain. "My Dream Girl," it says. "Sorry. . . Can't we iron things out?"

I don't suppose he'll still feel that way when this story appears.

♦

A FINAL

Louis da Silva is the last of the great more genteel era, he still

THERE ARE, according to André Simon's *Encyclopaedia Of Gastronomy*, as many ways of making Crêpes Suzette as there are *maitres d'hotel* willing to *flambé* them. Unfortunately, only one method seems popular these days. Limp pancakes are brought from the kitchen. A poncy steward sloshes them around in a warm orange sauce. A mixture of brandy and Cointreau is added to the slosh, and the whole mess is *flambéd* hastily.

This method, alas, has as much to do with Crêpes Suzette as a Big Mac has with Fillet Mignon. But rare is the restaurant manager with the skill, training, practice and imagination to do it right. The only man in India who still makes his Crêpes Suzette the way they should be is Louis da Silva, the legendary Assistant Manager of the Rendezvous restaurant at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay. Louis da Silva's method takes time – more time than most busy restaurants can afford – and requires several ingredients.

First, Louis melts sugar cubes and lemon juice in a thick pan until the mixture sizzles, and then caramelizes, to a golden brown. Next, he adds butter and then the shredded peel of one orange. When the mixture begins to smell of bitter orange, he pours in 160 ml of fresh orange juice. The sauce cooks till it is reduced to a light syrup.

When it is ready, he takes the crêpes (made earlier in the kitchen), folds them into triangles and adds them to the pan one by one. After they have been soaked completely in the sauce (this takes a few minutes), he *flambés* them with cognac and adds a measure of orange curacao for flavouring. (Cointreau will not do, Grand Marnier might.)

The final spectacle of golden triangles of orange delight flaming as they are transported to your plate is impossible to describe adequately.

Is it all worth it? The discriminating Foodie may notice that his Crêpes Suzette are special, but for most of the Rendezvous' guests, one kind of orange pancake is as good as the next. So why, then, does da Silva bother?

The answer seems to be that he wouldn't know how to do it any other way. And that, even if his guests can't tell the difference, he can. This was how things were done 45 years ago, when he joined the Taj at the age of 15. And that is how he'll continue to do them.

IRONICALLY – considering his later success – da Silva had never really wanted to join a restaurant. When he was 15, his mother sent him to Bombay from his native Mangalore and told him to find a job. He lived with his cousin in Byculla and went about finding a job as a mechanic. He applied to Richardson & Cruddas and to several other old British companies, but there were no vacancies. And so, after five months, he decided to take the first job he got.

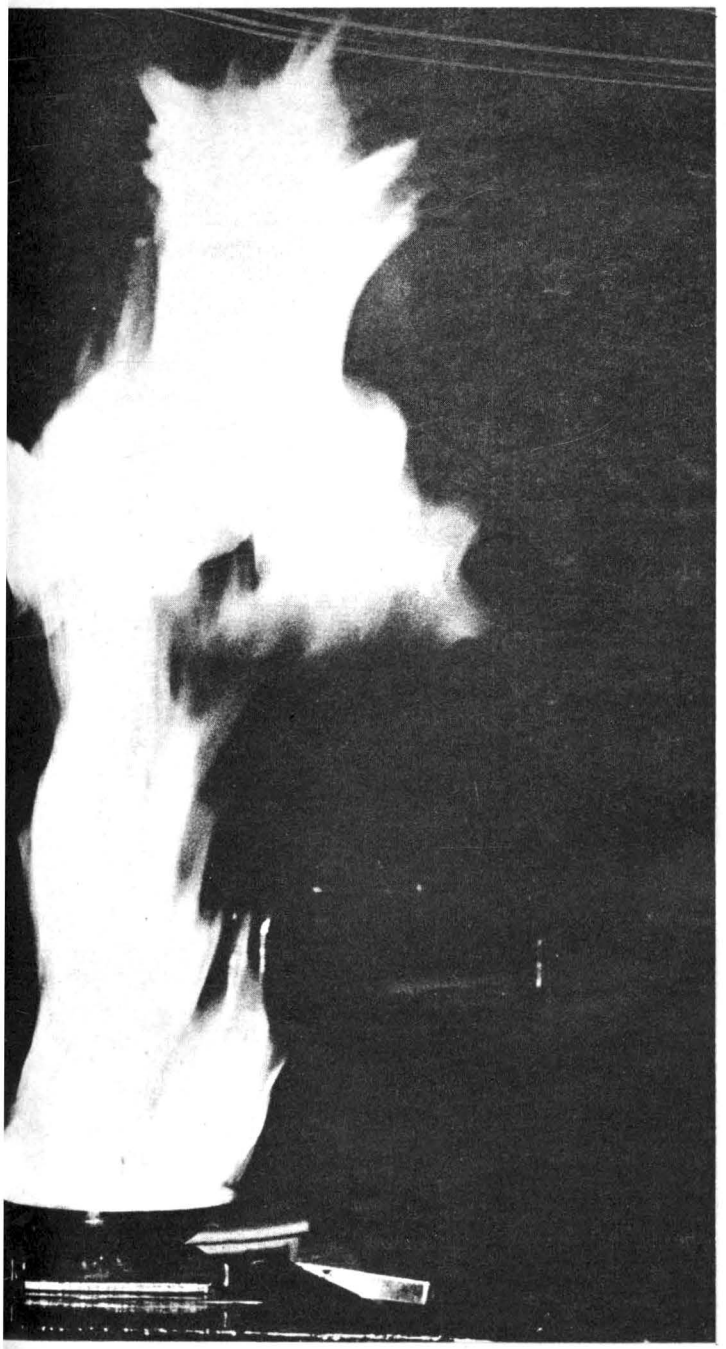
In 1940, the Taj Mahal Hotel was rather different from what it is today. The managers and chefs were all French or Italian, the clientele was either European or Parsi (though, perhaps, in those days, there wasn't much differ-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GAUTAM PATOLE

BY VIKRAM SINHA

FLAMBÉ

maîtres d'hôtel. A remnant of an earlier, acts as if nothing has changed.



ence between the two) and the waiters were all Goan or Mangalorean Catholics. The young Louis was something of a misfit in this environment. For a start, he spoke no English. Secondly, he'd never had a Western meal in his life. And finally, at 15, he had absolutely no idea what waiting on tables was like.

Somebody at the Taj took a shine to him, however, and he was hired as Apprentice Waiter for the princely salary of Rs 5 a month. It wasn't a lot, but it wasn't as little as it may seem to us now. In that pre-inflationary era, the Taj served a businessman's lunch for only Rs 2 and 8 annas. For your money, you got a soup, a main course, dessert and coffee. The full lunch was Rs 4. That bought you a starter, a soup, a fish course, an entreé, dessert, coffee and cheese. And a gala dinner, with a band in attendance, was only Rs 7. Alcohol was extra but it was inexpensive. A good claret cost less than Rs 20 and a reasonable champagne was Rs 25.

Louis decided that he liked the hotel trade. The older waiters were kind and considerate, and he picked up English in no time at all. There was also the glamour of working at the Taj. In those days, air-conditioning was immensely expensive and few private homes were air-conditioned. Even the Taj had air-conditioned only two of its suites: the Dutch and the Spanish. And yet, here was young Louis, fresh from a Southern village, wearing a gleaming, starched white uniform, serving Bordeaux and Burgundy to Bombay's elite – all this in the air-conditioned splendour of the Ballroom!

When the Taj confirmed him as a waiter, he was thrilled. For one, his salary shot up three times from Rs 5 to Rs 15. For another, he got a new uniform and moreover, he was now one of the elite corps of 55 waiters who ran the Taj's dining-room. Of course, Louis wasn't content merely hanging around tables and saying things like – "Would madam like an aperitif?" He wanted to get to the nitty-gritty of the restaurant: the kitchen.

Fortunately for him, the Taj's French chefs appreciated his interest. They took him round the *garde manger*, showed him the bakery and introduced him to the delights of the *boucherie*. He learned to tell the difference between the imported turbot and Dover sole and local pomfret (used only for frying). They taught him the difference between Australian beef and Austrian veal. They explained why corn-fed chicken from France or Denmark was so much better than the domestic *murgi*. They introduced him to the lightly salted taste of Anchor butter, imported specially from New Zealand, and taught him to distinguish between sevruga and beluga.

For little Louis, it was a marvellous education. A whole new world opened up before his excited eyes and he began to see that, good as the Indian lobster was, without its pincers, it couldn't really be substituted for 'Homard' in the classic French recipes. Perhaps surprisingly, Louis learned all this without feeling any envy or resentment. Even in those pre-inflationary days, his salary was not enough to buy a bottle of wine in the Ballroom. (Today, despite the fact that wine costs 20 times as much, waiters'

salaries have gone up by at least 100 times.)

LOUIS ROSE VERY RAPIDLY through the ranks. In 1943, when he was only 18, they made him Wine Waiter and taught him the difference between the wines of Burgundy and the wines of Bordeaux. He learned quickly what wine would best complement a saddle of lamb (a good claret), and got used to urging diners to enhance their enjoyment of their oysters by sipping a little Muscadet. He was so good at this that the Taj appointed him Assistant Head Waiter at the age of 20, in 1945.

From 20 to 27, he helped run what was then India's most renowned restaurant. In those days, hotels included the price of meals in the room rate, and all Taj guests would end up at the Ballroom. Every Friday and Saturday night, there would be a gala dance with a full band in attendance. Dancing and dinner would begin at nine p m, and the revelry would continue till two in the morning – four, if the band hit a hot streak.

Obviously, Louis was meant to go places. The Taj decided to open a small French restaurant for the discerning diner and when it came to finding a Head Waiter, there was no doubt at all. Louis was the best there was.

And so, on March 21, 1952, Louis changed out of his white suit and into a brand new uniform – a maroon jacket, with navy blue trousers, and a narrow, dark tie. It was the day the Rendezvous opened and Louis wanted to make sure that everything was perfect.

The restaurant was an instant success. It seated only 65 diners but it was full every night. Its French chef personally slaved over every dish and served the best *haute cuisine* in India. Lobsters cooked in the classic tradition: Thermidor, Newburg and Americaine. The best cuts of beef, sandwiched between *croûtons* and pâte, and turned into Tournedos Rossini. Fresh shallots and mushrooms chopped for the perfect Steak Diane. Fish.

In those days, a gala dinner with dancing at the Taj cost only Rs 7, and a bottle of a good champagne cost under Rs 25.

The Standing Pomfret that is a Rendezvous standby to this very day. Chicken. Poulet Sauté Eugenie – so good that Louis's mouth waters when he thinks about it now.

Of course, there were problems. Morarji Desai had become Chief Minister and he had his own notions about what people should drink. Prohibition meant that there was no wine. There were no cocktails, no aperitifs, and no after-dinner liqueurs either.

Fortunately, the clients didn't seem to mind. Inevitably, a good 75 per cent of all the regulars were Parsis. And half of those worked at Bombay House: Ardeshir Sabavala, J D Choksi, Sir Homi Mody, J R D Tata and the like. They came for the food and were able to do without the wine. Besides, many of them came at lunch-time, when the Rendezvous functioned as a second boardroom for the Tatas and there was no real time to settle down to serious drinking.

IN 1954, disaster struck. The government imposed stringent import restrictions and foreign exchange controls made it impossible to hire French chefs. Sadly, the Frogs packed their bags and left. And with them went the Dover sole, the New Zealand lamb, the French corn-fed chicken, the Austrian veal and the Danish bacon.

Now the Rendezvous was truly on its own. No booze. No Frogs. And no imported ingredients. But Louis rose to the occasion. He spruced up service. He sat with Maskie, the Taj's chef, and worked out new dishes that the regulars would like. And, in a show of almost insane optimism, the Taj actually extended the restaurant and added a band and dance floor.

It was an audacious move but one that paid off. The Rendezvous continued to be India's leading French restaurant and guests adapted their tastes to domestic ingredients without much difficulty. Louis had learned to *flambé* dishes by guests' tables from the French chefs and he put this skill to good use. He *flambéd* piccattas of veal, cooked chickens in jets of flame and ended meals with the Crêpes Suzette that have become his trademark.

And so it went, through the '50s and '60s. The Rendezvous never lost its popularity, Louis became a Bombay institution and for whole generations of the Bombay elite, French food was what Louis said it was.

He was a long way from his village in Mangalore, but he had kept up with his roots. In 1945, hundreds of offers had come pouring in from all over the world. Guests, impressed by this young waiter, had tried to lure him abroad. Louis had been tempted, but being his mother's only child, had always decided against leaving the country. Finally, in 1956, he went back to Mangalore, found a wife, and

decided that he was going to make his life in Bombay. In 1958, he had Allwyn, his first son. Three daughters followed in quick succession. The Taj gave him a flat at Mandlik House, behind the hotel. The da Silva family moved in, and they have been there ever since.

LOUIS DA SILVA'S world changed in the '70s. First of all, they closed down the old Rendezvous. Then they shifted it upstairs to the new wing. In its new avatar, it was to be called The Rooftop Rendezvous and run like a nightclub. Louis didn't mind that. They did, after all, promote him to Assistant Manager.

He was less enthusiastic about the second great change. In the mid-'70s, the Taj decided that it could no longer plod along with the heavy flour-based sauces of traditional French cuisine and sent its chefs to the best restaurants in France. They came back raving about *la nouvelle cuisine*, and the hotel decided that the Rendezvous was going to change its food.

Louis was less than overjoyed by the change. He talks about *nouvelle cuisine* in a manner that would have Pont spinning in his grave and regards the classical cuisine of Escoffier as the only cuisine worth emulating. To be sure, when the Taj chefs first came back from France with what seemed like a multiplicity of white sauce recipes, the patrons were less than overjoyed. Guests would ask for French Fried potatoes and the chef, imagining that he was Pierre Troisgros slumming it in some hotel kitchen, would retort: "I don't cook chips." And so, Louis and his staff would return to some old faithful Rendezvous client and try and persuade him to eat a stalk of asparagus, two leaves and a half-cooked carrot instead.

La nouvelle cuisine made Paul Bocuse a very rich man but then, he didn't live in Bombay. The local clientele wanted its Lobster Thermidor and its Chateaubriand and it didn't particularly care for the new

These days a new breed of Punjabi vulgarian thinks a good meal is a bottle of Black Label and jumbo prawns. But Louis doesn't mind.

food. The Taj persevered and finally an uneasy compromise was arrived at. The regulars did begin to alter their tastes and the chefs began to cook classical dishes for those who wanted them. And Louis went back to doing his table *flambés* for those who wanted them.

AFTER 45 YEARS in the business, what keeps Louis going? His old friends have all left the Taj: the last, retired a decade ago. He is now the hotel's longest serving employee and the only man who knows all of the Rendezvous' regulars by name. (In many cases, he knew their grandfathers by name too.)

Louis has no pat answers. He loves the work. He made his son join catering college (he is now a chef in the Gulf) and would recommend the trade to anyone who asked his advice.

