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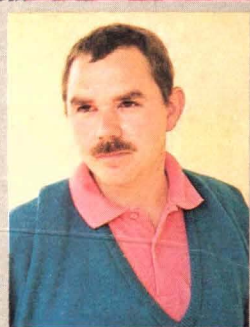
Can He Survive The Fire- Storm?

Kashmir's Forgotten Refugees
Of Beant Singh And Barnala
NTR And MGR: The Southern Czars
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How V P Singh Was Scuttled

SOMETIME EARLY THIS YEAR, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, was told* of two letters from an investigating agency in America, addressed to Mr S Gurumurthy, whose name was already familiar to him as the writer of a series of articles on the affairs of Reliance Industries Ltd.

We reproduce the substance of the two letters here: the first letter, dated November 20, 1986 has been published in *The Statesman* on March 20; the other letter has not been published anywhere at the time of our going to press (April 5).

Dear Mr Gurumurthy,

Dr Harris apprised me of his useful meeting in New Delhi last week with Mr R Goenka, Mr N Wadia, Mr V Pande, Mr B Lal and yourself. Now that the group has been retained to assist the Government of India we hope to expedite end result.

We received only US\$ 300,000 arranged by Mr N Wadia. As considerable efforts have already been made and expenditure incurred, it is advisable Mr Goenka arranges during his forthcoming visit to Geneva an additional US\$ 200,000. We shall refund both amounts on receipt from the Government of India to F Briner, Attorney, 31, Chemin chapeau-Rogue, 1231, Conches, Geneva.

We shall apprise Mr Goenka in Geneva about the progress made on source of funds for purchase of Swiss properties of Mr Bachchan. We shall contact Mr Goenka at Casa Trola, CH-6922, Morcote (Ticino), during his visit.

Yours sincerely,

(sd) G A McKay

Dear Mr Gurumurthy,

Please send me the following details to continue our investigations:

- (i) The details of rice exports by the Government of India to Soviet Union;*
- (ii) Documents relating to the non-resident status of Mr Ajitabh Bachchan from the records of the Reserve Bank of India.*

When Mr Bhurelal visits here next time, we will make his stay pleasant.

Yours sincerely,

(sd) G A McKay

Mr Gandhi surmised that Mr Gurumurthy was in touch with the Finance Minister, Mr V P Singh, as well as with the Revenue Secretary, Mr Vinod Pande, in connection with the Reliance articles he had written: it was quite natural for the Finance Minister and the Revenue Secretary to find out more from Mr Gurumurthy about the grave allegations he was making against Reliance. Mr Gandhi would have also surmised that Mr Gurumurthy was in touch with the Enforcement Director, Mr Bhurelal.

The mention of Mr R Goenka and Mr N Wadia in the letter was an indication to Mr Rajiv Gandhi that this duo and Mr Gurumurthy had now joined forces with Mr V P Singh to investigate Reliance affairs. He knew of the *Indian Express* campaign on Reliance Industries Ltd. The editor of the paper, Mr Suman Dubey, is a friend of Mr Gandhi and it is not conceivable that the Prime Minister and the editor have not talked of this great campaign in the paper. Mr Ramnath Goenka had met the Prime Minister while the *Indian Express* was making all kinds of embarrassing

* Nobody in New Delhi wants to talk on 'sensitive issues', and everything, unfortunately, is a 'sensitive matter' in India. However, some things are too dangerous to leave exclusively in the heads of our politicians and it is as such that I have taken the liberty of reconstructing the sequence of events in the V P Singh-Fairfax episode from information I have gathered. — R V P

revelations about Reliance's wrongdoings. It is not plausible for Mr Goenka not to have spoken to the Prime Minister about the former's great concern of 1986: the threat of subversion of the State by Ambani and Reliance. And as for Mr Nusli Wadia, he knows Mr Gandhi and has seen him once in a while ever since 1980: Mr Wadia is the grandson of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and both Mr Gandhi and Mr Wadia are prominent half-Parsis. Mr Wadia leaves no one he meets in doubt as to what he thinks of the Ambanis.

But back to the letters. To Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, the letters naturally caused grave concern. They mentioned his friends, the Bachchans. They mentioned Ajitabh Bachchan and his newly acquired non-resident status. One of the letters mentioned our rice exports to the Soviet Union. These references must have disturbed Mr Gandhi. One letter acknowledged receipt of a payment of US\$ 300,000 and US\$ 200,000 as due for investigations, and this must have disturbed the Prime Minister even more: here was an alliance between a private commercial interest as represented by Mr Wadia and a newspaper represented by Mr Goenka on one side and on the other side, the government as represented by two top functionaries of the revenue department, Mr Vinod Pande and Mr Bhurelal. And who was masterminding them? V P Singh, his Finance Minister. Involved in all this was a glaring violation of the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA) involving a sum of US\$ 500,000 — a violation in which all three top enforcers of FERA were involved!

*

ON JANUARY 24, Mr V P Singh was moved to the ministry of defence and the Prime Minister himself took charge of the ministry of finance. Sometime in early February, the Prime Minister summoned Mr Bhurelal and obtained from him the confirmation that a foreign investigative agency had been hired; at about this time he also saw Mr V P Singh and obtained a similar confirmation. On March 11, Mr Bhurelal was transferred out of the Enforcement Directorate. On the same day the Enforcement Directorate was shifted from the revenue department headed by Mr Vinod Pande to the department of economic affairs headed by Mr S Venkitaramanan.

Mr S Gurumurthy was arrested on March 14 and was questioned by CBI about Fairfax and about the Bachchans. Mr Vinod Pande and Mr Bhurelal were questioned by CBI officials sometime around the middle of March and most of the questioning centred around Mr Amitabh Bachchan. The CBI showed the two letters from Fairfax to Mr Gurumurthy and Mr Gurumurthy denounced them as forgeries. Mr Bhurelal was shown the first letter. He too denounced it as a forgery. But it was late. Too late.

*

I am incredulous. Mr R Goenka and Mr N Wadia were mentioned in the letter: Mr Wadia as having 'arranged' US\$ 300,000 and Mr Goenka as being asked to arrange US\$ 200,000. Yet, Mr Goenka is not questioned. Mr Wadia is not questioned. But Mr V P Singh is removed; Mr Bhurelal is removed. Mr Pande is deprived of the Enforcement Directorate. The three persons directly connected with the clean-up campaign are removed, gone.

Mr V P Singh is no ordinary mortal. In the Mr Clean Stakes, V P Singh has an edge over Mr Gandhi; he was also perceived to have been doing a good job — the Prime Minister himself had acknowledged this in many ways, the most important being that he had not pulled the chair from under him in the game of ministerial chairs which Mr Gandhi likes to play ever so often. In the event, Mr Gandhi pulled a trick from his mother's book: a contrived threat from Pakistan. Nobody in our motherland is supposed to question a threat from Pakistan, howsoever flimsy.

*

BUT FOR THE FACT that the newspapers were reporting the proceedings of the debate in the Lok Sabha on the 'Fairfax affair', what the daily press reported on April 1, 1987 as proceedings of the March 31 debate read more like April Fool pranks being played on the Indian people. Fairfax was only an informer, said Mr Brahm Dutt, Minister of State for Finance. The questions agitating the nation in connection with the hiring of a foreign investigative agency, Fairfax, and the firing of Mr V P Singh, Mr Vinod Pande and Mr Bhurelal from positions of great consequence remained unanswered. The debate in the Parliament, spread over four hours and covered in more than 50,000 words, had only the following of interest:

Mr Dinesh Goswami (AGP): "... I am happy that the former Finance Minister, Mr V P Singh is here. . . I would like to know from Mr V P Singh one thing. Did he do it on his own or did he do it with consultations with the Prime Minister of this country? And if he did it on his own without consulting the Prime Minister of this country, then is he prepared to take the responsibility for engaging such an organisation, which according to both sides of this House, seems to be of dubious character. . ."

Mr V P Singh: "I do share the responsibility."

Mr Dinesh Goswami: "Therefore, I congratulate the former Finance Minister of this country, Mr V P Singh. I congratulate Mr V P Singh who showed admirable courage to wipe out black money. He has owned responsi-

lity for hiring the agency. I congratulate Mr V P Singh. What has he achieved for having tried to unearth black money? The result is he has been shunted out and removed from the finance ministry. . .”

Mr Dinesh Goswami is close to the truth. All this, however, does not answer many other questions which have contributed to an even more confusing scenario and which is mirrored in our newspapers day after day. For example: What is Fairfax? Has Fairfax been hired by the Government of India? At whose instance? To do what? What was the basis for hiring Fairfax? Why is only Reliance being given such investigative treatment? Why this vendetta? Who pays Fairfax? Why a foreign agency? What background material was given to Fairfax by the government to assist it in its investigations? Fairfax says it has written no letters to Mr S Gurumurthy. Are the two letters, purported to have been written by Fairfax and mentioned or quoted in the press, forgeries? Is the government investigating who committed the forgeries? Who could have committed the forgeries? Why? To achieve what end? How were the forgeries committed? Could any sensitive material that could harm our national interests or something that could embarrass some of our leaders, have been passed on to Fairfax to facilitate their securing of the information Mr Bhurelal was seeking? What are the roles of S Gurumurthy, Ramnath Goenka and Nusli Wadia in all this?

Instead of the members eliciting answers to these questions or the ministers making statements on the floor of the House to satisfy people's anxiety, the debate in the Parliament degenerated into a shouting match between the government and the Opposition, and into an exchange of innuendoes; into B R Bhagat and Dinesh Singh viciously attacking V P Singh. Professor Madhu Dandavate was, uncharacteristically, unprepared for the debate. The wording of the motion for the debate (the engaging of the US economic intelligence agency, the Fairfax Group, by the ministry of finance for the investigation of cases of Indians having huge illegal funds abroad) was itself misleading. Fairfax was investigating specific cases involving allegations of four or five FERA violations, not the Bachchans, and certainly not any politician.

Fortunately, I am not as ill-informed as some members of Parliament or as deliberately dumb as some members of the Council of Ministers appeared to be during the debate in the Parliament on March 31. I shall, therefore, proceed to answer the questions which agitate us all.

Q: What is Fairfax?

A: Fairfax Group Ltd, to give the company its correct name, is a small investigative agency based in Annandale, Virginia, in the USA. It has a staff of six or seven operatives and is headed by Mr Michael Hershman, with Mr G McKay as the Vice-President. Both Hershman and McKay were involved in the Watergate investigations as prosecutors. It was after their success in the Watergate investigations that Hershman formed the Fairfax agency. Fairfax specialises in commercial investigations. The agency enjoys an excellent reputation.

Q: Has Fairfax been hired by the Government of India?

A: Of course, Fairfax has been hired by the Government of India. Mr Bhurelal, the Director of Enforcement, Ministry of Finance, the Government of India, appointed them in writing.

Q: At whose instance?

A: At the instance of the Government of India. In sensitive matters like this, an official at the Director's level refers the matter to his Secretary and the Secretary, in turn, will refer it to his Minister.

Q: To do what?

- A:
- (i) To investigate how Reliance Industries Ltd allegedly paid the capacity fee of US\$ 5 million to Du Pont Chemicals, the US chemical giant, for the excess polyester filament yarn spinning machines Reliance Industries Ltd, owns at their Patalganga complex.
 - (ii) To find out how Reliance Industries Ltd paid Chemtex, USA, a sum of US\$ 5 million as capacity fee for the excess poly condensation capacity of roughly 35,000 tonnes per year which Reliance has allegedly installed without the permission of the Government of India.
 - (iii) To find out how Reliance Industries Ltd paid something like US\$ 40,000,000 to Chemtex in the USA for the excess polyester filament yarn spinning machines allegedly brought to Patalganga.
 - (iv) To investigate the source of funds of the NRI Isle of Man and Virgin Island companies which have invested in Reliance Industries Ltd. An investigation in the USA, where Mr Praful Shah who registered several of these companies is resident, will have shown if he has the kind of resources required for funding of vast NRI investments in Reliance Industries Ltd. If you are rich and in America, then investigations into the records of Internal Revenue Service would show such wealth.

Q: What was the basis for hiring Fairfax?

A: The *Indian Express* exposé on the Isle of Man companies of the Crocodile-Fiasco fame and later the articles about the Virgin Island companies which invested NRI funds in Reliance Industries Ltd attracted the attention

of the Government of India and the government began to make inquiries to ascertain the source of these funds. After the *Indian Express* wrote about the smuggled PFI plant of Reliance Industries Ltd, the Government of India investigated the allegations of smuggling through the Central Investigating Unit of the Bombay Customs Collectorate and discovered that the company had, in fact, installed more machines and more capacity than the government had permitted. This conclusion was the basis of the Rs 120-crore *show cause* notice that the Bombay Customs authorities have, on February 10, 1987, issued to Reliance Industries Ltd. This, as well as the suspicions surrounding the source of the funds for the investments by the NRI companies from the Isle of Man and the Virgin Island, is the basis for the hiring of Fairfax. There are two or three more but similar cases the government wanted investigated.

Q: Why is only Reliance being given such investigative treatment? Why this vendetta?

A: The sums involved in allegations against Reliance are colossal. Also, the government is not adequately equipped to unearth corporate wrongdoing. In the case of Reliance, the *Indian Express* articles provided compelling evidence of wrongdoings. Therefore, the question of vendetta does not arise.

Q: Who pays Fairfax?

A: Nobody in the world works for free. Yet, it is common knowledge that investigative agencies work on the basis of bounty — they get a percentage of what the client (in this case, India) recovers. Soon after the poisonous chemical leak in Bhopal, a hoard of American lawyers descended on the Madhya Pradesh capital offering their services to the hapless victims of the gas leak. The lawyers were bounty hunters. American detectives are known to offer services on 'pay later' basis to divorce seeking spouses of the rich.

Q: Why a foreign agency?

A: An answer to this question will hurt my pride as an Indian. And your dignity too. Does anyone seriously believe that we are equipped to handle this kind of investigation abroad when the CBI and the Intelligence Bureau operations cannot even solve ordinary misappropriation cases involving crores of rupees in nationalised banks?

Q: What background material was given to Fairfax by the government to assist it in its investigations?

A: The government must have given Fairfax to understand that we have import restrictions in this country and that imports are against import licences. Technical collaboration fees to principals abroad are paid on the basis of various government approvals and permits and that what Reliance Industries Ltd had obtained by way of excess capacity, or imported by way of plant and equipment, was more than what was permitted by the government. Therefore, Reliance is likely to have paid their principals abroad sums of money without government permission for technology and plant acquired in excess of what was permitted. Government officers are known to us all to disclose much less than what is required of them. And it will be unreasonable to assume that any more information than what was necessary to conduct the specific investigations into the Reliance-Du Pont-Isle of Man-Virgin Island-Chemtex connections was given to Fairfax by the government.

The Bank of Credit and Commerce International in some places was also being investigated; the bank's manager in Bombay is absconding. Another company Fairfax was investigating was Luis Dreyfus Corporation Inc, a company suspected to have links with a New Delhi-based businessman and which link the government wanted investigated. Fairfax was also asked to investigate two or three other individual racketeers in foreign exchange.

Q: Fairfax says it has written no letters to Mr S Gurumurthy. Are the two letters, purported to have been written by Fairfax and mentioned or quoted in the press, forgeries?

A: Yes, they are. Now even the government accepts that the letters have been forged.

Q: Is the government investigating who committed the forgeries?

A: No, not yet. But this is what the government must do with the utmost vigour and urgency.

Q: Who could have committed the forgeries?

A: Somebody who stood to gain most through such disinformation.

Q: Why? To achieve what end?

A: To get at Mr V P Singh, Mr Vinod Pande and Mr Bhurelal.

Q: How were the forgeries committed?

A: Fairfax wrote letters to Du Pont and to Chemtex in the USA telling them that they were retained by the Government of India to conduct investigations into some aspects of the two companies' transactions with Reliance Industries Ltd and that Fairfax was seeking this and that information. The communications to Du Pont and Chemtex must have been signed by Mr G McKay. It would be natural for Du Pont and Chemtex to forward

these letters to Reliance Industries Ltd in Bombay for their comments.

Q: *Could any sensitive material that could harm our national interests or something that could embarrass some of our leaders have been passed on to Fairfax to facilitate their securing of the information Mr Bhurel was seeking?*

A: This question can best be answered by posing another question. How many traitors have we discovered amongst us Indians in the 40 years since we have secured our Independence, despite the fact that day in and day out we talk of a foreign hand, of the enemies of India, of destabilisers etc, etc? If we isolate the Punjab-related treachery and terrorism, you will see that we have only economic treacheries, only economic traitors: people who deceive our country in terms of what belongs to the State. It is the economic traitor, people who illegally accumulate funds here and clandestinely remit it abroad who constitute the real threat to our country. These are the people the government should be hounding.

Q: *What are the roles of S Gurumurthy, Ramnath Goenka and Nusli Wadia in all this?*

A: The relationship between Ramnath Goenka and Swaminathan Gurumurthy — a professional association which has grown into personal friendship — has been widely publicised in the Indian press. Mr Gurumurthy has no business connection with Mr Wadia. But Mr Wadia has been a friend of Mr Goenka for several years. It is reasonable to assume that the friendship grew after Mr Goenka launched the investigative campaign on Reliance Industries Ltd. Mr Wadia had his own grievances against the Ambanis and Reliance. They had tried to thwart his every effort to obtain a DMT licence for a long time, and when this was obtained after a long delay, the setting up of the plant and later the very economics of the whole DMT operation was jeopardised through one measure or the other, evidently engineered by the Ambanis. There is reasonable ground to believe that Ramnath Goenka, S Gurumurthy and Nusli Wadia shared between them whatever information they had independently collected against Reliance — it was the acceptable practice of a writer and his newspaper exploring every available source of information, except that, in this case, it was possible that Mr Wadia, the source of some of the information, stood to gain from the newspaper's use of such information on the premise that 'what hurts one's enemy brings comfort to me'. It is very likely the three — Mr Goenka, Mr Gurumurthy and Mr Wadia — have helped the government look in the direction of Fairfax.

*

In the July 1986 issue of **Imprint**, this writer had published a long article on the Ambanis and Reliance:

ONLY AMBANI

**The manner in which Reliance
conducts its affairs has attracted
widespread concern. What will this
lead to?**

What will this lead to? this writer was then wondering. Two paragraphs from the article, which summed up my anxiety, are worth reproducing here in the light of the recent events:

"Why does a corporation, even granting its large size and spectacular success, arouse such passions? Partly, it is because of where Reliance has arrived, and how fast. There is now also a growing realisation, in some responsible quarters, that Reliance is assiduously working in various ways and at various levels in the community and in the government to project an Only Ambani consensus, reminiscent of the Krupps in pre-War Germany and the handful of conglomerates the Japanese respectfully called *Zaibatsus* in pre-War Japan. Both in Germany and Japan, the corporations astutely cultivated the community, the bureaucracy, and the politicians, to advance their own commercial interests to a point where the community, the bureaucracy and the politicians became accessories to the ambitions and designs of the corporations. William Manchester's *Arms Of Krupp* had dealt with the rise of the Krupps and their role in the rise of Hitler and German militancy. One of the first acts of General Douglas MacArthur on becoming the supreme Commander of the Occupying Forces in vanquished Japan was to dismantle the *Zaibatsus*. History records the Krupps and the *Zaibatsus* as having played a role in events which finally led to the destruction of Germany and Japan respectively. Yet, in the '30s and the '40s, the Krupps were projecting themselves as socially responsible corporate leaders in Germany — and they were accepted as such by most Germans and the German government. In Japan, the *Zaibatsus* were so important in national affairs that their taipans were able to help in the installation of General Tojo as Prime Minister of Japan. Once settled in this power-engine position, they fed to the bureaucracy one-sided and often fraudulent data which made the concept of Greater South Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere appear a necessity for Japan's survival. It was this insidious economic philosophy that led to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour.

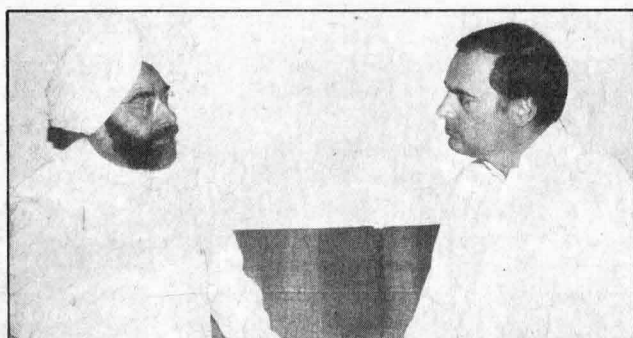
"While times have changed and political realities have altered, and there is no likelihood of Ambani's Reliance playing any kind of role in India similar to what Krupps or Mitsui played in Germany and Japan, there is enough evidence of deception, of massive violations of the country's laws, and subversion of the State at various levels of decision-making and monitoring to warrant a close official look at Reliance. There is something not quite befitting a corporate giant in how Reliance operates and functions, how it spreads disinformation, and how it obtains for itself what it wants, often exclusively, and grows and grows without the State benefitting correspondingly."

What will this — what Reliance Industries Ltd was doing — lead to? I had asked. Now you know. There is no point in looking for scapegoats, for the foreign hand, for destabilisers from outside. A business corporation in India has destabilised the Prime Minister and his government — a finance minister and two of his senior officers have been shunted out. The scenes over the Fairfax affair in the Parliament disgrace us all.

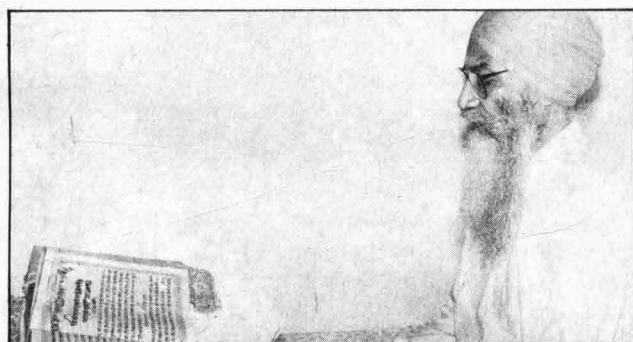
In the end, it is not the forgeries only nor the perceived threat to the Bachchans which have caused the scuttling of Mr V P Singh. The beginning of the end of Mr V P Singh's career as Finance Minister is steeped in our corrupt ways, in our disregard of truth, in the decay of our standards. Long before the present crisis, this writer was afraid that something like this would happen and had written (*On the Marquee*, Imprint, October 1986):

"When Mr Rajiv Gandhi came to power and made those daring noises about honesty in government, and appointed Mr V P Singh his Finance Minister, I was pleased, and also disturbed. The path of honesty, in the aftermath of 20 years of glorious corruption, is strewn with mines. Fearful of the consequences of a 'clean government' policy against our murky past, I had suggested in these pages, long before even Kapal Mehra was arraigned, that there was an urgent need for the government to make a statement about the past nexus between corrupt business and corrupt government. I had pleaded that the government consider settling all pre-January 1985 fiscal wrongdoings on basis of stiff fines — only fines and nothing else. But no such steps were taken and the law, under Mr V P Singh and his enforcement guys, who too wear the integrity badge, took its course — FERA violations particularly, invite arrest — and prominent businessmen were arrested. But politicians who live only on the fruit of corruption were not touched. Thus a schism has occurred, and the damage it is doing to the business psyche will not stop until the Prime Minister makes a bold and frank statement on the corruption of the past, and devises a settlement once and for all, of all the pending prosecutions arising out of the misdeeds of the past. A full restitution to the State of what is the State's, and a full repatriation to the country of what is illegally abroad, should be the basis of all settlements. Political money abroad and here must be included in such an overall final settlement. In the absence of such a settlement, there is no moral justification for the arrest of businessmen, unless, of course, the government is willing to arrest politicians for similar offences. There is still an opportunity for the Prime Minister to think this over. But not for going back on what the Finance Minister, in the meanwhile, partially handicapped, is doing. For that will expose the Prime Minister to the grave charge that he is scuttling the only serious effort this country has ever made to reduce tax evasions and stop the flight of black money abroad; that will also prompt many of our people to openly and loudly say what they are now only whispering. "Raided: the Kirloskars and Thapars. Good. Protected: the Bachchans and politicians. Shame! Shame!!"

Now the inevitable has happened. And for the next few years at least, nobody will ever again believe that we as a nation want a clean administration or that we deserve a clean administration. Or if we obtain it by some freak accident of history, that it will survive. That is, presently, the cost of Mr Rajiv Gandhi to India. ♦



6 **COVER STORY:** Mr Gandhi is confronted with more problems than he can solve. His 'Mr Clean' image is desecrated, he has been unable to win elections, his relations with the President verge on open conflict and his party is disillusioned with him. Mr Gandhi ignored the signs: now a fire-storm is imminent.



38 **OF BARNALA AND BEANT SINGH:** DOM MORAES journeys to Punjab to delve into the complex Sikh psyche. On the one hand, there is Chief Minister Barnala's quiet strength and on the other, Bimal Khalsa, Beant Singh's widow. Both command their own following in the state.

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LETTERS



Common Styles

The interview with Farooq Abdullah (*Rajiv Is Not My Enemy*, March 1987) was most interesting. True enmity comes only if there is a clash of personalities or approach but Rajiv and Farooq are similar in many respects. Both have their origins in Kashmir, have foreign wives, and enjoy a western lifestyle. Politically too, they have enjoyed a great deal of patronage and owe their current positions to their parents. Their political ideals are the same and so whether it is the Congress(I) or National Conference, party elections have not been conducted. The problem of dissidents in both the parties is also the same.

The differences are quite minor. Farooq Abdullah was considered to be the hero of the opposition parties, while Rajiv Gandhi has always been a Congress(I) man. Farooq Abdullah believes in God and has not taken over any mosques so far but Rajiv Gandhi has taken over the Vaishno Devi temple, an act which has pained orthodox Hindus. But these are minor differences and one hopes their alliance will bring prosperity to the people of Kashmir.

Pannalall Mundhra
Calcutta

Dimples And Blemishes

Mr. Moraes' versatility is evident in the two profiles — on Ribeiro in the January issue and the travellers of *Trishna* in the next. They are two

entirely different facets of human courage. Mr Moraes was at his best in the second profile: one thought one could actually see the blue of the oceans and feel the salty spray of the waves through his pen.

Justice Lentin and Antulay (March 1987) came as a real surprise. Bugged down by his position, Justice Lentin seemed to evade the rather long questions while Antulay was at his voluble best.

The writer of the piece on victorias seems to be in doubt about the angle of her story. One is not sure whose plight is most lamentable: that of the horses, the drivers or the *dhanis*.

Minnie Vaid-Fera deserves praise for reporting Granthali's efforts to revive the regional language publishing scenario. The photographs, however, needed explicit captions.

It was heartening to note that there are typewriter artists. Shamboo Ambhawane should have been profiled separately.

Farooq Abdullah's interview reads like an explanatory note on his alliance with the Congress(I). A follow-up to this interview after the elections would be interesting.

After the dimples now the blemishes. The short story by M A Sreenivasan should have been scrapped. The photofeature needed some action shots.

Murali Menon
Bombay

Bombay's Victorias

The article *Where Have All The Victorias Gone?* (March 1987) was very evocative. We also owe it to victorias for some of the most hummable, clip-clop, *ghodagadi* numbers in Hindi films.

Ms Nireshwalia mentions that horse carts at beaches make a lot more profit than victorias. Time and again I have seen these poor horses ferry potbellied men and women. If wishes were horses, wishes wouldn't be horses.

Meenakshi S
Bombay

Can He Survive The Firestorm?

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 'Mr Clean' image seems finally to have become tainted beyond repair. His party's debacle in the recent state elections, his personal fractious relationship with the President, and now the sordid intrigue over the Fairfax issue, are significant indicators of the Prime Minister's waning power and charisma.

R V PANDIT analyses Rajiv Gandhi's current position — in the eye of the firestorm that threatens to engulf him.



FOR THE BESIEGED MAN, Tuesday, the 24th of March 1987, was an extraordinarily luckless day. For even while Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, was applauding the smooth liftoff of the ASLV rocket from the Sriharikota launch pad, the soaring vehicle disintegrated (within two minutes and 40 seconds

of liftoff), bringing gloom and despair to the VIP spectators and the scientific community. In the late afternoon, as Mr Rajiv Gandhi flew north from Madras, the election results which had begun to trickle in from Kerala, from Jammu and Kashmir and from West Bengal held even greater portents of disintegration and



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despair: Mr Gandhi's party was being routed in Kerala, Jyoti Basu's CPM was heading for an absolute majority in West Bengal, and the Congress-I was riding piggy-back on Farooq Abdullah's shoulders in Jammu and Kashmir. Even worse, reports coming in from Kashipur were indicating a win for Akbar 'Dumpy' Ahmed, against a Congress-I luminary in that very important constituency of U P, Mr Gandhi's home state. The capital, when Mr Gandhi landed there, was a beehive of rumours that V P Singh was resigning, that President Zail Singh was making various devious moves, and of the Congress-I's disenchantment with its leader.

In the event, when the tallies of the results were made late that evening and on the next day, they revealed

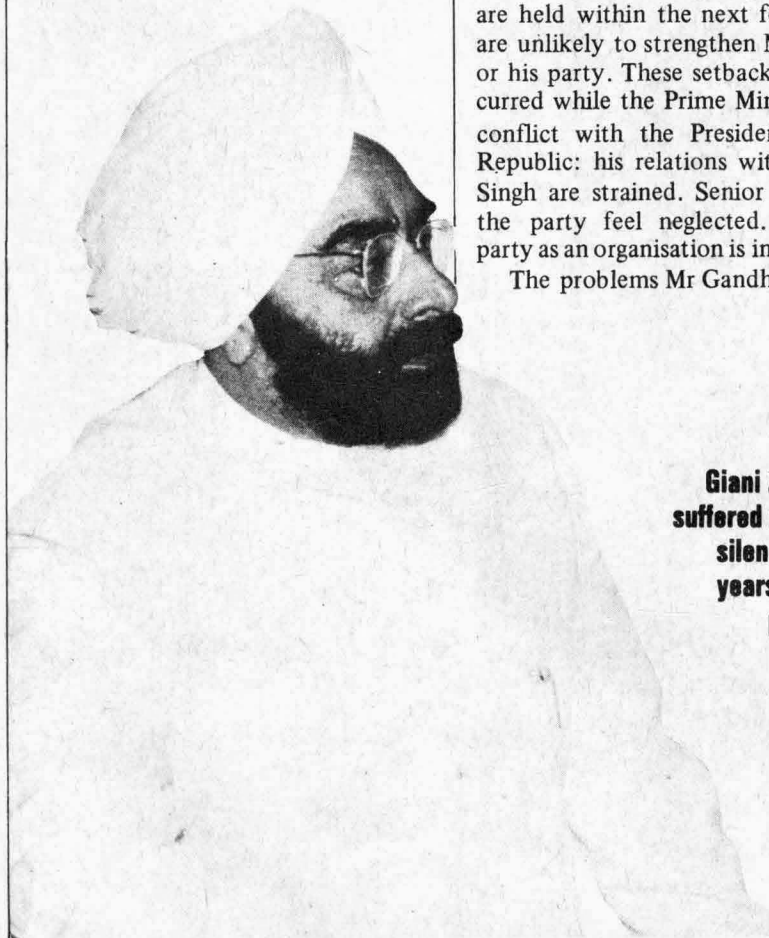
that Mr Gandhi and his party had taken a severe thrashing in West Bengal, and had lost in Kerala. In Jammu and Kashmir, where the Congress-I showing was less disastrous, it was all too evident that it was only as the junior partner of the National Conference of Farooq Abdullah that the Congress-I had won 24 seats. Fewer people had voted for Mr Gandhi's party now, in 1987, than in the elections held in 1983 when the Congress-I was also fighting Farooq Abdullah.

The loss of Kerala has trundled the Congress-I out of power in the whole of the south. And with Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura, Punjab, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu already with non-Congress parties, the Congress-I is now reduced to being a ruling party mainly in the Hindi-speaking belt. The outcome of the elections in Haryana, when they are held within the next few weeks, are unlikely to strengthen Mr Gandhi or his party. These setbacks have occurred while the Prime Minister is in conflict with the President of the Republic: his relations with Mr V P Singh are strained. Senior leaders of the party feel neglected. And the party as an organisation is in disarray.

The problems Mr Gandhi faces are

compounded by the character of the party he rules. Although Rajiv Gandhi was accorded princely ovations ever since he joined his mother's party seven years ago, Sanjay's brother was considered the odd man out in the Congress-I by most of those who live off the party. Much of what Mr Gandhi was saying as the General Secretary of his mother's organisation was anathema to the higher-ups as well as to the rank and file of the party, which tolerated him only because of his mother; because she had nominated him her heir apparent. When Mrs Gandhi was assassinated, a wave of sympathy for the survivor of the Nehru dynasty swept across the nation. The Congress-I began to view Mr Gandhi, who was in the meantime elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and was also sworn in as the interim Prime Minister, as a person, clutching whose *kurta* they could trail towards the general elections. The carnage which followed the assassination of Mrs Gandhi and the fear it generated for the unity of the country was cleverly exploited by the mostly apolitical coterie which surrounded Mr Rajiv Gandhi. And when Mr Gandhi actually won the general elections, taking 403 Congress-I candidates for the Lok Sabha with him to a landslide victory, the Congress-I had found in Mr Gandhi a leader unlike any before him — the sweeper of the polls and the demolisher of all opposition.

Yet, the odd man out image persisted; Mr Gandhi worked overtime to refurbish that image. He smiled at everyone except his partymen. He surrounded himself with people who had no experience of politics, people who had little grass roots exposure to the country. He appeared more concerned about what was happening outside India and pursued this unnecessary involvement with endless forays into foreign lands. His fresh and cheerful disposition in public, his once boyish face and his non-partisan political attitudes had won for Mr Gandhi much admiration among the people of India. Unfortunately, the



**Giani Zail Singh
suffered neglect in
silence for two
years. Then he
protested.**

popularity he was gaining also made him hubristic — he began to systematically ignore time-honoured institutions of governance; worse, he began to ignore the President of the Republic. His interest in the political party he had inherited from his mother began to decline.

After only 12 months in power, at the Centenary celebrations of the Congress in Bombay in December 1985, Mr Gandhi spoke of his party as if he was above it all, sending shock waves and anger through the rank and file of the Congress-I. Assiduously projecting his administration as clean and above corruption, he appeared, when it suited him, to be the mastermind behind V P Singh's policy of carrot and stick, and liberalisation. Even as such an image was being built, there was no explanation as to how the Congress-I was being funded, what the source was of the colossal sums of monies the party had spent on the 1984 general elections. Mr Gandhi made no effort to distance himself from friends of doubtful fiscal probity, nor were any denials issued when the press wrote of Congress-I funds stashed outside the country. In the event, the desecration of the Mr Clean image, his row with the President and his uncertain hold over his own party are clouding his horizons. The signs of an impending storm were everywhere, but Mr Gandhi chose not to read them. Now, a firestorm is about to engulf him.

OF ALL the grave problems confronting Mr Gandhi the most crucial involves his own party. 'If he cannot win elections, what use is he to us?' is the woeful refrain of most Congressmen. Long before Mr Gandhi came on the scene, the Congress had become a personality-oriented party. After the first split of the Congress in Bangalore in 1969, it was Mrs Gandhi who dominated the organisation to the exclusion of all others. In due course, she was the party and she was the government. The collapse of the Congress in 1977 illustrated this in one way; her return to power

in 1980 illustrated it in another, more dramatic way. Yet, it was Mr Gandhi's 1984 victory that was to establish the extent to which the Congress-I had come to depend on the leader and his philosophy. Now, in the wake of the flagellation in West Bengal where Mr Gandhi staked his reputation on the election results, what is likely to happen after 30 months when the general elections are held? This, as well as his poor personal relations with senior leaders of the party who have also been his mother's long associates, creates difficulties which Mr Gandhi will find hard to overcome.

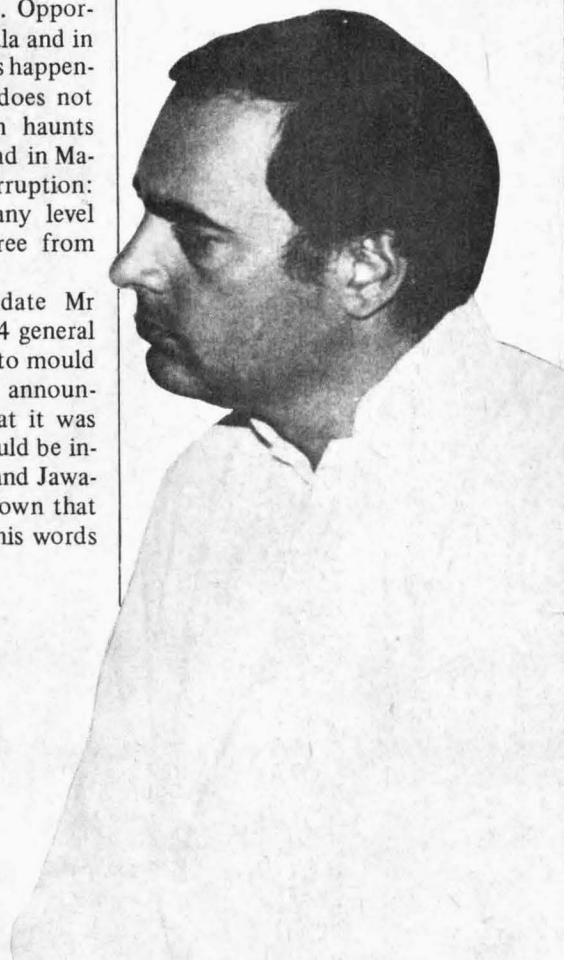
In the states where the Congress-I lost, the party suffered from shortcomings all too evident even in states still under Congress-I rule. Apathy, illustrated in a lack of genuine political commitment to the people, afflicts the party everywhere. Opportunism is on display in Kerala and in Jammu and Kashmir. What is happening in Bihar and in Orissa does not bear mention. Factionalism haunts the party even in Gujarat and in Maharashtra. Add to all this, corruption: very few Congressmen at any level can claim that they are free from taint.

After the massive mandate Mr Gandhi received in the 1984 general elections, the party was his to mould any way he wanted: he had announced to a thrilled nation that it was going to be a party that would be inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. But he has shown that he is not inclined to back his words

with deeds. Today, the party is not even democratic. No effective organisation exists — as the election campaign in West Bengal recently demonstrated.

In the midst of all this disarray, powerful regional chieftains are lying in wait, to strike when the opportunity arises. In his brief tenure as President of the Congress-I, Mr Gandhi has alienated more party leaders than Mrs Gandhi managed to drive into the Opposition in her entire career. And some of it is totally needless. There was no need to bring Sharad Pawar back into the fold, and then ignore him. There was no need to drop Arun Nehru from those heady heights. There was no need to ignore Asoke Sen in the cabinet or in West Bengal. Above all, there was no need

Mr Gandhi, culturally and mentally different from the President, ignored him till the leaked letter made the headlines.



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to treat a loyal lieutenant like V P Singh in the manner he has been treated. The Dinesh Singhs, for the likes of whom Mr Gandhi should have no need, do not attack V P Singh without Mr Gandhi's covert blessings.

WHILE THE PROBLEMS of the Congress-I party are his inheritance, and Mr Gandhi can be blamed only for making things worse, the question of his relationship with the President of the Republic which has exercised the whole country, is entirely of his own making. In a society where respect for the elders is a way of life, Mr Gandhi was most unwise to treat the President shabbily. And Zail Singh was his mother's associate of many years and later her own successful nominee — against strong opposition from others — for the highest office in the land. In the event, the most important thundercloud, though not the first, to blacken the horizon of the young Prime Minister was the issue of his relations with the President. His forefathers also had their differences with the Presidents of their time. Jawaharlal Nehru had sometimes disagreed with Dr Rajendra Prasad and later with Dr S Radhakrishnan. Mrs Gandhi had not been on the best of terms with Mr Sanjiva Reddy by any means. But whatever the squabbles between Prime Ministers and Presidents in the past, the Prime Ministers concerned had always followed the constitutional norms. They had apprised the President of their actions, and kept him fully informed. Mr Gandhi on the other hand, had, from the start, not bothered to conceal an indifference bordering on contempt for the incumbent President. He never consulted him or told him what he intended to do even in matters of great national concern.

Moreover, there had been a continual breaching of protocol. To cite just one example, when a visiting dignitary arrives or departs from Delhi, the Prime Minister and the President meet him at the airport. The Prime Minister is required to arrive first,

and the President, according to his dignity as head of State, comes later. On more than one occasion, the President arrived at the airport on time and found himself waiting for Mr Gandhi, who would turn up late without offering an excuse or an apology.

The Prime Minister's attitude in private was simply to ignore him. In public, he accorded him little of the respect due to a President from a Prime Minister. This was naturally noticed, both by senior officials and by the press corps. This magazine published a cover story in our issue of February 1986 on the reports of the rift between the President and the Prime Minister. Rumbles of rumour arose in the capital. The storm was on its way. It first broke when Mr Gandhi, in the Lok Sabha in early March, before the representatives of the entire nation, declared his fealty to the President and his close cooperation with the head of the State. If Mr Gandhi thought this could clear the air, it was a bad miscalculation on the part of a man who had been trained to be a pilot.

For the storm broke over him and he lost all control. The President wrote him a letter in which he refuted what Mr Gandhi had said in Parliament. In fact, he virtually called him a liar. The country would have never known of the letter but for a leak — the *Indian Express* published the letter on March 13. The result was a national uproar. Mr Gandhi, once regarded as Sir Galahad, became the villain of the piece, while the President, who was previously seen as rather ineffective, suddenly turned into a hero with a halo, one who had suffered for two years in silence.

Mr Gandhi's response to the scandal was even worse. Speaking to reporters in Calcutta, he said, "I have made my statement (on keeping the President informed) in the House. I stand by what I said . . ." This was like taking the fight to the streets. A few days after this the Prime Minister wrote a reply to the President and even met him for 130 minutes. But the relations do not seem to have

improved.

THE ISSUES dividing the President and the Prime Minister are many but the one concerning the report of the Thakkar Commission inquiry into the assassination of Mrs Gandhi is, potentially, the most intricate. The government maintains that the report, which has not been published, is too sensitive a document for the Giani to peruse. To say that the head of the State should not have access to State documents is, quite simply, preposterous. If such a premise is to be defended, then Giani Zail Singh should not be the President for even one more day; he should be impeached and removed. And if Mr Gandhi or his government cannot do this, then they ought to shut up: and the insidious leaks against the President must cease. Mr Gandhi has created for himself and his government a trap in connection with the withholding of this report. If the report is given to the President and he finds his name even remotely implicated, he can question the very basis of the Commission's findings and its reliability. And if the report does not cast aspersions on his integrity, then he also can take the government to task for the gravely damaging leaks. It is a no win situation for Mr Gandhi, and he has himself to blame for it. Had he followed his grandfather's respectful and constitutionally correct style of dealing with the President, nothing like this would have ever marred the relationship between the present Prime Minister and the President. The issue of the Postal Bill has also been poorly handled. The country is agitated over this proposal, and the President has only reflected the nation's concern in asking questions about some aspects of the Bill. Mr Gandhi is making a great mistake in viewing this as presidential interference.

WHEN MR GANDHI first became Prime Minister, a boyishly handsome young man, new to politics, he could have been called, like his grandfather, *Rithuraj*, the spi-

rit of Spring. Though he occupied a high political position, the perception of the public was of someone who was not a politician. The public was exhausted after the tortuous political manoeuvres that took place under Mrs Gandhi. With the coming of someone who did not seem a political person, they rejoiced.

A year passed, and he was still the Sir Galahad of India, riding forth on his white horse to challenge the political lords. In his speech at the Congress Centenary celebrations in Bombay in December 1985, he thrust a lance at power brokers and office seekers and declared his firm intention to rescue the party from itself. This enraptured the public. But as time went on, nothing happened: there was no follow-up action even on as elementary a procedure as internal party elections. Instead, he became a participant, and perhaps the guiding hand, in the ridiculously pointless shake-ups and changes in the party organisation. Arjun Singh was in one day, and out the next. The same treatment was accorded to Arun Nehru. Nobody regretted the retiring of the octogenarian Kamalapati Tripathi. But the manner in which this was achieved raised questions about Mr Gandhi's ability to handle men and matters.

On the administrative side, he appeared to assume almost total responsibility for everything: there were the accords, with Punjab, with Assam, with Mizoram: he appeared involved in a nationwide programme of poverty eradication, flying to villages here, there and everywhere. He was projected daily on television as someone entirely preoccupied with development programmes all over India, but particularly in Opposition-ruled states. He travelled all over the world, spoke of peace and cooperation and tried to sound more and more like his grandfather, at his vaguest. Unfortunately, in simultaneously pursuing such wide-ranging activities, Mr Gandhi forgot even the basic tenets of administration, how this sprawling country runs, how foreign relations are conducted,

how the bureaucracy functions. The bureaucrats are by no means perfect, but they are the arbiters of the administration, as good or bad as the political masters they serve. Given Mr Gandhi's ambitions for India, he should have cultivated and inspired the bureaucracy to maximum performance. Instead, Mr Gandhi caused grave offence in the manner in which he treated, in the presence of others, even such high officials as secretaries to the government. Worse, he publicly humiliated the Foreign Secretary of India, prompting the gentleman to resign forthwith. Reports of how Mr Gandhi treats some other functionaries also cause deep anxiety. In all this, the simple young man who had come to power had vanished. More and more, people began to view Mr Gandhi as a politician, and a blunderer at that.

