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## The Troubled Giani

Will The President Continue To  
Tolerate His Humiliation  
By The Prime Minister?

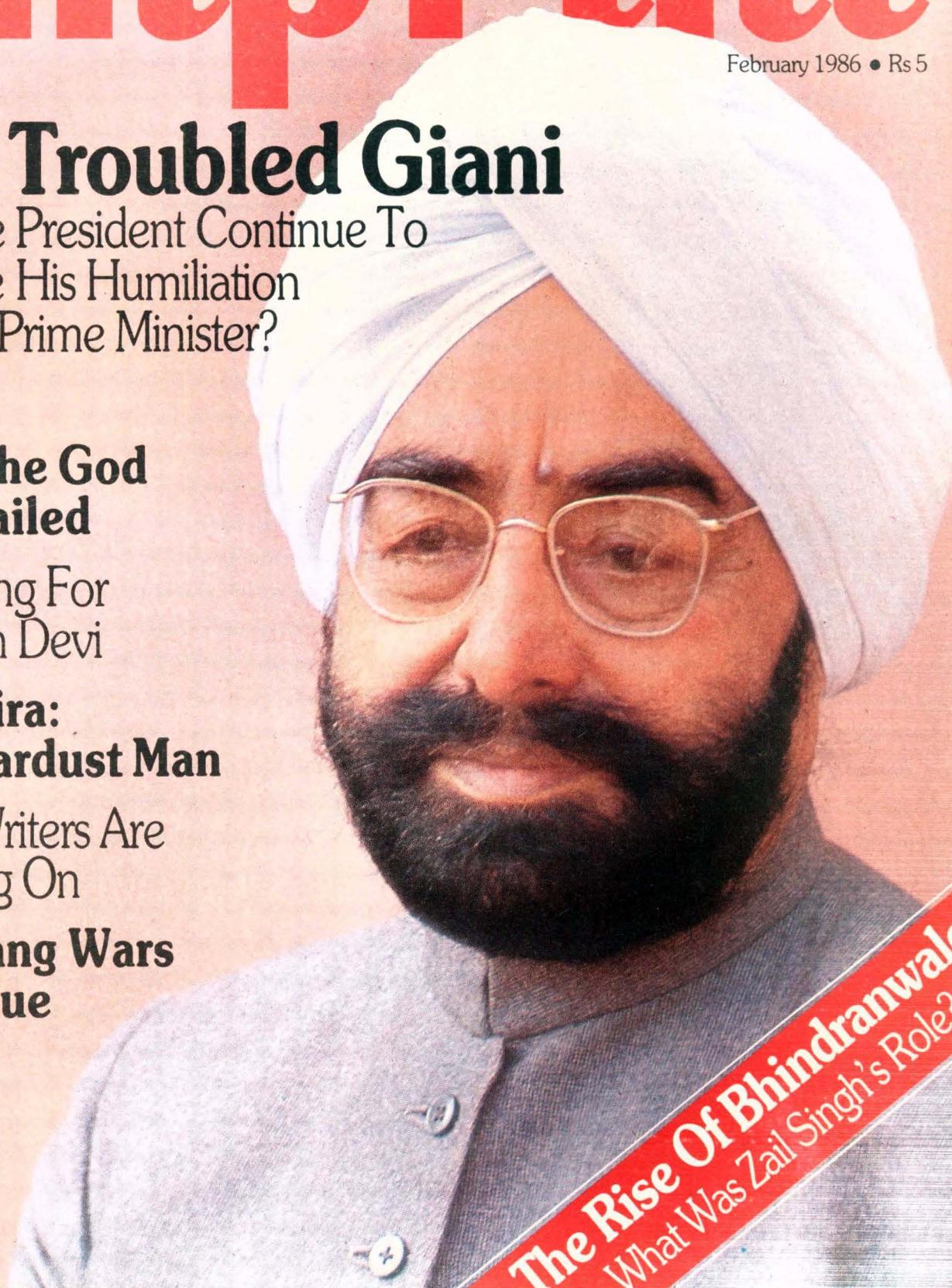
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Searching For  
Phoolan Devi

## Nari Hira: The Stardust Man

What Writers Are  
Working On

## The Gang Wars Continue



The Rise Of Bhindranwale  
What Was Zail Singh's Role?

PHILIPS

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# ON THE MARQUEE

**THE COVER STORY THIS MONTH**, *The Troubled Giani – Will The President Continue To Tolerate His Humiliation By The Prime Minister?* would have been unthinkable just 20 years ago for more than the obvious reason – the President then was President and the Prime Minister a faithful upholder of the Constitution of India, and an honourable stickler for norms and traditions. And if a story like this had somehow appeared, then there would certainly have been a storm in Parliament and in the country, many heads rolling in its wake. Now, how you react to the present story is how far we have traversed the wrong road in the short life of this republic – more specifically, in the 20 or so years since the departure of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and others of their generation.

“If my leader had said I should pick up a broom and be a sweeper, I would have done that. She chose me to be President,” declared Giani Zail Singh on July 25, 1982, on becoming the seventh President of the Republic of India. (Mrs Indira Gandhi was the leader the President was referring to.) After less than four years of this cavalier slighting of the highest office in the country by the new President himself, the Giani is in the doghouse, his diminution severely damaging all that the high office, and the Constitutional prestige of the President, mean to the country.

The diminution of the office of the President really began in 1969 with the support extended to the candidature of Mr V V Giri by Mrs Indira Gandhi’s faction of the Congress party. That was when which faction of the Congress party won had become more important than who the nominee for the high office was. It was thus that when Mr V V Giri was elected President, it was Mrs Gandhi who was hailed the winner. And not by the sheep only. Fakruddin Ali Ahmed, who followed Giri, was a greater triumph for Mrs Gandhi and a lesser President for the country. But who cared? And the inevitable happened – a man who was willing to be a sweeper

---

**The President must assert himself... To begin with he should fire Jagmohan, the Governor of Jammu & Kashmir. He must ask the Prime Minister to chastise Bhardwaj and Ansari. And after that, if he still feels ignored, he must resign and let Mr Gandhi bear the consequences.**

---

for his leader was thrust upon us as the President of India! The nation paid for the tyranny of Mrs Gandhi’s authoritarian will and poor judgement with the confrontations and all-round decline in public life her intransigence led to, and with the diminution and denigration of everything you behold. Mrs Indira Gandhi herself paid with her own life: you reap what you sow.

Mercifully, Giani Zail Singh’s conduct as President of India has been more dignified than he had given us hope to expect. He has grown in the job. And the past sycophancy notwithstanding, the President does not deserve the benign neglect his Prime Minister and government are inflicting upon him. Mr Rajiv Gandhi is the most courteous gentleman in Indian public life today. Already he has created a formidable reputation for chivalry. Such a man should bend backwards to ensure that he and his government cause no offence to the President nor assault in any way the highest office in the country. Mr Gandhi ought to be sitting together with the Giani until their differences are cleared away, and all the dignity and Constitutional responsibility is restored to the office of the President.

**The President should also be President.** To begin with, he must take cognisance of what the Supreme Court has said about Mr Jagmohan, his Governor in Jammu & Kashmir, and at once advise his government to relieve him of his office. Then the President must write to the Prime Minister for him to chastise and take appropriate action against the Minister of State for Law and Justice, Mr H R Bhardwaj, and Mr Z R Ansari, the Minister of State for Environment and Forests, for their deliberate slurs on the Supreme Court. And if the President cannot bring himself to assert his duty, he must quit. The President must also consider a showdown with the Prime Minister if the latter continues to ignore him or belittle the office of the President. What will then follow will not be pleasant but Mr Gandhi needs to learn at this early stage in his political career, that institutions are more sacrosanct than individuals, and in conducting the affairs of State, it is always to be remembered that the integrity of the Constitutional framework is paramount.

*R.V. Pandit*

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R V PANDIT

Associate Publisher & Executive Editor

VIR SANGHVI

Managing Editor

SHIRIN MEHTA

Assistant Editor

HUTOKSHI DOCTOR

Editorial Staff

AMRITA SHAH

SEEMA GUPTA

Marketing Manager

S K THAKUR

#### Advertising Sales Offices :

**BOMBAY :**

Business Press Private Limited,

Maker Tower 'E', 18th Floor,

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**BANGALORE :** K S PATTABHI DAS :

Business Press Private Limited,

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**HYDERABAD :** V T JAGTIANI :

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**MADRAS :** K DEVARAJ :

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## LETTERS

### Where Is The Party?



*But Where Is The Party?* (January 1986), has raised a very relevant question, even more relevant on the occasion of the Congress centenary.

The Congress has ceased to be the real inheritor of the Indian National Congress formed in 1885. The very objectives and ideals with which the Congress was formed are now conspicuous by their absence.

Sycophancy and sophistry have taken over. Cant and charisma fetch votes for the Congress today. National unity and patriotism have given way to regionalism and parochialism. The party is plagued with recalcitrants and genuflectors.

As was pointed out by you, the election results in Punjab and Assam are pointers to the escalating menace of regionalism in the country and the fading image of the Congress (I).

*M V Ravindran  
Ahmedabad.*

### Intellectual Illusions



The **Imprint** discussion between  
Vinod Doshi, Murli Deora, Gurcharan

Das and Dilip Piramal (*Towards the Future*, January 1986) is an illuminating example of how the elite in every field — industrial, economic, educational, social, political — engage in idle intellectual exercises.

The common man is none the wiser for it, nor does he get any positive guidelines for bettering his lot. With such performers around, the future cannot but be bright, not in reality, but as a mirage in the media.

*NIR Dudhe  
Pune*

### The Communicator



The interview with M J Akbar (*The Communicator*, January 1986) is the best interview published in recent times. Akbar's dynamic personality reflects in the interview. And one has to agree that *Sunday* is the only magazine, apart from *India Today*, which one grabs to read. *Newsline* is also a thundering success. It is the slickest programme on TV at present.

Akbar's acceptance that *Sunday* was going 'stale' is also noteworthy. How many ex-editors of national magazines would accept this?

*Dr Ravindra Jharia  
Nagpur*

### After Indira

R V Pandit has rightly appealed (*On The Marquee*, December 1985) to our Prime Minister "to lead us with sensitivity, with common sense, with decency. And wisdom." Our Prime Minister seems to be in a hurry, like Bombayites, to catch local trains.

No one can deny Mrs Gandhi's im-

## LETTERS

pact on our politics. But blind worship of her will take us nowhere. No individual is above the nation. Politicians and rulers come and go. But our nation remains forever. Her political blunders in Assam, her miscalculations in Punjab and the misadventure in Andhra Pradesh should serve as a lesson for Rajiv and his party-men.

S A Srinivasa Sarma  
Bombay

### Projecting Ribeiro

The data collected by your reporters for your cover story *How Safe Are We?* (December 1985) made the story informative for other journalists. I, therefore, consider it important to correct some statements and put others in a different perspective.

There is a reference in the story to the 1982 police revolt in Bombay. Your report says: "Completely overwhelmed by the looting, arson and violence, the state government called in the army." The facts about the autumn rebellion which I had reported in *The Illustrated Weekly Of India* were quite interesting. The government's action against the restless constabulary was secretly planned, well in advance, by a special committee. The chief of army staff sat in on all the meetings. The state officials involved in the plan were the Home Secretary, the Joint Secretary (Home), the Special Inspector General (Law and Order). The Special IG and the Joint Secretary worked out a detailed plan. Army companies were kept ready. After all, it was a massive operation throughout the state.

However, things went wrong only in Bombay. Several people took advantage of the police's preoccupation and indulged in looting and arson. The Bombay police were found wanting both by the government and the press. The Bombay police was then headed by J F Ribeiro who has been built up as a 'super-cop' elsewhere in the issue.

Ribeiro's failure in August 1982 was glossed over by the press. Obviously, the press had been overwhelmed by Ribeiro's publicity blitz. Dur-

ing his tenure as the Commissioner of Police, Ribeiro did not even try to find ways of curbing corruption.

There are two reasons for my response to your piece on Ribeiro. One, I think it is a disgrace to journalism as a whole that so many reporters have fallen for his self-promoting pub-

licity tactics. The result has been bad journalism. Two, projecting Ribeiro repeatedly as the only 'unusual cop' is unfair to the undoubtedly more talented and less shrewd achievers.

Sheela Barse  
Bombay

### AN OLD DOSCO WRITES...

My first words were 'Doon School'. The doctor and nurses who delivered me were stunned. I vividly remember instructing my parents to register me at Doon, when I was about one hour and 45 minutes old, knowing fully well that if we wasted any time at all I'd probably miss my chance. This remarkable foresight, as I saw it at the time, finally landed me in the wrong



school and ruined my life. For this permanent damage I can now safely blame my parents because they and the doctor and nurses, the only witnesses, have long since departed.

Surprisingly though, by the time we were about 11 years old and had got into school, we spent no time at all discussing its merits or otherwise. We were totally oblivious to the damage being done to us. As a matter of fact, some of us even respected the perpetrators — our teachers! By then, however, our memories had failed completely (no Dosco remembers corporal punishment — remember?) and we had been led to believe that it was actually our parents who had inflicted upon us this terrible plight. We were too young to rebel and anyway by then our minds had been warped completely — 'our conscience had become our task-master'. For the rest of our Doon School life and after,

we've had to suffer (our conscience on its own wasn't good enough for this task) the fact that one of our OBs became a Prime Minister of India, many became ministers and Members of Parliament, others leading journalists, scholars, photographers, armed forces personnel, industrialists, social workers, business executives — professions that the best schools would never encourage.

While at Doon, we really sped downhill. Apart from our routine academic life, we made friends with our schoolmates and classmates. We lived in the same dorms for over half our lives. We grew up with each other and shared common experiences. Some of us now want to perpetuate this shameful behaviour by sending our children there. It was even rumoured that some Doscos remained friends after having left school, and had nostalgic thoughts about it. This fact, unfortunately for us, was recently exposed to the world (as a matter of fact we were caught red-handed) by witnesses and internationally famous journalists who were forcibly dragged to the school campus for what has now become a 'black day' in the history of our school — our Golden Jubilee Founder's Day (for which we stooped so low that we even raised money to make it a success).

If there is a moral behind the story of the Doon School myth, now exploded by Dhiren Bhagat (*Doon: The Myth*, December 1985), it is this: Future generations would do well to keep their children away from Doon (we Doscos need the seats anyway) and send them to Dhiren's School — now what was its name again?!

Gautam Berry  
Bombay

## LETTERS

### Winds Of Werner



I felt badly let down after reading the article *The Winds Of Werner* (December 1985). To begin with, let me clarify that I am not justifying or trying to disprove what was written about Werner's \$ 15 million affair. My grudge is that The Hunger Project and the Forum have been misunderstood and, as a result, badly mauled.

The Forum is a powerful enquiry into the 'nature of being'. Participants from all walks of life meet on two consecutive weekends and engage in this enquiry, in the presence of a trained leader. The Hunger Project invites people to create a context for ending hunger by 2000 A.D. I see no reason to ridicule either The Hunger Project or the Forum. Both of them have benefitted thousands.

Ramesh Dharmaji  
Bangalore

### The Doon Myth

I don't understand all the hullabaloo about corporal punishment (*Doon: The Myth*, December 1985). I was at the Scindia School in the early '40s. A public school is a world of boys who are to become men — not pansies. I fervently hope that the prompt and judiciously placed thwack on the bottom has not entirely disappeared.

Look at all the drop-outs, alcoholics and drug addicts from schools and colleges today. Wouldn't a 'few of the best' have checked them in time?

Col B V Joshi (Retd)  
Pune

### THE HAVOC OF SOCIALISM

"To be a Tory before you are 40 shows a lack of heart; to be a socialist after you are 40 shows a lack of head," wrote Olivia Manning. It is depressing, therefore, to find the Congress affirming its faith in socialism in its 100th year.

In *The Havoc Of Socialism* (December 1985), K S Venkateswaran has taken pains to enumerate the failings of the government and to show that the present government is not supporting a policy for a market-oriented economy. However, the fault often lies with the policies themselves and not with their execution. You will find a number of socialists who blame their failure on the execution of policies rather than the policies themselves. Many even suggest that what we have in India is not socialism at all. What needs to be proved, or at least argued logically, is that the policies *per se* are incapable of yielding the desired results, and that the policies give rise to undesirable side-effects. This is the argument which I was looking for in the article, and did not find.

The author is also less than fair to the Rajiv government when he blames it for not really supporting the market economy. No one would be able to move any faster, given the fact that he would have to face the electorate again in five years. For, in spite of the fact that no socialist government has been able to solve even its food problem, let alone improve the standard of living of its people, the lure of socialism is very strong. The common man hopes that he will get a larger share in the prosperity of the 'rich', while the politician feels that socialism offers a painless way to absolute power. Further, many of those who support a market-oriented economy share with socialists a lack of understanding of the workings of a market economy. Even those who praised VP Singh for his 'bold' budget have started blaming his budget for the price rises, forgetting that it is this (temporary) price rise that acts as an impetus to increase production which, coupled with an increase in competi-

tion, would *eventually* bring down prices. With such a shaky faith in a market economy, even on the part of its supporters, and the populace, by and large, opting for socialism, no government will find it easy to turn away from socialism and espouse more pragmatic policies which, although beneficial in the long run, are bound to cause an increase in hardships as an immediate consequence.

What needs to be done to enable the government to move in the right direction is to start an education campaign to clear up the misconceptions and false hopes of the people. It needs to be explained convincingly, through historical examples and logical arguments, that:

State capitalism and tighter controls are inherent in socialism and result in loss of liberty, nepotism, corruption and arbitrary rule.

If, in a capitalist society, the 'rich' are supposed to exploit the poor, the men in power in a socialist state also suffer from the same weakness. There is a Hungarian saying: "Capitalism is exploitation of man by man; socialism is the other way around."

Money power in capitalism is effectively countered by State power. In socialism there is no counter-power to State power. The exploitation is, therefore, much more severe.

Socialism has not been able to do what it was supposed to do. No socialist country has been able to solve even its food problem, while the goal of equality is as distant as ever. In the socialist 'classless' society, there are two classes: the rulers and the ruled.

Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves that none of the predictions of Marx have come true. The revolution did not take place in an advanced industrial country but in backward, agricultural countries like Russia. Capitalism did not crumble, as predicted, under the weight of its contradictions. And as far as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is concerned, events in Poland have already exposed the hollowness of that slogan.

Y D Altekar  
Pune

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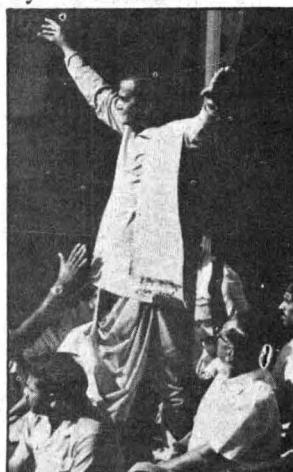
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# CENTENARY SHENANIGANS

The Congress had its little squabbles but Bombay escaped unscathed.

**S**IX MONTHS before the Congress came to town, the panic began. The people of Bombay didn't really care that the Indian National Congress had been founded in their city and would have been only too happy if Rajiv Gandhi had celebrated the centenary of his party in Jabalpur or Ganganagar instead.

What they did care about was their city. And many were traumatised by the tales of environmental destruction that the newspapers carried in the run-up to the Centenary celebrations. The racecourse was being turned into a *chawl* to accommodate 50,000 delegates. The Oval Maidan was to be the site of a concrete-and-steel industrial exhibition. The city's water supply would run out. There would be traffic snarls on every major thoroughfare.

There were also fears about the arrival of over 1,00,000 delegates. Would they loot the shops? Would they rape women? Would they run wild in the streets? Wasn't that what the Youth Congress had done in Nagpur?

\* \* \*

**AS IT TURNED OUT**, the fears were largely unfounded. There were few traffic snarls. The water didn't run out. The Oval was not permanently damaged. The delegates did not rape, pillage or plunder. The most they could manage were a few wolf-whistles at female pedestrians.

Even the bogus controversy over the racecourse proved unfounded.



The objection had been to destroying one of the few green spaces left in Bombay. It would have been a valid objection if the racecourse had in fact been a park that all the citizens of Bombay could use rather than an island of privilege in a concrete wasteland. In many Western cities, the racecourse is situated some distance from the main city and the available green space turned into a public park. Be that as it may, the Congress party did manage to return the racecourse to its original condition shortly after the delegates had departed.

While the Centenary celebrations

caused minimal inconvenience to the citizens of Bombay, many delegates were far from satisfied. Part of the problem was the Seva Dal. The Dal is a voluntary body composed of Congress workers that handles security at party gatherings, performing roughly the same function as the Hell's Angels used to at rock concerts in the '60s. Its techniques, too, have much in common with the Angels'. Its membership is composed largely of what Rajni Kothari and Ashis Nandy would call 'lumpen elements' and frequently it is the party that needs to be protected from the Dal.

This time, a chunk of Dal volunteers arrived two days ahead of schedule and found — predictably — that nobody was expecting them. They asked for food and when this proved difficult to arrange at once, *gheraoed* Shivajirao Patil Nilangkar, Maharashtra's nondescript Chief Minister. Later, the

Dal volunteers were to mess up many of the arrangements at the Centenary session.

\* \* \*

**ON THE FIRST DAY** of the extravaganza, the police had to use a little muscle to restrain the more enthusiastic delegates. In true Congress tradition, the organisers had issued 250,000 passes though the venue accommodated only 125,000 persons. ("We always do this. Can't have empty seats when Rajivji speaks.") When 130,000 people turned up, the last 5,000 were denied entry on

For two weeks after the session, it seemed likely that Deora would be forced out of his party post till, at month-end, the Prime Minister made it clear that he had forgiven him for the microphone fiasco.

## CENTENARY SHENANIGANS

the grounds that there was no room. Annoyed, the delegates tried to crash the proceedings through the VIP gate. The Bombay police then physically shoved them back and the mêlée made the front pages of the next day's papers.

\* \* \*

**THE OTHER** great fiasco concerned the microphones. During the session, a microphone failed while the Prime Minister was introducing a speaker. He was annoyed but recovered quickly enough to joke that the microphones too seemed to have been left over from 1885.

He was less amused when the mikes failed again, this time during his mammoth Azad Maidan rally. He turned around and shouted at the organisers and gave the crowd a flash of the famous Nehru temper.

What went wrong? The sound system was managed by Chicago Radio which always handles sound systems at such gatherings. Why did it fail this time? Shivajirao Patil told reporters later that he suspected sabotage by 'certain persons' (i.e. MPCC Chief Prajba Rao and her supporters) but never produced any evidence to back this claim. As for the Azad Maidan fiasco, the organisers have an interesting explanation.

Did the mikes really fail? they ask. When the Prime Minister was speaking, a section of the crowd grew restive. He broke off his speech to ask them: "Are you saying that you can't hear me?" The crowd shouted back: "Yes." Now, say the organisers, if they couldn't hear him in the first place, then how did they hear him when he asked if his speech was audible? So, could it be that 'mischief-makers' had put them up to disrupting the meeting?

Ah, the convoluted ways of the Congress (I)....

\* \* \*

**SENSING** that the Prime Minister was displeased, Gundu Rao, the former Chief Minister of Karnataka, chose to make his own complaints. The housing arranged for delegates was inadequate, he thundered. The arrangements were terrible.

How Mr Rao took it upon himself to speak for the delegates was never established. A fun-loving sort, the former Chief Minister's idea of adequate housing is a deluxe suite at the Taj or the Oberoi, stocked, preferably, with plenty of liquid refreshment so that he can discuss the politics of Uganda with several nubile visitors. Clearly, the other delegates were denied this comfort. But was this such a bad thing?

The Prime Minister didn't think it was. Shortly after his outburst, Rao was chopped from the Congress Working Committee.

\* \* \*

**RAO'S IRE** was really directed at Murli Deora, the dapper, gesticulating President of the Bombay Regional Congress Committee (BRCC). Deora, who is heartily disliked by many old-style Congress (I) politicos, appears to have a death-wish. All Congress sessions contain their share of chaos, and a centenary session was certain to have more confusion than usual. But Deora, who is already an outsider in a party that includes men like Sitaram Kesari and Bansi Lal, insisted on organising the *tamasha*. Predictably, his critics seized on the snafu — such as the mike failure — and attacked him. For two weeks after the session, it seemed likely that Deora would be forced out of his party post till, at month-end, he was warmly re-

ceived by the Prime Minister who appeared to have forgiven him for the microphone fiasco.

\* \* \*

**DEORA DIDN'T HELP** his own cause by keeping quiet about the expenditure on the Centenary. Before the session, the more outrageous Opposition politicians had levelled wild allegations about the sums collected for the extravaganza. It cost Rs 8 crore, said one. No, Rs 12 crore, said another. All Deora would say in reply was that the accounts would be audited in due course, giving rise to speculation that he intended to pocket a percentage of the collections.

Such speculation is based on a misunderstanding of the way the Congress now finances its activities. Gone are the days when black money used to be collected from industrialists. Gone, also, is the role of the regional middleman. Rajiv Gandhi's party does not allow the Deoras of this world to collect money for it. Everything is done from the top.

For the record, here is an unofficial but educated estimate of the expenditure: Rs 4 crore. There's no way that more could have been spent in Bombay, taking into account all the costs: buses, the stadium, the housing at the racetrack and the trucks to transport crowds to the Prime Minister's rally. Where did the money come from? Around Rs 2 crore was white. It was collected during the industrial exhibition by cheque from companies that rented stalls. The other Rs 2 crore was black. It came from the AICC in Delhi. And where did the AICC get the money from? Nobody will say, but it clearly wasn't from businessmen. (Did I hear somebody exclaim 'cuts on defence contracts'...?) ♦

# BHELPURI ECONOMICS

This government has no clue as to how the economy works.

THE ONE THING that clearly emerged from the Congress Centenary celebrations was that the Prime Minister has no clue as to how the economy actually works.

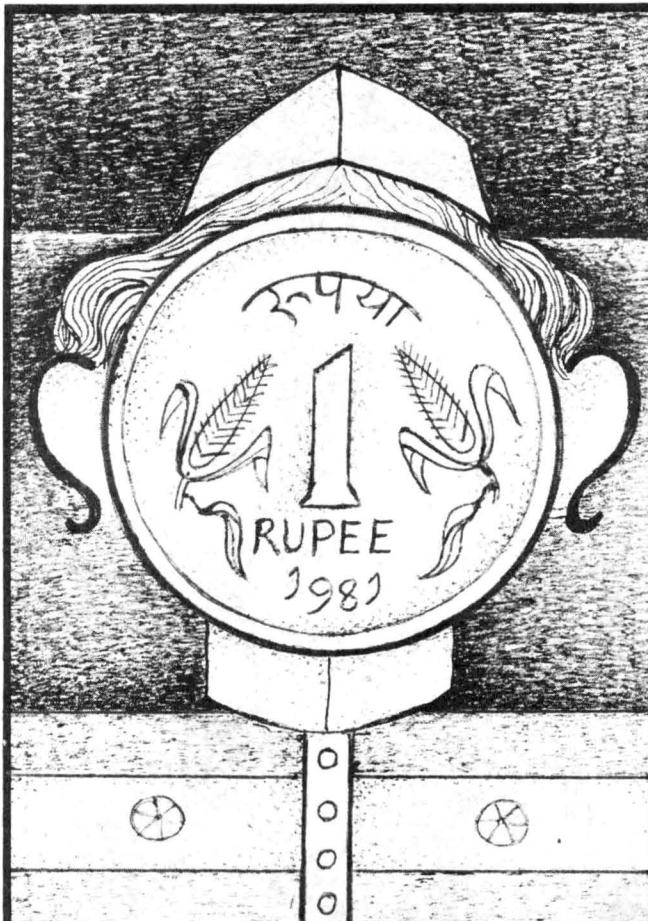
About the best one could distil out of the speeches by leaders of the illegitimate grandchild of the Congress — the Congress (I) — is that they are following a 'carrot and stick' economic policy. Even here, the Congress (I), as well as the PM, do not understand the origin of the idiom, and have made a hotch-potch of that graphic phrase. The 'carrot and stick' was utilised to make the donkey move forward. A carrot was tied by a string from a stick, and dangled before the donkey. The donkey moved forward to grab the carrot, but since the stick was fastened around the donkey's neck, the carrot also moved forward. So, the donkey walked and walked without getting the carrot.

That is the real meaning of the 'carrot and stick' policy — to delude someone into working for an elusive reward.

Most Congressmen, from the PM downwards, are college drop-outs with an incomplete education. So, just as they have appropriated the Mahatma Gandhi Congress as theirs and given it an entirely different meaning, they have appropriated the idiom as well, and have given us to understand that the 'carrot and stick'

policy means, first you administer the reward (carrot) and if the donkey does not behave, then punish it (stick). This does not, obviously, work as well. From the little I know, I believe that if the carrot is given first, the donkey will never respond to any stick.

I cannot blame the PM for his lack of knowledge of either the English idiom or economics. Given the fact that he has parachuted into the PM's chair (and his earlier scholastic misadventures), he has neither the academic background nor the empirical experience to make judgements on economics. But what about the



Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry?

Both these government agencies have recently produced authoritative and publicised documents on economic policy. The Planning Commission has produced the Seventh Plan document and the Finance Ministry has published a lengthy statement on the long-term Fiscal Policy.

I have earlier been a Harvard Professor for almost a decade and have worked closely with two geniuses in economics (both Nobel Laureates): the first, a theoretician called Paul Samuelson with whom I have published papers as joint author, and the second, an empiricist, Simon Kuznets. Therefore, I say with the full authority of an economist and not as a politician, that during my three previous terms in Parliament, I was continually amazed at how the 'expert economists' assembled in the Planning Commission

and the Finance Ministry produced, year after year, such inane, insipid, and verbose documents. Even with the new helmsman looking towards the 21st century, the capacity of the government's economists has not changed at all.

What should the Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry be addressing themselves to? The simple answer is to inflation, unemployment, low productivity of resources, and the poor growth rate. The hard question is, how?

In the Seventh Plan and the Fiscal Policy documents there are plenty of

Is this really the Seventh Plan? Or is it just the seventh edition of the same Plan that has hampered our economic progress for years?

## BHELPURI ECONOMICS

inane references to these problems. For example, in the Seventh Plan, it is stated: "The central element in the development strategy of the Seventh Plan is the generation of productive employment."

A pleasing mouthful. But ploughing through the verbiage, what does this central element lead us to? In the end, to no improvement in the current levels of unemployment! And there is a big 'if' attached to that. If everything goes according to Plan. Otherwise, the unemployment situation will worsen! After reading through the document, I came to the conclusion that this was not the Seventh Plan, but the seventh edition of the same Plan.

The Fiscal Policy document is not much better. It states pompously: "The government attaches high priority to keeping inflation under firm control. In particular, the financing of the Plan will require progressively more reliance on surpluses generated by the budget and public sector undertakings."

Some hope! There is, however, hope if we adopt an entirely different approach in our economic policy. The PM created that promise in the early part of 1985, making people like Palkhivala dance with joy (he is still delirious), but I knew better (see my *Imprint* column of May 1985). But, the hotch-potch nature of these economic ideas is now dawning on many others, and by the end of 1986, there will be no takers.

What is this entirely new approach? While I cannot detail it here, I can chart the high points. The first is privatisation — to make the government work less. Which means that hotels, cold drinks, bread, automobiles, and half the banking sector must be de-nationalised or auctioned off. There

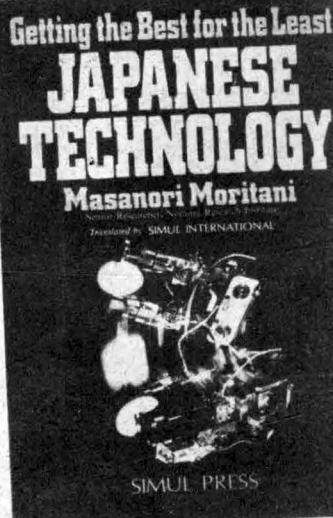
will be an increase in revenue with this privatisation. Second, serious fiscal reform — such steps as abolishing excise duties from all but the top 15 revenue earning commodities. Presently, there are 131 commodities on which excise duty is levied, and it is the most important source of corruption. The loss in revenue from such abolition will be only eight per cent, which will be covered by the gain in revenue by privatisation.

Third, foreign exchange reform for which the rupee (presently indexed to foreign currencies), should be made floating and convertible. At present, there is harassment under idle FERA laws which help the crooks and hurt the innocent. Anybody can buy and sell the rupee in the black market in Singapore. And what the Italians are doing with our rupee is yet another sordid story which I will write about later. Fourth, incentives for investment and reinvestment. For example, the capital gains tax should be abolished. All the expenditures that companies make for providing housing and education for their employees should be made tax deductible.

Finally, the Plan should be for providing infrastructure and employment. The Plan should be drawn up to provide investments for transportation, education, dairy farming, and energy, and the rest of the economy be left to the private and foreign investment, in mutual competition. Only such a radical approach will work. ♦

Otherwise, all we will get are the seventh, the eighth, the ninth editions of the same Plan. And if we do not press for this and let matters remain as they are, then the PM's *bhelpuri* economics is all that we will deserve. ♦

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FOLLOW-UP

By Vir Sanghvi

# ERHARD'S DEFENCE

Werner Erhard replies to the charges made against him two issues ago.

**I**N DECEMBER 1985, **Imprint** reproduced an article from *Forbes*, the respected US business magazine. The article, entitled *The Winds Of Werner*, dealt with est-founder Werner Erhard and his financial affairs. It also took a critical look at The Hunger Project, another of Erhard's projects.

Erhard was in Bombay in December and, in an interview to **Imprint**, said that he thought the article was biased and misrepresented facts. What follows is a brief rundown of what *Forbes* said (and **Imprint** reproduced) and Erhard's rebuttals:

a) *Forbes* said that Wolfgang Somary, heir to a Swiss banking fortune, had loaned Erhard US \$ 15 million in 1981 at a virtual giveaway interest rate of two per cent. According to *Forbes*, Somary thought he was making the loan to 'benefit the world' but the money actually went to Werner Erhard & Associates, 'a sole proprietorship', and a 'for-profit organisation'.

Erhard accepts that the facts are accurate but denies the insinuations. Yes, he says, Werner Erhard & Associates (WEA) is a 'sole proprietorship' but it is not an organisation run for profit. He has withdrawn no profits from it and, last year, did not even take a salary.

b) *Forbes* claimed that Somary had agreed to the loan, according to court documents, on the condition



that Erhard agreed to turn WEA into a charity. Erhard has failed to do this.

No, says Erhard, that was never part of the deal.

c) Somary, according to *Forbes*, 'began to wonder if he would ever see the money again and took the matter to a federal court in San Francisco charging that Erhard was welshing on his deal'.

Yes, says Erhard, Somary did sue, but no, he did not believe that Erhard was welshing on his deal. In fact, the law suit was part of a complex legal manoeuvre necessitated by Erhard's divorce from his wife. Under

Californian law, she is entitled to 50 per cent of all his assets and Somary had to establish that he was owed the US \$ 15 million.

d) *Forbes* said that The Hunger Project spent very little on actually feeding people, and one of its few 'token' projects was in Costa Rica, 'a place where most aid experts say that hunger is virtually non-existent'.

Erhard does not dispute that The Hunger Project spends less on feeding people than on its other activities. But, he says, the Project was established not just as an aid body but as an organisation that motivated individuals towards recognising that hunger could be ended. As for the claim that hunger is non-existent in Costa Rica, Erhard says that is not true. There are many hungry people there.

Erhard also makes the following points: The *Forbes* article, he suggests, insinuated that Somary's US \$ 15 million went to a private company for him to spend as he liked. In fact, he has agreed to leave his stake in WEA to a charity, and he is answerable for any expenditure incurred by WEA to a panel of five distinguished men.

Moreover, all of WEA's assets are pledged as security for the loan and US \$ 1 million of the principal has been repaid. WEA has also fully complied with the terms of the loan. Also, est is not a 'cult' as **Imprint** dubbed it, but a 'training'. Plus, Erhard does not face a US \$ 2 million liability for back-taxes as claimed by *Forbes*.

All of this may lead one to ask

*This article is based on an interview given by Werner Erhard to Imprint in Bombay.*

In Erhard's view, the article has undermined the support of a lot of very decent, sincere people in India. This is the reason why he is so keen to have his explanations heard.

## ERHARD'S DEFENCE

that if the *Forbes* article was so unjust, is Erhard going to sue?

Apparently not. He admits frankly that what he objects to are not so much the article's facts, as much as the inferences and the insinuations. "They started out with an opinion," he says of *Forbes'* writers, "and made the facts fit the opinion." He is more concerned that by reproducing the article, **Imprint** has, in his view, undermined the support of a lot of very decent, sincere people in India.

What about Somary? Is he going to at least write a letter to the Editor of *Forbes* complaining about the misrepresentation? No. According to Erhard, Somary has a 'European attitude' towards the whole thing and would rather not get involved.

So, is there any reason to accept Erhard's rebuttal when, as he himself concedes, his complaints are not so much about the facts as the insinuations? And insinuations depend on one man's word against the other's.

Yes, says Erhard. Even if one accepts *Forbes'* arguments, nothing the article says actually detracts from the merits of est. So, what does the *Forbes* article amount to? Basically, it claims to document a disagreement between him and Somary over money. However, as Somary himself does not seem to feel that he has been cheated — in fact, he refused to talk to *Forbes* — can *Forbes'* insinuations be upheld?

\* \* \*

**WHAT THEN** of The Hunger Project? Well, Joan Holmes, Executive Director of the Project has written to **Imprint** saying that 'I consider it important to inform you that the article you reprinted was based not on facts but misinformation'. Extracts from Holmes' letter follow:

"The work of The Hunger Project

is to generate a worldwide grass roots commitment to the end of hunger in order to bring forth the work that must be done to end the persistence of hunger and starvation on our planet by the turn of the century. Through various programmes, including communication, education and direct financial support of other voluntary agencies working toward alleviating hunger, The Hunger Project seeks to establish the possibility in which individuals can discover and act on their natural responsibility for the persistence of hunger and starvation and its elimination.

"While The Hunger Project is not a grants-making foundation, we do, as an expression of our support for development work, provide financial assistance to other organisations and institutions working to eradicate hunger. During our recent Board meeting in India, for example, we awarded several grants to Indian institutions concerned with rural development. Over the past several years, we have also provided financial support for non-governmental agencies working in Africa, Latin America and Asia. One of these grants was to Save the Children to help fund a joint Save the Children-Hunger Project programme in Costa Rica. This project was chosen because of Save the Children's outstanding record of accomplishment in more than 40 countries, and because the President of Costa Rica had personally extended an invitation to The Hunger Project to work with the people of his country in ensuring better nutrition and a higher quality of life."