But why, after so many years, does he still persist with the grand traditions and the grand style? The old clients have gone. The sons of his old Parsi regulars can no longer afford to pay over Rs 200 per head to eat at the Rendezvous. Their places have been taken by a new breed of Sindhi and Punjabi vulgarian who has more money than taste and whose idea of a good meal is half a bottle of Black Label and two large Jumbo Prawns, grilled till they are nearly burnt.

It must surely be frustrating for a gentle, dignified man like Louis to respond when this kind of person snaps his fingers. It must be awful to slave over the perfect Crêpes Suzette only to see some joker ask for custard sauce with it. Doesn't Louis ever feel down? Frustrated? Pissed off?

It is somehow typical of Louis that while yes, he does miss the old breed, no, he has no complaints about the new lot either. His job is to help run the restaurant to the best of his ability. It is not his job to make moral judgements about his guests. As far as he is concerned, anybody who pays for a meal at the Rendezvous has an equal claim to his time and attention. If they don't like his Crêpes Suzette, then perhaps he is doing something wrong. After all, the customer is always right.

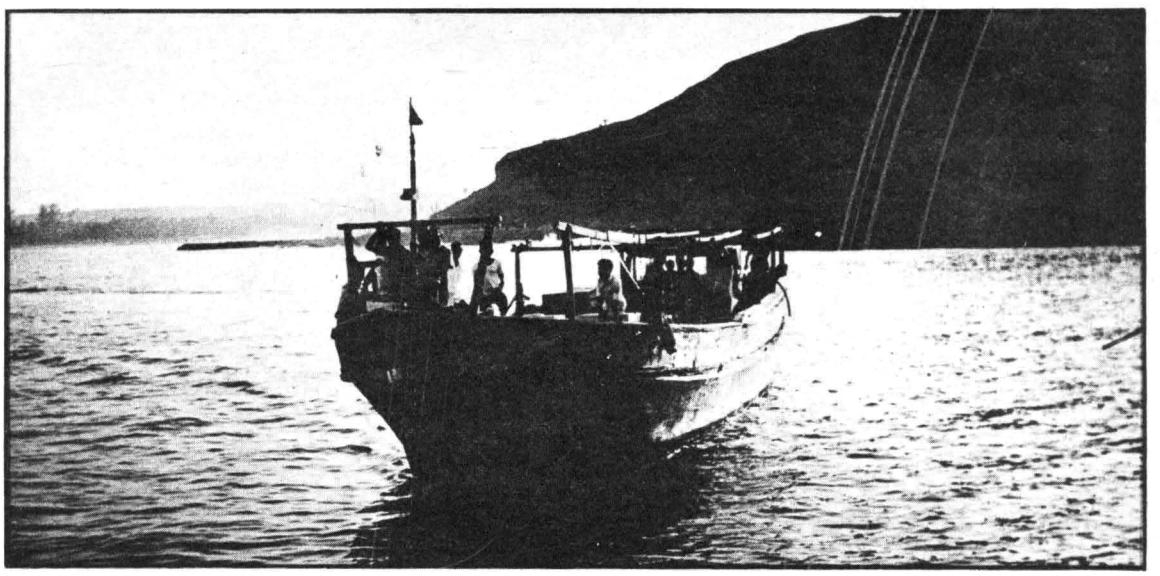
In a year's time, Louis will be due for retirement. It is not something he looks forward to. The Taj has been his life. He cannot imagine his day without it. Moreover, he has a young daughter who is still at school here. He does not fancy having to vacate his company flat while his children are still being educated.

Obviously, the Taj will not be willing to let him go either. It is impossible to conceive of the Rendezvous without Louis. He is still the classiest thing about the restaurant. Presumably, Ajit Kerkar will give him an extension for a couple of years. Till 1990, perhaps, when he will complete 50 years with the Taj Mahal Hotel.

But at some stage, Louis will have to retire. And with him will go an entire tradition. ♦

BY SHIRAZ SIDHVA

SMUGGLING



The Rs 2,000-crore smuggling industry is flourishing, though the Finance Ministry and Customs officials don't seem to think so. An in-depth report on how it's done, how it's financed, and why smuggling is almost impossible to eradicate.

EARLY THIS YEAR, Customs divers plunged into the depths of the murky sea off Bombay to recover contraband that had reportedly been jettisoned by a smugglers' dhow sailing from Dubai. Forty-eight frustrating hours later, even as they were about to call off the search, the divers dredged up two bags containing 12 bars of gold and 1,565 gold biscuits, together valued at over Rs 4 crore, in addition to 1,000 Japanese wristwatches. It was a record haul, made possible only by a tip-off and accomplished at great risk.

On June 24, a special 24-hour anti-smuggling operation was launched at international airports in Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Trivandrum, Tiruchirapalli and Varanasi, as part of the government's massive drive to detect economic offenders. A 100 per cent examination of incoming passengers and a ten per cent examination of outgoing passengers, along with aircraft rummaging on all terminating flights, yielded a little over Rs 1.14 crore as Customs duty on excess baggage, as compared to the average daily collection of Rs 69 lakh.

"Not a single day has gone by this year without a seizure," says R C Misra, ex-Chairman of the Central Board of Excise and Customs, with pride.

There are figures to back this claim. According to senior officials in the Finance Ministry, there has already been a 100 per cent increase in seizures since last year, despite the fact that we are only halfway through the current year. Between January and March alone, Rs 47.98 crore worth of goods were seized as compared to Rs 33.5 crore till April 1984. "We expect to make seizures to the tune of Rs 200 crore this year, doubling last year's record of Rs 101.9 crore," informs M V N Rao, Additional Secretary in the Finance Ministry, and Member, Customs (anti-smuggling).

On the face of it, this remarkable

spurt in seizures, signifies a positive trend, with the Customs authorities finally deciding to pull up their socks. What is more likely, however, is that there has been a considerable increase in smuggling activity, despite the fact that political crises have virtually sealed off key smuggling points like the Palk Straits (Sri Lanka), the Indo-Pak border (Punjab) and the Gujarat coast. Though Customs officials are reluctant to admit it, seizures uncover hardly ten per cent of the illegal business in the country.

Though much is made of income-tax evasions, it is smuggling that is the single largest organised illegal activity in the country today. Estimated to be worth a staggering Rs 2,000 crore annually, there is no business quite like it. Over the years, smuggling has burgeoned from a few stray cases reported on the western coast to a flourishing trade that causes the Indian exchequer an annual revenue loss of approximately Rs 3,000 crore by way of duty evasion.

"It must be pointed out that Customs and Excise duties constitute the chief source of revenue for the government," says a Finance Ministry official. "The Customs and Central Excise Department is the mainstay of our national economy. Its tax collections account for about 80 per cent of the Central government's total tax receipts." Besides, unlike most other enforcement agencies, the Customs and Central Excise Department more than pays for itself. According to official sources, the total annual cost of the Customs Department is an estimated Rs 53 crore; duties collected amount to Rs 20 crore; and this year, seizures alone will bring in four times the amount spent on the corps. The Department spends less than one paisa (0.7 paisa) on the collection of each rupee of tax, besides being the third-largest employer in the country after the Railways and the Post and Telegraphs Department.

Anti-smuggling is a minuscule, albeit high-profile part of Customs and Central Excise operations with seizures contributing only one per cent of the country's gross revenue.

Gold has been a constant on the smugglers list. Today, gold smuggling makes up 60 per cent of this 2,000-crore industry.

BEING the lucrative business it is, smuggling is almost impossible to eradicate. It can, at best, be contained by being made less attractive. Meanwhile, thousands of people are engaged in this nefarious activity. Contraband is smuggled in on mechanised fishing boats and dhows equipped with sophisticated gadgetry; in trucks; on camel back, across the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Pak borders; on international flights in baggage, or concealed in the panelling of aircraft. The goods smuggled in include gold, synthetic fabrics, electronic goods, synthetic yarn, watches, tetracycline powder, cortisone, even narcotics, though fortunately, these are usually re-smuggled out of the country. The smuggler's inventory of wares constantly changes in response to various economic factors like international and domestic prices, demand and supply. Experience has proved that the craze for things foreign subsides once an item becomes freely available on the market at a competitive price.

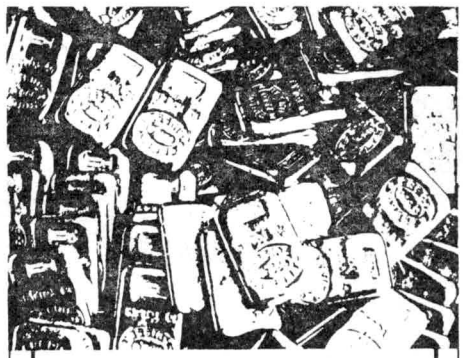
Gold has been a constant on the smuggler's list, the amount smuggled being directly related to fluctuations in the international gold market. Ten years ago, gold accounted for barely ten per cent of the goods coming in – today, it makes up 60 per cent of the flourishing trade. Since 1980, the international price of gold has plummeted from around $ 800 per ounce to less than $ 300. This works out to Rs 1,640 for ten grams according to the prevalent exchange rates on Bombay's *hawala* market. On the other hand, the domestic price of gold has risen this year from around Rs 1,800 per ten grams to over Rs 2,150, making gold smuggling very profitable.

And what better market to smuggle gold into than India? "Indians seem to have an insatiable craze for gold – any amount of gold can be absorbed here," despairs Union Finance Minister V P Singh. This, coupled with the fact that the 2.5 tonnes of gold produced domestically meets barely a fraction of the demand (100 tonnes), has contributed significantly to gold smuggling in recent years.

The illegal gold comes in mainly from Dubai. (It is significant that official gold imports from that country have risen substantially from 45,737 kilograms in 1983 to over one lakh kilograms last year.) The trend in gold seizures corresponds with these figures. In 1983, Customs seized 230 kilograms of gold, valued at Rs 4.18 crore. This figure more than doubled last year, to 515 kilograms valued at Rs 10.09 crore. This year promises to surpass all previous gold records: by April, Rs 20 crore worth of the stuff had already been smuggled in. A sizeable chunk of the gold smuggling is conducted along the west coast. The smuggled gold from Dubai is normally received off the Gujarat coast, where entire villages are suspected of being involved in the racket. Recently, however, a Rs 1 crore seizure was reported at Udipi. While Rs 33.3 crore worth of gold was seized off the western coast between January and March this year (compared to Rs 18.66 crore for the corresponding period last year), seizures off the eastern coast yielded Rs 4.7 crore till March this year, a marginal increase

on last year's figure of Rs 4.6 crore.

The amount of gold smuggled over land borders seems paltry by comparison, even though it has registered an increase since last year. Till March this year, the Indo-Bangla, Indo-Pak, Indo-Nepal and Indo-Burma borders accounted for seizures worth Rs 88 lakh, Rs 1.6 crore, Rs 73 lakh, and Rs 7 lakh, respectively, as compared to Rs 53 lakh, Rs 41 lakh, Rs 49 lakh, and Rs 5 lakh respectively for the whole of 1984. Though separate figures are not available for gold smuggled in on international flights, a significant amount is brought in by carriers and even bona fide passengers, eager to make a quick buck. This new breed of smugglers has little in common with its archetypal counterpart – even ladies returning from vacation cram gold jewellery between layers of clothing in handbags or wear it twisted around the waist or legs; smart executives conceal gold biscuits in hollowed out hardcover books and in briefcases; school children are made to carry the precious metal in stuffed toys or chocolate bars. A senior Customs official speaks of this trend with ill-concealed disgust: "You needn't be an unshaven, greasy man in dark glasses, to be a smuggler. Almost every day, we come across respectable upper-middle class women with impeccable family backgrounds who think nothing of stuffing a gold chain into a hollowed out cake of Camay soap!"



Smugglers are no longer unshaven, greasy men. The new breed consists of upper class people who stuff gold chains into hollowed out Camay soaps.

BESIDES GOLD, a mind-boggling range of goods enters the country clandestinely: synthetic fabrics, watches and electronic goods are major items, in that order. Though India produces synthetics as good as any in the world, it is much cheaper to smuggle in fabric. "Synthetic fabrics are considered luxury items by the government and are taxed accordingly. Until this changes, nothing can stop fabrics from being smuggled in," laments an officer.

Experience has shown that when an item is freely available on the domestic market, at a price that is comparable to international prices, it ceases to be smuggled in. "It is only a matter of time till we produce the range of electronics available abroad," feels Rao. "Years ago, cycles were being smuggled into Madras from Ceylon. Nobody would think of bringing one in today." Though smuggling of narcotics is reportedly on the increase, (Rs 5 crore worth of drugs have been seized since December last) fortunately, there is little demand for the deadly stuff in India. "India is used mainly as a transit country: narcotics are smuggled in mainly to be smuggled out again to countries that constitute the Golden Crescent – Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan," informs a Customs official. "Pakistan is involved in a very big way. We, as neighbours, are inadvertently roped in."

WHERE DOES the staggering sum of money that is required to keep the smuggling industry alive and kicking come from? The quantum of goods smuggled out of India is negligible compared to the quantum of goods smuggled in. India's illegal exports include snake skins, silver, foreign exchange and Indian currency. Traditionally, silver was smuggled out to pay for the gold coming in. In 1983, when international silver prices hit the roof, silver seizures totalled a phenomenal 40,000 kilograms. In 1984, when silver prices abroad crashed, not more than 700 kilograms of the metal were seized. Silver smuggling became unattractive overnight.

But something had to replace silver to pay for the gold being smuggled in. The illegal use of US dollars is one source. These are freely available on Bombay's flourishing *hawala* market, where currency is sold at a premium to pay for goods brought into India. Besides, Indian expatriates who send money to relatives here, bypass the Reserve Bank, funding smuggled goods to earn a premium instead. According to an article in *Business India* last year, the size of the *hawala* market is estimated at Rs 30 crore.

Another major source of funding smuggled goods is 'paper smuggling'. Exporters have been known to underinvoice their goods, receiving the balance in foreign exchange when their consignments reach their destinations. This illegal foreign exchange is then converted into smuggled goods.

Indian currency is smuggled into countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh, where the rupee commands a premium. Liquor, cloth and agricultural produce are smuggled over land borders to sustain this reverse smuggling.

SMUGGLING has assumed such a magnitude that it now seems almost impossible to prevent it. "Nobody can deny the adverse effects this illegal business has on our economy," says a Finance Ministry official. "The new government has done a lot to curb this evil, and will continue to fight it."

For the most part, higher-ups in the Finance Ministry and Customs Department exhibit a curiously fatalistic attitude towards the Rs 2,000-crore industry that is burgeoning under their very noses. "Nowhere in the world have Customs officials been

able to eradicate smuggling," says Rao.

Can nothing be done to control this problem? "The past six months have seen a sea-change in the Customs corps. Smuggling may have increased, but the record number of seizures made, clearly indicates that the government is very serious about tackling this problem," says Rao.

It is difficult to believe that smuggling can continue on such a mammoth scale without official connivance. "We have some black sheep in our midst," admits a member of the Customs Board. "But by and large, Customs officers are as honest or dishonest as the next man."

It cannot be denied that the Customs service is plagued with serious problems. The service is under-staffed. Large, unmanageable areas are under a lone Collector who often finds it impossible to look in every direction. An estimated 50-60 per cent increase in manpower is required, but it will be some time before the present government's ban on recruitment is lifted.