WHILE the Prime Minister has flaunted his charm, of which he has plenty, in many distant lands, some of which are of no interest whatever to India, he has not done so in countries nearer home. Every householder knows that an important requirement for a quiet life is to have peaceful relations with his neighbours. Of all the countries that abut on India, Mr Gandhi has only visited one: Bangladesh. But the Prime Minister has not visited our four most important neighbours: China and Nepal in the north, Pakistan to the west, and southward, Sri Lanka. Like the Great Mogul, he sits in Delhi and waits for their leaders to come to him. Probably to their displeasure, but much to their credit, they have.

Pakistan is probably one of the 'foreign hands' to which Mr Gandhi, like his mother, refers so often. Perhaps to be at peace with Pakistan would deprive him of a favourite scapegoat for anything untoward that happens here. It is remarkable that General Zia should have come to Mrs Gandhi's funeral, that he should recently have visited Jaipur (not to forget his visit to Bangalore to attend the SAARC meeting), ostensibly to

watch a cricket match but very probably to demonstrate to the Indian public that he is not an ogre, while Mr Gandhi has not returned his visits. Pakistan and India have been at loggerheads for 40 years, or most of them, and now, when Zia shows symptoms of wanting some kind of peace, Mr Gandhi is doing nothing about it. He talks about 'the Islamic bomb' and fears that the Arab nations may use it, thus annoying a bloc of nations with whom India is supposed to be friendly. He also, at a delicate moment in time, when Pakistan's nuclear facility is much in the air, allows Operation Brasstacks to take place on the Pakistan border. This in the old days would have been called sabre-rattling, and the Pakistanis were alarmed by it. Anyone but, presumably, the Prime Minister, could have predicted this. Seeing heavily armed Indian troops on our side of the border, they amassed their troops on theirs. War could have broken out.

As to China, there have always been disputes about the territories around the border. These have flared up again recently. At that time, the sensible thing to do would have been for Mr Gandhi to visit China and pour oil on the troubled waters of the Yangtse Kiang. It was not enough to send messages and secretaries in his place. But he himself did not visit China. This may be because it would have involved an exercise in diplomacy, an art with which the Prime Minister is not particularly conversant. Relations with China therefore remain uncertain, exactly as they do with Pakistan, and this should not be so.

Sri Lanka is quite another kettle of mud. What started out as an ethnic dispute has turned into a tripartite civil war. This is in no small part due to India's indifference in the first phase and interference in the second. At the beginning the clash between the Sinhalese and the Tamils was regarded as relatively unimportant and unlikely to escalate into armed conflict. Now Sinhalese are killing Tamils, and Tamils are not only killing Sinhalese

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las but one another. It cannot be denied that Tamil terrorists are not only being harboured but trained in Tamil Nadu. Mr Gandhi has done nothing about this, though it constitutes a hostile activity aimed at Sri Lanka, a friendly neighbour. From Delhi, the Prime Minister has expressed his sorrow about the turn of events. From Delhi, he has sent emissaries to tell the Sri Lankans, in an infuriatingly paternalistic way, what they should do. In Delhi, he has received President Jayewardene and his advisors. But though the island is in flames, he has not personally come anywhere near the fire. Neither the Sinhala nor the Tamils now trust him.

THIS UNSTABLE relationship between India and its neighbours, particularly Pakistan, is the excuse employed for all kinds of security strategies. Instead of building political bridges to Pakistan, we flog the same tired, old horse, ignoring in the process the larger interests of the country which friendship and commercial cooperation could serve. The phobia about Pakistan and the perception of the hazard of the destabilisation which Pakistan's friends can cause to India take their toll: we are now frightened of our own shadows. (This perception of Pakistan is not shared by the Indian public: a recent TIMES-ORG poll for *The Times Of India* indicated that fully 55 per cent of our people do not view Pakistan as a threat to India.) In this mental climate it does not appear abnormal for Mr Gandhi to be allocating more and more funds for defence: "We will make any sacrifice to defend the integrity of India," is now Mr Gandhi's refrain also. Of course, Mr Gandhi has himself to make no sacrifice whatsoever while the people languish. While so much attention is being paid to defend ourselves from external threats, we have failed to bring peace in the Punjab or security from criminals in the cities or the countryside. Mr Gandhi, partly because of the situation in the Punjab and partly on account of our very

poor security record, is protected by the most elaborate security arrangements of any leader in the world. This generates its own curious consequences. Everybody who is anybody in Indian politics and even in public life today flaunts guntoting bodyguards. The numbers of security people attached to the politicians have become symbols of their relative importance. In all this, the citizen is considerably inconvenienced, and exposed. He has little protection of law. Police and other security forces are almost exclusively employed to protect politicians and other functionaries. This has, unfortunately, created a schism between the rulers and the ruled. Nobody in power seems to realise this and certainly not Mr Gandhi. As a consequence, Mr Gandhi is viewed by many people in the country as the cause of the increase in crime which has affected the lives of all our citizens. This may be an unfair inference to draw but it has a germ of truth in it. Certainly, we have more crime today than ever before. Recently, in Bombay, a jail was bombed and an inmate shot dead in a revenge killing. Reports of gruesome murders even in exclusive residential localities in metropolitan cities have become commonplace. Yet there is no indication that Mr Gandhi is concerned or doing anything about this steep rise in crime.

Mr Gandhi remains convinced that defence needs higher and higher outlays. Recently, when some members deplored the increase in the defence budget, which was their inalienable right as elected representatives of the people, the Prime Minister's reply was somewhat unbalanced. Anyone who dared criticise the defence budget, he remarked, was an enemy of India. His behaviour in the Parliament has been somewhat petulant and at one time unruly. He has thumped the table in Parliament, like Khrushchev at the UN, except that Mr Gandhi used his hand and not his shoe. Khrushchev was universally criticised at the time for behaviour unbecoming in a national leader: so should Mr Gandhi be.

MORE THUNDER has recently been brewing on the horizon for the Prime Minister. The Fairfax affair has been fully discussed in *On The Marquee* in this issue. As regards this matter, what was essentially a simple if covert operation has been dragged into the light of day, and, when it was, the government has made a typically inept attempt to haul it back into the dark. Mr Brahm Dutt initially dismissed Fairfax as 'an informer'. Justly incensed by this denigration of his agency, Mr Michael Hershman, the head of the agency, revealed that there was far more to it than that. Immediately Mr Gandhi announced that a Supreme Court judge would look into the matter. Five days later he stated that two Supreme Court judges would form a commission and report on the whole affair. What the government had first sought to minimise has become magnified beyond all proportion. Mr V P Singh has taken responsibility for hiring Fairfax.

The Fairfax affair has been on the front pages of every newspaper in the country ever since it was first uncovered. Other issues concerning the mistakes of the Prime Minister and his cabinet have similarly received wide press coverage. But Doordarshan and AIR, both of which are controlled by the government, have not mentioned these issues, though both have frequent newscasts. There is no doubt that Mr Gandhi's government is responsible for this echoing silence. Mr Gandhi has cut off his nose to spite his face. Most people who read newspapers — and there are millions of them — and who communicate what they have read to millions more, listen to radio and watch television. They are perfectly aware that these two media are controlled by the government. Indians are not fools. They are aware that the government is attempting to hide controversial news from the public, and also aware that the Prime Minister is finally responsible for this. Added to this that the President has virtually called him a liar, and that everything he promised had

failed, and it added up to one result: like some of the politicians he had dealt with overseas, his own people had ceased to trust him, and he had lost nearly all his credibility. His own mistakes had turned what were essentially minor issues into national controversies. He had been trained as a pilot, but now, in the midst of a storm, he had lost his grip on the controls. He was flying blind, with no radar to chart his course, into the direct centre of a firestorm.

FEW POLITICIANS in history can have been changed for the worse, so quickly, by power. Mr Gandhi at first seemed a mild, unassuming young man, willing to be led by his elders. But the lovable young man, in the space of 27 months, has turned into a grim and self-obsessed politician. His career in this respect has curious parallels with that of his late mother. When Mrs Gandhi came to power in 1966, Kamaraj and the other senior Congressmen who supported her imagined, to their misfortune, that this woman, who appeared quiet, shy and withdrawn, would be both tractable and malleable. In a very short time they learnt their mistake, and were thrown out of the government by the very person they had brought in. The point is that this toughness was part of Mrs Gandhi's personality from the start, though it was masked by her silence. It is doubtful whether it was part of her son's personality.

In his first year as Prime Minister, the mistakes he made were minor, and could be attributed to inexperience. He may have felt rather dismayed at the responsibilities that now confronted him. Until 1980, he had led a sedate life, romping with his children, listening to music with his wife, flying small planes for pleasure rather than profit. He was known to abhor politics, or at least he said he did. When at home, that is in his mother's house, he shut himself away in his room to avoid the swarms of politicians outside. He is quoted as having said that he would like to move

out of his mother's house for the sake of his children, for whom constant exposure to a political atmosphere was, according to him, highly undesirable. He did not do so, he said, because he did not want to let his mother down. If he left her house, the press would read all kinds of sinister implications into his departure.

Be that as it may, those who knew him before 1980 aver that he had no interest in politics. Some indication of this is manifested in the fact that when Mrs Gandhi appeared to decide that the leadership of India should be hereditary, it was her younger son, Sanjay, whom she pitchforked into politics, as her own father had done to her in 1959. Sanjay was ready and willing, if not entirely able. Mrs Gandhi remarked to one writer that he was 'a doer' while Rajiv was 'a thinker'. Since he arrived as Prime Minister, his thoughts have seemed confused in the extreme. Since actions are a consequence of thought, or should be, many of his actions have therefore been incomprehensible. His treatment of the President, his continual reshuffles of union ministers and chief ministers, his wild promises, his untruths: all these reflect a mind which is not clear, which is still very immature, and which needs to be guided by advisors other than the ones he has so far had.

Mr Gandhi has managed to lose credibility with the public, loyalty from his followers, and respect from the press. To pick up the bits and pieces of his reputation will be a considerable task. He is by no means an intellectual, but he must see and feel the firestorm around him. With the instinct of a trained pilot, he can still fly his way out of it. He must have learnt something from his numerous mistakes. Giani Zail Singh has stated that he will not contest the Presidential elections. What many people do not realise is that he has not said he is unavailable. Nominated and pressed by his supporters and friends, of whom he has many, since his clash with the Prime Minister, he may well return for a second term. It is also

likely that Mr Gandhi's own party may betray him. This is dependent on the results of the Haryana elections. If Haryana is lost, as it well may be, for even though the Lok Dal is split down the middle, the Congress (I) in the State is by no means unified, Mr Gandhi's hold on power will become tenuous, and the chance of the Giani being put up as the Opposition candidate will increase. In that event, which is not very unlikely, Mr Gandhi must make amends for the past and remould a working relationship with Giani Zail Singh. Some of the mistakes he has made can be unmade. And there is no harm in Mr Gandhi learning to respect experience.

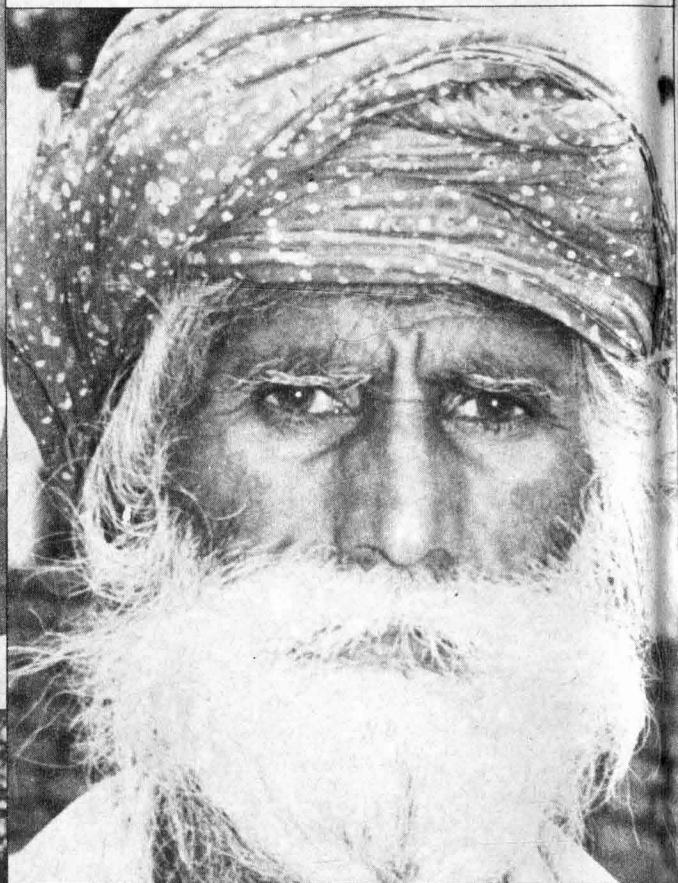
He has 30 odd months left before the next election. It is not a long time, but it would seem to be long enough for Mr Gandhi to at least partially redeem himself. If he falls, it will be a notification from the voters that they do not want young and inexperienced leaders. The country will then fall back upon elderly leaders with fixed ideas, and that would be a pity. The Prime Minister is still only 42. He has obtained some experience, at least, during his tenure, even though it has so far been misapplied. It is sorrow one feels, rather than anger, when one thinks of him. He was burdened with too much too young. If he comes out of the firestorm, he will come out badly singed, and this may force him to look at his own problems and those of the country with a calmer, wiser eye.

John Kennedy's Camelot fell away around him. Mr Gandhi's Camelot has suffered the same fate. But if Mr Gandhi has been taught any lessons by what has happened, and absorbed them, the ruins may still be rebuilt. The knights of Camelot, when they committed a sin or error, used to travel on dangerous quests to find the Grail and atone. Mr Gandhi has now to undertake a quest of his own, which is to find himself. If he does, he can reassume the golden armour of Sir Galahad, and ride forth on his white steed to conquer once more. ♦

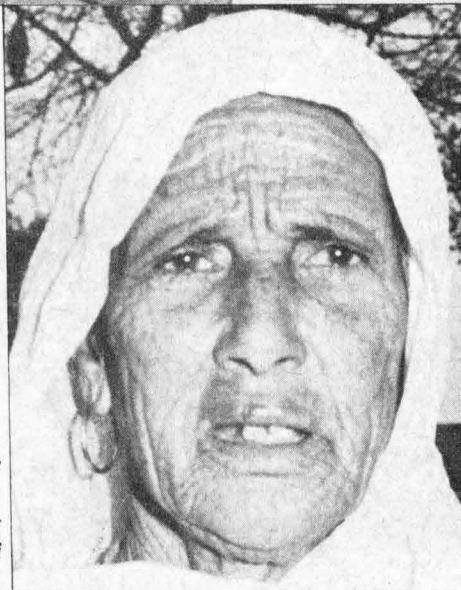
THE FORGOTTEN



Dhan Devi lives out her 40-year curse.



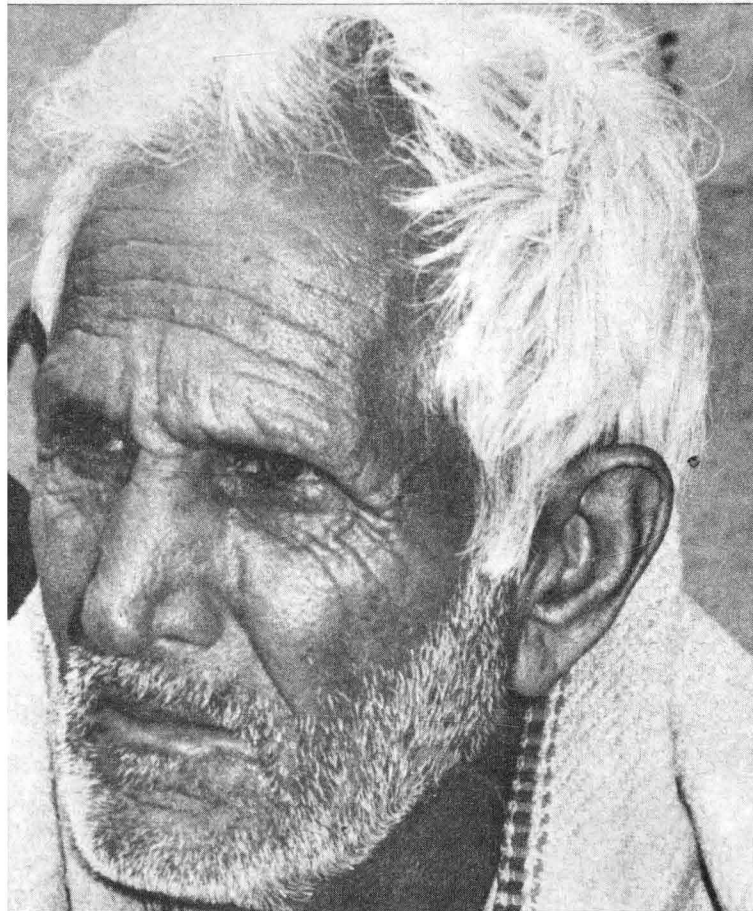
Sawal Singh speaks of dark days.



Kirpo Devi, Fakir Chand and Ram Rakho fear falling bombs and Pakistani tanks.

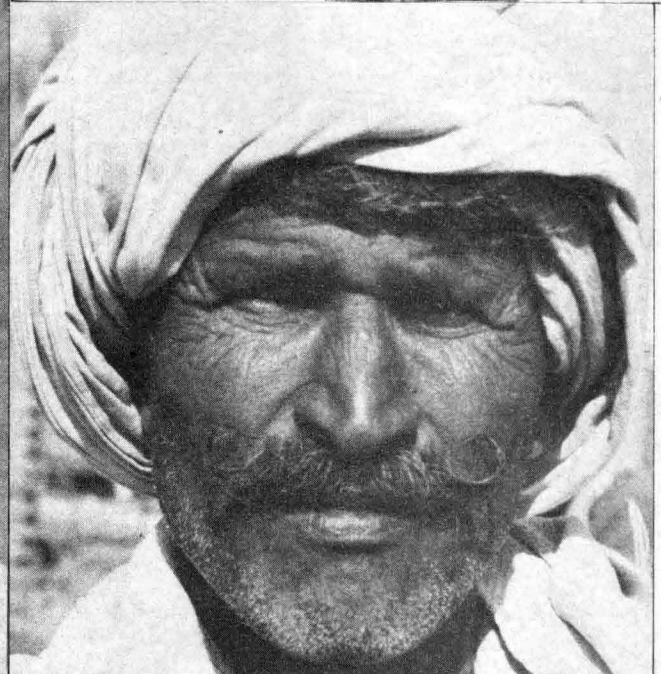
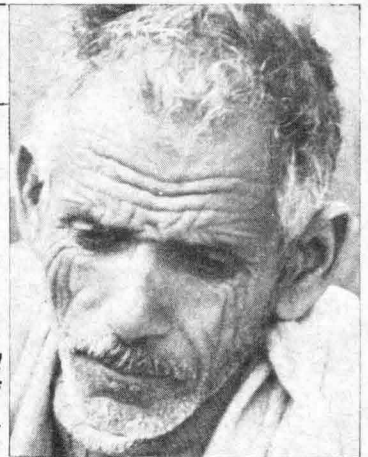


REFUGEES



Munshi Ram vividly remembers the '47 massacres.

*Chiman Lal
blames Rajiv Gandhi
and Farooq Abdullah.*



Bandu Ram feels betrayed.

The Pakistani refugees, largely Hindus, who migrated to Jammu during Partition, have 40 years later, received no compensation. Worse, they have no rights to own property, no rights to move the courts, no rights to vote, no rights of any kind. Successive state governments have neglected them and the present chief minister has ignored them.

This special report from Jammu's border villages also exposes how during the recent military build-up, lakhs of villagers fled from their homes at a cost running into several crore rupees. Will the government compensate them for this unnecessary loss? **HARISH MEHTA** investigates.

THEY HID THEMSELVES in the ripening wheat fields during the day. Only at night did they dare to emerge and run closer towards India. The year was 1947. And the Partition riots had broken out. Kirpo Devi, a 40-year-old lady clutched her 15-year-old son's hand and ran behind her husband towards Suchetgarh in India. Sialkot and their village Paloda in Pakistan were no longer safe. At the end of a long day's journey into night they reached Suchetgarh to discover that they had been labelled refugees. Here they would be safe from the Muslim hordes; far from the killing fields, yet so close.

Today, 40 years later, Kirpo Devi is a gnarled old lady of 80; her son Gurbachan Lal is 55. In fact, nothing

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has changed in their lives. They are still referred to contemptuously as 'those Pakistani refugees'; they still live in the same mud hut; they still eat one meal a day; and the government has, even after 40 years, not given them a piece of land or cash as compensation. Some years ago her husband died. To her it meant the loss of a dear one; it also meant the loss of a regular income of Rs 10 a day. "I have been betrayed by the government," she says, raising her hands helplessly. "I am fed up of living on the border. Sometimes it rains, sometimes bombs fall out of the sky. I wish I'd die," she says and her pent-up anger and *angst* come pouring out.

Every evening as the sun sinks into the Sialkot horizon, Kirpo Devi drifts back to the gory killings of 1947 and prays that the government, Farooq Abdullah or any kind soul will give her a piece of land as compensation for the eight acres she left behind in Pakistan. Forty winters have unleashed their cold wrath upon her but she has fought back the tears and clutched on to the hope that one day her son would get the land. Gurbachan Lal does not remember his early childhood but shudders when he thinks of the carnage. Today, he has other things weighing down his mind, for Kirpo Devi's clan has grown to 40 — all refugees, all waiting for Farooq Abdullah's largesse. "But he just does not bother to come here. Indira Gandhi did not, and Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah just do not bother about us," says Kirpo Devi in anger. The sun is now rising in the sky and Gurbachan Lal says he must go and work in the fields, or else the landowner will not pay him his daily wages.

The Human Tragedy

AS THE SHROUD of darkness crept up from the western Sialkot horizon, Banso Devi, a 20-year-old village beauty slipped out of a clump of trees and followed her parents. Living on a diet of fear, they covered the 10-



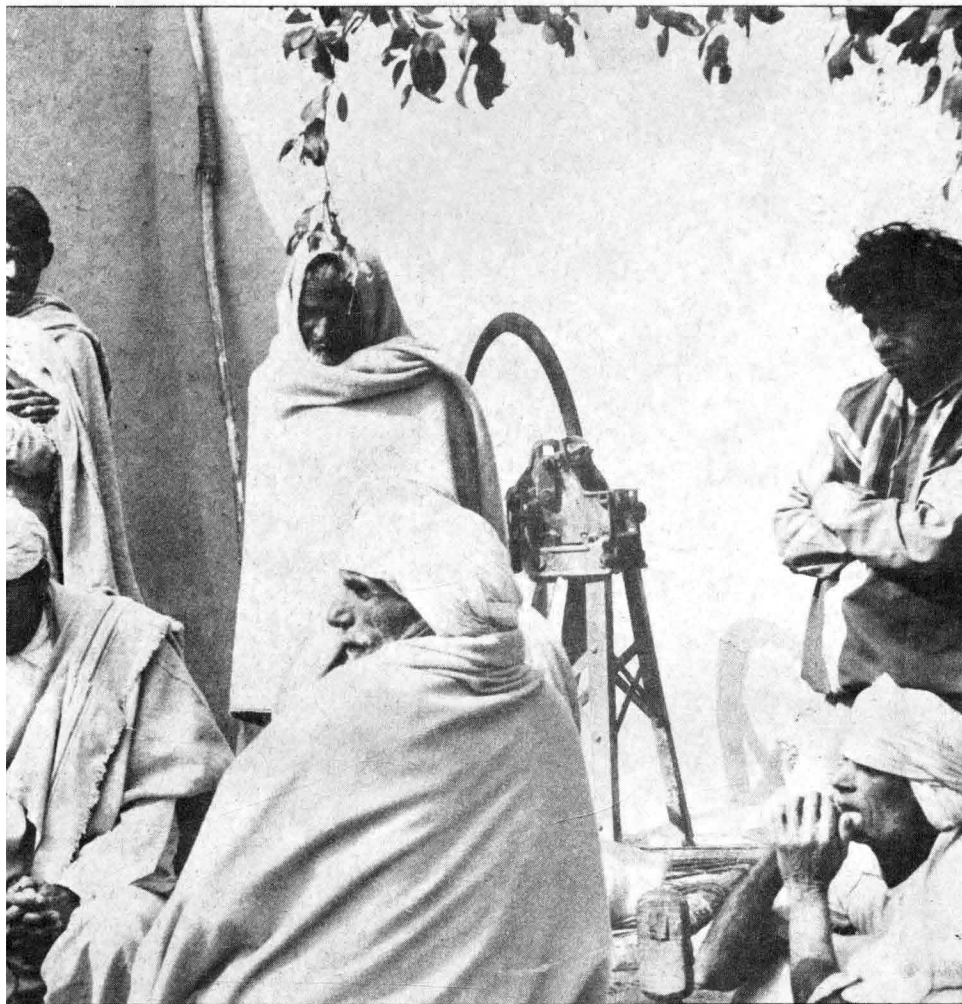
On the Indo-Pak border, the men of Parlah village relate their tales of woe.

mile distance to Sialkot cautiously, ducking and hiding, avoiding the blazing huts and the paths of the criss-crossing Muslims raiders. As the sun rose the next morning, they reached Suchetgarh and found other Hindu families hunkered around mournfully. Among the first families they met was Kirpo Devi's. In hushed, anguished tones they exchanged fragments of sad news, of butchered brothers, hacked sons, burnt mothers. That night they went to bed inside open, flapping tents while vigilantes kept guard against Muslim reprisals.

When I met her, Banso Devi had turned 60 but her beauty had not drained away with the three wars. The first shock came in 1948 when Pakistani raiders launched their attacks, but were repulsed by the Indian forces. The second shock took

its toll in 1965, but Banso Devi and the entire Suchetgarh clan had been evacuated to safe sanctuaries deep inside India. The third shock was the 1971 war, when Kirpo Devi heard the ominous rumble of American-built Patton tanks and fled to Ranvir Singh Pura, a nearby town. The now-familiar rumble of American-built M-1 tanks again assaulted Kirpo Devi in February 1987 and she, along with the entire village, fled to Ranvir Singh Pura one more time. "Tanks come, tanks go, we remain," laments Banso Devi.

The flapping tent has been replaced by a black-hole type mud hut where Banso Devi and her six children live on starvation's edge. She complains bitterly about being neglected and says: "We have never seen Farooq Abdullah's face." The village head-



ter informed than the others. Remnants of 1947 litter her hut: tattered shawls and broken shoes, possibly worn by a fleeing Partition victim. An escapee from the riots in Dalowali village in Pakistan, she wonders if things would have been better there.

Suddenly, Chuni Lal and Ratan Lal jostle through a small crowd that has collected and say they want to make their statements. Their story goes back to the 1971 war. One day the pair of them were walking around in the mustard fields on the Indian side of the border when two sudden explosions blew their legs off. They fell unconscious and could only be taken to hospital two days later. The government finally took notice of their cases only when hundreds of people had their legs blown up by land mines planted by the Indian Army. In dozens of villages able young men suddenly lost their legs and in the face of growing protest, the government sped through a sanction of Rs 1,500 per injured person. Ratan Lal, then begins to roll up his trouser leg and reveals his iron limb. "The money given by the government was not sufficient to make an entire iron leg,"

man Aroor Das, who is standing nearby, listening in on the conversation lustily adds: "We have boycotted both the National Conference and the Congress (I)." The entire village has now boycotted all political parties. "What is our crime? Are we being punished because we are Hindus?" asks Banso Devi. Ejected from Pakistan, not absorbed by India, the refugees remain suspicious both of the Muslim nation on the west and the Hindu state on the east.

Troopers of the Border Security Force watch as I walk around Suchetgarh village. Another refugee, Dhar-mo Devi, shows me around her hut and tells me that the refugees have no rights. "In Jammu we cannot vote, we cannot buy land, we cannot run a business, nor can we send our children to school." She seems slightly bet-



Leg blown up by landmines, Ratan Lal has an iron leg.



Chuni Lal's foot, too, was blown up by the army's mines.

INVESTIGATION

he says emotionally. I notice his thigh ends in a stump and his crude metal limb only helps him hobble along. The government slaps itself on the back for doling out Rs 1,500, nonetheless.

The Long Neglect

CLEAVING THROUGH the slush-filled lanes of Suchetgarh I am again on the road that leads to Sialkot, deep inside Pakistan. One hour later, I arrive at village Parlah that balances precariously just three kilometres from the Indo-Pak border, as the crow flies. Here chilly winds scissor through man and beast. But on the day when Amar Nath crossed over to India, full of hope, it was a warm day. The hope has since died down. Today, he is a broken man, gradually shattered by the sloth of a dithering government. While not one of the 36 refugee families in Parlah dared to take on the government, he battled with them for 20 enervating years. He fought night and day to get compensation for his house left behind in Pakistan. Looking back in anger, he began his letter-writing odyssey. Till today he has shot off 40 letters to the government, the first one in 1961, in a kind of quaint pidgin English. He wrote: "To the Settlement Officer, Amritsar. Sir, with reference to the above I beg to state I have already filed an affidavit to the effect that I am a displaced person from village Khiduwali, Sialkot district, Pakistan. That I owned residential house in the said village for which I have applied for. I migrated to India during the disturbances of the year 1947 and settled at village Parlah. It is requested that my claim be settled."

The Settlement Officer, Amritsar, replied under his letter SO/ASR/RE/J&K/6090 of 29.4.1961. He wrote: "Whereas you have filed application for Rehabilitation Grant Under Rule 95/86 of the Displaced Persons (Compensation & Rehabilitation) Act, 1954, and whereas you have not complied with the mandatory provisions

Beyond this barrier the road leads to Pakistan.

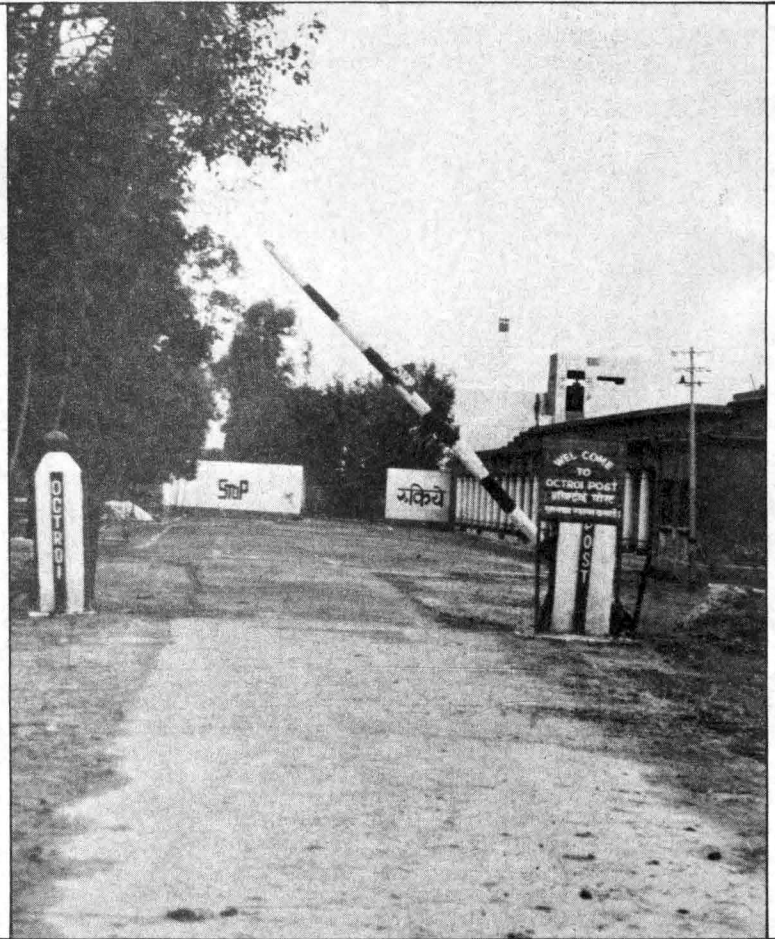
thereof by supporting your application with documentary evidence of the title to the property left in West Pakistan in respect of which a claim could have been filed under the Displaced Persons Claims Act, 1950. As you have mentioned in your application about your possessing necessary documents, you are hereby called upon to submit attested copies of the same to the office of the undersigned either in person or through Registered AD post to reach this office before 15.5.61, failing which it shall be deemed that you do not possess the necessary documentary evidence and consequently your application for rehabilitation shall stand rejected."

Amar Nath did not possess 'the necessary' proof, which was left behind in Pakistan in the Partition turmoil. His battle with the authorities continued although he is completely unlettered. Each time he had to have

a letter typed he journeyed to distant Jammu to request typist jobbers to draft his replies. The letters kept coming and going and Amar Nath spent thousands of rupees shuttling by bus to Jammu and back but ultimately nothing emerged.

To thread body and tortured soul together, Amar Nath turned textile weaver; he prizes his weaving machine but helplessly clutches a bunch of government letters, utterly confused by the warp and the weft of Kashmiri politics.

A fortyish-looking Munshi Ram claims he's 55. He came from Dhaunkal village, tehsil Wasirabad, district Gujranwala, Pakistan and did not even bother to write a letter to stake his claim, though he left behind four houses. Fakir Chand, 45, came from Jagal village in Narowal, Pakistan, and is a labourer eking out a living on a starvation wage of Rs 10 per day.





Homecoming after the Indo-Pak army build-up.

Bandu Ram, 56, came from Nakowal village, district Sialkot and lives out his days as a labourer. Gyan Chand, 50, came from Charba village, district Sialkot and doesn't remember seeing any politicians in his village, since he came.

The stories continue as the Pakistani refugees swarm around. Chiman Lal from village Jagal, Daulat Ram from Harpal, Sawal Singh from Chakamboh, Ram Rakho from Lidhoke, Ram Pyari from Malane, have all waited 40 years, buffeted about by the Jammu & Kashmir state government, sandwiched uncomfortably between two belligerent armies.

Through a profusion of ditches and cratered dirt tracks that twist over mustard fields, past Pakistani Rangers eyeing our Ambassador car, I arrive at Chakroi village, a stronghold of the Pakistani refugees. Chakroi is a staging post for alcohol that

is smuggled across the border into Pakistan. Allegedly, a large portion of the alcohol distilled by Janak Raj Gupta, MP, ends up in Islamabad, and very little of the brands are visible in liquor shops in Jammu, claims a Pakistani refugee.

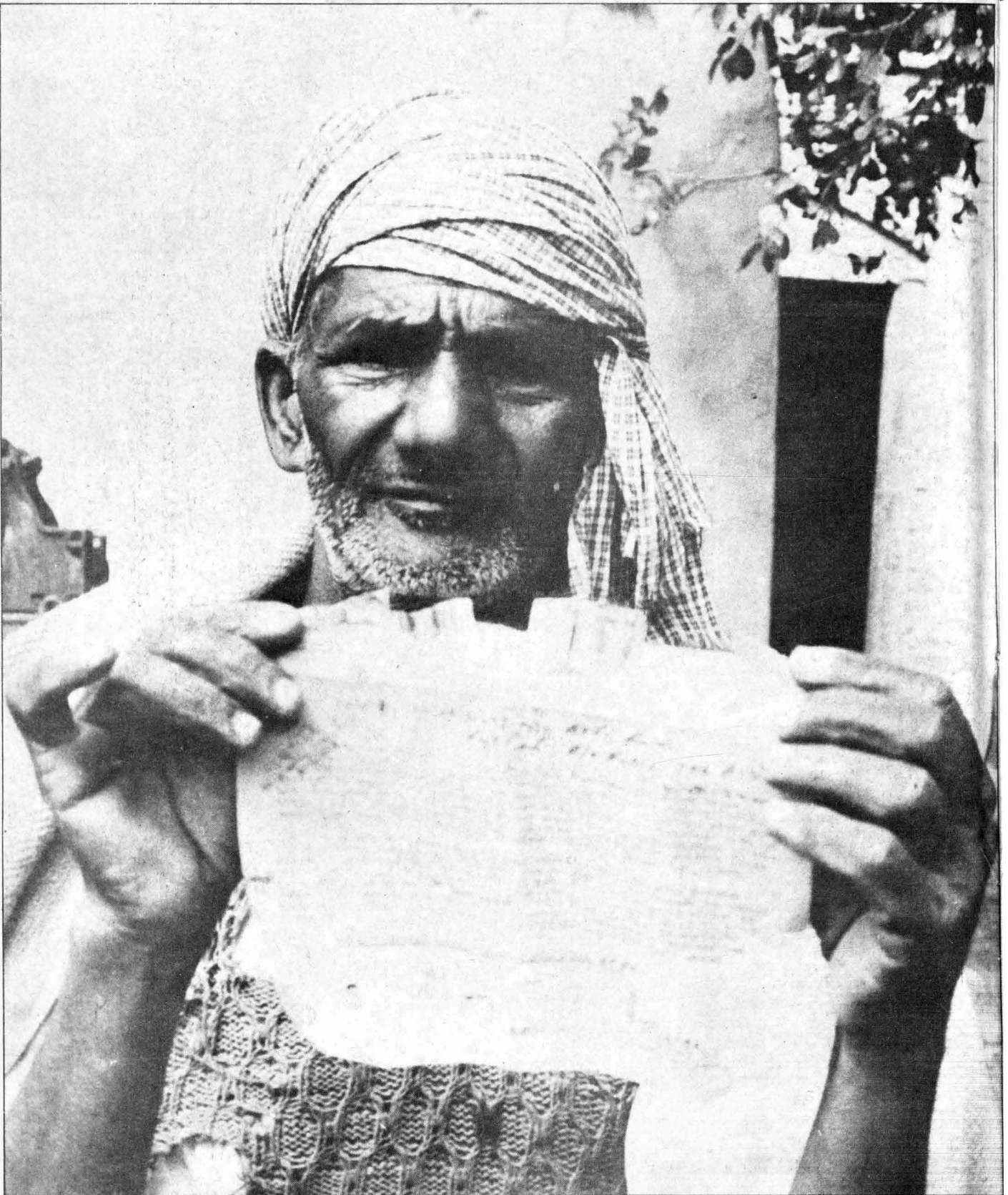
Covered in dust, Ambu Ram, 60, emerges from a mustard field where he works to earn a pittance. Babu Ram, Magar Ram and Darshan Lal from Sialkot, Pakistan, speak of their plight to anyone who cares to listen. Not many do.

Suchetgarh, a bomb-scarred border village, is separated from Pakistan by an imaginary barbed wire. The headman Aroor Das recounts how the entire village was evacuated earlier this year when India's 6th Mountain Division was moved out of its peacetime location at Bareilly and fanned out in defensive positions all along the Jammu-Pak border. Says Das: "We

had to shift all our belongings in hired trucks and bullock carts back to safer places and suffered a big financial loss." A quick calculation reveals that Suchetgarh's 150 families spent around Rs 300 each to move their goods back to Ranvir Singh Pura, a town 25 kms inside India. The added up to a staggering Rs 60,000 to just reach there, and the return trip (after the Indian and Pakistani armies had agreed to pull back) took their losses to around Rs 1,20,000. While the Defence Ministry has adequately compensated the villagers of Rajasthan where Operation Brasstacks was held earlier this month, the refugees of Jammu & Kashmir remain neglected.

Is the government even aware of the fact that these refugees have spent lakhs on the mindless war hysteria? Does it care that dozens of villages like Suchetgarh on the Jammu-Pak

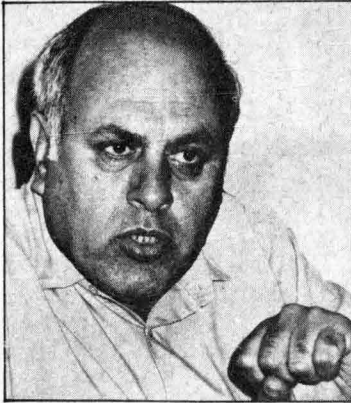
INVESTIGATION



Amar Nath shows a letter he wrote to the government.

"Refugees Are A Long-standing Problem"

Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah discusses the refugee problem.



Imprint: Till today you've done nothing to grant rights to the refugees from Pakistan.

Farooq Abdullah: That is a long-standing problem. We have two long-standing problems, one of which we have now sorted out. It concerns the refugees from Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir. We have formed a corporation, and a few days ago it has got the clearance from the Indian government. This corporation will look into their problems. For a long time these people were promised Rs 12,000 as a settlement but were never paid. But today, Rs 12,000 which should have been paid in 1950 is worth over a lakh of rupees. Today, Rs 12,000 is nothing. This corporation will raise some more money and give it to them as a loan, at a low interest. This would give them some income, to set up a shop, or to build two rooms.

In protest, these refugees actually walked all the way from

Jammu to Delhi to meet Mrs Gandhi and tell her their woes. I don't know whether they walked from Jammu to Delhi.

It is a fact that they walked and they met Mrs Gandhi. With the setting up of the corporation we have been able to achieve this.

But, why has it taken you 39 years to set up this corporation? We don't want quarrels, we want to achieve results. Thank God, even after 39 years we have achieved the result. Finally we've got what we wanted for these poor refugees.

When are you giving them their settlement money? Very soon. The corporation has been formed, the finance will be organised. The problem of refugees from Pakistan has been discussed with the Rehabilitation Ministry of the Government of India. I had discussed it with them in my last ministry. *Inshallah*, once the elections are over, the Rehabilitation Minister will come and we will discuss this problem.

Why have they got no voting rights? They have no rights to vote for the state assembly, they have all the rights to vote for parliamentary elections. They can't vote in assembly elections because they are not state subjects, they are not a part of the state.

border were affected by the army movement and had to be evacuated? Or that their cumulative losses run into crores of rupees?

Driving to Suchetgarh, a sprawling village cubbyholed with hastily evacuated bunkers of the Indian army,

we discover that the size of the villages has shrunk; villagers fleeing from the advancing Pakistani tanks have still not returned. From Suchetgarh the Pakistani army's observation tower is visible, rising high into the sky. Says Das: "We have to exist un-

der their gaze." But the refugees of Suchetgarh tell a sadder story.

The Broken Promises

IN CLUSTERED VILLAGES live the forgotten people who suddenly spring into memory when it is election time. Theirs is the story of 40 years of neglect studded with sporadic stock-in-trade election promises that are made, and quickly unmade, with bewildering regularity. Their endless nightmare at the border began during Partition in 1947; today they are certainly not a gullible lot since they have learnt to take all the promises — made over the years by Sheikh Abdullah, Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Vajpayee, Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah — with the necessary pinch of salt. Scattered along the trigger-tense Indo-Pak border from Jammu to Poonch, these Pakistani refugees live out their lives with a fine disregard for war. They've faced bombs and bullets alike three times over, and they came rather close to it for the fourth time in the post-Operation Brasstacks phase. Such things happen in Jammu & Kashmir.

In the Janata phase, the Minister for Rehabilitation, Sikander Bakht, had made several promises but did nothing. Neither did the Congress. The last promise was made by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Earlier Atal Behari Vajpayee privately concluded that in the greater interest of the country he could not annoy Kashmiri Muslims on the refugee issue. Betrayed by most political parties the refugees wait for death, war, disease, to liberate them from living on the razor-edged border.

Jammu, February 15 — The state government today decided to float a refugee rehabilitation corporation with an initial capital of Rs 12 crore. The state government, it is learnt, has identified 33 income-generating schemes in farming, horticulture, handloom and other sectors for them.

News item in *Kashmir Times*
This is not the first time that offi-

INVESTIGATION

cial assurances have been given. In 1975, during the Emergency, Mrs Gandhi announced an aid package of Rs 50 crore for rehabilitating the refugees. Nobody in the Kashmir administration knows what happened to the promised funds. Says Bhim Singh: "These are merely election stunts." Since 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru had been promising Rs 12,000 to each refugee; today Farooq Abdullah is mouthing the same promises.

The Constitutional Betrayal

THERE ARE THREE categories of refugees in Jammu & Kashmir: those who entered India from Pakistan in 1947 during Partition, those who came in 1965 at the peak of the Indo-Pak conflict, and those who crossed over into Jammu & Kashmir during the 1971 war.

Droves of Hindus, largely Harijans, poured into India to be settled at the border areas by the government headed by Sheikh Abdullah, though not many were prepared to live close to the Pakistanis. They were given small chunks of land at the border and were used by Sheikh Abdullah to function as a rough-and-ready territorial army to keep an eye on the Pakistani raiders. Sheikh Abdullah gave the refugees weapons and ammunition, since not many citizens of Jammu & Kashmir were keen to function as a buffer territorial army against the trigger-happy Pakistanis.

Quickly, the refugees realised they had been ripped off by Sheikh Abdullah, whose government had denied them statehood rights, civil rights and legal rights. But the Sheikh's hands were tied. He could not do much for them because under the Jammu & Kashmir constitution, one has to be a permanent, hereditary resident of the state in order to get its citizenship and other spin-off rights. Not being permanent residents, the refugees were thus fobbed off.

The tip of the communal iceberg suddenly emerges when one considers the fact that while the 1947 migrants



Dharmo Devi is helpless.

were denied these rights, the Jammu & Kashmir legislature under Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah had enacted the Resettlement Act, 1982, by which all these rights were extended to the Muslim residents of Jammu & Kashmir who had migrated to Pakistan during Partition. Hindu leaders in Jammu have been closely watching these ominous developments but have been unable to do much when confronted by Farooq Abdullah's overwhelming strength in the assembly. The provisions of the Resettlement Act were even extended to the children of the Pakistanis living in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, who might choose to return to Jammu & Kashmir.