What now? **Imprint** feels that having read both sides of the issue, our readers are now better placed to make up their minds about Werner Erhard and The Hunger Project. ♦

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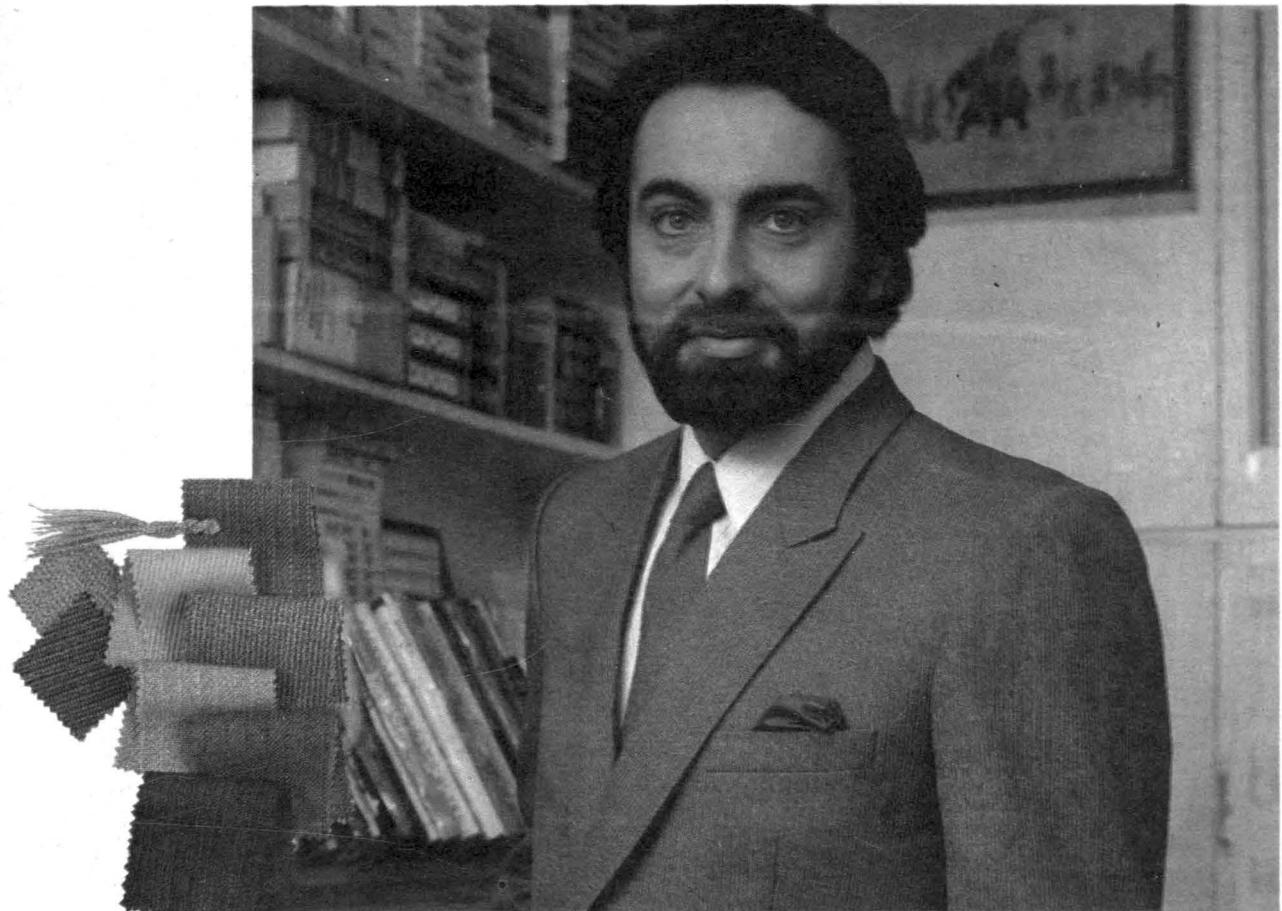
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# THE TROUBLED PRESIDENT

BY VIR SANGHVI



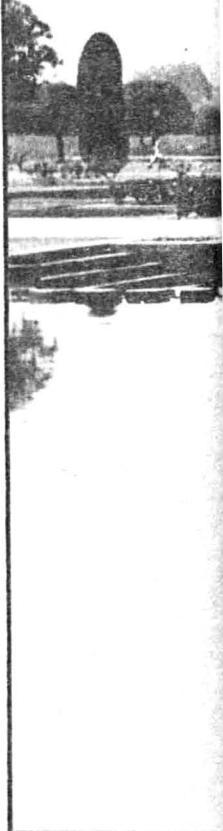
**G**iani Zail Singh is hurt and humiliated by the manner in which Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is treating him. Will he continue to tolerate this mistreatment? What are the implications for the office of the President?

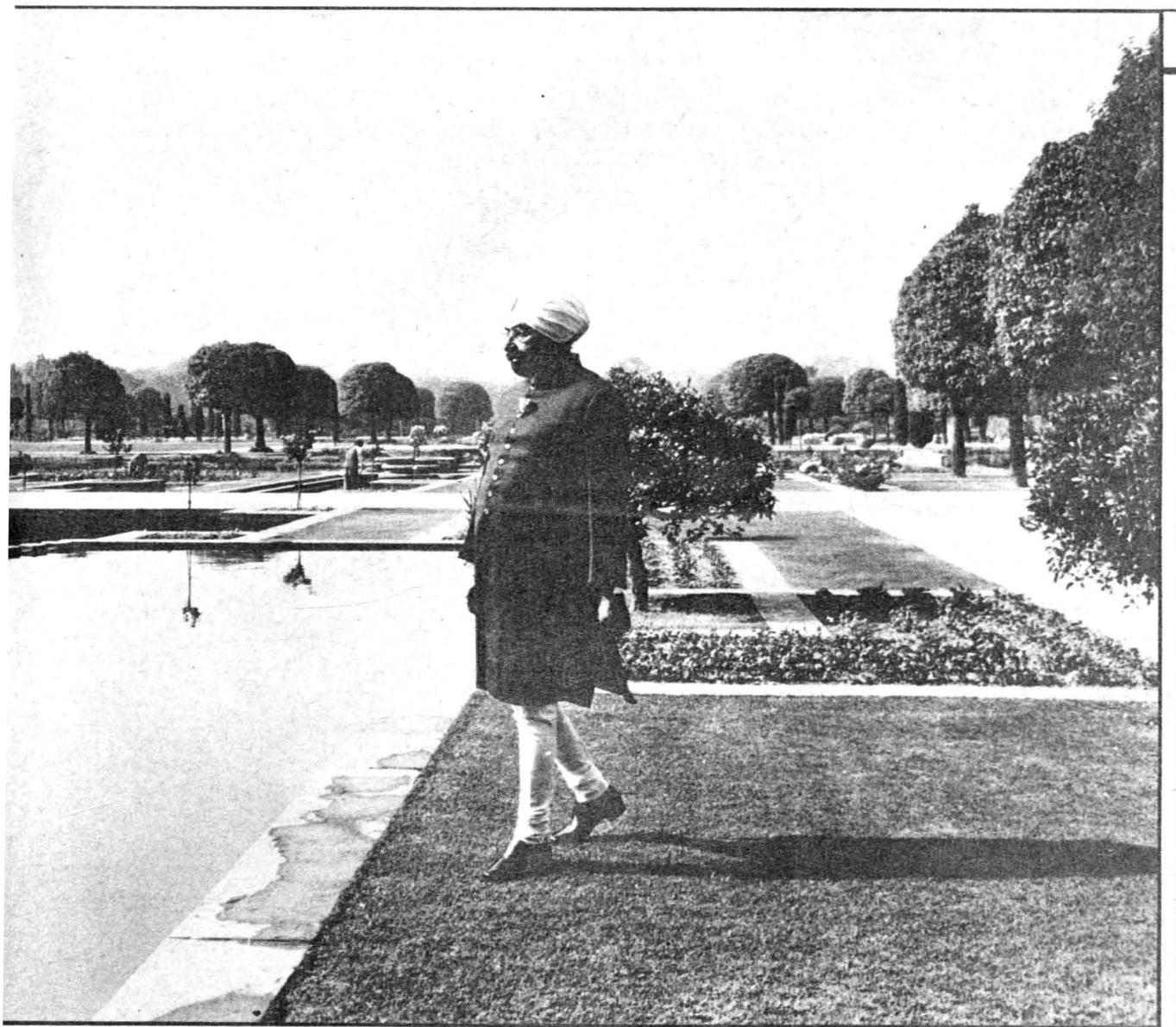
**W**HEN INDIRA GANDHI selected Giani Zail Singh to be the Congress (I)'s candidate for the Presidency, there was widespread dismay. Even those who accepted that it made political sense to appoint a Sikh, felt that Zail Singh was the wrong choice for the job. His record as Home Minister had not been particularly distinguished and he had made a fetish out of his loyalty to the Gandhis. ("Sanjay is my *rehnuma*," he said shortly after becoming Home Minister.) Moreover, he lacked the stature for the job and was clearly not up to the standard of such former Presidents as Rajendra Prasad, S Radhakrishnan and Zakir Hussain.

Since his election as President in 1982, however, Zail Singh has not

turned out to be quite the disaster it was feared he might be. He has behaved responsibly in the face of severe provocation in the aftermath of Bluestar and the Delhi riots, and has seemed almost to grow into the role. His faults have been those of sycophancy and extreme obeisance to the Gandhi family. "If my leader had said that I should pick up a broom and be a sweeper, I would have done that. She chose me to be President," he announced, shortly after his election to the Presidency. And when Mrs Gandhi was assassinated, he broke with tradition and immediately appointed her son Prime Minister, despite the convention that the senior-most Cabinet minister takes over as caretaker Prime Minister until the Parliamentary party can elect a new leader.

This excessive zeal on behalf of the Gandhis, makes his present situation particularly ironic. Over the last year, President Zail Singh has been consistently snubbed, belittled and ignored by the man he appointed Prime Minister on October 31, 1984. The situation has got so bad that, a few months ago, the President took the unusual step of complaining personally to the Prime Minister about his mistreatment. He told him that people were beginning to ask why there were so many tensions between the President and the Prime Minister and that this was not a healthy situation. Rajiv Gandhi is supposed to have replied that he shouldn't worry too much about what people said. After a while, they would find something else to gossip about.





And that was the only reassurance that Giani Zail Singh got.

**D**ESPITE RAJIV GANDHI'S confidence that the matter would blow over, Delhi remains full of speculation about the relationship between the Prime Minister and the President. While Zail Singh has respected the Constitutional tradition that prevents him from granting on-the-record political interviews, he has spoken freely, off-the-record to many visitors. Some of what he has said has found its way into the press, attributed — as is the journalistic convention — to 'friends of Zail Singh' and 'sources close to the President'.

There are many instances to support his contention that he is being mistreated. Rajiv Gandhi seems to

believe that he has no Constitutional obligation to accept the President's existence. Tradition has it that each time the Prime Minister returns from a foreign trip, he calls on the President and briefs him. Rajiv has stubbornly refused to respect this convention despite having been abroad more often than most other Prime Ministers. When the Giani complained to him about this lapse, Rajiv is said to have assured him that it would not occur again. Despite this assurance, the Prime Minister has continued to avoid visiting Zail Singh. However, his office has found a way of not making this too obvious. Recently, the Prime Minister waited till the Giani was out of town and then went and called on the Vice-President, on the grounds that the President was

unavailable at the time.

The Prime Minister has also refused to respect many other such conventions. Constitutionally, the President is supposed to appoint Governors on the basis of advice tendered by the Cabinet. In practical terms, this means that the Cabinet takes the decision, but the Prime Minister still takes the trouble to brief the President. Now, the government simply sends the relevant papers to Rashtrapati Bhavan and asks the President to sign them. Similarly, the President is no longer kept informed on any other matters of State or consulted on any major decision. As one of Zail Singh's friends says, "Never before has a convention been broken so suddenly, so gracelessly and without attributing any reasons."

## COVER STORY

Some of these snubs may, perhaps, have their origins in the Prime Minister's hectic schedule and his own hurried, personal style. The same cannot be said of the manner in which the President has been prevented from going abroad. The President receives several invitations a year from various foreign countries. When a foreign Head of State visits India, he usually invites the President to visit his country. Such invitations go to Rashtrapati Bhavan. After the President accepts them, he initials them and forwards them to the Foreign Ministry. The Ministry then groups together three or four such invitations, prepares a tour programme and arranges the trip in consultation with the President. Usually, the President of India visits ten or twelve foreign countries in a normal year.

Giani Zail Singh has accepted many such invitations and duly forwarded them to the Foreign Ministry. However, since October 31, 1984, the Ministry has not arranged a single foreign visit. Each time Rashtrapati Bhavan staff have made enquiries, they have been fobbed off. It is inconceivable that the Foreign Ministry could have done this without instructions from the Cabinet — especially since, for much of 1985, the Foreign Minister was Rajiv Gandhi himself.

There are many other such instances. Officials who the President depended on have been transferred out of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Television crews are duly deputed to cover his functions, but the footage rarely finds its way on to Doordarshan news. He has been ignored at banquets and the like. Such snubs have bewildered the Giani. What possible purpose could be achieved by preventing him from going abroad? What is he expected to tell foreign Heads of State who have invited him and whose invitations he has already accepted?

**W**HENEVER Rajiv Gandhi has been questioned about the manner in which he treats the President, he has given evasive replies. Asked by the press why he had stopped visiting the President when

he returned from abroad, he said that he had broken several conventions and that this was just one of them. To add insult to injury, he parried a question about Jagmohan, the controversial Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, by claiming that the President was concerned with the appointment of Governors, which, considering that the Giani is now not even consulted seemed particularly untruthful.

A possible explanation for the Prime Minister's behaviour has to do with the Giani's role in the Punjab. The recent publication of Mark Tully and Satish Jacob's *Amritsar* has aroused interest in the links between Zail Singh and Bhindranwale. The President himself entirely rejects the Tully-Jacob thesis that he contributed to the rise of Bhindranwale (see accompanying article) but not everyone is convinced. It is believed that Rajiv Gandhi feels that, without Zail Singh, the Punjab problem, which eventually led to his mother's assassination, would never have got out of hand.

This belief is reinforced by the smear campaign launched against the President by Congressmen and Congress-linked newspapers. K K Tewari, a Congress (I) MP, alleged in Parliament that in 1983 two Sikhs who were now involved with extremists abroad were guests of the President at Rashtrapati Bhavan. He also claimed that a public relations officer on the President's staff had passed on classified information about Bluestar to people in Amritsar.

Other such allegations followed. When Baba Joginder Singh enjoyed his brief eminence, reports suggesting that the Giani had manipulated his rise appeared in the press. Newspapers that support the Congress (I) have also attacked Zail Singh. *Blitz* carried an unusual front page story alleging that the President had intervened with the Sikh High Priests to get Buta Singh excommunicated.

Many of these reports were obviously based on leaks from official sources and the government did nothing to repudiate them. Home Minister, S B Chavan, took three days to

reply to K K Tewari and all he did was read out the Rashtrapati Bhavan denial, distancing the government from its contents.

The President is said to be gravely anguished over the campaign. He denies all the allegations (see accompanying article) and his friends complain that the government is making him the scapegoat for everything that went wrong in the Punjab. "How can one man have created Bhindranwale, kept up links with Sikh extremists abroad, promoted Baba Joginder Singh, instructed the High Priests who to excommunicate, asked Badal and Tohra to oppose the accord and still end up being regarded as a 'sarkari Sikh' by his community?" asks a friend of Zail Singh's, bitterly summarising all the allegations that have been levelled against the President.

**M**OST independent writers on the Punjab, including Kuldip Nayar, believe that Zail Singh had some role in the rise of Bhindranwale but feel that he stopped interfering in Punjab politics just before he became the President. So far, nobody has produced any evidence to suggest that he misused the office of President by assisting, or even consorting with, extremist elements. If the government did possess such evidence, then it would almost certainly have leaked it to the press when the smear campaign against Zail Singh was at its height.

Could it be then, that Rajiv Gandhi objects to Zail Singh's role in the Punjab in the days before he became President? If this is, indeed, the case, then the Prime Minister is on shaky ground. While Zail Singh's exact role in the creation of Bhindranwale is controversial, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister's own brother, Sanjay Gandhi, was the man most responsible for transforming Bhindranwale from an obscure village preacher into an important religious leader. Moreover, Mrs Gandhi herself clearly approved of Sanjay Gandhi's strategy and assisted in the rise of Bhindranwale. It does, therefore, seem absurd for the Prime Minister to hold



In the aftermath of Operation Bluestar, demonstrations such as this one in Bombay, calling for the resignation of Giani Zail Singh became common in many cities of India. Despite this, the Giani held on.

February 1, 1986

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IMPRINT, FEBRUARY 1986

16a

army would enter the Temple, let alone engage in a tank battle that would lead to the destruction of the Akal Takht.

The President found out about Bluestar only after it was nearly over and insisted on flying to Amritsar and seeing the damage for himself. Apparently, he was shattered by what he saw. There were bodies floating in the sacred pond and soldiers were still wiping the blood off the walls. The Giani could not control his tears and returned to Delhi deeply disturbed.

In the aftermath of Bluestar, there were demonstrations all over India

ed, then no other Sikh in the armed forces or in the government could hold on to his post without seeming like an office-hungry traitor. If that happened, then the divide between Punjab and the rest of India would become too great to bridge. Worse still, Khalistan protagonists would then have received a boost. And as a secular nationalist, he was bitterly opposed to the notion of Khalistan and to any action that damaged the integrity of India.

Even after he decided not to resign, he realised that he still had another option. He could have distanced

himself from a government that had failed to protect the lives of Sikhs. The President was completely ignored by the government during this period. When Rashtrapati Bhavan officials tried to arrange police protection for eminent Sikhs of their acquaintance who were under attack, they received no response from the government.

Despite this provocation, the Giani refused to step down. He knew that by not resigning, he would further alienate much of his community, but held on because he believed that any such move on his part would not benefit either the Sikhs or the rest of

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There are many other instances. Officials who depended on him have been asked to leave Rashtrapati Bhavan. Crews are duly deputed to perform their functions, but the footpath to the Foreign Ministry has been ignored at banquets like. Such snubs have bewildered the Giani. What possible purpose could be achieved by preventing him from going abroad? What is he expected to tell foreign Heads of State who have invited him and whose invitations he has already accepted?

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reply to K K Tewari and all he did was read out the Rashtrapati Bhavan denial, distancing the government from its contents.

The President is said to be gravely anguished over the campaign. He denies all the allegations (see accompanying article) and his friends complain that the government is making him the scapegoat for everything that went wrong in the Punjab. "How can one man have created Bhindranwale, kept up links with Sikh extremists abroad, promoted Baba Joginder Singh, instructed the High Priests who

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**D.S. Sanvordekar**  
Circulation Manager

IMPRINT, FEBRUARY 1986

his brief eminence, reports suggesting that the Giani had manipulated his rise appeared in the press. Newspapers that support the Congress (I) have also attacked Zail Singh. *Blitz* carried an unusual front page story alleging that the President had intervened with the Sikh High Priests to get Buta Singh excommunicated.

Many of these reports were obviously based on leaks from official sources and the government did nothing to repudiate them. Home Minister, S B Chavan, took three days to

come President? If this is, indeed, the case, then the Prime Minister is on shaky ground. While Zail Singh's exact role in the creation of Bhindranwale is controversial, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister's own brother, Sanjay Gandhi, was the man most responsible for transforming Bhindranwale from an obscure village preacher into an important religious leader. Moreover, Mrs Gandhi herself clearly approved of Sanjay Gandhi's strategy and assisted in the rise of Bhindranwale. It does, therefore, seem absurd for the Prime Minister to hold



**In the aftermath of Operation Bluestar, demonstrations such as this one in Bombay, calling for the resignation of Giani Zail Singh became common in many cities of India. Despite this, the Giani held on.**

Zail Singh, who was only a minion of the Gandhis, responsible for the creation of Bhindranwale.

In fact, Zail Singh's record on the Punjab, in the years since becoming President, has been good. His supporters say that he kept urging Mrs Gandhi to arrest Bhindranwale before he moved into the Akal Takht. This is unverifiable, but it does seem clear that Mrs Gandhi stopped taking his advice on Punjab matters. When she declared the Punjab a Disturbed Area, she went to see him and told him that she was sending the army in to restore law and order. He was informed also of the plans to surround the Golden Temple but was not told that the army would enter the Temple, let alone engage in a tank battle that would lead to the destruction of the Akal Takht.

The President found out about Bluestar only after it was nearly over and insisted on flying to Amritsar and seeing the damage for himself. Apparently, he was shattered by what he saw. There were bodies floating in the sacred pond and soldiers were still wiping the blood off the walls. The Giani could not control his tears and returned to Delhi deeply disturbed.

In the aftermath of Bluestar, there were demonstrations all over India

calling for his resignation and he received telegrams from all over the world — many of them abusive — asking him to step down. The Giani did seriously consider resigning. He cancelled all his appointments and closeted himself in a room. His supporters say that he felt badly let down by the destruction of the Temple but asked himself what effect his resignation would have on the country and whether it would benefit the Sikhs.

He realised that were he to resign, he would become a hero to the Sikhs as the man who gave up the highest office in the land for the sake of his community. But, he also recognised that if the President of India resigned, then no other Sikh in the armed forces or in the government could hold on to his post without seeming like an office-hungry traitor. If that happened, then the divide between Punjab and the rest of India would become too great to bridge. Worse still, Khalistan protagonists would then have received a boost. And as a secular nationalist, he was bitterly opposed to the notion of Khalistan and to any action that damaged the integrity of India.

Even after he decided not to resign, he realised that he still had another option. He could have distanced

himself from the government and made known his disapproval of Bluestar. Instead, he chose to publicly associate himself with the Operation by broadcasting to the nation and stating that the government had no alternative but to send the army in.

The Giani came under pressure to resign again in November 1984, during the riots following Mrs Gandhi's death. Many Sikhs found the massacres that occurred on the streets of Delhi, while the police looked the other way, even more disturbing than Operation Bluestar. Rashtrapati Bhavan received hundreds of telegrams urging the Giani to resign and to dissociate himself from a government that had failed to protect the lives of Sikhs. The President was completely ignored by the government during this period. When Rashtrapati Bhavan officials tried to arrange police protection for eminent Sikhs of their acquaintance who were under attack, they received no response from the government.

Despite this provocation, the Giani refused to step down. He knew that by not resigning, he would further alienate much of his community, but held on because he believed that any such move on his part would not benefit either the Sikhs or the rest of

# COVER STORY

India. His supporters believe, with some justification, that in June and in November 1984, he put the interests of the nation above his own personal welfare. Considering this, they are saddened that he should now be belittled and humiliated by the same people who were associated with Bluestar and who failed to protect the lives of Delhi's Sikhs.

**A**LL OF THE ABOVE has concentrated on Rajiv Gandhi and Zail Singh as individuals. Whether you think that Rajiv is right to ignore Zail depends on what you think of the role the Giani played in the Punjab and how you view the culture of sycophancy that the Gandhis have engendered.

But there is another aspect to the present situation. In the long run, neither Rajiv nor Zail is particularly important. What matters are the offices they occupy. The crucial questions to be asked here must be the institutional ones: Is the Prime Minister justified in belittling the President of India? And what are the implications of such behaviour on the institutions of Indian democracy?

The decline of our democratic institutions probably began shortly after Independence but the process was accelerated by Indira Gandhi. She superseded judges, ignored Parliament, turned the Cabinet into a toothless body and selected a series of uninspiring Presidents. Her three candidates for the office were all ciphers: V V Giri backed her minority government to the hilt; Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed signed any ordinance she sent him; and Giani Zail Singh held her in such reverence that he made the most outrageously sycophantic statements.

And yet, for all her subversion behind the scenes, Mrs Gandhi kept up appearances. When she returned to power in 1980, she was stuck with Janata's Sanjeeva Reddy whose candidacy for President she had sabotaged in 1969. Despite her personal dislike of him she did, nevertheless, treat him with all the respect due to the President of India. He was consulted on

the appointment of Governors, briefed after each of her foreign tours and travelled as and when he liked.

Even after she appointed Giani Zail Singh, she treated him with the consideration due to the office he occupied. Whenever she went abroad, she would use a specially installed hotline to telephone him and would call on him after her return. Before she had to announce a major decision, she went and informed him about its broad outlines. The Giani, admittedly, reacted with the utmost deference, but he never had occasion to feel slighted or humiliated. Even after Bluestar, when he insisted on visiting the Golden Temple, she readily provided an aircraft. Later, when he said he would write his own address to the nation, she agreed though she knew that he would be critical of the Punjab government.

It does not reflect well on the present Prime Minister of India that he has not maintained even the minimal respect for the President's office that his predecessor used to display. Rajiv Gandhi's attitude suggests that he thinks that Zail Singh is a joke and he is not going to waste his time on him. This is a dangerously immature attitude. The relationship between the Head of State and the Head of the Government is crucial to the Indian State: the President serves as a check and balance on the actions of the government. He has no real executive power (except in special cases) but by delaying assent to Bills or by sending them back for reconsideration he can force a debate on matters of national importance and can push the government into rethinking controversial decisions.

By confusing Zail Singh, the man, with the office he occupies, Rajiv Gandhi is damaging a central institution of Indian democracy. Now, whoever succeeds Zail Singh may find that his office has been robbed of much of its stature and the Constitutional conventions broken.

**W**ILL THE GIANI continue to tolerate this humiliation? It is not as though he is at

the end of his term: he remains in office till July 25, 1987. There are several things he can do in those 19 months till his term expires.

His first option is to embarrass the government. It is easy for a President to do this. Sanjeeva Reddy used to routinely embarrass Morarji Desai on a variety of pretexts. (See *The Morarji Papers, Imprint*, August 1983.) For instance, while unveiling a statue of Rajaji he made a speech about politicians who promoted their sons — a reference to Kanti. Similarly, he frequently complained about the speeches the government wanted him to deliver and often wrote his own. The Giani could easily do the same. In fact, when he made a speech about tax raids shortly after the Kirloskar arrest, it was widely believed that he was needling the government. His press office, however, denies this interpretation and says that he was simply misquoted.

His second option is to start sending Bills for reconsideration. For most of 1985, this was not a serious option because of the popularity of Rajiv Gandhi's government. But now that the popularity is fading, it has become a real option at last. In 1986, the Giani could delay signing controversial Bills and hamper the government's efforts to push difficult legislation through.

His third option is to provoke an open confrontation. He could, for instance, insist on making foreign trips and call for government files (which he is entitled to, under Article 78 of the Constitution), and if he is rebuffed, go to the press with his grievances. So far, he has been reluctant to publicise his situation on the grounds that convention prevents the President from speaking to the media (which is why no quotes can be directly attributed to him). But equally, he could take the line that, as the Prime Minister does not respect conventions, there is no reason for him to do so either though the consequences of this could be dangerous for Indian democracy.

There is also a fourth option. The Giani decided against resigning in June



**It was Indira Gandhi who diminished the office of the President by using 'loyalty' as the only criterion for appointment. But even she took care to keep up conventions and treat the President with respect.**

and November 1984 because he was fearful of the consequences for India. But now, after the Punjab accord, the situation has altered. If he was to resign now, it would no longer completely alienate the Sikhs from India.

He could simply say that he found it impossible to continue as President in the face of the government's belittling of his office. There is already some support for his position among a section of the intelligentsia — not because of his own personality, but because of the importance of his office — and many people would applaud such a dignified and principled renunciation of his post.

On the other hand, has the Giani

missed his chance to resign? He has closed his options with his own community which now sees him as a 'sarkari Sikh'. The Akali government in the Punjab detests him and portraits of the President have started disappearing from the walls of government offices in Chandigarh. Having failed to resign over the desecration of the Temple, and over the massacre of Sikhs, he might now be perceived as resigning only on the issue of his own importance.

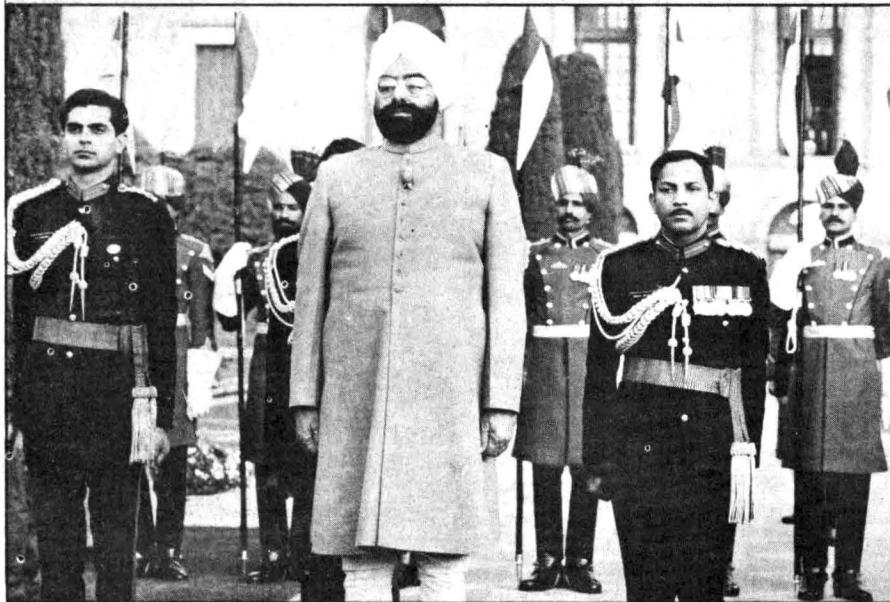
Nevertheless, the situation in the Punjab is still volatile. There are Sikhs who link the snubs suffered by the President to his community. And he could — just conceivably — win their

support in the event of a resignation. There are also a growing number of dissidents within the Congress party, many of whom are old friends of Zail Singh's, who would welcome his resignation as a means of embarrassing the Prime Minister. The old Indiaguard resents its sidelining and while it is difficult to turn Dhawan's humiliation into a matter of principle, the belittling of the President is a national issue.

For the time being, at least, the President seems determined not to take any drastic action. He talks of having effectively retired when he accepted this office, quotes Urdu couplets and insists that all he wants

# THE CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION

## The President's powers and how he can be removed from office.



**THE PRESIDENT**, it is well-known, is the formal head of the government and all actions are taken in his name. In certain special cases — when no party has a parliamentary majority or the Prime Minister dies suddenly and the like — he has considerable powers. But how much power does he *really* have in a normal situation?

The answer seems to be: not much. Until 1972, there was considerable debate over whether the President was bound to act in accordance with the advice of the Council of Ministers. That year, the Supreme Court ruled (in *Shamsher Singh vs Punjab*) that he was obliged to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers. During the Emergency, Mrs Gandhi's government included a proviso to this effect in the 42nd Amendment, requiring the President to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers. Janata amended this by adding: "Provided that the President may require the Council of Ministers to reconsider such advice, either generally or otherwise, and the President shall act in accordance with the advice tendered after such reconsideration."

So, though Zail Singh has enormous formal powers — for instance, Governors hold office 'at the pleasure of the President' — it is difficult for him to use these powers without the sanction of the government. Since the 42nd Amendment, there has been no situation in which the President has — in normal circumstances — acted on his own. Should Zail Singh go ahead and say, dismiss Jagmohan, the government would probably have to ask the Supreme Court to rule on the Constitutionality of his action.

The President does, however, have the right to information. According to Article 78, it is the Prime Minister's duty to communicate to him all decisions of the government. The President can also call for information relating to the affairs of the Union and the Prime Minister is Constitutionally bound to obey. Convention has it that the Prime Minister also calls on the President after foreign trips, briefs him on important governmental decisions, and consults him on the appointment of Governors.

The Giani's complaint is that this government has broken those con-

ventions and not fully respected his Constitutional right to information. He could respond — under Article 74 — by calling for information relating to governmental decisions, but has chosen not to do so.

Should he decide to be awkward, what could he do? Well, for one, he could dismiss Jagmohan. Even if the Supreme Court held, eventually, that he lacks the authority to do so on his own, he would still have caused a Constitutional crisis and embarrassed the government on an issue on which it is particularly vulnerable.

He could also use his powers to irritate the government. In the case of Bills other than Money Bills, he can return the Bill for reconsideration in both Houses. Under Article 74(1), he can refuse to act on government decisions until the Council of Ministers has reconsidered them. Since there is no time limit prescribed by the Constitution for the President to declare or withhold his assent to a Bill, it is theoretically possible for him to simply keep the Bill on his desk indefinitely.

The President can be removed from office by the process of impeachment, according to Article 61. A resolution calling for his impeachment can be passed by either House of Parliament provided it has a majority of over two-thirds of the total membership of the House. The other House will then sit as a court for impeachment proceedings during which the President has a right to appear and to be represented. If two-thirds of this House feel that the charge has been substantiated, then the President will stand impeached.

Alternatively, the President himself can resign. This is a simple process and all that is required is for the President to write a letter communicating his resignation to the Vice-President who then automatically takes over as President. ♦

## COVER STORY



**Why is the Prime Minister behaving in this manner? The only possible explanation is that he is confusing Zail Singh, the individual, with the office of the President of India. In the long run, it is the office that is important.**

now is a quiet life. Partly, it is also that he is unsure of what to do next. Having alienated his own community, would he also alienate the rest of the country by resigning? On the other hand, would he, if he resigned, at least mollify those Sikh extremists who are waiting to take a pot-shot at him when he retires and is no longer protected by the government's security apparatus?

Most of all, though, he is hurt and bewildered. He has always sacrificed his own identity to the greater glory of the Nehru-Gandhi family and cannot understand why the family would want to humiliate him having first elevated him to an office he never deserved in the first place. He is said to have told a friend: "Panditji often got angry with me. Once he even hit me. But I didn't mind. Indiraji would often shout at me, sometimes in the presence of other people. Because she was my leader, I accepted that. But neither of them consistently and cold-bloodedly humiliated me the way Rajiv is doing."

What makes it worse for him, say his friends, is that the Prime Minister has never told or explained to him why he no longer regards him as worthy of any respect.

**T**HAT THE PRIME MINISTER and President should have disagreements is not, in itself, particularly surprising. Rajendra Prasad and Pandit Nehru often disagreed over the Constitutional limitations on the President's role. Prasad's successor, S Radhakrishnan, frequently criticised the government in public, much to the Prime Minister's embarrassment. And Sanjeeva Reddy more or less conducted a running battle with Morarji Desai from Rashtrapati Bhavan.

It could be argued that all such disagreements were not necessarily unhealthy. After all, the President is supposed to act as a check on the government and some friction is only to be expected. What is most unfortunate about the present situation is that Giani Zail Singh has never functioned as a check on the actions of the government. He has been a mere rubber stamp and his gratitude to Mrs Gandhi for appointing him President has taken precedence over everything else.

The kind of friction that exists today is not the sort that the framers of the Constitution could ever have envisaged. If, as some Congress (I) loyalists claim, the Giani has been

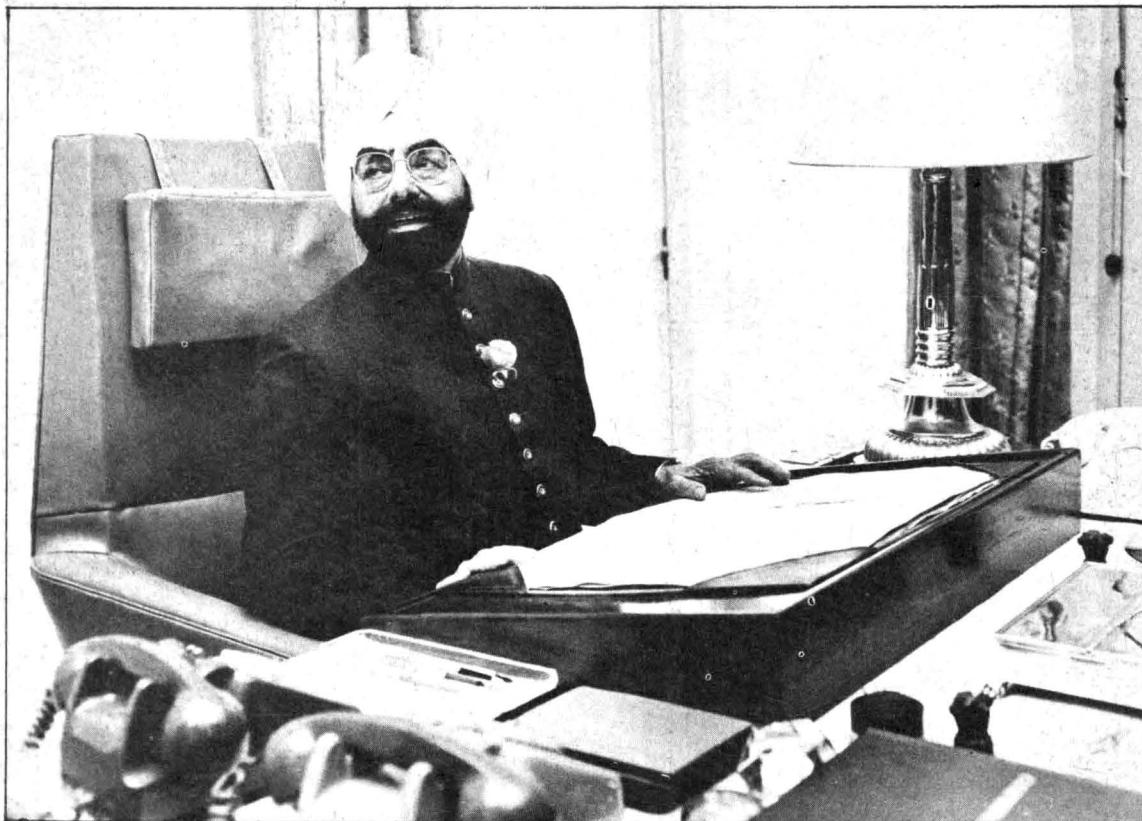
secretly helping the Punjab extremists even after he became President, then the importance of his office requires that the Prime Minister confront him with this evidence and ask him to either explain himself or resign. If the Giani refuses to resign, then the Constitution does provide for impeachment proceedings to remove him from office. Such a course of action would be far preferable to the present state of affairs in which the whole country speculates about tensions at the top and the office of the President is diminished.

Considering that Zail Singh is so open in his outrage at being mistreated, it seems unlikely that the government has much evidence of his involvement with extremists. Otherwise the Giani would have kept his mouth shut and made himself as inconspicuous as possible.

In that case, it is now upto the Prime Minister to bridge the gap between him and the President and to end this unseemly controversy. Otherwise it will be a sad reflection on the diminution of the office of the President that not only is loyalty the sole criterion for appointment, but that once the ruling family tires of the loyalist, he can be snubbed. ♦

# THE GIANI AND

Did Zail Singh contribute to the rise of Bhindranwale? How do Mark Tully and Satish Jacob's *Amritsar*?



**T**HE RISE AND DEATH of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale must be one of the most amazing sagas in the history of Indian politics. In 1978, he was an obscure 31-year-old village preacher who toured the Punjab warning youths against shaving their beards or cutting their hair. By 1984, when he was only 37, he had come to represent the single greatest threat to the stability and unity of India since Independence. And nearly two years after the battle in which he lost his life, taking the Akal Takht with him,

he remains a martyr in the eyes of many Sikhs. Even today, rare is the Sikh politician who will dare to call him what he was: a fanatic and a murderer.

As is now well-known, the transformation of Bhindranwale from travelling preacher to much-mourned martyr could not have taken place without the encouragement and active connivance of the Congress' party. In 1978, when the Akalis were in power in the Punjab and the Congress in opposition, the late Sanjay Gandhi looked for ways to lessen the Akali hold

on the Sikh community. He settled on building up a 'sant', a religious leader who by being even more fundamentalist than the Akalis would steal their religious thunder. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was the man Sanjay selected and while he did eventually, steal the limelight from the Akalis, he became a Frankenstein's monster that nobody could control.

What was Giani Zail Singh's role in the creation of Bhindranwale? As a former Congress Chief Minister of Punjab, he was Sanjay's principal advisor on matters pertaining to the

# BHINDRANWALE

his supporters react to the serious charges contained in Both sides of the controversy.



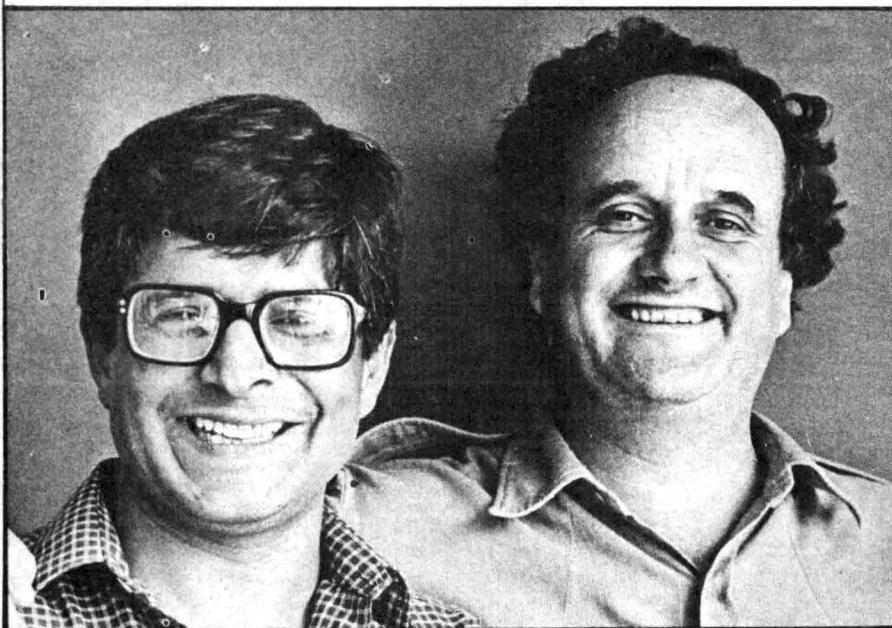
state. Later, after the Congress returned to power, he became Central Home Minister and had a vested interest in destabilising the Congress government in the Punjab because it was headed by Darbara Singh, a political rival. Did Zail Singh use Bhindranwale for this purpose? And did he later, even after he became President of India, retain his links with the 'sant' he had helped raise to prominence?