Customs officials find it increasingly tough to match the well-equipped, organised gangs of the criminal world, where money ensures an abundant supply of the latest gadgetry. The entire coast is manned by about 100 vessels – a motley fleet consisting mainly of confiscated vessels (only ten were actually bought – from Korea and Norway). Steps are being taken to replace this fleet at a cost of Rs 23.25 lakh. Besides, the outdated guns used by Customs are woefully inadequate to combat the semi-automatic guns and state-of-the-art weaponry that smugglers use.

Customs authorities have limited powers under the Customs Act. Seasoned smugglers have often succeeded in exploiting legal loopholes to evade the law. Though 84 per cent of prosecuted smugglers are convicted, they are considered economic offenders and tried in separate courts. Often, confiscated goods are disclaimed, and there is no proof left to act upon. The big fish never stray into the net of the law and often, carriers

It is difficult to believe that smuggling can flourish without official connivance. But the Customs service is plagued with serious problems.

are back in the business after a year of preventive detention. The penalty is no great deterrent either – it is deliberately kept low, as carriers are often too poor to pay at all. First offences are treated lightly by the law.

The number of seizures made seems to have no effect on seasoned and would-be smugglers, who are getting more daring by the day. "Forces outside the country stand to gain by conniving with smugglers," says an official. "Gold consignments are even insured by certain companies abroad (it is rumoured that the prestigious Lloyd's of London is also involved in this racket) against detection by Customs!"

Singh has initiated a dual strategy to tackle smuggling on a war footing: on the economic and administrative fronts. On the economic side, he has announced a reduction of Customs duties on a variety of imported goods like watches and watch components, to make smuggling less attractive.

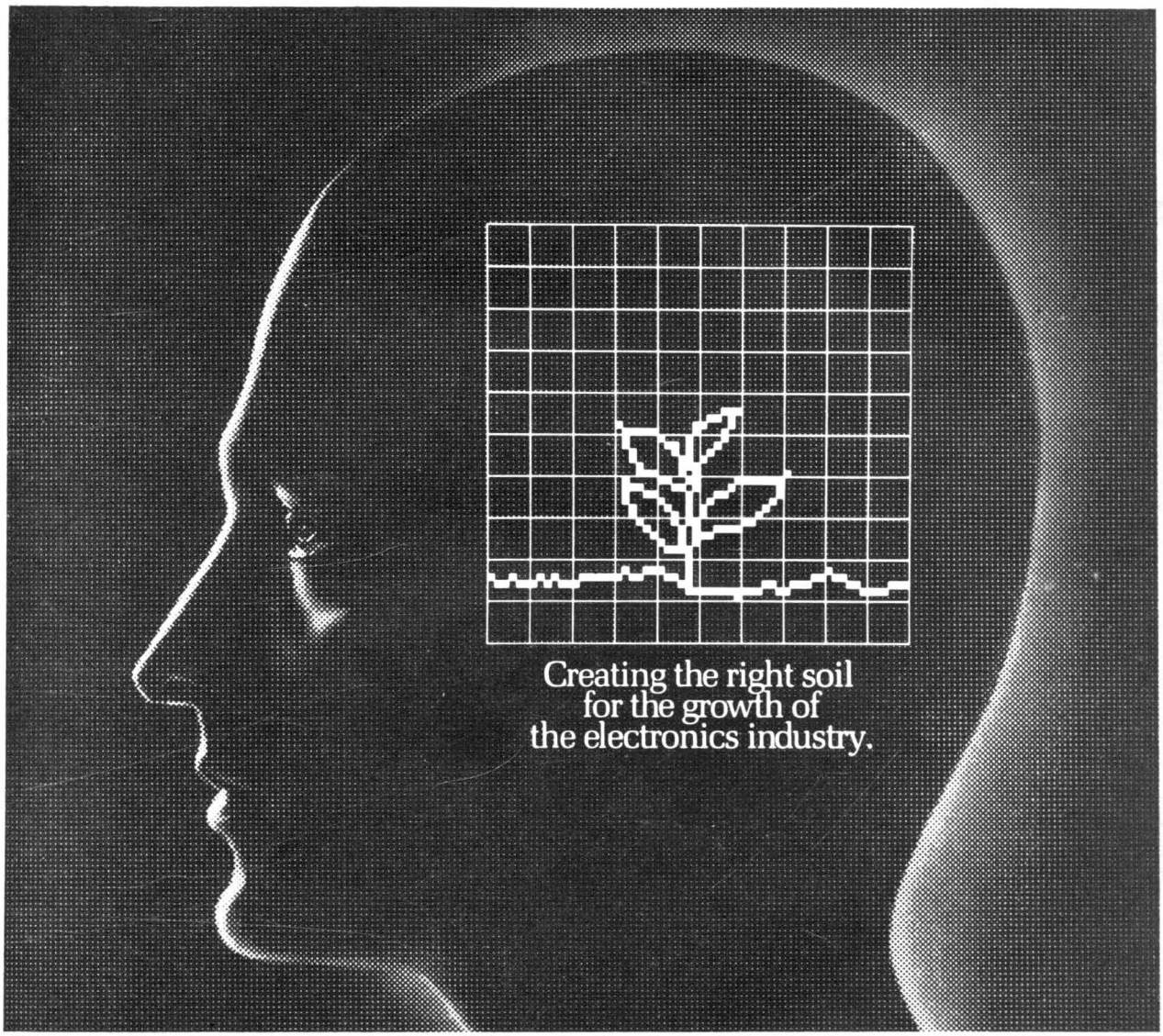
On the administrative side, Singh has introduced incentives to motivate Customs staff and minimise complicity. "An officer will now find it more profitable to be honest and make seizures," says Misra. "In four months, we have already equalled last year's seizures," beams Singh.

In British times, Customs officers would get 50 per cent of the value of the seizure, plus 50 per cent of the fine or penalty. This was later restricted to ten per cent of the value of the seizure, because it was felt that officers should not be rewarded for what fell in their line of duty. Only Class II officers and below were entitled to rewards. Later, a further ceiling was imposed – the reward could not exceed three months' salary. Till last year only 0.5 per cent (Rs 50 lakh) of all seizures was the total budget allocation for rewards. For gold, the allocation for rewards was very low – Rs 60 per *tola* for officials, Rs 90 for informers. In big hauls, this amounted to not even ten per cent of the value of the gold.

For the first time, Singh has introduced rewards for Class I officers upto the level of Assistant Collector. Under the new scheme, 20 per cent of all seizures will be given to the officer responsible, 20 per cent to the informer, and ten per cent will be reserved for a welfare fund to augment anti-smuggling equipment. That amounts to a generous 50 per cent. Also, 50 per cent of the reward would be given to the officer in advance. Earlier, it could be several years before the reward was actually granted. "Besides rewards we bestow honours to boost morale," says Singh.

Innocent passengers who have become accustomed to dealing with rude Customs officials may be surprised to find well-motivated, smiling officers instead. "We have told our boys repeatedly to be polite and patient," says a shamefaced senior officer. "That's one area where I have no defence."

"Economic measures are really the core of the matter," says Singh. "I cannot say that we will be able to tackle the problem immediately – we may not be able to go the whole hog in one year. But I'm certain that our co-ordinated attack on economic offenders will drastically curb this illegal activity." ♦



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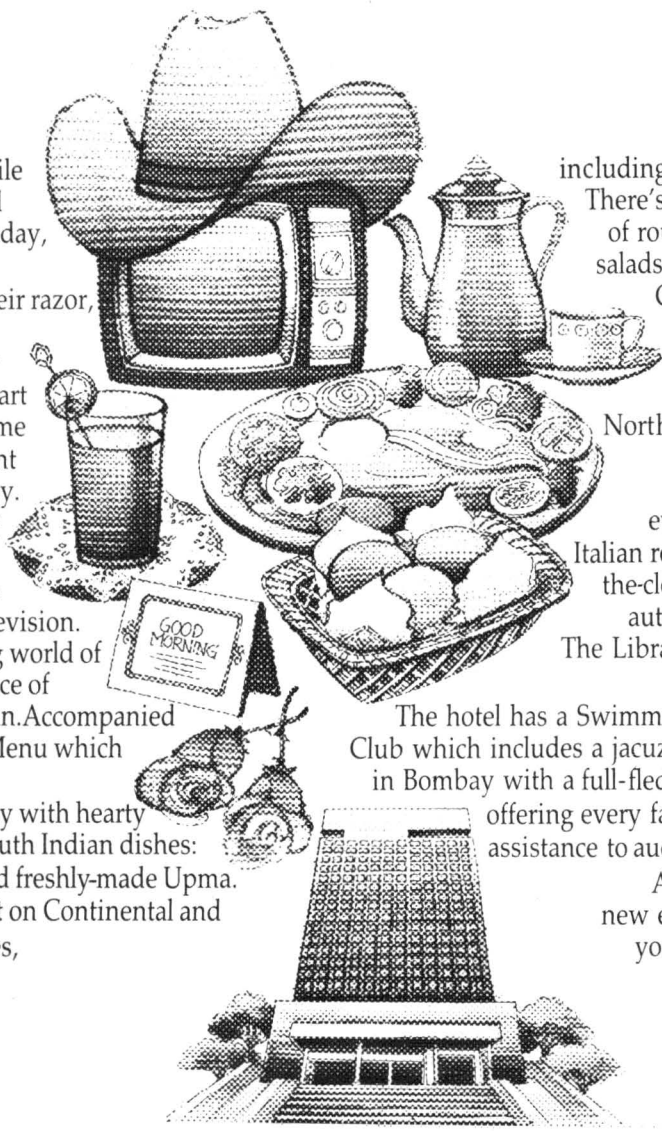

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He's never made it anywhere on the international circuit but our chauvinism ensures that he gets more publicity than he deserves.

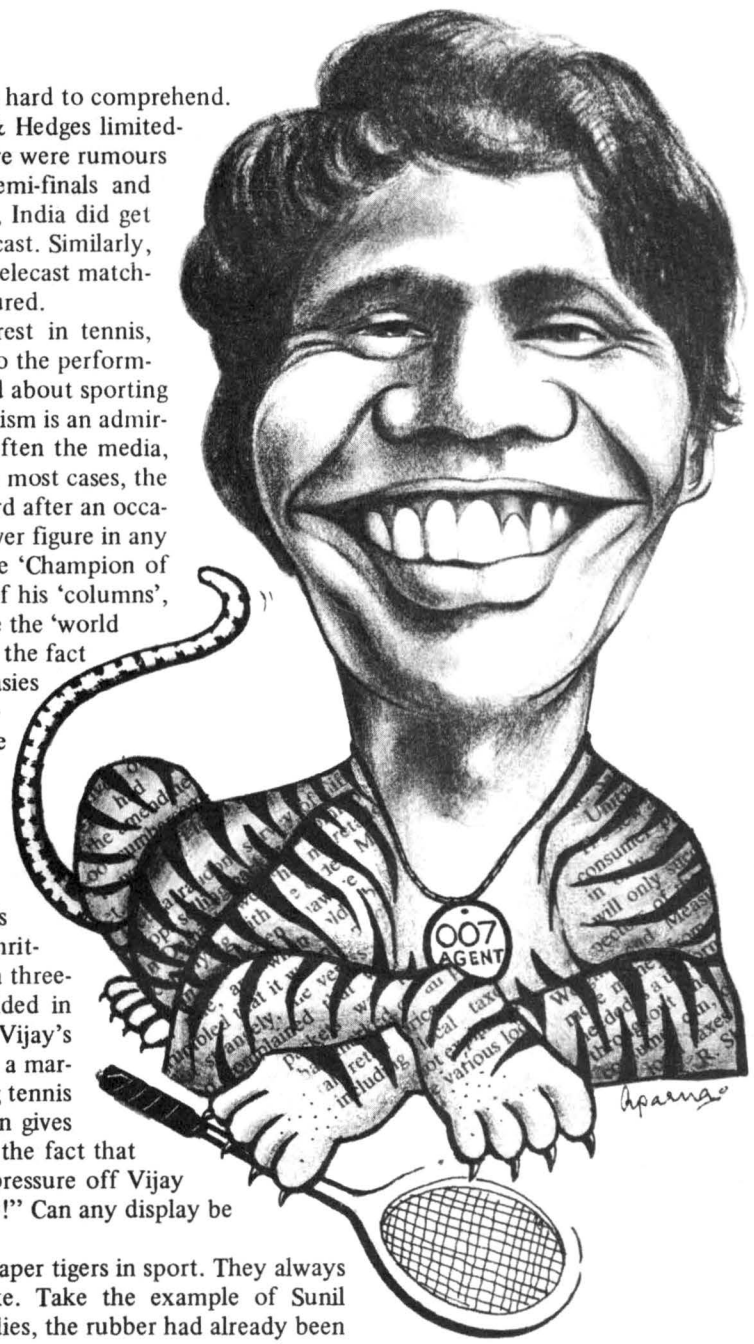
BY VIDHUSHAK

THE INDIAN ATTITUDE to sport is often hard to comprehend. Some months back, during the Benson & Hedges limited-overs cricket tournament in Australia, there were rumours that Doordarshan would telecast the semi-finals and finals only if India figured in them. Fortunately, India did get past the earlier rounds and the matches were telecast. Similarly, during the 1985 Wimbledon, there were moves to telecast matches where Ramesh Krishnan and Vijay Amritraj figured.

This raises an interesting query. Is our interest in tennis, hockey, cricket and other sports restricted only to the performance of our own players? Should we watch or read about sporting events only if Indians figure in them? While patriotism is an admirable quality, our sports-loving public and more often the media, tend to dwell too much on the performance (or in most cases, the non-performance) of our players and go overboard after an occasional triumph. Thus Ravi Shastri, who would never figure in any genuine cricket lover's World XI, is lauded as the 'Champion of Champions' and has the temerity to say in one of his 'columns', that the Indian team and not the West Indians are the 'world champions' in limited-overs cricket. This, despite the fact that, if one forgets the Bukhiar-staged cricket fantasies of the Arabian oases, India has won just two international tournaments while remaining near the bottom in the order of overall victories in one-day internationals.

And now, expectedly, the hosannas are loud and clear for yet another paper tiger of Indian sport – Vijay Amritraj. *Amritraj's Display Sight For The Gods* screamed *The Times Of India*'s Sunder Rajan, who should know better. Vijay Amritraj's victory over Mats Wilander at Bangalore in a three-setter was achieved after the tie had been decided in favour of Sweden. Yet Sunder Rajan pronounces Vijay's display 'outstanding tennis, a sight for the Gods, a marvellous display, a tremendous inspiration for young tennis aspirants in the country'. And then Sunder Rajan gives the game up rather naively by writing: "Perhaps the fact that the tie was decided helped to take some of the pressure off Vijay and enabled him to give such a memorable display!" Can any display be so memorable once the pressure is off?