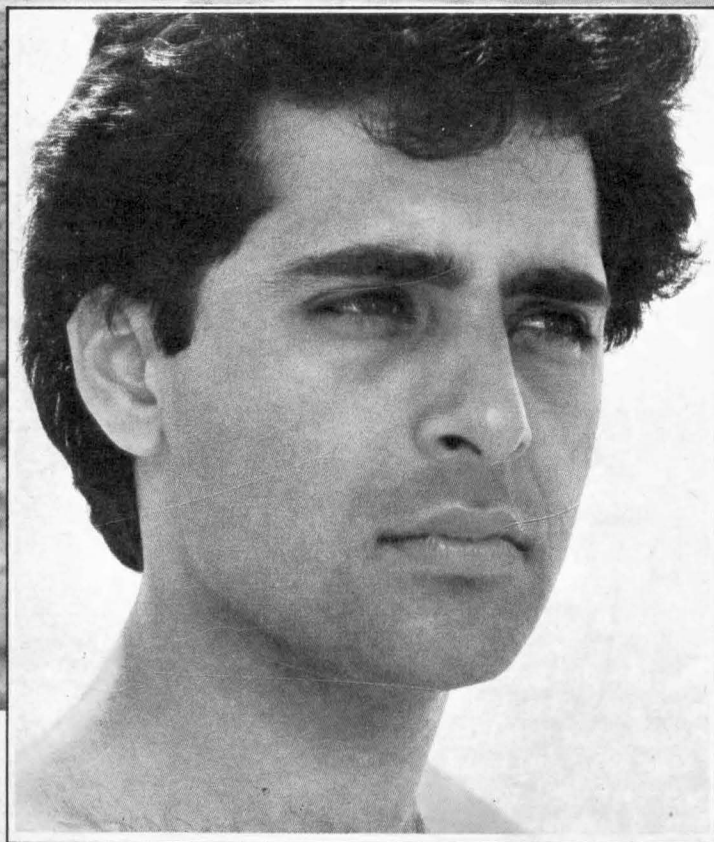
Basking under a special constitution, Jammu & Kashmir remains blind to the refugees, but under Section 6(2) of its constitution it provides that persons from West Pakistan, if they were previously class I and class II state subjects will automatically be-

come residents of J&K on their return to the state from West Pakistan.

The Judgement

SINCE 1947 the refugees have been fighting with their backs to the wall. And 40 years later, on February 24, 1987, the Supreme Court held that their grievances were 'justified' and stated that they were denied their basic rights because of the peculiar constitutional provision in the state. Delivering its fence-sitting judgement on a writ petition challenging the Resettlement Act, 1982, a division bench comprising Justices O Chinappa Reddy and S Natarajan, observed 'in the peculiar context of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, the Union of India also owes an obligation to make some provision for the advancement of the cultural, economic and educational rights of these people'. The judges said they were 'unable' to help the

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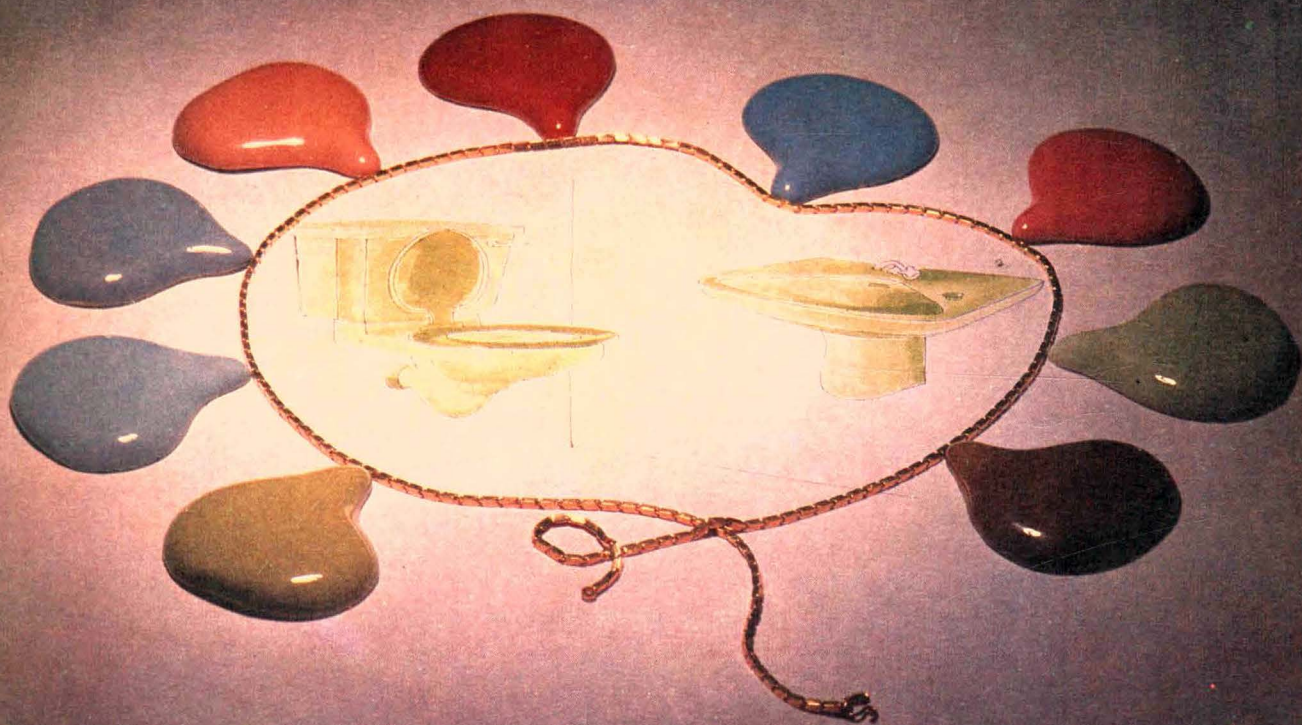
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refugees and hoped the state of Jammu & Kashmir would do something for them. However, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah told me: "Not being state subjects we cannot give them citizenship rights, nor can they vote for the state assembly elections." Bhim Singh of the Panthers Party alleges that Farooq Abdullah's conspiracy is aimed at preventing their names from appearing in any census so that they, being Hindus, cannot cast their votes and add more power to the pro-Hindu political lobby.

Till the government comes to a decision their fate hangs in the balance. In the mid-'60s the refugees had set up the Refugee Action Committee (RAC). Bachan Lal Kalgotra, the chairman, pointed out to the Supreme Court that though the migrants had been living in the state for the last 40 years, they were being denied the right to acquire any immovable property, right to employment, right to start an industry, right to purchase transport vehicles, right to higher technical education, and the right to be elected to the state assembly or a local body.

How long will the apathy last? If he desires, Farooq Abdullah can provide employment to the refugees by amending the Jammu & Kashmir Civil Services, Classification of Control and Appeal Rules. (In a private conversation, it transpired that he has not even thought of such an amendment.)

And how long will the refugees — nearly eight per cent of the population — continue to survive in pitiful circumstances on the Indo-Pak border?

Says Bhim Singh, a sympathiser of the refugees: "The state government has curbed their rights step by step." He remembers the scare created by Farooq Abdullah's Resettlement Act and the discontent that spread among the refugees at that time. "In fact, the National Conference lost the 1983 elections only because the people were scared that if the Pakistanis had returned to Jammu & Kashmir to claim their land, lakhs of Indians would have lost their properties," adds Singh.

By 1974 the government had become intensely unpopular with the refugees who barged into the state assembly and hurled pamphlets saying: "Kill us or give us our rights." They were arrested. The same year nearly 500 refugees walked in sheer desperation from Jammu to Delhi to plead their case before Mrs Indira Gandhi, but nobody bothered about them.

Beneath the thicket of legalese lies the ultimate political yardstick of Jammu & Kashmir's communalised elections: Hindu votes versus Muslim votes. Consider this: in the assembly, Jammu province has 32 seats, Kashmir 44. Whereas the difference in population is only 1,69,328, the difference in seats is 12. If the 2.5 lakh refugees are added, Jammu's population will grow higher than Kashmir's. This population increase is no ordinary phenomenon; it signifies the shift of power from the hands of the Kashmiris to the hands of the people of Jammu — and that worries Farooq Abdullah.

Moreover the census has not been conducted since 1981 nor has the delimitation of constituencies been carried out. Under the law, the delimitation report has to be implemented soon after the census. Thus, the 1983 elections were totally in violation of the law. Similarly the election held on March 23, 1987 was a legal infringement. In mid-February 1987, Governor Jagmohan issued a notification, using his power to issue ordinances, that elections should be held on the basis of the previous delimitation. "All these frauds are being perpetrated ostensibly to preserve Kashmiri hegemony over Jammu," adds Bhim Singh.

Other countries do not seem to have the same problem: Germany makes a migrant a full-fledged citizen in three years, the US gives citizenship in five years. Only Jammu & Kashmir's politically motivated legislations have prevented the refugees from exercising their freedom. A Hindu leader in Jammu lamented that Rajiv Gandhi is fighting for the rights

of South African blacks and Palestinians but 'has not lifted a finger to help these refugees'. The unkindest cut is that the refugees are contemptuously referred to as 'those Pakistanis'.

The Supreme Court's helplessness sent the refugees' hopes crashing, especially in view of the judges' statement that "it is up to the State Legislature to take action to amend legislations, such as the Jammu & Kashmir Representation of the Peoples' Act, the Land Alienation Act and the Village Panchayat Act." Talking to Farooq Abdullah (see box interview), it is evident that he is unlikely to do anything for the refugees by amending the laws.

Moreover the refugees cannot get admission to higher technical, educational institutions unless Farooq Abdullah makes them eligible by issuing appropriate executive policy directives, without resorting to legislation. But there seems little hope. When there has been no action for 40 years, it is unlikely that the laws will be changed to better the lot of the refugees. Certainly, Farooq Abdullah has no such plans. ♦



Governor Jagmohan has beautified Jammu but neglected the refugees.

POLITICS



IT IS a cold evening in Jammu and Begum Akbar Jahan Abdullah is resting beside a crackling logfire deep inside a labyrinthine Residency Road mansion, the official residence of her son Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah. This is the historic house that two generations of Abdullahs have lived in and lorded over. The porch bristles with insecure ministers, edgy loyalists, and guntoting guards who, it seems, are there more for reasons of ceremony than to protect the Abdullahs. Having said a polite no to Kashmiri tea, I am swept into the drawing room by a strapping private secretary swathed in a baggy *salwar* and *kurta*.

The Begum walks in. She is a small woman with an incredibly expressive, wrinkle-free face. The jaws of time have been kind to her in spite of a frenetic political career. But, the Abdullahs are not just a political family. It may sound surprising at first that the Begum comes from a family of hoteliers. (Her father, an Anglo-Swiss entrepreneur, ran the Nedous Hotel in pre-Partition Lahore). It may sound even more astonishing that she still runs the Nedous Hotel and the Highland

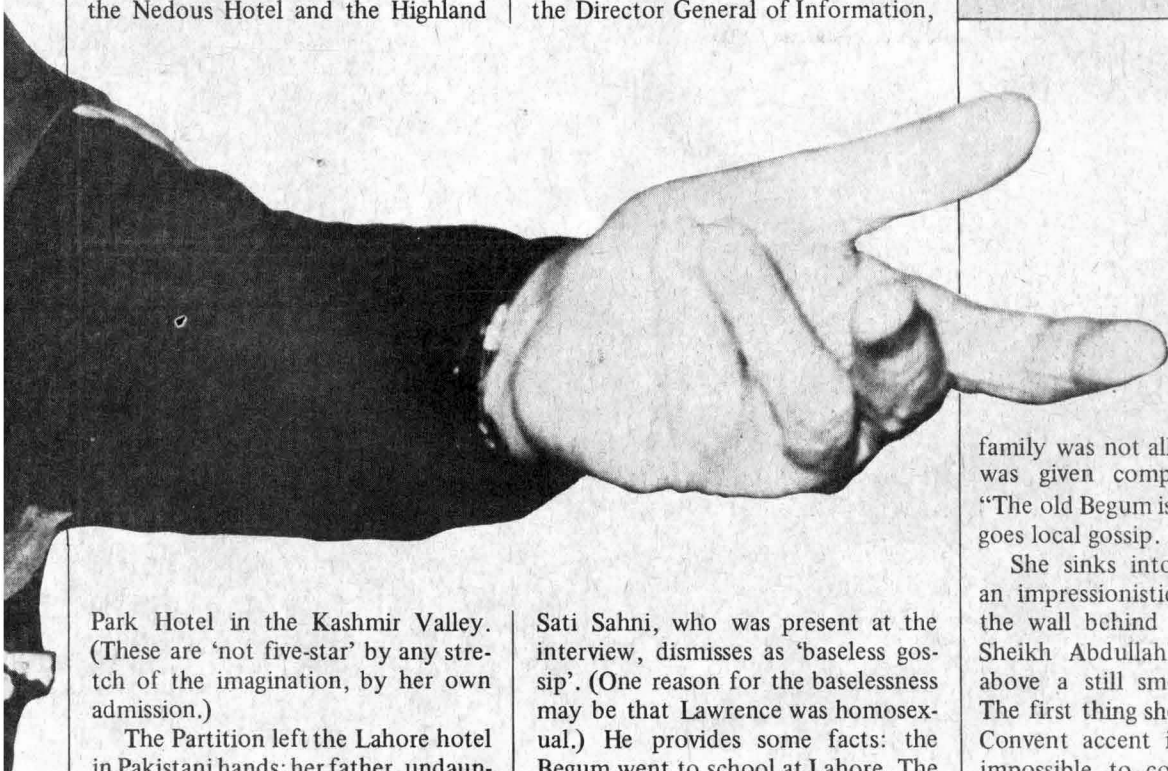
ted, had the prescience to expand his chain to Kashmir. A wag in Jammu said the Begum would never have entered politics had she remained confined to Nedous. The Begum, however, married politics when she married Sheikh Abdullah.

Today, it must stick in the National Conference's craw to state that she is a clayfooted, ineffectual politician, who is being kept on more out of sentiment than for hard political reasons. That the Begum, at the distinguished age of 74 is the patron of Farooq's National Conference underlines the fact that she's not yet over the hill. Her detractors say that she's a has-been. The Begum, however, has retained her scalpel-edged wit, though she does lapse into nationalistic moonshine on occasion. The has-been charge does not stick. The Begum is the member of parliament from Anantnag and takes her people's problems to the Centre.

Jammu is rife with some of the oddest rumours. One such would have us believe that the Begum was first married to Lawrence of Arabia. This, the Director General of Information,

Lioness In Loneliness

Sheikh Abdullah's widow, who is involved in politics, as is her son, the present Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, speaks to HARISH MEHTA in this exclusive interview. Since the death of her husband, her family has fallen apart. The Lion of Kashmir has left his helpmate alone.



Park Hotel in the Kashmir Valley. (These are 'not five-star' by any stretch of the imagination, by her own admission.)

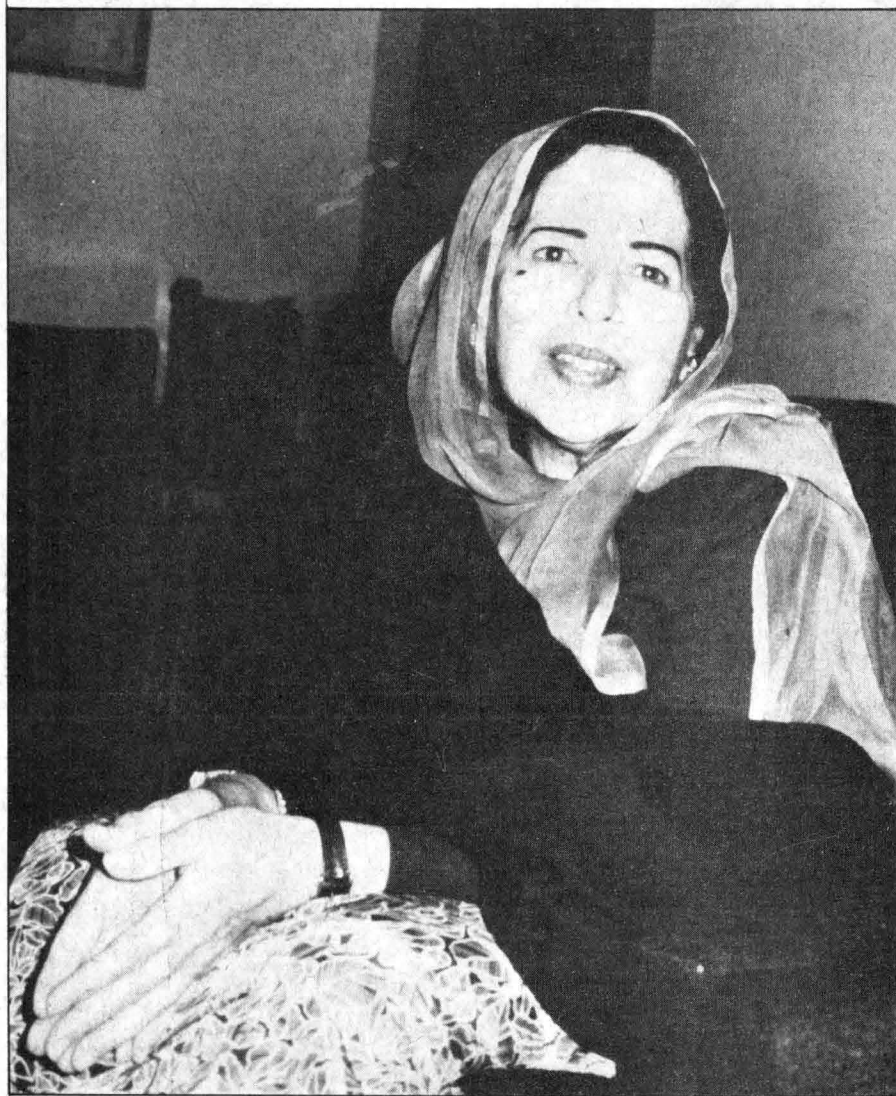
The Partition left the Lahore hotel in Pakistani hands; her father, undaun-

Sati Sahni, who was present at the interview, dismisses as 'baseless gossip'. (One reason for the baselessness may be that Lawrence was homosexual.) He provides some facts: the Begum went to school at Lahore. The

family was not allowed to return and was given compensation in India. "The old Begum is often incoherent," goes local gossip.

She sinks into a sofa, glances at an impressionistic painting hung on the wall behind her and sits facing Sheikh Abdullah's portrait hanging above a still smouldering fireplace. The first thing she says in her Lahore Convent accent is that it would be impossible to compress the history

POLITICS



A broken family makes the Begum a sad mother.

of Jammu & Kashmir in an evening's banter. Not that I had asked her to talk about that. Something distracts her. She looks through the window. The flag of Jammu & Kashmir, a red pennant with three vertical white stripes, hangs limp in the cold, windless evening, looking down on a sprawling lawn of such perfection that it might tempt a golfer to execute a swing. The Begum says her son is a keen golfer, his wife Mollie, an uncomplaining golf widow. But these days he has no time for such luxuries and the only iron he has a grip on is that of his will.

No, she had never imagined Farooq would be the Chief Minister one day. G M Shah, too, gravitated towards

politics and the Begum says, "The reason why my children entered politics was perhaps due to their father's life history and the conditions in Jammu & Kashmir." She flatly denies that there was any question of continuing Sheikh Abdullah's legacy. "What drew Farooq to politics was the struggle his father went through in the state," she adds.

The Begum informs me that she never meets the press and then goes on to say that she had "never wanted any differences between the Congress (I) and the National Conference, we never wanted a clash of ideologies, we knew the Nehru family so closely." When asked whether the animosity between the Gandhis and the Abdul-

lahs had ended, she reacts rather sharply, "You can't call it animosity. How can you call it animosity? Where did you get this idea of the existence of animosity?" In that one moment she forgets all those political machinations that have now become part of Kashmir's history: how Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv toppled her son's lawfully elected government. She deflects the next question on the toppling of Farooq Abdullah by the Congress (I), by stressing, "There were so many people from the Congress side as well as from our side, who, for their selfish ends, gave all kinds of wrong information to Mrs Gandhi." Then she utters what must be the bottom line in Jammu & Kashmir politics: "There *can* be differences in politics, but we had family relations with Mrs Gandhi."

She demolishes the view expressed by editorial writers that the Rajiv-Farooq accord is doomed to disaster. It is now obvious that she prefers to discuss the history of Kashmir and 'not the history of journalists'. The local Kashmir press has, by and large, given the Abdullaha a rough time and that is another thing the Begum cannot forget. The Begum changes the subject to her experiences in Parliament. "Since I went to Parliament I've been asked by many colleagues, both from the Congress(I) and the Opposition, how the political manipulations took place in Jammu & Kashmir. I wouldn't like to name the people who were behind the campaign to divide our family." Once again, she drifts back to 'what happened on July 2, 1984, when Farooq's duly elected government was toppled and how the defectors formed the government.'

She asks, "What justification do you, as a journalist, give to that?" At this stage, Sheikh Nazir, Farooq Abdullah's cousin, joins us. He resembles the Chief Minister and is considered a part of the family in more ways than one: he is also the General Secretary of the National Conference.

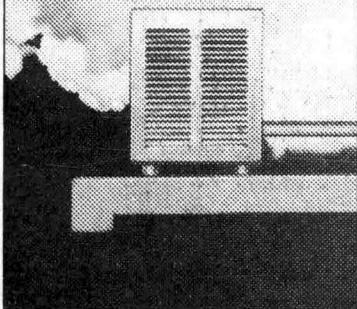
The Begum, resuming her train of thought, asks if I am aware of the

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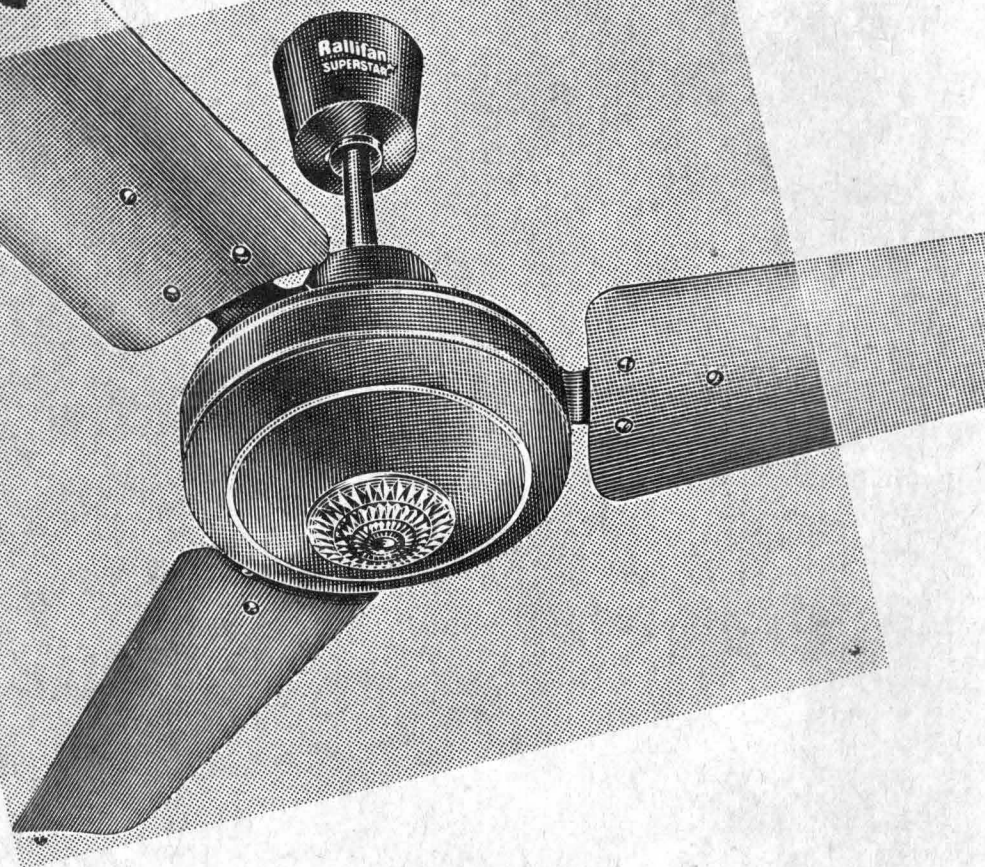
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POLITICS

extent of damage caused to Jammu & Kashmir as a result of the toppling of her son's government by the Congress(I). Obviously, the brouhaha over the accord notwithstanding, the Begum has not forgotten, and is unlikely to forget in a hurry, the events of July 2, 1984, a date most people on the street carry in their heads. "We were never distant from our people. Ever. They knew we would give them back the democratic rights that were snatched away from them."

Sheikh Nazir and Sati Sahni, who have been quiet all through, clear their throats when the Begum begins talking about the debate on autonomy for Jammu and the Jammu people's grouse that they've been given a raw deal. "That is very unfair. I will take you back to the year 1979. . . or 1980. . ." She turns to ask Sheikh Nazir, "Which year was it that your papa and I went to meet the industrialists in Bombay to ask them to come to Jammu to put up industries here?" Sheikh Nazir says, "The year was 1977." The Begum looks victorious; point well made. "We wanted employment to be generated in the Jammu region. Jammu is now an industrial state," she adds. Sati Sahni elaborates, "The total investment here is over Rs 100 crore from companies outside Jammu & Kashmir and Rs 200 crore worth of units are in the pipeline." The boot, says the Begum, is on the other foot. "Had the people from the Kashmir region raised this point, it would have been befitting. The fact is that the Kashmir region has not got one-third of the industrial investment that has flowed into Jammu. In the Kashmir region, it's quite impossible to set up heavy industries," she concedes.

Sheikh Nazir pulls his chair closer. "After Sheikh Saheb was deposed in 1953," he says, "the Congress was even then a part of the National Conference — they were both sister organisations. So, the animosity was of no consequence. Well, the Congress fell out with us." He laughs. "There may have been a difference of opinion but that does not make us enemies."

"*Samundar ko kuze main bhar nahin sakte.* (One cannot pour the ocean into a bowl.) And one cannot discuss the history of Kashmir in one evening," the Begum reiterates. "You know nothing of Kashmir's history. All you journalists think of is animosity."

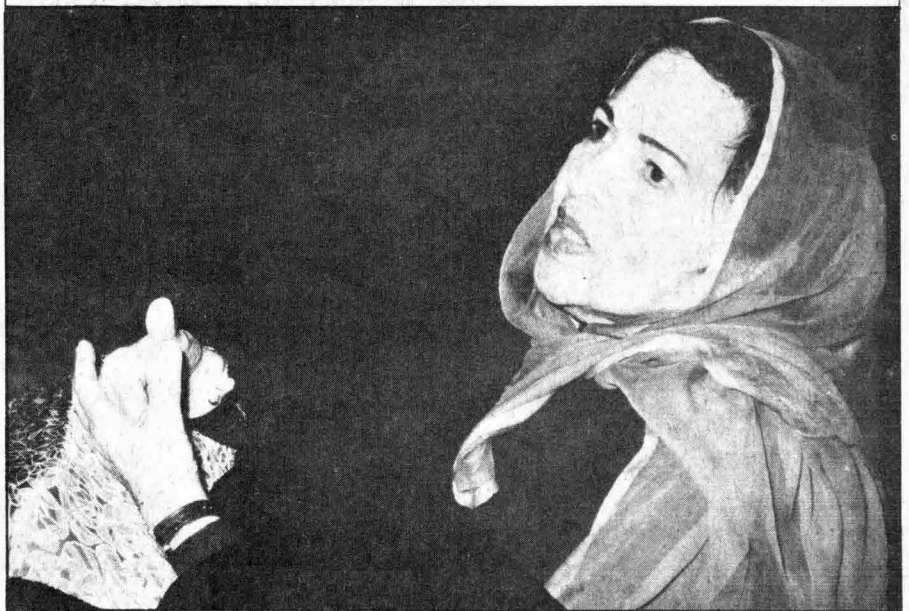
I remind her of the 'animosity' and bitterness she experienced when Jawaharlal Nehru had ordered the arrest of her husband, Sheikh Abdullah. "*Hum purani ranjishey bhula chuke hain.*" she says in chaste Urdu. ("I have tried to forget those old grievances and hurts.") She now talks about how she wanted her children to become doctors and engineers 'so they could become multi-millionaires within a few years'. The tears come into her eyes when I ask her about the split in the family, with G M Shah and Khaleda ranged against Farooq. "I have overcome all that. I have swallowed that very bitter pill. It has been doubly painful for me. I can't go on thinking about them, otherwise in life I won't be able to do anything." Was the idea of the Congress(I)-National Conference alliance really her brainchild? "I will answer that after the elections are over," she says evasively.

The advance of old age makes her

mind wander amidst fragments of thought. "Once somebody asked my husband a question. He said, 'Sir, you have suffered so much and still continue to suffer. What have you gained?' My husband said that he wanted to face all the challenges for his people." She sadly says that 'her people' were 'not even counted as human beings, they were so backward, so uneducated'. Many books had been written on the problems of Kashmir but her people had continued to suffer, she adds. She rambles on through many contentious issues, the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims, the religious diversity of the people: "No wonder Jammu & Kashmir is called *chhota* Hindustan, because it is a laboratory for the whole of India."

"Have you been misquoted by the press?" I ask. "Many a time have I been hurt by the press, especially after my husband's passing away. They've tried all kinds of unfair practices but I don't blame them as much as I would blame those people who are behind these journalists."

Suddenly defensive about Farooq's entry into politics, she remembers how Sheikh Abdullah had brought him in. Sati Sahni then chips in: "Sheikh Abdullah was requested by



The Begum fights to perpetuate Sheikh Abdullah's dynasty.

the people to take some of his own load off, being overburdened." "Eighteen and 19 hours he would slog," she interjects. "I used to take his files out of the room and put them somewhere else."

"On December 23, 1981," Sahni recounts, "Sheikh Abdullah happened to be at the Hazratbal shrine, Srinagar, when he posed this question to a large gathering of about 1,50,000 and the people overwhelmingly said 'you must have an understudy'. Then in one voice the entire crowd cried 'Farooq, Farooq'." The Begum adds, "And that's how Farooq came in."

The Begum is an eclectic and voracious reader. She devours political, historical and legal books with unflagging zeal, because, she says, "I may have to answer all kinds of questions in Parliament." But her repertoire doesn't end there; she reads novels and recently bought 'some very nice books at a book fair in Delhi'. Nowadays she finds no time and has been forced to pare down her reading, as well as her cookery. The last time she turned out a decent *goshtaba* and rice was when Sheikh Abdullah was in jail, but in recent times her cooking for son Farooq and daughter-in-law Mollie has, at best, been sporadic. In Udhampur, Sheikh Abdullah told his wife 'to cook for a month', which she did, having a lot of time hanging on her hands. "I cooked for a month for all of them," she says, recalling those years. She turns maudlin when she remembers, "They did not let my father go back to Pakistan to see cricket matches, but I haven't gone, ever, because I can see them on TV. Maybe they won't like my going."

Anything that was written on Kashmir, she repeats, would be like "Samundar ko kuze mein bharna." Pouring the ocean into a bowl. "I hope the Prime Minister and many senior leaders will give their blood to serve the country," she intones and walks back towards her own room: an ageing, retiring figure living off the pages of her memory, basking in the glory of her title, *Madre Mehrban*, the Gracious Mother. ♦

JAMMU & KASHMIR'S POLITICAL MAVERICKS

Congressmen, separatists, communalists, communists, rabid Muslims, fanatic Hindus, pro-Pakistan elements, and political opportunists co-exist in Jammu & Kashmir's political mainstream. Who are they? Excerpts from interviews with the main protagonists:



"GIVE AUTONOMY TO JAMMU"—

Balraj Puri, supporter of autonomy for Jammu.

In 1952 I presented the idea of granting regional autonomy to Jammu, to Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru then spoke to Sheikh Abdullah and later told me that the latter had agreed to do so. Both leaders made a joint press statement to this effect.

Though opposed to the Maharaja's rule, I wanted political power to remain in the hands of the Jammu people. But I was opposed by Shyamprasad Mukherjee and N C Chatterjee who began an agitation for Jammu's integration with India when the Delhi Agreement of 1952 was to be implemented. By February 1953, Mukherjee veered round to my viewpoint and wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, offering his support for Article 370 (which bestows special status on Jammu & Kashmir) and autonomy for Jammu. His agitation was futile because it began with his opposing the idea of autonomy and ended with his accepting it.

Recently, the Jammu & Kashmir government announced that it was setting up a commission headed by me to work out the modalities of how autonomy will be given to Jammu. The

Gadkar and Sikri Commissions which went into the unexplained diversion of funds from Jammu to Kashmir complained about the lack of data available on the matter. As long as the present system continues this discrimination will stay. The root cause of the problem is that political power has remained concentrated in the Kashmir valley. The chief minister of the state has always come from the valley, never from Jammu.



"FAROOQ IS A SECURITY RISK"—

Chaman Lal Gupta, General Secretary, BJP.

The people of Jammu have not supported the accord between Farooq Abdullah and Rajiv Gandhi. In fact, Rajiv has himself told the people, "Farooq is a security risk". Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv had said in their election speeches that "every vote given to Farooq would be a vote for Pakistan." And the accord between two political rivals is not based upon any principle but with an eye to capture political power.

A White Paper against Farooq's last government has established the fact that he turned a blind eye to the functioning of Sikh terrorist camps in Jammu.

The Jamaat-i-Islami has been kept alive by the Congress (I). Syed Mir Qasim had helped them win five seats and today people like Mufti Mohammed Sayeed and Ghulam Rasool Kar are linked to the Jamaat very closely. Qazi Nissar of the Muslim United Front destroyed around 50 temples in the valley. (The Farooq government claims only 12 temples

were destroyed.) Nissar is like another Bhindranwale, created by the Congress (I) in the state. Any government that comes to power in the Kashmir valley manages to win the elections with the support of anti-national elements. Take, for instance, how G M Shah was supported by the Congress (I). While the Congress (I) had 26 MLAs, Shah merely had 13. Today, the same G M Shah speaks in completely anti-nationalist terms. He sounds like a Pakistani.

The Centre has always spent crores of rupees on intelligence agencies by getting them to spy on opposition parties. These intelligence activities are usually stepped up during elections, when the Congress (I) wants to find means of defeating the Opposition.

The BJP is not a party for Hindus, it is a national party. But since Jammu has been a predominantly Hindu area, we do represent it because the people face discrimination in the services. A Hindu boy scoring 80 per cent in college is not selected for jobs but a Muslim boy scoring 25 per cent is.



"BEGUM ABDULLAH SIDED WITH FAROOQ" –
Ved Bhasin, Editor,
Kashmir Times.

Kashmir Times opposed Farooq Abdullah after 1983. We also criticised his policies and said he hobnobbed with anti-national elements. While we never said he was anti-national, we did say he was an opportunist.

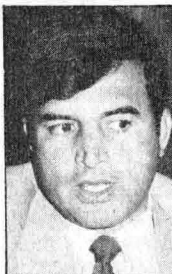
The Jamaat-i-Islami, a fundamentalist organisation, has cast its net wide in the Kashmir valley since the 1971 elections when Syed Mir Qasim encouraged it, and five of its members were elected to the legislative assembly. They have set up educational institutions and are trying to indoctrinate

people in the valley. They are opposed to Kashmir's accession to India and to secularism. They lay emphasis on setting up an Islamic state and are getting a lot of money from foreign sources. They have been patronised by various political parties – from the Congress (I) to Farooq Abdullah and G M Shah. I am doubtful about their electoral appeal. They may not be able to convert their support into votes. But what is a more dangerous trend is that they have captured the minds of a large number of youths in the valley.

The Red Book published against Farooq has revealed that Sheikh Abdullah's family had amassed wealth and had grabbed land. In Srinagar, Farooq, Tariq and Khaleda have built houses. How did they get that land? There should be an independent inquiry into this. Farooq has taken a piece of land in the heart of Srinagar, which has a commercial value of Rs 1 crore, at the cost of Rs 4 per month.

There were charges against Farooq in the White Paper authored by G M Shah, but that document remains incomplete because G M Shah was himself involved in many deals along with Farooq and could not possibly reveal them. In the rift that took place in the family, Begum Abdullah sided with her son, Farooq.

The Shiv Sena is not a potential force; the media coverage it has received is out of proportion with its actual clout. It's basically a negative force. If there's some kind of communalism in Kashmir, it would react against it.



"ARTICLE 370 CAN'T BE SCRAPPED" –
Dr Mehboob Beg, one of the MLAs who defected from Farooq's government in 1982.

I was the Health Minister in Farooq's government. In April 1984 I

was still Farooq's MLA and at the time I made a speech on the floor of the house when I said that Farooq would have to be very clear about the political issues in the state as far as Kashmir's accession to India was concerned. I told Farooq that not only by his statements, but also by his actions, he had to be pro-Indian. The Centre had also made it clear on the floor of the Parliament that Farooq was hobnobbing with pro-Pak elements. I had asked Farooq to abandon such pursuits and concentrate only on economic issues.

Therefore, I had no option but to bid goodbye to him and join hands with G M Shah. I am the son of Mirza Afzal Beg, who was Deputy Chief Minister in Sheikh Abdullah's cabinet and it was only in the last years of the ministry that they parted ways. I am not going to align myself with anti-national forces like the Muslim United Front with a view to come to power with their support. To my mind, any regional party in the context of Jammu & Kashmir means an anti-national party.

During Governor Jagmohan's rule, a political vacuum had been created because there was no popularly elected government in power. The Muslim fundamentalists took advantage of this and filled the political vacuum. In a sense governor's rule was dangerous for Jammu & Kashmir because the fundamentalists had emerged.

Why does Farooq make an issue out of Kashmir's accession to India? Kashmir is an integral part of India and such issues should not be raised at all.

There's no question of Article 370 being in danger. When Kashmiri politicians say it is, they're arousing anti-national sentiments. Even the Congress (I) had said they will not scrap Article 370. The Kashmir accord carved out between Mirza Afzal Beg and G Parthasarathy also laid down that Article 370 would not be scrapped.

Such fears must be dispelled. Politicians in Kashmir ought to work for the economic growth of Jammu & Kashmir.



"ACCORD IS DISASTROUS" — Bhim Singh, Leader of the Panthers Party

The accord between Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah is a farce. How can two leaders who have been rivals come together? Farooq, privately, does not trust Rajiv, because Mrs Gandhi had toppled Farooq's government. Already, the workers of the Congress (I) are not cooperating with the National Conference workers, they don't attend each other's meetings.

The other issue is the domination of Jammu by Kashmir. Nearly 80 per cent of the jobs in the secretariat are held by people from the Kashmir region. Moreover, the chief minister has never been a man from the Jammu region. The National Conference is a very communal party. Because of its communalism, the stateless refugees did not vote for them. And they lost the 1983 election due to the Resettlement Act which Farooq brought in.



"PAKISTANI PROPAGANDA IS SUBVERSIVE" — Maulana Iftekhhar Husain Ansari, Congress (I) leader from Srinagar.

After the accord, things are settling down. Both the Congress (I) and the National Conference, if they pursue secularism and socialism, will be good for the state. As far as G M Shah and the Muslim United Front are concerned, it is apparent that they are quite ineffectual and are no threat to the Congress.

The alliance between Rajiv and Farooq is very relevant today. Their

tussle was over their different approaches. Both parties have to be honest if they have to succeed. Backbiting and politicking will be disastrous for both; nobody will survive. The challenges are such that they have to work very cautiously.

Governor Jagmohan's rule has been counter-productive. Resurfacing roads doesn't mean that his was a good government. The approach is very important. Jagmohan's approach to Kashmir's problems was not very good.

Coming to Jammu & Kashmir's problems — unemployment tops the list and fundamentalism comes close be-

Pakistan uses its television very effectively to influence the Kashmiris. In one of their TV quiz programmes which was viewed in Srinagar, the interviewer asked: "Which is the race that wants freedom but doesn't want to work for it?" A Pakistani answered, "The people of Kashmir." This is the kind of insidious propaganda that is flowing in from Pakistan.

hind. Fundamentalism has been brewing since 1947 and has a definite impact. Certain elements are taking advantage of the situation and after a few years we'll have to face the music, because the youth in the valley has become more militant. The new militancy needs to be quickly countered — both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism need to be countered.

Who is Qazi Nissar? Why are people giving so much importance to Geelani and Moulvi Farooq? They are merely symbols, but behind the scenes there are other elements of Islam. Money and literature flow in from Islamic nations. Pakistan uses its television very effectively to influence the Kashmiris. In one of their

TV quiz programmes which was viewed in Srinagar, the interviewer asked: "Which is the race that wants freedom but doesn't want to work for it?" A Pakistani boy answered: "The people of Kashmir." This is the kind of insidious propaganda that is flowing in from Pakistan.



"SHIV SENA WILL FIGHT MUSLIMS" — Devendra Krishna Shastri, Chief of the Shiv Sena, Jammu.

The Shiv Sena in Jammu is trying to bring all the Hindus together. From our point of view, the Hindus are the protectors of India, and whenever the Islamic fundamentalists indulge in anti-national activities, the Shiv Sena combats them.

When the doors of the Ramjanmabhoomi temple were opened, it had its effect on Kashmir. The Muslims here agitated for the Babari Masjid. In Jammu they chanted slogans like "Pakistan *zindabad*, Hindustan *mur-dabad*." The Shiv Sena fought the Muslims, but the police lathi-charged our workers. In Srinagar, we get the feeling that the Muslims are pro-Pakistan. In Jammu, the Shiv Sena is trying to make the Hindus stand on their feet and give a befitting answer to the Muslims, if the occasion ever arises. If somebody tries to suppress us by using force, we will use force too.

The new trends in Kashmir, slogans like "Sikh-Muslim *Bhai Bhai*," have created an anti-Hindu movement. But the power of the Shiv Sena has not allowed the Muslim fundamentalists to take root in Jammu.

It is no secret that Pakistanis and Arab fundamentalists are spreading hardcore Islamic dogma in Jammu & Kashmir. To give the Hindus a bigger voice in the state legislature, it has become necessary for the Shiv Sena to contest elections. ♦

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CLIMATICALLY, the Punjab when I returned after two months' absence, was crisp and cool. Politically, it was not. The Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, had been excommunicated by the Sikh high priests, who were sitting in the Golden Temple at Amritsar above a cache of weapons and terrorists. Many more murders had taken place. There were people dying every day. A hailstorm occurred on the night I arrived in Chandigarh, which seemed to me rather symbolic. Rain had drifted down on Delhi the previous night. That also seemed to me symbolic of the future of India. The Chandigarh streets, the night I arrived were deserted: neither Hindus nor Sikhs were to be seen. I asked my taxidriver what he thought of Mr Barnala's future. "He is a dead man," he replied. The taxidriver was a Sikh.

Mr Barnala, when I saw him next day, was not only alive, but seemed to share none of my driver's apprehensions about his immediate future. He is a slightly built man, with a long white beard, a charming smile, and twinkling and perceptive eyes. "I do not feel that the terrorism can continue forever," he said. "Sikhs are not by nature terrorists. Most of the incentive for all these people has been unemployment. They have also been pushed a great deal from abroad." By this he appeared to mean not only had the incentive come from rich and badly misinformed Sikhs in Britain, the USA, and in particular Canada, but from Pakistan. He was rather plaintive about the behaviour of the high priests. "They may be good men," he said. "But I am a good Sikh. Why do this to me?"

Why they had done this to him was a symptom of the sickness that has come into the politics of the Punjab. When religion enters public life, one or the other is bound to suffer. The Punjab has suffered from its priests. But the reason the priests entered politics was because of the impinging upon their religious susceptibilities of the central government. There is therefore a vicious circle between

Of Beant Singh Barnala

In Punjab recently, **DOM MORAES** interviewed the beleaguered Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, who had been excommunicated from the Sikh faith. He also spent time with the widow, mother and other relatives of Beant Singh, the trusted guard who was one of those who shot Mrs Gandhi on October 31, 1984. Through all these interviews, the writer brings out the atmosphere of the troubled and turbulent state, and the characters of some of the people who live in it.