These questions are important because many of those who say that the Prime Minister is justified in belittl-

ing the President maintain that Bhindranwale was Zail Singh's creation, and that, therefore, the President has lost any claim to respect or consultation. Two recent books also detail the role played by Zail Singh in the rise of Bhindranwale. One of them is *Tragedy Of Punjab* by Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh (though the Zail Singh references occur only in the chapters written by Nayar), first published in late 1984. Another is *Amritsar* by Mark Tully and Satish Jacob of the BBC, which appeared in 1985.

Of the two, it is the Tully and Ja-

cob book that has done Zail Singh's reputation the most damage because it takes the line that Darbara Singh would have been able to handle the situation better, had it not been for the Giani's behind-the-scene interference. This is an interpretation Zail Singh vigorously rejects and he has spent part of the last two months telling anyone who will listen how inaccurate *Amritsar* is. His defence has cut at least some ice with two men who have been critical of him in print before. Khushwant Singh wrote a column recording Zail Singh's protes-



*Satish Jacob and Mark Tully : no axe to grind.*

tations of innocence and even Kuldip Nayar wrote a syndicated article reproducing the Giani's anguished denials. Unfortunately, convention has it that the President cannot talk about political matters to journalists on the record, so his version is generally credited to 'Rashtrapati Bhavan sources' or to 'friends of Zail Singh'.

**W**HATEVER the President may say, there seems little doubt that he was involved in the initial decision to produce a kept 'sant' for the Congress. According to Tully and Jacob, 'he recommended Sanjay to look for a new religious leader to discredit the traditional Akali Dal'. Even those who do not accept that the whole thing was Zail Singh's idea, concede that he participated in the search for a preacher.

The disagreements arise over the formation of the Dal Khalsa, described by Tully and Jacob as 'a party to promote Bhindranwale and harass the Akalis', in 1978. Six years later, the government's White Paper was to note: "The Dal Khalsa was originally established with the avowed object of demanding an independent sovereign Sikh state." Did Zail Singh really help found this party? Yes, say

Tully and Jacob. In fact, he even paid the bill for the inaugural meeting (it came to Rs 600) at the Aroma Hotel and would ring up journalists in Chandigarh asking them to mention the Dal Khalsa on the front page. Kuldip Nayar also claims "Zail Singh blessed the foundation of the Dal Khalsa; his supporters paid the bill for the inaugural function."

The President's camp repudiates this strongly. In fact, Zail Singh was asked about the formation of the Dal Khalsa by a BJP MP in the Rajya Sabha, when he was Home Minister. He denied it then and today his supporters argue that, firstly, no politician ever pays for a function himself, let alone one organised for another party and secondly, that in 1978, Zail Singh was in opposition and hardly in a position to tell reporters what to give prominence to. Besides, argues one Zail Singh supporter, reporters do not decide what goes on the front page, editors do. And no editor has any record of Zail Singh asking him to hype the Dal Khalsa.

In April 1980, after the Congress had returned to power, murderers believed to be linked to Bhindranwale, assassinated Baba Gurbachan Singh, the leader of the Nirankari

sect. At the time, there was an outcry and demands were raised for the arrest of Bhindranwale. As Home Minister, Zail Singh told Parliament that Bhindranwale had nothing to do with the murder: a statement for which he has been criticised by every writer on the Punjab. His supporters do not dispute that he made the statement (it is on record) but argue that it was a reply to a Parliamentary question and had been written for him by his civil servants. In fact, they say, whatever Bhindranwale's involvement, the government had no concrete evidence and the ministry thought it inadvisable to arrest him on a flimsy case only to have him acquitted and transformed into a hero.

**Z**AIL SINGH'S CRITICS continually point to the failure of the government to arrest Bhindranwale even when it became clear that he was a man of violence. This failure suggests, they argue, that Zail Singh wanted him free so that he could harass Darbara Singh. In September 1981, the Punjab police issued a warrant for Bhindranwale's arrest. At that time, Bhindranwale was preaching in Chando Kalan in Haryana. When the Punjab police crossed the state lines, and got there, they found that he had fled. The Haryana police knew he was a wanted man: why, then, did they let him escape? According to Kuldip Nayar, the reason was simple. Zail Singh called up Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal and told him to let Bhindranwale get away. Nayar says that Bhajan Lal himself told him this.

The Zail Singh camp denies this. Why, they ask, would Bhajan Lal, a Haryanvi with no great love for Sikhs, let somebody like Bhindranwale get away only because Zail Singh asked him to? Tully and Jacob have an answer: "Bhajan Lal was very anxious to ingratiate himself with the leaders of the Congress party. . . (he) never missed any opportunity to oblige ministers in the Central government."

Finally, the Punjab government arrested Bhindranwale in his own *gurdwara* at Mehta Chowk. Less than a

## COVER STORY

month later, however, the government decided to release him. This was a Central government decision and, "There is," say Tully and Jacob, "considerable evidence to suggest that Bhindranwale's release was ordered by the Home Minister."

According to Zail Singh's friends, anybody who knows Mrs Gandhi's style of functioning will appreciate that Zail Singh could not, on his own, have taken such a decision. Mrs Gandhi never allowed Central ministers to interfere in the politics of their home states and she would never have let Zail Singh order the release of a man arrested by Darbara Singh. The decision to let Bhindranwale go was Mrs Gandhi's and she made it after some Sikhs had hijacked an Indian Airlines plane to secure the 'sant's' release. Tully and Jacob, while sticking to their view that it was Zail Singh's decision, concede that Mrs Gandhi might also have been a party to it.

But, they argue, it was Zail Singh's responsibility to arrest Bhindranwale when he came to Delhi to celebrate his release because "he openly flouted the law. He drove around the capital with 80 of his supporters, many of them sitting on the roofs of their buses brandishing illegal arms." This charge rouses the ire of Zail Singh's friends. Firstly, they ask, could Zail Singh have really ordered the arrest of a man who Mrs Gandhi had just released? Secondly, what laws did Bhindranwale break? He came to Delhi in a mini-bus (similar to NTR's *ratham*) which he called his mobile university and moved around inside it. The language used by Tully and Jacob evokes images of gun-men in open jeeps. In fact, they were all inside a bus. As for the ones on the roof of the bus, they had licenced arms. Many Sikhs have licenced weapons — how do Tully and Jacob know that these were unlicensed? And thirdly, why is so much being made of the government's unwillingness to arrest Bhindranwale in Delhi? On his way to Delhi he passed through Haryana, a hostile state. Nobody arrested him then. Later he drove to



*Zail Singh with Bhindranwale at the bhog : controversial meeting.*

Bombay, passing through two other states. He was not arrested in either of those. When he did get to Bombay, an attempt was made to arrest him but he got wind of it and disappeared. Why does nobody say that the Maharashtra Chief Minister was also, therefore, a secret supporter of Bhindranwale?

At the end of this trip, when Bhindranwale returned to the Punjab, Darbara Singh too did not arrest him. In fact, Darbara Singh never again moved to apprehend him even though Zail Singh kept urging Mrs Gandhi to arrest Bhindranwale when he was still in the Guru Nanak Niwas, before he moved to the security of the Akal Takht. (This last claim is impossible to verify after Mrs Gandhi's death.)

**H**OW WELL did Zail Singh know 'Sant' Bhindranwale? The Giani's story is that he only met Bhindranwale once when he was passing through a village and noticed him preaching. This is not a version that many are willing to accept. On the other hand, if Zail Singh did meet the 'sant' on other occasions, he did so on the quiet: there is no record of any other meeting.

The one possible exception is the

*bhog* ceremony of Santokh Singh, the President of the Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee. There is little doubt that Santokh Singh was close to Bhindranwale; many have gone so far as to allege that he was the go-between for Mrs Gandhi and Bhindranwale. When he was shot dead in Delhi in December 1981, Congressmen and Bhindranwale supporters mourned. His *bhog* ceremony was attended by Rajiv Gandhi, Sports Minister Buta Singh, Giani Zail Singh — and Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Note Tully and Jacob: "At Santokh Singh's memorial service, Zail Singh was even photographed in the company of Bhindranwale." Kuldip Nayar goes a step further: "Both Zail Singh and Buta Singh touched Bhindranwale's feet." In *Amritsar*, Tully and Jacob reproduce a photograph that shows Bhindranwale sitting a short distance away from Zail Singh. Can the President still claim that he never met Bhindranwale after that first meeting? Apparently, yes. According to Zail Singh's supporters, there were over 5,000 persons at the *bhog*. Zail Singh did not personally go and speak to all of them. In fact, as Tully and Jacob accept, Bhindranwale even abused Zail Singh in his

speech. How then could the two men be said to have met?

What about the feet-touching? The explanation for this is that the Giani, being a religious man, always bows down before the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Moreover, if he is in the presence of a *Granth Sahib*, he doesn't bow before any man. At Santokh Singh's *bhog*, Bhindranwale went and parked himself behind the *Granth Sahib* (this seems to be borne out by Tully's picture). Therefore, when Zail Singh bowed before the *Granth Sahib*, it might have seemed that he was bowing to Bhindranwale.

**A**T WHAT STAGE did Zail Singh break off relations with the 'sant' — if he, indeed, did break off relations before Bluestar? Kuldip Nayar says it was in September 1981, after Bhindranwale had 'become too controversial'. He supports his claim by saying that Zail Singh wrote letters to Darbara Singh after that 'seeking assistance to have Bhindranwale arrested'.

If such letters do exist, then Darbara Singh, who seems to have been a major source for *Amritsar*, does not appear to have shown them to Tully and Jacob. They argue that the 'sant' turned against the Giani in September 1981, 'but Zail Singh still thought that Bhindranwale might be useful to him'. According to them, 'a senior colleague of Darbara Singh went so far as to claim that President Zail Singh was still in daily contact with Bhindranwale', in October 1983, when President's Rule was declared. And, indeed, there is no record in their book of Zail Singh ever breaking off relations with Bhindranwale.

Zail Singh's friends tell a very different story. According to them, the Giani may have had something to do with the evolution of the strategy that led to the creation of Bhindranwale, but it was essentially Sanjay Gandhi's strategy and, in any case, Darbara Singh was also involved. After he became Home Minister, Zail Singh was not allowed to interfere in Punjab politics by Mrs Gandhi. In fact, she appointed his old rival Dar-



## Did Zail Singh touch Bhindranwale's feet at Santokh Singh's *bhog*? His friends say he bowed before the *Guru Granth Sahib* and Bhindranwale happened to be sitting behind it.

bara Singh Chief Minister largely to contain his influence in the state.

It was Darbara Singh who failed to move decisively against Bhindranwale and who botched his arrest — first at Chando Kalan and then at Mehta Chowk. Mrs Gandhi probably did have some communication with Bhindranwale but the link was Santokh Singh, another of Zail Singh's political rivals. Later, after the Giani became President, he advised her to take a hard line on Bhindranwale but, somehow, his advice was not heeded. For instance, when Deputy Inspector General of Police, Atwal, was killed inside the Golden Temple, Zail Singh suggested to her that his body should not be removed: instead it should be allowed to remain in the Temple as a symbol of the lawlessness engendered by Bhindranwale. Once public opinion had been sufficiently aroused, then the police could go in and arrest the 'sant'. She appeared to agree, but told him later that by the time she

got through to Darbara Singh, the body had already been removed.

**T**HE GIANI'S LINKS with other extremist and secessionist leaders have also been the subject of some speculation. According to Kuldip Nayar, Zail Singh often met Jagjit Singh Chohan, the self-styled Khalistani leader, when the latter visited India during the Janata regime. This is not denied by the President's supporters, but they point out that, in 1977, Chohan was not quite the political pariah that he is today. He had been Finance Minister in the Akali government in 1969 and when he returned to India in July 1977, he had several meetings with Prakash Singh Badal and other leading Akalis. He even met Mrs Gandhi. It was only later that he became a total fanatic and at that stage, Zail Singh moved to have his passport confiscated.

Nayar also says that Ganga Singh Dhillon, the US-based Khalistani, met Giani Zail Singh at Karnal in Haryana in 1981 when the Giani was Home Minister. Nayar quotes a letter Dhillon wrote to a go-between called Gajinder Singh. It reads in part: "I had mentioned about my talk with Giani Zail Singh at Karnal in detail. You must have met him by now and he must have managed the finance and other required things." According to Nayar, "Zail Singh's supporters argue that he wanted to retrieve Dhillon and had told Mrs Gandhi so." Now, Zail Singh's supporters flatly deny that any meeting took place and ask, "Who will believe Ganga Singh?"

Last year, K K Tewari, a Congress (I) MP who frequently serves as the High Command's mouthpiece on controversial subjects, attacked Zail Singh in Parliament and argued that the President had links with such US-based 'extremists' as Yogi Bhajan. Zail Singh's friends do not dispute the links with Yogi Bhajan, but hotly dispute the claim that he is a Khalistani or an extremist. According to them, Yogi Bhajan is a holy man who has converted thousands of Americans to Sikhism. He has never been pro-Khalistan or anti-India and comes to

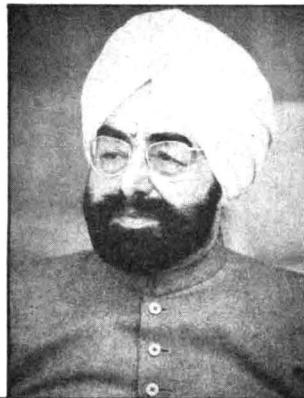
# COVER STORY

this country every year and calls on the President in the course of his visits. On one such visit he was feted at a reception in Delhi's Chelmsford Club which was also attended by Rajiv Gandhi. In 1983, he arranged a reception for Mrs Gandhi in New York and is still on the guest list of the Indian Embassy in Washington. As one of Zail Singh's supporters says: "If even Yogi Bhajan has to prove his loyalty to India, then it is a sad day for Sikhs."

Around the time that Tewari made his attack, pro-Congress papers suggested that the Giani had persuaded the Sikh high priests to have his *tankhaiya* (ostracism) status removed by apologising for Operation Bluestar and reaching some secret agreement with them. This charge is denied by the President's supporters. They say that the *tankhaiya* decree was issued on two grounds. Firstly, Zail Singh was supposed to have entered the Temple with his shoes on when he visited it in the aftermath of Bluestar and secondly, he was blamed for having sent the army into the Temple in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief.

The Giani sent a message to the priests explaining that he had removed his shoes; it was only bad editing on Doordarshan's part that made it seem that he hadn't. And that, while he was technically Commander-in-Chief, the government was not required to seek his permission before such an operation and had, in fact, not told him about Bluestar. His explanation was accepted, his *tankhaiya* status withdrawn, and only then did Zail Singh visit the Temple. While he was there, he did *not* apologise for Bluestar but asked God to take mercy on all those who died in the Temple — a statement that could in no way be construed as an apology. (According to Tully and Jacob, however, "He was reported to have said, 'I ask sincere forgiveness from the Gurus for the unfortunate incidents which have occurred.'")

**S**O WHAT is the truth? Some conclusions seem clear. As Kuldeep Nayar says: "Whatever Zail



**Satish Jacob denies that Darbara Singh was the principal source for Amritsar. He says they used many sources and as for the allegations against Zail Singh, he stands by them.**

Singh's faults, we must remember that he entered politics during the freedom movement as a secularist who opposed a Sikh ruler. When he was Chief Minister of Punjab, despite being a religious Sikh himself, he never gave the Hindus of the state the impression that he was running a Sikh government." There is nothing in such a man's background to suggest that he would ever want to be a Khalistani or a Sikh communalist.

Even so, did he contribute to the rise of Bhindranwale? Despite Zail Singh's denials, there seems little doubt that he did. Even if one disregards the evidence collected by Tully and Jacob, it is clear that the decision to promote Bhindranwale was Sanjay Gandhi's. And there is no way that Zail Singh, a faithful minion of the Gandhis, could have avoided being a party to that decision.

This, by itself, is not saying much. Sanjay and Indira Gandhi were as involved and it has been suggested that

even Darbara Singh helped in the rise of Bhindranwale. So why single out Zail Singh?

Did Zail Singh shield Bhindranwale when he was Home Minister? Nayar insists that Bhajan Lal himself told him that Zail Singh had phoned him (Bhajan Lal) and asked him to let Bhindranwale escape at Chando Kalan. And there are countless instances of the benign neglect of Bhindranwale's unusual activities. Those of Zail Singh's supporters who accept that, as Home Minister, he was not firm enough with Bhindranwale, argue that he was acting on Indira Gandhi's instructions. It was Mrs Gandhi who was reluctant to crack down on Bhindranwale.

Tully and Jacob do not seem inclined to entirely accept this. In *Amritsar*, they suggest that Zail Singh was motivated by a desire to embarrass Darbara Singh, his old political rival, and that this petty politicking assisted in the rise of 'Sant' Bhindranwale.

Zail Singh's friends strenuously deny this. They feel that *Amritsar* tells the story of the Punjab only from Darbara Singh's point of view. They claim that to Tully and Jacob, Darbara Singh is the hero of the Punjab, and Zail Singh, the villain. This suggests that much of the information came from Darbara Singh, and obviously, he has a vested interest in maligning Zail Singh, and in making him a scapegoat for the failures of his own government.

Satish Jacob rejects this criticism. "Darbara Singh was a source for *Amritsar*," he says, "but he was by no means our principal source. The references to Giani Zail Singh are based on what others — many of them Zail Singh's own people — have told us. Mark and I have no axe to grind. There is no reason for us to promote one politician and denigrate the others."

Does he stand by the allegations in the book? "Oh yes, of course."

Finally, it does seem to boil down to whom you choose to believe: the authors of the many Punjab books or the Giani himself. ♦

# NTR. THE

He was a media  
seems to be no



**S**IGNBOARDS DOT the walls of the arrival lounge at Begumpet Airport. They welcome visitors to the city of mosques and minarets. The description seems wholly misleading for there is precious little Islamic architecture to be seen on the road leading from the airport. Only the calm blue waters of the Hussain Sagar Lake and a trickle of bicycles and autorickshaws, moving even slower than usual.

Near the main thoroughfares, the traffic worsens. The reason for this becomes immediately apparent as a gigantic procession comes into view. Led by a 60-member brass band, a seemingly endless number of people flow past the waiting vehicles. The Telugu Desam is celebrating the conclusion of its three-day conference, an autorickshaw driver explains.

A chorus of slogans rises from the processionists, all of whom are dressed in the official party colour, yellow. Yellow drapes adorn even the elephant, horses and camels that form part of the crowd. A saffron-robed figure atop an old Chevrolet van brings up the rear. A benevolent smile creases the familiar face. The imperious lift of the head and the outstretched hand are unmistakable. Hyderabad is still NTR's city.

# GOD THAT FAILED

favourite, a champion of democracy and truth. But N T Rama Rao now more than an authoritarian with little respect for human rights.



**I**T HAS BEEN that way since January 1983, when the former filmstar, overturning all predictions, captured 202 of the 294 Assembly seats to become Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

Even in the brief spell between August and September 1984, when his former lieutenant Nandlendra Bhaskara Rao displaced him as Chief Minister, the city stood by him. The houses of legislators who had defected with Bhaskara Rao were stoned and NTR welcomed back as a martyr. His victory in the subsequently held state Assembly elections further established his hold over the capital.

But NTR has always aimed higher. Not content with being a regional party leader he organised the first conclave of Opposition parties at Vijaywada in 1983. His emergence as a victim of the Centre's authoritarian tendencies helped his national aspirations immensely. Civil libertarians like Arun Shourie and V M Tarkunde rallied to his side when he was undemocratically ousted. Minoo Masani even suggested that he should be the Opposition's candidate for future Prime Ministership.

It was a view that NTR probably concurred with, for soon after the Lok Sabha elections in late 1984 —

where his party secured 28 of the 40 Parliamentary seats — he announced his proposal to expand the concept of Telugu Desam and make it Bharat Desam. The new party would be formed in alliance with the Opposition parties, he declared. As the chief of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, NTR could afford to be magnanimous to his less fortunate colleagues.

**S**OMEHOW, this never quite materialised. Partly, this was because the leaders of other parties including NTR's 'brother' in Karnataka, Ramakrishna Hegde, seemed unenthusiastic. Further, NTR found that his antipathy towards the Congress (I) did not extend to Rajiv Gandhi. Reports had it that he was extremely keen to personally compliment the young Prime Minister on his successful foreign trips, and many went so far as to suggest that this was a prelude to his joining the Congress (I). But the two men did not hit it off as well as expected and NTR went back to airing his old complaints about mistreatment by the Centre. And talk of Bharat Desam ceased altogether.

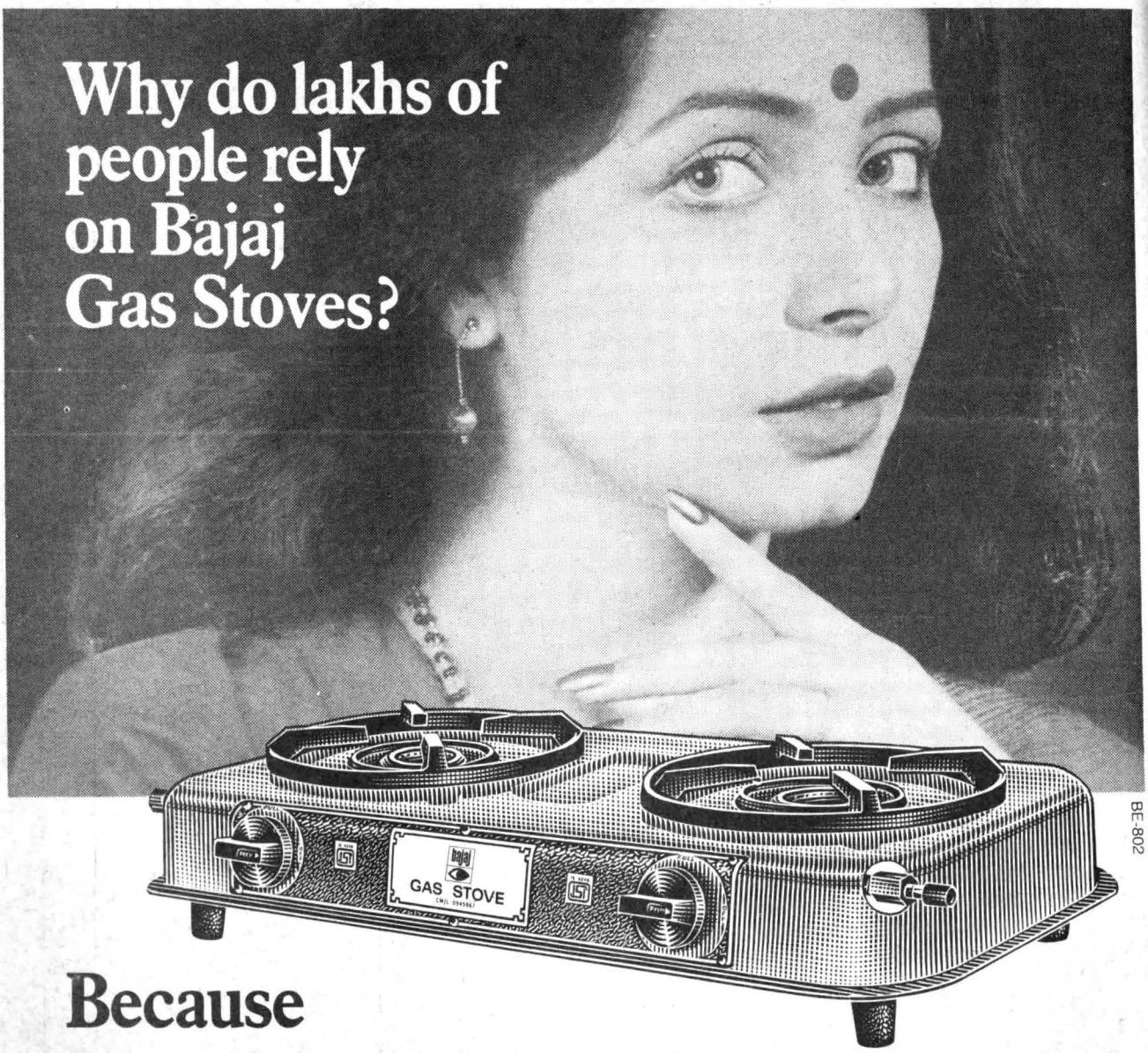
P Upendra, the Telugu Desam parliamentary leader, now maintains that the concept of Bharat Desam was mis-

understood by people. "We never envisaged a unitary party," he explains blandly. "That would have been against the concept of regional parties that we believe in."

It was, presumably, this belief that led NTR to announce the formation of a forum of regional parties on the eve of the Telugu Desam's fifth Mahanadu or annual conference. This also saved him the embarrassment of approaching national parties like the BJP, the CPI, and the CPI(M), which may not have been too eager to participate. In fact, Vajpayee, who welcomed the idea, was quite firm that his party would not join the forum. The communist parties went further. "Any alternative to the Congress (I), including the proposed forum of the so-called regional parties is simply a hoax," said N Giri Prasad, Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh State Council of the Communist Party of India.

The purpose of the 13-party forum that NTR eventually put together — which included parties like the Asom Gana Parishad, the National Conference (Farooq) and the Akali Dal — remained unclear. It consisted mainly of regional parties — the only two 'national parties' present being the Congress (S) and the Janata. And in the case of the latter, Ramakrishna

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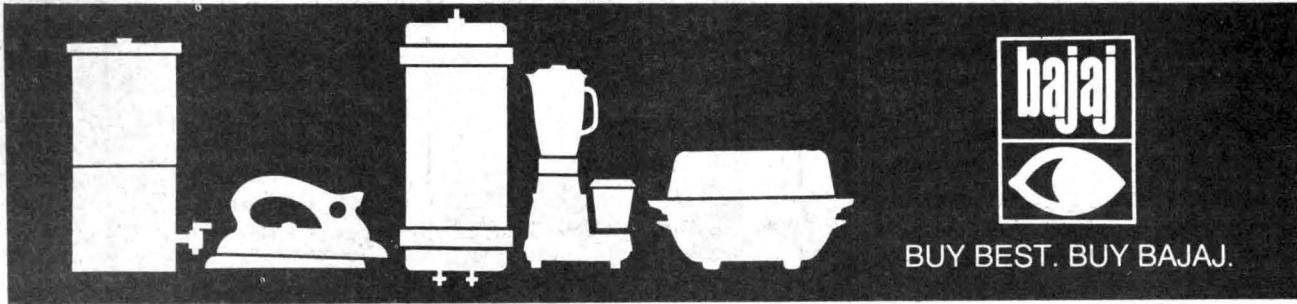
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Hegde seemed to be there more in his capacity as a regional leader. All that the 13 parties agreed to do was 'to forge a suitable forum for discussion and action on various problems and issues confronting the nation'.

**T**HE OPENING DAY of the Mahanadu witnessed the first public performance of a drama that had, till then, been enacted within the confines of the Chief Minister's drawing-room. The story had all the makings of a film script — the patriarch dividing power between his warring sons-in-law — and had striking parallels with the Gandhi family saga.

It was well-known that NTR had always favoured his younger son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu. Unofficially, Naidu was the most powerful person in the party, since NTR never acted without his advice. But it was the other son-in-law, Dr D Venkateswara Rao, who held all the public positions. In 1982, when the party was formed, Rao abandoned medicine to help his father-in-law. In March 1983, he was made President of the youth wing of the Telugu Desam and later stood for an Assembly by-election and won.

When, in March 1984, the party's General Secretary, P Upendra, was asked to resign his post, the stage seemed set for Naidu's appointment to this post. But NTR waited till January 3, 1986, before announcing the appointment — the first day of the Mahanadu. Simultaneously, Venkateswara Rao was asked to resign as Chief of the Telugu Yuvatha on the grounds that no person should hold more than one position (he was also an MLA).

Nobody in the Telugu Desam ever questions NTR. So, when members of the Telugu Yuvatha stormed into the conference demanding that Rao be exempted from the one-man-one-post rule, NTR was taken aback. More so, when the protestors dared to point out that he, as Chief Minister and party leader, occupied two posts simultaneously. Nevertheless, he refused to concede their demand and Rao



**"Like Hitler, you must not give people time to think," NTR advised his party members. This reference to Hitler cannot have been accidental: the former film star has learned from the Fuehrer.**

offered to resign from whichever post the Chief Minister chose.

The drama is not over, though. Away from the storm, in his house on the Banjara Hills, Rao speaks cautiously. "I have not decided yet which post to retain." His dilemma is understandable. Hefty Telugu Yuvatha members guard his other house in the MLA quarters' colony. He should be allowed to keep both posts they insist.

While NTR's diktat will be obeyed, there is some resentment among the people of Hyderabad. They see the decision to promote Naidu at Rao's expense as a misjudgement. While few have strong views in support of Rao, many seem convinced that Naidu is a *goonda*.

"I have no comment to make on the controversy," says Naidu sitting in a small, bare room at the party's old office at Himayatnagar. "It is in the Chief Minister's hands." All around him are clustered admirers and reporters with garlands, bouquets and gifts.

Every fresh offering is tossed carelessly onto a large heap of flowers as the new General Secretary outlines the party's plans. One, starting a daily called *Naa Desam* (My Country); two, asking workers to work continuously; three, purchase of a computer for storing information on the five lakh party workers....

If these plans sound like Rajiv Gandhi's formula for the Congress (I), there's still more to come. Sitting next to Naidu is a dark, bespectacled man who describes himself as 'the best management consultant in the country'. Without pausing for breath, he begins to explain how the party is run very professionally with the approval of Naidu who is young, and has the push.

The widely publicised political training camps organised by the party, are the result of this 'professional' approach. Started to impart training in various aspects of political life, the camps serve an essential purpose in a party of professionals turned politicians. In 1984, when Bhaskara Rao toppled the NTR ministry, it was the people trained at these camps who organised demonstrations outside the houses of MLAs who had defected.

More recently, the Telugu Desam held a speech training camp where formerly tongue-tied legislators picked up prizes in debating. A formidable orator himself, NTR advised his party members on the subject. "You must imitate speakers like Annadurai, Hitler and Goebbels," he is believed to have said. "Like Hitler, you must not give people time to think."

The reference to Hitler cannot have been accidental. For, apart from his rhetorical skills, there seems to be much else that the film star has learnt from the Fuehrer. His insistence on yellow — party workers wear yellow shirts, saris and lungis, and on New Year's day last year, NTR cut a huge yellow cake — and the constant invocation of 'Telugu Desam' bear a strong resemblance to Hitler's use of the Swastika and his glorification of the Aryan race. Substitutes for the

Jews abound. There is the evil Centre and the Naxalites...

**S**HIVERING in the evening chill, the frail President of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC), K G Kannabiran, is whithering in his condemnation of the Chief Minister. His feelings are shared by a large number of civil rights activists who find themselves greatly disturbed by many of NTR's recent actions. The first of these was the introduction of the Press Bill. Almost a clone of the infamous Bihar Press Bill, it proposed an insertion in the Indian Penal Code to make 'grossly indecent or scurrilous writings or writings intended for blackmail' a cognisable and non-bailable offence. In addition, it proposed to extend punishment even to criticism of public servants — a clause that was not present even in the Bihar Press Bill. Public protest and complaints from the Press Council caused NTR to drop the idea.

But the Press Bill was followed by the even more insidious Urban Areas Police Bill which sought to extend the Nizam's Hyderabad City Police Act to other urban areas of the state, starting with Vijaywada and Vishakapatnam. The Bill envisaged extensive powers for the police and, if implemented, would give the Police Commissioner magisterial, judicial and legislative powers including the power to declare an Emergency in any part of the city.

In view of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Preventive) Bill enacted at the Centre, NTR's Police Bill assumes terrifying proportions. For with the Superintendent taking on magisterial functions, the wide-ranging powers given to magistrates under the Terrorist Bill would also fall within his purview. Moreover, the Bill would make it impossible to penalise policemen who misuse their authority.

The move provoked the non-Telugu Desam parties in the state to threaten an agitation. Senior policemen res-



**In October 1984, he was thanking the press for all that it had done for him. Only a year later, he was trying to push through a Bill to curb the powers of the same press. It was quite a turnaround.**

ponded by writing articles in the press defending the Bill, thus lending credence to the rumour that the Chief Minister was being advised by a coterie of policemen. It is well-known that interviews with NTR are more easily arranged through the Deputy Superintendent of Police in charge of his security than through the official Press Relations Officer.

It was to protest against these measures that several groups of civil rights activists met at the Basant Talkies in Hyderabad early this year. The meeting was an eventful one. While the groups were peacefully constituting themselves into a 'movement against repression', the police arrived and lathi-charged the gathering. Earlier, their request for permission to take out a procession was left unanswered.

Repression is not new to Andhra Pradesh. K Pratap Reddy, advocate and convenor of the Movement Against Repression, remembers the killing of civil libertarians protesting

against the rape of a woman in police custody during Chenna Reddy's Chief Ministership in 1978. "And, in 1981, when T Anjiah was the Chief Minister, a large group of Dalits were beaten up," he recalls. The existence of Leftist extremism in the state since the 1967 'spring thunder' over Naxalbari has been instrumental in the creation of two opposing trends: legislation — which gives the police extraordinary powers in certain areas — and an active civil rights movement to guard against their misuse.

Ideological differences have led to repeated divisions within the activist ranks. Most of the dissension seems to be centred around the extent of support given to the Naxalites. The ambiguous nature of their stand on this issue makes it easy for any government to identify civil libertarians with Naxalites. And this is precisely what NTR's government is currently doing.

Perturbed by the rise of Naxalite activity at the beginning of his chief ministership, NTR ordered a crackdown. But, according to Kannabiran and his colleagues, the police soon started misusing their powers. Thirty-five CPI (ML) activists were killed in fake encounters last year. Prominent APCLC activists, like Dr K Balgopal and K Seetha Rama Rao, were arrested and implicated on allegedly false charges. APCLC Vice President, Ramanadham, a popular paediatrician in Warangal, was killed, apparently in retaliation for the murder of a sub-inspector by Naxalites.

But despite all their efforts, the police have not been able to curb the growth of Naxalites or their influence. Workers, students and the unemployed find themselves increasingly drawn to the movement which, according to an *India Today* report, has 7,000 hard-core activists and 80,000 sympathisers. The government has responded by trying to rouse public sentiment against Naxalism. Anti-Naxalite literature is distributed by the police, and meetings between the Chief Minister and Naxalite victims receive



*NTR campaigning: "He has charisma."*

wide publicity. Now, NTR's government is intolerant of every kind of dissent. Those who dare to question or protest are threatened. Mystery still surrounds the murder last October of Pingali Dasaratharam, Editor of *Encounter*, a magazine devoted to exposing public figures. According to Dasaratharam's mother, important political personages were involved in the killing.

What, however, really exercises ci-

vil libertarians in the state is what they see as NTR's Judas-like behaviour: that he should have taken their support to assert his rights against Bhaskara Rao but seems to have no hesitation in riding roughshod over theirs. In October 1984, he was thanking the press for all that it had done for him and for its 'significant contribution to the cause of restoration of democracy and upholding the spirit of our Constitution'. Only a

year later, he was trying to push through a Bill to curb the powers of this same press. The God, indeed, had fallen.

Andhra Pradesh is not yet a police state. But members of civil rights groups claim to have received several threats from the police. Even Kannabiran feels he has reason to fear a knock on his door. Ironically, his dusty, weather-beaten door still has a faded pencil mark saying 'Vote for NTR'.

**L**ATE 1985: Pink and white streaks run across a deep blue sky, pointing like celestial arrows to the Chief Minister's house in Hyderabad's Abid's Circle. The sun, unlike NTR, has yet to rise. So have the security guards at the CM's residence. Only two Marutis and a couple of sleepy men stand sentinel at the gate.

Inside, the house is alive. In an untidy office on the ground floor the Press Relations Officer calls for steaming cups of filter coffee and doles out, with robot-like movements, booklets on the Telugu Ganga project, a statistical profile of Andhra Pradesh, 'Speeches of N T Rama Rao', 'Bio note of N T Rama Rao', etc.

The phone buzzes. A word later, the PRO beckons. A flight of stairs and another wait, this time, in a large room with a chessboard floor, watched over by a badly painted Gandhi and a framed Venkateswara.

Again, the PRO beckons and moves towards a door. Shoes are taken off and then the door opens. A lustrous golden Hanuman smiles at the entrance and an elaborate glass-covered clock ticks softly on a large desk. A neatly-ironed saffron sash is slung over the adjacent chair. A tall, stately figure in saffron looks up from the rexine sofa at the far end of the room. Two men with notebooks in their hands are scribbling down his mumbled words. 'Finance' (pause) 'commission' (pause and conclusion).

"Sit down." It is a command. His high forehead is smeared with a



*NTR with Bhaskara Rao: in happier times.*

*tilak*, and his lips are curled slightly above an excessively jutting chin. One hand rests lightly on his knee, diamonds and emeralds glittering through the stiff folds of the starched saffron dhoti.

The two men remain present. His first utterance is enough to send their pens racing across the notebooks. His flow of words permits no interruption. Inconvenient questions are met with a dangerous glint of the eye and jokes are indicated by short laughter: "Ha, ha, ha, ha." The two men repeat every action.

"What I mean by Bharat Desam," begins NTR, "is where there should be no poverty, where social and economic benefits are shared by all. In our first five years we want to show the country what the Telugu Desam's policy is:

"Education, so that one can stand on his own legs.

"Youth — they are the future leaders of this country. They must be given an opportunity to continue efforts to take the country on the road of development.

"Women are 51 per cent of the

population, they must get equal opportunities in jobs and ancestral property.

"Workers must work for the country — there must be total involvement.

"A society must be created above caste, creed and colour. It must be a wantless society."

A regal nod and the audience is over. The PRO is again at hand. This time he does not beckon, he glares. Time does not stretch — even for the chosen one. Party work and legislators await attention. Local functions await inauguration.

NTR stands up and smiles. A smile that doesn't reach his eyes. Hand raised, body stiffly erect, he mumbles, "God Bless."

**'A WANTLESS SOCIETY'** — possibly the only thing that NTR is genuinely concerned about is poverty. He should be. For he was, according to his official biographical sketch, born into 'a poor but respectable family of farmers' and starved in his days as a struggling actor. It is reflected in his many social welfare schemes including the supply of rice at Rs 2 a kilo to the lower sections of society; the low-priced sale of Janata dhotis and saris, and the scheme to provide cheap housing.

NTR's political detractors — and their number keeps growing — do not agree. In his Democratic Telugu Desam office, deserted except for a couple of old men ('they were my ministers') Nandlendra Bhaskara Rao sits behind a small desk. A smile punctures his chubby cheeks as he repudiates any suggestion that NTR has concern for the poor. "Look at his personal wealth," he observes. "He has 32 residential buildings and property worth Rs 250 crore. He even managed to get 1.5 lakh square metres of property exempted from the Urban Land Ceiling Act." In the Congress (I) office, the allegations are repeated. "He has spent crores on the Mahanadu," Congressmen complain.



*At the end of the Mahanadu: one circus after another.*

Even if criticism of the Chief Minister's wealth is politically motivated there seems to be a strong basis to claims that his social welfare schemes are a strain on the state exchequer. The Rs 2 a kilo rice scheme alone costs around Rs 200 crore a year to implement. And the mid-day meal scheme had to be dropped for lack of resources. Under the circumstances, the Andhra Pradesh government's many appeals to the Centre for more funds are not surprising. Unfortunately for NTR's political opponents, his populist welfare plans have helped to keep his constituency intact. Overwhelmed by subsidised clothes, rice and housing, amongst other things, the rural poor are more than happy that they voted him back to power. Also undiminished, of course, is the ex-film star's personal appeal. "He has charisma," concedes Bhaskara Rao, "which is why I brought him into politics. But," he says sadly, "he turned out to be a cheat."

The press which had exalted him in the early days of his chief ministership ("You can accuse him of anything but non-performance") probably feels cheated, too. Till late last year, around 2,000 important files awaited clearance. Said Lok Ayukta Sambasiva Rao, "Papers do not move. And if they move, they move several times backwards with avoidable queries."

Another black mark was inserted in the Chief Minister's record by the Supreme Court last October. The previous month it had struck down NTR's order lowering the retirement age of government employees from 58 to 55. The state government was also instructed to pay arrears in the salaries of 18,000 employees who had been prematurely retired by the order.