This, then, is the problem with most of our paper tigers in sport. They always perform 'marvellously' when nothing is at stake. Take the example of Sunil Gavaskar. In Madras in 1984, against the West Indies, the rubber had already been



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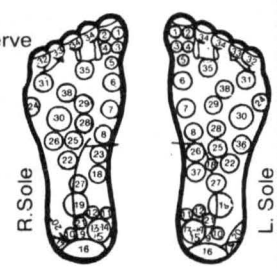

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PAPER TIGERS

In a career spanning 12 years, he has done best at tournaments where the top-notchers warm up. At the important tournaments, he has always performed badly.

decided in favour of the visitors. The first day's play had been washed out, there was nothing in the game, the West Indian pacemen were going through the motions of bowling, and our 'Little Master' did not lose the chance to knock up a record-breaking double century which would have been more timely and match-saving in the previous encounter at Calcutta where India collapsed and lost by an innings.

It's the same with the paper tigers of tennis. At Bangalore, for the umpteenth time in his career, Vijay put up a fight against Jarryd in the crucial opening match and, as usual, lost! When the tie was decided and the reverse singles reduced to the level of an exhibition match, he 'defeated' the world number four, Wilander.

Somewhat surprisingly, even the usually hard-to-please Arvind Lavakare goes overboard with praise for Vijay. "What an inspiring, goose-pimpling (whatever that means) image was Vijay Amritraj!" he writes in *The Sunday Observer*. 'Pride and joy of Indian tennis' . . . 'remarkable enthusiasm when the cause was lost' . . and so on. A week earlier Lavakare had waxed eloquent over the Britannia Amritraj Tennis Foundation (BRAT) in Madras. More about that later.

A truly great player is one who always rises to the occasion. Connors, Borg or McEnroe in tennis, and Alan Border, Gordon Greenidge or Viv Richards in cricket, are champions whose talents blossom when the chips are down and who generally shun the easy pickings. In 1956, Keith Miller, then 34, was spurred by a full house at Lords to take ten wickets and a packet of runs, thereby enabling Australia to win a Test. In 1948, the same Keith Miller had thrown his wicket away for nil in a county match against Essex where the Australian batsmen made merry, scoring 721 runs in a single day's play. This, essentially, is the difference between a champion and a paper tiger.

Paper tigers function differently. Ramanathan Krishnan may beat top-ranking players like Hoad, Fraser or Drobny and win tournaments at Baastad or Bournemouth, but come Wimbledon, Forest Hills or the French Open, he is nowhere. Yet the media portray him as a champion.

It's the same with Vijay, only more so. In a career spanning nearly 12 years, some of his wins had been at Chichester, Bretton Woods, Beckenham, WCT/Memphis, Temple, Cologne, WCT/Milan. . . . mostly tournaments where the top-notchers just warm up, if they actually turn up to play. There had been occasional wins over Connors and McEnroe. Borg had been stretched for five sets but had emerged the ultimate winner. Even in the 1985 Wimbledon, much was made of Vijay's victory over Yannick Noah (who seldom plays well on grass), but true to form, he lost out to an unknown Swiss player in the next round.

Vijay, the paper tiger, has several avatars to his credit, dutifully reported by the fawning press. Did leading model Farah Fawcett really date Vijay? One would believe she went out with real champions, not sporting losers. And imagine a tennis player (who trumpets high-flown ideals of doing his best for his country) being lured by the movies and performing silly, stupid roles in films like *Octopussy,* which denigrate his own country!

But such paper tigers have never had it so good. They are millionaires, live in posh suburbs in America and have mediamen eating out of their hands. "I am still aiming for Wimbledon," boasted Vijay recently in an interview with *The Hindustan Times*. "I'm playing better than before." In a tennis world where teenagers walk away with all the major titles and retire satiated by the time they are in their late 20s, it's nice to hear such optimism. But where does it all lead to?

The paper tiger has now built a tennis sanctuary in Madras in collaboration with Britannia Industries. This is supposed to be a nursery for future tennis stars who live, breathe and dream tennis all the time! One can only hope that the nursery will not produce champions who lose gracefully all the time, win only unimportant tournaments, spend more time on movie sets than on tennis courts, or build five-star hotels which exceed the allotted FSI!

Permanent residents of Marina del Rey in the US, Vijay and brother Anand will be visiting the camp for a week every year to coach foreign coaches, who will then coach the Indian coaches who, ultimately, will coach the dozen-or-so boys. Were the Borgs, Beckers and McEnroes created at such nurseries?

We seem a gullible lot. Comes the news that Shashi Menon (who is that?) has been allotted 50 acres of land by the Karnataka government in Bangalore for a similar tennis academy. With so many *desi* Hopmans about, it won't be long before Ramesh Krishnan comes up with his own coaching school where the stress will be on service – making your opponent impatient and nervous with serves that never seem to reach him! Anything is possible with our paper tigers. ♦

THE FOODIE
Madhur Jaffrey

For years she was the best-known expatriate Indian actress. Now she is the high priestess of Indian cuisine abroad and author of bestselling cookbooks.

MADHUR JAFFREY, the energetic woman who, in her own words, has been 'sashaying through New York in a sari' for over two decades, is an award-winning actress, author of bestselling cookbooks, and mother of three grown-up daughters. A curious turn of events made this cosmopolitan actress single-handedly responsible for introducing Indian food into American and British kitchens. Her latest book, *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery*, on the bestseller list in England for 11 months, sold 350,000 copies, and was accompanied by an eight-part cookery series aired nationally by BBC Television.

"It helps to be an actress," she says with a laugh. "You're performing, trying to make the audience recreate whatever's in you. With acting, it's emotion, with cooking, it's the recipe."

We are seated in her Greenwich Village apartment, strewn with reminders of India. Fourteen floors below us police sirens wail as Ms Jaffrey converses about her varied activities. The woman who is 'entirely comfortable' in three different cultures – Indian, English and American – has had an unusual past.

As she speaks, she draws one into her charmed circle. Her conversation is animated, her mimicry perfect, her anecdotes funny, her laughter infectious. Her writing has this same intimate quality. It's no wonder her readers feel that they know her. Many, she claims, do not hesitate to call her when something goes wrong; "Ms Jaffrey – the *vindaloo*'s gone sour. What should I do?"

Fortunately, her recipes are accurate and easy to follow, so she receives more fan mail than calls for emergency advice. After her television appearances on BBC, letters poured in from all corners of the British Isles. An old Scotsman wrote in to say that she had revolutionised his way of cooking eggs. She had convinced him on television, that it was easy, tasty, and worth trying just once. He did try it, and was immediately hooked. Another victory for her lifelong crusade against culinary insularity.

Madhur Jaffrey is not a typical cookbook writer. Until she was 20, she didn't know ginger from garlic, and could barely make a cup of tea, though she has always loved food passionately. Growing up in Delhi, on the banks of the Jamuna, Madhur Bahadur's future plans did not include domesticity of any kind. The thin girl with the long nose wanted to be an actress.

"As a teenager growing up in India, I was preoccupied with the usual teenage concerns – boys (whom we saw only at a distance and therefore coveted), my ambitions (why can't *I* play Hamlet?) and other such nonsense. I went into the kitchen only as a dilettante, more to taste than to help or learn."

It was when she left India at the age of 20, to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in London that she realised that if she was to survive, she had to learn how to cook. Faced with a daily dose of institutional British food, too poor to eat out, Madhur began a correspondence course in cooking with her mother. Her mother's letters, written in Hindi, led her, step by step, into the world of Indian cuisine. Soon, she began adapting and experimenting; arriving at the authentic tastes she remembered by circuitous routes. Her days were spent learning Shakespeare and Molière; her nights, experimenting with *kheema* and dal.

Twenty-seven years later, with three cookbooks behind her and two more in the oven, the ambassador of Indian food says with some candour: "I'm not always thrilled with cooking, but I still love to eat. And there's no way to eat what you want to eat

Sooni Taraporevala's photographs have appeared frequently in **Imprint.** *This is her first article for us.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SOONI TARAPOREVALA

unless you cook it. So it's a means to an end. I'm not thrilled with the act of cooking, as I'm not thrilled with the act of writing. I'm thrilled with the act of acting, though. That, I enjoy doing. Everything else is a chore, but the results are all right."

ACTING has always been Madhur Jaffrey's first love, her perennial passion. In 1957, after graduating from the Royal Academy, she went to Winooski, Vermont, to conduct a pantomime workshop. Naturally, the bright lights of Broadway beckoned, and soon she was a struggling actress trying to make it in New York.

"It was terribly, terribly frustrating. The pay was always terrible; it was hard to break through and get non-Indian parts. I couldn't play what I had been trained to do at RADA. Couldn't do Shakespeare, Molière, couldn't even do Medea! They would hire blondes and very Anglo-Saxon people, and I just couldn't get the parts."

Her debut off-Broadway, in the play *Shakuntala,* was a nightmare. Paid $10 a week, she had to sign a handwritten contract that promised she would iron the director's shirts as well. She had other concerns besides those of her career. Married to Saeed Jaffrey, an Indian actor, in the space of four years she had three babies to look after. She continued to act. In one of the plays she did, she was eight months pregnant. Besides acting, both of them had to take whatever odd jobs came along, and life was a constant and exhausting juggling act. It was pointless to think of leaving New York to break into the Indian film industry, the largest in the world. Madhur Jaffrey knew she did not have the curves required of Indian filmstars.

But in 1964, she did return to India. She was offered a role in the film *Shakespearewallah* to be shot on location. Ironically enough, her role was that of a pretentious Indian filmstar. She played the part with such relish that when the film was screened at the Berlin Film Festival,

Madhur Jaffrey was awarded the Silver Bear as Best Actress.

After accepting the award, she returned to New York. Her six-year marriage to Saeed had ended in divorce. She married Sanford Allen, a black musician. She had met him when she worked as a guide at the Lincoln Center; he played violin for the New York Philharmonic. They have been married for 17 years now. New York became her home and Madhur Jaffrey and her three daughters became New Yorkers.

MADHUR JAFFREY'S second coming to New York was more triumphant than her first off-Broadway debut. *Shakespearewallah* was being screened at the New York Film Festival and Craig Claiborne of the *New York Times* wrote an article about the actress who was also a superb cook. Soon after, a publisher approached her to write a book on Indian cuisine.

"He asked me, 'How long will it take you?' and I said, 'Three months.' I thought, what is there to it? I cook all this stuff at home. All I have to do is write it down.

"It took me five years to do that first book. I didn't realise the demands. And also the accuracy I would demand of myself. There were hundreds of things I tasted and rejected because they weren't working out. I can't tell you how many *gulab jamuns* I've thrown out in my time."

The pains she took were well worth the effort. *An Invitation To Indian Cooking* launched her second career. Claiborne described it as 'one of the finest, most lucid and comprehensive books on Indian cooking ever published'. The women of her family, especially her mother, found the whole affair 'hugely funny'. "Everyone thought it was hilarious that I, of all people, who hardly stepped into the kitchen at home, should go out and write a cookbook!"

An Invitation To Indian Cooking kept many a thin Indian student in America well-fed. We, too, received aerogrammed instructions from mothers back home, but it was simpler to follow Madhur Jaffrey's recipes. Meticulously adapted for American kitchens by a person who was once a non-cook, her recipes demanded little more than the ability to read and follow instructions. The results were always superb. We were soon cooking *biryani* and chicken *moghlai* with the ease of professionals; writing to our mothers about the discovery of this great book that had done the impossible – taught their daughters to cook.

"I'm still acting," she says with a laugh. "I'm acting a food person now. And life is taking a wonderful turn at the moment."

Since that first cookbook, there has been no looking back. Published in 1981, her second book, *Madhur Jaffrey's World-of-the-East Vegetarian Cooking*, won the RT French Tastemakers Award. Mimi Sheraton immediately placed it on her Christmas list of the six best cookbooks of the year, and Craig Claiborne acclaimed: "If, through some miracle, I decided to resort to a vegetable diet forever, this new book by Madhur Jaffrey, who is, to my mind, the finest authority on Indian cooking in America, would be my *Bible*. It is by far the most comprehensive, fascinating and inspired book on vegetable cookery that I have encountered." One year later, *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* took Britain by storm.

I ask her if she is dissatisfied about being categorised as a 'food person', when she sees herself primarily as an actress? "Not dissatisfied, really," she replies, "because I'm still acting. I'm acting a food person," she says with a laugh. "Life is taking such a wonderful turn at the moment. The BBC series got me so well-known in England, that I'm getting more acting work as a result. I've just completed this film called *Assam Garden*. It's a two-character film with Deborah Kerr, directed by an absolutely wonderful director." This same young Englishwoman plans to direct a filmed version of *Medea*, and Madhur Jaffrey is finally going to get that part. She is justifiably thrilled.

She shows me stills from *Assam Garden*, to be released soon. I would not have recognised her; the old lady with large hips, in a nylon sari, cardigan, tennis shoes and socks. She plays a Gujarati lady who has lived in England for many years with her family, but who longs to return to India. Deborah Kerr plays an old colonial whose husband has died, leaving behind his huge tropical garden, a recreation of their life spent in India. Out of a mutual need, the two women come together. The film is about their relationship.

The script initially called for a frosty Deborah Kerr, and an overly friendly Madhur Jaffrey. She refused. "The way it was written, kind of 'Oh yes, I'm so happy to see you,' was coming from the Indian woman. And I said, 'No, it's not right. If she has this animosity, it will register with me however good-natured I am, and I'll pay her back one day for it.' So we changed the script a little bit," she says with a smile.

Madhur Jaffrey has been playing a lot of old ladies in recent times. This type-casting by the film industry only

makes her laugh. Her ability to play old ladies has opened many doors. In the film *Heat And Dust*, she played a bejewelled, powerful, haughty Indian begum; mother of the ruler of a princely state. She also gained entry into the Indian film industry recently. In *Saagar*, a commercial blockbuster, she plays a 75-year-old grandmother, rich and tough, who objects to her grandson's tryst with a poor fishergirl. Her antagonist in the film, the poor girl's father, is played by Saeed Jaffrey, her ex-husband.

MADHUR JAFFREY also laughs and jokes about acting her way through the world of food, but that's not an accurate reflection of the work she puts into her culinary books. While researching them is enjoyable, testing recipes can be terribly trying, and the act of writing is, for her, agony. Though she graduated from Delhi University with the highest marks in English Literature, she still doesn't enjoy sitting down to write. "The third draft I enjoy," she says, "because I'm cleaning it up, making it good. But the first draft! I always think I can't write! Can't write a sentence that is grammatically correct."

Currently working on a book on the regional variations in Indian food, she plans to write a recipe book which will include a historical and sociological study of Indian food: why an area eats what it does.

"Each area will be covered in terms of a total picture – from breakfasts to banquets to snacks. One hundred years from now I want it to all be there for somebody to say: 'This is how it was in 1984 with India as far as food was concerned.'

"It is ambitious, but I'm learning, and I'm enjoying it a lot. I've had such fun going into little, little villages with my begging bowl crying, 'What can you teach me. . .?' This time, in Kashmir, I attended weddings and feasts in villages, went to the local bread shops and bazaars. Each little town has its own bakery and they specialise in different bread. Utterly, utterly fascinating.