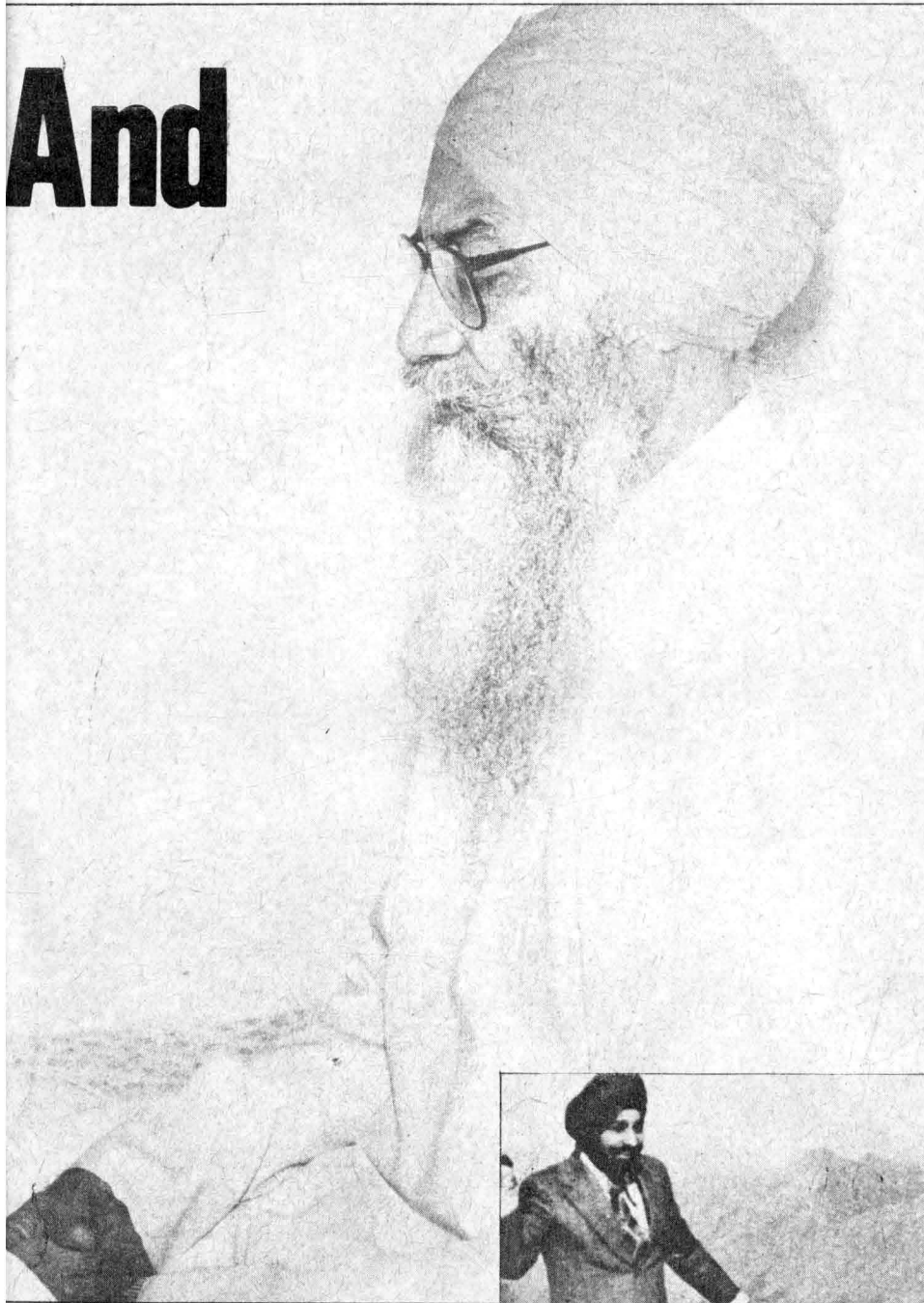


The excommunicated Chief Minister, S S Barnala, reads from the Granth Sahib.

the politics and religion within the state. Barnala commented on this — he had reason to — but he also commented on the random nature and waste of the killings. "How many people have died," he mourned, "who did not know why they were killed?" This is perfectly true. But most people don't know why they die anyway, and Barnala said, "I'm not afraid."

He has often been portrayed as a weak person. He is visibly not a weak person, and he is also a person with a sense of humour. The point is that he has been caught in an impossible situation. He is a man of honour who owes fealty to his country and to his religion, which have now, because of the insensitive behaviour of the central government since 1984, become

And



ers are already married.

"The climate of opinion is changing," Barnala said to me, that cold day in Chandigarh. "Even after the riots in Delhi after Mrs Gandhi's death, when the feeling among the Sikhs was so bad, there was no intention among them of asking for Khalistan. Now the feeling is completely gone." Mr Barnala has not seen everything that is happening among his people, especially amongst those inimical to him. The climate in the villages isn't changing.

ON OCTOBER 31, 1984, two of the Prime Minister's entourage of guards met her as she was going into the garden of her house to be interviewed for British TV by Peter Ustinov. One was called Beant Singh, a man of gentle and rather effeminate appearance, despite his beard. The other was much younger and was named Satwant Singh. Having greeted her, Beant Singh fired four bullets into her birdfrail body from his revolver. Satwant Singh then poured a hail of further bullets into her from his carbine. A few minutes later she was either dying or dead.

Shortly before this, according to an American magazine, she had been asked, by her security people, to dismiss all Sikhs from her personal ser-

slightly separated in the Punjab. Some days after I met him his ministers restored him to full power. Thereby they ignored the edict of the high priests, which was that he was excommunicated from the Sikh religion in the sense of *rotibeti* — that he could not, by this edict, eat with other Sikhs, nor could his daughters be married to any other Sikhs. His daught-



Bimal Khalsa and her husband out in the cold.

SPECIAL REPORT



Beant Singh's mother with a pet goat.

vice. This was in the wake of Operation Bluestar, when the Indian Army entered the Golden Temple and shot a number of terrorists. She replied, "The Sikhs will stay as my bodyguards. Are we a secular country or not?" The same magazine said that at some point, at the Golden Temple, she indicated Beant Singh and remarked, "How can I be afraid, with men like this to guard me?" The result of all this trust was her death. At the same time, it might be true to say that Beant Singh, who betrayed her, may have felt she had betrayed him, and more importantly his religion, by ever ordering the attack upon the Golden Temple.

Beant Singh is dead, and therefore a sort of folk hero in the Punjab. I was taken to the village where his mother and widowed sister-in-law live, by Yog Joy, my photographer, and Beant Singh's elder brother, who told me certain things about Beant Singh. Since it is probably true that Beant Singh will enter history as one of the most famous assassins of all

time, like Lee Oswald, who killed Kennedy, this seemed very interesting. His brother told me about the eagle Beant Singh said he saw circling around him, a sign that he should kill Mrs Gandhi. He told me also that the family disapproved of Beant Singh's widow.

This was not because Beant Singh had killed the Prime Minister. It was because there was some dispute between the family and the widow, about land. There was also some dispute because when Bimal Khalsa entered politics, after the death of her husband, she received a great deal of money by way of Sikh charity, which she had apparently not shared with the family. We drove to a village called Markhana, some miles outside Chandigarh, where we met Beant Singh's mother, apparently very old.

She was seated on a charpoy, with a pet goat beside her. This goat was an interesting animal in that it seemed to be personally fond of the lady. It nuzzled at her hand, leapt up and touched her wrinkled face with its

muzzle, and in other ways prevented the course of the interview from running smoothly. Through the elder son, she told me that whatever the courts said, Beant Singh *had* killed Mrs Gandhi and because of this she was proud of her son. He had performed the execution of an offender against the Sikh faith. He had been shot and had therefore become a martyr for the Sikh faith. His elder brother said to me, "When Satwant Singh and he were taken by the guards, and they tried to take Satwant and shoot him, Beant covered Satwant's body with his own. It was therefore Beant who was shot dead, while Satwant was only wounded. It was in this way that Beant became a Sikh martyr."

Whether or not this was wholly true, the entire village seemed to believe it. Large numbers of Sikhs had collected around the hut where Beant Singh's mother lay on her charpoy, stroking her goat, and not all of them seemed hugely friendly to us. Dust smoked up from the paths of the village. Children scowled and st-

ared. People told me that Beant Singh had been a very good young man. They told me about the eagle or falcon who visited him and gave him instructions to kill Mrs Gandhi. I didn't dare to say that this seemed to me highly unlikely. First of all, these were interpreted interviews. Second, the eyes upon us were so unfriendly. Beant Singh's mother having issued more instructions, a young woman, whom I later gather was another daughter-in-law, who had previously been washing clothes at a pump in front of the house, returned to the kitchen and came out with a tray of tea and biscuits.

As we left the hut, I noticed a large flagpole beside it. Yog Joy said, "This is the foundation of a *gurdwara* which is going to be built in honour of Beant Singh." Apparently the whole village, as well as various Sikh organisations, some anonymous, are going to contribute towards its construction, because

the man it will be built in honour of killed the Prime Minister of India. He may, according to his own lights and those of his family and fellow villagers, have had reason to. He may also have had reason to in the eyes of many Sikhs. This is debatable.

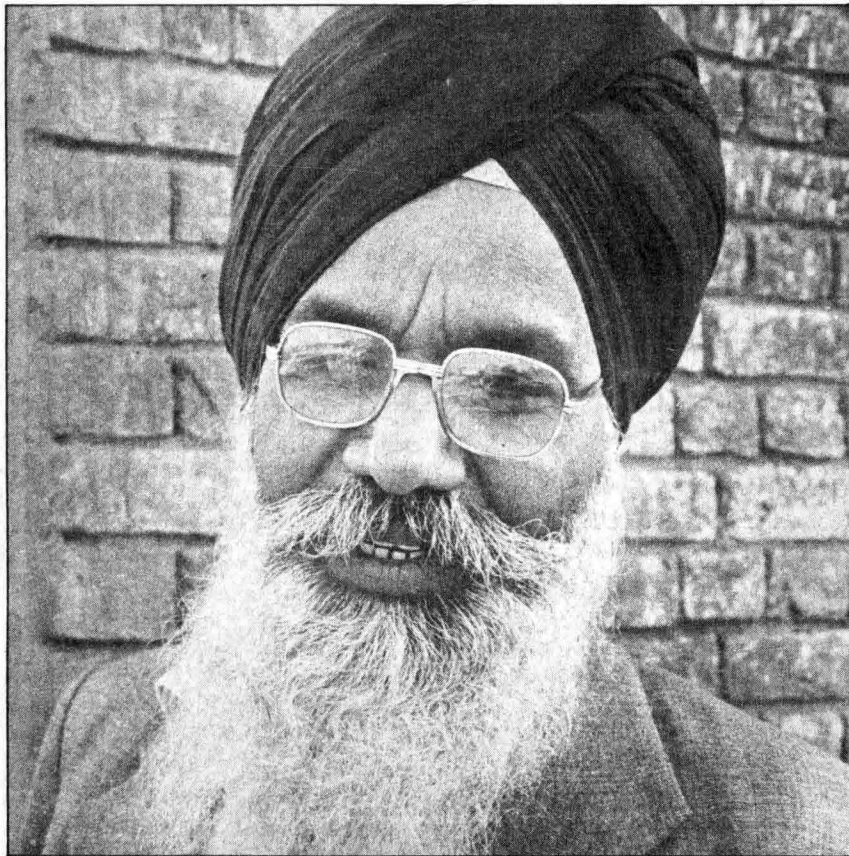
NOW in many places and in many voices in the Punjab, there appears to be a difference between Sikhs, the natural inhabitants, and what they call Indians. Since the Sikhs have worked and fought for their own country, India, over the course of many years, it is hard to see what has happened. I do not think that even many of the Sikhs really know. The course of all these extraordinary events was precipitated by Operation Bluestar. But what precipitated Operation Bluestar was the behaviour of fanatic Sikhs like Bhindranwale. The murder of Longowal then split the Sikhs down the middle, and took the

recalcitrant half farther away from India. Disaster after disaster, murder after murder, had followed all this.

Gently bearded in his chair, guards around his house and his office, poor Mr Barnala is attempting to cope with the situation. But farther away, in Amritsar, 40 miles from the Pakistani border, there are the incredibly unreasonable five high priests of the *panth*, and what are apparently their minions, that is to say terrorists. These people have not only assembled in the Golden Temple, which is supposed to be an abode of peace, or God, or whatever you want to call a milieu in which man can be man, but on March 7 they dragged a policeman who had come to pray, being a Sikh, into a room in the residential quarters of the temple, beat him severely, cut his body in various places with knives, and rubbed salt into the wounds.

This constable at the time of writing is in a critical state in hospital and the head constable who was one of a party that attempted to rescue him was shot dead. This state of affairs cannot possibly continue. The situation is much aggravated by the fact that Julio Ribeiro, the strongest police chief that not only the Punjab, but perhaps this country, has ever had, is due for retirement in May, and nobody is willing to replace him. Mr Ribeiro said to me when I visited Chandigarh in December that the alternative to the police was the Army. If the police has no leader, the Army is bound to come in. If it does, Mr Barnala's problems are bound to be even more complex. For then it really will be a kind of war, rather like the Vietnam war, where US troops were fighting a virtually invisible enemy. The guerrillas of Vietnam could strike where they liked when they liked. The same applies in the Punjab.

Also, across the border from the Punjab, there is Pakistan, sitting quietly on a mysterious bomb. Nobody knows if they have it or not, but to defuse it completely (or whatever you do with nuclear bombs) one has to



Beant's elder brother and admirer.

SPECIAL REPORT



Victims of one of the bus massacres in Punjab.

defuse the whole situation in the Punjab. If the Army enters that state, the problems of Mr Barnala will become not merely confused but chaotic. The Army will have to take much stronger action than the police is permitted to do. There have already been many complaints about the excesses of paramilitary forces assisting the police. There will be many more about the Army from the extremists, whether there have been excesses or not. It is simply not fair to Mr Barnala for the Centre to open a sort of Pandora's box to hurtle its contents into his dignified beard. The Prime Minister, whatever his advisers say, and however much he praises Mr Barnala, may not know what the contents of the box are.

THE WIDOW of Beant Singh, Bimal Khalsa, lives next door to a school. The children were singing when we came, and they also seemed to be laughing at Yog Joy and myself, since we were visibly not

Sikh. "The *gurdwara* the family is building," Yog Joy said very quietly to me as we climbed out of the car, "has nothing to do with Bimal Khalsa. She knows nothing about it. So don't ask her." Bimal Khalsa has a neat, compact house which, though in a village, must have cost quite a lot. It is furnished in Western style, with upholstered chairs and a sofa, and framed pictures on the walls. It is quite different from her mother-in-law's house. On a low table a picture in oleograph, displaying Guru Nanak, stands between two pictures of Beant Singh, looking young and happy.

"After Operation Bluestar," said his widow, "he became very silent. He became very unhappy. He never said anything to me, but people used to come to the house — we lived in Delhi then — and he used to talk to them. I had no idea what they were saying. I would simply be cooking." She now seems to have a cook of her own. At least, a servant brought tea and sweets. "Yes, Balbir Singh came there. Kehar

Singh came there. Towards the end, Satwant Singh also came. But I didn't know what they were saying to one another. How could I know?" This seemed to me a bit strange, since they were then living in police quarters, and police quarters, unlike Mrs Beant Singh's present residence, are normally rather cramped, unless you are a senior officer. Therefore, unless you actually leave your own quarters and wander off somewhere else, it is unlikely that you could avoid hearing almost everything being said by other people talking in the room or rooms.

According to Mrs Beant Singh, her husband was a gentle and pleasant man, liked by everyone he knew. "How did he like Mrs Gandhi?" I inquired. "Very much," she said, in excellent English, "until Operation Bluestar. After that he never spoke about her. Maybe he spoke about her to the people who came to see him." I asked, "How did Mrs Gandhi like him?" She replied, "She liked him very much." I was a bit amazed by

this, except that I recalled Mrs Gandhi's alleged remarks about Beant Singh and her trust in him at the Golden Temple. Bimal Khalsa said, "How can that be? When this American magazine said she had said this at the Golden Temple, he was on leave in Delhi." I inquired whether she had ever said any such thing about Beant Singh. "Yes," said his elder brother. "But in another place and at another time. Please don't ask her about her family affairs." He then left. I continued with my interview, sipping my tea, eating my sweets.

"For hundreds of years," I said, "there has been a Sikh tradition of respecting the salt which you eat. Your husband ate Mrs Gandhi's salt. Why did he betray her?" Mrs Bimal Khalsa, who looks strangely like Maneka Gandhi in one of her worse moods, said, "How he betrayed her? He had allegiance to the Sikhs first, Mrs Gandhi, second. When he killed her, he was doing what the religion demanded. His religion demanded this. She had violated the Golden Temple. I am proud that he did that. I am so *proud*." I asked a second

question about the matter. "You are a woman," I said. "Mrs Gandhi was also a woman. If you were to be shot by a man, many women in India would be upset. But, knowing that your husband shot not only Mrs Gandhi but someone who was a woman, aren't you upset?" Bimal Khalsa was rather quiet, for a little while. "No, I am *proud, proud*," she said, "because of what he did." Another pause. "But it's true I am sorry for her."

Few other people in the village seem to be. Bimal Khalsa, whatever feuds she may have with her inlaws, has launched herself, since the death of her husband, into a highly motivated political campaign. She wrinkled her brow, appeared to dive deep into thought, and said, "Now we Sikhs feel like second class citizens. What are we to do?" Since I had no answer, I was silent for a moment. Then I said, "Surely not all Sikhs feel like this? There are many who have earned great honours." She asked, "Who?" At this point I thought of two Sikhs, both friends, Bishan Bedi and Hari Ahluwalia. I mentioned them. Another short pause ensued. "Who?"

she repeated. I thought of some more Sikhs of distinction. I mentioned those. One of them, unfortunately, was General Jagjit Singh Aurora, and Bimal Khalsa appears to feel that he is fighting for her cause, though I do not think he is, since her cause is very, very unclear, but is shared by many Sikhs in the Punjab now.

She said that her husband killed Mrs Gandhi because she invaded the Golden Temple. At that point she didn't say Sikhs were second class citizens. Having said this later, she appeared to think that they had become so because of the riots in Delhi in November 1984 as a consequence of Mrs Gandhi's death, where Sikhs were murdered by Hindus in the most horrible manner. But, I pointed out, if this had happened because her husband shot Mrs Gandhi, wasn't it a direct consequence of his action that other Sikhs were killed in revenge? She seemed to have no real answer to this except that Beant Singh was very upset about Operation Bluestar, and so were all the other members of the Sikh community. "But," I said, "many Sikhs have been pleading for unity."



Chandigarh: paramilitary forces and rioters in conflict.

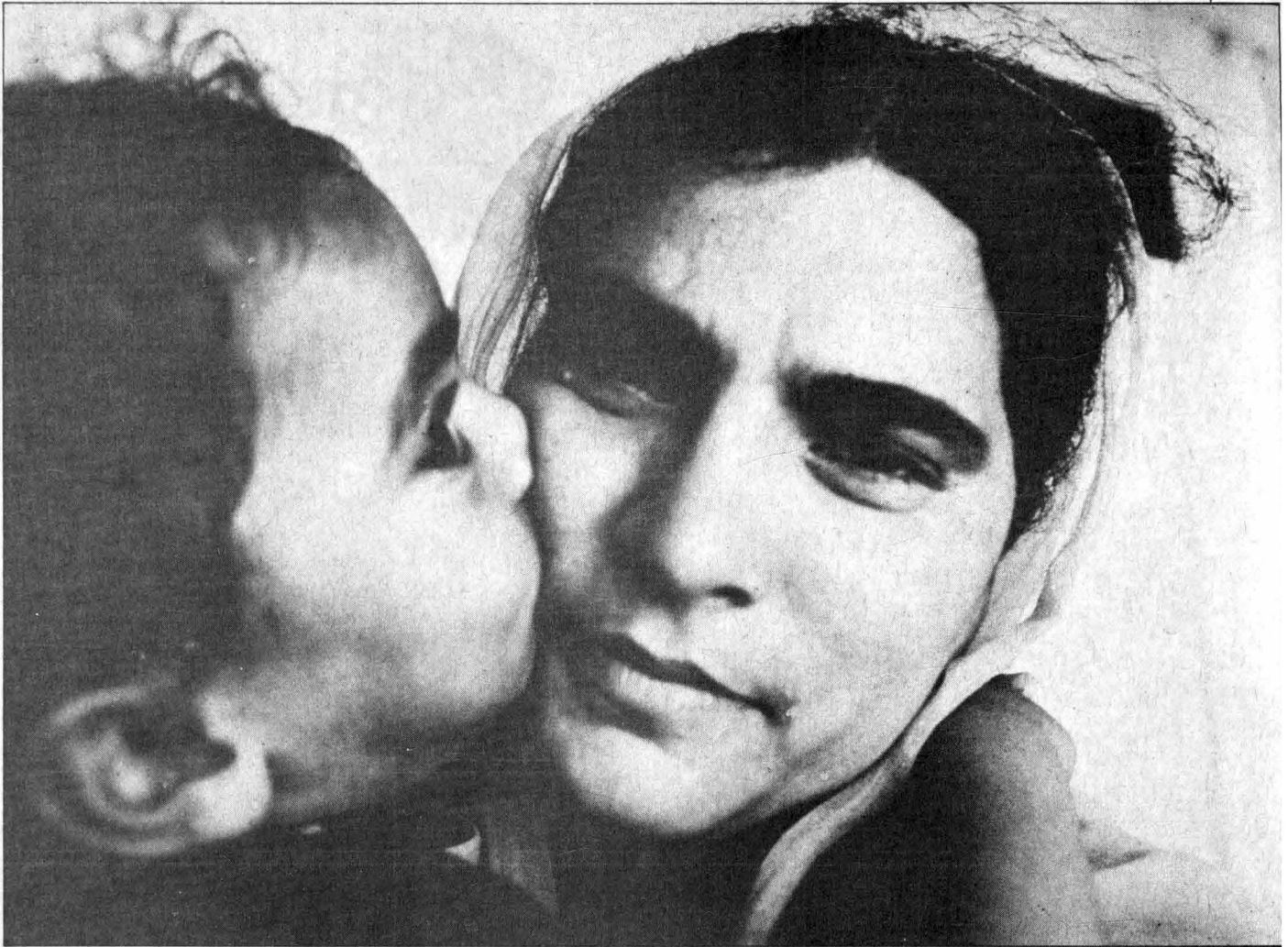
SPECIAL REPORT

Her reply was as strange as others I had heard in the Punjab. "You mean," she said, her brow wrinkling, "unity with Indians?" I replied, "But you are Indians. Are you Pakistanis?" She said, "No, we are Sikhs."

If Bimal Khalsa is now leading a militant movement, though she firm-

If they are correct, I don't see why not. It also seems extremely odd that she has suddenly become a comparatively rich woman, and that, according to friends of mine, she was given money, ornaments, and so forth by Sikh women shortly after the death of Beant Singh. The police, of cour-

That is what Mrs Gandhi would have said, or what her son would say. I think we have to look somewhere else, to Indians, or as they would now probably prefer to call themselves, Sikhs, abroad, who have money and are pumping it in large quantities and by illegal means, into this



Beant's widow: with a fatherless son.

ly calls herself an Independent, she may be doing so because of the killing of her husband. It seems odd that as both she and her brother-in-law told me, the body of Beant Singh was hastily disposed of by the police without being shown to his relatives, and the magistrate's report required for his death certificate has not, after more than two years, been produced.

se, were hardly likely to offer her Beant Singh's widow's pension, but nonetheless she was not destitute. The third odd fact is where she suddenly learnt such phrases as that Sikhs are second class citizens, or that they aren't Indians but Sikhs.

For the answers, one could look directly across the border, or into the gelid eyes of the CIA top brass.

country. Or rather, into a certain part of this country, the Punjab, across the Pakistan border. Over that border lie many strange opinions, some friendly to India, some highly inimical. Over that border also, as India has discovered to her sorrow, are many estranged Sikhs. The Pakistani authorities may not be entirely responsible for this state of affairs. It is probably true to

say that the Khalistanis overseas *are* responsible.

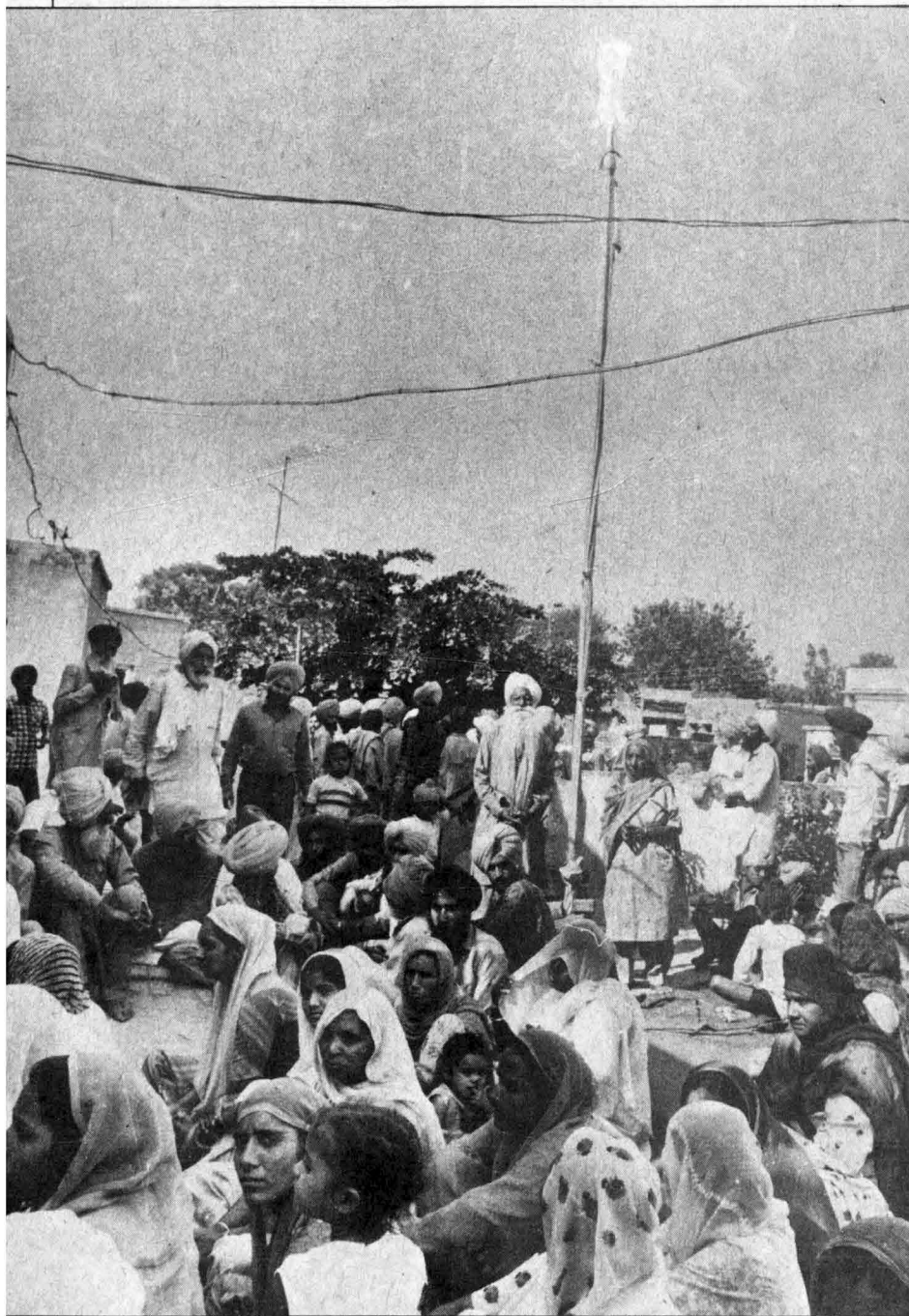
For when Beant Singh killed Mrs Gandhi, he wasn't killing for Khalistan. His entire family has told me this, and I don't entirely disbelieve them. He killed Mrs Gandhi because in his opinion she desecrated the Gol-

den Temple. And many Sikhs in the Punjab honour him for his act of martyrdom. The Khalistanis, I think, are an entirely separate, and a very small part, of the Sikh population. Their finances come from abroad, but from Sikh, not CIA, sources. Much of the finance for the terrorists comes from

their own robberies of banks and businessmen. The terrorists should be thought of as somewhat separate from the Khalistanis, and the third branch of Sikh activists seems to be, like Beant Singh, to be motivated purely from religious frenzy.

Though one cannot say that Beant Singh, apart from frenzy, didn't feel a deep sorrow at what he considered to be the desecration of the Golden Temple. On one occasion a witness at Mrs Gandhi's assassins' trial saw him weeping bitterly, standing as he was at the side of Kehar Singh, another of the killers.

I was very fond of Mrs Gandhi. She had tremendous faults, especially when she came back in 1980. Then she appeared to have lost control. Had she not done so, Operation Blue-star would never have happened. She would have prevented the strange circumstances under which Bhindranwale sank himself, his followers, and his weapons, into the Akal Takht, with the connivance of the high priests. Since this happened, through her own mistakes, she had two options: to leave Bhindranwale and his followers there, or to muster civilised Sikh opinion in the Punjab. She chose the third option, to weed them out by military action, and thus invited chaos in the state, and her own death. There is the fact that the person on the other side has his or her own point of view. One has to understand this. Though I wept when I heard that Mrs Gandhi was dead, I can see that other people wept when they heard Beant Singh was dead. Sitting with his widow, in the room with the oleograph, the Guru rising between the two photographs of Beant Singh, one of them showing him happy with his wife, and the stiff plastic flowers tilting up from a plastic vase, I said, "Well, do you regret any of it?" She said, "How was I involved?" I said in reply, "How do you now feel about your husband?" Drooping her head, Bimal Khalsa muttered of the assassin of Mrs Gandhi, "He was a very religious man. He was a very good man."



In Beant Singh's village: foundations of a memorial gurdwara.

SPECIAL FEATURE

The two film stars who rule the largest southern states in the country are no longer very credible. In wooing the masses with populist measures, both NTR and MGR seem to have sidelined the more pressing needs of the people. SHIRIN MEHTA reports from Madras and MINNIE VAID-FERA from Hyderabad on the MGR and NTR regimes.

SUPERSTARS OF THE



SOUTH

MGR: Decline Of A Deity

"HE IS the unquestioned leader of Tamil Nadu. As an actor he earned crores and now he has spent crores on the poor. MGR thinks for the poor, worries for the poor. All great leaders in the past have done this: Lenin, Gandhi... And now our very own Chief Minister..."

P Musiriputhan, President of the All-World MGR Fans Association is probably used to mouthing these platitudes. Every once in a while, when big words fail him, he slips into a spate of Tamil which is then quietly translated for me by his personal assistant. Everything about MG Ramachandran, the Chief Minister of Tamil

Nadu, is described in superlative terms: he has spent so many lakhs on rebuilding slums, he is the first man to spend his own money when natural calamity strikes in the state; he has proved his worth to the people by the numerous schemes he has started to help them. The Noon Meal Scheme was one such success. "Our great leader has said that he himself has starved when he was young and therefore would like to make sure he feeds everyone," Musiriputhan adds.

For the President of the All-World ("we have centres in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, USA, Britain") MGR Fans Association, MGR is God. And if Musiriputhan's statistics are right, he is akin to God to nearly three million believers, spread across the 18,000 units of the MGR Fans Association in India. The Association,

SPECIAL FEATURE

begun as a simple fan club, now does propaganda work for the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), MGR's party: promoting the party image, organising mass rallies and conferences, and spreading the word of the great leader through the Tamil daily, *Manram Murasu*, which Musiriputhan claims has a circulation of 28,000. There is no doubt about it — M G Ramachandran is a great leader indeed.

Musiriputhan speaks with the zeal of a person who has himself been given a new lease of life. For, last year the benevolent MGR had sought to replace the President of his Fans Association. "But," as Musiriputhan recalls with a smile, "there are 18-20 lakh youngsters in the organisation who did not want to have me replaced. And so I continue to be the President, till today. . ."

The moral is implicit: MGR, like all wise and good leaders, listens to the voice of the majority.

FOR MOST PEOPLE outside Tamil Nadu the hold the balding hero has over his electorate seems mystifying. But to the people in the state the mystique seems very real indeed. His cap is known to have the power to make a crowd turn delirious with excitement. Thirteen people are said to have taken their lives when MGR lay critically ill in the Apollo Hospital in November 1984. Recently, women in the audience have wept at the efforts he has made to speak at his rallies. . .

For the Tamilians, the myth is the man. Since his early days as a hero in Tamil films, MGR seems to have captured and retained the imagination of his audiences. In the beginning, he fought the forces of evil through the carefully worded, propagandist films of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK); then in 1967, when the DMK came to power, his celluloid roles changed; he portrayed the honest bureaucrat, policeman, industrialist, (any profession, in fact) fighting to show the people that honesty pays. And in 1977, even after he was elect-



MGR pays homage to his mentor C N Annadurai.

ed Chief Minister, films continued to be a vehicle for anti-DMK propaganda, even though MGR never actually featured in them.

There are some who dismiss his popularity as the old cinema charm. They believe that MGR has kept his image alive in the people's mind through these blatantly propagandist, ham acted films which are still released in theatres all over Tamil Nadu. And that, once the films stop, the man's continued hold over the masses will weaken.

But to say this is to ignore the essence of the relationship of the masses with MGR. He was responsible for giving an identity to the Tamilians when they most needed it. An identity that was anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindi, an-

ti-anything that was imposed from the north. And when he faced the camera, a shadow of the rising sun (the DMK symbol) peeping out of his costume, and delivered a thinly disguised impassioned speech against the Congress (I), the people loved it. They identified with it. And soon, MGR became one with their cause: he was the cause.

Even C N Annadurai, founder of the DMK recognised this ability in his protege. "If MGR shows his face, the DMK would get 40,000 votes," he is supposed to have said "If he utters a word: 4 lakh."

The DMK leaders recognised this power and gloried in it. But they forgot that once the image was built up, MGR could go it alone. Which he did,

MGR was responsible for giving an identity to the Tamilians when they most needed it. An identity that was anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindi, anti-everything that was imposed from the north. And when he faced the camera and delivered an impassioned speech against the Congress (I), the people loved it. Soon MGR became one with their cause, he was the cause.

after the split with the DMK in 1972, when he founded his own party — the AIADMK. And ever since he became the Chief Minister in 1977, he has been heading his own blend of one-man democracy.

“HE’S A DERANGED sadist, ruthless and suspicious. I know him for 15 years and was in his cabinet as the Finance Minister. He doesn’t believe anybody, not even his shadow.”

Nanchil Manoharan, Assistant General Secretary of the DMK is, obviously, not given to mincing words. Having worked with MGR closely, he feels he can be honest about him now. “MGR has created an impression that he’s generous,” Manoharan continues, eyes inscrutable behind his dark lenses, “but he’s not. He would announce very often that he would donate one lakh towards some cause or the other, but he seldom gave. He’s determined to hoodwink the people by saying things like ‘My wealth, life and body are for you.’ As far as I’m concerned he’s not sincere in anything he does. He’s just an artiste.”

The criticisms come strong and fast. MGR never did run a cabinet, according to Manoharan. Everything was decided by him. “Most of his ministers are bonded labourers, slaves,

and have no ideas of their own. When, at cabinet meetings, he asked the opinions of others, they would all say, ‘Whatever you think is best, sir!’ ”

Manoharan is dismissive of most of MGR’s pet schemes. All of them are announced on the spot without financial backing or discussion with cabinet colleagues. The Noon Meal Scheme, for instance, entailed a Rs 200-crore drain on the finances of the state. “Even though he knows he doesn’t have the economic resources, he announces schemes. Recently he said he’d give chappals to young children and women who were pregnant. He does not have an infrastructure for this. And yet, Rs 28 crore have been earmarked for this scheme.

“Last year he announced that within three years, five lakh houses will be built for the scheduled castes and tribes. Then he changed his mind and said he would build 30 lakh houses. The Housing Minister announced only a few days ago that two lakh houses were built. Now, if two lakh houses took one year to build, how can he build 30 lakh houses within three years? And what about the expense: one house costs approximately Rs 10,000 and 30 lakh houses means Rs 3,000 crore. Where is he going to get the money from in a budget outlay of only Rs 2,800 crore?”

That’s not all. Manoharan claims that one of MGR’s election promises had been a stipend of Rs 50 to every pregnant woman after her third month of pregnancy. But this hasn’t been done, ostensibly because MGR claims that a census of pregnant women is still being conducted in the state. His promise of one job per family has also remained unfulfilled.

But what is frightening, according to Manoharan, is how casually MGR can pick up and drop schemes, depending on his moods. “Once while he was in the United States, Tamil Nadu was lashed by floods. On his return MGR visited Rameshwaram, one of the worst hit areas. After his visit the press was eager to know his reaction and asked him what he was going to do. MGR replied: ‘I have got

a scheme and I’ve got it all the way from USA.’ Naturally the press was curious to know what it was. ‘I am going to convert Rameshwaram into Miami Beach,’ MGR announced. He was serious,” Manoharan exclaims now. “He thought it would get in foreign exchange. What annoyed me was that he wanted me to include this scheme in my budget.”

There was no escaping the Chief Minister’s enthusiasm. Within a week he wanted a feasibility study of its cost. Even though the finance ministry thought it was a hare-brained idea, an estimate was drawn up. It would cost the exchequer Rs 600 crore. Now, Manoharan recalls, “He was taken aback and couldn’t, at first, believe it. Then he dropped the scheme. Even idiocy has its own saturation point.”

But even Manoharan has to admit that MGR’s rural popularity is still unaffected. “There are roughly 4,000 theatres of which 2,000 screen MGR films. The people get a daily dose of him. But even that is decreasing, gradually. If it was not for populist schemes like the Noon Meal Scheme, MGR wouldn’t be so infallible today.”

IT IS 12.30 PM and in Centre No 976 along Eliot’s Beach Road, K Shanti has finished doling out the mid-day meal: rice and dal. The children are busy eating or playing around with the food. Huge vessels at the back of the simply constructed shed indicate that this is the ‘kitchen’. Shanti has about 50 children in her charge, between the ages of two and five, who come here to eat.

The Chief Minister’s Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme (NNMS) is the most lauded and criticised of MGR’s undertakings. When it was launched, critics in the DMK were quick to point out that the scheme — supposed to be an incentive for school children to come and learn — was defeating its purpose by its very existence. School teachers, put in charge of the cooking, had very little time to teach and the school children themselves were roped in to gather firewood for the

SPECIAL FEATURE

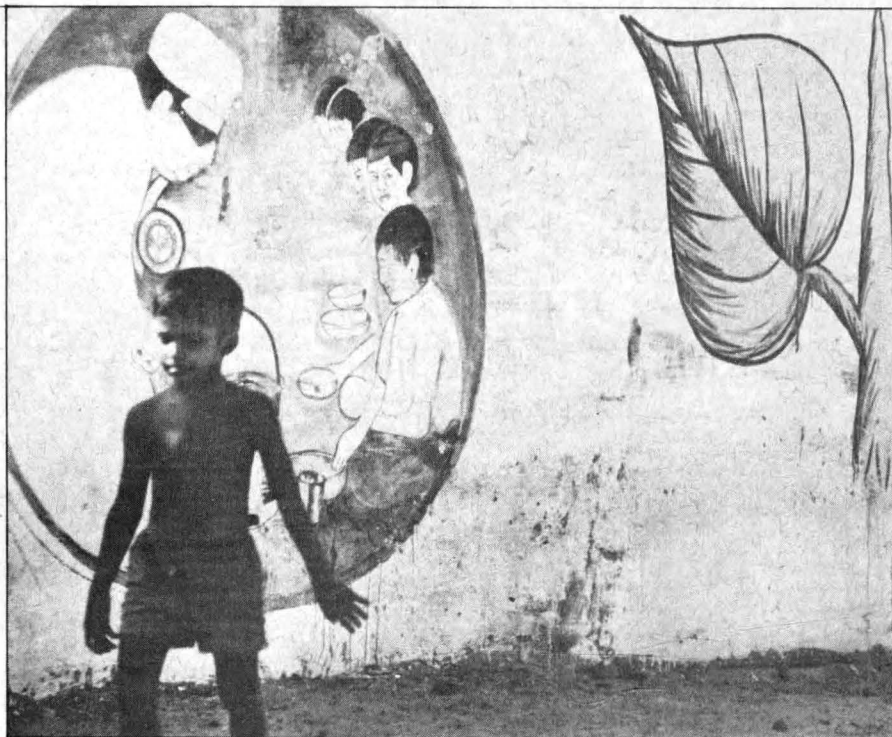
meal. Besides, the meal was hardly 'nutritious' and it only became a new area for further corruption.

But whatever the earlier criticisms, the Noon Meal Scheme is here to stay. And it is to MGR's credit that it has been kept up since 1982. Shanti admits that, to begin with, the rice was substandard. But now the Centre provides the 150 kgs of rice, 35 kgs of dal and 7 kgs of oil (for 45 days) with clockwork regularity for the 50 children. In addition, the Centre itself gets money to buy the vegetables, firewood and provisions.

Official statistics are impressive: 66,000 centres have been set up for the Chief Minister's NNMS since 1982, all over Tamil Nadu. Over 85 lakh school children (upto the age of 16) are said to have benefitted from it as against two lakh old people and 30-50,000 pregnant women. The official estimate of the cost is between Rs 176-200 crore. But, unofficially, critics claim that the scheme costs over Rs 300 crore to sustain. And the gap between the budgetary outlay and the actual amount spent is being funded from donations taken (often forcibly) from traders and people seeking licences from the government.

Janaki Venkataraman, Editor of the English fortnightly *Aside*, claims that official government statistics of the number of adults fed may not be wrong. But that, according to *Aside*'s own calculations and survey, only between 40-50 lakh children are being fed. And that the scheme itself requires Rs 196 crore to keep going; salaries of personnel employed, shed construction costs and transport bills are extra. Since the government allocation is only Rs 120 crore, a sizeable amount has to be brought in through 'outside contributions'.

The soft-spoken Shanti in charge of Centre No 976, is, herself, not too happy with the job. "Whenever there are gaps in the quota of food sent to us, we have to pay the difference from our own pockets. Besides, we have to work every day of the week (including Sundays and bank holidays). We are allowed 12 days casual leave in a



MGR 'serving' a mid-day meal.

year, but we can't even take that as we choose. Only one day in a month is allowed."

She earns Rs 195 and the two servants who cook the meal get Rs 70 each. "From this amount we are expected to report every Wednesday to the supervisor's office which is seven kms away. Any complaints we have also have to go to her. But," she adds dejectedly, "usually, nothing happens."

Critics notwithstanding the CM's NNMS is still one of MGR's tangible achievements. As one of the editors of a leading daily puts it: "We feel that it is good not just because it has raised attendance in schools but because the bureaucracy has been able to keep this going."

Whether the scheme can be kept going by future governments is anybody's guess. But, as things stand now, it is one of the main reasons for the accolades MGR collects.

"MGR IS in power but he has forgotten C N Annadurai. As far as social reforms are concerned, he is promoting all the things that Anna was against. In 1963,

Anna himself burnt the Constitution (to protest against the language issue). If MGR is the true comrade of Anna, then why is he victimising the DMK people who burnt the Constitution just recently?"

M Karunanidhi, President of the DMK, is well within his stride by now. MGR is no popular hero, Karunanidhi feels. At least, not now. In March last year in the elections to 97 municipalities, the AIADMK candidates won in only 11. In contrast, the DMK emerged winners in 64. The perception seems to be that the charisma is fading — people are fed up with the internal bickerings of the AIADMK leaders.

Ever since Jayalalitha Jayaram, MGR's leading lady in about 40 films, was inducted into the party in January 1983, dissension within the AIADMK has grown. Jayalalitha's meteoric rise — from membership of the high level committee on the CM's Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme to Propaganda Secretary and then to the Rajya Sabha — caused quite a few diehards in the AIADMK to raise objections. One of the first to openly criticise MGR for this was S D Somasundaram, Mi-

The Chief Minister's Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme is the most lauded and criticised of MGR's undertakings. Critics were quick to point out that school teachers in charge of the cooking had very little time to teach, that children were roped in to gather firewood and that the meal was hardly 'nutritious'. Nevertheless, the Noon Meal Scheme is here to stay.

nister for Food in MGR's cabinet and co-founder of the AIADMK.

Corruption charges have often been levelled against the MGR government. In 1981, prohibition was relaxed in Tamil Nadu, which sent the AIADMK membership soaring — from 10 lakh to 24 lakh. A majority of party leaders and workers were involved in the peddling of either Indian-made foreign liquor or in arrack, which brought a revenue of Rs 230 crore to the state. Between 1981 and 1984, the state government gave blending unit licences to 10 claimants and issued wholesale licences to 14 others. MGR was accused of collecting huge funds through the disposal of spirits.

Three different judicial commissions were set up by the state and central governments to look into allegations against the Chief Minister. While two commissions were restrained by the courts, one exonerated MGR. But Karunanidhi is still unconvinced: "The DMK was accused of corruption while it was in power. What is MGR doing now? If arrack sells for Rs 2 per bottle then Rs 1 is the cost of the bottle, 50 paise goes to the dealer and 50 paise to MGR. He makes at least Rs 24 crore a year that way."

Charges of corruption are not con-

fined to liquor alone. Accusations of bribery for awarding contracts and transferring of officials are rampant. Nanchil Manoharan says: "If MGR is valued at Rs 500 crore, each of his ministers is valued at Rs 5, 10, or 15 crore. After all, it was MGR himself who came to power on the promise of a clean government. Corruption has now become so widespread that his ministers have become shameless. Originally they used to pass on 80 per cent of the money collected to MGR. Now, they keep 80 per cent and MGR gets 20 per cent."

Somasundaram's exit from the cabinet in September 1984 affected the morale of the AIADMK leaders. Ever since, MGR has been playing the autocrat more and more fervently, keeping ministers in line with threats of expulsion. The cases of R M Veerappan (Information Minister) and Jayalalitha (Propaganda Secretary) are fine examples of such conduct. Every time MGR feels that either of them is getting too strong, he takes away their portfolios and throws them into the wilderness for a while.

But in the power structure of the AIADMK that revolves around MGR, nobody dares to protest at this undemocratic shuffling. K Subbu, former leader of the AIADMK Trade Union wing, who recently got the axe for no other reason than allegedly 'working against the party' is still to think that the dismissal was MGR's fault.

But, inevitably, this autocratic manner of functioning is beginning to seep into other areas as well. Ruthless suppression of Naxalites had for long been a wellknown feature of the MGR administration. But later, even Left-oriented civil rights groups (who were trying to educate and motivate the rural population through cultural means) were severely harassed.

And when A M Paulraj, Editor of *Vaniga Otturamai*, a small traders unity magazine, wrote an editorial criticising the Assembly proceedings, he was sentenced to two weeks' imprisonment by the Assembly. Paulraj dramatically disappeared 'undergrou-

nd' when the harassment became acute (he even claims to have been kidnapped by uniformed policemen from whose clutches he escaped) but was finally forced to surface and put in jail for two weeks.