NTR appealed to the court to postpone payment, arguing that it would adversely affect his welfare schemes. But in the absence of proof

to support this statement, the court reiterated its position saying 'the least one could expect from the government was the truth'. Not surprisingly, such instances have served to diminish the Chief Minister's popularity, at least in the urban areas.

**W**ORK IS BEING DONE on the sprawling lawns of Hyderabad's Public Gardens. Carpenters hammer nails into broken chairs and tables. And wires strung with little coloured bulbs are being fixed onto trees.

A sudden power failure has thrown the high ceilinged Jubilee Hall into darkness. But Filmotsav '86 officials continue to work diligently by candlelight.

No one outside the railings of the Gardens seems to share their enthusiasm, though. More immediate problems occupy the minds of the residents of the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

"There is no water in the city," says an autorickshaw driver, casting an angry look at the frenzied activity within the Gardens, "and NTR is spending money on a Filmotsav." His feelings are echoed in banners held aloft by a procession of Congress (I) members. NTR's extravagance — brought out recently both by the Mahanadu and the Filmotsav — has been the subject of widespread criticism. Members of the Telangana Jana Sabha went on a 30-hour hunger strike in protest. And Opposition parties have been vociferously critical. Says Bhaskara Rao, "NTR loves circuses — he will have them one after another."

None of these attacks seem to bother the ebullient Chief Minister. For he knows that when the lights come on inside the Gardens and the musicians tune their instruments for the inaugural function all eyes will be on him. And when the curtain comes down on Filmotsav '86 the whole country will stand and applaud. Lest anyone forget, he is still the ultimate showman. ♦

# Sunil Gavaskar wants to know:



## Do you love your family enough?

When I'm making runs, the more the better. But with children, it's different. You need to pay attention to them, educate them, play with them, love them. That's why I have only one. I can give him all the attention he needs — and believe me, life's a lot more fun. What about you? Do you love your family enough to plan it?



Copies of this advertisement are available on request. Rallis India Limited, 21, D.S. Marg, Bombay 400 001.

*"I love my family enough"*



Trikaya.R.5.85

# MEDIA ENTREPRENEUR

Nari Hira, the man behind *Stardust*, talks about his empire and the future of the Indian media.

**NARI HIRA** must have the lowest profile of any media tycoon. Despite having launched the magazine revolution in 1972 — with the publication of *Stardust* — Hira has been content to avoid the limelight. Today, 14 years after the launch of *Stardust*, he runs a huge, multi-media empire that takes in advertising, video and publishing, quietly but efficiently.

Born in Karachi in 1939, Hira moved to Bombay with his family in the early '40s. Educated at Bombay's Sacred Heart School and Jai Hind College, his first job was with a small advertising agency called Ranjit Sales and Publicity. A year later, in 1960, he joined Bensons (now Ogilvy, Benson & Mather) as an executive for two years before going to work for Alexander Butterfield in London. He returned to India, rejoined Bensons, and then left again in 1964 to start his own agency: Creative Unit. Four years later, he diversified into cosmetics, setting up Lure Cosmetics.

A penchant for publishing finally found expression in 1972 when he launched *Stardust*, India's first 'glossy' magazine. *Stardust* was an instant success and proved that a small publishing outfit could take on such media giants as *Filmfare* (published by The Times Of India) and win.

In 1975, Hira took an apartment in New York and planned an Asian newsmagazine called *Peninsula*. The Emergency was declared before *Peninsula* could appear but Hira stayed on in New York to launch a paper for expatriate Indians and start a travel agency.

In 1979, came the second of his Indian magazines: So-



society, another instant success. Since then, there have been two other magazines: *Savvy* and *Showtime* and a Hindi edition of *Stardust*.

Hira has also displayed his shrewd commercial instincts by moving into video and taking Creative Unit into the sponsored TV programme field. Another of his enterprises is in-film advertising whereby companies pay to have their products used as props in feature films. Every venture has been a success.

Hira himself is a thin, slightly shy bundle of energy, moving between cities and companies with élan. In this candid interview, he talks about his empire and the Indian media scene.

**Imprint: How did you think of *Stardust*?**

Nari Hira: I got the idea when I saw the existing film magazines — *Filmfare*, *Star & Style*, *Filmworld*. They were — to use a kind word — boring. They had double-page spreads of Nanda, Asha Parekh, Waheeda Rehman building sand-castles at Juhu. I knew that there was scope for a fan magazine; I am basically a marketing or advertising person.

**Had you any interest in Hindi films yourself?**

Not till I started *Stardust*. I went and saw Hindi films for a year before I started the magazine. I went to all the Sunday morning shows. I went to Poona, to the film archives — that sort of thing.

But my interest really was publishing, not films. I had always been interested in publishing. When I was at Bensons, I wanted to bring out *Bombay*. I'd designed the

format, the cover, everything. This was — let's see — 1963, so, of course, it didn't look like the *Bombay* you have now, but I was going to call it *Bombay* even then. Maybe that was the wrong time for it. Maybe *Bombay* wasn't ready for a city magazine, but I was.

The plan was scrapped when I started Creative Unit. There was no time for *Bombay* then. *Stardust* was the first thing I started when I finally had enough time in 1972.

***Was it difficult finding a staff?***

No. Shobha (Rajadhyaksha) was working for Creative Unit then and shifted to the magazine. Then Uma Rao, who later became editor, joined. This was her first job. It was the second job for Ingrid Albuquerque. Vanita Ghosh, too, was just starting out. They were all very young — 22 or 23.

***What really distinguished *Stardust* — apart from the content — was the style in which it was written. How did that style evolve?***

It evolved as we sat together at editorial meetings and I think everyone contributed to it. It was partly because of the exposure to the film industry. When you talk to *filmi* people you realise that they always talk in a mixture of Hindi and English. Even someone like Zeenat (Aman) will, once in a while, break into Hindi. So we brought that same style into the magazine.

The next thing was: why not give each star names? That really established *Stardust* because people picked up the names: Asli Ghee, Garam Dharam, Shotgun, La Tagore, all that sort of thing.

Of course, it was also the content. While the other magazines had photos of Rajesh Khanna sitting in his library reading Shakespeare, we simply asked: Is he secretly married to Anju Mahendru?

***Did you find it easy to get the access? Were the stars willing to talk to you?***

Very willing. First of all, they



***"What really established *Stardust* were the names we gave the stars: Garam Dharam, La Tagore, Shotgun, Asli Ghee etc. And, of course, it was also the content, because we went straight to the point."***

wanted publicity — there was no question about that. And then *Stardust* went through a phase when it became the only magazine that counted. If they wanted to reach anybody, they had to come to us. Now, of course, that's changed. There's *Cine Blitz*, *Movie* and the others. But for about five or six years, there was nothing else except, perhaps, *Deewar*. We never had to look for stories. They gave them to us.

***Were they hostile to your kind of gossip?***

You know, they got used to it very, very fast. Don't ask me why! There have been times when a specific instance has got them upset but they accepted the principle quite easily.

In the beginning, people would call me personally and say, "You know, we know you've got nothing to do with the magazine." And I'd say: "I've got everything to do with the magazine. I read every bit of it. It is my magazine." I'd refuse to delete a single word and they got used to it.

***How did the feud with Amitabh Bachchan come about?***

In the beginning, *Stardust* and Amitabh were great chums. In fact, we used to build him up quite a lot. Then there was one story that we did — on the differences between Jaya and his mother. It was a story that came from a very reliable — oh, it's idiotic even hiding the source — the story came from Jaya herself. We were originally tipped off by Raakhee, who put us on to Jaya, who gave the story to Uma (Rao) herself.

When Uma did the story, I asked her to check it out with Amitabh himself. Amitabh said, "None of this is true. I don't know where you've got it from. Go ahead and publish it." He said all this not expecting us to publish it. But we did, even though we edited out the harsher elements of the story.

Ever since then he was really furious with us. The story really upset him. It also coincided with *Zanjeer* and *Deewar*. I think it was also a factor that he had made it around then. Till then, he was available all the time. Now, he was suddenly very busy.

Around this time, Dilip Kumar started his tirade about *Stardust*. He tried to get the entire industry to boycott us. Amitabh was one of the few stars who went along with him. This led us to treat it as war. So we went from being friends to enemies at once. But the interviews would go on. It wasn't as though we wouldn't meet him. To be honest, we really went to town. Things he'd told us in the good old days when we were friends were promptly dredged out and put into print. (*Laughs.*) I think I'm being far too honest about this!

Then came the Emergency and the censors came down on us like a ton of bricks. Amitabh claims today that he had nothing to do with the kind of pressure that *Stardust* went under. But I used to go to the meetings with the censors and all the articles they objected to were about Amitabh.

Now, whether it was some

bureaucrat who assumed that, as Amitabh was a friend of the PM's family, he had to be protected, or whether Amitabh asked for it, I don't know. But nothing else — except for an occasional item about Nargis — was found objectionable. Everything they complained about had to do with Amitabh.

After one of these monthly meetings, I finally got fed up and said, "Look, cancel these meetings. We're not going to write about Amitabh." And that is how the so-called 'ban' began. All the other magazines went along with this though, of course, they didn't keep to it.

When the Emergency was over, we decided to be holier than thou. A big mistake (*smiles*). We'll never do that again! We said, "We won't take revenge on him. We'll just not write about him." This continued till he had that accident when we stopped it. We were anti-him in the sense that we wanted his films to flop, but we didn't want him to fall seriously ill. So we stopped it then.

**And have you interviewed him since then?**

Not in *Stardust*. He's given an interview to *Showtime*. But, we write about him. We don't play him up. We put him on the cover only once. And that was when he was standing for election.

**While you were feuding with the top star, you were backing a lot of losers though, weren't you? Mahender Sandhu, for instance.**

Everybody talks about Mahender Sandhu, but we've backed every newcomer. In fact, we had a policy that we would never run down a newcomer till his first film was released. Mahender Sandhu is the mistake that everyone remembers, but there were others: Vijay Arora, Navin Nischal, so many. People remember Sandhu because of that bloody headline (*Lock Up Your Wives And Daughters: Here Comes Swinger Sandhu*). I wish I'd never done it (*laughs*). And then, Shobha



**"In 1975, I hired M J Akbar to start an Asian newsmagazine. It was going to be called *Peninsula*. Everything was ready: offices, staff, a prototype etc. And then Mrs Gandhi declared the Emergency and we had to scrap it."**

wrote the article like one of those Chesterfield ads. So, everyone remembers Mahender Sandhu. But don't forget that *Stardust* put Shatrughan Sinha on the cover when nobody had heard of him.

**When did *Stardust* peak, circulation-wise?**

We are now doing over 1,50,000 excluding the Hindi and international editions. We hit 1,00,000 a long time ago. But when you say 'peaked', I suppose it would be four or five years ago. Our growth has not been more than 5 to 6 per cent per year since then. But then, we kept on increasing the cover price. We don't allow returns. And *Stardust*'s Hindi edition must take away some circulation. But if you count the entire circulation of *Stardust*, then it's 1,50,000 for the main edition, 1,00,000 for the Hindi edition and another 50,000 for the international edition. That's about 3,00,000.

**What came after *Stardust*? Society? No. *Peninsula*, a magazine that**

never appeared.

In 1975, I hired M J Akbar from *Onlooker* to start an Asian newsmagazine. We planned for six months. I went to New York, hired an office and appointed journalists all over the world. The magazine was directed at a readership abroad: expatriate Indians plus Americans with an interest in Asian affairs.

***That sounds a lot like the original India Today.***

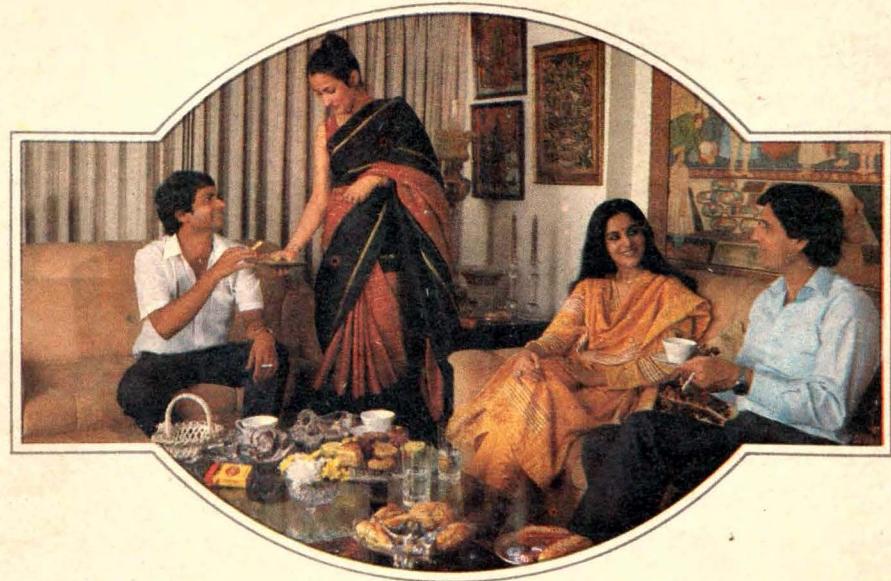
Yes, but that was terrible and anyway, this was pre-*India Today*. Akbar did a fantastic job on *Peninsula*. Even now, ten years later, the prototype seems so impressive.

Anyhow, here I was in New York in 1975, having hired a team in India, having taken an office in 555, Madison Avenue, and having appointed an American advertising manager, when the Emergency was declared. The first issue was supposed to have Idi Amin on the cover but Akbar, to his credit, immediately knocked that out and sent me a story attacking Mrs Gandhi and the Emergency.

But I knew that we were all heading for trouble, particularly the guys sitting in India. The climate had suddenly changed. You couldn't, during that era, with censorship restrictions, produce a newsmagazine. I sensed this when shortly after the Emergency was declared, I got a bunch of flowers from T N Kaul, our Ambassador in Washington with a little note saying that we are so glad you're bringing out a magazine, but hope that you realise that you are an Indian first and an Indian last. I knew that we were in trouble and abandoned the scheme.

Anyhow, I had the offices and infrastructure in New York, so I went ahead and started a weekly paper called *Cine India* which, funny enough, did reasonably well. Then it became *News And Cine India*. And finally, *News India* which is now Number Two to *India Abroad* in its market.

*Society* came after that.



The tinkle of crystal,  
the sparkle of talk and laughter...  
and Gold Flake.

Great quality...  
For the gracious  
people.



**GOLD FLAKE  
KINGS**  
Quality that's forever



Every genuine  
WILL'S GOLD FLAKE  
cigarette bears the name  
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CLARION C-GFK-1

# MEDIA

## *What was the original concept for Society?*

The concept was a personality magazine.

## *Wasn't it supposed to be a women's magazine?*

It started out as a women's magazine but when we looked at it, we found that it had turned into more of a personality magazine, so we promptly turned it over.

## *Did you sense at the time that there was going to be a glossy magazine boom?*

Oh yes. It was very much in the air. *Stardust* had done it to the film magazines. Other magazines had woken up and taken a look at themselves and tried to change. Now, new film magazines had been launched. It seemed clear that the boom would extend to other kinds of magazines. In fact, I'm surprised that people took so long to start the glossies.

## *Why didn't you think of a city magazine, given that you'd once planned a magazine called *Bombay*?*

The reasons were personal. I had a heart attack and open-heart surgery. That's the reason we didn't think of any other magazine between *Peninsula* and *Society*.

## *Is it true that the magazine was called *High Society* till you realised that there was a porn magazine of the same name?*

No. We wanted to call it *Society*, but the name was registered by somebody in Calcutta, so I suggested *High Society*. Then we found out that there was this *High Society* porn magazine and had to go and buy the name *Society* from the chap who had registered it.

## *What came after *Society*?*

Well, we decided to get organised. We looked for more space. We took over our own distribution. We started our own printing press. Unlike *India Today*, which had the enormous advantage of being linked with a



**"Creative Unit is the biggest agency in the sponsored programme field. *Ek Kahani* is ours. *Dada Dadi* is ours. *Chitrahaar* is ours. *Saptahiki* is ours. Manju Singh produces two other programmes for us."**

press, *Stardust* and *Society* had to be printed outside. I saw the way things were going with paper prices, printing costs, etc, and decided that we had to own our press. Now, today I can say, "Let's add another machine and start two more magazines." I couldn't have done that then. And I didn't want to keep being at the beck and call of Printwell or Army and Navy press.

That's what I did after *Society*. And it's paid off. Look at Hindi *Stardust*. It took us just three months from the time we started planning it to hit the stands. That's because we now have our own infrastructure.

## *One of the more unusual things you do is in-film advertising.*

Yes. That's part of Creative Unit. My life is compartmentalised. Creative Unit continues to do better and better without my having to do very much. At the moment it is one of the biggest agencies in the sponsored TV programme field. It is the biggest, I think. Maybe after Shobha Doctor.

No, I think we are bigger than her. *Ek Kahani* is ours. *Dada Dadi*, whatever that is, is ours. *Chitrahaar* is ours. Manju Singh produces two programmes for us. *Saptahiki* is ours. So, we've got quite a lot going on.

Now, this is all part of Creative Unit. So is in-film advertising. It was my concept. I set it up, appointed the people and they look after it.

## *Is it a big success?*

Oh yes. We've handled dozens of movies. You name any big film and you'll find that we were involved. *Arjun*, for instance. We had Ponds, Parle's, Cadbury's, everybody in that film.

## *How much do you have to pay to get a product featured?*

Depends on the scene and the budget. If it's only a stall on the street and the hero is walking past it, then it's Rs 40-50,000. If he's having a drink and he keeps the bottle on the table where the camera can pick up the label, then it is a lakh of rupees. The amount is negotiated depending on the scene.

## *Is this a common practice abroad?*

Oh, yes. I got the idea from ET. Do you remember there's that scene at the beginning when Elliot finds ET? You remember the chocolates he's eating? Well, the chocolate company paid to have its brand featured. In fact, one chocolate company refused and so, the producers went to another which gladly paid up. And it worked. Its sales rocketed after *ET*'s release.

I read about this and thought that it was an idea that could work in India too. Of course, when I started it, ten people claimed it was their original idea!

## *Lure cosmetics is part of your empire as well, isn't it?*

Empire! (Laughs.) God, I wish you'd stop using that word. But yes, I own it. I started the damn thing.

## *And the Otters Club?*

I'm a trustee of that. It is not a

money-making venture nor was it ever meant to be. My partners had this interest in swimming and that led to us starting the Otters Club.

*There was a move to take it over a year ago, wasn't there?*

We'd love to give it away. But nobody wants to take it over. You are referring to the time when this MLA wanted membership. So he created a lot of problems. But he made it so obvious that if he was given membership he'd drop the demand to have it taken over, that he made an absolute ass of himself.

*Plus you also run a travel agency in New York.*

And a tour company. And there's Hiba Video.

*That's a pretty eclectic bunch.*

I'm basically a marketing person and a creative person. And if I see that there's a vacuum in the market, then I think it is worth moving in.

*What was the provocation for launching Hiba Video?*

The market was there. We already had offices in London and New York so there were no overheads. We found that many of our agents in the publishing business had already diversified into video and so, it seemed natural to move in ourselves.

We started in a small way, but then, we had a spate of luck. We picked up movies with small budgets like *Ardh Satya*, *Masoom*, *Aakrosh* and *Pyar Jhukta Nahin* — and they all went on to become super-hits.

The next step is what I'm doing now. Producing films directly for video. People say that this is the stupidest thing I've done, but I think we can beat the video pirates. We have about 200 distributors of *Stardust* in the UK and I hope that if we can ship enough original cassettes out to them, then we can flood the market before the pirates issue their own version.

*What is the budget for your own productions?*



**"It's getting on my nerves. This bloody television is taking far too long to grow. The shows are such flops and the people are such flops. If Neena Gupta is the biggest TV star, then we are really badly off!"**

I can't give you a single figure, but I'll try and explain what our expenses are. We've got the equipment, so I don't know what the hire charges are. For locations, I've used the places that I've got. Again, I'm not paying for that. *Shingora* has cost me roughly Rs 3.5 lakh, maybe Rs 3.75 lakh. Marc Zuber and Persis Khambatta worked for a special price because I knew them. Persis did it not for the money, but because she wanted to come to India very badly. She's just finished *Knight Rider*, *Airwolf*, *Hunter* and all these American TV shows, but she still wanted to do something in India regardless of the money.

*What about her hotel expenses?*  
She stayed in my parents' flat. They were out of town. I should mention that we spent another US \$ 900 on her wardrobe. But that was it. And the publicity we got from casting her was enormous. Plus, she co-operated with everything and has given a great performance.

*Who directs these films?*

This one was directed by Anil Tejani who made *Partners*. Otherwise, the director is on our monthly payroll. So is the second star-pair, the co-stars to Marc and Persis. We'll build them up as second leads in these films and then they'll become the stars themselves from the fourth film onwards. We pay them around Rs 5,000 a month and they make roughly, one film every two months. So in the future, we'll end up spending even less on stars.

*How will you recover your investment?*

I'll sell it to video distributors all over India who'll hire it out. Then, there is the in-house video market: hotels, buses, etc. The film won't be sold to them, but we'll charge them a daily fee. After the Copyright Act, they're very short of Hindi films, so they'll snap this up. We'd charge a hotel like the Oberoi Rs 500 a day or so, and they can keep it as many days as they like. The video coaches are desperate, so they'll pay. Plus, there's the overseas market which I've got, anyway. Plus, there are the commercials which I'll put on to every cassette. Then there's in-film video.

*What about selling them to sponsors to show on Doordarshan as tele-films?*

Yes, there's that too, but Doordarshan ties you down. Message films and all that. I don't know if I want to get involved with that.

*Was Showtime launched with the idea of becoming a TV magazine once the TV boom took off?*

I thought — rightly or wrongly — that there was scope for a serious film magazine. We knew that television was coming, but I didn't think that TV was ready for a magazine devoted exclusively to it. We thought we'd start off covering TV but would do it, initially, in a smallish way and get circulation quickly by putting film stars on the cover. But the whole idea was that

we would eventually make it an all-round entertainment magazine covering TV, theatre, music, cinema — everything.

Except, of course, that this bloody television is taking far too long to grow. It's getting on my nerves! You don't have any personalities on TV except Priya Tendulkar or one or two others.

***Well, you did capitalise on Jayant Kripalani's popularity and put him on the cover.***

Yes, we try and catch them as soon as possible, before the programmes are cancelled. The trouble is that the shows are all such flops and the people are such flops.

***There's TV & Video World in the same slot. And The Times Of India is launching Variety. Is there room for three TV-oriented magazines?***

Only if TV grows the way it is supposed to. If TV doesn't, then there won't be a market. But TV hasn't caught on enough at the moment. If Neena Gupta is the biggest TV star we have, then you can imagine how badly off we are!

***Why do you think Savvy, which was going to be one of four new women's magazines, is the only one to have worked?***

I haven't a clue. (Smiles.) I think the problem with the other three was that they either never came out, or didn't give themselves enough of a chance.

**Savvy** worked because we went straight for human interest subjects related to women. There was no humming and hawing. We didn't put in 'serious' rural stuff to feed our own egos, and prove that we 'care'.

***Is the readership of Savvy entirely female?***

Well, the figures for last month say 85 per cent female.

***And Society?***

That's 67 per cent female. We are talking about the primary reader here, not families, etc.



**"When you take into account all the expenses of putting a serial on — including the bribes you have to pay Doordarshan — then you realise how other media are a bargain at the moment: magazines, papers, cinema ads etc."**

***Presumably, the readership of Stardust is also more female than male. Do you think it's significant that you've brought out three successful magazines that appeal to a certain kind of Indian woman?***

I've never thought about it that way. Maybe. But look at all my other business. Creative Unit is not female-oriented. Nor is Hiba Video. I suppose Lure cosmetics is.

I think it was just that the slots were vacant and we moved in.

***But have you never wanted to start a more serious, male-oriented magazine, given that your big disappointment was Peninsula? Why not start a newsmagazine now?***

Because you'd have to do that from Delhi. We've opened a Delhi office recently and though there are rumours that we're starting a newsmagazine, they're not true.

***Do you think the magazine boom is over?***

No. Not at all. There are lots of segments left. There's room for new

general interest magazines. I think *Bombay* could do with some competition for a start.

***What about Hindi magazines, given the success of Hindi Stardust?***

Oh yes. That's a big segment. Not just Hindi. All languages. That is a logical growth area.

***Are you planning new magazines?***

Yes. Definitely. I don't accept what people say, that the magazine boom is over. TV has taken away a lot of advertising and will take away more in the coming year. But after 1987, the more successful magazines will get back the advertising that they've lost.

***Why?***

Because you need reminder media even if TV is your primary medium. One day advertisers are also going to realise how badly Doordarshan is treating them with 30 commercials appearing one after the other. Nobody would tolerate this anywhere in the world. I can't understand how Indian ad agencies can take this kind of bullshit.

Ultimately, somebody like Vimal, for instance, is going to realise that it is better to have a colour double-spread in a magazine than a 20-second TV spot that is buried under 30 other ads. The honeymoon will end in a year and magazines will regain all the advertising.

Don't forget how expensive TV is. A serial costs an advertiser Rs 2 lakh a week and at the end of 13 episodes, Doordarshan can just cancel it arbitrarily. Advertisers are going to wonder what other media they can get at Rs 2 lakh a week. Take cinema advertising. That's a bargain at the moment if you take into account all the other expenses of putting a serial on — including the bribes you have to pay Doordarshan.

***So, the magazine boom is alive and well?***

Yes, of course. Doordarshan is going to help the magazines by 1987, just wait and see. ♦

From early 1986.

**Businessmonth,**  
**month after**  
**month after**  
**Businessmonth.**

From Business Press.  
The Information Company.

# THE ANARCHY OF EDUCATION

The new education policy document is an exercise in obfuscation and downright deception.



*Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.*

—H G Wells

**I**T IS HARD to beat the complexity of a society that boasts a 5,000-year-old intellectual tradition and harbours nearly 500 million illiterates. India, according to World Bank estimates, will enter the

*P Sainath is Foreign Editor and Deputy Editor of Blitz. His last article was A Patent Farce in the January issue.*

21st century leading the world in the number of people who cannot read and write (not to mention, the largest number of unemployed).

These questions, however, do not seem to have seriously exercised the minds of the authors of *Challenge Of Education – A Policy Perspective*, released by the Ministry of Education in the second half of 1985, and touted as a 'new' education policy on some occasions and as a 'fact sheet' on others.

The document is, in fact, an untrained exercise in obfuscation and downright deception, and represents the abdication of the most basic and fundamental commitment of any government to its people — that of providing children with a minimum education. The new report has drawn peculiar responses from protagonists of elitism in education, including J D Sethi who, writing in the *Indian Express*, argues in favour of 'privatisation'.

## UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Another such gentleman, Sukanta Chaudhuri, feels that the report does not go far enough — he wants it to legitimise child labour. And he wants to catch them young: "Beginning from the age of ten, if not earlier, they could engage in simple cultivation, poultry-keeping and needle-work," he writes in *The Telegraph* (September 11, 1985). They can also, he feels, 'produce other commodities marketable locally, like simple food and domestic items, or more widely through the cottage industries network, like handspun yarn...'

So, children are to cook, cultivate, sew, spin and tend poultry at an age when they should be acquiring basic literacy. The question of leisure or playtime, of course, does not even strike the writer as being a necessary and inseparable part of the growth of every child in the world.

Is there a single other contemporary society today where the legitimisation of child labour (India has over 17 million adolescent workers, more than one-third of the world's total) can be so seriously propagated and received? And yet this view, too primitive and barbaric to be described even as Neanderthal, springs from a cast of mind not very different from that of the authors of the *Challenge Of Education* document. Sadly enough, this call for the acceptance of converting

**India has over 17 million adolescent workers, more than one-third of the world's total. The new policy may end up increasing this number, rather than reducing it.**

schools into sweat-shops is billed as a call for a 'humane and educative redeployment of the child labour force'.

Behind a smokescreen of sterile clichés — 'universalisation', 'diversification', 'social relevance', 'resource mobilisation' and the rest — the *Challenge Of Education* merely seeks to evade that challenge. It is an indirect admission of the fact that — in conjunction with its 'new' policies in other spheres such as anti-poverty programmes — this government has simply decided to write off the vast majority of the nation's children, abandoning them to ignorance, condemning them to adolescent labour and its attendant dehumanisation.

**I**T IS NEITHER possible nor desirable to view the 'new' policy perspective on education in isolation from the 38 years of earlier destruction and damage inflicted by successive governments (primarily Congress governments). The latest perspective merely seeks to institutionalise and make acceptable, policies that were covertly followed during the past three decades in violation of all stated goals. Today, the damage becomes the policy.

Part IV, Article 45 of the Constitution (Directive Principles) decreed that "the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years." That was in 1950. More than three decades later, the Sixth Plan noted that 'even after 30 years, 60 per cent of the children (11-14 years) cannot go to school'.

At the time of adoption of the Constitution, there were 300 million illiterates in the country. Today, there are nearly 500 million. The *Challenge Of Education* itself concedes that the situation is not about to improve. It estimates that, by 1990, there will be 46.7 million children outside the schooling system.

Even this admission, however, is

## HARSH FACTS ON EDUCATION

- One-fifth of all the populated areas in India have no schools at all. Where schools do exist, 40 per cent have no *pucca* buildings, 39.72 per cent have no blackboards and 59.50 per cent have no drinking water.
- An analysis of data gathered by the Fourth All-India Educational Survey of the National Council of Educational Research and Training showed that there were 2,937 primary schools without a single teacher, 600 of these unique institutions in Bihar alone.
- As many as 89 per cent of primary, 70 per cent of middle, 27 per cent of secondary and 11 per cent of higher secondary schools in rural areas did not have any toilet facilities.
- The female population gets the worst of it, particularly in the rural areas. Female literacy in rural areas of Rajasthan, for example, is as low as 5.4 per cent. In Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, female literacy ranges from 8.99 per cent to 10.17 per cent.
- The situation is worse still in the case of females coming from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. In the case of females from the Scheduled Tribes, the extent of literacy is on an average a pathetic 6.8 per cent in rural areas.
- The number of schools with more than five teachers dropped drastically between 1973-78 — from 15.51 per cent to 8.85 per cent. Today, as many as 35 per cent of schools have a *single* teacher to teach three or four different classes.
- Nearly 1.5-2 lakh school premises do not have any furniture or even mats for the children to sit on, while 40 per cent of existing primary schools are housed in open spaces, tents or thatched huts.

# UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

a gross falsification. How does the document arrive at a figure of 46.7 million children outside schools for 1990? By assuming a one per cent rate of population growth in the age-specific group. The actual rate of population growth in the country, which is likely to continue through the '80s, is 2.5 per cent. If this genuine rate of population growth were applied to the figures, it would mean that not 46.7 million but nearly 80 million children would be outside the schooling system by 1990!

**W**HILE the magnitude of the problem keeps increasing, the allocation of funds to tackle it keeps diminishing, and the current allocation is at a level which, even if official criteria and estimates are applied, would simply mean that India's education problems cannot be solved at all. In 1966, the Kothari Commission suggested that the per capita expenditure on education should be a minimum of Rs 54.

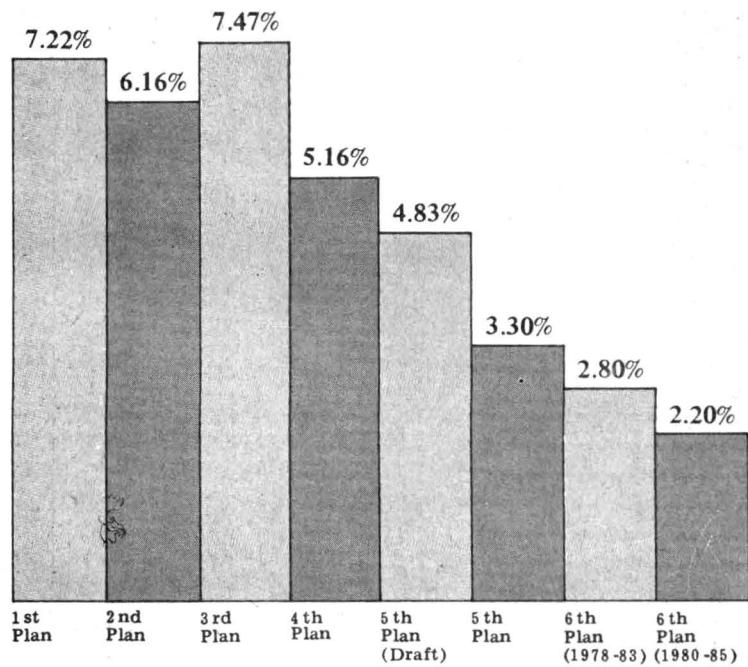
At 1966 prices, the budget allocation for education for 1985-86, works out to a dismal Rs 3.10 per capita. Even before Independence, the Congress National Planning Committee (1938) — which included Pandit Nehru and Dr Radhakrishnan — and the Gandhi Plan of 1944, advocated a statutory minimum allocation of ten per cent of the budget to be spent on education. What actually happened?

With every successive Plan, the percentage allocated to education (as the percentage of total outlay) kept shrinking. But the *Challenge Of Education* document attempts a very cheap deception on this score. It tries to make out that 'in each successive Five-Year Plan, the outlay and expenditure on education showed an increase over the previous Plan'. It then tries to fortify this crude falsification by quoting a few absolute figures.

It fails to tell readers what a sharp decline would be noticeable if the same 'expansion' were viewed — as it should be — in terms of what percentage of the total outlay the allocation for education constitutes. That per-

## SHRINKING OUTLAY ON EDUCATION

(Plan outlay on education as percentage of total plan outlay.)



centage, pathetic as it is, still does not express the full depth of the falsification. For, time after time, even the limited allocations made to education were not fully utilised.

Despite the recommendations of both the Congress National Planning Committee and the Gandhi Plan of 1944, that education be assured a statutory minimum allocation of ten per cent, the First Five-Year Plan allocated 7.22 per cent and the Second, 6.16 per cent. By the time of the Sixth Plan (1980-85), the allocation was down to a microscopic 2.20 per cent (see chart on declining funds for education).

What is worse is the under-utilisation of these limited funds. Take the Second Plan, for instance: though funds allocated for education amounted to 6.16 per cent, only a sum amounting to 5.83 per cent constituted actual expenditure. In the Fourth Plan, against an allocated 5.16 per

cent, actual expenditure equalled 4.94 per cent.

**W**HILE the document waxes eloquent about the great 'expansion' despite 'limited resources', it comes up with the idea of 'model schools'. Model schools cannot but mean model facilities, and model facilities are calculated to eat heavily into those limited resources. No one in his right mind would oppose the setting up of good schools, but the entire experience of Indian education shows that, given the present set-up, they will merely end up schools of the few, by the few, for the few.

How many existing 'centres of excellence' include, amongst their students, children from poorer backgrounds, particularly those from the rural areas? Why just the centres of excellence, how many poor students manage to complete schooling at all?

# UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

For every 100 students who join Class I, 62 drop out without being able to reach Class V – for economic reasons.

Of every 100 who enrol in Class I, all but 23 drop out before Class VIII. But the document boasts 'an all-round increase in the enrolment of both sexes at all the levels of education'. As if enrolment were the only requirement for education! As if the fact that 77 per cent of those enrolled dropped out by Class VIII did not matter!

The new perspective does, however, try to find a way out of this anarchy – on a principle of 'the man is sick, kill him'. Thus, the State, under Rajiv Gandhi's government, has simply done away with its Constitutional obligation, using the failures of the last 30 years to justify such an abdication of responsibility! Now the government openly says that there will be millions of students outside the schooling system at even the turn of the century and that their formal schooling cannot be ensured.

Its formula is 'non-formal education'. By the time they arrive at a discussion of this concept, the authors of the *Challenge Of Education* are scraping the barrel for ideas. Non-formal education can, and does, play a useful supportive role in several societies, but in no society in the world is there a situation where an excessive reliance is placed on non-formal methods to educate millions of people. Thus, the undue emphasis on non-formal education reinforces the suspicion that the government has thrown overboard the Constitutional commitment to free and compulsory education. Indeed, it has already started trying to substitute free and compulsory education with the words 'universal education', though the two stand for very different things.

Not a single one of the original goals or values sought by the freedom fighters or the Constitution in the field of education survives the new onslaught. In a situation where the

masses are destined never to enter a school, policy fiddling with the introduction of computers in schools proceeds as if it were of supreme importance.

Computers are not social-neutral. While they can be extremely beneficial in certain situations, they can also, in conditions of sharp disparities and handicaps, greatly accentuate existing inequalities. Already, in several Western countries, the painful side-effects of computer literacy are being recognised, with the instrument introducing new dimensions to social divisions amongst students – the final and determining factor being Who Can Pay?

It is impossible to discuss exhaustively all the negative aspects of the new policy perspective, but the areas covered should give the reader some idea of the promised new era, one in which an Indian child's learning will be decided by what his parents are earning. ♦

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## Kumbh Mela



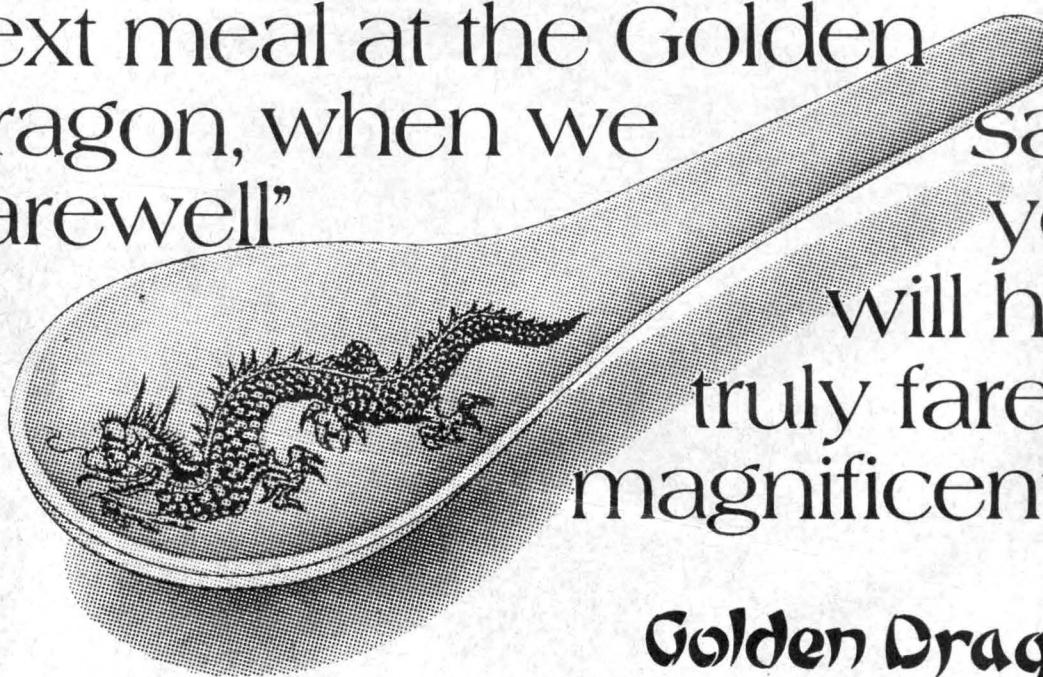
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# THE TALE OF

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## MURDER ONE: Shabir Ibrahim

**I**T SEEMS HARD to believe now, but the Ibrahims started out as the offspring of a policeman. Ibrahim Haskar was a *havalidar* with the CID and specialised in smuggling cases. His sons, Shabir, Dawood, Nur-ul-Haq, Anees and Abdullah were brought up on tales of smugglers and smuggling. Each night he would tell them about dhows laden with gold from Dubai, about the lighthouse off Cuffe Parade where smugglers transferred their cargo and about police chases in the middle of the night.

What young Shabir, Dawood, Nur-ul-Haq and the others made of these stories is not known, but presumably, they missed any moral point that the tales were meant to contain. Whether there was, in fact, a moral element at all, however, seems far from clear. After years of chasing smugglers, Ibrahim gave up, turned in his uniform, left the force and switched sides. He had learnt enough about the world of the smugglers, he decided, to become a successful one himself. And so, deserting his old colleagues in the CID, he took to smuggling and made a tidy fortune.

The boys had heard enough stories from their father to appreciate his enterprise and lust after the glamorous life of the big-time smuggler. When he was only 16, Shabir opened a shop at Crawford Market and began



to sell smuggled goods. When his brother Dawood came of age, the two of them joined their father and became full-time smugglers. And when Nur-ul-Haq, Anees and Abdullah were all old enough, Ibrahim retired and Shabir took over as head of a full-scale Mafia-style family.