"And the aspects of Kashmiri food most people know nothing about! The red colouring in their food sometimes comes from saffron, but sometimes comes from the coxcomb flower, a red flower, which is something I didn't know. They kept saying it was a flower and I had *no* picture in my mind so I said, 'Show me, show me,' and they said, 'It's the wrong season,' and they showed me a dried crumpled something. And I said, 'I still don't know what it is.' So we searched

In *Saagar*, a commercial blockbuster, she finally acts opposite her ex-husband, Saeed Jaffrey.

village after village after village and in *one* shop they had it hanging from the rafters. Coxcomb. Red coxcomb. That's what it was."

Indian cuisine is largely an oral tradition, learnt by observation and practice. Perhaps this is why Madhur Jaffrey doesn't believe in simply collecting recipes, but watches dishes being cooked, tastes and remembers them, scouts around bazaars, and asks endless questions. "You have to hound people until you're almost a nuisance," she says. She travels alone. Nobody in her family is free to take these long trips with her. When I meet her, she is to leave for India the following week to continue her travels with her 'begging bowl' crying: "What can you teach me?"

Madhur Jaffrey's past has fuelled much of her future work. She has documented another oral tradition: the folk stories she was told as a child. Every season and festival had its accompanying story, forming a living, oral tradition, because it got changed in the telling. Generations of women added their own embellishments. (Madhur's aunts liked to add many specific details about food – exactly what was eaten at the banquet, what kind of *biryanis* and *pullaos*).

The folk stories form a part of Hindu mythology, and have as characters, a wide range of Hindu gods and goddesses. Faced with having to explain the attributes of each, and since 'exposition is basically boring', each story in her book is preceded by another story; a personal narrative from her childhood, giving her relation to that season, 'a very personal anecdotal story that tells you without telling you'. *Seasons Of Splendour* was written ten years ago and 'nobody wanted it then'. Now it is to be published next spring by Pavilion Books in London, and Athaneum in America. Though slotted as a children's book, Madhur Jaffrey says it's a funny book and should appeal to people of all ages, including adults.

Though Madhur Jaffrey has lived an extraordinarily different life, in many ways she has been following her family's traditions. The Bahadur family belongs to the community of Kayasths, a community known for its scribes and described as *Kababi-sharabis*.

"A great emphasis was placed on food in my family. At every wedding, for example, the *halwais* would come and sit outside, but not just that. Several members of the family would stand there drooling over everything saying, 'Put more this, put more that,' always taking a very active interest in

food.

"And that seems to be the case in all the generations I remember, and it seems to go on and on. . . ."

The tastes of the food she grew up with have stayed with her all her life. That is fortunate since she believes that when one is writing about food, taste memory is essential. "To be able to remember things from way back, link them, and be able to reproduce them." Her family's passionate interest in food gave Madhur Jaffrey a sound beginning; she took the tradition one step further and fulfilled the second family function: she became a scribe.

"All my memories of India have been so wonderful as a child, every time I go back it's a voyage of discovery. . . I'm really just following the traditions of my family, whether it's cooking or stories. It's just that I'm writing about it, which nobody thought worthy of doing."

FROM HER CONVERSATION and her work it is evident that Madhur Jaffrey cannot put India out of her mind. Has she ever felt any cultural schizophrenia, I ask her, living between the two worlds of India and America?

"No. None at all," she replies emphatically, before I can complete my question. "I think I just don't have enough of the genes in me that some people have, those who find the differences like chasms. I see the similarities always."

As an Indian woman in America, has she ever felt an outsider?

"I *am* an Indian woman, and I have learnt over the years to use it to my advantage; but I must say I never felt like an outsider, even in the beginning, even sashaying through New York in a sari. That's what I like about America; there are enough holes where you can fit in."

India, on the other hand, did not present enough holes for Madhur Jaffrey to fit herself into.

"Within the system in India," she says, "an ambitious woman has a hard time of it. And it was a struggle – barely conscious even – but somehow you knew that it would be easier to be out of the cocoon. The same cocoon that we all love going back to, has its own walls.

"And you behave within the system. You do things that don't offend; don't do this, don't do that or there's hell to pay. I've always had hell to pay for whatever I did, but it was sort of accepted that I was the odd one in that sense," she says with a hearty roar of laughter.

Madhur Jaffrey has had the last laugh. The odd one became the successful one. The thin girl with the long nose became an actress, the dilettante in the kitchen turned into a historian of food, and a writer of cookbooks. With considerable persistence, she fashioned her life in a recipe entirely of her own making; managed to blend her diffrent talents, interests and multiple roles: as actress, writer, researcher, cosmopolitan, cook, celebrity, mother, wife.

"Within the system in India, an ambitious woman has a hard time of it," feels Madhur Jaffrey.

Madhur Jaffrey's three daughters follow in her footsteps, if not directly, then in related fields. Zia, 25, works for a publishing house as an editor; Mira, 24, a pre-med student, aims to combine Eastern and Western medical practice; Sakina, 22, acted in plays at the Public Theatre and La Mama while still in her teens. At present she is studying Chinese 'because her sister told her it was great fun'. Like their mother, all three enjoy returning to India. "Emotionally, they love it," says Madhur Jaffrey, "because our family in India is very close and that extends to the children. So there's a real cocoon to go back to and they feel very comforted when they are in India."

Does she ever think of returning permanently?

"I would think of going back if I was married to an Indian. But what would Sanford do there? Play violin in the Carnatic style?

"I think in a marriage, having gone through one disaster, it's terribly important that two people try and exist on an equal footing. And you compromise, you do what suits both of you.

"We are taking a lot of turns at the moment, talking it through, because my career at the moment is just taking me away from here a lot. In any marriage you have to just sit down and say: 'What are we going to do if this keeps up?' So 1985 is the review of the whole situation for us.

"This year I said, 'All right, I'll just do it.' Next year, I'll have to refuse things, even things that I want to do I'll have to turn down. Because we'll just have to see how much Sanford can stand my being away.

"It's okay for me – I'm working so much when I'm gone. But he's sort of left here. And it's always harder for whoever's left behind. So we'll have to think about it. I don't know what we'll think – but there'll have to be a compromise somewhere....."

Though her sentence trails off softly, sounding very sad, a hint of determination in her voice makes me think, that compromises or no, Madhur Jaffrey is going to be as busy this year as she was in 1984. ♦

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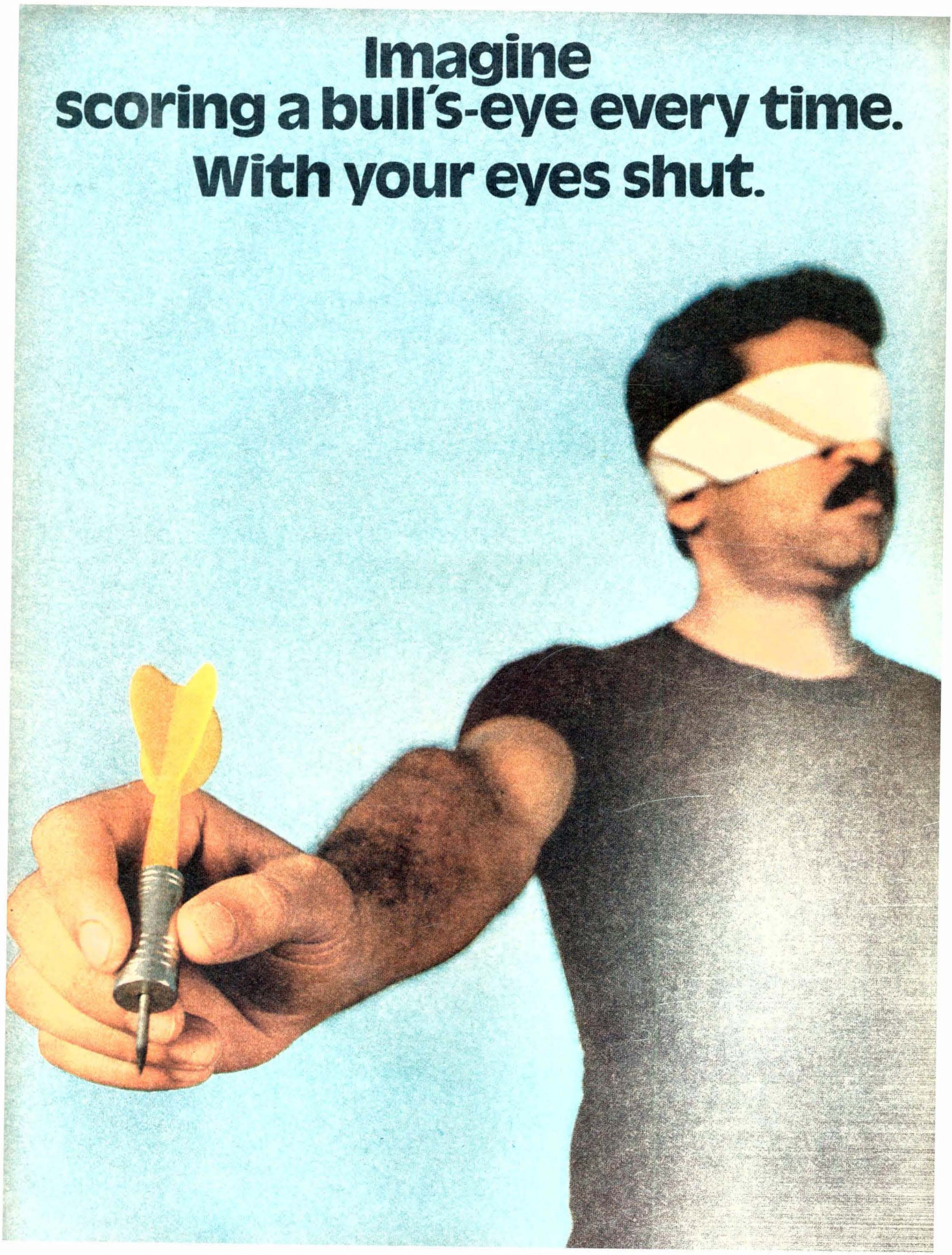

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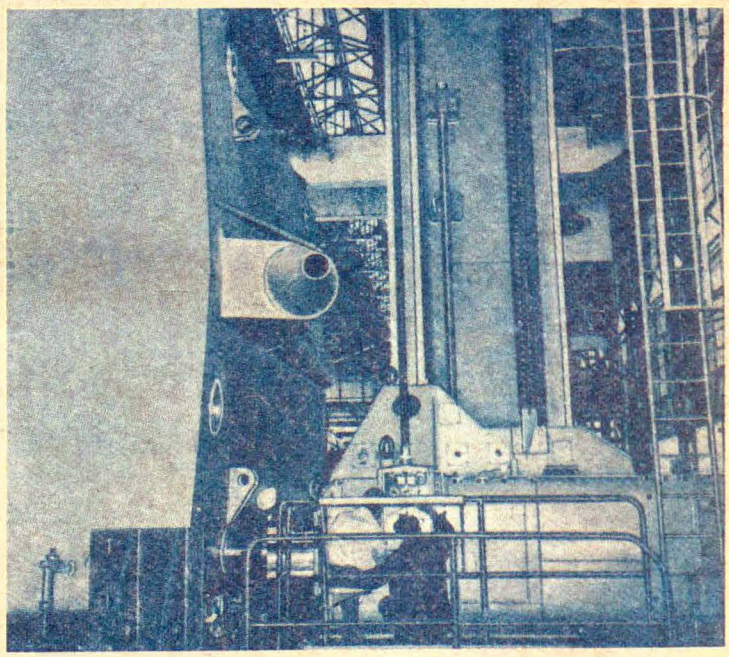

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ROCK 'N' ROLL BABYLON

Sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll. The three seem to go together as Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Brian Jones, The Beatles and Pink Floyd all found out. An account of the drug culture that killed so many of rock's biggest stars.

BY GARY HERMAN

SERIOUS DRUG-TAKING has always had some part in the rock 'n' roll landscape. In fact the excessive use of stimulants and depressants of one sort or another has been associated with the rebel image and with music-making since well before the first bohemians walked the boulevards of Paris. For rock musicians, trapped by tough schedules, unnatural hours and the expectations of entertainment-hungry audiences, drugs can also be a necessary tool of trade. Even back in the Beatles' early years, entertaining the thirsty patrons of the Hamburg Reeperbahn bars, John Lennon recalled the need for drugs: "The only way to survive in Hamburg to play eight hours a night was to take pills. The waiters gave you them. . . the pills and the drink."

The story was the same wherever the rock music of the '60s was being born. In New York's Greenwich Village, the coffee-houses echoed to the folksy sounds of Bob Dylan, Jim McGuinn, Steve Stills and John Sebastian. In London there was less folk, but more blues, R & B and soul, fuelled just the same by plentiful supplies of booze, speed, marijuana – and sometimes by something a little more exotic, like amyl nitrate or cocaine. One rock star used to surprise fellow performers on British TV's early '60s show, *Ready, Steady, Go!* by popping amyl nitrate ampoules in front of their faces just before they went on. (Amyl nitrate is a heart stimulant administered in vapour form. The startling effect of the drug is due to a sudden surge of blood to the brain.) For some die-hards, there was always heroin, and for others, as the '60s progressed, there was LSD.

Two days after Janis Joplin's death from a heroin overdose, her friend and musical colleague Nick Gravenites talked about the inevitability of death among the rock fraternity. "There's a lot of people using junk on the rock scene and they're on death row. . . You know they're going to die, you know it. So people were just figuring out ways to cushion the blow when it happens." This was in 1970 – by this time the list of drug- and booze-related deaths among rock stars had grown so long that it wasn't really a surprise; feelings were numbed and each one was, as John Lennon said of Brian Jones, 'just another victim of the drug scene'. Janis Joplin had been part of the West Coast rock scene, where LSD ruled.

LSD, whose effects were first noted in 1943, gained immense popularity in the '60s thanks largely to the proselytising efforts of two Harvard University researchers, Drs Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert. Both men were sacked by the university in the early '60s for their very public

This extract is reprinted from Rock 'N' Roll Babylon *by Gary Herman, with the permission of Kamlesh Shah Enterprises, the distributors.*

Janis Joplin: she made love to crowds of thousands but went home alone.

espousal of the drug. For Leary in particular, LSD became a messiah whose gospel he preached across America, wherever there were people adventurous enough to look for new experiences.

The inheritors of rock 'n' roll's rebellious spirit – musicians and other outsiders from Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and London – were just such people: politicians of pleasure, enemies of the establishment and mostly practised drug users already. They took to LSD like ducks to water. It was an excuse to throw aside the old conventions, a drug that changed you, as Hunter S Thompson said, 'at the place of definitions'. It certainly changed the style and image of rock music.

1965 was the year. The Beatles (who famously smoked pot in the toilets of Buckingham Palace before collecting their MBEs) and the Rolling Stones (three of whom had more famously been fined for pissing against a filling station wall) had made it in the USA. From out of Greenwich Village, a politically committed nasal folk-singer named Bob Dylan had become – quite unpredictably – a star. As it happened it was Dylan who turned the pill-popping Beatles on to marijuana's more meditative buzz in 1964. It showed in the music – rock 'n' roll started to look into itself and created a sound that was built for LSD. By the time the Beatles played San Francisco in 1965, Leary was proclaiming them the advanced guard of his psychedelic revolution, 'mutants' preparing for an imagined golden age.