Not everyone is convinced however, that civil liberties are suppressed in Tamil Nadu. "When you talk of suppression, who are you referring to?" asks the editor of a leading fortnightly in the state. "Only a few people are affected by it. The majority — and this, one can say with absolute certainty — is secure in Tamil Nadu. Repression hasn't and probably never will, come to the acute stage it has in Bihar and UP."

INEVITABLY, the question is beginning to be asked: after MGR, who? Ever since his serious stroke and illness in November 1984, MGR has more or less lost his speech, he makes few public appearances and his centralised style of functioning has almost come to a standstill. By all accounts, files pile up on the Chief Minister's desk, unattended. Most ministers dare not take decisions — major or otherwise — without his approval. And governance suffers.

Critics from the DMK are more than gleeful at this state of affairs. Very soon, they feel, the vote of the masses will swing in their favour (as indeed it did in the 1986 municipal elections). Businessmen, who are said to abhor the unapproachability of the Chief Minister, will no longer have to worry. And issues like power and industry — which have long been stagnating due to MGR's obsessive penchant for 'schemes', will, at last, flourish.

"People who are politically vigilant are beginning to realise just how far MGR has drifted from the ideals of Anna," Karunanidhi says. "If he didn't have the Congress (I)'s support he wouldn't even have 40 people with him. Even in 1984, the AIADMK and the Congress (I) combine got only 50 lakh votes more than the DMK-Communist Front. And that was a time when the sympathy wave was in their

favour — Mrs Gandhi's assassination and MGR's illness."

MGR's heavy tilt towards the Congress (I) is perceived as a sign of weakness. Moreover, his soft stance over the language issue as also his non-criticism of the Centre's handling of the Sri Lankan-Tamil problem has led observers to believe that he is angling for the highest post in the land — that of the President. That, like all regional leaders, MGR now seeks fame and attention at the Centre. And that, increasingly, MGR is fed up of the petty bickerings within his party.

But whether this is true or not, MGR has undoubtedly a lot of quick thinking to do before the next election rolls around. Populist schemes can only carry the seal of public approval for a few years. Beyond that, people look out for concrete achievements. Already some villagers are beginning to doubt the wisdom of the charity meals. Wouldn't it have been better if MGR had given them industries and steady jobs so that they could feed their own children?

The cinematic charisma is also not as strong as before. MGR's appeal may never fade but it is doubtful that he will be able to win elections in absentia, anymore. AIADMK is MGR and in the absence of the hero the people are not so willing to give their votes to his minions. (The 1986 elections — when neither Jayalalitha nor MGR campaigned — seem to reflect this.) And the AIADMK without MGR is certain to head for electoral disaster. Moreover, the screen image of MGR and the rather frail mortal of today are quite far apart. So far, the myth of the hero as eternal do-gooder has endured, but MGR's credibility can no more be so automatic.

In the final analysis, MGR has a troubled time ahead of him. A debilitating illness, a strife-ridden party, a fading glory from his cinema days, and several populist schemes which may not win him the unstinting support they have till now. And if he doesn't keep the show rolling smoothly, his rivals are waiting on the sides to step in. ♦

NTR: The Hero As Chief Minister

FOR NANDAMURI Taraka Rama Rao, the dividing line between cinema and reality appears to be so blurred as to be almost non-existent. Indeed his role as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh can be seen virtually as an extension of his screen portrayals of God-like super heroes and in fact, of the Gods themselves, in the course of his highly successful film career. For he is the state's supreme giver of boons, a rajah bestowing favours on his subjects.

Populism is the name of the game. Populist slogans — 'moral-based and value-based politics' — and populist schemes, a whole variety of them, have been among the most prominent features of the NTR government since the film star took charge on January 9, 1983. These schemes or 'vote-catching gimmicks' as some political observers term them, coupled with the man's charisma and popularity with the masses, have worked out to be an unbeatable combination. Which the state's Opposition, despite grandiose claims to the contrary, have been unable to weaken, let alone destroy. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has won a resounding victory in the Zilla Parishad and Mandal elections held in the state recently, effectively quashing the contention of Jalagam Vengal Rao, former Congress (I) Chief Minister and Union Minister for Industries, that "This time the people of Andhra Pradesh will not be deceived by bogus promises."

In an interview given to this correspondent just before the election results were announced, Vengal Rao confidently declared, "NTR can only mouth cinema dialogues and deceive the masses. His every act is a gimmick which cannot fool the people any longer. The people of this state are very politically conscious. NTR's

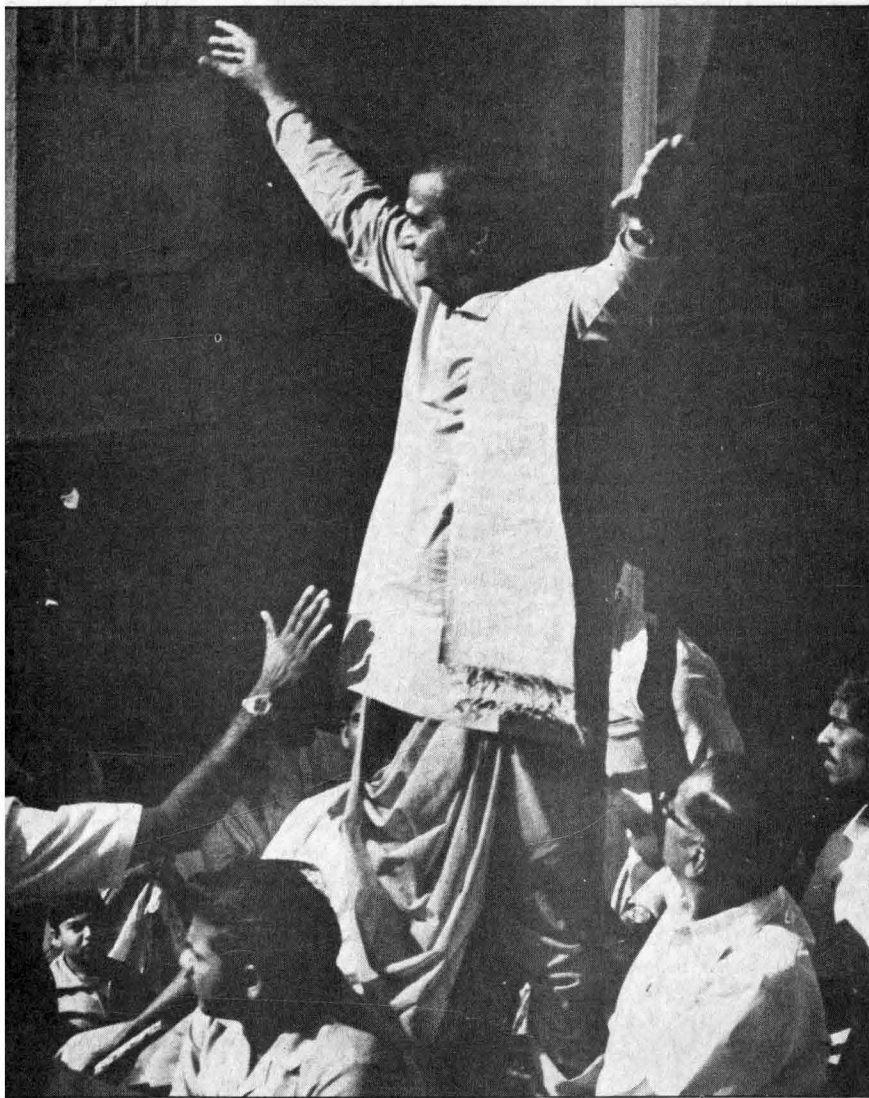
Populist slogans and populist schemes have been the most prominent features of the NTR government since the film star took charge in 1983. These 'vote-catching gimmicks' as some political observers term them, coupled with the man's popularity with the masses, have worked out to be an unbeatable combination.

bases will be shattered when the Congress (I) wins a majority in these elections." It was not to be.

This victory has prompted jubilant TDP loyalists to claim that the NTR government is seen by the masses as a benevolent one, spreading prosperity and stability in the state. This is a claim that is routinely challenged in the press because of the palpably deteriorating law and order situation in Andhra Pradesh.

Police Violence

The Andhra Pradesh police force has the unenviable reputation of being one of the most inhuman and brutal in the country. The statistics supporting this view are an indictment in themselves. Between January 1985 and November 1986 there has been, on an average, one death per week, either in an 'encounter' or in police custody or in police firings in the state. The Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) cites 55 encounter deaths and 66 deaths in police lock-ups since 1984. There were as many as five deaths in police custody in September alone last year. Civil liberties activists continue to be prime targets for the Andhra Pradesh police as is evidenced by more than 12 recorded cases of assault on these



activists since November 1984. According to the APCLC, several activists based in Karimnagar and Warangal have had to resign from their posts following police harassment, which takes the form of physical assault, illegal detention and false incrimination of people.

"Despite reports in the press of the killing of J Lakshma Reddy and Dr R Ramanadham, two of our activists, no investigation has been undertaken by the government," says K G Kannabiran, president of the APCLC, bitterly. "In any case, NTR is subverting the judicial process, using it more to intimidate opponents. And in appointing commissions of inquiry, he is merely rehabilitating retired judges. Tailor-made reports are then submitted and

the Constitution is brazenly undermined," he adds.

While P Upendra, TDP leader in the Rajya Sabha, attributes the national uproar over police atrocities in the state to 'motivated publicity', civil servants in Hyderabad are more articulate. They say that 'subordinate echelons in the police force run amok, giving rise to a spate of police excesses'. While agreeing that judicial inquiries into these excesses are a farce, some bureaucrats aver that the police atrocities in the state are, by and large, individual aberrations which go unpunished as the government does not want to risk offending the rank and file in the police administration. Kannabiran strongly disagrees. "The NTR government sanctions the elimi-

nation of political dissent, in fact, *any* form of dissent. Only the form of democracy is maintained, the substance has long been destroyed," he says.

Hyderabad's DGP Chandrasekharan presents an almost tragi-comic figure. "Who says our reputation is bad? We have been subjected to a trial by the press — and by a third rate press at that. The figures of lock-up deaths and deaths in police custody that you cite are all wrong. Very few such cases occurred and we have instituted judicial proceedings in those few cases. I know the attitude of you press people — just rub someone up the wrong way and extract wrong information from them. In any case, I don't have any time for you," the tirade comes to a sudden halt. The defence rests.

Oddly, NTR's populist schemes for Green Card holders (those whose annual income is less than Rs 3,000) take precedence over everything else.

Populist Schemes

"If providing food, clothing and shelter are labelled as populist schemes, even the Centre is guilty of being populist," says Upendra angrily. "The poorest of the poor in Andhra Pradesh today eat rice and thank the TDP and NTR daily," he continues. Bureaucrats in charge of implementing the much-publicised scheme of providing rice at Rs 2 per kg (25 kgs per family) to Green Card holders, however, point out certain obvious discrepancies in the prestigious project. A major lacuna is that in this case, activity is not linked with availability. First, how many Green Card holders can afford to pay even Rs 2 for the rice? For those who can, the maximum quota of 25 kgs per family is often insufficient for the five or six members in a family. They then have to supplement their requirements by buying rice at the market prices, which are often as high as Rs 4 or 5. Furthermore even as the state government has spent Rs 200 crore on this scheme, rice mills have had to levy

collections to meet the demands of this scheme, alleges Bal Baddam Reddy, a BJP MLA. A fourth of the state's rice mills have been shut down, he contends. CPI General Secretary in Andhra Pradesh, K L Mahindra further charges the TDP with raising taxes on toddy (the poor man's drink) to meet the costs of the ambitious scheme. The landlords are the scheme's real beneficiaries, the Opposition claims, since they are not compelled to increase the minimum wages for agricultural labour. It is the alms syndrome again — that gives the poor rice at a discount and deprives them of any other fundamental rights, such as fixed minimum wages. Senior civil servants in the department of social welfare confirm that the minimum agricultural wage is definitely not being implemented in the state. TDP spokesman Upendra also evades citing the exact figures in this matter.

Moreover, despite official assurances that "There will be no let-up in this prestigious programme" and that "The pipelines will be kept open," the Public Distribution System (PDS) that supplies the subsidised rice, is facing a very real threat with falling buffer stocks and poor arrivals. The state will require at least 22 lakh tonnes of rice to meet the annual demand of the PDS. Officials confidently assert that they will tap the surplus in the state (which is doubtful due to the shortfall of 1.50 lakh tonnes in procurement last year) and the Centre's pool. Irrespective of whether the Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation is able to muster up the requisite resources or not, the closure of this very popular scheme, seems highly improbable.

NTR's other equally popular schemes for Green Card holders include a 20 paise discount on every quarter litre of milk, the distribution of saris/dhotis at half price and low cost housing. The latter, certified the Weaker Sections' Housing Scheme covers both the rural and urban poor. The government's target this year is 200,000 houses at Rs 8,000 per house for rural labourers earning less than Rs 350 per

month and Rs 12,000 per house for urban residents earning less than Rs 500 per month. The scheme which does not involve employment of contractors, is financed partly by grants and partly loans. These houses are constructed by the beneficiaries themselves with technical assistance from the government's department of social welfare. The government's aim will be to include within the parameters of this scheme, the complete rebuilding of villages — the internal road and water supply, the electricity etc. The scheme's overall success has yet to be fully established though some senior bureaucrats think it is the only welfare project that has reached the people.

This is not so in the case of another of NTR's well-publicised schemes — the old age pension of Rs 30 a month given to landless agricultural labourers. The government sanctions Rs 21 crore each year for this and claims to be benefitting 5,66,000 people. But independent observers in Hyderabad claim that these people have not received any money for the last two years. Under a separate scheme, widows who were allotted Rs 50 a month have also met a similar fate.

It is indisputable, however, that the Andhra Pradesh government has adopted a fairly liberal, almost radical policy in safeguarding women's rights. It has been among the first to grant equal property rights (hereditary wealth) to women, and also to reserve 30 per cent of public employment for women.

The success of some of these welfare schemes apart, civil servants and critics rate them as cosmetic rather than structural changes, which boost the TDP's image as a positive, reformist government. The value of these schemes in the perspective of the state's overall economic progress and development, as indeed their capacity to continue, is open to question.

Lacklustre Record In Development And Industry

"Welfare schemes have not been

Civil servants in Hyderabad rate NTR's welfare schemes as cosmetic rather than structural changes, which boost the Telugu Desam's image as a positive, reformist government. Their value in the perspective of the state's overall development and their capacity to continue, is open to question.

the government's sole priority," says Upendra — defending the criticism that most of the money from the public exchequer has been used to fund them. He reels off statistics to support his party's contribution towards the setting up of 'major developmental projects and industries'. "The planned expenditure has been increased from Rs 540 crore in 1982-83 (during the Congress (I) regime) to Rs 1,300 crore today. We have dug 1,30,080 borewells in four years, provided Rs 360 crore for irrigation projects (which includes the prestigious Telugu Ganga project), and set up a Minorities Finance Corporation, and farmers' councils. We also provide incentives for major and medium industries such as the Godavari and Nagarjuna Fertilisers," says Upendra. The list stops here. The rest of the figures are familiar — the TDP claims to have built 5,06,480 houses, 1,000 high schools, 153 residential schools, 30 B Ed colleges, 614 hostels for the backward classes, 101 hostels for tribals and 5,000 new primary schools. It provides free uniforms (the colour of the party's orange) and textbooks to children in the first and second standards and free travelling facilities for those below 12 years. Upendra does not explain if these are 'major developmental projects' or a continu-



NTR: Superstar, Superman.

ation of the populist welfare schemes.

What the state government *has* done is to set up various corporations for various projects whose results are hardly commensurate with their cost. The widely publicised Non-Resident Indians (NRI) scheme is one such example. No one in Hyderabad, even from the bureaucracy, was able to explain the tangible results of these schemes.

Contractors Benefitted

An interesting fall-out of the proliferation of government bodies and corporations has been the considerable benefits accruing to contractors in the state. As an example, K L Mahindra (CPI) says that the auditing of accounts and bill collection in the state's electricity board has now been given to private chartered accountants. Similarly, contractors building bridges will now build with their own money and recover their investment through a toll tax. Until the outlay is recovered, the bridge thus belongs to the contractors.

It is hardly surprising that Andhra Pradesh should today be dubbed a contractors' paradise if one considers the section of interests that NTR him-

self represents — the prosperous and powerful caste of Kammas or the wealthy farmers, who invest their profits from agriculture in construction activities. Their task is made easier when privatisation is rampant, where certain functions of public sector undertakings are sought to be given to independent bodies.

Strangely enough, for a populist hero, NTR has initiated privatisation in several areas. One such experiment is a bid to commercialise government hospitals. Distribution of free food to the general wards has been halted in favour of contractors supplying food to Green Card holders alone. Doctors working in government hospitals have been prohibited from doing private practice or running clinics at their homes. The Nizam's hospital in the state, earlier run by the Nizam's trust and later transferred to the state government, has been placed under an autonomous body which has the freedom to charge rich patients. In effect this prevents the poor from patronising the hospital since its profits now come from the patients who pay. Government hospitals have also been brought under a medical commissionerate.

This unwelcome practice of ap-

pointing a nominated body over an elected one has been adopted in the case of universities too in Andhra Pradesh, which now fall under a Higher Education Commissionerate — a board which can monitor academic programmes, suggest means of mobilising resources for pay scales of the teaching staff and maintain a separate fund of its own. This will possibly lead to a lowering of academic standards with teaching institutions catering to the whimsical dictates of a nominated board.

What is even more surprising is the alleged compliance of four vice-chancellors of the state with the government's moratorium on opening new colleges.

Spectre Of Unemployment

The underlying motive is clear — an attempt to halt the increase in the number of the educated unemployed. Despite this, from the unemployed youth thus registered in 1985, almost 13 lakh were graduates and post-graduates who have been denied an opening in either agriculture or industry. With the state government's slow rate of expansion — approximately

9,000 jobs in a year — their future is as uncertain as the government's schemes for generating employment.

Civil servants in the city airily dismiss this problem. "Direct employment opportunity creation is not the government's job, it is concerned chiefly with motivating the growth of new industries that will provide jobs." The infrastructure that can offer incentives to indigenous industries is, sadly lacking, according to political observers in the state.

Mahindra (CPI) corroborates this view. "There has been scarcely any local capital formation, despite NTR's electoral promises," says Mahindra. "New entrepreneurs have been encouraged only if they are backed by NRI capital, which is NTR's pet idea now," he says.

Inadequate Handling Of Drought

Employment generation schemes are even more crucial in a state that faces severe drought in 14 out of its 23 districts, for the fourth successive year. An estimated Rs 600 crore has been lost in crop production, major and minor irrigation tanks have dried up and villagers have begun to make distress sale of cattle and to migrate. While the opposition parties are unanimous in describing the NTR government's handling of the grim situation as 'deplorable', official reactions have been both baffling and callous. A senior civil servant of the Drought Relief Commission enumerates a list of relief measures for drought victims — employment schemes, augmentation of water supply by tapping existing sources, digging new borewells and transporting water, agricultural contingency production of subsidised inputs, fodder procurement and distribution of supplementary food and pensions to victims.

"These are situations where impressions count and mine is that the situation is in complete control," the civil servant says self-righteously. As for the government's refusal to open gruel centres for drought victims, the practice has been disconti-

nued for the last two decades, he asserts. The 14 documented cases of starvation deaths in Mahbubnagar, one of the worst affected areas, are also dismissed as malnutrition deaths — a belief shared by the Chief Minister.

As for malnutrition, the official says, "What is so special about it? It is a chronic problem among the poor. Migration too is a usual phenomenon with a mono crop, as is the case in Andhra Pradesh. It has not been aggravated by the severe drought this year," he adds.

The TDP's standard refrain with respect to the drought situation is the Centre's indifference to their plight despite the great loss incurred by the floods last year. "The Centre's help is very meagre," complains Upendra. "We asked for Rs 400 crore for drought and received barely Rs 48 crore."

Despite these constraints the TDP boasts of having provided elaborate relief measures for drought victims, which indignant opposition members contest. "The central government grants have been grossly misused, the funds have been diverted for their own projects," says Bal Reddy. "They (the TDP) dug borewells in their own constituencies, their plans of dispatching water tankers to drought areas were unsuccessful and no link roads or schools were built, which could have provided employment to victims," he adds.

According to Mahindra, "The state government didn't even accept the fact that the drought situation needed the setting up of gruel centres. The CPI and CPI-(M) started gruel centres in Mahbubnagar after collecting funds from all over the state." "The assessment of drought assistance is greatly exaggerated. Where are the permanent measures?" asks Dr Vizarath Rasool Khan, MLA, Majlis-i-Muhameen. He also alleges the TDP government as being totally communal. "Not a single Muslim in Hyderabad is happy with the government," he says. The myth of the Telugu Desam alleviating the lot of the poor and the suffering has

The blatant misuse of the police force in Andhra Pradesh is merely one of the several bastions of democracy that NTR is attacking, according to critics. Since he is a staunch believer in his 'divine right to rule', he projects a distinctly feudal approach to the governance of the state.

been shattered by its inept and lackadaisical handling of the state's drought crisis.

Backward Areas Ignored

The aftermath of the state government's mismanagement of the drought situation will be felt even more keenly in the backward districts of Andhra Pradesh. These areas — Anantnagar, Kurnool, Rayalseema, Karimnagar and Warrangal, to name a few — have yet to benefit from the much touted welfare and developmental schemes of the government. In fact, TDP officials and senior civil servants are unable to name a single major employment-generating project or industry that has been set up recently in the backward areas. On the other hand, in the Karimnagar and Warrangal districts of Telengana, an essentially economic problem is being treated simplistically as a law and order one.

The poor peasants in these two districts have been battling unsuccessfully against exploitation by the landlord, indebtedness and the government's failure to grant them minimum wages. The state's police, meanwhile, have been clamping down on such activities, terming them as 'naxalite



uprisings'. In the words of K G Kanabiran, "People are liquidated, not their problems. It is typical of NTR's so-called democratic system that there are anti-reservation agitations in the city and police violence against the backward classes in the rural areas." Significantly, both Upendra and Vengal Rao feel that stringent government (in this case, police) action is called for to suppress these 'extremist movements', that are used basically to 'settle old scores, generate panic and extract agricultural produce forcibly'. Both parties condone police repression in these areas.

Style Of Functioning

The blatant misuse of the police force in Andhra Pradesh (opposition members vouch for its complicity in the election procedure) is merely one of the several bastions of democracy that NTR is attacking, according to critics in Hyderabad. Since NTR is a staunch believer in his 'divine right to rule', he projects a distinctly feudal approach to the governance of the state. Opposition leaders bemoan the fact that certain bills are introduced in the House and passed within 24 hours without discussion or debate.

The number of days on which the legislative assembly is to meet has been curtailed from 100 to 51 days in a year, and sometimes NTR's absence or his partymen's, leads to frequent adjournments for want of a quorum.

Irate residents of Hyderabad protest against the government's skewed priorities. The city which faces an acute water shortage, requires at least 90 million gallons of water per day, but it receives only 30 million gallons on alternate days. Some areas get water every fourth or fifth day. According to the BJP, it is the government's apathy in not seeking a permanent solution by tapping the waters of Krishna or the Godavari that has led to this exigent state of affairs. Yet, in the face of vociferous public disapproval, NTR spent Rs 4.5 crore on beautifying the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The installation of 33 statues of prominent luminaries of the state, at Tank Bund (which links the twin cities), was not only regarded as extravagant but also seen by some as a 'Teluguisation' drive. Only a few agree with Upendra's view that the statues add a touch of culture to the city.

Upendra also contends that the

NTR government has been able to eradicate corruption in politics and in administration. Obviously NTR and the TDP leaders believe that a constant harping on the slogan of a 'clean government' will persuade the public to accept it as fact. In reality, however, the people tend to dub it a 'family government', pointing that key positions in the government have been usurped by NTR's relatives. NTR's quick retraction of the nomination of his son and political heir, Balakrishna, is seen by many as an attempt to placate his son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu, General Secretary of the TDP.

No Alternative To NTR

NTR's authoritarianism, his populist measures, acts of nepotism and his resource to gimmickry notwithstanding, his government continues to enjoy popular support in the state. The Opposition is fragmented and cynical — their attacks on NTR reflect a sense of resignation. The Telugu Desam's majority in the recent elections is ample testimony that NTR's image, though tarnished here and there, has not lost its hallucinatory shine. The enormous cardboard cut-outs of superstar NTR in Hyderabad and remote areas of the state, have worked their magic effectively.

While urban Andhra Pradesh favoured the Congress (I) — 46.85 per cent of the votes in 95 municipalities as opposed to the TDP's 34.37 per cent — the TDP has won 18 of the 21 Zilla Praja Parishad (ZPP) chairmanships and 632 of the 1,058 Mandal Praja Parishads, defeating the Congress-I, its main contender, by a comfortable margin. The Congress-I has been able to bag only three ZPPs and 338 Mandals. Their most crippling defeat has been the rout of Vengal Rao's son J Prasada Rao, in Khammam district, by the ruling party, by a margin of 50,000 votes.

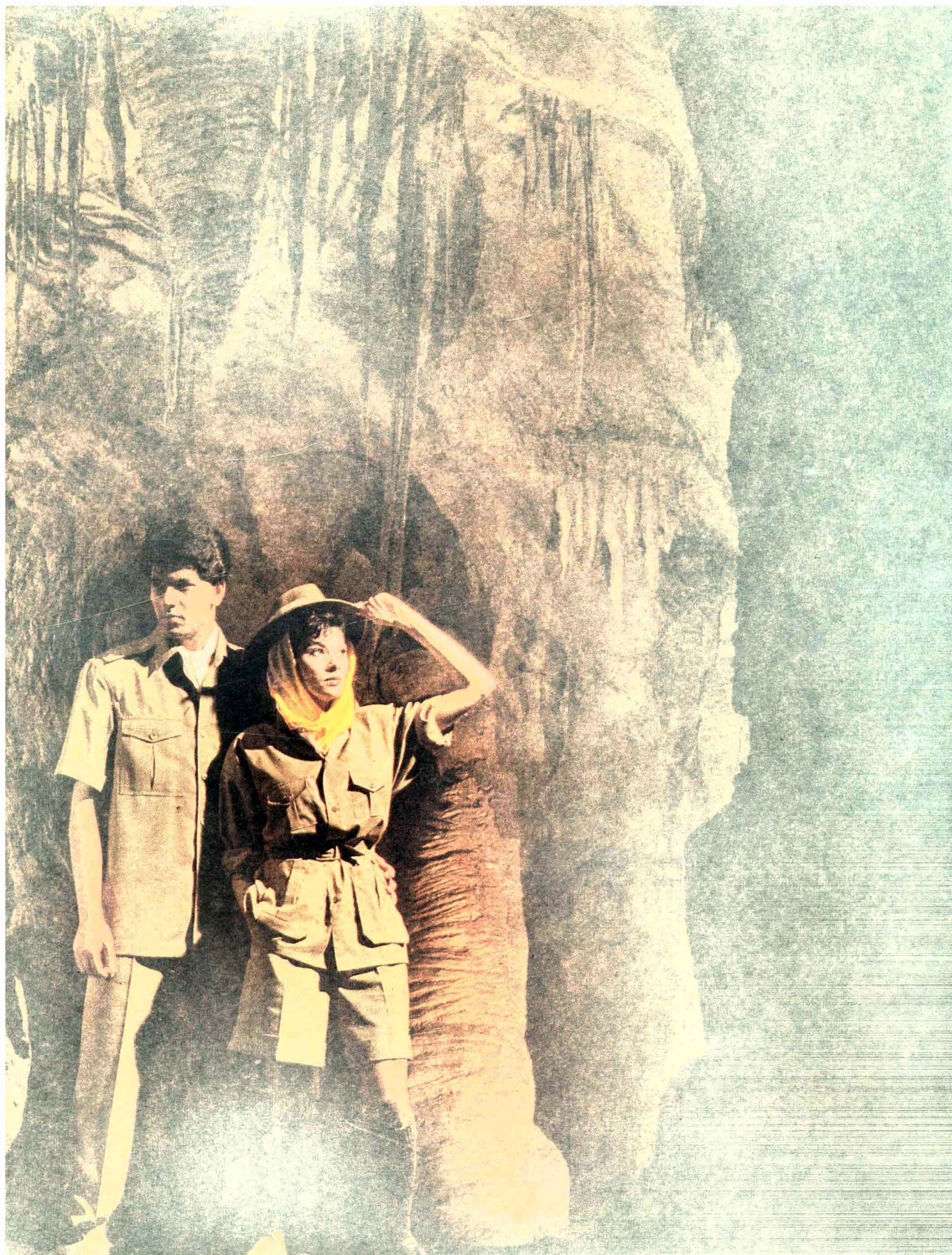
For want of a realistic alternative, NTR's *Ramarajya* promises to carry on. ♦

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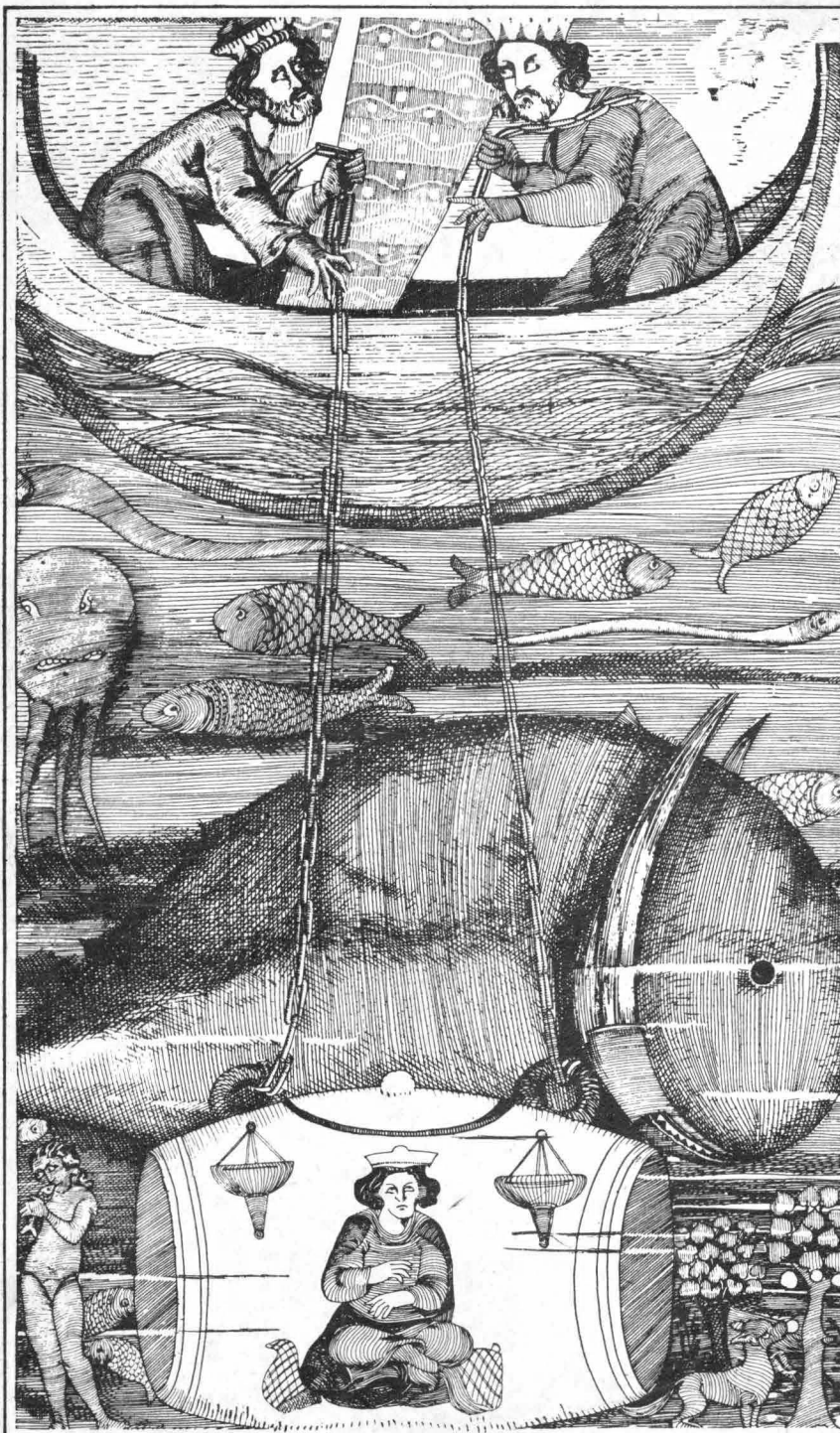
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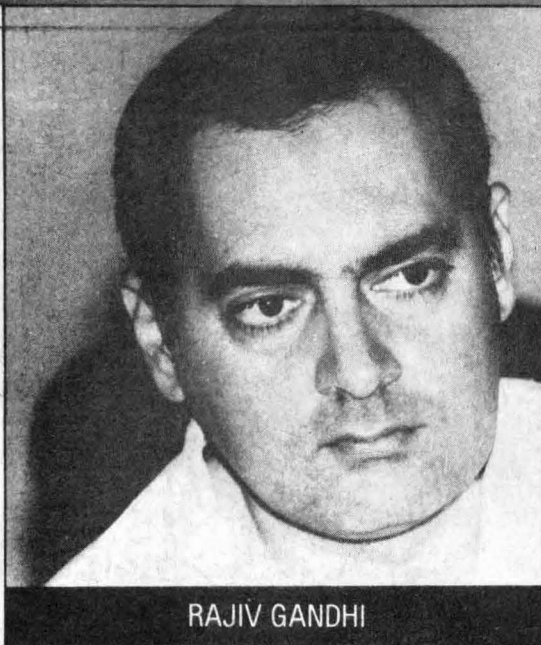
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FIVE FOR



RAJIV GANDHI

RAJIV GANDHI has now been the Prime Minister of India for more than two years. The likelihood is that he will continue in his present position for a good deal longer. This is not so much because of his performance as because of the potential he still has: sadly, apart from Mr Ramakrishna Hegde of Karnataka, who has no political backup of great strength, Mr Gandhi appears to be the only contestant around for his exalted post. His mother and grandfather were people who, by one faction in the country, were much hated, by another much loved. A curious difference between them and Mr Gandhi is that he provokes no very strong reactions. People either show approbation for his activities, or criticise him. They cannot be said either to love him or hate him. For Mr Gandhi's is not a very colourful personality. He cannot be said to possess a mind of great distinction. Nor, despite his occasional outbursts against his own ministers, does he have the flaming temper of his forebears.

In his first year as Prime Minister he appeared to personify, as his grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, was said to do in his own youth, *Rithuraj*, the spirit of spring. He seemed to have a fresh approach to India's ancient problems. Where his mother had wavered, he seemed positive.

Then came the second year. The Punjab and Assam accords had failed, and there was more trouble there than even in the time of Mrs Gandhi. Later the Gorkhaland issue erupted. The famous Nehru temper also erupted in Mr Gandhi, perhaps understandably tired of his demanding duties. His dealings with others in government were by no means tactful. The performance of his advisers had proved that to be a student of Doon School doesn't necessarily qualify you for the corridors of power. His jaunts abroad had annoyed a number of people. With so many problems at home, his absences seemed absurd. He also went about the countryside, when he was in India, promising all kinds of people large sums of money

To mark the 27th year of **Imprint's** publication we pick five people who are likely to shape the course of the country's history. They have merited such selection because of their potential to initiate change: Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi**, for whom this is 'a time to build up, not break down'. Defence Minister **V P Singh**, who controls one of the most sensitive portfolios and to which he is likely to bring unprecedented innovations. Punjab Chief Minister **S S Barnala**, who has separated religion from politics and emerged on top. **The public sector chief executive**, who can cast off the malaise that currently beleaguers the public sector. And **the farmer**, the salt of the earth, but the most neglected segment of India's population, who holds the key to India's progress.

to be provided by his government and eventually the taxpayers.

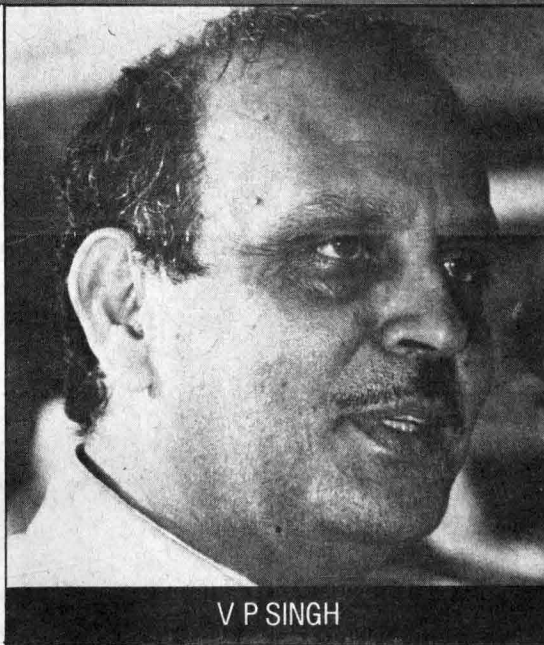
His quota of respect has shrunk, and is now by no means what it was, only a year ago. This is not to say that it may not be restored.

THE FUTURE

What he has to do is to learn to work with people who have personalities very different from his, whether these are political friends or political enemies. He has to gauge situations better than he has yet done. For example, he has four neighbours with whom he has problems. Southward he has Sri Lanka and the ethnic problem, about which he continually makes mysterious pronouncements. Mr Jayewardene is twice his age, but has so far run circles round him. West of his frontiers he has President Zia and his bomb, buoyed up by the USA. East of India he has Bangladesh, which has made a number of inimical moves towards India in recent times. On the Himalayan border to the north is China, gigantic, powerfully armed, and claiming various tracts of Indian territory as its own. Within India itself the Punjab terrorists are supposed to be supported by Pakistan and the movements in the North-East, at least partially, by China. Mr Gandhi has not been to Pakistan, China, or Sri Lanka.

If Mr Gandhi could establish peace, or an untroubled situation, with his four neighbours, he might be able to do something about the internal agitation, and then turn his attention to the most pressing needs of the people.

In order to do this, he must assemble a proper team of ministers and advisers, and shed the ones he has at present. What with cabinet reshuffles and the moving around of chief ministers and deputy chief ministers, there are several who have been flipped around like a pack of jokers in the last two years. If Mr Gandhi had a good, solid, and established team with him he will be, perhaps, the greatest influence on this country over the next few years. But this is only to suggest what he should do: what he *will* do is quite a different matter.



V P SINGH

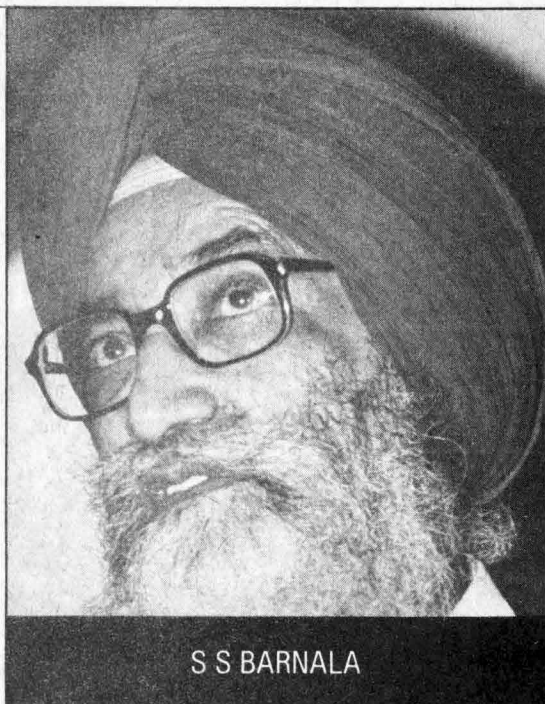
CAN INDIA afford a Rs 14,092-crore defence budget? Won't this kind of an outlay bleed the nation white and negate the economy's developmental programmes? Defence Minister V P Singh needs to quickly put a curb on defence expenditure. If this continues to grow at the rate of 4 to 5 per cent per year, the economy will suffer. The Defence Minister must also not give any credence to the Prime Minister's statement that, "Anybody who suggests a cut in defence expenditure is anti-national." In fact, V P Singh must re-evaluate the perception of external threats and begin to introduce cut-backs. He must observe China's example: Deng Xiaoping has put through his plan to demobilise one million People's Liberation Army troops. India too, must cease to be unnecessarily alarmist. Singh's initiatives must be to:

- * Introduce a body in the ministry of defence to suggest defence cuts. Such a body does not exist in our country at the moment, but there

are many parallels to be found in NATO. In the light of Rajiv Gandhi's massive defence budget a body of this kind becomes a necessity.

- * Freeze expansion of existing army divisions and naval ships till the end of the seventh plan. India's one million strong army is too large and already the Rs 703-crore burden towards pensions is unacceptably high.
- * Review threat perceptions and scale down the Indo-Pak and Indo-China arms race with a view to diverting scarce resources from this unproductive area.
- * Commence regular dialogues with his Pakistani and Chinese counterparts to keep peace.
- * Set up indigenous industries to manufacture sophisticated defence equipment of the calibre of world-class aircraft thereby saving foreign exchange and creating a local defence techno-industrial infrastructure.
- * Restructure the promotion scale.

ANNIVERSARY FEATURE



S S BARNALA

At present over 50 per cent of army officers retire at the rank of a Lieutenant Colonel at 50 years of age unless promoted to a higher rank. This has led to disgruntlement since nearly half the officers retire as Majors and Lieutenant Colonels and merely a handful become Brigadiers. Frequent upgradation will not help. It has already resulted in a situation where a Colonel today commands a battalion, whereas earlier it was commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel. Upgradation, actually, downgrades a post.

- * Rationalise capital defence purchases. Every major defence buy means that the forces will train less since the budget is thinly spread. It is better to have a well-trained, less sophisticated force in terms of fancy equipment, rather than an ill-trained force and a lot of high-tech gadgetry.

Singh, undoubtedly, will be a cautious, down-to-earth Defence Minister and his personal fondness for computers may well have the forces switching to computers. His deep understanding of the working of the finance ministry will provide the much needed controls on the defence ministry.

SURJIT SINGH BARNALA, the Chief Minister of Punjab, is a much harassed man. By an act of defiance, he has become the first man in the state to separate religion from politics. His state is of course the sorest trouble spot in India, and while terrorist activities continue there, Mr Barnala obviously cannot devote his full attention to other matters of importance, such as unemployment, and the provision of more industry in places like Ludhiana. His troubled mind is full of the thunder of gunfire echoing from the Wagha border to Chandigarh. What further complicates the situation for him is that he is a deeply religious man, owing allegiance to the *panth*.

Last year he was declared *tankhaiya* by the *panth*, that is someone who had committed a crime against Sikhism. This was probably a sufficient blow to a man with religious faith, but the punishment decreed for him was that he had to sit in the Golden Temple dusting the shoes of all and sundry. This he did, in all humility, but retaining his dignity for some while. Two months back Mr Barnala was declared *tankhaiya* by the high priests for the second time. The high priests snarled in triumph over Barnala.

The slight monotony of all this may have palled on Barnala, but it made the lives of the high priests even more exciting and varied.

On both occasions, what provoked this was that the Chief Minister had authorised troops and police to enter the Golden Temple and flush out terrorists. This time, the high priests ordered him to appear before them and explain his actions. Mr Barnala may by now have been a little exasperated by their actions. Instead of complying with their orders, he sent them a letter by a subordinate. The result was that the high priests formally excommunicated Mr Barnala. This was under the *rotibeti* law, which meant that no other Sikh should eat with him or marry his daughters. It virtually amounted to sending the Chief Minister to Coventry. All over India, the high priests were condemned for mixing religion with politics. This, it may be said, is nothing new in the history of this country. Religion and politics have continually been mixed, in a hellbrew which has led to many deaths: the most notable example being the various massacres of the innocent that took place at the time of Partition in 1947.

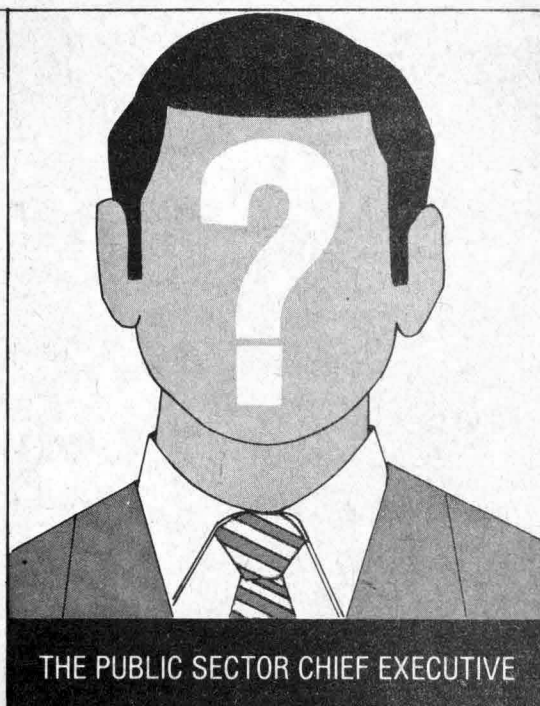
In India people tend to take the edicts of their priests lying down. Excommunication from any religion is a terrible thing for a believer in that faith to suffer. Mr Barnala, however, did not take it lying down. He called his party members together at a village called Longowal, and by an overwhelming majority they affirmed their solidarity with him and their opposition to the *panthic* edict. It could be said that Barnala and his party men affirmed, that day at Longowal, the sharp distinction between politics and religion. A few days later, the terrorists at the Golden Temple unmade this distinction. A policeman who had come there to pray was seized and dragged into a room referred to in the press as a 'torture chamber'. Here he was tortured nearly to death. When other policemen, hearing of this, arrived to rescue him, a head constable was shot dead and three

others wounded. The tortured policeman was announced by the hospital to which he was taken, to be in a critical condition. This was politics, not religion.