But while Ibrahim, his police experience notwithstanding, had known only how to handle small-time operations, Dawood and Shabir thought big. They took a large office in Musa-firkhana Building in Bombay's Bohri Mohalla and turned themselves into a well-diversified smuggling conglome-

# SIX MURDERS

war that continues to the present day. An up-date subject in November 1983.



rate. They imported their own goods, they wholesaled them, they ran retail stalls, they provided protection to other smugglers and rented out their services to Haji Mastaan as transportation agents. With success came the trappings of wealth. They didn't quite make the Chamber of Commerce but

they did buy the obligatory Mercedes, a fruit farm in the Ratnagiri district, a hotel in Dubai and the like. By early 1981, they had Rs 4 crore stashed away and were considering expanding their Dubai operations.

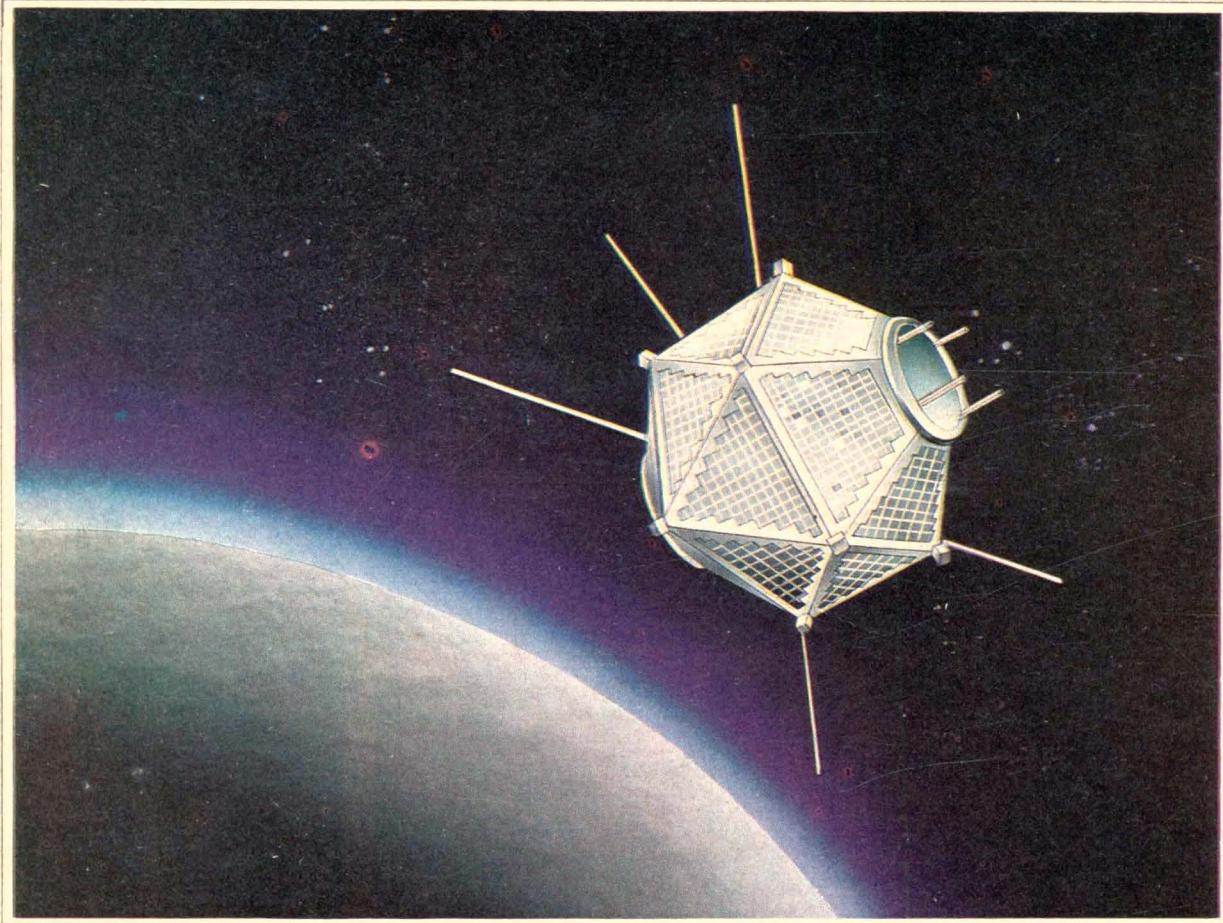
Of course, there had been problems, but then, every Indian business-

man learns to face competition from envious rivals. In the Ibrahims' case, the problems had come from a family of crude Nagpada hoodlums, the sons and nephews of Nawab Lala. While the Ibrahims had tried to professionalise their operations, paying off the police and ending needless violence, Nawab Lala's family had seemed intent on hassling them at every step. When Shabir had tired of these pesky Kamathipura crooks and their seedy sidekicks, he had instructed his men to terminate one or two of them as an example. After a few failed attempts, Dawood and Shabir themselves had gone along and dismembered the arms of a particularly unpleasant character called Syed Batla. It hadn't worked. Nawab Lala's brood had then taken the battle to the streets and opened fire at them near the Alexandra cinema.

Finally, Mastaan sent for Shabir. Was he willing to bury the hatchet? Yes, he was. Well, then, he would talk to Karim Lala, his old associate. Nawab Lala had once worked as a domestic servant in Karim's house and his family would listen to him. And so, peace returned to the underworld. Mastaan got the Ibrahims to promise to lay off and Karim Lala instructed Nawab Lala's crowd to refrain from violence.

Pleased with having neutralised his opposition, Shabir got married in grand style and invited Nawab Lala's offspring and their great friend Samad Khan, Karim Lala's nephew. Both

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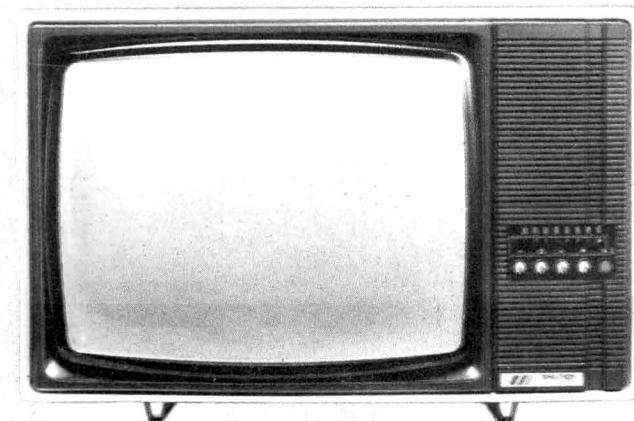


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sides laughed, joked, clapped backs, clasped hands and swore undying love. The smuggling wars were truly over.

And so now, on the night of February 11, 1981, here he was, Shabir Ibrahim, daredevil, millionaire, playboy and man about town, cruising around Chowpatty in his white Premier Padmini. Of course, he wasn't just cruising. One of the Nawab Lala crowd had fixed him up with a girl called Chitra who did quite exceptional things when the lights were out. He'd even sent his own girl-friend Nanda along to fix the assignation.

As the February air rushed in through the open windows of his car, and pushed his hair back, Shabir had reason to be pleased. Things were going well. There was Chitra right by his side and all around them was Bombay, the city that had made him rich. He was particularly jaunty when he pulled into the Servocare petrol pump in Prabhadevi and asked the attendant to fill the Padmini's tank.

At that point, things began to go wrong. A black Ambassador screeched to a halt beside them. Five men ran out and opened fire. The first bullet got him in the shoulder. The second in his stomach. As he attempted to resist, one of them slashed his wrist with a kukri. He collapsed on the ground in a pool of blood as the killers kept firing. Nine bullets later, they were sure that he was dead. They returned to their Ambassador and zoomed off into the night.

The smuggling wars had just started.

## MURDER TWO: Amirzada

HAD NAWAB LALA really been a mere domestic servant in Karim Lala's household? That was what the Ibrahims said, but Amirzada insisted it wasn't true. After all, he was Nawab Lala's son and he knew that his father was no mere servant: he was Karim Lala's right hand man. Look at it this way: Why would Samad Khan, Karim's favourite nephew, want to associate with him if he was a servant's

son? And could anyone deny that Amirzada and Samad were best friends?

No, Amirzada maintained, his was a glorious criminal heritage. His gang, consisting of his brother Shahzada, his cousins Alamzeb and Ayub, and such feared hit-men as Ayub Lala, Iqbal Tempo and Syed Batla, really ran Nagpada. They were the true inheritors of the traditions of Mastaan and Karim. Was there a single gang in Bombay that could guarantee the security of a smuggled shipment the way his men could? Was anyone more feared than he was? Of course, he had his hassles. There had been Iqbal Natiq, a reporter for *Razdaar*, the

everyone knew that they were no better than Amirzada's men. Shabir Ibrahim had put Natiq up to attacking him and Shabir Ibrahim had paid for his nerve. Amirzada, aided by his cousin Alamzeb, had personally gone along and disrupted the Ibrahims' smuggling operations. Shabir had taken revenge on Batla, but he did not dare touch Amirzada.

There had been only one real problem: the Natiq case. The police had enough witnesses to prove his complicity in the murder. He couldn't even threaten the witnesses: the Ibrahims had guaranteed their protection. But Amirzada had been clever. He had pretended to make up with the Ibrahims and had even attended Shabir's wedding. As part of the deal, the Ibrahims had leaned on the witnesses themselves (just imagine, without him, Amirzada, having to threaten anyone!) and the case had failed for lack of evidence.

Of course, Amirzada didn't forgive easily. Once he was free, he'd arranged for Nanda, his girl-friend, to lure Shabir to his death using a whore named Chitra as bait. Why, Amirzada had personally pumped the last few bullets into Shabir's bloody body!

The police had been self-righteous about it. They had arrested him and charged him with Shabir's murder. But how, Amirzada wanted to know, were they going to make it stick? Where were the witnesses? What was the evidence? And so, here he was, Amirzada Nawab Khan, King of Nagpada, inheritor of Mastaan's mantle, wasting the morning of September 6, 1983, in Bombay's Sessions Court, watching the police unfold their pathetic apology for a murder case. Well, he would sit this one out. It wouldn't take long. It took even less time than he thought. As he looked around idly, a stranger crept up to the dock. Startled, Amirzada looked up but by then, the stranger had whipped out a .36 revolver and shot him in the mouth. Amirzada slumped, and the stranger fired again, this time at his chest. The third bullet got him in the neck and the fourth went wild. But by then, Amirzada Nawab Khan

**Shabir had reason to be pleased. Things were going well. He had made crores and life was good. He was content almost to the minute he was killed. And with his murder, began the smuggling wars.**

Urdu paper, who had run a campaign against his boys. They had all been arrested during the Emergency because of Natiq's crusade. But in 1977, when the Emergency ended, Amirzada had led a small band of men to Natiq's Bhendi Bazaar home. They had pulled him out of the house, taken him to Khetwadi, and killed him. That served as an example to any reporter who tried to take on the gang.

Amirzada knew why Natiq had been after him. It was the doing of the Ibrahims, local Nagpada hoodlums, hirelings of Haji Mastaan, who pretended to run a fancy multinational smuggling operation when, in fact,

was very dead.

The smuggling wars had just shifted into high gear.

## MURDER THREE: Bada Rajan

**IN HIS WILDEST** imaginings, Dawood Ibrahim had never dreamt that Amirzada would have the nerve to kill his brother Shabir, so, when the unthinkable did happen, he made two decisions. First of all, he was going to get the hell out of Bombay until he could work out what to do next. And then, he was going to find some way of avenging his brother's death.

Leaving Bombay meant giving up the protection racket, but Dawood had a few ideas about how he could double the group's turnover by sticking to smuggling. He went to Daman and set up a joint venture with Lallu Jogi, one of that region's most important smugglers. Jogi introduced him to a new overseas collaborator, Haji Ashraf, in Dubai and the three of them went into the smuggling business with a vengeance.

When the profits started streaming in and his own life seemed safe, Dawood decided to venture back to Bombay. But fate continued to be unkind. He was hurt in a shooting accident on his way back to Maharashtra and ended up in a Baroda hospital. The doctors sent for the police who recognised and promptly arrested him. Fearing that he might try and escape, the Gujarat police shifted him to Sabarmati, a more secure prison. On his way there, Dawood was shot at from a passing car. He had the sense to duck, but his police escorts were injured.

Back in Bombay, Shabir's other brothers were at their wits' end. Dawood was in jail. Alamzeb, who ran the rival gang after Amirzada was arrested, seemed out to get them. They lacked the resources for a full-scale gang war and were too frightened to attempt a hit on Alamzeb. Worse still, it seemed probable that Amirzada would be acquitted on the charge of murdering Shabir.

The honourable thing to do was to kill Amirzada. But how? Recognising their own limitations, the Ibrahims turned to a professional hit man: Rajan Nair alias Bada Rajan. When they explained the situation to Nair, he told them that there was only one solution: a courtroom hit. But wouldn't that require a kamikaze killer? Yes, said Rajan, but he would find some unemployed man on the streets of Bombay who would gladly risk his life for a little money.

David Paradhan, a pavement-dweller, was the man Rajan settled on. He taught him how to handle a gun, promised him Rs 30,000 and sent him off to the Sessions Court to kill Amirzada.

**In his wildest dreams, Dawood Ibrahim never imagined that Amirzada would have the nerve to kill his brother Shabir. When the unthinkable did happen, he realised that he had to take revenge. But how was he to kill Amirzada?**

Till the end, Paradhan had thought he could get away with it. When Amirzada had slumped into a dead heap, Paradhan had tried to jump out of a window, only to be shot by a policeman and arrested.

Rajan was not particularly sorry that Paradhan had been caught. As far as he was concerned, the important thing was that Amirzada was dead and he had kept to the terms of his contract with the Ibrahims. What he hadn't counted on was the persistence of the police who insisted on finding out from Paradhan just who had hired him. The policemen had expected him to name one of the Ibrahims; to

their surprise, he blamed Rajan. They knew where to find Rajan. They burst into his Tilak Nagar room, confiscated his gun, and threw him into jail.

Rajan was upset but not dismayed. Would a court believe Paradhan? What possible motive could he possibly have for killing Amirzada? The only danger was that Alamzeb might try and have him shot in court as well. So, when the police did produce him in court on September 30, 1983, he seemed unusually tense. Fortunately, his appearance went off without a hitch. Relieved, he let the police lead him through the compound towards the waiting van.

It was at this stage that a man in naval uniform disentangled himself from the crowd of curious onlookers, walked up to Rajan and fired six shots into his body at point-blank range.

The smuggling wars were spreading.

## MURDER FOUR: Samad Khan

**SAMAD KHAN** was a playboy. Unlike his friends, Amirzada and Alamzeb, who were happiest in Kamathipura and Nagpada, Samad liked the good life. Drop into the SeaRock Hotel on a Saturday night and you'd see him strolling through the lobby looking for pick-ups or sitting in the coffee shop holding court. Samad had, after all, been born rich. His uncle was Karim Lala, the respected underworld don, and Samad had always got everything he wanted.

Like every able-bodied young man, Samad wanted to join the family business. Karim's business was protection. Any time a don wanted a rival put out of business or a shipment protected, it was Karim they turned to. When Yusuf Patel had cheated Haji Mastaan, Karim had lent Mastaan the two Pathans who made an abortive attempt on Patel's life. In recent years, though, Karim had lost his zest for killing and the business needed a young, dynamic man to run it. Who better than Samad?

Besides, Samad had his own friends: the Amirzada/Alamzeb gang. Whenever Karim's men protested at one of the tasks assigned to them or

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complained about Samad's reckless behaviour, he would turn to his friends Alamzeb and Amirzada. Of course, they had their own problems. The Ibrahims were making life tough for them. But, as Samad had explained to Amirzada, there was only one way to deal with this kind of problem: kill.

And so, at Samad's urging, Amirzada and Alamzeb had shot Shabir dead. Dawood had fled and the field seemed clear. Unfortunately, the younger Ibrahims had shown more brains than Samad had given them credit for and had gone and hired a contract killer, Rajan Nair, to kill Amirzada. After the courtroom shooting of Amirzada, Samad knew it was open war. Honour would not be satisfied till all the Ibrahims were wiped out. He'd spoken to Alamzeb and they'd taken a leaf out of the Ibrahims' book by hiring their own contract killer: Abdul Kunju. It was Kunju who had arranged for an assassin dressed as a naval officer to kill Rajan in the compound of the court.

The Ibrahims themselves, though, were a different matter. No way was Samad going to do the cowardly thing and hire a contract killer to wipe out the main gang. He was going to do it himself. Unfortunately, things hadn't gone too well for Samad recently. He'd accepted a contract to kill a travel agent called Jain at the SeaRock and had ended up killing the wrong Jain by mistake. The police had pulled in Samad for the murder by the simple expedient of arresting Karim Lala and refusing to let him go till Samad surrendered. Samad had given himself up but there was nothing good lawyers couldn't manage in Bombay: he had been granted bail.

Once he was out again, Samad pursued the Ibrahims with a vengeance that even Alamzeb found terrifying. He saw Shahid Hassan, a member of the Ibrahim gang, in Byculla's Arab Lane and shot him at once. Later, he actually drove up to the Ibrahims' home on Pakmodia Street and shot Iqbal, another leading gang member. All of this was just for starters. He had heard that Dawood Ibrahim him-

self was out on bail. That was the one he wanted. Only when he killed Dawood would Amirzada be truly avenged.

Samad was still waiting for Dawood's return to Bombay early on the morning of October 4, when a gang of killers surrounded the house he was staying at in the middle class locality of Siccaganagar. As Samad left the house, preparing to catch a flight to Indore where he was headed for a short stay, the killers moved in. The sounds of Sten gun fire rent the air and Samad was cut down at the entrance. He died instantly.

Dawood Ibrahim was back in town.

**Samad Khan was a playboy. He liked the good life and if people thought he was brash and reckless, well, yes, he probably was. Samad had one way of dealing with problems: murder. He had pushed for Shabir's execution.**

## MURDER FIVE: Abdul Kunju

**THE STRANGE SAGA** of Abdul Kunju shows how easy it is for ants to get trampled on during a battle between elephants. If the truth be told, Kunju had no real interest in the war between Nawab Lala's crowd and the Ibrahims. He was a small-time Tilak Nagar hoodlum who relied on extorting money from rickshaw drivers and small shopkeepers to make a living. He had only one real rival: Rajan Nair alias Bada Rajan. There was a time when Kunju had been Rajan's protégé, but that was a long time ago. Then Kunju had set up on his own

and wanted to finish off Rajan's entire gang.

The gang war continued till Rajan got involved in the murder of Amirzada. After he was picked up by the police, Kunju had a free run of the area. Rajan's gang, temporarily headed by his second-in-command, Chhotta Rajan, was lying low and nobody dared question Kunju's authority. Unfortunately, Kunju got greedy. What if Rajan were to be put out of action permanently?

When Samad Khan and Alamzeb approached him to hit Rajan, Kunju was thrilled. Not only could he dispose of an old rival but he would get paid for it! And what's more, Samad Khan would guarantee his safety after that! So, Kunju found a rickshaw driver called Chandrashekhar Safalika, dressed him up in naval uniform and sent him off to kill Rajan.

Unfortunately, nothing went well for Kunju after that. He had correctly reckoned that the Ibrahims wouldn't care enough about Rajan to avenge him, but he hadn't counted on the fury of Chhotta Rajan and the rest of Rajan's gang. Worse still, Samad Khan and Alamzeb made no attempt to protect him, contrary to the undertaking they had given. As far as they were concerned, he was expendable.

Everywhere Kunju went, Chhotta Rajan's men would pursue him. He never stayed in the same place two days in a row and still, somehow, they managed to find out where he was. Finally, on October 9, 1983, he gave himself up to the police, reasoning that he was safer behind bars.

Kunju was very wrong. In January 1984, when he was being taken to the Vikhroli court, Chhotta Rajan's men opened fire at the car carrying him. Kunju caught a bullet in his shoulder, but he lived. In April, he was taken to the JJ Hospital for treatment. Outside the doctor's cabin, one of Chhotta Rajan's men suddenly whipped out a revolver and shot him. He took the bullet on the shoulder and once again, he lived.

Eventually, Kunju reasoned that it made no difference to his safety whether he was inside or out and waited



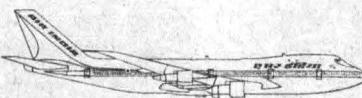
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# CRIME

for the next murder attempt. It didn't come.

By May 1985, Kunju decided that Chhotta Rajan had abandoned the vendetta and resumed his normal life. On May 4 he even went to watch a hockey match. It was there, at 6.45 in the evening, that Chhotta Rajan's men found him. This time, they did not merely wound him. Kunju died instantly.

The smuggling wars had claimed the life of another incidental character.

## MURDER SIX: Alamzeb

**WHAT ALAMZEB** could not understand was this: how had Dawood Ibrahim suddenly become such a formidable opponent? When Samad, Amirzada and Alamzeb had killed Shabir, they were sure that Dawood would not be able to run the gang on his own. But the younger Ibrahim had surprised them all. Now Amirzada and Samad were both dead and even here, Alamzeb had been forced to shift the base of his operations to Gujarat to evade Dawood's wrath.

Not that he really minded having to operate in Gujarat. In many ways it was far better than life in Bombay. Here, he could use his influence as a member of the dreaded Karim Lala gang without having the Bombay police at his heels.

His break into Ahmedabad's criminal fraternity, too, was easy. He joined forces with the local hooch king, Abdul Latif, and lived in his four-storeyed *haveli* in Baluchwad. It was the safest hide-out possible because none of the poor Muslims in the area were likely to tell on him. For them, Latif's illicit liquor business was an essential source of income. Alamzeb's association with Latif gave him immunity. Together they ran a successful extortion racket, paying off the police (they paid the Kalupur police station nearly Rs 30,000 per month) and making lakhs in the process.

But in December 1983, he got himself into a bit of trouble. The kid-

napping and murder of a successful businessman, Umar Baxi, arranged by Alamzeb, attracted undue attention from the city police force. The Kalupur police could no longer protect him. So, Alamzeb became a fugitive, moving from town to town in the two states of Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Then, tired of wandering, he decided to flee the country with a few of his accomplices. The plan failed. While crossing the Rajasthan border in a stolen car, Alamzeb and his friends shot at the policemen at a check-post. A wireless alert enabled his arrest at the next check-post. Fortunately for him, the court could not find enough evidence to implicate him in the Umar Baxi case.

**Alamzeb thought that the best way to evade the wrath of Dawood's men was to shift the base of his operations to Gujarat. He was much safer there. Finally, though, it was the police, not Dawood, who killed him.**

After his release, Alamzeb had to carve out a new role for himself. He noted that the poor Muslims of Surat and Ahmedabad lived in appalling poverty and faced the worst kind of discrimination. Motivated partly by feelings for his community and partly by a desire to become the unquestioned godfather of all the Muslims in Gujarat, Alamzeb began to help them out. If they needed a little money, he provided it. If they were attacked, he protected them. It was a strategy that worked. By late 1985, Alamzeb had built up a substantial following among these poor Muslims.

He still dreaded the arrival of Da-

wood's men, of course, but now he felt safer. With so many local residents on his side, would Dawood really be able to kill him? There was also the matter of the police vendetta. During the communal violence in Ahmedabad in May, a police inspector had been shot dead. The police blamed Alamzeb but somehow had never been able to catch him. (It was rumoured that their Kalupur colleagues, fearful of losing their *hafta*, kept Alamzeb informed of police plans.)

Still, late in the evening of December 29, Alamzeb felt relatively secure. His life was in no immediate danger and he had an evening's entertainment lined up. A procress named Amba had arranged for a girl named Bharati who would meet him in a flat in the Rander area of Surat. Amba had already been paid Rs 300 and Bharati was promised another Rs 100 if her performance was up to the mark. Alamzeb reached the flat on his Hero-Honda motorcycle, accompanied by two bodyguards.

There are two versions of what followed. Common to both versions is the fact that somebody complained to the Rander police station that a woman was being raped. The police rushed to the flat where Alamzeb was entertaining Bharati. He thought they had recognised him and opened fire. They returned the fire and killed him.

The first twist to the story has it that Bharati was a plant. She had been hired by Dawood's men to lure Alamzeb. Dawood's men then informed the police who rushed to the scene of the alleged 'rape' and found Alamzeb.

The second twist is that the whole thing was an 'encounter'. The police heard about Alamzeb's presence in Rander, saw their chance to avenge their dead colleague and killed Alamzeb in cold blood.

Whichever version is true, Alamzeb's death sparked off communal riots all over Gujarat and he became a martyr to the poor Muslims. In Bombay, Dawood's men celebrated. With the death of Alamzeb, the smuggling wars were over. Till the next murder, that is. ♦

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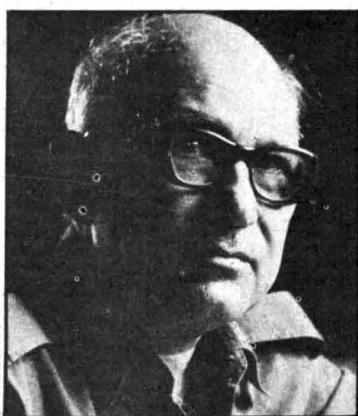
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# WHAT WRITERS ARE WORKING ON

What has Salman Rushdie done since *Shame*? When will Ian Jack's book on India hit the stands? **Imprint** asked writers — all Indian or with an Indian connection — to tell us what they were working on at present.

Compiled By Sharmila Joshi

## K A ABBAS



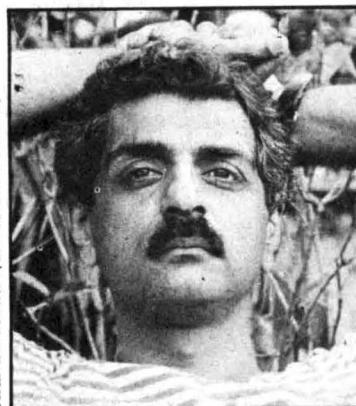
F. Robinson

"YES, I'M WORKING on the third volume of a trilogy. It's about India and the world. The theme is life. It's a very broad perspective," says the 70-year-old film-maker and author of about 70 books, which includes *I Am Not An Island*, his autobiography.

A book on Indira Gandhi, *The Last Post* ('which is the name of a tune raised by the military band'), has been his last published work. *Inquilab*, a monumental novel and *The World Is My Village*, a historical book, form the

first two volumes of the trilogy of which he is now writing the concluding part. He has finished only five chapters and thinks he will reach the last chapter after about a year. The book will probably be called *Son Of India*.

## T ARIQ ALI



Chandu Mhatre/Illustrated Weekly

THE PAKISTAN-BORN writer with the vitriolic pen, whose last book, *The Nehrus And The Gandhis - An Indian Dynasty*, was published in early 1985, is not working on any book at the

## PREVIEW

moment. "Yes," he says, "I've got a number of ideas. But I don't like to talk about them." He has just finished a set of four plays for the BBC, which will be broadcast next winter. "Essentially the story of the last few years of Bhutto," the plays are about a clash between a military dictator and a civilian politician in Pakistan.

### C CHARLES ALLEN



HE'S DOING SOME 'Kipling short stories on India'. That is, he is editing and introducing them in a book called *Kipling's India*, which will probably be out next Christmas. With his interest in all things Indian, Allen has co-authored in the past, *Lives Of The Indian Princes*. Now, he is "also starting work on a vast novel on India. It's like seeing it through three generations, from a British point of view. But a much more involved look at Indian life." This book will take at least a year-and-a-half to complete.

### D HIREN BHAGAT

HE IS WORKING ON two books. The first is nearly complete. It is an anthology of English verse epigrams. He says, "I've read every



volume of English verse epigrams ever published between 1550 and 1984 and I've tried to define what the English verse epigram tradition is." Bhagat feels that this is one genre of poetry that has been most disregarded – both by academicians and by the lay public. The last time such a comprehensive effort on this subject was made was in 1870, by a man called Dodd. The book is not titled yet, but a possible title would be: *Brief Lines – An Anthology Of English Verse Epigrams – 1550 to 1984*. The book will be published by Pan Books, in the latter half of this year.

His second book is on religious reform in India till the early 19th century. It's a historical, polemical argument. The book will be completed by early 1987.

### D DARRYL D'MONTE



HE IS AMONG the editors working on a book called *The State Of India's Urban Environment*. A number of researchers have been commissioned for the book, which is to be published by the Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi. "The book consists of just what the title indicates. The idea is to look at all the raw material, food and other inputs in the city. How that affects the quality of life in the city. Ours is the second biggest urban population in the world. By the turn of this century, it may be the biggest. The attempt is to treat the city as an ecosystem. It's a kind of a new approach." The book will be published some time this year.

### K KEKI DARUWALLA

HE IS WORKING on a book of short stories. He initially thought of calling it *Long Stories*, but then, 'some of them are long, some not so long'. So, this compilation of about 15 short stories, will have a different title. Each story is set in an era (like *When Gandhi Came To Gorakhpur* in 1921 or *How The Doab Was Saved*, set in 1930) from 1857 to the present age. This idea of eras, 'somehow fell into a pattern and I discovered I had a book ready'.

He is also working on a book of poems titled *Landscapes*. The book begins with a long poem called *Mandva* and includes some poems on the landscapes he observed on a trip to Kashmir, which 'play on the imagination'. If Oxford, which has published two books of his poems already, decides to publish this one too, it will be out by mid-'86.

### K AMALA DAS

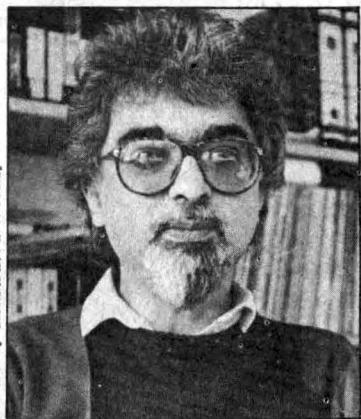
THE REVOLUTIONARY femin-



N K Sareen/ Illustrated Weekly

ist poetess, whose published books include *Requiem For A Love Affair*, *Descendants*, *A Doll For The Child Prostitute*, *Alphabet Of Lust* and others, is now Orient Editor of *Poet*, a publication of the World Poetry Society. She tells us: "I keep writing poems, all of which I shall publish in the forthcoming volume to be entitled *Collected Poems*." Though social work takes up most of her time in Trivandrum, she has also begun a novel.

## FARRUKH DHONDY



Courtesy Illustrated Weekly

THE WRITER with the left-wing political perspective, he is one of England's most highly regarded Indian authors. His published books include *East End At Your Feet*, *Come To Mecca* and *Poona Company*. Right now, though, he says: "I'm not working on any

book. Not even contemplating one." Dhondy was appointed Commissioning Editor for Multi-Cultural Programming on Channel Four in 1984. Since then, he has been involved in a number of controversial programme broadcasts. This month, he says, he has "just finished a television series for the BBC. It's a drama based in the East End of London. It's called *King Of The Ghetto*."

## P RANAY GUPTA



Gautam Patole

PERSONAL TRAGEDY has dogged Gupte recently. His father died last year while he was writing his highly-regarded *Vengeance: India After The Assassination Of Indira Gandhi*. And last month his mother died while he was researching his new book on global development programmes.

Nevertheless, he hopes to finish the development book this year; an Indian edition of *Vengeance* will be out soon; and his next book is a prestigious assignment that he 'would rather not talk about'.

## IAN JACK

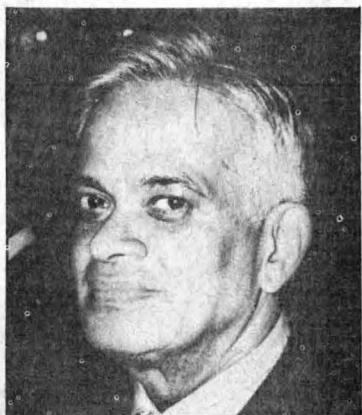
JACK, whose much awaited book on India is still in the making, says: "God knows when I'll finish it!" He is also writing 'about



Ketaki Sheth

the decline and fall of England', in the form of a collection of articles of his, to be published by Heinemann as a book by the end of this year or early next year.

## M V KAMATH



"I'VE GOT TWO projects in mind right now." The first is a compilation of Indian names (for children). He hopes to build up his collection of 5,000 names to about 10,000. Tentatively titled *Nama Karan*, the book may be released by the end of this year.

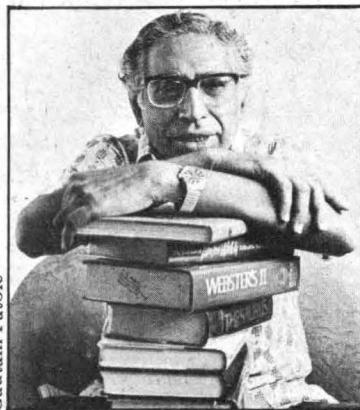
He is also summarising 'for popular reading', two books on the meaning of death, written by Professor Settar, who is Head of the History Department at Karnataka University. Meanwhile, another of Kamath's books is complete and will be in print by

## PREVIEW

mid-'86. It's the history of the National Dairy Development Board and is called *Island Of Excellence*.

### IQBAL MASUD

Gautam Patole



HE IS NOT writing a book but is working on a few short stories which may eventually be published as a book. He tells us, "It's a series of stories, actually planned as a novel. But now, as they are longish short stories, they will not be in book form for quite some time." The stories work up a kind of sequential pattern about the life of the same character, Anwar, from 1930 to 1947. It is an autobiographical series. Masud says: "It's a kind of education. A looking back. I hope to open the doors to Indian-Muslim life in the pre-Partition days. The experiences in my stories are grim, but my point of view is not. Though, after 1947, I don't know what happens. I'm basically a critic. But this is a kind of holiday from criticism. The book began as a kind of reaction to a lack of (historical) reflection in contemporary fiction." He has about four stories in mind. One of them has already appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly Of India*. If he adds more stories between now and the end of next year, he feels that a book would be born.

### DINA MEHTA

Gautam Patole



SHE SAYS her new novel is "about the conflicting loyalties of two generations of a Parsi family during Gandhi's Quit India movement — that's in the '40s. The older generation of Parsis has a burning loyalty for the King and the Crown and the younger generation has nationalistic feelings." The book is three-quarters complete.

She has not yet thought of a publisher — "Usually, a manuscript goes to ten publishers and an 11th may accept it." The book, at this juncture, is untitled.

and she has this to say about her forthcoming book: "I thought I'd written a low life book about the hippies and then I thought, wouldn't it be fun to talk about the high life? And the Indian princes seemed right." As a result, she's been working on a book about the maharajahs for the last two years. It's a historical novel that covers events from the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee to the accession of the princely states into the Indian union. "It tries to bring in the politics of the world during that period in the sense that it impinged on India," she adds. This novel is called *Darbar* and will be complete in a few months.

### DOM MORAES

Santosh Verma



HE TELLS US he has finished a book about Sunil Gavaskar, called *Gavaskar!* After books like *A Matter Of People* and *Mrs Gandhi*, wasn't this an unusual subject for him to write on? He says, "He (Gavaskar) asked me to write it. It's an authorised biography." The book will be out by May 1986.

In 1958, as a 19-year-old undergraduate at Oxford, Moraes won Britain's major literary award — the Hawthornden Prize — for a book of poems. His poetry has, since then, come a long and prolific way. Now, he is putting

### GITA MEHTA

Chandu Mhatre



HER *KARMA COLA* caused a major literary flutter in 1981,

# PREVIEW

together another book, which will be out around July 1986. He is also thinking of working on a book about children.

## RAGHU RAI



Courtesy Illustrated Weekly

"MY NEXT BOOK is almost complete. It is on the Taj Mahal." The photographs are about different themes on the Taj. The book has been planned in such a way that "the Taj is put in an Indian landscape and related to Indian life, because if the pictures are of the Taj, they must show the Taj in India and India in the Taj." Secondly, says Rai, the Taj is the best piece of Moghul architecture. So, he has included not just the intricate details, but also the depth, the details of colour, in his photographs, and related them to the life of the people. Yet another theme of the book is how the Taj changes its 'moods and colours in different weather'. "Lastly," says Rai, "since it was a man's gift to a woman, it was born of love." The photographs capture 'the romance of the Taj'.

He began the project several years ago but 'worked for a few years and forgot about it'. In 1985, though, he worked on it extensively. The book is titled *Taj Mahal* and it will be out by September.

Raghu Rai is also working on a book on the Tibetans, with em-

phasis on the Dalai Lama. He says he has photographed 'how they have, through various festivals like Kalachakra and many other traditions, kept Buddhism alive'. The book will be completed by the end of 1986.

## SALMAN RUSHDIE



Courtesy Gentleman

*GRIMUS, HIS FIRST NOVEL*, which was a surrealistic fantasy, went by relatively unnoticed. With *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai joined the ranks of immortalised fictional characters, and won Rushdie the 1981 Booker Prize. *Shame* was his third and last published book. Giving no inkling of the theme of the novel he is now working on, he says, "I don't like to talk about a book while I'm working on it." If the content of the other three is any criterion for comparison, it's sure to be highly readable. The book will be completed after about a year.

## PARTAP SHARMA

*DAY'S OF THE TURBAN*, a novel of approximately 160,000 words, is to be published in the autumn of 1986 by The Bodley Head, London. "The novel has been inspired by the cockaded frontier-style turban of the north,



Ashok Gupta

but is a tribute to all turbans and the times they have seen," says Sharma. "It is the saga of a joint family in transition from feudal values and feuding times, through the turbulent events of 1984." The novel has taken him more than six years to write. "In the meantime," he says, "events have overtaken the fiction and encrusted it with fact."

## KUSHWANT SINGH



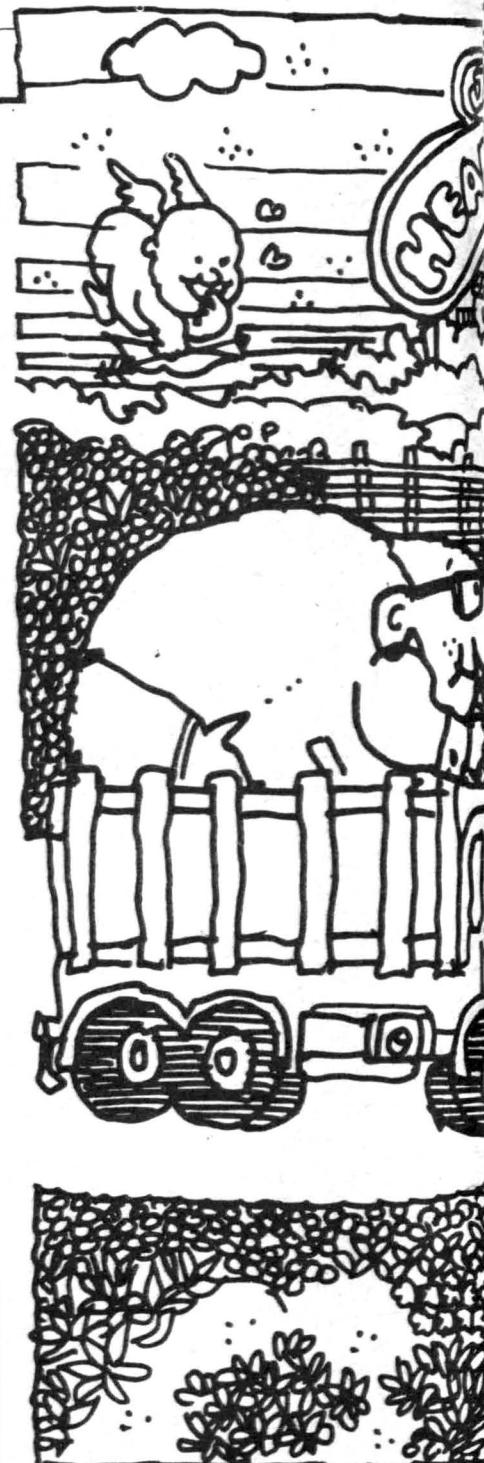
Gautam Patole

THE FORMER EDITOR of *The Illustrated Weekly Of India* has 'just about finished a novel'. It's a historical fiction on Delhi, and he doesn't want 'to divulge its name'. He is also working on a book on nature. "I keep notes about birds and trees" and how they look at different times in Delhi. Both books were to have been despatched to the publishers in January. ♦

# JINDALS DIARY

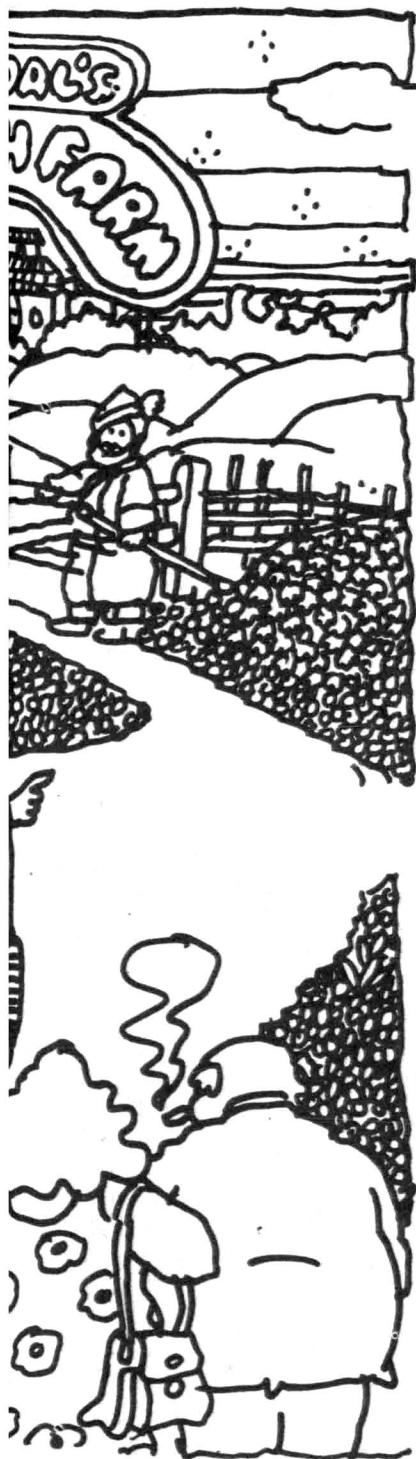
The Institute of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences at Bangalore, better known as Jindals, is the country's most famous health farm, and haunt of the rich, the fat and famous. But what is it *really* like?