THE DRUG CULTURE was nurtured especially in the fertile ground of California – where LSD remained legal until as late as October 1966. In the Bay Area, LSD quickly became part of a dramatically radical scene which moved from North Beach to the noto-

rious Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. There were revolutionary students from Berkeley campus, the Sexual Freedom League, dance troupes, mime troupes and a burgeoning commune movement. The mid-'60s saw a variety of dances, festivals and benefits (among them, Ken Kesey's famous 'Acid Tests') at which musicians, poets, face-painters, Hell's Angels and even ordinary people were piled into one large room, dosed with LSD, dazzled with light-shows, seasoned with music, films, make-up and exotic costumes and left to simmer all night. 'Fluid' was the word that fitted.

Jerry Garcia, sometimes known as Captain Trips, and some of his LSD-soaked friends, played music at the early Acid Tests. They were known as the Warlocks, later they became the Grateful Dead. In those days, the band took plenty of drugs – dropping acid, so it was said, before *every* show. For a while, the band was being supported by one Augustus Owsley Stanley III, a drop-out engineering student who had set up his own laboratory and supplied much of San Francisco's LSD. Owsley poured his profits into a sound system for the Warlocks of such unparalleled power and complexity that it took three or four years for the rest of rock to catch up.

"Acid has changed consciousness entirely," Garcia said around this time. "The US has changed in the last few years and it's because that whole first psychedelic thing meant: here's this new consciousness, this new freedom, and it's here in yourself."

Although the electric heroes of rock were among its first and most avid disciples, by no means all rock stars favoured LSD. Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead's Ron 'Pigpen' McKernan, for example, rejected LSD in favour of booze, speed or heroin. They seemed scared of LSD's disorienting effects, and sought other drugs and drink in order not to 'expand their consciousness' but to shut it down. But LSD or not, everyone shared the common attitude of experimentation, hedonism and excess.

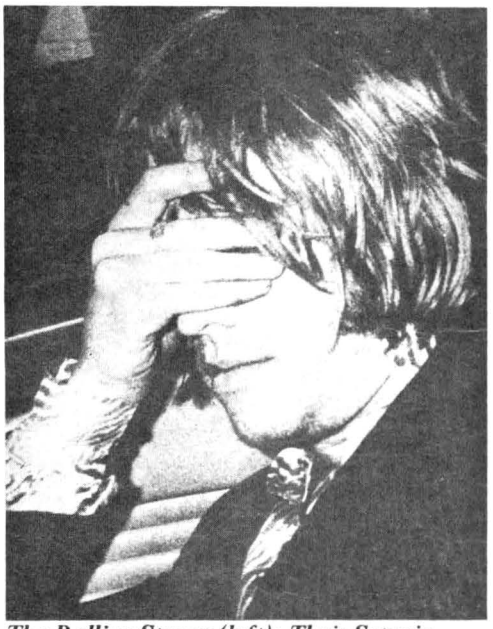
With typical exaggeration, somewhere between exuberance and calculated image-building, Janis recalled her mood on arriving in San Francisco in 1963. "I'd've fucked anything, . . . I did," she told David Dalton. "I'd lick it, smoke it, shoot it, drop it, fall in love with it." She tried acid only once in those days. Some time later when she inadvertently drank LSD-laced wine, she forced herself to vomit rather than endure the trip.

Yet, her consumption of drink and other drugs was prodigious. Within a few months of leaving her Texas home town in the early '60s she had become heavily dependent on speed; her death in 1970 was due, according to the inquest, to a self-administered heroin overdose; an open bottle of tequila or Southern Comfort had been a permanent companion on- and off-stage. As with many other rock stars, the drugs and drink all but eclipsed the music. Janis's later performances became caricatures of the woman she had then become – drunk, drugged, pained and passionate, trapped between torture and orgasm and screaming hoarsely for release. "It's not what isn't, it's what you wish *was* that makes unhappiness," she said. "The hole, the vacuum. . . I think I think too much. That's why I drink. . . ."

If she could hold back, she preferred not to drink till a few minutes before going on-stage because she felt that her best times were when performing and she could never remember them if she was too drunk to start with. Running on-stage at 'full-tilt boogie' was, for her, as good as an orgasm – 'better than it has been with any man'. Performance was the key term in her personal equation between sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll. Lonely and desperate for love, she found solace in men, women and – best of all – anonymous audiences who alone seemed to promise an uncomplicated release.

But release never came – the common ambivalences of her soul were magnified by the heights of adulation she attained. She once commented in evident amazement that her fans paid her $ 50,000 a year to be like her. And like her they were – especially if they were women. More than anyone else, she was the cultural symbol of a need for liberation that women were only beginning to rediscover and from which men would ultimately gain. She stood for the future, yet she never overcame the memory of her own past – an unpopular pupil at school, an unhappy and alienated child at home. She couldn't admit her stardom; she liked to be 'one of the boys' but needed to be treated as a helpless little woman; she had dreams of marriage and, according to a former boy-friend, Country Joe MacDonald, wanted children, but she lived and died a child herself and a faithless woman among faithless men. Booze and speed charged her up; heroin blanked out the despair. And though she tried to sort herself out, even managing to overcome her addiction to speed, the last shot of smack took its toll on a sad and abused body. On October 4, 1970, alone in her room in Hollywood's Landmark Hotel, she collapsed and died from an overdose, splitting open her troubled head as she fell to the ground. She had been in the middle of recording what turned out to be her last album, *Pearl*: by all accounts the sessions had been going well. It may not have been suicide, but then a self-administered heroin overdose is hardly an accident.

ACID HAD ALSO FOUND ready converts in the place already known as Swinging London. Naturally, the rock musicians whose names were almost synonymous with that overworked phrase were part of the elite band of young aristocrats, artists and photographers, musicians and models, hairdressers and Harley Street doctors' daughters whose names rang out of the gossip columns and who frequented the night-clubs and restaurants of Soho and Chelsea. Money was the great leveller – upwards – and despite the Carnaby Street image of psychedelia on the cheap, the Beatles, Stones and their friends were early on cocooned in a world of privilege where sex was freer, the drugs more available, the clothes and cars more expensive than anything most of their fans could have imagined. "We were kings," Lennon remember-



The Rolling Stones (left): Their Satanic Majesties put away a lot of the white stuff and finally it ended up killing lead guitarist Brian Jones (above).

ed. "We were all just at the prime. . .it was like a men's smoking club, just a very good scene."

The Beatles' tours became, in Lennon's words, 'like Satyricon'. So much money was being made that no one could mock them – and why should they when the boys in the band picked up the tabs for drinks, drugs, meals and whores. Even those who could afford to pay for their own pleasures, felt a need to buy entrance to the most exclusive 'men's smoking club' in the world by offering gifts unavailable to the common herd. In fact it was a dentist who first introduced John Lennon and George Harrison to LSD. Without telling them, he dosed both of them and their wives, Cynthia and Patti, at a dinner party. "He was saying, 'I advise you not to leave,' " Lennon said later, "and we thought he was trying to keep us for an orgy in his house." (Obviously a common occurrence.) "We didn't want to know," added Lennon, and so it was that the trip hit them at a night-club later, with its usual disconcerting delusions. The club was on fire, their table seemed to elongate, and at George's house, John imagined he was in a submarine floating 18 feet above the ground. George Harrison told journalist Hunter Davies: "It was as if I'd never tasted, talked, seen, thought or heard properly before."

Lennon took his second trip in California, during the Beatles' 1965 tour. Jim McGuinn, Dave Crosby and Peter Fonda were there, as well as George, Ringo and the Beatles' road manager, Neil Aspinall. This was the occasion on which Fonda kept whispering: "I know what it's like to be dead," which at least gave Lennon the hook for a song. After that, trips came thick and fast: Lennon claimed he dropped acid 1,000 times – all the while taking speed to help get by in recording sessions.

THROUGH 1966 AND 1967, LSD spread through the British rock scene like wildfire. Eric Clapton claimed that 'acid was conducive to exploring music'. After taking it he never played straight blues. The Rolling Stones, leaders of the '60s rebels of rock, also joined the beautiful people. Brian Jones, who had initially been the drive and musical inspiration behind the Rolling Stones, was particularly prominent. In 1966, the Stones found themselves musically dried up. LSD provided something of an answer, encouraging them eventually to make *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. The only problem was Brian Jones, who spent his time in the studio tripping out in a corner, contributing little or nothing to the recording sessions.

Jones and his Italian-German girl-friend, Anita Pallenberg, inhabited a world of self-obsessive callousness, but on the streets of London they dazzled the world with their androgyne splendour. As part of the underground they were members of a tight little family, whose house magazines were *IT (International Times)* and *Oz*. The 'all-night rave' thrown to launch *IT* was visited by Paul McCartney dressed as an Arab and accompanied by Jane Asher (the proverbial Harley Street doctor's daughter). Unhampered by intrusive fans, the Beatles, Pete Townshend, Jimi Hendrix and the Stones could visit John Hopkins's club UFO

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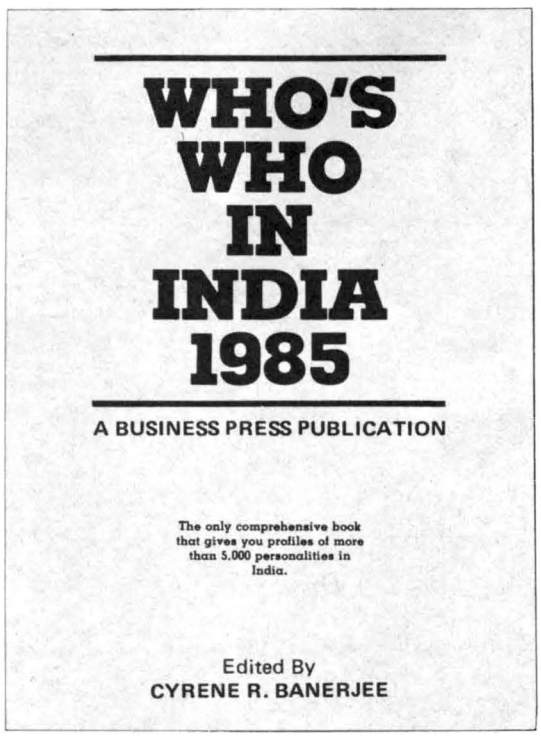

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(standing for Unlimited Freak Out), and at the same *IT* launch party, Marianne Faithfull, with four top ten hits under her belt, could win a prize for 'the shortest/barest costume' dressed as a nun in a bottomless habit, without anyone being uncool enough to make a fuss about it.

But of course they wouldn't be allowed to get away with it. After all, the drugs they openly used were illegal, and though rock stars were cushioned by privilege and wealth, their fans were following suit and were, in the eyes of the media, being seduced by the easy pleasure of drug-fuelled liberation. Horror stories began to be unleashed on the public – many of them complete fabrications, issuing from government agencies. LSD was made illegal in California in October 1966, and began to be condemned in unequivocal terms: "The greatest threat facing the country today. . .more dangerous than the Vietnam war" was how the Chairman of the New Jersey Narcotic Drug Study Commission described it. Sexual licence and a breakdown in social order were identified, not altogether inaccurately, with the spread of drug use, and a police crackdown began. Rock stars were prime targets – especially once phenomenally popular heroes of the young publicly confessed to having used (and sometimes enjoyed) illegal drugs.

In July 1966, the folksy Donovan, (full name Donovan Leitch, once heralded as Britain's Bob Dylan), was fined £250 for possession of marijuana. "I would like you to bear in mind," said the magistrate, "that you have great influence on young people, and it behoves you to behave yourself." A London Sunday paper reported that 'evidence disclosed a shocking scene of debauchery at a reefer smoking party in his flat', and, despite claiming to have given up drugs altogether after the case, Donovan's immediate response was to comment that 'I hope it won't hurt my career'. Of course the press was indignant and took great relish in pointing out that Donovan was, at that time, earning £25,000 a year.

An investigation by the *News Of The World* followed Donovan's conviction. The investigation had some far-reaching, if unexpected, consequences. In the course of the paper's four-week series, banner headlined *Drugs And Pop Stars – Facts That Will Shock You,* it was 'revealed' that members of the Moody Blues had taken LSD, Pete Townshend (who had previously admitted to taking marijuana and pep pills) had taken LSD, Ginger Baker had gone 'from hash and LSD to heroin and cocaine' and that, generally, drug use among pop stars was rife and clearly demonstrated by the titles and lyrics of numerous songs, like Donovan's *Sunshine Superman,* the Move's *Night Of Fear,* the Beach Boys' *Good Vibrations* and even the Mothers Of Invention's *Can't Happen Here* which, the *News Of The World* wrote, was said to have been made on an LSD trip, (by whom, one wonders, since the Mothers' leader, Frank Zappa, is one of the few who definitely *didn't* trip out). The paper also revealed the 'inside story' of psychedelic events, paying particular attention to 'bare-breasted girls' at 'a freak-out' – complete with pictures, of course.

Many of the paper's revelations were unreliable – a fact which was dramatically demonstrated when Mick Jagger instituted libel proceedings against it. The paper had attributed to Jagger the substance of an interview about drug-taking that two unnamed 'investigators' had in fact had with Brian Jones. However, the real impact of the articles soon became evident. Jagger's libel suit was lodged two days after the *News Of The World* article naming him appeared. Five days later, on February 12, 1967, Keith Richard's house in the Sussex countryside, known as Redlands, was raided, with the resulting arrest of Richard, Jagger and art dealer Robert Fraser. Eight men were present, 'two of whom were hangers-on', according to one of the prosecutors at one of the subsequent trials, 'and the third a Moroccan servant'. (Persistent rumour maintains that there was a ninth – George Harrison – but although he had been at Redlands that weekend, Harrison had left before the raid.) There was also one woman present – called 'Miss X' in court, but actually Marianne Faithfull (whose name the Stones wanted kept out of the whole affair). But further harassment was to follow. On the day of Jagger and Richard's committal appearance in court, May 10, Brian Jones was arrested on drugs charges at his London flat. The campaign against drug use was hotting up.

Jagger and Richard's trials, held in June 1967, were fated to become spectacular engagements in the phoney war between youth and the establishment. Jagger, charged with possessing four legally purchased Italian amphetamine tablets, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment; Richard, charged with allowing his premises to be used for smoking cannabis, was jailed for a year. On appeal, Jagger's sentence was reduced to a conditional discharge and Richard's was quashed on the grounds that the prosecution put too much emphasis on the role of Miss X. It was felt that the reliance of the prosecution on the evidently carefree behaviour of a young woman who was naked but for a fur rug when the raid took place, suggested moral opprobrium – even prurience – rather than legal consideration. During the trial Jagger was held for two days in Lewes prison, an experience which shocked him deeply.

One exchange between Keith and the prosecution indicates the tone of the original trial. Replying to the prosecution's suggestion that Miss X should have been embarrassed by the state of undress in which she was found, Richard said: "We are not old men. We are not worried about your petty morals." The *News Of The World* – in a sudden fit of moral rectitude – subsequently admitted passing on information to the police which led to the arrest.