Though the terrorists apparently see religion and politics as identical, the events at Longowal were very significant in that this was one of the few occasions in modern Indian history when politicians have stood up to their religious leaders and made the difference clear. That this should take place in a state as obsessed with religion as Punjab is in itself remarkable. Though Barnala has frequently been accused of weakness, on this occasion he conducted himself with strength, and he set a precedent. The precedent in some ways created history, in that he had enough clout with his followers to defy the *panth*. Because of this, but mainly because he is the Chief Minister of the most turbulent and tumultuous state in the country, on whose future development much of the future of India will depend, Barnala has become one of the most important men in India. What happens to him in the next few years will greatly affect what happens to the country.

IS IT IMPOSSIBLE—for the public sector to make profits? How long will the gigantic public sector enterprises — in which the country has invested over Rs 75,000 crore — continue to be submerged in red ink? What kind of economic magic is needed to turn these units around? For a start, the country needs 600 men and women of integrity and the highest managerial talent to head our 600 public sector units. For a country of 780 million, it should not be difficult to find 600 topflight managers to lead the 2.2 million workforce and convert losses into profits.

The public sector's deep-rooted inefficiency has resulted in a loss of Rs 1,094 crore incurred by 90 major units. To reverse the tide, these 600 chief executives must be given absolute autonomy to run their units effi-



ciently. Only then can the consumer get good, cheaply priced products, and the industrial infrastructure a boost. Thus, the priorities of the 600 chief executives must be to:

- * Reduce losses. The balance sheets of 207 public sector units reveal a whopping deficit of Rs 7,092 crore. This deficit must be reduced.
- * Reduce manpower to realistic levels. At the moment most public sector units are overstaffed by 60 to 70 per cent of their requirements. If Coal India were to be given the freedom to retrench 50,000 workers, it would save hundreds of crores of rupees each year. This alone would enable it to wipe out its cumulative losses of Rs 700 crore in just five years.
- * Increase productivity: India's is the lowest in the world. While the Steel Authority of India Limited employs 140,000 workers to produce 10 million tonnes of steel, the Pohang Steel Works, South Korea, employs merely 16,000 workers to produce 8 million tonnes.
- * Increase profitability. A competent, result-oriented chief executive can reduce waste and turn around a unit incurring losses. Though

207 public sector units showed a record net profit of Rs 928 crore in 1984-85, this was solely due to the massive profits earned by the oil companies. If the combined profits of the Oil and Natural Gas Commission and Oil India Limited — Rs 971 crore — are not counted, the remaining 205 public sector units would show a net loss of Rs 43 crore.

- * Give more power and autonomy to chief executives of public sector units. The L K Jha Commission had made out a cast iron case for greater autonomy, while deploring political interference. Unfortunately, the success of public sector chief executives has hinged upon their rapport with ministers.
- * Stop arbitrary increases in administered prices and make the public sector units more competitive. Prices should be determined by the forces of demand and supply, not artificially.

The former Finance Minister V P Singh had pointed out that the public sector needed to develop a work ethic. This lies in the hands of its chief executives. The nation's progress, will, to a large extent, depend on this.

ANNIVERSARY FEATURE



THE FARMER

WHAT MUST the government do to bring the smile back on the face of Mohanty, a poor farmer from Kalahandi, Orissa? He owns just an acre of land, the recovery from which is low and is not enough to support his wife and six children. Mohanty is just one of the many poor farmers in India. On the other hand, there is Rachpal Singh, a prosperous farmer from Gurdaspur, Punjab, who owns 100 acres of land, two tractors and uses modern farming methods. Farming for him is a profitable venture. Given the right inputs, any Indian farmer can transform farming into a lucrative occupation and it's for the government to tap the potential inherent in the agricultural sector.

Farmers Mohanty and Rachpal Singh feel that in coming years, agriculture should be the economy's main thrust for various reasons. Firstly, there is the increase in population.

* India's population is today 780 million and every year 12 million more people are added to it, which, in itself entails one million tonnes of additional foodgrain. The per capita food consumption is 1,949 calories; for an increase of the per capita intake by 100 calo-

ries per day, the country would require an additional five million tonnes per year. Given the orthodox farming practices of our farmers today, it is doubtful whether they can meet the country's future demands for food. Mechanisation and modernisation of farming methods must be pursued by the government.

* Agriculture which employs 75 per cent of India's workforce will continue to provide the largest scope for employment. With the population increasing, efforts should be made to create more jobs. Therefore, the government must quickly bring more land under cultivation.

* An outstanding feature of the economy in the '80s has been the impressive contribution of the agricultural sector to the national income: 5.5 per cent. The performance of the agricultural sector for the past four seasons (1983-87), despite acute drought conditions in many parts of the country, has been outstanding with a reasonably high level of production. The yield of foodgrains in 1985-86 was about 150 million tonnes and in 1986-87 a new record was set with the production of 154 million ton-

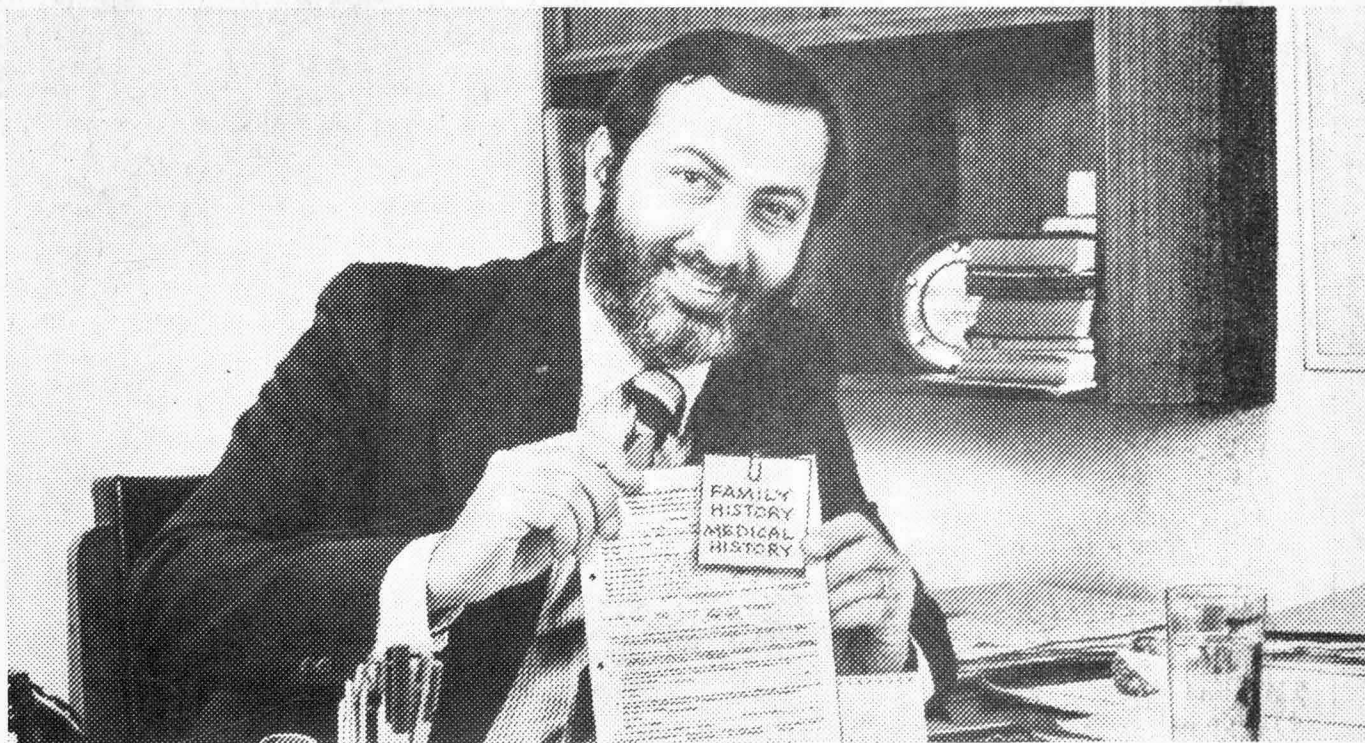
nes of foodgrains. In comparison, the growth rate of the industrial sector in the same period was slow. Agriculture therefore is of greater significance for it has the potential to wipe out the shortfalls created in the economy's growth rate by the industrial sector.

* Exports of agricultural commodities are a major source of foreign exchange for the country and on an average these account for about 40 to 45 per cent of our total export earnings. Like the US, India can make foodgrain exports a major foreign exchange earner. Further, both farmers insist that to give impetus to agriculture, the government should:

- Concentrate on technological innovations in farming — like improved farming practices and extensive use of high-yielding seeds and fertilisers.
- Eliminate waste. Six million tonnes of foodgrains, valued at Rs 10,000 million, are lost every year because of non-scientific and old methods of farming. Improved agricultural practices can increase productivity.
- Give credit to agriculturists on a priority basis since lack of capital is a major deterrent to progress. The disbursal of loans should also be streamlined.
- Initiate irrigation schemes on a large scale, especially in arid lands where precipitation levels are low, and the monsoons unreliable.
- Give remunerative agricultural prices and make effective procurement arrangements for farmers.
- Consolidate land holdings and confer ownership rights on tenants.
- Establish industries in rural areas so that the villages around the industrial site develop.

The government cannot ignore the farmers' well-being. It must realise that the Indian farmer can be instrumental in improving the country's productivity and its independence of external resources. The challenge before the government is to ensure that the benefits of its plan funds trickle down to the farmer. ♦

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The 1987-88 budget came as a damp squib. In the wake of the previous year's liberal economic policies initiated by V P Singh, expectations ran high. While the salaried class had hoped for an increase in the lower slab of tax exemption, the corporate sector was confounded by the draconian 30 per cent tax on book profits. As for the deficit – despite the Prime Minister's assurance that it 'shall not be exceeded' – when it translates into inflation, it will pinch the common man most. M J OZA analyses the implications of the budget.

A LACKLUSTRE BUDGET

THERE HAS always been a mystique about the budget in India whether the oracle was T T Krishnamachari, Morarji Desai or Pranab Mukherjee. Perhaps this is a legacy from the British who invested this annual event with the solemnity of a sacrament. For in the USA, the attitude to the budget is characteristically different. Reporting on the recent proposals of the Reagan Administration, *The International Herald Tribune* said, "The Administration's budget was never more than a paper exercise anyway, a formality, a pile of strained assumptions..." Recently, in Ireland, several ministers made a statement even before the budget was printed and made public, that it

contained provisions which were contrary to social welfare. They resigned even before the budget was presented, and new elections were then ordered. In India, any authentic, official information about the budget before the actual day on which it is presented would be considered a 'leak' and grave consequences have been known to follow.

But changes are taking place. The advent of the Rājiv Gandhi government and the appearance of V P Singh on the finance scenario did a lot to rob the budget of its ritualism. Singh in his budget speech of 1985 proclaimed, "The formulation of the budget is an annual exercise but, to be meaningful, it has to be set in a larger time-

frame." The foundation of the Long Term Fiscal Policy (LTFP) was laid then, and the magnum opus of 44 pages saw the light of day in December 1985.

The LTFP 'is intended to serve as an effective vehicle for strengthening the operational linkages between the fiscal and financial objectives of the seventh plan and the annual budgeting exercises to be conducted during the plan period'. It 'will serve as a bridge between the five-year financial targets of the seventh plan and the annual budgets by providing an indicative, year-wise, financial framework for fiscal policy'. It went on to detail the financial framework and the tax structure for direct and indirect taxes. The

watchword was 'simplification'.

The formulation of the LTTP made it possible to view the annual budget as a continuing exercise rather than a 30-day affair. This openness was reinforced by the Finance Minister at his 'Open House', a facility that enabled discussions with organised groups of business and labour, apart from professionals, technocrats, journalists and the like. All this helped remove some of the speculation and mystery surrounding the budgetary process, and to indicate the trend of government policy so that the announcements on the last working day of February did not come like bolts from the blue.

The first full-year budget to be presented under the 'culture of change' in the finance ministry was the 1986-87 budget under the stewardship of V P Singh. Its highlights:

- For the past 15 years, the budget has always been in the red and with each year, the deficit has widened.
- The non-plan expenditure provision for 1986-87 was nearly one and a half times the central plan outlay.
- More than two-thirds of the non-plan expenditure was on merely three items: defence, debt servicing and subsidies.

In his 1986-87 budget speech, the Finance Minister took credit for several bright features in the economy: 4.5 per cent growth in the GNP, increase in industrial production by 8 per cent, increase in the productivity of the infrastructural sectors of power and railways, stability in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) which, in fact, dropped from 5.4 per cent of the previous year to 3.4 per cent, and buoyancy in tax collections. Then came the bad news:

- The growing burden of expenditure on defence, interest and subsidies.
- The public sector's output was not measuring up to the task of financing the plan to the extent envisaged. That is, it was not making enough profits.
- Balance of payments became an area of concern. That is, we were

importing too much and not exporting enough.

- While cereal production had increased, sugar, pulses and oilseeds were lagging behind.

Let us look at the rationale of taxation in the 1986-87 budget, the first full-year budget since the formulation of the LTTP. For the first time, it introduced the concept of Modified Value Added Tax (MODVAT). The budget attempted to simplify and rationalise the excise duty structure and special excise was removed from 100 items. Cess was withdrawn on cotton, copra and vegetable oils.

Growth-oriented excise concession schemes were introduced for small scale industries with a view to generate employment and increase production. The exemption limit for the small scale sector was increased from Rs 7.5 lakh to Rs 15 lakh.

Special adjustments in excise and customs duty levies were made to boost production, with special emphasis on import substitution and export promotion. The basic duty on general machinery was raised by 10 per cent while import duty on components was reduced by 5 per cent.

The import duty on gem and jewellery machines and machinery for production and packing of marine products was reduced. The import duty on raw wool was halved (from 40 per cent to 20 per cent) and the duty on garment exports was raised to 10 per cent.

To encourage the use of minor oils, excise duty relief was provided on processed oils and vanaspati.

The 1985-86 budget proposals won across-the-board acclaim from all strata of society, with little or no criticism, in the hope that the budgeted figures would be made workable and remain, by and large, untampered through the year.

The Finance Minister's bounty in giving concessions of about Rs 50 crore to the small scale sector did give it a fillip: it achieved a growth of 20 per cent from 1984-85 to 1985-86. But in the export sector, the concessions had no immediate visible

impact. In fact, a steep fall in exports was recorded from Rs 19,749 crore in 1984-85 to Rs 12,496 crore in 1985-86. A partial reason for this was poor demand and the tumbling prices of crude oil exports. Nonetheless, with an increase in cash compensation and other measures, exports began to look up in the first six months of 1986-87.

The hopes generated by the 1986-87 budget, however, began to fade with amending legislation and fiscal fiats in between the budgets. The short communiques, the 'mini-budgets', had as widespread an effect on the economy as the annual budget itself.

It was against a scenario of hope and optimism that the year 1986-87 had opened. However, in spite of a further hike in revenues through additional taxes and price increases to the extent of an annual rate of about Rs 1,800 crore from 'mini-budgets', the end of the financial year 1986-87 saw a whopping deficit of Rs 8,285 crore. This was the sombre backdrop against which the annual budget was presented this year by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself.

THE BUDGET estimates for 1987-88 provide for a deficit of Rs 5,658 crore, which the Prime Minister has said 'shall not be exceeded'.

The instant reaction to the budget was mainly one of disappointment, or else, a cautious optimism. The salaried class had hoped for the lowering of tax exemption limits, the captains of industry were looking forward to cuts in corporate tax, investment allowance etc to spur growth, specific industry sectors like the auto industry had sought excise duty reliefs; the workers were expecting policies for the reduction of inflation and the provision of housing facilities on a large scale while hopes ran high in the capital markets for special incentives and the exporters waited for an increase in subsidies. Their hopes were belied.

"It Is A Very Tight Budget"

KANNAN SRINIVASAN interviews

Bimal Jalan, Chief Economic Adviser to the government of India.

Imprint: What is particularly important to you in this budget?

Jalan: We are concerned to stimulate and to reward those who provide the domestic component of value added to any product. Our effort is not to earn revenue by taxing raw materials. But we tax progressively at the higher value added end of every item. So you should know who is paying for what.

Which area of expenditure is particularly significant?

In a difficult fiscal situation, the financing of the five year plan is of paramount importance. That is because the basic concern it addresses is the eradication of poverty: commitments such as the National Rural Employment Programme will not, in any way, be curtailed.

How are you going to keep down the deficit?

The budgetary deficit will be monitored and controlled by the new Cabinet Committee on Expenditure, which will be serviced by the Cabinet Secretariat and have cabinet ministers as members.

What assurance is there that last year's overrun of the deficit will not be repeated?

There were several one-shot additionalities to budgeted expenditure that could not be anticipated. There was a Food Corporation of India transfer of Rs 1,200 crore. The Pay Commission recommendations required us to pay Rs 500 crore of arrears. And there were certain subsidies.

You could not anticipate everything in 1986, but you have thought of everything for this year.

There will be no increase this year. It is a very tight budget.

It is tight because there is a cut in plan expenditure.

There is no cut at all. By the third plan year, about 50 per cent is usually met. We have met 63 per cent of the expenditure.

But surely plan expenditure usually falls sharply in the last two years. So 63 per cent for the first three doesn't mean all that much. And your budgetary support for the plan has declined.

The plan has not gone down in real or in absolute terms.

Have you spent more than what the Long Term Fiscal Policy document (LTFP) lays down for defence?

That document specifies about 3.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product for defence. We have spent something like Rs 2,000 crore more.

Will the new National Savings Scheme not be difficult to administer?

It will be very simple, as easy to administer as National Savings Certificates: you simply use a pass book.

It has been said that people have to reopen old books, and so will pay to avoid doing so? Why not an expenditure tax?

An expenditure tax is impractical. Our pattern of savings and expenditure makes this net saving easier.

Suppose a company gives someone a small brokerage, will it have to deduct it at source?

There is a minimum of Rs 36,000 a year in rent for example. These operational instructions are laid out in the explanatory memorandum to the Finance Bill.

Have you done a review of the last budget's impact on specific industries, such as cement, textiles and exports?

Well obviously, this budget is based on such a review, and in areas where concessions will promote growth,

they have been increased.

What of the import of plant and general machinery?

There we found misuse: an import of plant machinery under the guise of general machinery. So it has been set uniformly: this actually amounts to a preference in tender to Indian manufacturers.

This Rs 10,000 incentive for housing: what difference can it make?

This is aimed at the middle class. By way of example, it costs about Rs 800-900 a month to service a DDA flat.

Your budget depends critically on the generation of internal resources by the public sector. That will mean they have to charge higher product prices for steel, aluminium, petroleum and so on. Is that not bound to be inflationary? Moreover, you also depend a good deal on a good monsoon.

After several bad monsoons, that is not unreasonable.

But if you have a good monsoon, your procurement will have to be very substantial. Where is the money for it? Will this procurement — since it is financed by the deficit — not have an inflationary impact?

We are committed to holding price levels.

You say there has been no cut in plan expenditure. But has the growth rate decreased?

That it has, yes.

Had the growth rate of the plan been kept up, surely the deficit would have been larger? Hasn't the deficit been kept down at the expense of the plan?

The real damage a large deficit does is its inflationary impact on prices. But here we don't have to worry because prices are very steady. ♦

The key questions then, concern first of all, the deficit. The government this year intends to run up a deficit which is more than the total of what the Nehru, Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Janata governments chalked up between April 1, 1951 and March 31, 1979. If Rs 3,000 crore plus the deficit last year could not be contained in spite of the buoyancy of receipts, how is it expected that Rs 5,000 crore plus deficit can be held at the same level when the rate of growth of receipts is tending to come down?

It is clear that without instituting a proper monitoring system for recei-

It has been argued that what is lost on the roundabouts is made on the swings. But how can private industry compensate for the public sector's slackness in the face of the 30 per cent tax on book profits? This measure can affect the capacity of the corporate sector to raise risk capital.

pts and expenditures, the deficit will widen still further and engulf the nation in a frightening debt trap. It will need all the available management talents in the various ministries, down to their smallest departments, to keep a constant vigil on the credit and debit sides of the ledger as summarised in the budget papers.

The adversity of deficit would not be so painful if it were unrelated to the prices. There are many eloquent proponents of the theory that deficit, per se, does not necessarily cause inflation. Inflation is a product of psychological and economic factors. According to the advocates, last year's actual deficit was over Rs 8,000 crore. Did the prices get out of hand? The answer is two-fold. Yes, the rise in prices in 1986-87 was higher com-

pared to 1985-86. Secondly, the impact of this colossal deficit on prices has yet to run its course. Now the key question is: are we capable of containing the 1987-88 deficit within the Rs 5,000-crore limit?

Deficit is an excess of expenditure over receipts. If we examine the individual components of the two columns, our worries grow in geometric proportion. We begin to doubt the logic behind these figures. For example, import restrictions are sought to be achieved through jacking up the import duties. How then is an increase in customs revenue feasible? Another glaring inconsistency: the cost of imported fertiliser plants will go up by 15 per cent because of customs duty. This will increase the cost of production. But if the government wants to boost the use of fertilisers by 10 per cent, its 1 per cent subsidy to the sector is totally inadequate. One cannot escape the conclusion that the figures have been flung together quite regardless of the close interdependence between inputs and outputs.

There is reference to supply management. Due credit is taken for the increase in the supply of cereals. But what happens to even a marginal increase in the demand for sugar and edible oils? How is this supply to be increased in the short run except by imports? Where is the foreign exchange for these added imports going to come from when we are straining every nerve for a beneficial import substitution?

The budget speaks of the public sector as a vital instrument of growth. The provision is for a 4.22 per cent rise in the aggregate of the central plan outlay and public sector resources over the corresponding total of the previous year. Even assuming that there is a 5 per cent inflation during the year in real terms, the growth will be negative.

It has been argued that what is lost on the roundabouts is made on the swings. If there is slack growth in the public sector, private industry may do well. Can this be expected to hap-

pen in the face of a provision that taxes a public company's book profits at 30 per cent? Nani Palkhivala, the eminent tax expert and company law specialist, has said that such provisions could lead the economy to disaster. If nothing else, this measure would affect the capacity of the corporate sector to raise risk capital.

To enable public sector enterprises to augment their borrowed resources, they have been permitted to float public bonds. These offer attractive rates of interest and favourable terms. All this is happening when the nation's gross savings rate of 22.1 per cent in 1984-85 is feared to be decreasing with each succeeding year. The public and private sectors are thus in competition with the decreasing pool of savings and as the competition gets sharper, the interest rates are bound to be pushed up. This has only to be added to the interest liability of the government which already forms about 17 per cent of the non-plan expenditure.

THE OTHER DESCRIPTION given to the budget was that it was 'for the poor'. It is true that the allocation for poverty eradication programmes has been raised to Rs 2,000 crore this year compared to the total allocation of Rs 3,600 crore in the entire sixth plan. The crucial question is, has this expenditure created a corpus of assets which will generate employment on a sustained basis? Or else the allocation will remain a mere dole in disguise needing frequent and larger and larger doses of replenishment.

Inflation is surreptitious taxation of the poor. The puller of hand-carts or the domestic servant is not equipped to calculate the percentage increase in budgetary allocation for removal of poverty but is more concerned with the price of his daily bread and dal. The finance ministry is, however, not worried about inflation. It relies on computer printouts to declare to the anxious media that 44 items of common consumption will become cheaper following the excise

THE ECONOMY

reliefs proposed in the 1987-88 budget. They have even listed Lux and Rexona as 'cheaper toilet soaps' which will come down in price by 5 per cent.

Some keen observers of the Delhi scenario have attributed political slants to the budget. They take the view that a budget preceding major state assembly elections is bound to have political overtones. There is a tendency to frame the tax proposals in such a way that there is a minimum 'taking' from the poor and a lot from the rich. Among the direct taxes, they cite the example of the taxes on expenditure at luxury hotels and foreign travel as an imposition which the affluent can bear without a whimper. The concept of 'net saving', in their reckoning, is an incentive for the middle class to increase their deductions and lower their taxes. In the indirect taxes, the new excise levies will be raised in a major proportion from cigarette smokers. The fuel-efficient cars of 1,000 cc engine capacity and less have also to be charged a higher rate of excise levy which the well-to-do can afford to pay. On the other hand, the government has trod softly on low-priced footwear and given more sheafs of blank paper to the weaker classes by reduction of duty.

The pro-government political lobbyists have been proclaiming that the budget has some good news for everyone, that special care has been taken to protect the interests of the poor while not neglecting the compulsions governing the growth of the economy as a whole. The opponents fire back that if there is something for everyone, one would need a microscope to search for it.

Shorn of its political implications, what is quite clear is that the budget is out of focus. It is a patchwork budget where various items have been sewn together to make an incongruous garment that covers everything but touches nothing. It is expected, though, that this being just a 'showy' budget, a supplementary one will follow, which will take cognisance of the harsh realities. ♦

The Common Man Disappointed

The effect of the budget on the common man will be insidious: it will be felt only when the prices go up in a few months.

"THE GOVERNMENT claims to represent the common man, but we don't get any reflection of this. In the government's scheme of things, the common man does not seem to exist," Prakash Kulkarni, Chief Sub-editor of *Loksatta*, the Marathi daily, may well be echoing the opinion of a large section of the middle class on the 1987-88 budget. The general response has been one of bewilderment: the middle class housewife does not understand as yet the implications that the budget will have on her family's daily life except to feel a vague unease about the generally rising prices. But those in the corporate sector — sharebrokers, small traders and businessmen, all of whom are directly affected by the budget — are disappointed, some shocked, at the government's iniquity.

People are disillusioned with the government and its budgets over the last few years, according to Kulkarni. The common man also wants to know why V P Singh was removed from his post: "The man who toiled over the budget during the year should have been allowed to present it." Moreover, there seem to be no clear-cut advantages and disadvantages in this budget: the common man is baffled by the bureaucracy's ways. Or, as Bharat Doshi, General Manager, Mahindra & Mahindra put it, "On one hand, they talk of simplifying taxation. But this budget is trying to bring in the most contrived, complicated mechanisms (of tax collection)."

He means, specifically, the imposition of a minimum tax on the profits a company makes, which will be 30 per cent of the book profits (Sec 115 J of the Income-Tax Act). Doshi says this is a clear instance of how the bureaucrats have 'run amok once the

Prime Minister accepted the concept of taxing book profits'. The provision, according to him, goes against the Long Term Fiscal Policy (LTFP), which spoke of withdrawing Sec 80 VV(A), (which it has done) but it has now brought in something more stringent. Section 80 VV (A) was brought in because it was felt that companies tended to become zero tax companies by availing of the incentives and deductions provided by the government and that therefore, they should pay a minimum tax. It was decided that some of the incentives should be reduced while computing the taxable profit. However, the deduction that was not permitted in a certain year would be permitted the following year. Thus the profit was not lost forever. Some of the incentives under Sec 80 VV(A) were investment allowance and allowances for scientific research. But the tax depreciation continued to be fully deductible — so in spite of Sec 80 VV(A), the tax depreciation-book depreciation gap was sizeable enough to keep the companies in a zero tax situation.

In the LTFP, it was indicated that this complicated deduction would subsequently be withdrawn, says Doshi. "But V P Singh did not keep his promise last year and now the Prime Minister, as if that was never a promise, has tried to say that since 80 VV(A) was not effective, we're bringing in another provision: we will now deduct not tax depreciation but book depreciation — the profit shown in the books, thereby re-introducing all the provisions for tax liability. So a company which made a substantial loss last year but turns around and makes a profit this year, will be liable to pay tax. To take every year in isolation, with no provision for adjust-

ment is to bring about an artificial situation," says Doshi. "It is not tax on real income." (The government in a White Paper issued last year had said that its objective was to tax real income only).

Sanat Dalal, a sharebroker on the Bombay Stock Exchange, deplors the imposition of the 30 per cent tax on book profits without taking into account a company's carry forward losses or the arrears of depreciation. "Those companies that are expanding cannot provide for the full depreciation-cum-investment allowance out of the profits for a single year. Or take a company like Reliance, which has a huge expansion programme. It will be affected because there will be less liquidity. They will therefore pay less dividends to their shareholders to conserve their resources."

Niranjanlal Dalmia, Managing Director, Klassik Garments Pvt Ltd must be among the few who find the budget praiseworthy. "It is growth-oriented and will benefit the poor though it has affected my paper mills, those mills that depend on imported waste paper as raw material, since the duty on this has been raised from 0 to 25 per cent." Regarding the levy of 30 per cent tax on a company's book profits, Dalmia is of the opinion that this is not harsh. "When the government gives so many incentives in the form of subsidies, cheap rates of interest on loans, the abolition of 5 per cent surcharge on income tax and the fixation of only three rates of depreciation — 100 per cent, 50 per cent and 33 1/3 per cent — for plant and machinery, these advantages offset the 30 per cent book profit tax. If industry comes forward to share in the government's expenses, at least the poor will be spared — or else they too will be taxed."

What solicited a chorus of criticism from Dalal and the company executives spoken to was the newly inserted Sec 194 in the Income-Tax Act requiring deduction of tax at source from payments of fees for professional and technical services, commission and brokerage, rent and pay-

ments for goods supplied. "This is most disastrous," says Dalal, for it involved a minimum deduction of 50 per cent tax on supply of goods exceeding Rs 1 lakh to a government body. "We brokers are affected because there will be a 20 per cent tax on professional services if the amount exceeds Rs 5,000 per annum." This is likely to adversely affect the efforts of sharebrokers to underwrite new issues and to continue their operations in the secondary markets on behalf of financial institutions and other investors. "And with this tax, our brokerage will be siphoned off at each stage," Dalal predicts.

"The common man's hopes have been belied," says B B Parekh, advocate, "with the lower slab of income-tax remaining unchanged. A lot of government expenditure is unproductive. A tremendous burden (on the exchequer) was created by the Fourth Pay Commission Report which has set some monstrous process in motion and every state is having to follow its recommendations. It has set off a lot of inflationary trends in the money market. And the unorganised sector has no protection. Only those who can bargain with the government can have their problems attended to."

Could the budget then be called 'socialist' at all? "They may have reduced the excise duty on janata saris, footwear and cheaper toilet soaps," concedes Doshi, "but this is a deficit budget. Can the common man read between the lines? On page 13 of his budget speech, the Prime Minister says, 'Some supplementary demands are unavoidable.' This means that after his political objectives have been achieved, some changes in the excise customs situation are entirely to be expected, especially because he states categorically that the deficit, 'shall not be exceeded'."

Says Abrar S Penwalla, chemist, "With inflation, the manufacturing cost of drugs will increase. Our sales won't be affected because we sell consumer products, toiletries and medicines. But once the mark-up changes, the prices go up. Earlier a

cake of Lux cost Rs 3.13, now it is Rs 3.35, Lifebuoy was Rs 2.92, now it is Rs 3.15. When ordinary toilet soaps now cost more, what does the government mean by a janata soap? We stock nothing called a janata soap."

Mangesh Parkar, an officer at the Bank of Maharashtra, Cuffe Parade, sees no difference between last year's budget and this year's. "Rajiv Gandhi doesn't want to create any more complications, he doesn't want a reaction from the people. He just wants to keep afloat."

With respect to the increased excise duty on TV, a luxury, though savings-related item, people would buy a set if they had saved for it, regardless of the price increase, he says. Similarly, in the case of soap, people will anyway buy a brand they have been using all along. As for cigarettes, "I don't think the budget is a deterrent to an inveterate smoker."

But Daulat, a *paanwala*, has done very desultory business. "Wills Filter now sells for Rs 7 a packet. I have had no sales at all." His enterprising neighbour on the pavement, holding a lot of stock of Wills Gold, which usually sells at Rs 4 a packet, has sold it for Rs 6 since the budget announcement. This is fraudulent since the excise duty was levied at the time of production.

Mrs Vineeta Hate, a copywriter with Ogilvy, Benson and Mather advertising agency, was planning to invest in some gold, but has now abandoned the idea with the price of household goods going up so much. The budget has made large purchases even more inaccessible to her in the interest of the household's economy. But like most members of the middle class, she says she is not entirely aware of how the budget affects her.

A taxi driver spoken to says Rajiv Gandhi is to be praised for building houses for the poor in his hometown, Benares. The budget seems irrelevant in his scheme of things. But those figures on paper will only take shape unobtrusively, much to the common man's incomprehension. ♦

NOSTALGIA

ACROSS THE STREET, the noisy chatter of schoolgirls racing home contrasts sharply with the silent, sombre gloom that pervades 4, Elgin Road. The quiet bungalow seems to almost crouch in solitude; the gate creaks as you open it, and a small, wizened man appears at the sound.

P D Tandon is a relic of the 'honourable' past — of happier days when people risked everything for freedom, when journalists wrote their copy 'in blood', and when respect for one's leaders was a foregone conclusion. As Tandon approaches you, a ready smile on his face, you notice the rolling gait — a peculiar shuffle that sounds loud on the path. Almost before you have time to draw breath, tea has been ordered.

Inside, the feeling of gloom is emphasised. His study is crammed with dusty, brown paper packets ('my research material'), a solitary lamp and a desk piled high with assorted papers and books. But it is the living-room that really reveals the essence of the man: plastered all over the walls are pictures of the Nehru family ('rare pictures such as those of Indiraji learning to ride a bike'), Kamalapati Tripathi and other personalities. Echoes of a once grand past that P D Tandon lives in even today.

"Write down," he says reminiscently, chomping on the biscuits that have accompanied the tea. "Tandon was known to the Nehru family since his student days and used to accompany Jawaharlal Nehru to various places. My home," he continues at an even pace, munching busily, "during working hours used to be the Anand Bhawan, for many years. Later I lived in Swaraj Bhawan when I was released from the Naini Central Prison. I was fortunate in coming into close contact with Nehru, Kripalani and others — that was the best thing that happened to me in my life."

Tandon's eyes take on a faraway look as memories rush in, swift and

strong. For a moment, even the straying hand reaching for a biscuit, halts in mid-air. There is so much to tell, so many incidents to relate... For instance, his first meeting with 'Indiraji'.

"I was sitting on a chair in the verandah of Anand Bhawan. Miss Indira Nehru had just returned from England and I felt she was not at home even in her own home. She came to me and asked, 'You're Mr Tandon, aren't you?'"

"I got up, greeted her and said, 'Yes, I'm Tandon.'"

"You're a student at the University?"

"I have completed my education and am working for the *National Herald*," I replied.

"Yes, yes, that I know," she said and slipped away."

From this innocuous beginning apparently grew a strong friendship. "We met almost daily and talked freely and frankly," Tandon dictates with the air of a man who has said the same thing somewhere else before. "She was a slip of a girl (the word 'slip' is emphasised in a sing-song voice), very intelligent and of a retiring nature. She was not very articulate even when she entered politics. One day she told me, 'You know I understand everything but I'm not very articulate.'"

The dictation continues. In the initial stages, as Tandon recalls, she almost hated politics. And publicity. He speaks of the time he asked her for her photograph for his article in the *National Herald*. "She refused and added, 'I don't want publicity at all.' But I persisted, so she brought two photographs and almost threw them at me and disappeared. Those pictures," Tandon ends on a soft sigh, "I still own."

As the second cup of tea is being swiftly swallowed, Tandon is lost in those happy times. The time she went with him to the P C Banerjee Hostel of the Allahabad University and add-

Memories Of Another Day

P D Tandon, a friend and confidant of the Nehru-Gandhi family, was a journalist with **National Herald**, the newspaper which Feroze Gandhi once edited. A frequent visitor to the Nehru household at Anand Bhawan, Tandon now lives the retiring life of a veteran scribe, continuing to write occasional, vitriolic articles on political subjects. SHIRIN MEHTA visited him at Allahabad, his hometown recently.

ressed the students, for his sake, even though 'she never liked to go anywhere to lecture'. ("Everyone was surprised and that was my triumph.") Or the time when she went to an election meeting in a remote place that even the driver had difficulty in finding.

"I asked her, 'Why have you come here? Nobody else does, because there aren't many votes to be got here.'"

"She replied, 'I have come because other people don't come here. See the plight of these landless labourers? Tell



me how to help them.' " Tandon's voice rises dramatically on the last sentence and through the anaesthesia of the droning voice, you get a glimpse of the 'slip of a girl' before she acquired the power and glory that were to dog her life.

There is admiration too — admiration for the woman who could size up people very early on in life. Who could cloak her anger behind a smile and yet let it show when it mattered. "One day a student went to see her and wanted her to attend a function

arranged by him. She kept refusing politely, but the student continued to pester her. To make matters worse, the invitation card he gave her spelt her name wrongly. She was fed up with his insistence and flared up, 'You have come to invite me but you don't even know the spelling of my name!' She threw the envelope at him and went away."

Tandon stops speaking. A half-smile hovers on his lips. This seems to be a favourite incident for not long after — enough time to gulp down

some more tea — he recalls how she had never refused to see him, although he'd criticised her on many occasions. "I often used to bring unpleasant aspects of her policies and attitudes to her notice, but she tolerated me. One day I felt that I had hurt her and was sure she would lose her temper. I said: 'Indiraji, if you do not like what I am saying, I'll go home and never return to say anything. But please don't lose your temper with me.'

"She gave me a friendly smile," Tandon dictates nostalgically, "and observed, 'Go ahead — I'm listening. I know what I'm in for.' "

Through his eyes one sees an Indiraji who was not just strong-willed and imperious, dictatorial and impatient. "She always thought that her father was a gentleman and that people took advantage of his nature, which she resented. She was very attached to Nehru. Nobody could force her to do anything against her wishes," Tandon recalls. Feroze is seen as a shadowy figure, 'a very jolly fellow, a great mixer with a sense of humour'.

Tandon's happiest memories revolve around Mrs Gandhi's patience with him. "It was known among her staff and others," he declares pontifically, "that she sometimes refused to meet really important men but she never refused me, even when she was very busy. Thus, when Kamalapati Tripathi resigned from the railway ministership in protest against some of her remarks, I wrote to her that the resignation of a man who had stood by her all along should not have been accepted. I had no business to write her such a letter because I was not even an MP but I did, and she was gracious enough to reply and explain."

By now most of the delicacies that accompanied the tea have been consumed. Tandon continues to fidget in his chair as memories engulf him. Most of them are pleasant, all of them tempered by the passage of time. The Indiraji he knew and loved, was graci-

NOSTALGIA



P D Tandon with Mrs Gandhi.

ous, large-hearted and generous. Perhaps she was — to her friends. And, now perhaps, only the good aspects of a fairly stormy relationship remain. . .

Tandon is at pains to point out, yet again, how large-hearted Mrs Gandhi was. Showing me round the cosy room, he identifies the personalities pasted on the wall. "That's me with JP," he says, looking upwards at the ageing photograph. "In 1975 or 1976 when he came to Allahabad and launched a vigorous campaign against Mrs Gandhi, he stayed with me. I knew that Congressmen would carry tales to her, therefore I myself wrote to her: 'JPji is coming to Allahabad and will, as usual, be my guest. I'm sure you will understand.' Several Congress leaders told me that I had dug my political grave but when I went to meet her later, she did not even refer to the incident and was kinder than ever before."

A similar incident involved Mrs Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Mrs Gandhi's estranged aunt. Tandon recollects, "There were many who used to venerate Mrs Pandit in the Nehru era.

Later all of them dreaded meeting her because of her rather unhappy relations with Indira. On one occasion, in 1983 or 1984, I was told that she was coming to Allahabad. I requested her to stay at my cottage. She had already decided to stay at a friend's house, but she wrote back saying that she would call on me. When I met her, I told her that I wanted to throw a public reception in her honour on November 19 at my residence. She readily agreed. I invited approximately 100 people from the city, but no Congressmen. She and her daughter, Chandralekha, were happy to have met several friends. She later sent me a warm, personal letter in which she wrote . . . 'friendship is the best thing in the world and I am lucky to have many good friends'."

Tandon continued, "But for me there was no rest even when all the guests had left. I was sure that the news of the party would be sent to Indiraji to prejudice her against me. I sat down and wrote to her, 'My dear Indiraji, . . . You will be amused to know that I entertained Mrs Pandit and her daughter, Chandralekha, at

a public reception at my residence on your birthday. . . With affectionate greetings.'

"I was told by several politicians that *this* time I would not escape her wrath. I was also apprehensive. Two weeks later I requested an appointment with her. When I finally met her I was entertained with some delicious dishes I had never tasted before. I found her gracious, friendly and understanding. She had inherited large-heartedness from her father who always snubbed pettiness."

The creak of the gate shatters his reverie and Tandon breaks off with a loud "*Kaun hai?*" as slow footsteps come up the path. It's much darker outside by now — and colder. As an old woman makes her way towards us, Tandon suddenly comes alive. "Come, I'll take you to my workshop."

We cross the garden in the descending chill, Tandon's rolling gait and out-of-breath voice leading the way. He collects a key from a small building at the side — the key to the room where all the Indira Gandhi letters are kept. "She'd written me so many,"

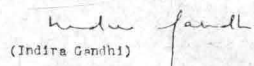
प्रधान मंत्री भवन
PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE
NEW DELHI

November 6, 1974.

Dear PD,

I have received your letter. It is understandable that you should wish to help. The door for talks, as you have said, is never closed. Saturday's meeting was useful even if it was not productive. My attempt was to have a dispassionate discussion of all the points raised by Jayaprakashji. But he was insistent that the only test was dissolution of the Assembly. This is obviously difficult to accept. The larger interest should never be made contingent upon a single step. You are certainly free to discuss issues with him on your own. But the efforts of a number of earnest people have not deflected Jayaprakashji from the course of action he has chosen and which he is pursuing with the help of the 'grand alliance'.

Yours sincerely,


(Indira Gandhi)

Shri P.D. Tandon, M.L.C.,
4, Elgin Road,
Allahabad.

प्रधान मंत्री भवन
PRIME MINISTER'S HOUSE
NEW DELHI

Camp: Agartala
December 22, 1982

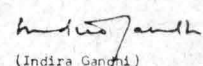
Dear P.D.,

I have only just been able to read your letter while I was in a helicopter on my Tripura tour.

I am glad you appreciated Asiad. A newspaper which had been foremost in criticism of the Asiad and upto the last moment was blaming Rajiv for imagined lacunae, later wrote that it has left a glow. But of course no one had the decency to even mention Rajiv's share in making it such a success.

You must be back before you get this letter as you may have learnt, except for a day in between I shall be away until the 3rd January.

Yours sincerely,


(Indira Gandhi)

Shri P.D. Tandon
4, Elgin Road,
Allahabad 211 001

Two of the many letters Mrs Gandhi wrote Tandon.

he says in a mournful voice. "So many." A pathetic gesture with his hands indicates a large number of them but the air in the small, damp room has obviously dampened his enthusiasm. We leave almost immediately with no letters having been brought out.

It's time to leave and P D Tandon spills forth his last reminiscences. This time the tone is sad, mournful, in keeping with the eerie silence of this quiet house. Memories of her death. Of Rajiv Gandhi having come down to Allahabad with her ashes. And as they sit — Rajiv Gandhi, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, P D Tandon and N D Tiwari — on the floor, Tandon at last gets to meet Rajiv Gandhi, the son of his friend. They are introduced by Tiwari and shake hands. There seems to be nothing to say. Not even a word was exchanged that day. It was a day of painful silence for all those who were present.

"When suddenly," Tandon interjects, throwing up his arms to illustrate the suddenness of the gesture, "a man I had never seen before came rushing towards me. He held me in his

arms and burst into copious tears. I felt intrigued and baffled. I guessed he was some big shot. 'Oh Tandonji, she always talked so well of you, so highly of you, she respected you,' the man said. I asked V P Singh who he was. It was M L Fotedar. Fotedar again turned to me and said, 'Tandonji, about a week before her death, she had written something about you.' I was almost speechless. N D Tiwari then told Fotedar to send me a photostat copy of the note. I have yet to receive it."

Why wasn't it sent to him? Tandon explains, "Fotedar is a tough politician. He thought I would cash in on her kind words to me, that I would tell Rajiv, which is totally untrue. That she valued me was my biggest treasure. I needed nothing more. But if Fotedar had sent me the photostat copy, I would have valued it greatly."

Acting it all out now, Tandon's face takes on a mystified look, his eyes register the surprise he had felt then. He sits back with the air of a man who has delivered the punchline. What more proof is needed of their friendship than this peculiar requiem

sounded by one of Mrs Gandhi's closest advisers?

As I get up to leave, Tandon draws me to a drawing-board cluttered with notes, letters, slips of paper and memos. Rummaging among the mess he unclips a card — a graceful pattern of grey birds on white card paper, garishly embossed on the top with a golden Ashoka emblem. Opening it he shows me the signature — it is a New Year card from Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi, "I thought you might like to see it," he says softly, almost wistfully. "What a New Year card from the Prime Minister looks like." The link with the Nehru family, however tenuous, seems to be maintained.

The creak of the gate and the peculiar shuffling footsteps are the last sounds I hear as I walk out into the mist. I imagine him going back into that silent, lonely house filled with memories and photographs. And I think of his enthusiasm when he says that the best thing that happened to him in his life was coming into such close contact with the Nehrus and the Kripalanis.