**N**O ONE IS QUITE SURE WHICH heavyweight actually started the exodus to the Institute of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences, or 'Jindals' as it is popularly known. Some say it was the late Piloo Mody who descended upon it with admirable regularity just before he embarked on one of his legendary gourmet tours of Europe. Others insist it was whippet-thin industrialist Viren Shah, who gathered his flock of admirers and groupies and returned each year, the bounce back in his walk, the gleam in his eye. Soon, as these things are wont to happen in India, a trend was created.



It became fashionable to detoxify and plug in one's body to nature's gentle ways, in the salubrious climate of Bangalore. In December, the people who mattered went to Goa, and in summer, they were at Jindals, sweating out the accumulated sins of high living and fast eating in the long, cavernous sections of the treatment rooms.

So, Dilip Kumar and wife would move into a hut and be gently wean-



ed from their addiction to tea. Biju Patnaik would stride all over the lawns distributing a fair amount of his charm to all and sundry. Jayalalitha would recuperate from political debacles, with a bodyguard following three steps behind. Sundry Birlas, Tatas, the entire Ambani clan, what looked like every Opposition member who mattered (Ramakrishna Hegde, Chandrashekhar, Menaka Gandhi, Minoo Masani), society hos-

tesses, film stars, debutantes, journalists — all seemed to find their way to India's first and only health spa: its very own fat farm. Here, Gundu Rao jogged, Camellia Panjabi walked, Feroze Varun Gandhi gambolled and Dhiren Bhagat prowled, making up scoops.

But, obviously, the stars had retired for the spell that I was there at Jindals because, except for a lady who looked suspiciously like Rukshana Sultana (but alas, was not), the farm was overrun by tired housewives, Bombay and South African Gujaratis (playing endless games of rummy in their pyjamas) and an entire season's worth of overweight heiresses from Delhi, who had to lose the weight of a mini-tractor between them. Oh yes, there was a fashion designer from New York, a member of Calcutta's leading publishing family, a young female barrister from London, a world-renowned astrologer from Europe. But there was no Shatrughan Sinha to smuggle in pungent *paya* curry or Scotch when the lights were out, or even a Manjit Dua to write home about.

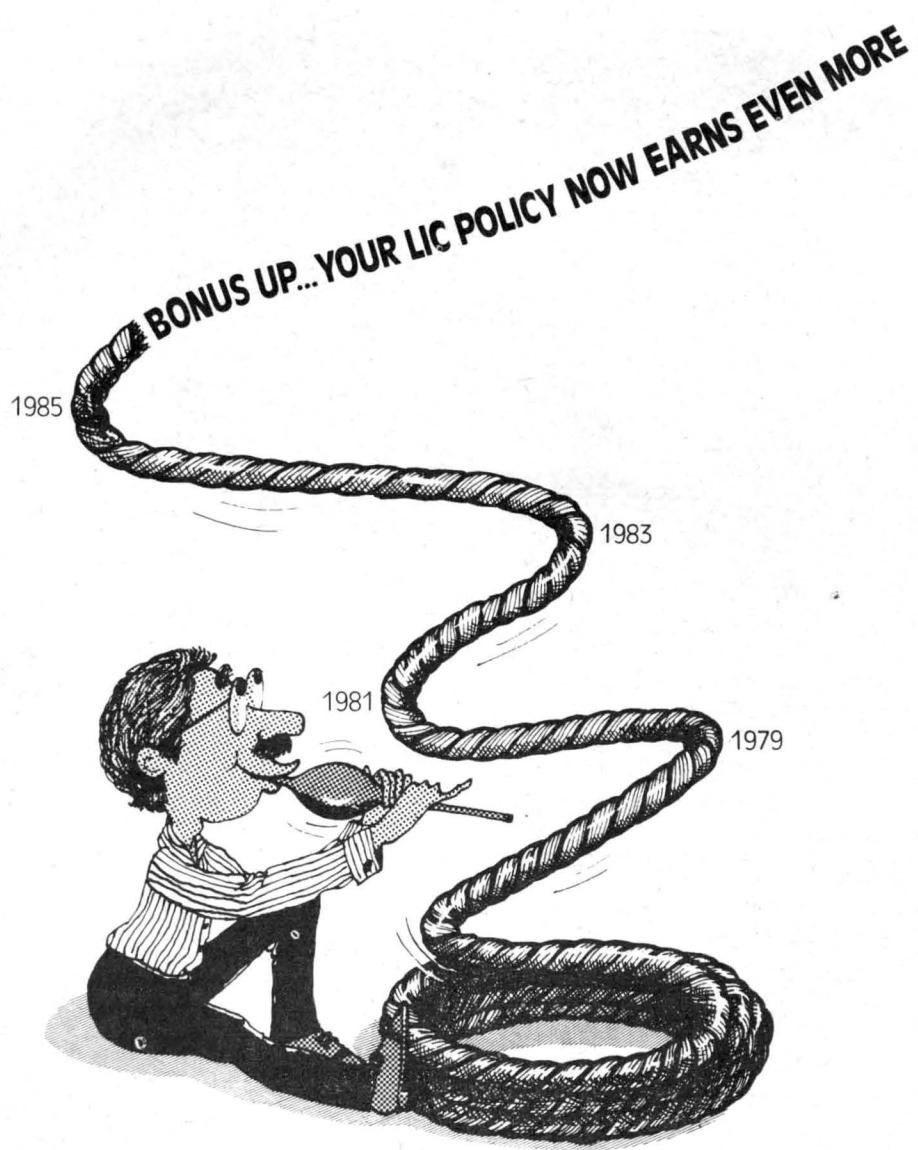
But it was not celebrities that I was searching for, as I scoured the faces of the flotsam and jetsam that late morning in December as I was checking in. I was searching for signs of good health in the countenances of inmates: sparkling skins, shining eyes, luxuriant cascades of hair... But, the sight that met me as I sat there, alone and swamped by admission papers and the rituals of checking in, was that the people were no different from the average passenger of the Rajdhani.

Not that I was a sight to behold at that stage, either. Tired from a four-hour spell in a plane — two of which were on the tarmac, due to Bangalore's notorious mist — hassled by bullying taxi-drivers who naturally look upon Jindals inmates as easy prey, and nervous due to the horror stories I'd heard from a few ex-patients, there was not much to recommend me to them either. Willy-nilly I tumbled in, confused by the vast spaces, boggled by the rituals, and barely awake from a morning that

had started at 4 a.m in Bombay.

**T**HERE ARE THOSE who feel that the most horrific thing at Jindals is the speaker installed in each room that lustily belts out *bhajans* at 5.30 each morning, encouraging (and that's an understatement) each inmate to rise and shine and walk and perform yogic ablutions at that unearthly hour. But then, to these people, given to rising at 10 at home, to have to be subjected to such tyranny is far worse than being immersed in a tubful of water, while a girl aims a hose pipe at you at 50 pounds pressure and massages (another understatement) your vulnerable naked body till you're pulverised into shape. The underwater jet massage, as it is called, is only one of Jindals' many 'treatments'. More unusual are the mud baths during which you sit shivering in your underwear on a terrace along with other embarrassed inmates as mud is patted all over your body and head; plantain-leaf baths in which you are trussed up in giant plantain leaves, wrapped in a blanket and left to sweat in the cold winter sun; (I didn't, which was rather a waste, but the lady next to me seemed to be having a nervous breakdown, so she sweated for both of us!); and hot and cold hip baths, an apparent cure for constipation. These require you to sit, feeling rather silly, in tubs of hot and cold water alternately for five minutes, with your legs hanging out, until your teeth chatter like the congas on a Bappi Lahiri disc, and your skin begins to resemble a Mafco broiler.

In fact, naturopathy has a whole series of baths to choose from: cold immersion baths which are excellent for the nervous system; arm baths in which you sit with both arms plunged into hot water, hoping no one you know will walk in; spinal baths, for which a great fibre-glass armchair with intricate gadgetry resembling a health freak's torture chamber is used; whirlpool baths; wax baths, where molten wax is poured onto you — excellent for arthritis and joint pains; Kuhnes friction sitz baths; and even an asthma bath!



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## FIRST PERSON

On my first day there, I washed my hair and, carefully, in my naivete blow-dried it, to the groans of the initiated. "Your hair gets wet all the time," said one to me. "No one here bothers about blow-drying!"

To be sure, each day at Jindals was like the high-spot of a Raj Kapoor hit film (tons of water thrown on the heroine). In the mornings, you go for a sauna. So, it's a shower before (cold water), a shower between, and a shower later. In the evenings, you have a plantain-leaf pack, so, it's a shower after. The next day it's a cold jet-spray, so it's a shower all over and, later that evening, it's a shower once again. . . . and on and on it goes.

But water, and its many therapeutic uses, is not the only curative element in the science of naturopathy. According to Dr Satyanarayan Murthy, the man who set up the Institute and India's leading naturopath, "It is the stimulation of the body's inherent power to regain health with the help of five elements of nature, namely, earth, water, fire, ether and air."

So, for every drenching in cold or hot water, there are mud packs, cucumber packs, chest packs (a cold damp cloth tied tightly to your chest at night), steam inhalations, sun baths, and the dreaded enemas.

There is much embarrassed laughter as well as some nervous ha-has when the subject of enemas arises at Jindals. If the truth be told, they are given with such hygienic efficiency and gentleness, and are so vital to the basic tenets of naturopathy, that only the chronically tight-sphinctered

are not, by the end of their stay at Jindals, converted to the joys of enemas. Dr Murthy says, "Natural healing is a biological process which always comes from within and not from without. When the tiny microscopic cells are supplied with an efficient drainage system. . . ."

But still, in the beginning, much embarrassment ensues and so, it was quite inappropriate of me to have recalled to an assembled group of newcomers the only enema joke I was acquainted with:

"Question: What did the patient in the hospital say when he heard a knock on the door? Answer: He said, 'Who's that? Friend or enema?'"

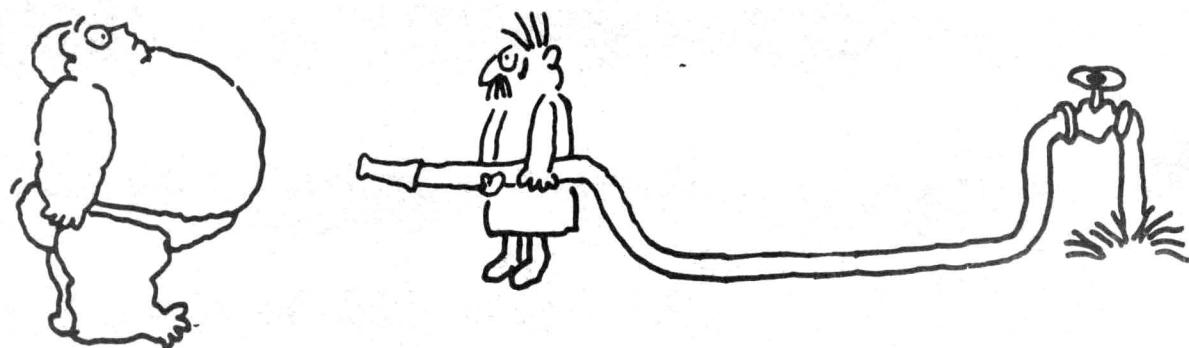
Not surprisingly, no one laughed, as they all mulled over their private trauma of that morning, silently.

**J**INDALS was set up in September 1979 by Mr Sitaram Jindal of aluminium-manufacture fame who, according to the Institute's Public Relations Officer (PRO) had travelled the world over to health clubs in Germany and Switzerland and decided to put up 50 to 60 lakhs and purchase land behind his conglomeration of factories in Bangalore. Mr Jindal, whose photographs reveal him to be a nice enough Marwari cut from the same cloth as Murli Deora, is also a devotee of Maharaj Charan Singhji, the head of the Radhasaomi cult, and that accounts for the slightly bewildering array of pictures of the elderly white-haired Sardar in all rooms of the Institute.

Today, due to his astute invest-

ment and efficient running of the Institute, it has grown to a 52-acre property easily worth five to six crores, with new land being purchased each year for expansion. To start with, for instance, the Institute possessed no Jaimal Hall (recreation and yoga centre), diet centre, luxury nests or huts, all of which were added on in stages. Today, the Institute has the capacity to host 200 patients, and has a staff strength of approximately 200. The actual built-up area of the Institute comprises ten acres, the other land being given over to farming organically-grown vegetables such as cabbage, radish, cauliflower, brinjal, beans, carrots and cucumber, and such fruits as bananas, papayas (a wonderful reddish variety), guavas, chickoos and sugarcane.

However there is nothing organic or logical about the naming of living quarters. Jindals seems to have got a little carried away in this exercise. There are single rooms and double rooms, going for as little as Rs 60 per day (rates include rent, food and treatment). Then there are cottages, little semi-detached rooms with pretty, individual gardens and sitting-rooms for Rs 150 per day. Cottages, though they are the nicest of all accommodation at Jindals, don't occupy a very high perch in the pecking order. Because, for the really upwardly mobile, with a penchant for flash and for dishing out Rs 250 per day, there are 'huts': larger, with two bathrooms, a living-room, dressing-room, verandah, all done in objectionable taste, with formica-covered table-tops and



## FIRST PERSON

green walls. But that is not where it ends. For the seriously rich there are 'nests', and it is here that sundry Bir-las, Tatas and Ambanis come to roost. Huge stucco-bungalows, with TV antennae sprouting from their roofs, nests cost Rs 500 per day and are for the big birds only. The nice part about Jindals is that whether you stay at the free ward or a nest, you wait your turn in the same queue for your place in the sauna or whatever.

However, the outdoors is really quite nice. There is an artificial lake created during the monsoons on one side, and a field of vegetables ringed by a cobbled road to walk on. And though one would prefer some of the wild cascades of grass to the manicured lawns and cement buildings, in the early mornings, with the cool nip in the air and the stillness of the dark, even these things are quite nice.

Not so nice are Jindals' tall factory towers spewing noxious gases into the air, just as you've walked your fifth mile of the day, and your lungs feel like Rambo's second cousins. Neither are the pithy little billboards strewn around the grounds with messages that seem to be written by a Confucian dietician gone berserk: "Food taken in disease, feeds the disease, not the body." Or, "Eat only when hungry."

To be sure, the graffiti, signboards and messages on the wall at Jindals give an interesting insight into the nature and the kind of patients who frequent the place. "Please do not argue with doctor, he is the best person to cure you," says one. "Dictation to

doctor will do you no good," says another. While a third at the diet centre, at the end of the food queue, gravely admonishes, "Please do not ask for more food or change of diet."

Whereas, on the one hand, Jindals is perhaps one of the only true classless and caste-free Institutes in the country (you could be rubbing shoulders quite literally in the gymnasium with someone from the free ward or Mrs Gulshan Rai, such is the system), it is true that a majority of the inmates, in fact, do argue with doctors, or are so used to throwing their weight (some of it, at least) around that the regimentation and fasting seems to, at first, bewilder and then depress them.

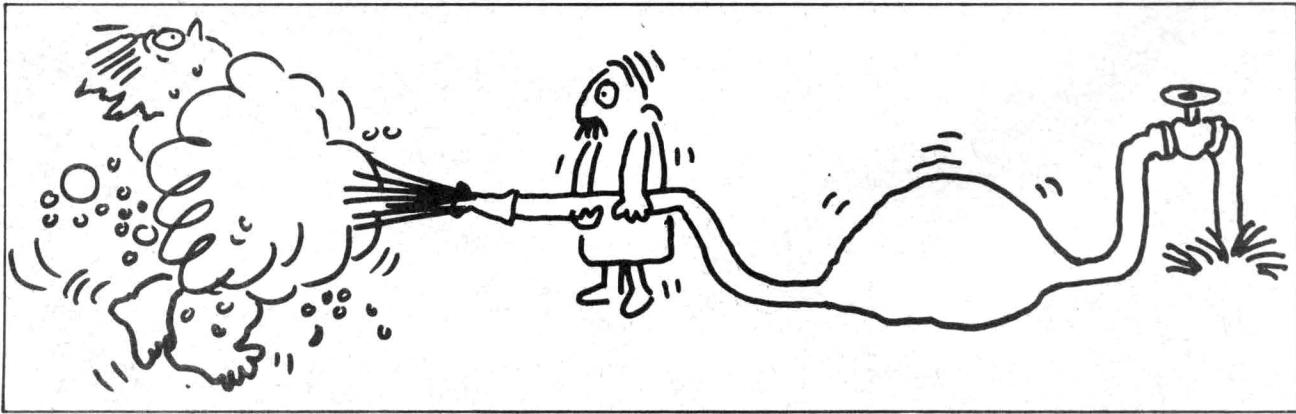
Many inmates reacted in different ways to the depression. Some got rebellious, some gregarious, and some obsessive. Consequently, batches of patients have been periodically rusticated, for lawlessness, breaking the rules and, of course, cheating.

Cheating, I was to learn, meant breaking the diet rules. It could be as innocent as begging for a slice of tomato from a more fortunate member's plate, or, as serious as smuggling in food. During my stay, even I mustered all my charm to wheedle someone out of a slice of cucumber, and as for smuggling, suffice it to say, that for all the lathi-wielding, intimidating *chowkidars*, the food checks at the entrance, the surprise raids on rooms, and the general fear psychosis, the really hungry never really went hungry. To my horror, I discovered empty packets of biscuits, cans of *paan*,

*masala*, and Gujarati savoury snacks under a friend's bed.

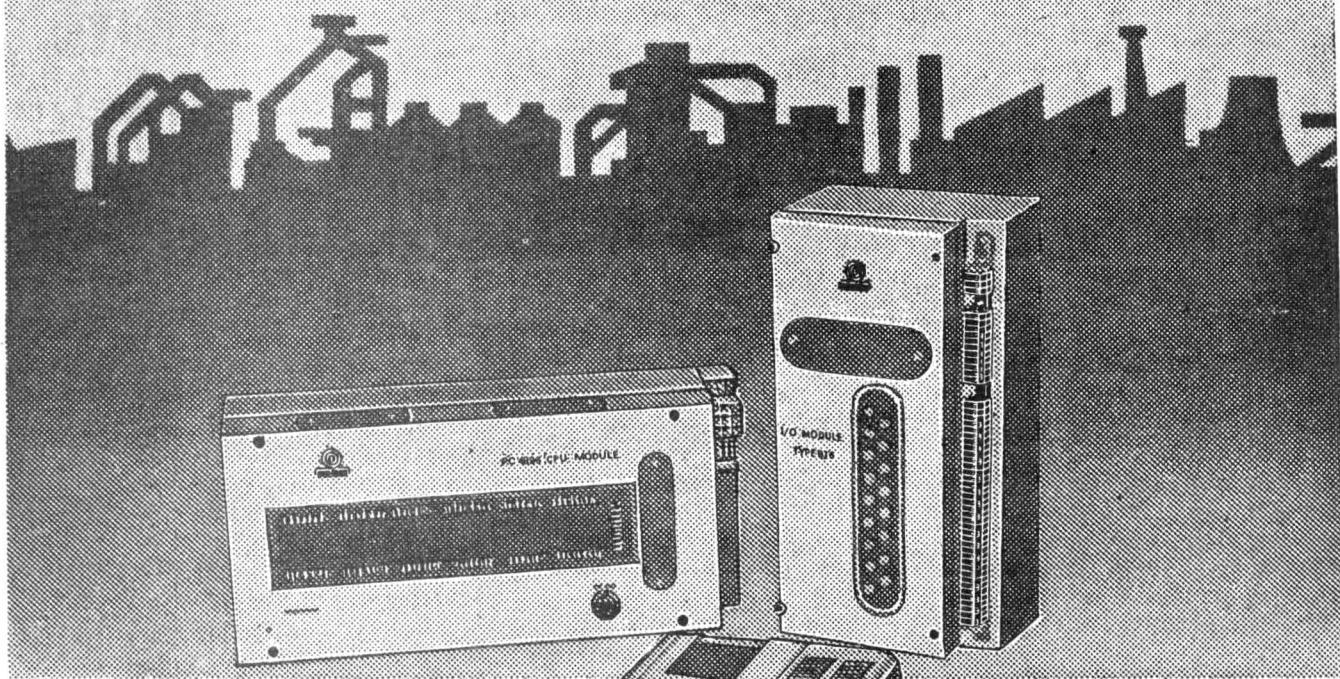
Food becomes an obsession at Jindals: people recall what they ate at the age of three. But sex remains the major topic of interest. During my stay there, a group of young girls and boys, residents for over two to three months, seemed to have got quite obsessive over smutty humour. Jindals is grim about both topics. It is not unusual for a *chowkidar* to rudely knock on your door after eight if you have a friend (or even a husband) in your room. The walls too seem to have been whittled to paper thinness to discourage any hanky-panky. Even in the ladies section, ladies are encouraged to keep their underwear on during the saunas, and the rules state quite clearly: "During fasting, sex is not permitted."

Still, as every repression results in rebellion, millions of hungry taste-buds stalk the nights, while their owners sleep, and people's imaginations run amuck. Boys and girls thrown together begin to imagine they're in love with each other. Crushes develop across gymnasiums, and between yoga classes. Lovers are known to liaison annually at the Institute. One story seems particularly revealing. A young housewife, accompanied by her mother-in-law and a young daughter, developed a reckless passion for a man in an adjoining hut. At night, having stealthily made her way to his hut in the dark, she was overheard by a *chowkidar*. A group of *chowkidars* surrounded the hut, while one shouted for the man to bring out the lady



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## FIRST PERSON

in question. She hid in the bathroom, but emerged finally. The next morning, the lady, her mother-in-law, child and lover were all expelled. Did the *chowkidars* have the right to interfere in a purely adult private matter? Was it any of their business, what the couple did in their free time? Did her mother-in-law tell? Is this story reliable? Well, the last is in grave doubt.

**E**VEN THE CYNICS have to concede that Jindals is run with clockwork efficiency. You enter the treatment section and before the co-ordinator even looks up, she says: "Hut No 8. Sauna in the morning, mud-bath in the evening." This instant recognition is not just reserved for you, but for 200 or so other patients as well, and you begin to wonder how they manage. The wonder increases when, without delay, you are led to the particular room by an attendant and you realise that everything has been kept ready: the machines are prepared, your hot water run to the right temperature, and the room cleared from the last usage.

The PRO informs me that there is a staff of over 200, which includes office-boys, doctors (5), yoga instructors (8), treatment attendants (45-50) and an army of gardeners (over 80). For such a large organisation to operate at such high standards of efficiency, Jindals has been divided into two sections — general administration and clinical. Under general administration, you have departments such as accounts, reception, housekeeping, horticulture, sanitation, security, electricity, water — all the departments without which chaos would ensue. The clinical department consists of treatment, physiotherapy, yoga, gymnastics, the research laboratory and other such functions.

The system operates on a series of checks. If a machine in the treatment room malfunctions, like the powder massage machine, it is the treatment co-ordinator's responsibility to inform the Administrative Officer, who will then despatch a mechanical as well as electrical engineer to have it put into operation again.

Yet, in all my stay there, nothing malfunctioned, no machines blew up, broke down or collapsed from overuse. Everyone was courteous, punctual, (even the nurses who came to give me mud-packs and enemas) no one threw a tantrum, nothing got lost or stolen, no one fell ill and, even though the papers were full of breast-beating women and horror stories of the drought situation in Karnataka, the tubs at Jindals brimmed over.

But there is trouble brewing at Utopia. By my second day, I got the drift. Amongst the long-time, hardcore residents, not even the most deep-reacting cucumber packs could smoothe the frown lines from their faces.

The upshot was that the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), the man who's built up the place, India's leading naturopath, the friend of the famous, the diseased, the overweight, had been fired: just like that.

Dr Murthy, an affable diminutive man with the manner of an absent-minded professor, had gone on leave, and in his absence, on December 4, a meeting was called where the medical staff was informed that he was not returning as CMO.

That a senior doctor should be dismissed in such a cursory manner, is bad enough, but it seems that Dr Murthy's house was guarded by two *chowkidars* who surveyed his every movement, his calls were tapped, and he was given a week's notice to clear out of his residential accommodation, with no alternative jobs or house in sight and five children to be rehabilitated in a new school.

How did such things come to pass in the puritanical, vegetarian, pious milieu of Jindals? There are those who have an almost mystical bond with Dr Murthy. Many young ladies left Jindals early, because he had been fired. "I lost 19 kgs," says one such friend to me, "but the moment Dr Murthy stopped treating me, I started putting it back on!" "I was recovering perfectly from my asthma — and then some other doctor came on my case, and now I find there's no improvement at all," said another.

If insiders are to be believed, Dr Murthy had it coming. Even though he was a soft-spoken, peace-loving man, he just couldn't get along with the management. Because he was gentle and mild-mannered, the management suspected him of being too lenient with the staff, of not firing them. At Jindals, it is important to keep the staff on their toes, and the threat of dismissal probably helps.

One day, having a little time on hand, I tried to start a conversation with the two maids cleaning my bathroom. They got agitated when I asked them their names, and suspected that I was going to complain about something being stolen. One just dropped her brushes and brought her supervisor over to have it out right there.

Certainly, if the CMO can be summarily sacked without so much as a by-your-leave, a bathroom sweeper has a lot to worry about.

**W**HAT OF MY STAY at Jindals? Was it worthwhile, finally? Was there any reason for the fat, famous and beautiful people to go there? Or, was it as bad as some people say? Does it damage one's health? Was it too drastic, too radical, too severe? Was it an eyewash, a fad, a fancy?

I was there ten days in all. On the body workshop scheme. Not so much to lose weight, as to rejuvenate, detoxify and cleanse the system. To plug into nature's natural rhythms — remember?

I woke up each morning at 5.30. I walked three miles. I went for yogic ablutions, for juice (lime-water and honey) at 7. At 7.05, the nurse would come for my enema and mud-packs. At 7.30 I'd leave, towel in hand, for the treatment centre, for the morning session. I'd return and go for yoga, then it would be 'lunch' at 10.30 (more juice) and then a siesta till 1.30. At 1.30, I'd be back at the diet centre for more juice. Then the nurse would be back for more treatment, after which, the 'evening session' would start in the treatment room. At 4 I'd visit the gym, and fight for

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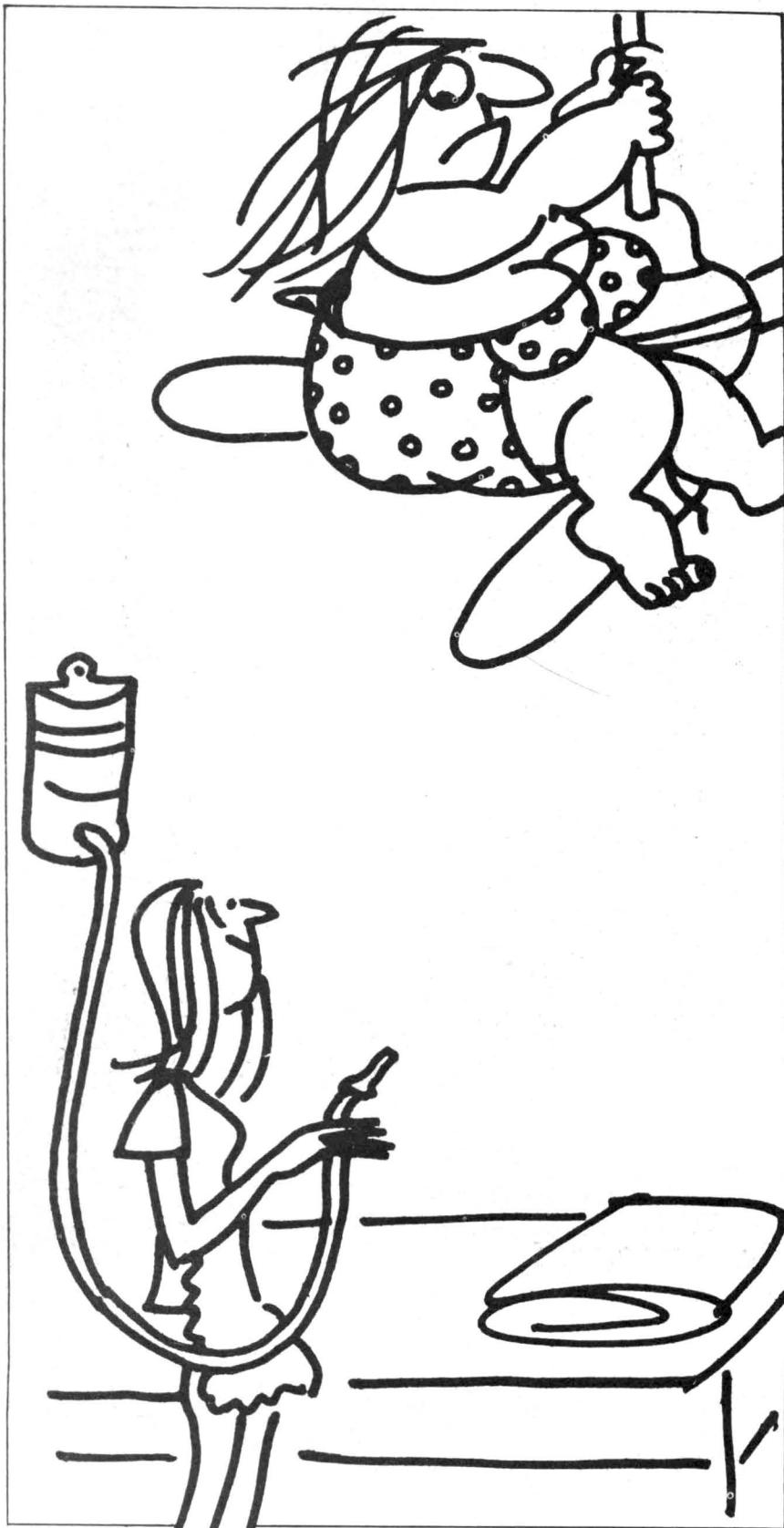
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## FIRST PERSON



a place on the cycle or the jogging-treadmill. At 4.30, it was Jane Fonda workouts, when I'd fix my gaze on the video screen and try and look as alluring as a 40-year-old in skin-fitting leotards with billions stashed away. At 5, my doctor, dietician and lab-specialist would drop in for the daily tête-à-tête — where we'd chalk out my progress, squabble over an extra ounce of buttermilk. Then by 5.30, the day was nearly over. I would walk another three miles. At 8, the nurse would return with another pack — and by 8.30, I'd be in the land of dreams.

This went on for six days. On my seventh day, I was given a banana, an apple and a papaya. I ate the papaya and banana, but found the apple too heavy. On my eighth day, I was given boiled vegetables and soup with two chapattis. I could only eat one. By the tenth day, I was out of Jindals, alone, without my set rules and regulations, free to do what I wanted, exercise my own judgement — even eat meat!

Despite my freedom, I cling to my Jindals diet of honey and lemon juice. I'd lost five kgs and none of my clothes fitted. More important, I felt cleaned — inside out. My skin shone, and my eyes sparkled; every nerve in my body tingled.

It's ten days since Jindals. I've maintained my weight. I've given up tea and coffee. I am, for all practical purposes, a vegetarian — alcohol and aerated waters are a no-no. I nibble at carrots, have developed a radar to seek out the raw foods on a party buffet table. I carry cachets of honey for instant swigs of energy. I do my yoga once a day. I've joined a health club. I hate to admit it, but at parties I feel morally superior to all the other diners making pigs of themselves.

Ever so often, I meet an ex-Jindalite or a friend of someone who's been there, who takes a pot-shot at me by saying, "Oh, but you'll soon go back to your old ways." But till then, all you gourmands, you drunks, you guzzlers of fizzy drinks, and gulpers of coffee, I'm for the good life. You just go ahead and have a good time — indulge, and bulge! ♦

# RAVI SHASTRI

Darling of the Bombay media and a future Indian cricket captain. Can any cricketer have enjoyed such media favour? Especially, says VIDHUSHAK, when he doesn't deserve it?

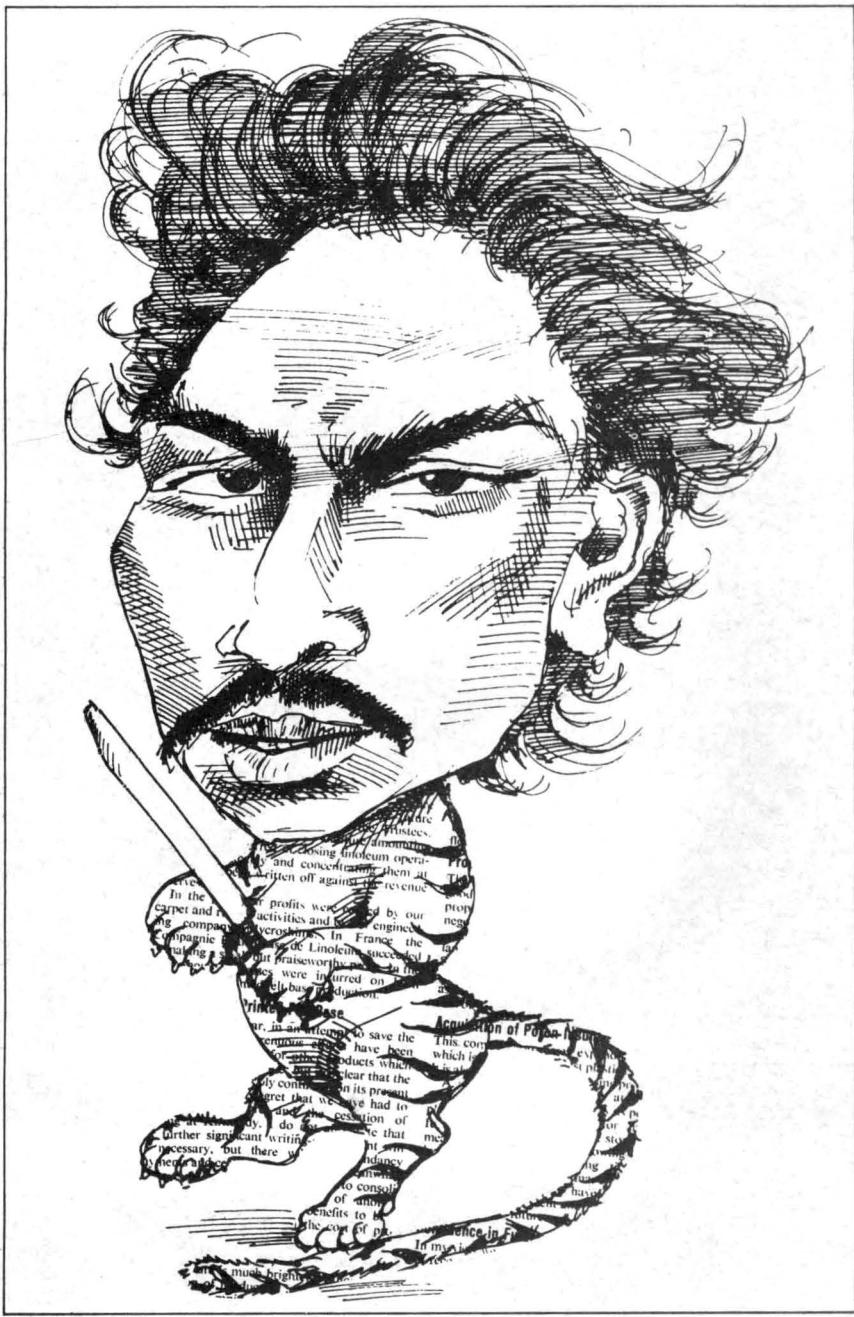
**N**OW THAT THE AFFAIRS of this vast country are being run by what are known as the 'Computer Boys', it is time for this column to turn its attention from paper tigers to paper tiger cubs. But can a cub make this column? Read on and find out for yourselves.

Some time back, a group of tigers spotted a prey, followed its trail and then made the kill after some bitter fighting. They then had their fill and went away. Now, the tiger cub entered the scene and claimed the credit for the kill. Such was the irony of fate that this came to be accepted and the cub was crowned the Champion of Champions.

This is what happened to Ravi Shankar Jaidrath Shastri, darling of the Bombay media and a future Indian cricket captain. During the last Benson & Hedges World Cup tournament in Australia, Kapil Dev, Madan Lal and Roger Binny softened up the top half of the opposition's batting order by bowling out their top batsmen, so that when Shastri came in to bowl, there was little he had to do. It was the same while batting. Srikant, Kapil Dev and occasionally Vengsarkar, undertook all the dangerous work of attacking the bowling right from the start, allowing Shastri to hang on, play his own defensive game, tap out singles, remain unbeaten, boost his average and claim the Audi. Never was the title Champion of Champions so wrongly bestowed. One charitable explanation was that the judges were high on beer!

Phenomenal luck has favoured

*Vidhushak is a regular contributor to this column.*



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## PAPER TIGERS

# Very soon the paper tiger cub will captain India and I am not looking forward to it. Expect no positive, result-oriented leadership from Ravi Shastri.

Shastri from the beginning of his career. At the end of the 1980-81 tour of Australia, when offspinner Shival Yadav was injured, captain Sunil Gavaskar did not ask for another bowler of the same type as a replacement. Instead, he insisted that his Bombay *chela* be flown over.

Shastri had a successful debut against the New Zealanders who are susceptible to spins. From the start, it was obvious that he was 'special' to his captain. He was carefully nursed, his place in the team was assured (a favour not extended to many more talented players) and he quickly gained confidence. The paper tiger cub had tasted success and was purring in satisfaction.

Shastri was only following the tradition of Bombay-born players who are regarded as special in Indian cricket, even if they are in the category of Suru Nayak, Ghulam Parkar, and now Raju Kulkarni. In the past, despite frequent failures, Dilip Vengsarkar finally consolidated his position. But what happened to Surinder Amarnath, Brijesh Patel or Tamil Nadu's T E Srinivasan? The Bombay clique of Wankhede-Umrigar-Gavaskar functioned effectively, the Bombay press boosted its 'stalwarts', and everyone had a nice time.

Shastri flourished in this kind of atmosphere. Gavaskar favoured him with the choice of ends, he got long bowling stints and finally, during the Pakistan trip of 1982-83, managed to oust Dilip Doshi, who was always brought on to bowl against well-set batsmen. Gavaskar would have Shastri in the team at any cost, if not as a bowler, then as an opener! After the series had been decided in Pakistan's favour and the tension lessened, Shastri was promoted to the opener's slot, displacing poor Srikanth who definitely deserved another chance.