AFTER THE REDLANDS RAID and the subsequent trial, Paul McCartney and Brian Epstein both publicly admitted to taking LSD – as did Eric Burdon. Burdon claimed to have given it up by then, but later re-

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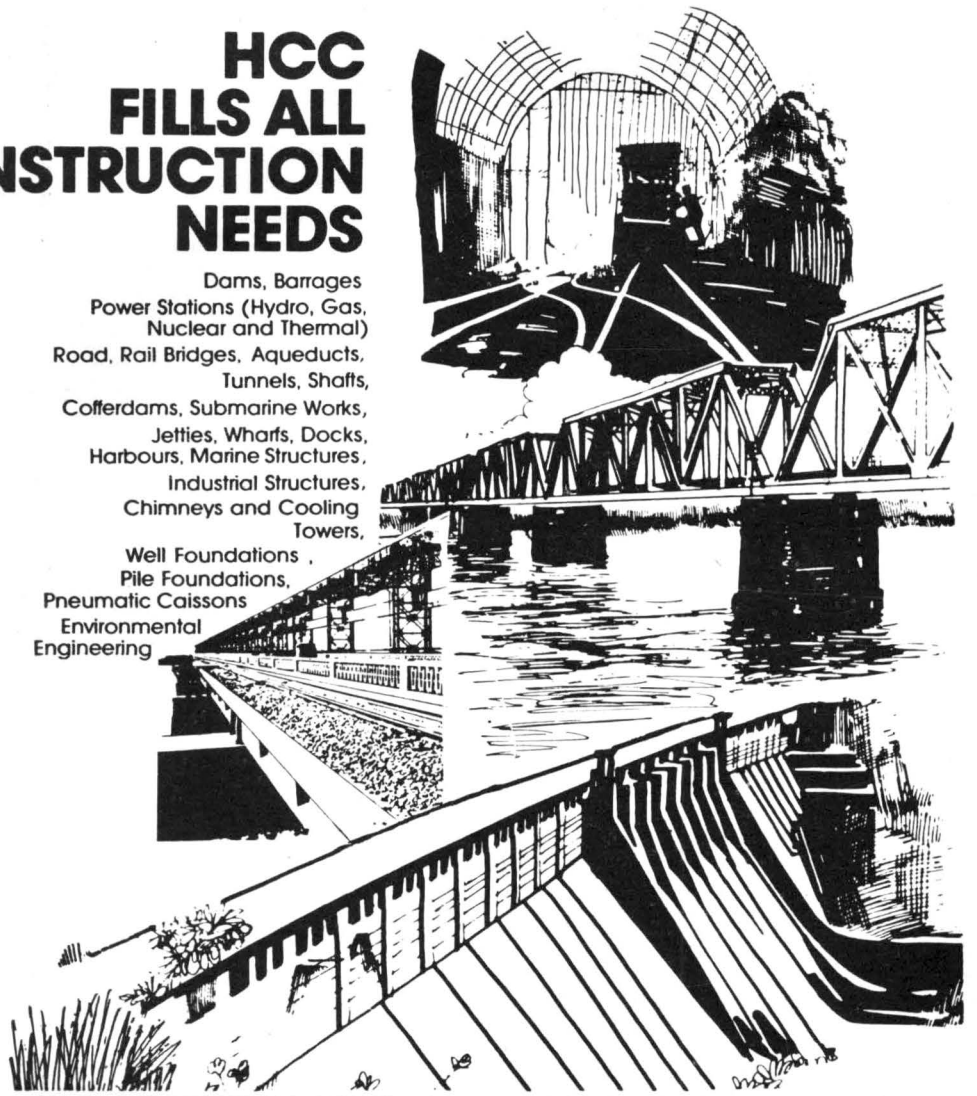

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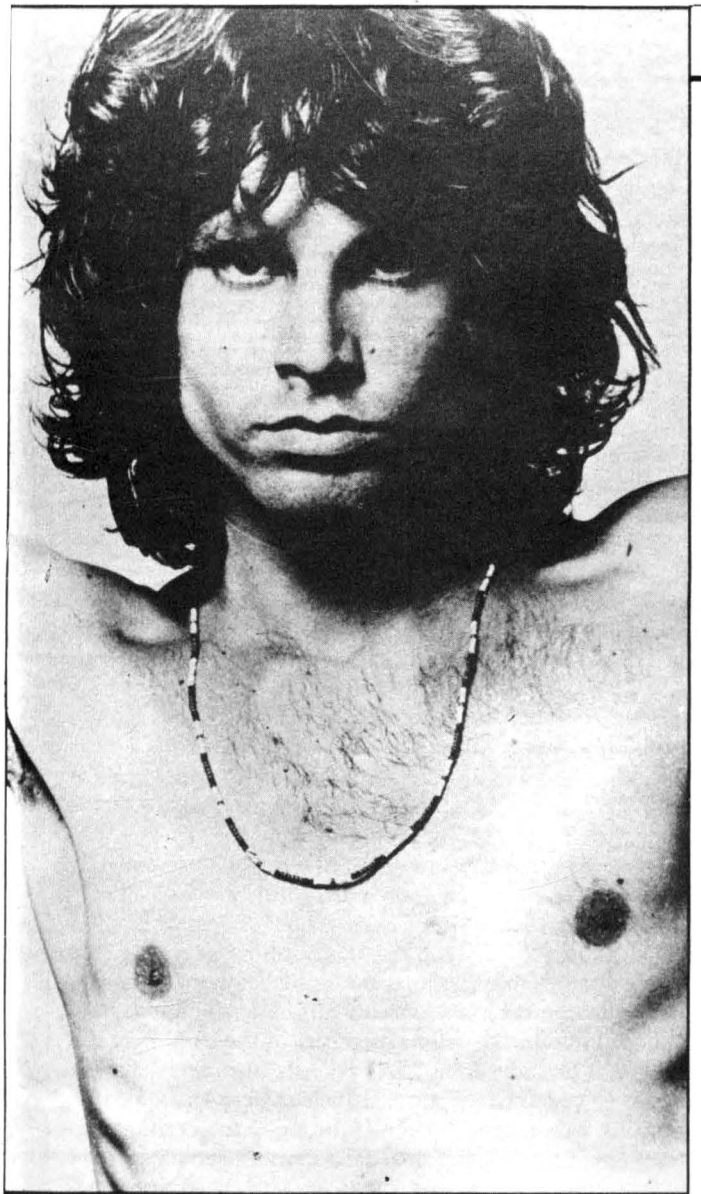


Jim Morrison: drugs dethroned the lizard king.

vealed that until 1970 he had spent most of his time on acid. The press and public picked up the smell of vendetta. The role of the *News Of The World* in the whole affair raised considerable doubts as to the propriety of the Redlands arrests in the first place. There was a widespread feeling that what highly paid adults did in the privacy of their own homes warranted no intrusion by sensationalist newspapers and killjoy policemen. The picture of Jagger in handcuffs on his way to Lewes prison was a clear image of the victimisation of a scapegoat. "Who breaks a butterfly on a wheel?" asked the *Times*. "Let him who is without sin jail the first Stone," said a popular poster.

Restricting people's freedom of movement is one thing, but – as Keith Richard commented about Brian Jones – 'they hounded Brian to death'. At the trial following his bust in May 1967, a psychiatrist described Brian as 'an extremely frightened young man'. A sentence of nine months' imprisonment for possessing cannabis was overharsh, especially since the sentences passed on Jagger and Richard following the Redlands raid had already been effectively overturned on appeal, following an unprecedented public fuss. But Brian's sentence was particularly stressful since he had already spent some time in hospital, suffering from what was politely called 'strain' and one of the psychiatrists at the trial had commented that Jones had suicidal tendencies. In December 1967, the sentence was at last commuted – to £1,000 fine and three years' probation – but three days later, Jones had collapsed again and was once more in hospital. Six months later, in May 1968, Brian was arrested again on a drugs charge. This time the fine was only £50 but the real punishment was the psychological damage caused by so much police interest.

The harassment accelerated Brian's general decline. The Stones as a whole found it increasingly difficult to work under the permanent threat of imprisonment and Jones himself was rapidly sinking into complete mental and physical stupor. He believed Jagger and Richard were conspiring against him. Even his girl-friend, Anita Pallenberg, had deserted him for Keith. Brian's total insecurity was reflected in the reputation he had acquired for near satyriasis (60 women a month was the figure bandied about) and, believing himself deliberately shut out of the decision-making, creativity and companionship of the Rolling Stones, he withdrew into drug dependence and manic hedonism. His own suspicions turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. By the summer of 1968, Jack Nitzsche – scoring the music for Nicolas Roeg's film, *Performance*, which starred Jagger and Pallenberg – observed that the Stones had, in reality, turned against their former golden boy. Brian, in his turn, became literally incapable of making music: when he tried to play harmonica, his mouth started bleeding.

In mid-summer 1969, Brian quit the band, ostensibly to pursue a solo career, in fact because he was a liability. The Stones were planning a tour and Brian was incapable of undertaking it. A month later, on July 3, he drowned in the swimming pool of his secluded mansion in Sussex (once the home of A A Milne and Christopher Robin) – many of his vital organs suffering fatty degeneration that could, in itself, have killed him. Two days later, his replacement, Mick Taylor, made his first public appearance with the Stones at an open-air concert in Hyde Park. Jagger, looking Byronesque in a white Greek-style tunic dress, released hundreds of butterflies and everybody felt sad. Pete Townshend's response to Brian's death was to comment: "It was a normal day for Brian, he died every day." And ten years later, Jagger recalled that "I felt a bit shocked, but it was really inevitable. The guy was unbearable, but maybe it was us that made him unbearable." Precisely who 'hounded Brian to death' remains an unanswerable question.

ONCE UPON A TIME drugs were seen as a route to a new form of musical expression. Today, with all the emphasis on 'recreational drugs' as new con-

sumer commodities, drug-taking in quantity is all too often seen as the reward and proof of rock stardom. And between taking drugs to make music and making music to take drugs, the performers, the music and the fans have lost more than the law could ever take.

Syd Barrett, for example, was a founder member of Pink Floyd. He was apparently the first of the band to experiment with LSD, although as Floyd's Roger Waters once said: "There was so much dope and acid around in those days that I don't think anyone can remember anything about anything." Even so, it's clear that Syd overdid things. In no time at all, he had taken to a performance style which consisted of playing one chord all night. From then, it was only a matter of time before he learned to stand on stage and not play at all. Sometimes he didn't even appear. On a tour of America in late 1967, the Floyd played 'American Bandstand'. They were meant to mime to their second single, *See Emily Play*, but unfortunately Syd 'wasn't into moving his lips that day'. Two or three months later, Syd left the band and disappeared from view, only surfacing to cut two albums some years later and become the subject of a curious cult which considers him a genius. Meanwhile, he has retired once more into obscurity.

THE COMFORTING THOUGHT for the fans, stunned by all this wasted talent and wasted years, is that all rock star drug addiction and its associated deaths are a form of suicide brought on by the intolerable pressures of stardom. In a way this is true, though self-destruction is more accurate than the deliberate taking of lives. Stardom tends to frustrate noble intentions and distort the stars' grip on reality and their view of themselves. Janis Joplin saw the futility of 'making love to 25,000 people on-stage' and then going home alone. Jimi Hendrix complained he could never quite capture the sounds he heard in his head. Jim Morrison of the Doors, who perfectly captured the precise mix of sexual liberation, psychic exploration and political revolt which characterised '60s rock, found his vision clouded by complacent audiences who took him for the thing that he, like Janis, least wanted to be – a pop star. He tried to shock and humiliate his audience out of their passivity. On-stage he was, without doubt, magnetic – leather-clad, defiantly beautiful, play-acting the dying soldier or the doomed Oedipal lover in a sort of spotlit netherworld that focused all the audience's darkest hopes and fears onto his cathartic presence. The act, as many people have pointed out, was ritual enactment of chaos and anger.

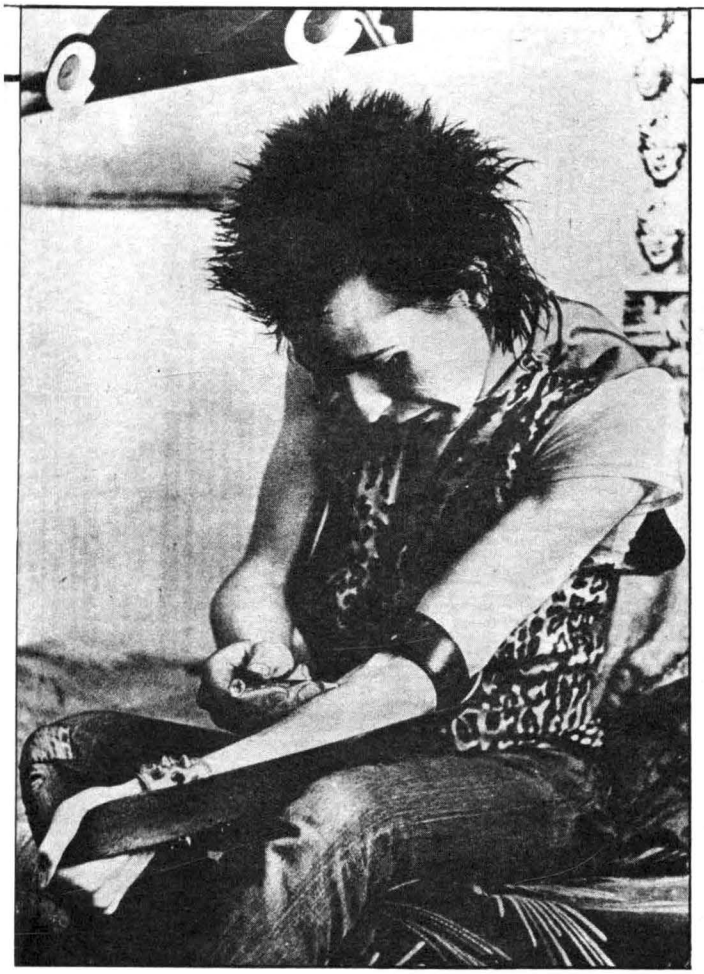
But off-stage, Morrison was a drunken Lothario, a would-be poet cultivating a booze-soaked irresponsibility he might have learned from Baudelaire, Brendan Behan or Dylan Thomas, and finding an endless stream of women with whom he tried to play the 'erotic politician' (his own definition of himself) for real. He explained his fondness for the bottle over less legitimate drugs by saying that "getting drunk. . .is a lot of small choices. . . I guess it's the difference between suicide and slow capitulation." It was usually less romantic than that. On one occasion, at a friend's apartment in New York, he fell into a drunken stupor on a sofa and began urinating on the carpet; a large vase had to be held under his member to catch the flow – it was filled and emptied three times. Meanwhile, Morrison remained senseless.