I'm not so sure. ♦

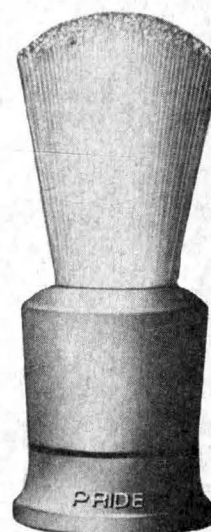
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ON DECEMBER 20, 1986, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India delivered judgments in the controversial Jagannath Mishra and Nandini Satpathy cases. Disappointing as the decisions have been to those concerned about the alarming erosion of probity in public life, there is another aspect of the judgments which gives no less cause for concern. In a singularly sweeping pronouncement, the court sought to 'condemn unequivocally and unreservedly any attempt on the part of a litigant or a member of the public to impute directly or indirectly, any bias or prejudice to a sitting or retired judge whether of this court or of a High Court'. No exceptions were laid down to mitigate the rigidity of the rule.

This dictum marks an unprecedented departure from the court's long-

the matter reached the Supreme Court after a long and tortuous course, a majority of two judges (Justice Baharul Islam and R B Mishra) to one (Justice V D Tulzapurkar) ruled that the withdrawal of the prosecution was perfectly in order, although every impartial authority dealing with the case had opined otherwise. The court's verdict, naturally, came in for sharp criticism from diverse quarters. As one commentator put it, the majority judgments were "shocking, their reasoning palpably wrong and their effect is to give a *carte blanche* to every malefactor in power to abort the course of justice and, by the grossest abuse of office, acquire complete protection against criminal liability. Such a ruling cannot fail to inflict a grave injury on the court's prestige and authority."

What exposed the court's verdict

ded respect and obedience. Rules were then evolved whereby any disrespect to the courts was treated as an affront to the dignity and authority of the king. Oddly enough, these rules remained uncoded (except to a very limited extent under the Administration of Justice Act, 1960) in England until as recently as 1981 when the Contempt of Courts Act was first promulgated.

In its essentials, the law of contempt is based on the premise that any obstruction to, or interference with, the administration of justice is against public policy and ought to be put down at all costs. Such obstruction or interference may occur not only by disobedience of court orders, or attempts at influencing the course of justice by premature comment concerning a pending case (the *sub judice* rule) but also by scurrilous or abusive

An Embargo On Speech

standing approach in matters of contempt. It was prompted, say the judges, by 'a growing tendency these days to attribute bias, prejudice or improper motives to a judge if he delivers a judgment which is not to the liking of the person concerned'. This, in turn, would 'harm the reputation of the concerned judge and shake the people's faith in the judiciary and democracy'.

How far do these considerations justify the radical departure made by the court in dealing with criticism rooted in suggestions of bias? The Jagannath Mishra case offers as good an answer as any.

The case goes back to the early seventies. It centred on the legality and propriety of the withdrawal by the State of prosecutions launched against the former Bihar Chief Minister and his cronies for their involvement in the gross irregularities of the Patna Urban Cooperative Bank. When

to particularly scathing criticism was the fact that, within days of delivering the judgment, Justice Baharul Islam, in an unusual move, tendered his resignation to the court and contested the ensuing Rajya Sabha election on a ruling (Congress-I) party ticket. This, in turn, led to the filing of a review petition in the court in which, not surprisingly, a suggestion of bias was made. (Justice, after all, must not only be done, but also be seen to be done, as the old adage goes.) It was this suggestion that triggered off the judgments from the Constitution Bench last December.

Contempt of court is a little understood subject. Like many other concepts in common law, it has its origins in the monarchical tradition of England where the king himself used to dispense justice to his subjects. Eventually, this function came to be delegated to courts presided over by judges who, as agents of the king, deman-

attacks on judges which have the effect of shaking public confidence in the system as a whole ('the rule against scandalising').

There are, obviously, two conflicting interests at work here, namely, the need to preserve public confidence in the administration of justice and the right to freedom of speech and personal liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. Since the latter interest is clearly paramount in a democratic polity like ours, the power of contempt ought to be exercised with utmost circumspection. And barring the rare exception or two, Indian judges have followed this rule scrupulously over the years. The power of contempt has generally been used sparingly, with the courts often erring on the side of leniency. However, as a recently published book (*The Law Of Contempt Of Court* by B R Verma; 1986, Tripathi) notes, "the contempt jurisdiction continues to be a play-



NANDINI SATPATHY.



JAGANNATH MISHRA.

The law on contempt of court has become 'unreservedly' rigid. It condemns any attempt to impute bias to a judge of the Supreme Court, or of a High Court, a tendency that is more noticeable, when the judgment is averse to the litigant. An analysis of the implications of this extreme rule.

thing in the hands of frustrated lawyers, unsuccessful litigants and politicians, with the main object being causing harassment to their opponents."

By an accident of history, the law of contempt in India, though based on the common law of England, came to be codified much earlier (1926) than in the country of its origin. This was followed in 1952 by the enactment of fresh legislation which, again, underwent a radical overhaul at the hands of a committee headed by the former Additional Solicitor-General, H N Sanyal, in 1961. Based on the recommendations of the Sanyal Committee, and after due deliberation, the Parliament finally enacted the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, which continues to be the law of the land today. Additionally, the Constitution itself provides (Articles 129 and 215) for the Supreme Court and the High Courts to punish those guilty of contempt of the respective courts.

HOW DOES the law define contempt of court? According to the 1971 Act, there are two kinds of contempt — civil contempt, which consists of wilful disobedience of any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other process of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court; and criminal contempt, which consists of any act that (a) scandalises, or tends to scandalise, or lowers, or tends to lower, the authority of any court, or (b) prejudices, or interferes with or tends to interfere with, the due course of any judicial proceeding; or (c) interferes, or tends to interfere with, or obstructs, or tends to obstruct, the administration of justice in any other manner. There may also be cases involving both civil and criminal contempt.

The focus needs to be on the latter type of contempt, and more particularly, that falling under the 'scandalising' rule, which the mass media have

often contended with in the course of exercising their right to comment on matters of public interest. There is a surprising degree of ignorance on the subject. One of the most widespread beliefs is that anything said or done that is defamatory of a judge constitutes contempt of court. This erroneous belief stems from not distinguishing between defamation and contempt of court. Whereas defamation concerns the individual reputation of a judge, contempt deals with the dignity of the system of justice administration as a whole.

If, for example, a judge takes it upon himself to make extrajudicial pronouncements of a controversial nature (as many in India have been prone to do in recent years), it would be singularly unfair to launch proceedings for contempt against anyone who may criticise the conduct of the judge, in however strong a language, because in such a case the judge clearly departs from the line of conduct dictated by his office. Nothing illustrates this principle better than a celebrated case which was brought to the Privy Council in England nearly a century ago.

In pursuance of a letter written by the chief justice of a colony to a newspaper, a man replied, also in a letter to the editor, holding up the chief justice to public ridicule in the grossest manner, calling him an utterly incompetent judge, a shirker of his work, and suggesting that it would be providential if he were to die. The Privy Council, however, rejected the argument that this constituted contempt of court, holding that when a judge was foolish enough to enter into a controversy generated by a newspaper, he exposed himself to a response which could not but be critical.

The Indian courts have generally been in favour of free speech. Only in cases where reasonable limits of bona fide criticism were exceeded has the contempt jurisdiction been invoked. One of the most prominent cases in this category concerned E M S Namboodripad, the veteran communist leader, who, in the course of

a press conference nearly two decades ago, launched a vitriolic attack against the judiciary, calling it an instrument of oppression and alleging that judges were guided and dominated by class hatred, class interests and class prejudices, instinctively favouring the rich against the poor. Given the gravity of the allegations and their potential to impair public confidence in the system as a whole, the Supreme Court held, in a judgment delivered in 1970 that Namboodripad was indeed guilty of contempt. (Surprisingly, however, it also reduced the fine of Rs 1,000 imposed on the contemnor by the lower court to a paltry Rs 50.)

There were two cases, though, in which the Supreme Court sought to invoke the power of contempt on grounds which were far from justified. Both these cases, initiated at the instance of the then Chief Justice M H Beg, were decided within days of each other, and came in for considerable criticism in legal circles.

The first case related to an article in the *Indian Express* which attacked a controversial and secret proposal by Beg, to draw up a 'Code of Conduct' for judges. "So adverse has been the criticism," said the article (referring to the proposal), "that the Supreme Court judges, some of whom had prepared the draft Code, have disowned it." Beg was offended and thought that this warranted action for contempt. Accordingly, he issued notices to the alleged contemnors, but even before the proceedings had begun, the whole court decided to drop the action. The reasons were obvious. As H M Seervai, the noted constitutional expert explains, "Any article which criticised the proposals made secretly by the Chief Justice of India on a matter of such public importance as a code of judicial ethics can hardly be treated as contempt in the sense of lowering the position, dignity and authority of the judge in the administration of justice." Even so, Beg thought it necessary to write a long judgment, commenting on the facts of the case, although no arguments were heard in the matter.

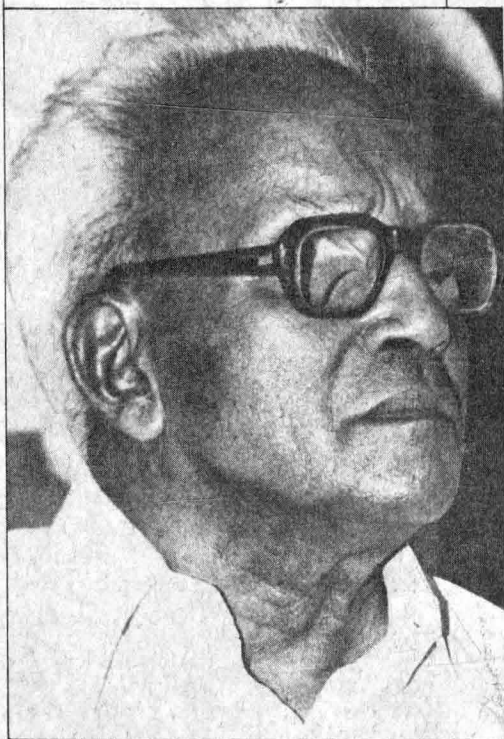
The second case, involving a news item in *The Times Of India* on the Supreme Court's infamous judgment in the habeas corpus case decided during the Emergency, also met with a similar fate. It may be recalled that Beg (then a puisne judge) had, in that case, delivered a judgment which virtually gave a *carte blanche* to the government to ride roughshod over the most basic rights of the citizen. This naturally provoked sharp criticism from several quarters. After the contempt notice was heard by a Bench consisting of Chief Justice Beg, Justice Untwalia and Justice Kailasam, the latter two judges noted in a brief order that, considering the pros and cons of the matter, they felt that it was not a fit case for invoking the contempt law. Accordingly, they ordered that the action be dropped. Beg dissented and again wrote a judgment which was a detailed defence of his decision in the habeas corpus case.

Nor was this the only questionable aspect of Beg's conduct in both the above mentioned cases. The learned judge had also disregarded the spirit, if not the letter, of one of the most important provisions of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, viz section 14, which deals with contempt of the Supreme Court *ex facie* the court and expressly provides that the judge in whose presence the alleged contempt has been committed shall not hear the matter if the alleged contemnor desired that it be heard by a different judge. Given the facts of the two cases, Beg should not, in all fairness, have allowed the cases to be placed before a Bench of which he was a member.

When it comes to discussing cases that are *sub judice* the law states that any publication which has a tendency to foil or thwart a fair and impartial trial, or any conduct which in any manner prejudices or prevents judicial investigation, whether by intimidation of or by reflection on the court, counsel, parties or witnesses in respect of a pending cause, would constitute contempt of court.

This area of the law is fraught with complexity. Aren't the interests of free speech jeopardised by a bar on publication of comment on cases which have a clear public interest element in them? Where does one draw the line between acceptable comment and comment which has a tendency to prejudice a fair trial? While case laws on this point are scarce in India, decisions given in England are quite illuminating.

The most celebrated of these was the thalidomide case decided in the seventies. Involving the disaster that



E M S NAMBOODRIPAD.

befell children whose mothers had consumed the thalidomide drug, manufactured and marketed by the leading pharmaceutical company, Distillers, an action was brought against *The Sunday Times* (London), seeking to restrain the paper from commenting on the subject while negotiations for settlement of claims were in progress between the company and the affected parents. While the High Court granted an injunction, the Court of Appeal presided over by

Lord Denning held that such a restraint was unjustified unless there was a 'real and substantial danger of prejudice' to a pending trial or to a negotiated settlement. "When considering the question," observed Denning, "it must always be remembered that besides the interest of the parties in a fair trial and fair settlement of the case, there is another important interest to be considered. It is the interest of the public in matters of national concern, and the freedom of the press to make fair comment on such matters."

the right and indeed responsibility of the mass media to impart information of public interest. The public had a right to be properly informed, which could only be denied them if it appeared absolutely that the article would have presented a threat to judicial authority.

Another, albeit slightly different, kind of restraint often imposed on the mass media, relates to reportage of legal proceedings held *in camera*, for example, in matters involving national security or personal relationships. In India, for example, section 22 of the Hindu Marriage Act and section 33 of the Special Marriage Act ordain that proceedings under those statutes are to be conducted *in camera* and would, therefore, attract action for contempt if published except with the permission of the court. A recent attempt by *The Daily*, a Bombay tabloid, to challenge this prohibition on the grounds that it was an unreasonable restriction on the freedom of speech and expression, failed.

As in most penal statutes, the efficacy of contempt legislation is determined mostly by the procedural provisions. These have, by and large, proved satisfactory in India, although one can complain about the rather lenient punishments prescribed. It is doubtful whether, for instance, in the face of gross and contumacious conduct by a person, the maximum punishment of six months' simple imprisonment and/or a fine of Rs 2,000 would prove to be a sufficient deterrent. In contrast, provisions in England allow a superior court to sentence an offender to up to two years in prison (without any limit on the fine that may also be imposed) and an inferior court to a term of one month in prison with a fine extending up to £ 500. Incidentally, the exiguous punishment prescribed under the Indian Act is further qualified by the proviso that if the contemnor tenders an apology to the satisfaction of the court, he shall be discharged, or the punishment remitted. It is not uncommon for offenders to generally take advantage of this proviso and get

away with contemptuous conduct. The final decision on whether the apology is sufficient and genuine, however, rests with the court.

Proceedings for contempt can be initiated by the higher judiciary either *suo moto* (on its own) or on a motion being made by the advocate-general or any other person who has the advocate-general's sanction. An opportunity is given to the accused to show cause why action should not be taken for the alleged contempt. A formal hearing follows, at which the accused can present his case either in person or through counsel. There are several modes of defence that may be pleaded under the act — innocent publication (when, for instance, the accused had no reasonable grounds to believe that legal proceedings in respect of the subject matter commented upon were pending), publication of a fair and accurate report of a judicial proceeding, complaints made in good faith against presiding officers of subordinate courts to a coordinate or higher court, and so on.

Although the Supreme Court's latest edict delivered on December 20, 1986 does appear questionable for its sweeping nature, some good might yet come of it in the context of a recent disturbing development. According to certain newspaper reports, a move is afoot in some ruling party circles to discredit certain judges of the Supreme Court who have, rightly or wrongly, delivered judgments in controversial matters which have not been popular with certain sections of the people. This is reminiscent of a similar move many years ago when some members of the ruling party actually succeeded in collecting scores of signatures from members of parliament on a proposed impeachment motion against one of the judges who held that the nationalisation of banks was bad in law. It is against such attempts that are aimed at browbeating the judiciary, that the contempt jurisdiction ought to be invoked in all its vigour. Yet whether the court needs sweeping powers of the kind contemplated under the latest ruling is debatable. ♦



C J BEG.

The attorney-general, however, appealed to the House of Lords which reversed Denning's ruling and restored the injunction. The case was ultimately taken to the European Court of Human Rights which, in a landmark judgment, held that the House of Lords was wrong and Lord Denning was right. Ruling in favour of *The Sunday Times*, the court said that the thalidomide disaster was a matter of public concern, and the mere fact that litigation was in progress did not alter

The Last Captaincy

GAVASKAR OFTEN SPEAKS without thinking very hard about the consequences of his words, and around this time he described the Indian selectors as 'a pack of clowns'. This did not endear him to the selectors. When he said this, Gavaskar may have been somewhat embittered by the reception he had received on his return from Pakistan in 1983. He had done his best as a captain, though his side had not won a Test; he had himself done bravely as a batsman, largely unsupported apart from Amarnath, and equipped with the best effective Indian attack in years. Kapil Dev, it was true, had taken 24 Test wickets, though at 34 runs apiece. He had twice achieved spectacular figures, 7/220 in one innings and 6/85 in another. But Doshi, the bespectacled little leftarm spinner from Bengal, had only taken eight wickets at 61 runs apiece, and he had been supposed to be Kapil Dev's main support. Not only was Doshi omitted from the West Indies team, but also Vishwanath.

Vishwanath's friendship with Gavaskar was not only close — they first became friends on the 1971 tour of the West Indies — but had been cemented by family ties, since Vishwanath had married Gavaskar's sister Kavita. It was true that Vishwanath had a poor tour of Pakistan, but immediately before it, he had an excellent trip through England, heading the tour batting averages with 47 in the Tests. To shed someone of his gifts and experience seemed a mistake. Whether or not he had failed on the Pakistan tour, he was still considerably better than some of the other batsmen who were taken along. Gavaskar, as a cricketer of deep knowledge and experience, probably recognised this: he may also have felt the omission of

Vishwanath as a personal slight. He was too sensible to let this rankle for long, and went confidently on tour.

Vishwanath did not say a word about his omission, but Doshi did. He alleged that he had persistently been mishandled by Gavaskar. In Pakistan, he said, the captain had consistently put him on to bowl on flat wickets when the formidable local batsmen were well set. In Australia, he had been ordered to bowl for hours with a fractured foot. Gavaskar's first reaction to this was, characteristically, wryly witty. "Dilip introduced me to my wife in 1971," he told a pressman. "I am no friend of his." Gavaskar said to me later: "About his fractured foot, players are supposed to report fit before a Test, and we depend on them to tell us whether they are or not. If Doshi had a fractured foot, he should have told us. How were we to know?"

In this overcast atmosphere, the team set off for the Caribbean. They started off with a match against Jamaica, in which Gavaskar didn't play. Then came the first Test at Kingston. Gavaskar was out for 20 and 0. Kapil Dev took four wickets in each innings. But he then threw away the match. He left the home side to get 172 at six runs an over. Richards cut loose with an unstoppable 61, but India could have saved the match if Kapil had not inexplicably brought on Mohinder Amarnath with his gentle medium pacers. In 2.2 overs Amarnath picked up two wickets, but was brutalised for 34 runs and the West Indies won by four wickets. It was now Kapil Dev who came in for criticism because of his suicidal captaincy.

At Port of Spain the Indians played Trinidad and Tobago. This ground, the Queen's Park Oval, carried vividly happy memories for Gavaskar. He

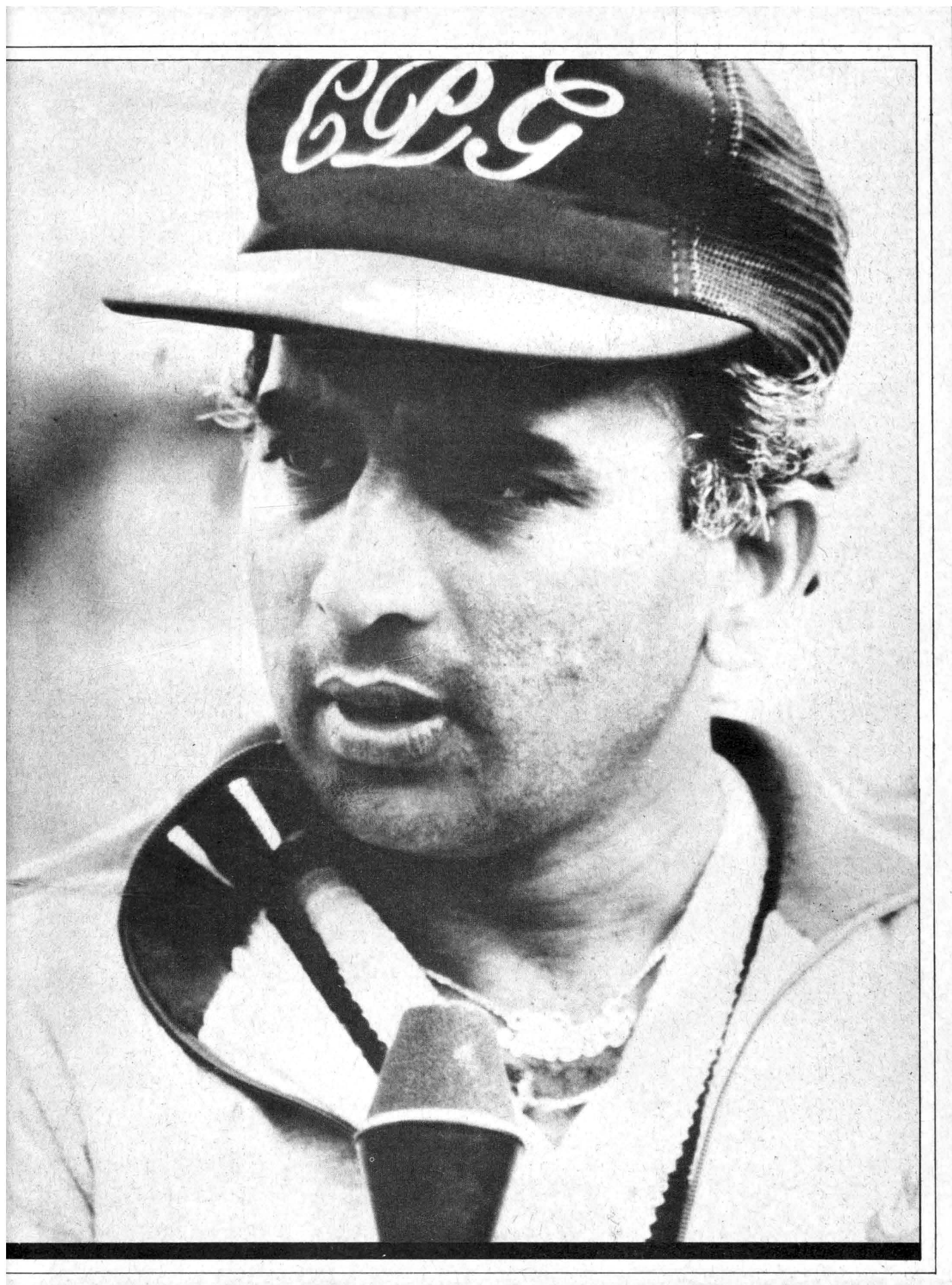
Sunil Gavaskar, the greatest batsman in India today, recently completed 10,000 runs in Test cricket in an innings against Pakistan. He has been the first batsman in history to reach this massive mark. The next highest scorer was the inexorable Geoff Boycott of England, who collected 8114 runs in 108 Tests. The little master of India took 124 matches to establish his record, one that will not soon be surpassed.

Through 1984 and 1985 I worked with Gavaskar to write his biography, Sunil Gavaskar, and an extract from the book appears below.

This chapter describes what happened to him between 1983 and 1985, when he experienced more press criticism than ever before. This was not only because of his supposed failures with the bat, though he was more successful than any other Indian batsman save Mohinder Amarnath, but the losses India suffered under his captaincy. His last captaincy, when he took the Indian team to Australia in 1985, was probably his greatest feat as the leader of the side.

Of the many other records he has set, one is of giving General Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan his biography by me before I even saw a copy of it.

had scored well whenever he had batted there, and he had a host of admirers to applaud him. But when he opened, he was out to an appallingly uncharacteristic shot for 5. Reports were now sent back to India to the effect that Kapil Dev had sternly reprimanded his former captain for throwing away his wicket. The Indians won by an innings, but rumours of a rift between the two superstars were already heavy in the air. "It was



EXTRACT

a very bad shot," Gavaskar told me later, "but Kapil never said anything to me about it. I was absolutely taken aback when the correspondents started to question me. When I'm playing a match, I never read the press reports. I may look at the action pictures but not read the reports."

In the second Test, again played at Port of Spain, before a crowd attentive upon its hero's every move, he was out for 1 and 32. The team moved on to Guyana, where he made 36 not out in a draw. Pammi (his wife) flew out to Georgetown to meet him. She brought him luck, and an innings of 90 in the one-day match against West Indies at Berbice. In the Guyana Test, West Indies made 470 in a fixture much interrupted by rain. The Indians replied splendidly, largely through Gavaskar, who returned to his kingdom. The fourth day having been rained out, there was nothing in the game, but Gavaskar batted with all his old technical skill and concentration for 330 minutes, hitting 17 fours and a six in his unbeaten 147. This may not have been an innings played in crisis, as so many of Gavas-

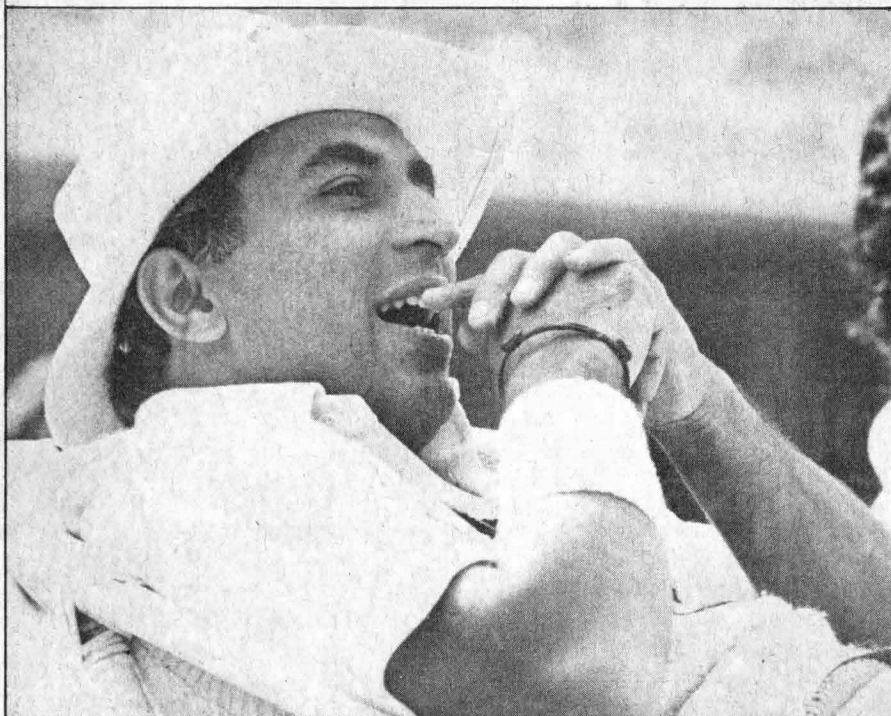
kar's were, but it seemed a lucky augury.

It turned out not to be. In the fourth Test at Bridgetown, Gavaskar was out for 2 and 19. In the final match at St John's he made 18 and 1. He finished the series with 240 runs at an average of 30, sixth in the Indian Test average. As in Pakistan, he was completely overshadowed by Amarnath, who against the formidable West Indian fast bowlers hooked fearlessly and made 598 runs at an average of 66, including three centuries. Even Kapil Dev outdid Gavaskar, with 254 Test runs at an average of 42, including an innings of 100 not out and another of 98. Of the five Tests, the Indians lost two and drew the rest. Speculation and rumour had spread like a forest fire in the press box as to Gavaskar's failure, for the failure of any great man, in any sphere of life, makes immediate news.

The main allegation against Gavaskar seemed to be that, irate at having to play under a captain 10 years younger than himself, he had failed to try for Kapil Dev, thus letting down the whole side. Next, it was said that re-

lations between the two had worsened considerably as the tour went on, to such an extent that they wouldn't speak to each other. In these circumstances cliques had formed and the morale of the whole team had suffered. Some members of the press said that Gavaskar, like Vishwanath, should be dropped forthwith. At this even the selectors, 'that pack of clowns', balked. With his Georgetown century Gavaskar had broken Sobers' record of 26 Test centuries. He now had 27, and the only batsman ahead of him was in fact Bradman.

The point seemed to be that on this tour Gavaskar seemed to part with the form which had been his constant comrade all these years. "Sometimes I went to good balls," he said, "sometimes to bad shots. Perhaps I sometimes tried too hard. After Guyana I thought my touch had come back, but then it went away again." It was like a poet talking of his departed daemon. "It's not that Kapil and I were on bad terms," he continued. "We're simply two different kinds of people. I used to sit in my hotel room and play music. Kapil

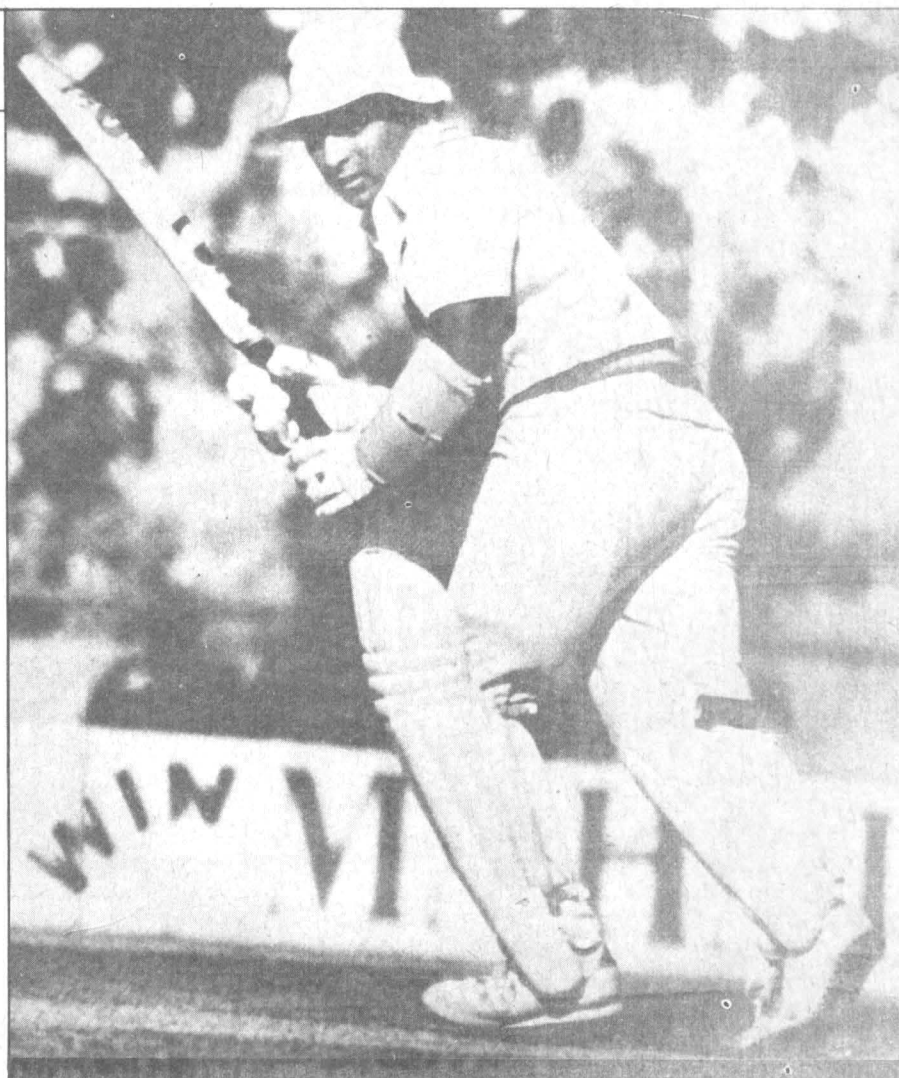


The main allegation against Gavaskar was that, irate at having to play under a captain 10 years younger than himself, he had failed to try, thus letting down the whole side. Next, it was said that relations between him and Kapil had worsened to such an extent that they wouldn't speak to each other. On this tour Gavaskar seemed to part with his old form. "It's not that Kapil and I were on bad terms," he said. "We're simply different."

had different ideas. At team conferences we always collaborated closely. As regards the formation of cliques I've told you before. In the old days the Indian players would form cliques because of communal differences or even of caste. There are still cliques up to a point, but they're zonal. For example the boys from the north mixed together, so did those from the south, the east, the west. This is nothing to do with hostility, but the players of one zone tend to be more comfortable with people from their own zone, perhaps a question of language."

THERE WAS no respite from cricket. Gavaskar was now 34, and he had been playing Tests steadily for nearly nine months. Now the team had to leave for England to take part in the Prudential Cup matches, the limited overs competition held every four years. Eight countries contested this year, divided into two groups. Group A included England, Pakistan, New Zealand, and Sri Lanka. Group B, the stronger, included West Indies, Australia, India and Zimbabwe. All these countries except Zimbabwe played Test cricket. It wasn't expected that India had a hope in hell. The most likely finalists it was thought, would be the West Indies and England. The tournament ground under way, watched by large, almost perversely happy crowds. By June 20, the semifinalists had been decided. England and Pakistan topped Group A: the West Indies and India B.

By June 20, India had beaten Australia and Zimbabwe twice each, and the West Indies once. They had only once been beaten, in the return match against the West Indies. They had shown immense fighting power as a team, and Kapil Dev had been described as 'an inspirational leader'. In the return match against Zimbabwe, amidst the showery, flowery green of Tonbridge Wells, the Indians lost five wickets for 17 runs before the captain appeared. He launched so furious and brutal an attack upon his opponents that he made 175 not out of 266, and

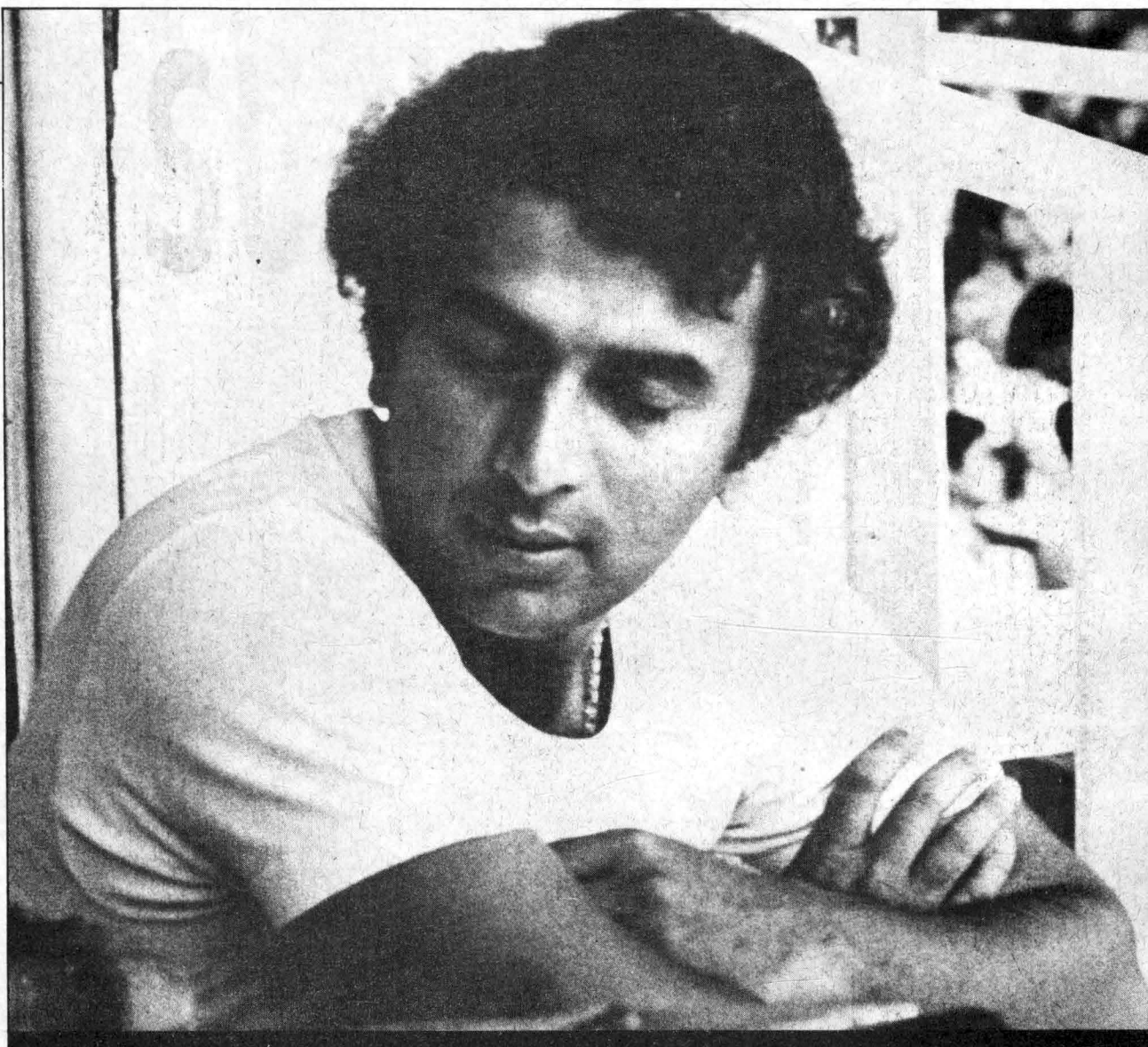


India won the match. India relied heavily upon its battery of medium-pacers, who normally inutile in Test cricket, were ideally suited to this kind of contest, and to the weather conditions, where the ball moved. Kapil Dev, Madan Lal, Binny, Sandhu and even Amarnath did well.

England were unexpectedly beaten in the semifinal, and in the final India came up against the current champions, the West Indies. This seemed like crushing a butterfly under a hobnailed boot. The West Indies had hardly ever been beaten in one-day cricket: the Indians, except in this tournament, had hardly ever been victorious. The final started at Lord's amidst a bubbling stewpot of West Indians with musical instruments and bottles of liquor: the Indians were as excitable but less noisy. The musical instruments fidgeted and boomed as the Indians went down for 183. Then, in the greatest

upset in limited overs history, the West Indies were put out by the seamers for 140, and India won by 43 runs. There was a stampede across Lord's. Some unpleasant incidents took place between Indian and West Indian spectators, but, by and large, the atmosphere was that of some Indian fair. Some of the Indian players danced on the balcony. Champagne corks popped. As the members of the team went up to shake hands with the officials, the gelid eye of the camera caught Gavaskar among them.

He looked as pleased as his colleagues, but by no means as spry as usual. His eye had a slightly distant look, and his smile was not entirely unforced. During the course of the six matches in which he had played, he had made 59 runs, with a top score of 25 in the semifinal against England, at an average of 9.83. His other five innings had brought him 19, 0, 4, 9 and 2: This



was the worst run of scores in his life, and though they did not lope past him in Test matches, they were nevertheless a horrible shock. Gavaskar had always contributed something to the Indian cause, usually something of great consequence. In this tournament he had contributed nothing at all, and had in fact been dropped from two important matches. When the team returned to a red carpet treatment in India, he hung modestly back as the cameras clicked and the reels of television film unspun. Already there were many clamouring that he should be summarily dropped from the Indian side, and driven into the wilderness of retirement.

Gavaskar returned to his desk at Nirlon. Some of his friends advised

him to retire. "His reflexes have become slow," one of them told me. "He's played too much cricket in the past. He should expect it if they drop him when the Pakistanis come." They came to Bombay in torrential rain towards the end of the monsoon, captained by Sunil's old friend, Zaheer Abbas. This was a rather shaky team, with a number of unknowns, the most promising of whom was a young left-arm mediumpace bowler called Azeem Hafeez. But it did not seem that such a side would provide much opposition to the Indians. A little to the surprise of the masses, Gavaskar was included in the first of the three Tests. He made 42 in the first innings. In the second, when the match was clearly floating through the rain to-

wards a draw, he started to bat with all his old aplomb.

He was in the 90s when, towards the end of the mandatory overs, Zaheer decided to abandon the match. Gavaskar, however, stood his ground. There was a heated discussion between Zaheer and the umpires. At the end of it the match continued, under the law that a match cannot be abandoned without the consent of both captains. Gavaskar went on to his 28th Test century, and finished with 103 not out. But unlike most of his hundreds, hermetically sealed and self-contained innings, this left an odd taste of damp cardboard in the mouth. Until the end, it had been a disciplined and structured effort: the flurry and argument of the concluding

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moments spoilt the whole effect. But it had been proved that Gavaskar was still capable of making runs in Test cricket, something which large numbers of people had commenced to doubt.

He failed in the second Test, but in the third and last made 50 and 64, and a dreary series ended in yet another draw. The next visitors were the West Indies. They had beaten the Indians fairly easily during the tour earlier in the year, but Lloyd had

This was the old Gavaskar: looking thickset in his almost gladiatorial armour, a floppy white hat with a hard rim on his Roman head, a gold chain round his neck, thick armpads on his muscular arms, thick pads on his thighs, above the ordinary pads, hands gauntleted, shuffling around the crease, probing the pitch with the toe of his bat, muttering to himself.

blood in his eye. The World Cup defeat still rankled. The West Indies had their accustomed retinue of fast bowlers: Roberts, Holding, Marshall, and a newcomer Davis. Another newcomer was an offspinner, Harper. This was a thoroughly motivated team: revenge for their World Cup defeat was uppermost in their minds, and in fact they won all the limited overs matches with ridiculous ease. They won most of the official Tests as well, but perhaps the most notable feature of the series was the batsmanship of Gavaskar, which appeared at first to have changed completely. Much earlier in the year, he had told a friend that at last he wanted to enjoy his cricket. The seasons had followed him around and allowed no quarter: he had borne

the burden of the Indian batting from the top since 1971. More recently, Mohinder Amarnath had superseded him in the eyes of the Indian public. Long before this, after the 1976 West Indies tour Gavaskar had said that Mohinder was technically the best equipped of all the Indian batsmen. Even so, he may have felt a little bitterness at this annexation of his position as top dog. But after his experience with very fast bowlers the previous season, Mohinder seemed a little shellshocked. Gavaskar had failed in the first Test at Kanpur, playing reckless shots. Mohinder, playing hardly any shots at all, had failed even more dismally. At Delhi, Mohinder, who seemed to have developed a terror of pace, asked Kapil Dev to demote him at No 7. In this instance, Kapil Dev agreed. Simultaneously Gavaskar asked to be dropped to No 4. Kapil Dev demanded that this request be submitted to him in writing. So Gavaskar went out as usual at No 1. It may have been chagrin that now set him off.

He exploded like a Catherine-wheel in all directions. The shots flashed from his bat through a baffled field. Lloyd, gigantic and saturnine at slip, altered his placements, but they did not hinder Gavaskar. He batted as nobody in a Test match had seen him bat before. For the first time in years, he hooked. He reached his 29th century off 94 balls, and with this equalled Bradman's record of 29 Test centuries. Then, at 121, he was bowled. Congratulatory cables and letters poured in from all over India and the world, but there were many who criticised his batting as not being in the best interests of his side. In the next Test at Ahmedabad on an amazing, unprepared pitch, he played almost exactly as he had played at Delhi.

However, he missed the 30th century which would put him ahead of Bradman. He went for 90. It ought to be remembered that the next highest score for India was 39 by Gaekwad, and apart from that only Kapil Dev passed 30. Gavaskar was once more attacked for his indiscriminate stroke-play, but obviously it came off on this

appalling wicket, where Kapil Dev had 9/83 in the West Indies second innings. Gavaskar was out for 1 in the second innings and failed in the next Test, using the same methods. He was scourged by the press, though the luckless Mohinder Amarnath, who had made 1 run in six innings, went more or less unscathed. By the time the last Test at Madras rolled round, there were reports of open warfare between Kapil Dev and Gavaskar, and more suggestions that Gavaskar should be dropped. True, there was also a suggestion that Kapil Dev's captaincy, praised during the World Cup, was shocking and incompetent.

Caught in this crossfire, Kapil surrendered. He decided to let Gavaskar have his way. After the West Indies had piled up a considerable total at Madras, in a match continually interrupted by rain, he put Gavaskar down to No 4 in the batting order. Gavaskar later told me that his insistence on batting No 4 was that as he grew older, he needed more rest after a hard day in the field. He needed to have time to put his feet up and relax mentally. It was ironic, therefore, that on the third evening, when India went in to bat in drizzle, the first two wickets fell and Gavaskar found himself in, virtually as an opening batsman. Very cautious, very cool, he took his score to 36 by the close. Next day, fighting to keep off a collapse, he took his score to 149.