The paper tiger cub continued to be petted and adored but when Kapil Dev took over, there was a slight change. Though a member of the team, Shastri did not make the final XI for the semi-finals and finals of the 1983 World Cup. Dropped for the first Test against Zaheer's Pakistanis, he was back for the second Test and has carried on since then, being elevated to the position of vice-captain for the recent Sri Lanka and Australian tours.

Shastri has acquired a temperamental nature and a kind of dubious defence-oriented talent, solely because of the captain's backing which gave him the supreme confidence that he would never have to worry about his position on the team.

In Shastri, Gavaskar found someone who shared his way of thinking. He was always prepared to put his own interests above those of the team. Shastri plays cricket for individual achievements like the Audi. If the team wins, well and good; if it doesn't, well, who cares, so long as I have my prize money or the Man-of-the-Match award?

Time and again, this happened in the Benson & Hedges matches where the real champions were Srikanth, Kapil, Binny, Madan Lal and Sadanand Vishwanath. Had these men played like Shastri, we would not have won. In the semi-finals against New Zealand, Shastri plodded along miserably as the match was slipping out of our hands. Fortunately, he got out: Kapil entered, struck some mighty blows and, along with Vengsarkar, won the game.

A champion of champions, particularly in one-day cricket, should have the ability to win a match on his own. Viv Richards has done this time and again.

Playing for personal glory has

been the bane of Indian cricket from the days of Merchant and Hazare. Who can forget Shastri's crawl for a 100 against England in 1984? It was torture for the thousands who had paid hard-earned money and deserved something better than watching the achievement of a century by someone who batted while looking at the calendar, not the clock. He crawled again in the recent Test match at Melbourne, when a more positive approach would have won the game for India. It's not the weather, nor the umpires or Kapil's captaincy that cost India the series against Australia. It's the slow, selfish, personal gain-motivated batting of Shastri, Gavaskar, Vengsarkar and Amarnath. With such players, even a Clive Lloyd will not be able to force a win.

And that brings us to the most hilarious, bizarre episode involving the much-adored paper tiger cub — the six-sixers non-event which bracketed him with the immortal Sobers. Sobers's feat was in the first innings of a match which was very much alive, against Malcolm Nash. Shastri did it in the second innings of a dead contest, when they were going through the motions of batting and bowling. And who was this Tilak Raj who was hit about like this? Was it all pre-arranged? It's simple to infer that a batsman who hits six sixers in an over will never score at an average of ten runs an hour. The Bombay episode must remain one of the mysteries of the game.

Very soon the paper tiger cub will captain India and I am not looking forward to that. Perhaps we may see 'timeless Tests' if at all we are interested in a result. To expect positive, aggressive, result-oriented leadership from Shastri would be like expecting Dr Ashok Mitra to sing the glories of Indira Gandhi. ♦

# THE LEGEND OF PHOOLAN

BY JON BRADSHAW

## MY QUEST

**The legend says she is beautiful. Alluring. Ruthless. Vengeful. The bandit queen of the Chambal. It was this legend that possessed an American journalist and made him travel across the world in search of the legendary Phoolan Devi. This is the story of his quest.**

FOR PHOOLAN DEVI HAD POSSESSED ME LONG enough. Seduced by tales of her derring-do, I desperately wanted to meet the bandit queen who had been described to me as an avenging angel, more famous in fact than Robin Hood in legend, a beautiful *femme fatale* who had butchered twice as many men as she had bedded; and, by all accounts, she had been a wanton woman.

I had travelled halfway across the world to find her. Sitting now in the office of the superintendent of prisons in the ancient city of Gwalior, some 300 kilometres south of New Delhi, I waited impatiently for Phoolan to appear. Only moments before, the superintendent had confided that although it was early afternoon, she had decided to bathe and change her clothes. Phoolan had never met an American journalist before, he said with a thin official smile, and she wished to make a favourable impression.

A wooden fan spun uneasily overhead, and thick curtains hung from the windows and doors to repel the harsh light and the dust that swirled through the air like volcanic ash. During Phoolan's 18 months in prison, she had received a continual flow of visitors — movie producers, policemen and politicians, friends and relatives. Almost daily, loud gibbering crowds of the idle and the curious gathered beyond the jail's high walls, hoping to catch a glimpse of her as she strolled through the open prison yard with the indifferent aplomb of a potentate.

*This article has been extracted from Esquire, October 1985.*



Laughing, the policeman who had arranged our interview referred to Phoolan as Gwalior's most important tourist attraction.

Moments later the door to the interior jail was opened and, preceded by a burly mustachioed sergeant of the guard, Phoolan Devi entered the room. "Be wary of her," the policeman whispered. "She's as cold-blooded as they come, but she'll charm the pants off you if she can."

**I**HAD FIRST HEARD of Phoolan Devi some time ago in Australia. Having recently completed a lengthy book and in search of respite and recreation, I had flown to the Land of Oz to visit my friend Richard Neville.

The 40-year-old Australian was what he liked to call a knockabout nomad, a man who, because he had once been prosecuted unjustly (during an infamous trial in London's Old Bailey), tended to sympathise with those outside the law. Following his departure from England, Neville had wandered across Europe, through Afghanistan, and into India. It was in Delhi that Neville had first heard of Phoolan Devi, and now, some years later, he referred to her as 'a bloody hellion, mate, a combination of Angela Davis and Jesse James'.

Astonished that I had never heard of her, Neville sighed, somewhat complacently, and said, "Cobber, next to Indira Gandhi, Phoolan Devi is the most famous woman in India." Then, reaching into a bookshelf, he pulled out a thick scrapbook bursting with newspaper clippings and photographs pertaining to a variety of exotic people and places that appealed to him. He extracted an untidy file entitled 'Phoolan Devi, Bandit Queen'.

The clippings referred to Phoolan's beauty, her cruelty, her nymphomania, her ultimate surrender. The *Bangkok World* reported the fact that as a girl Phoolan had been raped repeatedly by a group of Indian policemen. Newspaper headlines heralded her as *Lady Killer*, as *Mistress Of Murder*, and an Australian tabloid went to the extent of proclaiming, *Good Looks Blamed For Notorious Life Of Crime*.

"But the tale to which I tips my lid," said Neville, "is the one that describes how Phoolan and her ten-man gang drove into Delhi one afternoon to rob a major bank. While her men looted the bank Phoolan climbed up to the roof of the building and sang arias from popular Indian films to the crowds who had assembled in the streets below to hear her sing." He grinned. "I'm told even the cops were mesmerised."

"How often do planes leave for Delhi?" I asked. "I've got to meet her."

Neville laughed. "You will," he said. "You son of a bitch."

**W**hile her men looted the bank, Phoolan climbed up to the roof of the building and sang arias from popular Hindi films to the crowds who had assembled in the streets below. Even the police were mesmerised.

**T**HE SIGNS were not auspicious. I arrived at Delhi's Palam Airport at 2 a.m., only 16 hours after Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards. A strict curfew had been put into effect, which meant, I was told, languishing in this scruffy airport till dawn.

One of the more impressionable drivers, finally relented to drive me into town for the not inconsiderable baksheesh of Rs 300.

The driver dropped me off on Janpath Road, and I walked the few hundred yards to the Sikh-owned Imperial Hotel. Skirting an overturned taxi that was still in flames, I hurried through the archway and into the hotel, where I registered and retired to my room.

Kalyan Mukherjee, the contact name I got from Neville, arrived in the bar at noon. A slim, bearded youth from West Bengal, he spoke the gruff, rough-and-tumble English of a man who had spent his childhood in sleazy cinemas watching spaghetti westerns. He insisted on taking me to lunch at the Moti Mahal, a rowdy restaurant near the thieves' market in Old Delhi. We took a taxi, and as we chugged through the still and ominous city streets Kalyan explained that he had little time, that he had a train to catch that afternoon, but he had dispatched a telegram to a deputy superintendent of police in Gwalior announcing my arrival.

Like the rest of Delhi, the Moti Mahal was nearly empty. "I hope you don't believe our city-slicker press," Kalyan rasped between mouthfuls of food. "Those guys hate Phoolan Devi. Truly. They created her myth, and now they're furious because they can't blow it away."

Kalyan grinned. "But you want the facts, I suppose? Phoolan Devi comes from a small village in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Her name means 'goddess of the flowers'. She grew up speaking Bundelkhani, a low dialect of Hindi. Her father, a poor man, a Shudra of the Mallah — the ferryman and fisherman subcaste — worked as a farmer on a small plot — not much more than two acres of land.

"When Phoolan was 11, her father made arrangements for her to marry a guy called Puttilal, a widower, a Mallah from a nearby village. Phoolan told me that Puttilal was 28, 'an old man, and I was just a kid in knickers'. But she went along with her parents' wishes anyway.

"After the marriage ceremony Phoolan stayed in her own village, because it's only when a girl reaches puberty that she actually goes to live with her husband. But a few weeks later Puttilal insisted she come immediately. Despite Phoolan's father's reluctance, an arrangement was made — Puttilal returned a portion of Phoolan's dowry — and she was carted off to her husband's village lock, stock and barrel.

"'About a week later,' as Phoolan put it when I met her,

'Puttilal behaved improperly to me in the night,' which meant of course that he'd raped her, and when she screamed, he beat the shit out of her. Phoolan's mother criticised him publicly, and the village council told Phoolan's parents to retrieve the dowry. But Puttilal refused to return it. He claimed he'd been humiliated. A few months later, he married again, this time his niece, who was already pregnant with his child.

"For the next seven years Phoolan lived at home with her family, but the news that she'd been deflowered had reached the ears of village gossips long before. They ridiculed the poor girl unmercifully. One of them, Suresh, the headman's son — I guess he thought she was an easy mark — whispered about her to his friends, and now and then he tried to embrace her. Phoolan always slapped him and pushed him away, and he swore revenge.

"A few weeks later Phoolan went to a nearby village to visit her younger sister, Ramkali. In Phoolan's absence, a robbery was committed in her village, and Suresh put the blame on Phoolan. Because Suresh was the headman's son, the cops believed him. He must have imagined that Phoolan would go to jail, that she'd be beaten, that she'd become less headstrong, more amenable to his advances.

"When Phoolan returned to her village, she was arrested, thrown into jail, and the cops kissed her, fondled her breasts, and beat her. Now, Phoolan wasn't the first girl to have been sexually abused by the police. In the Chambal Valley and in the Bundelkhand, villagers fear them even more than they do dacoits."

"Dacoits?"

"Yeah. Outlaws. Bandits. Anyway, Phoolan was eventually released, and in, I think it was July of 1979, there was a full moon, a dacoit called Vikram Mallah and his gang crept into Phoolan's village disguised as policemen. Phoolan was sleeping when they burst into her house. Vikram woke her and dragged her from her bed. 'So you were insolent enough to slap the headman's son,' he shouted while slapping her. 'I've been told you keep yourself away from men. I will teach you what a man is. I am Vikram. I am your master.' And then they took her away."

**A**S THE TRAIN pulled into South Delhi's Nizam-ud-Din station, I took out my notebook and prepared to write a letter to Richard Neville in Australia. Not only had I promised to send him up-to-date reports of my journey, but it would help me to sort out the details of Phoolan's life while they were still fresh in my mind.

"My dear Neville,

"In my note of yesterday, I think I brought you up to the point at which Phoolan was kidnapped by the dacoit

**When Phoolan returned to her village, she was arrested, thrown into jail and the cops kissed her, fondled her breasts and beat her. Phoolan wasn't the first girl to have been sexually abused by the police.**

Vikram Mallah. By 1979, Vikram was the leader of the most troublesome gang in the trans-Yamuna tract of Jalaun. He was young, only 26, and a bounty of Rs 10,000 had been placed on his head. Vikram was clever and was supported by his fellow castemen, the Mallahs, who possessed a hawk's eye for faces and a bat's ear for accents. The Mallahs shielded Vikram from the police.

"For the first months of captivity, Phoolan longed to escape, but the gang watched her carefully and did not permit her to carry a weapon.

"There is an Indian adage that makes an outrageous claim: Love always leads to ruin. And yet that is the fate suffered by Phoolan Devi from the moment she found

herself warming to Vikram. Explaining her change of heart to Kalyan, she said, 'Vikram was very kind to me, and slowly, I fell in love with him. He was seductive and I accepted Vikram as my husband.'

"What happened afterwards now seems to have been inevitable. Vikram taught Phoolan how to shoot a gun, a 12-bore, single-barrelled shotgun, at which she soon became expert.

"In December 1979 the gang raided the village of Gufiakhar in Etawah. They had been in the village for only 20 minutes when a police patrol of some dozen men turned up unexpectedly. A gun-fight ensued in which three constables lost their lives. As the dacoits retreated, Vikram suddenly leaped up on the village well and, as a kind of salute to Phoolan, shouted through his megaphone: 'This is the gang of Phoolan Devi.' The next day a warrant was issued for Phoolan's arrest and a bounty of Rs 2,000 was placed on her head. Back in the safety of their camp, the dacoits shouted: 'Long live Putli Bai. Long live Phoolan Devi' — Putli Bai being a reference to the famous bandit queen of the '50s. The gang, at last, had accepted her, and Phoolan was thrilled.

"It was here, in the arid ravines that Phoolan's fortunes, if one can call them that, began to sour. Some weeks after the raid at Gufiakhar, a new recruit joined Vikram's gang — a young girl named Kusma Nain. A Shudra of the lowly barber subcaste, Kusma soon became romantically involved with a gang member who was of the noble warrior caste — a Thakur — named Sriram Singh.

"Vikram opposed the liaison. Shortly after it began he beat Kusma in front of everyone and told her she would have to end the affair or leave the gang. Two nights later, near the small village of Baijamau, Phoolan and Vikram ate their evening meal, and afterwards Phoolan walked out beyond the camp to relieve herself. She had not gone far when she heard shots. Rushing back to the camp, she was told by Sriram that they were being attacked by a police

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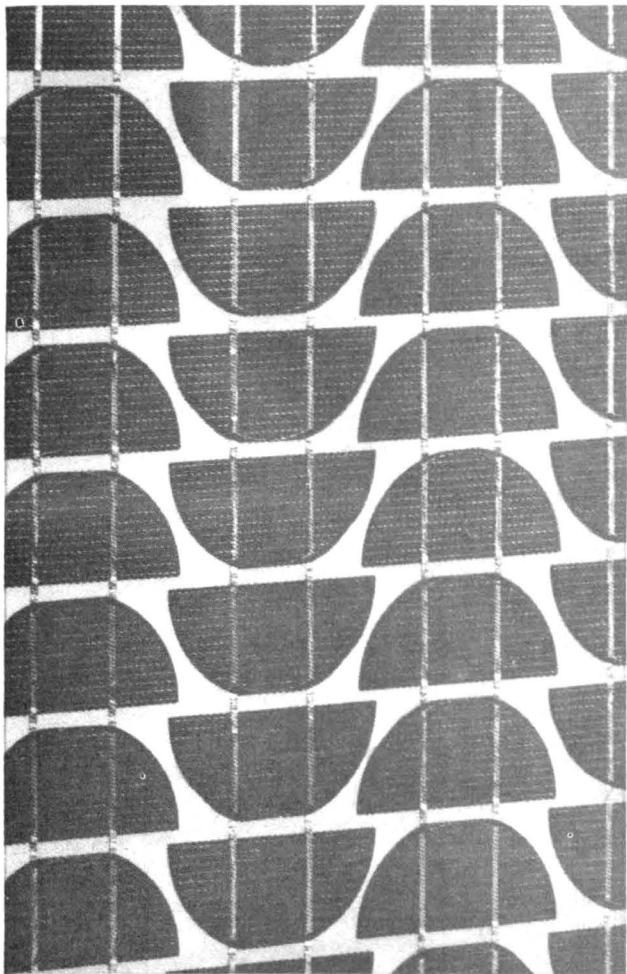
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patrol. The gang raced down to the Yamuna river where their boats were moored, and it was only when sitting in one of them that Phoolan realised Vikram was missing. She tried to return to shore, but Sriram clubbed her with an oar, declaring that he had killed Vikram, that he was sick of taking orders from scum, from a fisherman. 'You have been spared because my brother Lalaram wants you for himself,' he shouted.

"They sailed down the dark river for several miles, stopping finally at a village called Behmai, where Phoolan was held captive. She was locked inside a filthy hut. That first night she cowered on the floor, crying out for Vikram. Shortly after midnight the door opened and a man whom she could not see came in. He beat her first, and then, as she lay on the floor, ripped off her clothes. Phoolan screamed, striking out at him, but he was too strong. Holding her down, the stranger raped her. They came in one by one after that — tall, silent Thakur men — and raped her until at last Phoolan lost consciousness.

"For the next three weeks, Phoolan was raped several times a night, and she submitted silently, turning her face to the wall. Some time later — she had lost all sense of time — the door opened and bright sunlight poured in. Blinded, she put her arm across her face, and a loud voice summoned her outside. Sriram and Lalaram Singh and a group of Thakurs, some of whom she felt she recognised, stood around the village well. There were no women anywhere. Sriram ordered Phoolan to fetch water for him from the well, and when she refused, he ripped off her clothes and kicked her savagely. At last she limped to the well while her tormentors laughed and spat at her. The naked girl was then dragged back to the hut and raped again.

"That night, the 23rd of her captivity, Phoolan heard a knock at the door and Santosh Pandit, a priest from the nearby village of Simra, crept in. The priest and Phoolan were old friends. Putting his arm around her, he said, 'I know what they have done to you. Everyone in the village knows. But there was nothing I could do till now. The Singh brothers finally left Behmai this morning and the villagers are all asleep. Come, let me get you out of here.' Phoolan began to cry hysterically. The priest carried her outside — 'She was as light as a sack of feathers and bone,' he recalled — and took the girl by bullock-cart to Pandri, one of Phoolan's contact villages where, he knew, she would be nursed and safely concealed.

"One last aside: for the next month Phoolan recuperated. She mourned for Vikram, her slain lover, and plotted her revenge. You can imagine how she must have felt, but could you have guessed what form her vendetta would take?"

**"She was cruel. She was passionate. She was filled with a terrible rage. She was nearly six feet tall and her hair was the colour of dried blood. I was dizzy with desire." Thus was the legend of Phoolan Devi, the bandit queen, created.**

**I** SPOTTED Shiva Muhti immediately — the seediest character in the bedraggled, fly-blown crowd of waiting passengers at Morena station. A knave if I ever saw one who when not running guns, masqueraded as a country lawyer.

Muhti claimed to have sold guns to Phoolan's gang — shotguns, revolvers, and Browning automatics — and that they had become, if not friends, casual acquaintances.

As we left Morena, rattling through the hilly wastes of the Chambal Valley, Muhti described the swift and violent course Phoolan's vendetta had taken.

Having recovered from her ordeal, Phoolan trekked deep into the ravines to Gulaoli, the village of a famous dacoit named Baba Mustaqim. She offered to join him, but Mustaqim, a Sunni Muslim, did not approve of unattached women in his gang. "I will accept you only if one of my men wishes to harbour you," he said. Phoolan looked around the campfire at the more than 20 bandits sitting there, but there was only silence. Finally one of them rose, a tall, dark man with flowing locks and a well-groomed moustache and beard.

His name was Man Singh Yadav. A Shudra of the milkman subcaste, the 27-year-old dacoit was born in the Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh. Phoolan liked him immediately. Less than a week later, following an altercation with Mustaqim, Phoolan and Man Singh decamped and formed a new gang.

During the next few months Phoolan and Man Singh terrorised the ravines, perpetrating dozens of robberies and kidnappings. Her defilement at Behmai had turned Phoolan into a merciless woman. "She was cruel," said Muhti. "She was passionate. She was filled with a terrible rage, like a deep thirst that cannot be slaked. I remember going to her camp on the other side of the Chambal river to sell her guns and ammunition. She wasn't there. She was out on a robbery. I had never seen her before, and when she returned my heart went to my head. I was dizzy with desire. She was nearly six feet tall, believe me, at least, and her hair was the colour of dried blood. I swear to you, on the head of my son, a night with that woman would be like drinking the most delectable and deadly poison." At this, Muhti hungrily smacked his lips.

In early February 1981 four of the most powerful Chambal gangs, some 80 dacoits in all, gathered on the east bank of the Yamuna to discuss the appropriate punishment to be meted out to the Singh brothers for the murder of Vikram Mallah. It was decided that these Thakur dogs, as they were called, had acted dishonourably, and they were sentenced to death. Summoning their informers from all the nearby villages, the gangs were told that Sriram and

## ENCOUNTER

Lalaram Singh would be in Behmai in five days' time. And so it was agreed that a Shudra gang led by Phoolan Devi would strike the village of Behmai on February 14, a date that would become India's version of the St Valentine's Day Massacre.

At first, Behmai villagers mistook the dacoits for just another platoon of the antidacoit police force that patrols the area, since all but one of them were dressed in police uniforms. That afternoon Phoolan wore her favourite disguise — a peaked pea cap and cartridge belt, North Star tennis shoes, and a khaki uniform with the Ashoka emblem on the shoulders, two gold stars on the epaulettes and a small plastic badge on the left breast with her name inscribed in Hindi. It was the uniform of a senior superintendent of police.

Phoolan leaped up onto the village well, the same well from which she had been ordered to fetch water by Sriram Singh, and, brandishing her .315 Mauser rifle, shouted through her megaphone: "Round up all the men in the village. I want every one of them." The gang split into three groups, the first standing guard over the 26 Thakur men who had been herded into the village square, the second patrolling the main northern road, while the third group drifted through the mud-and-brick huts looting valuables and cooking utensils and searching for any additional male Thakurs who had concealed themselves. As the villagers pleaded for their lives, Phoolan screamed: "If anybody interferes or resists, he will be shot down like a dog." And Man shouted: "Today is the day we take our revenge!"

When all the male villagers had been assembled before her, Phoolan looked carefully at each of them. "Where are Sriram and Lalaram Singh?" she shouted. "Where have you hidden the bastards?" Suddenly, there was the sound of shots. One of the Thakurs, armed with a rifle, had climbed into a nearby tamarind tree and had begun to fire on the dacoits. Dropping the megaphone, Phoolan aimed her rifle at the tree and shot the Thakur in the leg. He fell to the ground, then rose on one knee and begged Phoolan for mercy. Peering closely at him, Phoolan thought she recognised him as one of her rapists; he had certainly tormented her as she had been paraded naked through the square. Without hesitating, Phoolan shot him through the other leg.

As he toppled to the ground Phoolan smiled and began to taunt him — singing the lyrics of a song from *Mera Gaon, Mera Desh*: "Maar diya jaye. Ya chod diya jaye," she sang. Looking up at her, the Thakur cringed, and Phoolan shot him in the face. He flopped back on the dusty ground.

The 26 villagers were then driven towards the river, where they were ordered to kneel in a row with their hands raised. The dacoits lifted their rifles, then hesitated, and

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Phoolan shouted, "Kill them. They're nothing but Thakurs." The kneeling villagers began to moan. And then the firing started.

One of the survivors was to claim the shooting had lasted for 20 minutes, another said 30, but that was almost certainly an exaggeration. When the cordite fumes had cleared, however, 20 of the Thakur villagers lay dead, their bodies sprawling in and out of the bloody river. Huddled in their huts, the Thakur wives sobbed and beat their breasts and Phoolan shouted, "This is only the beginning. I'm coming back for Sriram and Lalaram." And then, waving to her men, Phoolan led them from the village.

In Behmai, sitting on the raised stone-columned well from which Phoolan had begun her rampage, Shiva Muhti and I could see the hut in which she had been violated; the mud-brick hovels in which the Behmai survivors, who had subsequently shaved their heads in mourning, lived; and beyond, the murky Yamuna river where their Thakur relatives had been slain. Even now, and well after the event, Behmai seemed a forlorn and haunted place.

**T**HE 45-YEAR-OLD A N Pathak was the most decorated police officer in India. He had been involved in police encounters in which more than a hundred dacoits were killed; he had shot 24 of them himself. And for the past three years Pathak had been the town's deputy inspector of police.

The morning after I arrived in Gwalior, Pathak and I drove by jeep to the Chambal Valley — 'Phoolan's lair', Pathak called it. The Chambal Valley, covering an area of 8,000 square miles, lies in the extreme north-western portion of Madhya Pradesh, forming a boundary with the adjacent states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan; it is India's last remaining bandit country. There is a belief that the Chambal river, which loops down through Madhya Pradesh like a hangman's noose, bestows on those who live on its banks a natural streak of rebellion. It is called the River of Revenge.

The jagged ravines stretched out before us as far as the eye could see, and it seemed to me that one might easily conceal a whole army there. "Is that how Phoolan managed to elude the police for so long?" I said.

"Oh, Phoolan was a wily one," said Pathak, almost admiringly, and there was a trace of regret in his voice that he had not been her adversary. He implied that they would have been worthy foes.

"In the weeks following Behmai," he said, "Phoolan split up her gang. They travelled through the ravines in twos and threes to escape detection. They made forced marches of up to 20 kilometres a day, making their pre-

## ENCOUNTER

sence known in one village, then moving rapidly cross-country to confuse the police. Classic guerrilla tactics. Once or twice a week, the gang reconvened, slipping through the night to plunder landowners and rich shopkeepers, to kidnap wealthy farmers — and killing any policemen who got in their way. By the end of 1981, Phoolan was wanted for nearly 70 associated crimes involving robbery, kidnapping, assault and murder, and a bounty of Rs 25,000 was placed on her head. On two occasions she was nearly caught, but Phoolan led a cat's life and she always escaped."

During this period police officials did not even know what she looked like. Ultimately they released a photograph of Phoolan to the Indian newspapers, which the Associated Press transmitted to the rest of the world. It was subsequently discovered that the photograph was a composite of pictures of a well-known Indian actress and Phoolan's younger sister Ramkali.

Following Behmai, Phoolan became a famous woman. The Indian press mythologised her; ballads were composed, the lyrics of which usually asserted that Phoolan had sacrificed everything for love. Clay statues of her were hawked in Chambal towns and villages for 10 to 12 rupees apiece and, according to *The Times Of India*, sold 'like hot cakes'. In urban India, Phoolan suddenly became a symbol of the new woman, depicted as a brash Amazon who had risen above her caste and the traditionally subservient position of the Indian female.

Hidden deep in the Chambal ravines, Phoolan was happily unaware of her fame. Nor did she know that the Uttar Pradesh state home minister had threatened his senior officers with dire punishment if Phoolan and her gang were not captured within 15 days. But the 15 days passed, and Phoolan remained at liberty. She would be a fugitive for the next two years, and despite numerous official 'sightings', Phoolan seemed to have disappeared.

"During that period," said Pathak, "a superintendent of police for the Bhind district in Madhya Pradesh called Rajendra Chaturvedi was making every effort to contact Phoolan in the ravines. He believed that giving dacoits an attractive alternative to certain death (in this case surrender) was a more effective means of clearing up the dacoit problem than spending vast sums of state funds to hunt them down. And I agreed."

"But why would Phoolan have surrendered?" I asked. "Surely, by then, she must have believed she would elude the police forever?"

"Surrender was the *only* solution. And Phoolan knew it. Life in the ravines is gruelling. Few dacoits live to see 30. Hungry. Huddling in caves during the long monsoons. Furtive. Pressed and pursued." He shook his head. "A rat's

**Finally, the police released a photograph of Phoolan which the Associated Press transmitted to the rest of the world. It was really a composite of pictures of a well-known actress and Phoolan's sister.**

life is preferable."

Through Chambal informants Superintendent Rajendra Chaturvedi arranged a clandestine meeting with Phoolan. Travelling all night by foot and motorcycle, he was led to her camp deep in the ravines. Phoolan awaited him and listened quietly to his proposal. When he had finished, she exploded: "You ass-licker. Do you really think you can just come and ask me to surrender? I am Phoolan Devi. I could kill you now."

But Chaturvedi was a patient man. The Superintendent arranged a second meeting for the following month, and in the intervening weeks Phoolan almost lost her life in two separate police encounters. At the second meeting she finally agreed to surrender, providing the Madhya Pradesh police comply with all her written conditions: that she not be hanged; that she be granted the status of a political prisoner and be guaranteed three meals a day in jail; that she not be handcuffed and that her cases pending in Uttar Pradesh — where her safety was not assured — be tried in a special court in Madhya Pradesh; that her family be given new accommodations in Madhya Pradesh; and finally, that her cow and goats be transferred to Madhya Pradesh as well. "If you keep your vows, I'll keep mine and give myself up with dignity," she said.

And so, on February 12, 1983, Phoolan's nine-man gang formally surrendered at the Special Armed Forces Ground in Bhind, a market town some 75 kilometres from Gwalior. A 23-foot-high wooden platform had been erected for the ceremony, and at Phoolan's insistence, framed portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and the awesome, ten-armed goddess Durga had been placed near the microphones. Shortly after nine that morning Phoolan, Man Singh a step behind, mounted the high platform — a red woollen shawl draped over her khaki uniform, a red bandanna around her head — and placed her cartridge belt and her .315 Mauser rifle before the garlanded portraits of Gandhi and Durga. Rising, she faced the large crowd that had gathered to see her, placing her hands together and raising them high in salute. The crowd began to clap and cheer, but one of them, a Thakur student, rushed towards the platform shouting: "This is not the surrender of the dacoits, but that of the state minister." The police dragged him away.

Moments later, Phoolan, Man Singh and the rest of the gang were escorted to a waiting bus. As the bus pulled away, lurching south under armed escort to the Gwalior Central Jail, Phoolan Devi, a faint smile on her face, waved shyly to the adoring crowd.

**P**ATHAK had made arrangements for me to meet Phoolan that afternoon, and we returned by jeep to Gwalior. As we entered the superintendent's of-



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# PREMIER 118 NE



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## ENCOUNTER

sence known in one village, then moving rapidly cross-country to confuse the police. Classic guerrilla tactics. Once or twice a week, the gang reconvened, slipping through the night to plunder landowners and rich shopkeepers, to kidnap wealthy farmers — and killing any policemen who got in their way. By the end of 1981, Phoolan was wanted for nearly 70 associated crimes involving robbery, kidnapping, assault and murder, and a bounty of Rs 25,000 was placed on her head. On two occasions she was nearly caught, but a cat's life and she always

During this period, officials did not even know what she looked like. Ultimately, a photograph of her was published in Indian newspapers, and the Associated Press transmitted it to the rest of the world. It was really a composite of

Following Behn's lead, The Indian press mythologized the lyrics of which reflected everything that faced everything for Phoolan in Chambal towns and, according to *The Times*, in urban India, Phoolan was a new woman, depicted above her caste and above the Indian female

Hidden deep in the hills, Phoolan was completely unaware of her surroundings. In the Pradeshi state home, she was surrounded by uncouth, uncouthers with dire purpose. She was not captured with difficulty, but Phoolan remained

the next two years, and despite numerous official 'sightings', Phoolan seemed to have disappeared.

"During that period," said Pathak, "a superintendent of police for the Bhind district in Madhya Pradesh called Rajendra Chaturvedi. He was making every effort to contact Phoolan in the ravines. He believed that giving dacoits an attractive alternative to certain death (in this case surrender) was a more effective means of clearing up the dacoit problem than spending vast sums of state funds to hunt them down. And I agreed."

"But why would Phoolan have surrendered?" I asked. "Surely, by then, she must have believed she would elude the police forever?"

"Surrender was the *only* solution. And Phoolan knew it. Life in the ravines is gruelling. Few dacoits live to see 30. Hungry. Huddling in caves during the long monsoons. Furtive. Pressed and pursued." He shook his head. "A rat's

**Finally, the police released a photograph of Phoolan which the Associated Press transmitted to the rest of the world. It was really a composite of**

life is preferable."

Through Chambal informants, Superintendent Rajendra Chaturvedi arranged a clandestine meeting with Phoolan. Travelling all night by foot and motorcycle, he was led to her camp deep in the ravines. Phoolan awaited him and listened quietly to his proposal. When he had finished, she exploded: "You ass-licker. Do you really think you can just come and ask me to surrender? I am Phoolan Devi. I could kill you now."

But Chaturvedi was a patient

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head — and placed her cartridge belt and her rifle before the garlanded portraits of Gandhi and Durga. Rising, she faced the large crowd that had gathered to see her, placing her hands together and raising them high in salute. The crowd began to clap and cheer, but one of them, a Thakur student, rushed towards the platform shouting: "This is not the surrender of the dacoits, but that of the state minister." The police dragged him away.

Moments later, Phoolan, Man Singh and the rest of the gang were escorted to a waiting bus. As the bus pulled away, lurching south under armed escort to the Gwalior Central Jail, Phoolan Devi, a faint smile on her face, waved shyly to the adoring crowd.

**P**ATHAK had made arrangements for me to meet Phoolan that afternoon, and we returned by jeep to Gwalior. As we entered the superintendent's of-



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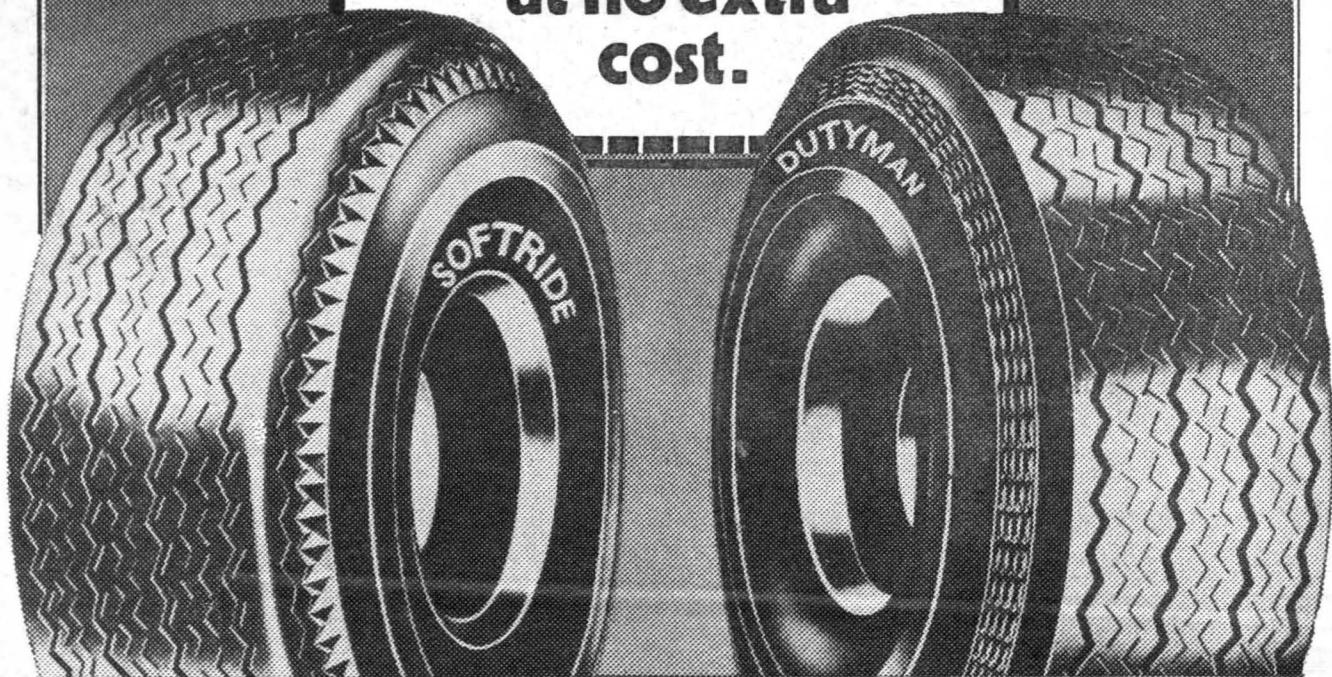
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## ENCOUNTER

fice in Gwalior Central Jail, I asked him about Phoolan's alleged nymphomania, producing the tabloid clipping that stated: "For every man this girl has killed, she's slept with two of them." Pathak laughed. "You'll see," he said. "Phoolan's moody and difficult, but verbally she's quick, spontaneous, a typical jungle girl. There's a lot of violence and sudden sex in her. It floods from her like a river — whoosh — but between you and me," and he smiled and winked, "I think it's mostly show."

As we waited for Phoolan, Pathak explained that she had been tried in Madhya Pradesh for possession of unlicensed firearms for unlawful purposes and had been sentenced to seven years. Although many people believe she would then be freed, Pathak claimed that she would ultimately be tried for all her crimes.

It was rumoured that Indira Gandhi had saved Phoolan's life. Following the dacoit's surrender, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh had been in close consultation with Mrs Gandhi, who said that Phoolan Devi was a wayward village girl and urged that she be treated leniently. Pathak had arranged for Phoolan and Man Singh to live in an open jail and, fulfilling a promise he had made to Rajendra Chaturvedi, looked after her needs as best he could. Phoolan was indebted to Pathak, and it was because of him that she had agreed to see me.

Phoolan was certainly taking her time. More than 40 minutes had passed since we had entered the jail, and there was still no sign of her. I had waited too long and come too far to see Phoolan Devi, and I began to fear that now, at the 11th hour, she had changed her mind.

Moments later the door to the interior jail was opened, and preceded by a burly, mustachioed sergeant of the guard, Phoolan entered the room. We were introduced, and clasping her hands together in the traditional Hindu greeting, Phoolan bowed and sat down, rearranging her sari over her bare brown legs.

I couldn't believe my eyes. It was almost impossible to imagine that this little girl was the cruel and fearsome Phoolan Devi. Concerning her beauty, her size, and her blood-red hair, the newspaper accounts had been exaggerated. Kalyan had transformed her into Calamity Jane; the perfidious Muhti had blatantly lied; and finally, my own imaginings had deceived me most of all. In the flesh Phoolan was about five feet tall and looked to be no more than 17. With her short black hair, high cheekbones, and broad, snubbed nose, she might have been a Nepali girl from the frontier. Most alarmingly, perhaps, she possessed not one arm, but two. Legend, it appeared, had confused her with Putli Bai, the famous one-armed dacoit of the '50s.

Stunned, I turned to look at Pathak, and my astonish-

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Phoolan Devi.**

ment must have loomed from my face like a flare. "Illusions must not be destroyed too quickly," he said with a smile, "but they must be destroyed."

Dressed in a stained and tattered lavender sari, Phoolan wore plastic bangles on her arms, hoop-ear-rings, and silver anklets. She had the sly face of a wild leprechaun and she spoke in a high, stuttering sing-song voice, speaking in what Pathak called her 'pourbi lingo' — a low dialect of Hindi.

She began to talk, but, she said, she wanted one thing understood. She would have preferred that none of this had happened, "but it was not my lot, it was not my destiny. What happened to me was meant to be."

Phoolan believed herself to be the equal of any male, if not his better. Even so, I asked her if she had not found it difficult being the leader of an all-male gang. "Certainly not," she retorted angrily. "Doesn't a woman lead India?" And then, remembering that Mrs Gandhi was dead, her voice trailed off.

"In the ravines," she began again, "gang leaders pissed in their pants when they heard my name, and they shit when they encountered me in battle. I was never afraid. Why should I have been? Bullets came out of their guns just as they did out of mine, but mine were more accurate. As for the peasants, I don't know whether they feared or respected me, but when I walked into their villages the headman would come to me with garlands and touch my feet."

The tale of Neville's that had first seduced me — of how Phoolan's gang had looted a bank in Delhi while she sang arias from the rooftops to her fans below — turned out, like so much else, to be apocryphal. But it amused her and drawing her sari across her face, Phoolan giggled, her dark eyes darting about mischievously.

Concerning her sins, as she called them, she said, "I am a sinful woman, but I have done nothing but take revenge. My crimes were crimes of the heart. What else? I only regret that I did not have the chance to kill Sriram and Lalaram Singh. I would have nailed them to a burning cross. And if I had tracked down that bastard Puttilal, my husband, I would have killed him too. I went to his village once, but he had disappeared, so I burned down his house. Now I will take him to court and get my dowry back."