Morrison seemed to be trying out the body and mind of the characters he became on-stage in his private life, and the confusion between these personae began to intrude on both. He longed for the opportunity to galvanise an audience into action. At a concert at New Haven, Connecticut, in 1968, he introduced *Back Door Man* on stage by describing how a cop had 'maced' him backstage without realising who he was. The crowd of course loved it – right up to and including the arrival of a cop on-stage to arrest him for 'indecent and immoral exhibition', breach of the peace and resisting arrest. It would not be the last, nor the most serious occasion.

Jim Morrison was extremely impressed by the methods of the Living Theatre, a group of American performers whose techniques were based on psychodrama and the aggressive use of obscenity and violence directed at the audience. Their influence led directly to the famous incident at Miami in 1969 when, after a concert performance, Morrison was arrested for having allegedly exposed himself on stage. There are various versions of the event; one is that Morrison had it all planned and that he was wearing a large pair of boxer shorts under his leather trousers, so that when he took his trousers off, he would not actually expose himself. But fellow members of the band were also reported to have tried physically to restrain him as he began to unbuckle his belt. He was extremely drunk, slurring his words and apparently losing track of things, so they could not predict how far he would actually go. But what is undoubtedly true is that the kids themselves, roused by Morrison's example, had divested themselves of plenty of clothing. One member of the Doors' entourage remembered that, in the concert hall afterwards, 'every three or four feet there was another garment'.

Significantly, the concert took place on March 1, 1969, the day after Morrison had seen the Living Theatre perform *Paradise Now*. The charges made against Morrison were not made until March 5, long enough for the worthy citizens of Miami to have worked themselves into a lather of hindsighted indignation about the event.

The charges claimed that Morrison "did lewdly and lasciviously expose his penis, place his hands upon his penis and shake it, and further the said defendant did simulate the acts of masturbation upon himself and oral copulation upon another." Whether this was true or not, there is no argument that he verbally cajoled and assaulted the audience. During the trial it was alleged that he shouted at them: "You're all a bunch of fucking idiots. Your faces are being pressed into the shit of the world. Take your fucking friend and love him. Do you want to see my cock?" This was the general tone of the evening – and it



Sid Vicious: no great loss to humanity.

echoed the general tone of Living Theatre 'happenings' pretty faithfully as well. It couldn't pass without comment in Florida.

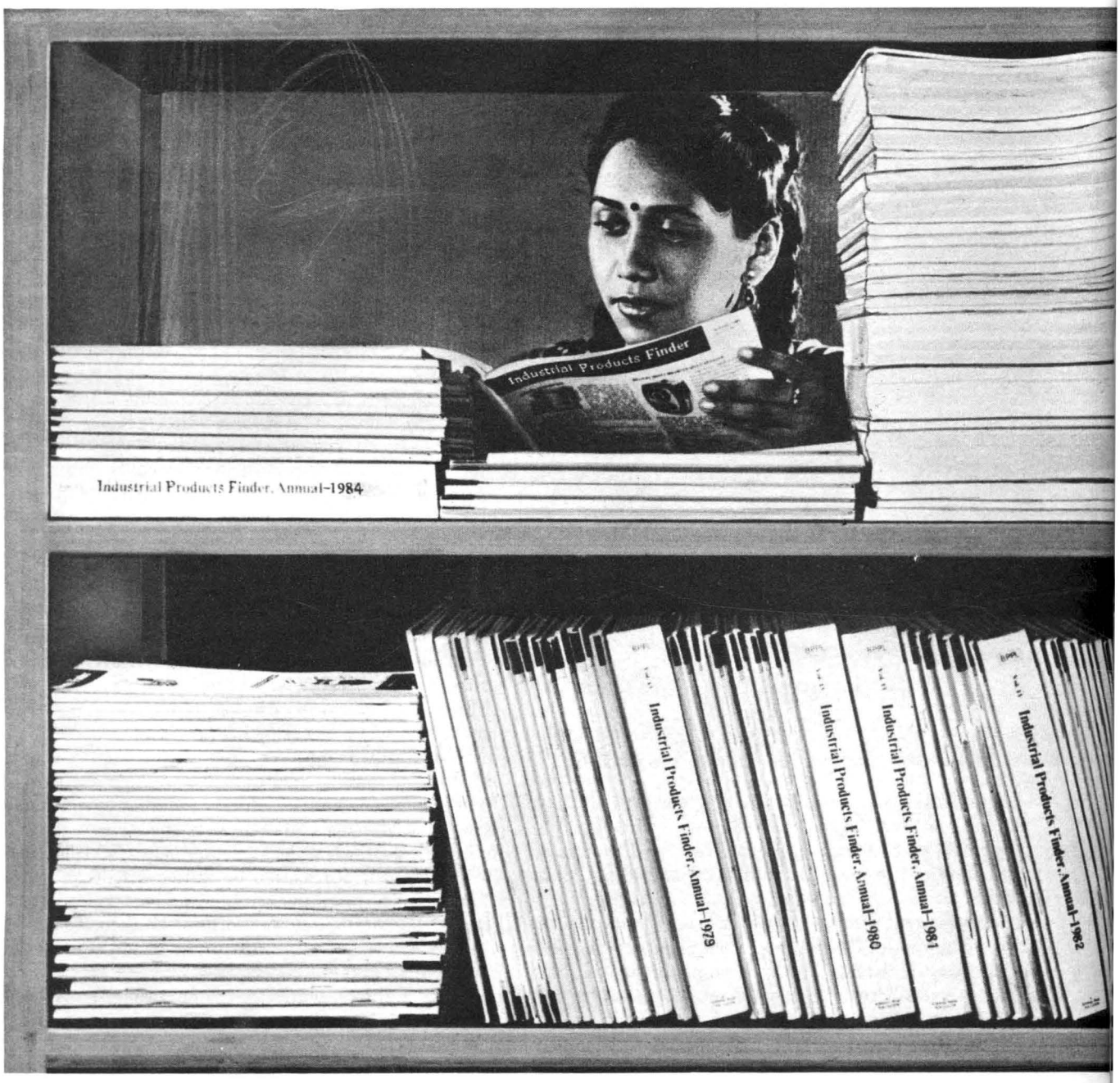
Morrison was found guilty of exposure and profanity, but not guilty of lewd behaviour and public drunkenness – an odd irony, since this latter was probably the one thing anybody could have been sure of on that occasion and one he himself admitted at the trial. Eventually, he quit the rock world in disgust and went to Paris to become a poet – apparently unaware that the poets had all left that city years ago. His body was already wrecked by drink at the age of 27; bearded and bloated, he tried to make a Door-less life for himself with his common-law wife, Pamela Courson, but his heart gave out and he died in the bath on July 3, 1971. Some say it was heroin, others booze; most agree it was inevitable – unless, of course, they don't believe that he died at all.

SELF-DESTRUCTION or faked deaths alike are just excuses, however. The unpleasant truth is that excessive drug use has become an essential part of the star system. Speed and coke are very common as 'working drugs', (providing, in the words of a Byrds song, 'artificial energy'), and as drugs to heighten sexual pleasure or delay orgasm. Many musicians resorted to heroin to ease their nerves or simply to get some sleep. It becomes easy, as Clapton has said, to 'rationalise it by saying that musicians live on a very intense emotional plane of necessity, and heroin is probably the strongest pain-killer you can lay your hands on'. This is the sort of self-image that underlies Patti Smith's contention that there is something called 'heroin consciousness' that some stars have, whether they use heroin or not, (Smith denies that she does). To use heroin (or to look like you do), according to this image, is to acquire artistic credentials, since no one but a lunatic or a tortured genius would do such a dumb thing. And the aspiring rock musician of recent years often assumes that he or she needs to seem one part lunatic and one part tortured genius to have 'street credibility'. This assumption killed John Simon Ritchie when he came to believe that he was Sid Vicious, star, and not just a deluded kid that had hit lucky as part of rock 'n' roll's most self-conscious satire to date. The sorry tale of Sid Vicious's short life and miserable death puts the lid on rock 'n' roll drug deaths for all time. No rock star has followed such a futile career with such a violent and yet unsurprising death, and no one is likely to in the future.

Recruited to the Sex Pistols because of his violent punk image, Sid Vicious fell for the hype completely. ("He believed his own publicity," said Johnny Rotten. "He was called Vicious because he was such a wanker. He couldn't fight his way out of a crisp bag.") When the Pistols split up, he was just a celebrity with nothing to offer but the myth of his own empty stardom. Drifting aimlessly round London, he was latched onto by an American groupie, Nancy Spungen. Vicious, already a heroin addict, left for New York, after she had been threatened with deportation following a brawl with some journalists. On landing in New York, Vicious had to be carried off the plane, 'obviously under the influence of drugs or drink', said the reports. Sid and Nancy moved into the notorious Chelsea Hotel where Nancy was subsequently found dead, stabbed several times in the stomach.

There were no witnesses to the killing, but evidence pointed to Sid, who was duly arrested on October 12, 1978, and charged with her murder. Five days later he was released on $50,000 bail, put up by his record company, Virgin. Less than two months later he was back on remand again, this time in the tough Rykers Island prison, after being involved in a night-club fight with Todd Smith, Patti's brother. (So much for heroin consciousness.)

On February 1, 1979, Sid's lawyers tried to get the charge of murder dismissed, but they failed. They then prepared to take the case into court on a 'Not Guilty' plea, so Sid was released yet again on February 2, once more on bail of $50,000. The story was beginning to sound like a game of legal ping-pong – except within 24 hours of Sid's release the ball was finally out of court. He was found dead by his mother and current girl-friend Michelle Robinson, in the latter's Greenwich Village flat. He died from an overdose, after consuming more heroin than his body could stand following two months' enforced withdrawal in prison. He was 21 years old. ♦



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Bejan Daruwalla's Predictions

ARIES: March 21 to April 20: In the first week, expect travel and ties, thanks to Mercury. The main trend is in the direction of employment, job-hops, relationships with colleagues and servants, loans and funds. Your pets will claim your undivided attention. The last week favours partnerships. As you will be working at a fast pace, periodic rest is essential.

TAURUS: April 21 to May 21: There will be a wish-fulfilment, either in the form of travel, or a major alliance – strictly personal or purely professional. Improve your mind by reading, writing, data collection and so on. Those in research, travel and the arts prove their worth. Between the seventh and 21st is your period of power and glory. Get to it, bulls!

GEMINI: May 22 to June 21: The home, parents and in-laws, will be the focus of attention as the new Moon falls in your fourth sector. Also, the outside world will see a lot of you. Travel will be sudden, around the last week of this month, as the Sun changes signs on the 23rd. Quick-witted, you will manage to find time for romance, entertainment and children in September-October.

CANCER: June 22 to July 22: Move, crabs, move – mentally, physically and emotionally. A newsy month. Therefore, pay attention to letters, calls and conferences. That's where your strength really lies. A contract will be signed. Relatives and visitors land up unexpectedly. Travel is predicted. Around the 14th, an arresting message will arrive.

LEO: July 23 to August 23: Expect a fusion of the personal and professional, as Mercury and Mars shift from your Sun sign. A financial deal, an important transaction, are the highlights. You will entertain in style. Socialising fetches its own rewards. The last week marks a new high in creativity, a reaching out to people. You will wield more clout.

VIRGO: August 24 to September 23: Make away to pastures new and green! A Sun-Mercury fusion hones your skills, makes for greater awareness at all levels and helps you win a round of well-deserved applause. Romance blossoms. Activities connected with children give you pleasure and recognition. A wish-fulfilment is foretold for Virgos. A long-standing project will approach completion.

LIBRA: September 24 to October 23: Trips, rendezvous, collaborations and links are the salient features of this month. Public welfare and philanthropy will be your major interests. While expenses will be rather heavy, you will make up for it in the last week. A Sun-Saturn formation could lead to a liaison. A personal poser will be resolved after the 23rd.

SCORPIO: October 24 to November 22: Friends and well-wishers rally round you. Your enemies will be vanquished. You will score emotionally. Group activities will find you in your element, therefore don't pretend to be the lone ranger. Enrol in clubs, organisations. This is a power month: people pay heed to your advice. Expenses mount after the 23rd.

SAGITTARIUS: November 23 to December 21: Mix play and work now as the Sun is in excellent formation with Jupiter. Trips and ties are foretold, and they will make for gains and gaiety. You are due for a promotion. The dominant trend is an overhauling of goals for many Sagittarians in September-October. Definitely a month to look forward to. The last week is for fun.

CAPRICORN: December 22 to January 20: The luck of the draw will be with you. Your intuition will pay handsome dividends. Journeys, ties, ceremonies, around the 14th and the first, are foretold. You could be interested in reincarnation, expansion of business, places of pilgrimage, enlarging the vistas of your mind. You will evolve, reach for the stars.

AQUARIUS: January 21 to February 18: There are two main trends this month: partnerships and ties, and a focus on loans, funds, insurance, legacies and intimate relationships. Taxes will have to be paid but you will have the money to do so. The last week is for travel and communication as Mercury is in juxtaposition with Jupiter. It's a good month.

PISCES: February 19 to March 20: Exceptionally strong attachments and a bout of ill-health make strange bedfellows, but that's the way it goes. A trip with a stop-over is more than probable. Your moods will fluctuate wildly but this could lead to a pole-vault in creativity. You will find this a newsy, fast-paced month. The occult will have a special appeal for you. ♦

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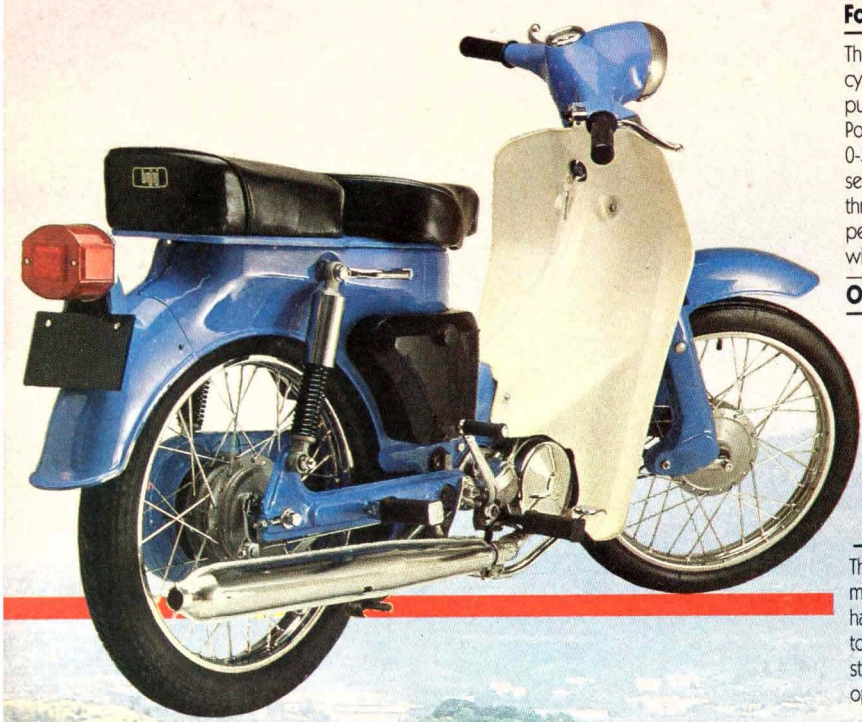

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