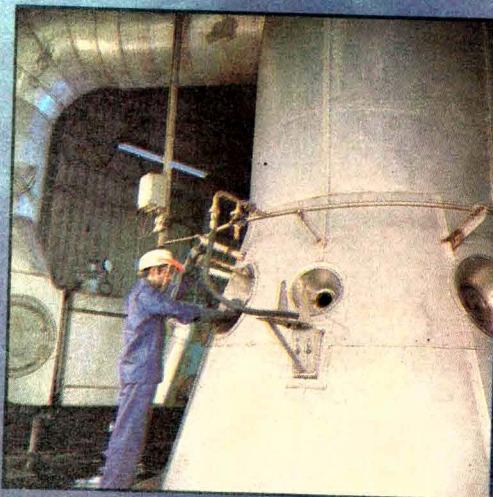
Since I was catching the late train to Delhi to attend Indira Gandhi's funeral, I rose to leave. Phoolan asked me to place a flower on Mrs Gandhi's bier. As I turned to leave, Phoolan Devi bowed; then, looking up, she said, "One thing more. I learned all this cruelty after I joined the gang. I was not like that before. I don't know what the world thinks of me. Left to myself, I'm an ordinary Indian village girl." She paused. "But I think I'm capable of anything."

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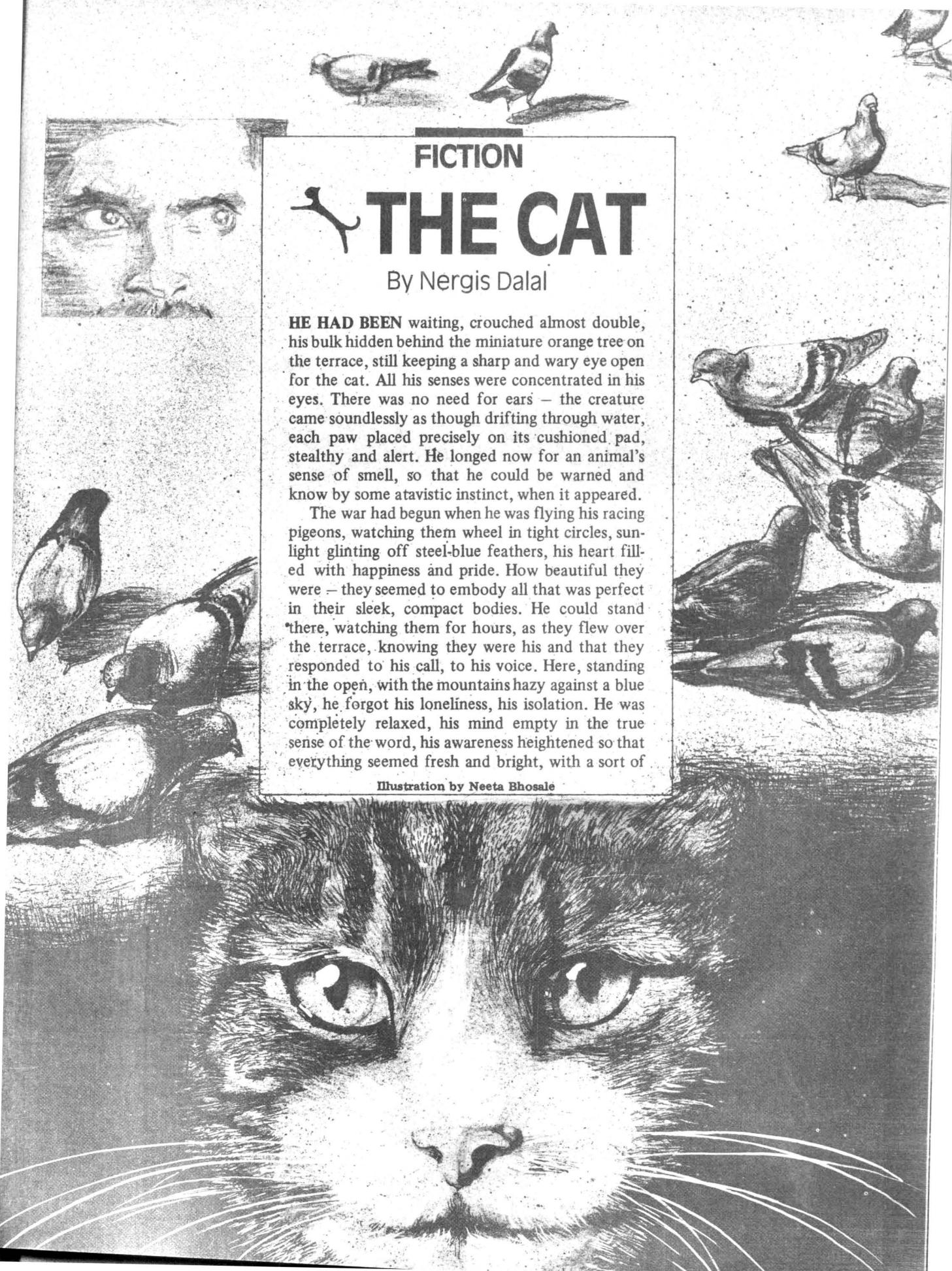


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FICTION

# THE CAT

By Nergis Dalal

HE HAD BEEN waiting, crouched almost double, his bulk hidden behind the miniature orange tree on the terrace, still keeping a sharp and wary eye open for the cat. All his senses were concentrated in his eyes. There was no need for ears — the creature came soundlessly as though drifting through water, each paw placed precisely on its cushioned pad, stealthy and alert. He longed now for an animal's sense of smell, so that he could be warned and know by some atavistic instinct, when it appeared.

The war had begun when he was flying his racing pigeons, watching them wheel in tight circles, sunlight glinting off steel-blue feathers, his heart filled with happiness and pride. How beautiful they were — they seemed to embody all that was perfect in their sleek, compact bodies. He could stand there, watching them for hours, as they flew over the terrace, knowing they were his and that they responded to his call, to his voice. Here, standing in the open, with the mountains hazy against a blue sky, he forgot his loneliness, his isolation. He was completely relaxed, his mind empty in the true sense of the word, his awareness heightened so that everything seemed fresh and bright, with a sort of

Illustration by Neeta Bhosale

## FICTION

dazzling clarity. Subtle feeling tones permeated and soothed his whole being, vibrating like a moving aura around him, harmonising all aspects of his being. It was as though he were being warmed and soothed by an inner sun.

But that was weeks ago. Now everything was changed, spoiled and destroyed by the cat. Some people are magnets for trouble, the iron filings of broken and bewildered lives fly to them through the air. He had been watching the dizzy flight of his birds when he saw that one had detached itself from the rest and was flying straight to him. It was Munni, his favourite, his pet. It always came before the others, to sit on his shoulder and croon into his ear. That was when tragedy struck.

The cat, appearing as though from nowhere, made one murderous leap, catching the bird in mid-air, killing it instantly, cutting through feathers, bone and flesh with the intensity of its spring. And just as fast it had vanished, not leaping or jumping down from the terrace but flowing down, letting down its forelegs to ensure a safe, soft landing, and then, with the dead bird still in its mouth, vanishing like a shadow between the trees.

He had cried like a child, raved and ranted like a madman, but the cat and his pigeon had become as it were, invisible. All his joy, his happiness in his high-flying tumblers was now overlaid with dread. If he turned he could see the cat, watching, camouflaged sometimes against the leafy limb of a tree, or sunning itself innocently — its yellow eyes slitted against the light. Waiting, no doubt, for a suitable opportunity to strike.

Soon the weight, the strain, the anxiety, were turning him slightly mad. How precariously we manage to hold on to reason — the eclipse of reason seems such an easy affair, one's grasp on sanity so provisional and insecure. He hardly dared to let the birds loose to fly and yet it was impossible to keep them imprisoned all the time. There was only one solution left — the cat must die. As soon as he

had made up his mind, he felt better. Now he had something to do, something constructive to plan for.

The easiest way would be poison. The cat was a stray, lean and constantly hungry, spending its waking hours hunting for food. A nice fat piece of poisoned meat would bring it running and then it would fall over — glazed eyes and stiffened paws — no longer a threat. The picture gave him pleasure. He hated the cat with all the pent up venom in his heart, the hate and venom that he was forced to conceal, if he was to live in this world.

He took the breast of chicken left over from last night's dinner and began, systematically, to cut small pockets in the flesh, filling these with generous amounts of rat poison.

"What on earth are you doing?"

He started so violently that the knife clattered to the floor. His wife stood staring at him, pale and slender and remote, withdrawn and silent generally, but now curious and fearful.

He exploded in a rage, "I've told you before not to creep up on me. You'll give me a heart attack one of these days." He retrieved the knife and returned to his task, but his hands were not so steady and he spilled some of the deadly stuff on the table.

She persisted, "But what are you doing?"

"I'm laying out poisoned bait for that thieving, sneaking cat which killed Munni. That's what I am doing."

She continued to stare at him and he had the uneasy feeling that somehow she reminded him of the cat. Perhaps it was the pale eyes or the slender, supple way she moved, or simply the cool, watchful stare. Her slanted eyes, so brilliant under heavy lids, were evasive.

He finished the job, washed his hands and pinched her cheek hard as he passed, smiling as she winced. He managed often to get in these little jabs — affectionate squeezes that left blue marks on her skin — pats on her back that knocked her over. His jokes were always based on hostility and superiority — black humour or slapstick. He saw himself as very loving

and kind — it was always other people he had to watch out for, since they wanted to hurt or attack him. He operated always from a predominantly paranoid stance, remaining unaware of much of himself.

He took the chicken piece to the terrace and hid it behind one of the large drums that held a miniature fruit tree. The cat would find it and then — dead.

He was in excellent good humour when he returned and at once pulled her into his arms as she was leaving the room. It was the only way he had of communicating with her. Words, feelings, were alien things, which he regarded with suspicion. Sex was for him uncomplicated — an appetite to be assuaged. It was convenient to have a wife. She had known no other man and in her innocence was convinced that all sex was like this — brutal, without tenderness and ultimately boring. She could never understand why so much fuss was made about it. It was something to be got through as quickly as possible and with the least possible involvement.

This time her detachment annoyed and provoked him. He was specially violent, all his frustrations compressed into this one act. He was helpless against the pitiless weapon of feelings that were not returned. She rose and gathered her sari around her and he could hear the shower which would run for a long time. It was only the thought of the poisoned chicken that got him up and out in a hurry, full of eager anticipation.

The chicken had disappeared and he rubbed his hands with delight. The poison was very strong — and somewhere on this terrace he should find the body. That sleek, furred, yellow body with its finely articulated bony structure, flowing silkily through shadow and colour — now, forever still.

The terrace was full of pots of all sizes, large and small, grouped together and heavy with green trailing plants or brilliant with flowers. He examined it systematically, inch by inch, peering behind and between the pots, moving the trailing ferns to look

## FICTION

under, and wedging himself between the huge barrels that held miniature fruit trees. It was here that he found her. She was not dead at all, but sleeping.

As his face appeared, she sprang up and he had a vision of a high arched back, two blazing slitted eyes and then a hissing spit like a cobra before she attacked, her claws lashing out like scimitars, narrowly missing his eyes and gashing down his cheek. The pain made him cry out and when he put his hand up it came away covered with blood.

"I could get blood poisoning or tetanus," he sobbed, safe inside the house as she washed and swabbed and cleaned the wounds. He shuddered to think what would have happened if those deadly claws had slashed at his eyes.

"But why don't you leave her alone?" she remonstrated. "Cats can't help killing birds. It was only a coincidence that it was one of your pigeons. Just leave her and she will go away."

But he was not listening. He was planning a new campaign, like a general with an implacable and dangerous enemy. In his mind he devised all sorts of traps, with baits, nooses, knives and hooks, that would strangle, slice or impale when sprung.

He had once seen a friend trap a young falcon in something called a *dogaza*. The memory came back to him now — a strong net, held on collapsible metal poles and baited with a live creature. He was so desperate that when, with much effort, he had erected his version of the *dogaza*, he even used one of his beloved pigeons as bait.

But nothing worked. The cat came and prowled around suspiciously, lashing its tail as it spied the pigeon and circling cautiously, even sniffing at the net while he held his breath. Then it walked contemptuously to the wall and sat there sunning itself and ignoring both trap and pigeon. In his rage he picked up a brick and flung it at the cat. But the brick struck resoundingly on the wall and the cat

was already flowing smoothly down the wall into the garden.

The weather was perfect and normally he would have enjoyed seeing his birds wheeling in the lavender air, sliding in and out of the sun as though some great choreographer was specially designing the light and shadow effects for his delight. But now he barely glanced at them. He was obsessed. He could not sleep at night and in the day he thought up schemes for murder. He felt detached from day-to-day realities. Only one thought dripped like rain insistently into his skull and into his brain. He ate, washed, slept, all in a kind of demented if illusory solitude — a man made insane by hate, teetering on the verge of hysteria.

She did what she could to calm him down, tried to distract him with talk, with books, with television. He was as though deaf and blind. He lurked about the terrace, hiding here and there, watching his enemy. Even at dawn he would be crouching behind the terrace wall, watching. He knew how she spent every moment of the day. As the afternoon relinquished its fearful heat and colours began to fade into evening, he would take up his position again as a watching silhouette.

They had fish for dinner one day and he heard the cat yowling outside, drawn by the smell. He went down to the market and bought two large fish. He tied the tail of one to a string and trailed it around the terrace. In a flash, the cat appeared, sprung from nowhere and vanished over the wall with the fish in its mouth. Now he was jubilant. He knew what to do. He bought a piece of strong wire and with pliers and cutter, fashioned a hook. This he embedded inside the second fish, covering it completely and then once more tying a string to the tail. He had read once how poachers in the forest trapped wild deer by putting sharp hooks inside the wild fruit they came to eat. The hook caught inside the mouth and the animal was impaled alive till the poacher came and bashed it to death.

In the daytime the cat slept in the fork of the mango tree, keeping a wary eye open for birds or enemies. Standing on the terrace, he leaned over and lowered the fish on the string till it dangled just below the tree. The cat sat up, stared at the fish and then sprang down. He began to trail the fish on its string, slowly, making the fish wriggle as though alive. The cat stalked it and once put out a tentative paw to pat it, and then crouched, watching with cold calculation. He ducked down behind the ledge so he was invisible, the cord still in his hand. He pictured the cat pouncing on the fish, tearing it with teeth and claws and then the coiled hook springing open and embedding itself in the mouth. He imagined the yowls of the tormented creature as he descended leisurely and bashed it to death.

He waited. There was nothing but silence. The string in his hand lay slack. Cautiously, he raised his head and peered over the edge. Nothing — he could see nothing. Neither fish nor cat. He leaned over further, trying to see below the overhang. The rain had made the edge slippery, covered with moss and slime. With a cry he lurched forward and fell, ricocheting with a thud against the tree and landing sprawled, his head bashed in.

There was the usual untidy chaos that is the aftermath of any accidental death. And then she was alone at last. She went upstairs and released the pigeons. They wheeled joyously in the air and silent, with the eyes of a predator, the cat watched.

She went and brought it a bowl of creamy milk, a packet of chicken bones and some chopped meat. It accepted everything without hesitation or suspicion, lapping at the milk and crunching up the bones with delicate greed. Then it washed itself very thoroughly and lay down, in the sun.

She called the birds in. The cat, replete, did not move. The woman hugged herself. She felt a mounting warmth, a tiny exhilaration that, wildly unwarranted, would not be denied. For the first time in many years, she smiled. ♦

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MOTIVATION

# YOUR RIGHTS

**I**MAGINE the helpless condition of a prisoner who is lodged in a jail; who does not know whom to turn to for help in vindicating his innocence or, as the case may be, defending his legal rights; who does not know how to protect himself against torture or ill-treatment or oppression and harassment at the hands of his custodians. Is he aware that, under the provisions of the Constitution of India and other related laws, he has certain rights that protect his position? For instance, does he know that he has a right to demand medical examination, the results of which could be placed before a magistrate, if he has any complaints of torture or harassment in police custody? Is he aware that, even before things get to the torture and harassment stage, he has the right to demand consultation with a lawyer of his own choice? Does he know that he has a right to remain silent till this legal advice is available, or that he has a right to protect himself from giving evidence that might incriminate him?

For that matter, did you, sitting far from the closed, claustrophobic confines of a cell, know you had these rights?

The right to silence or protection against self-in-

## WHEN ARRESTED

The police may not inform you of them but you have certain important rights when you are arrested.

Crimes are considered a critical right in most common law jurisdictions. It is based on the belief that the State must prove a criminal offence to have been committed beyond reasonable doubt as, indeed, it must prove that the offence has been committed by a particular person. The proof of the identity as well as of the commission of the offence must be at the initiative of the State and not through the 'co-operation' of the individual accused. This is based on the belief that the 'co-operation' of the individual accused could easily lead to oppression and coercion to prove and establish an offence, whether real or imagined, at the whims and fancies of the oppressive State.

In USA, this right to remain silent arrived on the judicial map with the famous case of *Miranda Vs Arizona*, in 1966. Ever since then, arrest-happy

policemen have often found themselves at the wrong end of the law if they clapped on the handcuffs without reading the accused the *Miranda Declaration*, detailing his basic rights in the circumstances. In our own country, practice might have thrown up innumerable instances of undertrials languishing in jails for months, even years. But on paper, according to the Constitution and other related provisions, the arrest made without informing the accused of his rights is just as invalid.

Article 20(3) of the Constitution and Section 161(2) of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) provide for this protection. The Constitution provides that no person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself, and Section 161(2) CrPC enjoins that "Such persons shall be bound to answer truly all questions relating to such

case put to him by such officer other than questions the answer to which would have a tendency to expose him to a criminal charge or to a penalty or forfeiture."

Section 179 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) deals with matters regarding the questions asked by a lawful authority. It provides that "Whoever being legally bound to state the truth on any subject to any public servant refusing to answer a question demanded of him touching that subject by such public servant in the exercise of the legal powers of such public servant, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months or with fine up to Rs 1,000 or with both."

The question, therefore, is: Does Section 179 IPC prevail over Section 161(2) CrPC and Article 20(3)? In the matter of the right to possess a passport, dealt with in this column last month, the definitive case recalled was the Menaka Gandhi case. In this case, the categorical answer was provided through the initiative of another well-known lady politician — former Orissa Chief Minister, Nandini Satpathy. As recently as 1978, Justice V R Krishna Iyer held that a person is entitled to refuse

*Louise Fernandes, a former Sunday staffer, is now a Delhi-based freelancer. This is a regular column.*

# TAKING RIGHTS SERIOUSLY

to answer questions that are likely to incriminate him or her and that this protection is not limited only to questions put in a court of law, but covers the ambit of police investigation as well.

Under Indian law, a confession made to the police is, in any case, not admissible. In other jurisdictions, such as the US and Britain, the law is somewhat different. In certain cases in America, judges have held that the common law does not allow illegally obtained evidence, which includes a coerced confessional statement, to be admissible, while in other cases, judges have held that parts of the confessional statement that can be related to an actual fact established in corroboration, remain admissible. Courts in UK are somewhat more liberal in the matter of admitting illegally obtained evidence, and the law leaves it to the discretion of the individual judge to decide whether the confession is on the whole reliable, in which case it remains admissible.

The real controversy arises in the grey area between being a witness or helping in enquiries to establish facts, and being an accused oneself. The problem arose most dramatically before the Shah Commission when Mrs Indira Gandhi was requested to appear before it with information that would allow the Commission to establish the facts it was constituted to establish. Not surprisingly, Mrs Gandhi refused to help, and was summoned as a witness. On the first occasion, she

If it could happen to Nandini Satpathy and Indira Gandhi, you too could be subjected to similar pressure at some point in time. So remember what your rights are.

stated that she would not answer any questions before the Commission. Justice Shah filed a complaint before the local magistrate. Realising that there had been an inadequacy in the charge because Mrs Gandhi had not actually refused to answer questions but had merely stated her intention not to answer questions, Justice Shah summoned her once again.

In a writ petition before Justice T P S Chawla of the Delhi High Court, Justice Shah's complaint was struck down on the ground that Mrs Gandhi had not committed the offence on the first occasion. On the second occasion, too, she had not been called to answer questions, but simply to be made to commit the offence. Furthermore, the High Court also held that between Mrs Gandhi's being requested to help and being summoned as a witness, no such material had been brought on record to show that the Commission had become aware of her personal knowledge or involvement in any particular matter. On this basis, Mrs Gandhi was able to establish that the Commission was in the know of material and facts as a result of which she could be accused of having committed an offence and, therefore, she was fully justified in claiming protec-

tion against self-incrimination.

There are unconfirmed reports that a similar problem has arisen before the Justice Thakker Commission, inquiring into the assassination of Mrs Gandhi. Being a fact-finding Commission, the inquiry has proceeded on the basis that each person is but a witness and not an accused. But as the facts turn out, the report will invariably have to apportion the blame to certain persons. It will, thereby, put them in literally the same category as those accused of a criminal offence in a court of law.

Apart from holding that a person has a right to remain silent, Justice Iyer in the Satpathy case went further, to establish a specific right which would come as a surprise to many administrators and lawyers even today, almost eight years after Justice Iyer spoke of it. Indeed, *obiter dicta* in more recent Supreme Court judgments and comments from the Bench during arguments in other cases, suggest that even now the Supreme Court may not have completely understood the extent of Justice Iyer's position on such a right: the right to a lawyer. He categorically held that "The right, under Article 22(1) (which reads: 'No person

who has been arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds of such arrest, nor shall he be denied the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of his choice') included the person who had not been arrested and taken into police custody. The spirit and sense of Article 22(1) is that it is fundamental to the rule of law that the services of a lawyer shall be available for consultation to any accused person in the circumstances of near custodial interrogation."

In a more recent case, *Sheela Barse Vs State of Maharashtra*, where a freelance journalist in Bombay filed a writ petition against the State for ensuring fundamental rights of undertrial prisoners and convicts, the Supreme Court, speaking through Justices P N Bhagwati, R S Pathak and A N Sen, has held that legal assistance to a poor or indigent accused who had been arrested and put in jeopardy of his life or personal liberty is a Constitutional imperative, mandated not only by Article 39(A) but also by Articles 14 and 21. It is a *sine qua non* of justice and where it is not provided, injustice is likely to result, and undeniably, every act of injustice corrodes the foundation of democracy and the rule of law.

If it could happen to Nandini Satpathy and Mrs Gandhi, you too, can be subject to similar pressure at some point. So, at the crucial moment, remember that you have rights. ♦

# COMPUTERS



BY MICHAEL CRICHTON

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Getting the computer to think intelligently has shown up the limitations of human psychology.

**I** WANT TO MAKE four points about the 30-year-old study of artificial intelligence or AI.

1) There is no theoretical limit to what machines can do. No aspect of human behaviour is so unique or special that machines cannot perform the same function — or appear to do so. The world backgammon champion is a machine. Computer chess programmes whip all but the most gifted human opponents. Computers can diagnose disease as skilfully as human physicians can in certain instances. These are all activities earlier observers insisted 'a computer can never do'.

You'd think by now everyone would have gotten the point: there is nothing a machine can't do.

2) The machine isn't doing it the way we do it. Depending on your point of view, this fact is either deeply troubling or irrelevant. But certainly it suggests a danger that naive computer users will attribute to the machines qualities they do not really possess.

3) Getting the machine to do it is hard. Genuine artificial intelligence has been a long time coming. In fact, it's quite a bit overdue. In the '60s, most AI researchers were predicting true artificial intelligence within 30 years. As recently as 1975, a few observers still expected it within ten years. Now some AI workers are saying that real artificial intelligence is a 100 to 300 years away.

Yet limited examples of artificial intelligence are not so far off. Certainly in the next decade there will

be 'expert systems' highly skilled in specialised areas such as medicine, law, or engineering. These expert systems may be so adept that it will be difficult for professionals to ignore the advice of the machine in many instances.

But the general-purpose artificial intelligence, the machine that will make your coffee, commiserate with you over your automobile accident and sue whoever hit you, do your laundry, check your sore throat, and advise you on your career *angst*, is not hovering in the wings.

4) AI is a branch of human psychology. This conclusion is not self-evident, although it should be. Artificial intelligence is really focussed on how human beings do various tasks. This is only natural, since before you can instruct a machine to imitate human actions, you need to understand what human actions really are.

The quest for artificial intelligence has provoked intense scrutiny of the most obvious and therefore unexamined components of human behaviour: how you recognise a friend, how you tell whether the friend is happy or sad, how you decide what to say to your friend, and so on. This is a very different order of problem from how to solve a quadratic equation, or even how to translate Russian into English.

Marvin Minsky, an artificial intelligence pioneer, observes that it's often easy to make machines do things that are hard for people, and hard to make machines do things that are often easy for people. A decade ago, Minsky's laboratory at MIT tried to make a machine that could play ping-pong. The lab encountered severe problems

in attempting to duplicate this human pastime.

In any event, it is easy to be distracted by the artificial part of artificial intelligence. At the moment, the limitations of AI are the limitations of human psychology, not the limitations of computers. AI will thus remain a field of study devoted to understanding human behaviour — at least for the foreseeable future.

### Specialised Knowledge And The Professions

Because computers can easily store and manipulate formal information, professional knowledge is extremely vulnerable to computers. That should have been obvious as soon as pocket language translators appeared. If you can encode the formal rules for language translation on a microchip, you can encode the formal rules for divorce proceedings or appendicitis diagnosis on a microchip as well. Once such a chip exists, it can be manufactured cheaply in quantity. Why should anyone consult a lawyer when he can buy all the information the lawyer possesses on a legal-knowledge chip for a couple of dollars?

There's little question that in certain applications of specialised knowledge the computer can function as well as or better than its human counterpart. It's also true that the overwhelming majority of professional consultations are quite routine. The writing of wills, or the differential diagnosis of fatigue, is not complex.

Rarely is the goal merely access to information. We want advice, we want understanding, we want 'someone we can talk to'. It's common to feel better as soon as we've seen the doctor,

*Michael Crichton is a bestselling novelist and film director. His novels include The Andromeda Strain and Congo.*

## ELIZA, a programme which imitates a non-directional, Rogerian therapist, can be startlingly persuasive. Some users assume the computer really understands you. Actually, the whole process is utterly mechanical — although complex.

even before we start taking the prescribed medication. And the lawyer who says "I'll handle it" makes us feel better, even before he actually takes any steps to solve the problem.

When professionals are viewed in this way, the importance of computers to professional interactions diminishes. We consult professionals not because we want information but because we want to feel better.

Can a computer make us feel better? Perhaps it can — if we allow ourselves some fundamental errors in perception.

In 1966, Joseph Weizenbaum, a computer scientist at MIT, wrote ELIZA, one of the most famous and significant programmes in computer history. ELIZA instructs a computer to imitate a non-directional, Rogerian therapist. In the years since, many versions of ELIZA have been written for small computers. Here is a recent interaction on mine:

HELLO THERE, I'M ELIZA. HOW ARE YOU FEELING?  
I'm tired today.  
WHY ARE YOU TIRED TODAY?  
From working on my book.  
HMM... TELL ME MORE.  
The book's about computers.  
YOU THINK COMPUTERS CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR YOU?  
Trying to explain that computers are stupid machines.  
ARE YOU REFERRING TO ME?  
Yes. You.  
LET'S GET BACK TO YOUR PROBLEM...  
Okay. Fine. Tell me my problem.  
THERE ARE NO EASY ANSWERS TO YOUR PROBLEM.  
You always say things like that.  
HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?  
I feel you don't care.  
INTERESTING... CAN YOU ELABORATE ON SUCH FEELINGS?  
Computers are just machines.  
OH I THINK YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT.  
Well, you aren't a human being, kiddo.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I AM NOT A HUMAN BEING KIDDO?

I rest my case.

DO YOU FEEL IT SOLVES ANYTHING TO REST YOUR CASE?

Although the responses sometimes appear complex, the computer is actually doing something rather simple. It scans the input sentence for key words it has been programmed to recognise. When it finds one, it selects an answer from a group of previously programmed responses. If the computer fails to find any word it knows, it gives a nondescript response such as HMM... TELL ME MORE. The whole process is utterly mechanical — and in this case, obviously so.

But more refined versions of ELIZA can be startlingly persuasive. It's not difficult to assume that the computer really understands you. Weizenbaum himself was alarmed by the initial acceptance of his programme. Some users asked him to leave the room, because their conversation was becoming too intimate. Others refused to believe it was 'just a programme'. Still others heralded ELIZA as initiating a new era of automated therapy.

This raises the question of what people think a therapist is. In *The Road Less Travelled*, psychiatrist M Scott Peck defines a therapeutic interaction that no machine could ever imitate, because that interaction is inherently, profoundly human. But unless we have conceived a view such as Peck's — unless we have developed a real sense of what a human being is, and what a caring human interaction is — then a chat with ELIZA will seem perfectly satisfactory.

In the future, we can expect a radical transformation in the professions, in which the exclusivity of information is denied the professional person while his therapeutic role continues unchanged. This strikes me as good.

### MACHINES AND MEN

We are entering a period when it will be important to distinguish clearly between what men can do and what machines can do. Unfortunately the distinction has been blurred in recent years.

The astronauts are the most publicised example of men turned into machines. When the first astronauts landed on the moon, the world cheered — but with reservations, for it was clear that these 'men' behaved in rather inhuman ways. The first man on the moon should have shouted, "Gosh! I'm standing on the moon!" But he didn't. There weren't a lot of spontaneous yucks from the Apollo astronauts, and for very good reasons. They had been living in simulators for months on end, grinding the humanness out of them; they were totally dedicated to 'the mission', and perceived themselves as integrated with the 'onboard mission systems'. They were aware that their every heartbeat and breath was monitored and measured, watched from earth like any other mechanical system on the spacecraft that might fail.

We risk loss of humanity whenever we treat a man as a machine. Fortunately, men usually can't live up to their machine conception. Even the astronauts had the good grace to throw up occasionally, or get the flu, or do something else that differentiated them from the machinery aboard the spacecraft.

But the reverse is not always true. A sophisticated computer may not provide clear signals that it is only a machine. Its machine nature may be difficult to recognise; it is up to us to keep the mechanical truth in mind.

We are not machines, and machines are not people. Not now, and not for a long time to come. Personally, I think not ever, although at the far reaches of imagination this becomes an issue of philosophy. ♦

# THE COMET IS COMING

**W**RITING at yule-tide, a day prior to the 1,984th birth-day of Jesus, one is struck by the number of press stories circulating about him and Halley's comet. Now, it seems, the comet is being deprived of its portentous overtones, while the birth of Jesus is being shorn of the supernatural. Perfectly natural. Since, according to astronomical calculations, the birth of Jesus was close to the appearance of the comet, the two events get interlinked. Hence, what could be more natural than that this fiery wanderer in space, this Inspector General of the skies who visits our solar system once every 75 years, should have led the Magi to Bethlehem? There is a word for this, euhemerism, the reference of myths to historical basis.

The first among these stories appeared on December 13, in *China Post* of all places, date-lined 'Bethlehem, Occupied West Bank, December 12'. The piece, headlined *When Was Jesus Born?* was written by Wesley G Pippert. The next, on December 16, appeared in the *International Herald Tribune*, headlined *A Debunked Comet Brings A Message All The Same*, by Charles Krauthammer. And then, on Christmas eve, appeared the Reuter story — *Jesus May Have Been Born In Late Summer*.

The first and third stories have a common basis, the views of James Fleming, the Director of the Jerusalem Centre for Biblical Studies. He took foreign correspondents on a pre-Christmas tour of Bethlehem (which literally means 'the house of bread') and the newly ploughed fields on the Judaean hillsides. The birth of Jesus coincided with the last years of King

*Keki Daruwalla is one of India's foremost English language poets. This is a regular column.*

**When was Jesus Christ really born? Of late, the international press has tried to link his birth to the appearance of Halley's comet. But is it necessary to reduce the nativity myth to our mundane level?**

Herod who died in 4 B C. Fleming, however, links it to a census carried out in 12 B C, evidence of which has been found through the decipherment of the 'Micro-graffity' on a tablet found 300 years ago. Moreover, Halley's comet was visible twice in 12 B C. So, the whole thing fits in rather well, though it has not been explained why the date has been shifted to 12 B C merely because the comet appeared in that year. Couldn't another comet have made its appearance later on? How many of us remember Kohoutek, that much-heralded comet of the '70s, which, far from providing any celestial pyrotechnics, ended up a damp squib? I saw another big comet in April 1970, night after night, as it loomed over northern India (did it forewarn the Bangladesh war the next year?).

The *Bible* claims that the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem were among the first to learn that the New King had been born. Fleming points out that farmers in Bethlehem plough their fields in December to receive the rains for their winter wheat. They would not have permitted flocks of sheep in the fields. However, farmers welcome herds after the May harvest so that they can eat the stubble and fertilise the fields. Hence, he was probably born in summer and not

in December. Christmas was fixed on December 25 according to the new Gregorian calendar to replace a Roman holiday on that day.

Now, for me, this is a piquant situation for, while I am happy at the debunking of certain old beliefs, I get no joy out of reducing the core of the nativity myth to our mundane level. One is happy to see that comets are no longer known as the 'thick smoke of human sins', which is what a Lutheran minister dubbed them as. Comets are not brooms which sweep sins from the sky, as the Chinese mandarins thought. The heavens are no longer a place for seraphs and cherubs but for space shuttles, extraterrestrials and these long tails of congealed snow and gases roaming the emptiness of space, which our forefathers called the skies.

But most people have grown up with the nativity myth. I quote from memory, a hazardous thing to do with Milton:

"See, how far from on the eastern road  
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet."

To bring a little perspective into this rather directionless debate, let it be said that the star was annunciator first and a geographic pointer afterwards. It first heralded the birth of Jesus and later, the place where he was to take birth. Moreover, light and divinity have been associated since the very dawn of belief and mythology. E J Eitel has shown in his book, *Handbook Of Chinese Buddhism* that 'according to traditions elaborated by Chinese Buddhism, five lights shine at the birth of every Buddha and a flame springs out of his corpse'.

Mircea Eliade, anthropologist, psychologist, historian and an authority

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## NIGHTWATCH

on comparative religion, has stated in his book *The Two And The One* that Zarathustra's radiance in his mother's womb during the last three days before his birth was so intense that it lit up the whole of his father's village. Eliade states: "It is probable that the Christians borrowed the imagery of the nativity of the Cosmocreator-Redeemer from the Parthians and applied it to Christ." He goes on to speak of Christian sources which place the nativity in a cave and concludes: "But primarily, it is the star and the light shining above the cave that have played the important role in Christian religious beliefs and iconography. Now, as Monneret de Villard and Wiedengren have lately shown, this motif is most probably Iranian. The Protovangelium spoke of the blinding light that filled the cave at Bethlehem. When it began to wane, the child Jesus appeared. This amounts to saying that the light was consubstantial with Jesus, or was one of his manifestations."

One does not need Eliade to tell us of the connection between nirvana and light. The Buddha is supposed to have received his illumination when, at dawn, after a night's meditation, he saw the morning star. The mystique of light is fairly complex in Hindu philosophy. As Eliade shows in *India: The Light And The Atman*, a basic idea is that light is creative. "Light is procreation," (*jyotir prajnanam*) says the *Satapatha Brahmana*. And the *Chandogya Upanishad* tells us that the light that shines beyond this sky, and in the highest worlds is, in fact, the same light that shines within a man.

IT IS uncanny how books on a particular theme you are interested in, come your way. Perhaps the sensory antennae fan out unconsciously and the eye focuses automatically on a particular title. So what do I ferret out from a bookstore but *Four Wise Men* by the French novelist, Michel Tournier, a brilliant book about the Magi and the birth of Jesus. But Tournier adds a fourth prince to

the three well-known wise kings, namely Balthasar, Melchior and Gaspar. The fourth is an Indian prince from Malabar, by the name of Taor. Each of the four, as also Herod, writes his own version of events as they follow the star till Jerusalem. But the *pièce de résistance* comes from the prince of Malabar, childlike in his wants and unbridled in his indulgences. His gastronomic obsessions make him summon the best chefs from all parts of the world who prepare all kinds of decoctions and delicacies for him, from emulsified almonds to balsamic resins. But he wants to know how the Turkish delight, *rahat loukoum* is made, and sets out on a voyage with a fleet of ships and five elephants on board, including one called Yasmina.

Taor arrives too late for the great event and, when he does reach Bethlehem, the holy family has left for Egypt. He sees starving children, some carrying 'bellies as swollen as wineskins on legs as thin as drumsticks'. So every child above the age of two is invited to a terrific feast and the wide-eyed children are served delicacies like jujube jelly, ramekins of rich cream cheese, pineapple fritters, dates stuffed with walnut-meats, litchi nut soufflés, mango tarts, Dionysian custards flavoured with the wine of Lydda and succulent frangipane cakes.

And while the party is going on, Herod's soldiers come and slaughter all the new-borns.

Later, Taor stands in for a person being condemned to the salt mines and puts in 33 years of terrible suffering there. The salt mines in Sodom and the area around the Dead Sea are vividly described. When he is freed, he again misses Jesus, eternal late-comer that he is. Thirteen people have dined at the last supper. Taor eats the crumbs and drinks some wine from one of the 13 cups. He then topples forward, but even as he is falling, two angels gather him in their great wings and carry him to heaven. After all, he was the first to have received the Eucharist. ♦

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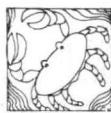
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# Bejan Daruwalla's Predictions



**ARIES:** March 21 to April 20: The partial Mercury-Jupiter-Venus triad in your 11th sector of gains and gaiety, backed by the Sun, promises high office and promotion, a round of hectic socialising, ceremonies and ties. Around the 20th, both Jupiter and the Sun change signs, making you restless and introspective. Travel could be a major trend this year.



**CANCER:** June 22 to July 22: The focus is clearly on finance and journeys. You will be rewarded for your services. Also, taxes, legacies, insurance and joint-finance will claim your attention. Intimate ties are more than possible. The last ten days favour a journey. Visits, calls and interviews have a special significance. Important issues will have to be resolved.



**LIBRA:** September 24 to October 23: The Sun-Uranus sextile on February 10 helps you in terms of romance, sports, hobbies, speculation, publishing and creative pursuits. Librans will be in the limelight. Children and grandchildren give immense joy. You will socialise with éclat and grace. Artists, writers, entrepreneurs and organisers, will be in their element.



**CAPRICORN:** December 22 to January 20: The new Moon around the ninth implies buying, selling, investment, and a lot of fun. Your tremendous drive and acumen come into full play. An important contract is in the offing. Many Capricornians will be planning a major journey on and after the 20th, as Jupiter ingresses your third angle of communication.



**TAURUS:** April 21 to May 21: As the Sun and Saturn are in fine juxtaposition, you will accomplish much in your profession or business. That could mean expansion of business, opening a branch, an independent venture or a job hop. Expect a heavier work load. After the 20th, you will find yourself in a bargaining position. Funds will be released, and that should give temporary relief.



**LEO:** July 23 to August 23: Alliances at various levels are foretold. These could change your life-style. Get ready for hard, sustained work after the 20th, as Jupiter enters your sixth sector. For employers, it could mean the hiring and firing of staff, while employees can expect a fatter pay-packet. Weddings, engagements and links with foreign countries are the other highlights for Leos.



**SCORPIO:** October 24 to November 22: Two trends will run simultaneously: firstly, a focus on property and renovation, and secondly, romance, peak-level creativity, sports and pastimes. The second trend assumes dominance after March 20, but picks up momentum from February 20. Buying and selling are strongly accentuated. This is also the time to come to terms with parents, in-laws and elders.



**AQUARIUS:** January 21 to February 18: A Sun-Moon trine on the 19th gives a tremendous fillip to your self-confidence, spurring you on to enterprise and creativity. Travel is certain. You will make the right moves at the right time, and that spells success. There will be an augmentation of income. Romance brings happiness. February is the beginning of a sea change for Aquarians.



**GEMINI:** May 22 to June 21: With intuition and imagination on your side, you simply can't go wrong. This applies specifically to writers, artists, salesmen and executives. A raise or promotion, letters, calls, contacts and trips are destined. Collaborations and religious experiences are foretold. This is a month to reach out to people and places.



**VIRGO:** August 24 to September 23: A month of pressures, for you will have to keep to a tight schedule. Discipline and regularity will help. Pets and important projects take on an added significance in February. The second half of the month is for a major partnership or an important journey. February is an important month for decision-making.



**SAGITTARIUS:** November 23 to December 21: A Moon-Jupiter union on the ninth suggests trips, ties, contacts and communication. Plenty of movement, in short. Sagittarians will be signing important contracts, documents, cheques and deeds. You will succeed in getting your message across effectively. In the last week, the emphasis shifts to the home and property.



**PISCES:** February 19 to March 20: On February 20, Jupiter rolls into your sign, promising you plenty. In your work area, you score heavily over rivals, and your status rises steadily. Till the 20th, you will feel restless, raring to go. You will assess and evaluate your goals and values. A month of introversion and, after the 20th, extroversion. ♦



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