This was the old Gavaskar: looking thickset in his almost gladiatorial armour, a floppy white hat with a hard rim (Zaheer Abbas introduced him to these hats in Karachi in 1978) on his Roman head, a gold chain round his neck, thick armpads on his muscular arms, on one of which he also wears an amulet of elephant hair, thick pads on his thighs, above the ordinary pads, hands gauntleted, shuffling around the crease, probing the pitch with the toe of his bat, muttering to himself. He had realised that he had broken Bradman's record and now had 30 centuries, but he was unaffected. Next day he went on to score 236 not out, the highest Test score ever

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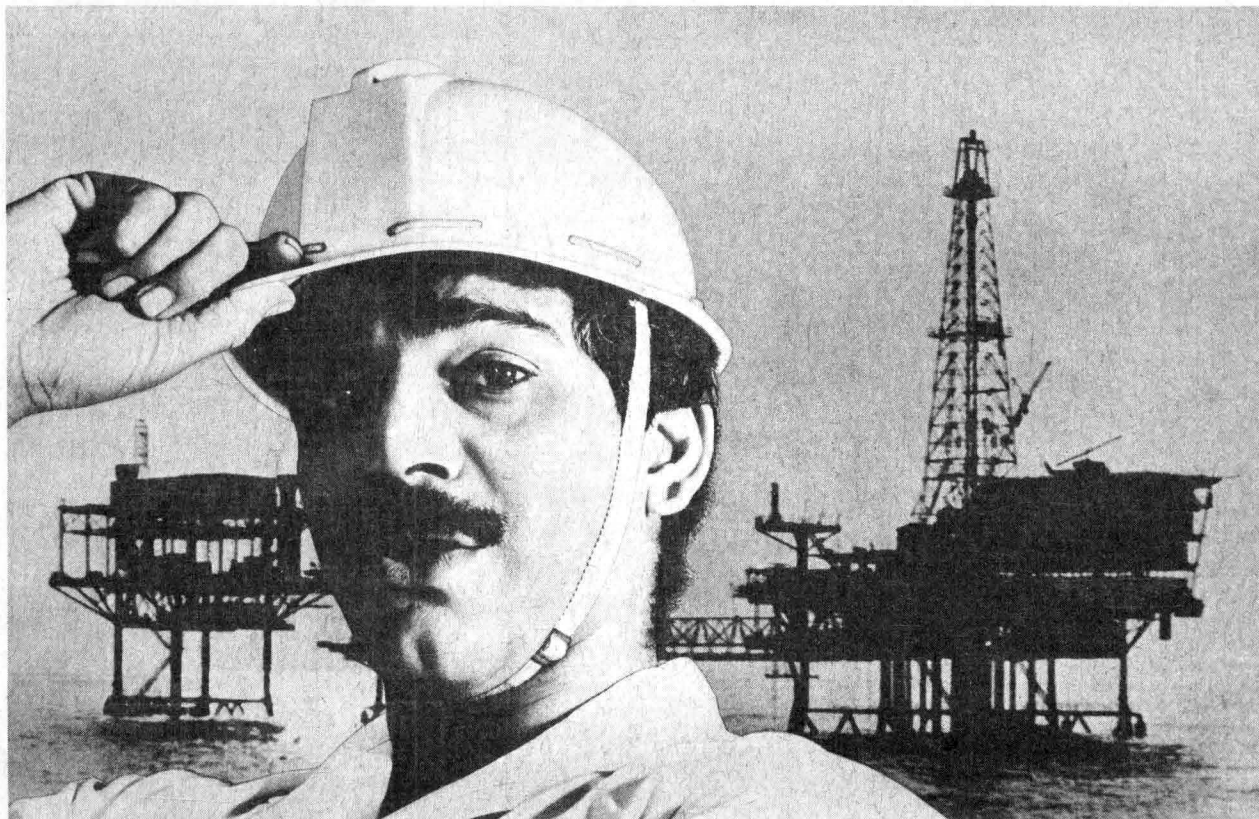
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by an Indian. He had batted for nearly 11 hours, on each of the three days.

Considering that Gavaskar's batting had come in for so much criticism in 1983, it is surprising that between January and December of that year, he made over 1,300 runs, including five centuries. This last century was one of his highest scores: in Ranji Trophy matches he had played higher innings, 282 against Bihar and 340 against Bengal. But this was probably the most difficult attack off which he made a really large score, though his 220 also against West Indies at Port of Spain in 1971 and his 221 against England at the Oval in 1979 ran it close. Gavaskar was presented with a number of awards when the match was over, including a red Maruti car which he likes to drive. He was now once more the idol of the public: and those who had agitated for his expulsion from the team now clamoured for him to be reappointed captain. This was a reversal of opinion typical of India.

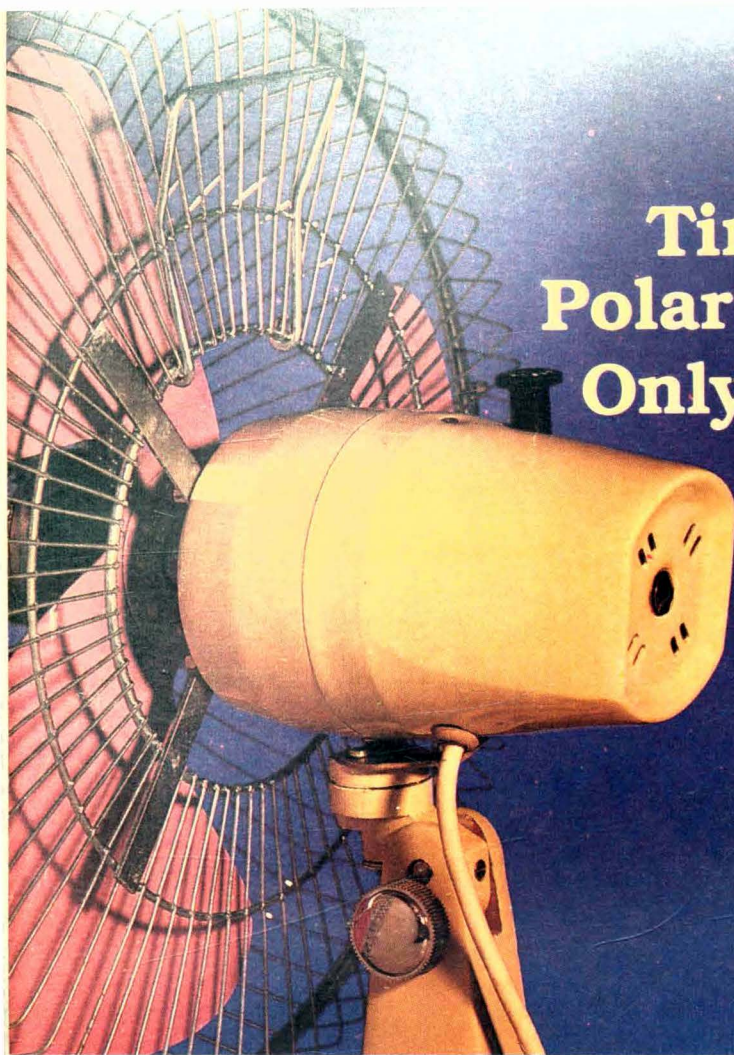
TIME ON HIS hands, apart from his work at Nirlon, and his pre-occupations with his family, he spent it playing music and watching video cassettes of some of the English players who would be in India that winter. It was by now virtually certain that he would be the captain. He was visited by, and visited, other cricketers and friends, but by and large he kept himself to himself, as he had always done. He was preparing mentally, as he would soon be preparing physically, for the coming season, a season which would bring him failure as well as triumph. He also read thrillers, printed in large type so as not to disturb his 50/50 vision. Many cricketers, while professionally unoccupied, keep themselves loose by playing other sports, golf being a prime favourite. Gavaskar is no golfer. The only sports he likes besides his own are table tennis and badminton. Prakash Padukone, the Indian badminton champion, is by way of being his sporting idol. The fraternity of sportsmen, however,

does not extend to billiards. Michael Ferreira, then the amateur champion, came out with a number of loaded statements, pertaining to cricket in general and Gavaskar in particular.

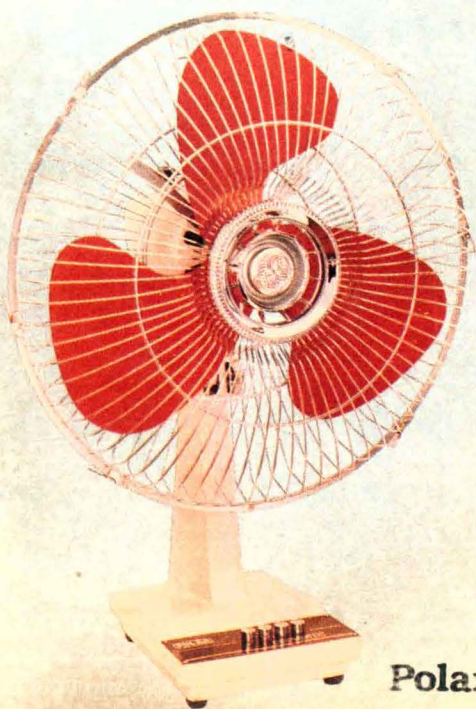
Cricketers, he said, were highly paid, and Gavaskar was the most affluent of them all. Ferreira complained that though a world champion, he was hardly paid anything at all, and that he received a fraction of the

money paid to any Test cricketer. He also said that when he met cricketers they seemed to him arrogant and snobbish, apparently considering themselves the salt of the earth. The second part of his complaint may be true, in that some of the younger players tend towards vanity. But as regards the first part, the complaint is illogical. Cricket and billiards are different, not only in the way they are





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played, but also in the pecuniary gains from each. Cricket is watched by thousands of people in a number of countries. Billiards, by its very nature, cannot be played in large stadia and no very large crowds turn up to watch a billiards match. The financial potential of cricket and billiards is as different as that of a multi-national and a department store.

Gavaskar didn't enter into this controversy. But he had previously said in a speech that Hindi films 'were made by asses for masses'. Since his hosts were from the film community, the remark was taken slightly amiss. It achieved a lot of publicity, during which it was pointed out that Gavaskar himself had not scrupled to appear in a Marathi film, and that he regularly lent his presence to filmed ads. The arguments about this remark seemed to continue for longer than was necessary. Gavaskar's argument was that he had acted in the Marathi film thinking it was an ad film: nobody with his intelligent eye could possibly have mistaken a feature film for an ad film. All this was still very much in the air when I watched him at practice in the Brabourne Stadium, with the Englishmen on their way in from Sri Lanka. Then I watched the first Test at the Wankhede Stadium at Bombay. The Englishmen did badly, floundering against the spin of Sivaramakrishnan. For the Indians, Ravi Shastri and Kirmani scored centuries, but Gavaskar failed. As the series continued, so did his failures. His best score was 67.

Disheartened by this, his team cracked up, England, against all odds, took the series. Shastri batted well, and there was a new discovery, the 21-year-old Mohammed Azharuddin, from Hyderabad, who hit a century in each of his first three Tests. Nevertheless India lost a series in which Gavaskar's personal average was 17. His reputation, always flexible at this stage of his career, contracted sharply. There were more demands for his retirement. The critics were confounded when Gavaskar was appointed captain of the Indian team which

Gavaskar had previously said in a speech that Hindi films 'were made by asses for masses'. This remark was taken slightly amiss by the film community. It was pointed out that Gavaskar himself had not scrupled to act in a Marathi film, and that he regularly lent his presence to filmed ads.

was to contest the Rothman's Cup in a limited overs competition in Australia. This was not only a challenge to Gavaskar. The winning of the World Cup in 1983 had been followed by humiliating defeats in one-day cricket by the West Indies and England, all in India.

When I saw him shortly before the team's departure for the Antipodes, Gavaskar seemed a little subdued. "I failed very badly in this series," he said. "I've been studying video films of myself. I was bringing the bat down from third man, playing across the line. My feet weren't in the right position. It seemed impossible to change. My right hand was too far across in my grip. Also, in this series, I was forced to open, which as you know I no longer want to. But I'm going to Australia because my motivation is still there. I don't feel nervous. And I like playing in Australia. I have been happy playing there."

He could have had few pleasant memories of the series now over. At Calcutta he had delayed his declaration so long as to preclude all possibility of a result. The crowd had reacted so violently that he had been impelled to declare that he would never play at that venue again. This had caused further criticism, intensified when Azharuddin scored his first Test century. The rest of the Indian team had come out on the steps to congratulate the young batsman as he came in, but according to some

sections of the press, Gavaskar had been notably absent. "I was standing behind the others," Gavaskar said. "Because of my height, I wasn't seen. Why shouldn't I congratulate Azu? He's the most fantastic prospect I've seen in years. He has the temperament, the strokes, the defence, everything." I remarked that Vijay Merchant had compared Azharuddin to the young Gavaskar.

Sunil shrugged, grinned, but said nothing, except "His one difficulty now is not to get his head turned. There are plenty of people to advise him, to tell him how to bat. If he listens to them, he will get into a real mess. But I think he has too much sense for that." Before he left, he said, "After this tour, I'm retiring." Observing my expression he said, "Oh, I don't mean that. I mean I'm retiring from the captaincy. I never really wanted it, and now I've had more than enough of it. I'll be making the announcement in two or three days." Before the team's departure however, he landed himself in another imbroglio: earlier in the season, he had reprimanded and suspended some members of the Bombay team for turning up late on the first day of a Ranji Trophy match. Before the team left for Australia, they had to pose at the Brabourne Stadium for a group photograph.

According to the press, Sunil himself turned up late, and the photography session had to be postponed. Sunil said, "That's not true. There was a long delay caused because my blazers did not fit." Rusi Modi says that this wasn't the actual fact. In all this not unusual fluster of controversy, the team left for Australia. Here there was tremendous activity as the cricketers of the world flocked to the two centres where the tournament was to be held, Sydney and Melbourne. There was to be some night cricket, and the Indians would play for the first time in coloured clothes, under lights, and with a white ball. None of them was tremendously happy about this. But there was nothing to be done except to practise hard

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"Unlike in the case of quick or mediumpace bowlers against whom you can move away and play, it would have been difficult to do so with Siva. One could only hit him straight or crossbat. It was worth taking him..." In a sense, Gavaskar in Australia changed all extant theories of limited overs cricket. He used Sivaramakrishnan as a strike bowler, to considerable effect, with Shastri's leftarm spin as a foil.

under these new formulae. Gavaskar all this while, lifted and drove the team on his strong and experienced shoulders.

ONE-DAY CRICKET has always been played at school and club level, but not with the complex laws and hard competition found in professional limited overs matches. In 1963 the Gillette Cup was instituted as a knockout competition between the counties. This had some curious results. Bob Barber, until then a very defensive batsman, turned himself into one of the freest hitting opening batsmen of the 1960s. Geoff Boycott in the 1965 final took the clamps off and made 146 in one of the fastest innings he ever played. This was at the beginning of it all, when batsmen still felt they ought to hit boundaries as often as possible. Later, as the number of limited overs competitions multiplied, new techniques came in, together with new laws. Batsmen now pushed for ones and twos as often as possible, the cumulative effect being as effective and less dangerous than continually aiming to clear the horizon. To contain such tactics, mediumpace bowlers were necessary.

Counties signed on mediumpace bowlers where they might previously

have opted for spinners. It was in no small measure due to limited overs cricket that the true spinner began to vanish from English county sides. The adage was that spinners who might give away a large number of runs from a small number of overs had become redundant in this kind of cricket. Presently the limited overs match went international, and in 1975 the first World Cup was played. The Indians, with little experience of this kind of cricket, competed but with no success. It was in this World Cup that Gavaskar played his notoriously immobile knock of 36 not out against England. In 1979 the second World Cup was held. In the course of this the Indians were beaten by Sri Lanka, and again did not show up very well. Then came the victory of 1983, which astonished the entire cricket world.

Gavaskar, in these three World Cups, scored two 50s but was otherwise a failure. His best score in limited overs cricket was his 90 against West Indies at Berbice in early 1984. By this time his acute cricketing mind had securely fastened onto the main principles of this type of cricket, and he had determined to use them in Australia. The inclusion of Sivaramakrishnan in the team for Australia was much cavilled at. Nevertheless, he was to prove the bowler of the series. From the very beginning of the tournament, the Indians looked a likely side. The fielding improved match by match, spearheaded by Gavaskar himself. As a batsman Gavaskar kept a low profile, coming in at the middle of the order and making runs as and when it was necessary. Most of the runs came from the younger batsmen. The unpredictable Srikanth blazed away with such consistency that Gavaskar thought him the best batsman seen in the entire tournament.

Azharuddin and Shastri also did very well. Shastri wound up as the man of the tournament, the rather floridly titled 'Champion of Champions' and was presented with an Audi car for his pains. Under special dispensation from the Prime Minister,

customs duty was waived on this chariot when it was brought to India. Kapil Dev had his moments, but of Sivaramakrishnan, Gavaskar wrote: "He proved all his detractors wrong. Leg spinners have not done well in England but they have performed well in Australia. And the grounds down under are much bigger. The boundaries are longer — 90 to 100 yards in most cases. So to hit Siva would have taken not only immense effort but one would have had to time the ball extremely well to clear the fielders.

"Unlike in the case of quick or mediumpace bowlers against whom you can move away and play, it would have been difficult to do so with Siva. One could only hit him straight or crossbat. It was worth taking him..." In a sense, Gavaskar in Australia changed all extant theories of limited overs cricket. He used Sivaramakrishnan as a strike bowler, to considerable effect, with Shastri's leftarm spin as a foil, and conclusively proved that spin bowlers can be highly effective in one-day cricket. He exploded a theory that had been widely held for years. Accused in the past of being a conservative captain, he now appeared in the role of a buccaneer leader, a Captain Morgan taking risks nobody else would have dared to venture. This was perhaps a form of compensation. Earlier in the year Gavaskar told me that he thought he was not as good a batsman as he had been. The good days, he thought, had gone.

Amarnath had outshone him in Pakistan and the West Indies. In the home series against the West Indies, he had performed some superlative feats interspersed with failures. In the terrible series against England, he had watched with approval the rise of Azhar. Twice he had been displaced from his plinth of honour by younger men — though Amarnath wasn't that much younger. Gavaskar is sometimes a temperamental man, but on these occasions his attitude was one of philosophical acceptance. He may well have thought that like Sir Frank Worrell before him, he

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should drop back in the order and make runs only when required, leading the side by experience and knowledge, to prove himself a great general as well as a great warrior. This he did in Australia. India won every one of the six matches it played, and collected the Benson and Hedges trophy for the World Championship of Cricket. At the presentation ceremony the team drenched its captain in champagne. There was not only affection in this act, but a sort of awe.

Sharjah, one of the Gulf Emirates, has recently, through the efforts of Abdul Rehman Bukhtazir, become a centre for cricket in Asia. The facilities are not really adequate for First Class matches, but they are suitable for one-day matches. Here, in 1983-84, India had won the Asia Cup. This year the competition was to be for the Rothman's Cup, a tripartite competition between India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A curiosity of the competition was that the umpires were largely neutral: two Australians, two Englishmen, an Indian and a Pakistani. The Indians maintained the bowling and fielding standards Gavaskar had set for them in Australia, and they carried away the Rothman's Cup as well.

GAVASKAR AND PAMMI now went to America, Gavaskar in charge of a team of Indian players. The team played matches in several centres where there was a high West Indian and Indian population. The opposition was of low quality, and the Indians didn't really have to try. Sunil himself made a couple of 70s and an 80. The younger players had a fairly festive time. The tour was too long, and towards the end became tedious. There was no challenge in the cricket, and there were endless parties hosted by the Indian community. They meant well, but became a trifle trying, as one succeeded the next. The players despite all the hospitality and kindness, were glad to come home, though they came in the middle of the Indian monsoon and several contracted stomach ail-

ments.

Two more tours approached, and these were official Test tours. One was a relatively short one of Sri Lanka, on which three Tests were to be played. The other was a longer one of Australia. The Indians went to Sri Lanka with confidence. The country had not won a single match of their 13 Tests. The Indians were moreover flushed and complacent after their clean sweep of the one-day tournaments. Nobody seemed to have told them that the success of a side in one-day matches does not necessarily mean an equal degree of success in actual Tests. The pace is different; the conditions, even the atmosphere, are different. Sri Lanka, as the Indians had found at Madras, three years before, were not to be underestimated. Roy Dias and Duleep Mendis were still in the side, and to be feared, and Siddath Wettimuny had proved himself a useful opening batsman.

Vinodhan John had done well as a mediumpace bowler in England and New Zealand, and with Asantha de Mel and a number of other useful mediumpacers at hand, it looked as though the Indians were going to face an attack moved mainly on seam. Somachandra de Silva had retired, so in fact the Lankans were devoid of experienced and accomplished spinners. The Indians had brought Maninder Singh and Siva, and there were Kapil Dev and the newcomer, Chetan Sharma, for pace. It had been increasingly notable, however that Kapil Dev, at least as a bowler was stale and tried, all passion spent. While playing for Northamptonshire in the English cricket season, he had had numerous purple patches with the bat, but his successes as a bowler had been sporadic.

The first Test was played at the old Colombo Oval, and concluded in a difficult draw. In the first innings, with India in serious trouble, Gavaskar settled down between fixed parameters. Facing a nagging, steady three man seam attack, he worked his way along with perfect solidity for 287 minutes, an innings born of

Gavaskar once said to me, "When I'm dropped from the Test side, or retire from it, I'd like to play for the State side. When I'm not good enough for that either, I'll play club cricket. And after that, well, there is the coaching bit. I don't want to be a selector." Even now, therefore, in his maturity, he retains a slightly rebellious posture towards authority, or of becoming part of that authority.

necessity rather than desire, and partially saved the situation. The second time round he was out for 0. In the second Test, also at Colombo, in the Sara Stadium, Sri Lanka won without difficulty. Gavaskar obstructed them in the first innings with 52 after India had lost three wickets for eight runs. In the second innings, as India folded up completely, he made 19. Kapil Dev had not been very effective: Chetan Sharma had looked better. Roger Binny was flown in from England to stiffen the side.

It was said that one reason why the Indians had fared so badly was the unrest around them. The Tamil community in Jaffna and other northern and central parts of the island were fighting for a separatist state called Eelam. Terrorists called Tigers, well-armed and equipped, roved these areas, in constant collision with the Sinhalese police and army. Before the team arrived, the terrorists had stated that in a matter of weeks they would launch a fullscale attack upon the government forces. The team had been sent in haste, almost as a peace



mission, which was rather hard on them, since they might have found themselves in the middle of a running war. This obviously told on their nerves. The players' activities were confined to the Sinhala south, but they ran two risks here. The two Tamilians in the side, Srikanth and Sivaramakrishnan, faced the general hostility of the Sinhala towards their race. There was also an outside chance that Tamil extremists, feeling that the Indian players, by performing against Sinhala before predominantly Sinhala crowds, had shown themselves to be traitors, might attempt a strike at the cricketers. These were farfetched ideas, but every Indian player knew that they were possible.

There was obviously a fundamental need to cobble together a new Indian team. Gavaskar has always been obsessed with the idea of coaching and educating, in the cricket sense, as many young players as possible. His pet idea, until recently, was to found a coaching school at Dadar. He was in fact promised some land there, but the permission was later withdrawn.

He has attempted to do this in other ways. In October 1985 he decided to lead a side which included Vishwanath, Prasanna, and Venkatraghavan, through various centres in the south, playing one-day matches and also holding coaching classes for young players. This kind of thing, done on a regular basis might well be of very great value. The difficulty is that schoolboys and college players of promise graduate into Ranji Trophy cricket and then look for Test caps, which they are often awarded.

But very often, having reached the heights of Test match cricket, they find the air too rarefied. There are innumerable young players who have tremendous records in the Indian tournaments, but in Test matches, and particularly on overseas tours, lose all trace of form. A sedulous sifting of talent is required from people who know cricket. That has not yet been done on a large scale. Gavaskar would surely be the man to spearhead such an enterprise, and he is obviously willing to do so. It would take away the burn and itch of retire-

ment, which must come soon.

Gavaskar once said to me, "When I'm dropped from the Test side, or retire from it, I'd like to play for the State side. When I'm not good enough for that either, I'll play club cricket. And after that, well, there is the coaching bit. I don't want to be a selector."

Even now, therefore, in his maturity, he retains a slightly rebellious posture towards authority, or of becoming part of that authority. It is perhaps part of his sense of humour. Pammi tells me that he is a brilliant mimic, though I have seen no samples of his art. She also says that he is fond of wearing horrible masks such as children buy. "Once, in Australia," Pammi said between bursts of laughter, "he climbed into the balcony of the room next door and looked through the window. Kirti Azad had come out of his bath and when he saw this horrible face, he dropped his towel and ran down the hotel corridor without any clothes on." She laughed affectionately. "He's still only a little boy." ♦





Buniyaad, Adieu

It is a short while to D-Day — on May 26 the much-loved television serial BUNIYAAD which has enthralled millions of viewers for the past year, will go off the air.

On these pages director Ramesh Sippy and a galaxy of BUNIYAAD's stars, in conversation with MINNIE VAID-FERA, pay tribute to the serial.

"BUNIYAAD can be stretched on endlessly," says Ramesh Sippy, its dynamic director wryly. But the serial's 20-25 million viewers who have been following the lives of Haveli Ram and his extended family, with unwavering concentration and vicarious pleasure twice a week for the past year, are doomed to disappointment.

The last week of April will witness the dismantling of the sets of *Buniyaad* at Film City studios, which is tucked away in remote Goregaon, 35 miles from Bombay. One month later, on May 26, the joys and vicissitudes of *Buniyaad*'s two families — Master Haveli Ram's and Lala Vrishbhaan's — will come to their predestined end.

Sippy emphatically denies any possibility of an extension. "I'm far too tired, my entire unit is tired. If at all we want to extend the serial, we'll probably do it after a long break, after six months or so. But it seems very unlikely," shrugs Sippy. Especially as Sippy Films has neither asked for nor received an extension from Mandi House. Besides, Ramesh Sippy is intent upon taking up his film commitments again. The challenge of doing something unique on a different medium and the heady audience feedback — instant popularity and recognition — have lost their charm for him.

Fatigue seems to have set in, as one observes Sippy on the *Buniyaad* sets one windy afternoon. Sprawled in a deck chair under a tree, he waits patiently, as his crew bustles about on the lawns of Film City, tripping over serpentine cables, arranging massive light reflectors, filling a garish, artificial pond with water and issuing instructions stridently to one another.

In another corner, Neena Gupta (the sultry fake princess, Rajeshwari) and Mazhar Khan (the lovable con-man, Roshan Lal) stand huddled together. Romi, the assistant, helps them rehearse their dialogues. K K Mahajan, the cinematographer, placidly puffs at a cigarette near his JVC video camera, and surveys the pandemonium around him. The atmo-



"BUNIYAAD is a landmark in Indian TV"

Debonair **Vijayendra Ghatge** on Vrishbhaan — 'the most colourful role in BUNIYAAD.'

Buniyaad is a landmark in the history of Indian television. It has been acknowledged as one of the best soap operas in the Third World, so there's been international recognition too. If other serials on television can match Buniyaad's high standards of technical, directorial and acting excellence by even 35 to 40 per cent, we'll be assured of fairly good programmes. Buniyaad has become a national habit. Its powerful dramatic structure showing the joys and trials of an average Indian family, their emotional problems, love affairs and conflicts, has guaranteed almost universal popularity. In the north, the identification with the family's predicament and with the period, has been near total. But I'm told it's watched avidly in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra too, where the trauma of Partition was hardly felt. And in terms of style, scripting and team effort, very few films, let alone television serials, have been able to match Buniyaad.

The role of Vrishbhaan has brought me more popularity, recognition and job satisfaction than most of my film career has. The audience for just one night surpasses that of a silver, even golden jubilee film. The medium itself is challenging and the role of Vrishbhaan even more so. Ramesh Sippy outlined the role to me four months before the serial went on air. I accepted it unhesitatingly, since I had been taking a break from cinema. But as I got into it, the role developed in terms of depth, range and character. In fact I think it's the most colourful character in the serial. There's a whole range to portray, from the role of a romantic young man to a man with money and authority whose emotional nature leads to various conflicts involving his wife and sweetheart, son and illegitimate son, etc. The role, in its totality, has worked out much better than I expected.

Now as the serial comes to an end, the pace has slowed down. Earlier we used to take five or six days to shoot one capsule, today we wind it up in three. It's been a mad race against time.

Within the constraints of government censorship, and Doordarshan's attitude, we've done the best we possibly could. We could have made significant political and social comments within the scope of the serial had we been allowed to, but today there's really nothing much that we can do on Indian television. So we've relied more on emotions, on the questions left unanswered in each episode and on the realism of the characters. All of which have worked very well.

As for being filmi occasionally, well, television is a film-associated medium. It's meant for mass consumption and so has to contain certain features common to film.

here suddenly turns electric as the stars take their places. The crowds that have cropped up as suddenly, surge forward expectantly, craning over shoulders to get a better view.

Dressed for summer in cool white (he has a whitish-grey stubble as if to match), Ramesh Sippy saunters across to a table set beneath a sunshade, which is covered with a sheet of black tarpaulin. He disappears into this tent-like shelter and sits down in front of a TV monitor, and a microphone that booms out his instructions.

Following his cue for 'action' Rajeshwari and Roshan Lal stroll down a path, engaged in easy banter, her coquetry versus his machismo. Three rehearsals precede a 'take', and in a remarkably short time, the shot is okayed. The actors, the chief assistant Mr Thakkar, Romi and the other crew members all disappear into the black tent to 'check' the shot. Much to everyone's relief, nothing needs to be altered. The duration of the shot has been a little over a minute, the preparation for it has taken more than an hour. Sippy's instructions



have been almost minimal – from the slightly admonitory, (“Hurry up, we’re losing light,”) to the mildly directorial, (“Neena, move a little to your right.”) The tone is unhurried, the attitude almost indolent. Where is the much-touted dynamism, the frenetic energy, the perfectionism for which Sippy is eulogised by his admiring cast?

He takes a break and settles down to talk about *Buniyaad* – its beginnings and the initial hurdles, its shortcomings, its strengths, and its unprecedented success. As he talks, the essence of his personality, which is his understated charm, a certain modesty together with a quiet determination, emerges.

“I wish *Buniyaad* could have gone on along the lines it was conceived initially,” says Sippy regretfully. “The whole excitement of doing *Buniyaad* meant for me, the challenge of not making just another soap opera. I thought I’d use a much larger canvas, give an entire historical perspective. But I was frustrated each time. Finally I just had to give up, we had no alternative but to follow Doordarshan’s



“Personally I hate Sham Lal”

BUNIYAAD’s villainous Sham Lal, Delhi-based **Vinod Nagpal**, talks about the soap opera.

Personally, Buniyaad has taught me the importance of detail, of perfectionism. I’ve put in a lot more work for the fewer episodes in Buniyaad than for the many more I had in Hum Log. I’ve had to maintain a consistency in the role of Sham Lal. There can be no second rate performance for Ramesh Sippy.

As for the character of Sham Lal, personally I hate the man. I never watch myself on TV. Yet Sham Lal is an eminently plausible person. Where I live in Delhi – the Kashmiri Gate area that adjoins Civil Lines – I’ve seen these Kayasth munshis in real life. People who do a man out of his property for small sums of money. You see, very often, these munshis were paid meagre salaries by their employers, so they had to earn an income by their wits. So Sham Lals exist even though they may seem overly villainous.

“I won’t complain if I get typecast as Roshan Lal”

Mazhar Khan enthuses over BUNIYAAD’s fun-loving Roshan Lal.

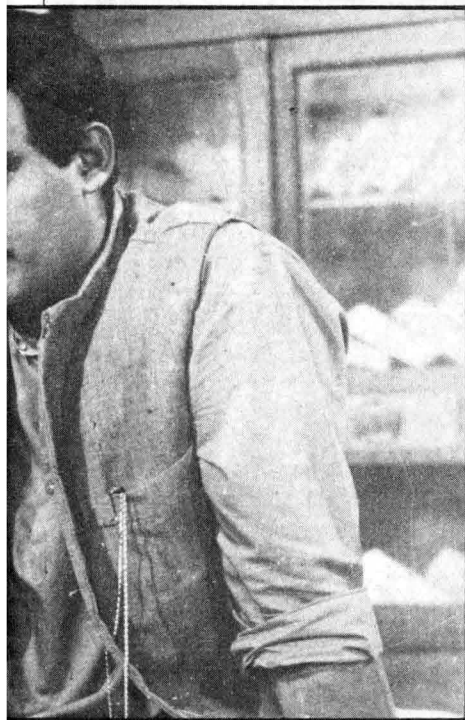
Buniyaad burst upon the audiences at an appropriate time. Serials were being looked down upon at that time and Buniyaad made a dramatic impact – it spelt sophistication and class. People identified with the Partition period. The period we’ve been covering lately is more confusing and disjointed, which speaks volumes for the serial’s veracity. It’s really true to life – life was confused and in a shambles in the post-Independence era. Then again, we’ve been limited by Doordarshan’s strictures and, to a small extent, by the audience feedback.

I was passing through an uneasy phase, when I took up Buniyaad purely because of Ramesh Sippy. Playing the role of Roshan Lal has given me a status, recognition and immense popularity: all my 40 films put together have been unable to achieve this. If I get permanently typecast in Roshan Lal’s image, I won’t complain. His is a fascinating character, which has many shades to it. He can be comical, emotional, affectionate, angry, resigned. A lovable rake and a rank opportunist.

I’ve experienced complete work satisfaction. Though the hours have been taxing, I’ve rarely felt any fatigue. In fact, today if I lay off for even a day, I feel helpless.

Till Buniyaad is over, I’m not going to be tempted by other offers. It has been my top priority. Most of the other offers I’ve received, are, in fact, due to this serial.

As for Ramesh Sippy, the entire unit is in love with him. He’s my favourite human being, not just my favourite director.



TELEVISION



"The first few episodes were the best"

Alok Nath's Master Haveli Ram has been a virtuoso performance, bringing him both critical acclaim and worthy offers. The long and arduous struggle seems to be over, says **Alok Nath**.

One of the major hallmarks of Buniyaad has been its honesty. Its superb script, the construction of characters, their placement in the socio-political environment, their relationship with society – everything has been beautifully and intricately woven. More importantly, the viewers' association with the characters has been immediate and complete. There were basically two kinds of viewer reaction: the survivors of the Partition era identified very strongly with that period while the younger generation was fascinated by the depiction of those simple, honest, matter-of-fact times.

I personally feel the first few episodes were the best. We were all working like inspired people – from 7 am to the early hours of the next morning. The concentration was intense. We couldn't afford to falter while shooting on film. Today shooting on video, the attitude is more casual. Then again politics in the serial was restricted to the British period, so the environment existing in those times was reflected through the family story. In any case, Master Haveli Ram's involvement with politics was always quite academic. The authenticity of the serial faltered because we could only make passing references to political events. And how long can you keep relying on references?

Then again, there have been loose episodes, often unreal, filmi situations. But one has to make allowances for a few loose ends: after all, we've all been working overtime for the last eight months.

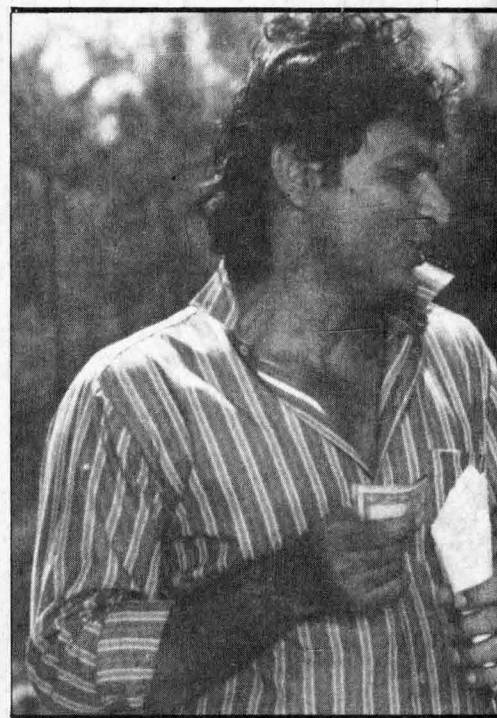
These minor criticisms apart, I can vouch for positive feedback from the audience. I don't care a hoot for the critics – do they know how much tension and effort goes into the making of such a serial?

As far as Masterji's role is concerned, I was lucky to have been briefed extensively. We had discussions lasting for 15 days, when we were given a thorough knowledge of that period, the characterisation, the stances, right down to the nth detail. After that it was left to the actor to live his role. What was of immense help and certainly an unusual coincidence, was that most of us – Aneeta, Kanwaljeet, Daleep Tahir, Kiran Joneja and I – had our roots in that age. Our parents did cross over to India after Partition. So the seeds of awareness were already in our minds. The script and discussions provided the stimulus. We only had to rake our memories. Then of course, there was a magician called Ramesh Sippy. . . and the rest is history.

Buniyaad has been for me, the end of an extremely frustrating struggle. Today I feel very confident. My career is shaping up pretty well also, without my taking any drastic steps. I'm being offered dignified serious roles, not exactly Haveli Ram stereotypes, but roles where I count in the entire structure. I've had a fairly favourable reception from commercial cinema, as well as TV serials: I'm open to art cinema too but have not had any offers yet.

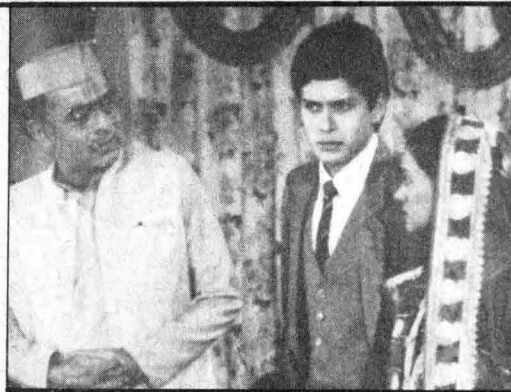
edicts," says Sippy. This meant no depiction of any form of communal violence or riots, or anything that could incite and influence the people's passions. It was a nebulous instruction. There was even a ban on showing camp life – Doordarshan wanted *Buniyaad's* refugees to step into concrete houses directly after fleeing from Lahore. Finally Sippy was allowed to show camp life but without any of its inherent hardships. "We could have shown so many beautiful and poignant moments at camp," Sippy regrets.

In the face of the government's vacillating attitude, *Buniyaad* had to perforce change its focus and become primarily a family story with a distinct narrative structure. The linear pattern was broken occasionally to bridge the gap of time. "These jumps disoriented our viewers," says Sippy. "We started with 1947, then went back to 1914, but no matter what we gave them, people always wanted the alternative period. Those who were hooked onto pre-Independence Lahore resented the plunge back into the Partition period, and vice versa."



Individual preferences apart, *Buniyaad* has, indisputably, captured the hearts of its nationwide audiences. The serial is watched with great devotion. According to the popularity ratings too, it has held its Number One position among other serials effortlessly. Ramesh Sippy is modest in his analysis of *Buniyaad*'s phenomenal success. But, he says, "If one person can be given the maximum credit for the success of the serial, it's Manohar Shyam Joshi. He has single-handedly provided the *buniyaad* (roots) of *Buniyaad*. His research, his paperwork, his detailed description of each character and the authenticity of the script, have been tremendous," Sippy says. He also has praise for the rest of the crew – the technical team and the artistes. "Signing unknown actors was initially born out of a practical need to get bulk dates for a year and the actors' undivided attention. But the result has been more than satisfactory," beams the director.

The race against time has left its mark, however, on the quality of the serial. Despite warm denials to the



"BUNIYAAD has been like going to school"

Abhinav Chaturvedi alias JB, BUNIYAAD's rich, spoilt brat-turned-model husband, talks of the serial's magic formula for success.

Buniyaad's major strength lies in its strong content and slick presentation. It has combined the several factors – social, political, economic and moral – operating in a specific timespan. Its themes of change and differing value systems, its visual depiction of history and the total concept, has created a mass-based appeal. Buniyaad, unlike Hum Log, in which I also worked, has cut across all sections of society. Further, it has led to a general awareness of the various forces prevalent in society during the pre- and post-Partition period. Not just Haveli Ram's family, but each character has developed. Buniyaad is a perfect example of what happens when an excellent writer teams up with an equally excellent director. Moreover, the unit is one big, happy family. For me, it's been an education, just like school. You attend classes from 7 am to 10 pm, go home, do your homework and report for shooting again the next morning.

Moreover, the role of JB, which is a combination of good and evil, gave me ample scope to learn. The character evolved, veered from being quite negative to positive, and became more and more interesting. It has been my most challenging role so far. The director has contributed to every inch of the character's growth.

"It has been a great role"

Krutika Desai, BUNIYAAD's rebellious Mangala, on the serial.

You cannot define Buniyaad's formula for success. It is an amalgamation of so many factors: an excellent script, Ramesh Sippy's direction, a familiar period of history, the Partition, emotional drama within limits, visually creative sets and of course, every actor giving in his best performance.

People criticise Buniyaad for now turning into a typical soap opera, but it was never a social satire. And the Partition was the single most important political event that affected every single family of that period. Today if the prime minister loses an election, does it affect people like the Partition did?

Ramesh Sippy had initially offered me a choice of roles – that of Mangala or Nivedita. I asked him to choose. Since Satbir was a central character in the serial, Mangala's role seemed meatier, with many more aspects to it. Mangala is practical, determined, outspoken, interested in both politics and poetry, and is surprisingly traditional too. She grows as a character. Mangala is a person in her own right, with her own identity. She is a good blend of feminism and tradition: audiences haven't reacted adversely to Mangala's rebellion, since they also see her as a gentle, soft-spoken, affectionate person with a strong sense of fairness. It has been a great role.





"Nobody realised how tough it was going to be"

Of the profusion of very real talent that BUNIYAAD has thrown up, Aneeta Kanwar's brilliant portrayal of Lajoji has taken the viewers, critics and film industry by storm. **Aneeta Kanwar** talks about the phenomenally popular serial.

Buniyaad is a family story with a difference. It portrays the strains of the Partition, the desire to begin afresh and the conflicts arising out of insecurity. In the earlier episodes, we dealt with the immediate after-effects of the Partition, the homelessness and the unemployment. For the last few months we have been focussing on its long-term effects: the immense task before Master Haveli Ram and his family in finding their roots once again. So I don't think Buniyaad has outlived itself. Besides, we've never denied that it is a soap opera.

People tell me that the earlier tautness in the serial is not that evident anymore. That's because they're used to the basic (Haveli Ram's) family. But we've had to branch out. Also, everybody has been working to maximum capacity and there's nothing left to give out anymore. So we've had to fall back on things that came more easily to us. Nobody realised how tough it was going to be. It was like biting off something one couldn't really chew. Today if anyone asked me to act in a serial twice a week, I'd think 60,000 times before agreeing to. Despite the hectic pace, however, the set-up has been very very easy to work in. There have been no hassles at all. As for Ramesh Sippy, he is a fabulous director and gets the best out of you.

As for my role, initially, I had to get into the character. I'd think of new ideas, little touches of my own. I had to internalise the role. Today there's nothing extraordinary about the role: the character (of Lajoji) doesn't grow. It's become fairly mechanical for me – I just don the costumes and deliver my lines. There's not the joy of doing something new or creative. But older people are predictable, it's only the younger generation that wants change. So my character is true to life. The focus has shifted to other characters and naturally I am disappointed. I certainly don't enjoy playing an old woman.

I expected a lot of recognition after Buniyaad but not to this extent. Except for the south, where the whole ethos is remote as far as the Partition goes, Buniyaad is watched avidly. People have been critical occasionally – for instance, my mother told me that the entire sequence of Lajo and her children leaving Pakistan was like they were going on a picnic. Also we were told to tone it down. Doordarshan asked us to delete all violence or unnecessary politicisation of events.

What I plan to do next? I'm planning to do every kind of role, provided I play a major character – whether it is in art cinema or commercial cinema. I won't exclude one kind of experience for the other, I want to do both.

contrary by the cast and its director, *Buniyaad* has failed to adhere to its earlier standards of excellence. Though it is virtually impossible for a serial to be consistently absorbing for 104 episodes, the constraints of time and exhaustion have taken their toll. This has been markedly evident in recent months. The earlier realistic and moving portrayals of the birth of a nation and of the traditions and values of an old world era have given way to *filmi* cliches (for example, Sham Lal snapping the brakes off Vrishbhaan's wheel chair), gimmicks for the gallery (Babli's brief cabaret number), boring repetition of dialogues (the prevarication and the stock explanations concerning Satbir's parentage) and an overall feeling that the serial lacks direction.

While *Buniyaad*'s cast unanimously blames the time factor ("Do you realise we've been working almost 14-15 hours a day for the past year?"), the director valiantly defends himself: "I don't think people have really noticed the tiredness setting in. Within the time and the budget available, (a staggering Rs 2.75 lakh each for the



first 52 episodes and Rs 3 lakh each for the last 52), I think we've all tried not to compromise on the quality of the work." He adds however, "Let's say the critics have more to criticise (in the serial) now than before."

Any plans of repeating *Buniyaad*'s success on TV? "Well, I've made six films in 16 years. Yet this one year (of doing *Buniyaad*) has been equivalent to 13 films in terms of audience viewership. That's been the most satisfying part, but television serials are out for me for sometime at least," he says frankly.

And finally, how did it feel to be adored by all the 32 members of his cast? He smiles shyly, "We've all had a good run. I'm sure they've gained a lot in exposure and experience, which will stand them in good stead. The rest is up to them."

The members of the *Buniyaad* team will not be the only ones for whom other serials will now be 'second best': TV addicts will find it hard to replace Masterji, Lajoji, Vrishbhaan, Satbir and gang in their affections for the Tuesdays and Saturdays to come. ♦



"Almost everyone has liked Veerawali"

For Kiran Joneja, vibrantly attractive and vivacious, the transition from being a top model to BUNIYAAD's Veerawali and finally the sanyasini, Pragyawati, has been easy. **Kiran Joneja** describes her BUNIYAAD experience.

Buniyaad's success lies in its teamwork — a winning combination of a strong script, camerawork, and direction. Especially the last: Ramesh Sippy is a perfectionist who doesn't bother about overshooting his budget or merely finishing the work quickly. He wouldn't give up till he was totally satisfied. There were no compromises on the quality of work.

We shot the first 26 episodes on 16 mm film, so the quality was much better, especially due to the dubbing. Video somehow lacks the depth that a film possesses. Besides we took almost five to six days to shoot one episode. So we found, to our dismay, that our reserve (the eight or nine episodes we had in stock when we first went on air) was fast getting used up. Moreover, we covered a number of years in that flashback. And how long could a flashback go on? The pace then changed, it became slow and steady without the nostalgia that so many people found enthralling. But it was extremely difficult to work at that non-stop tempo.

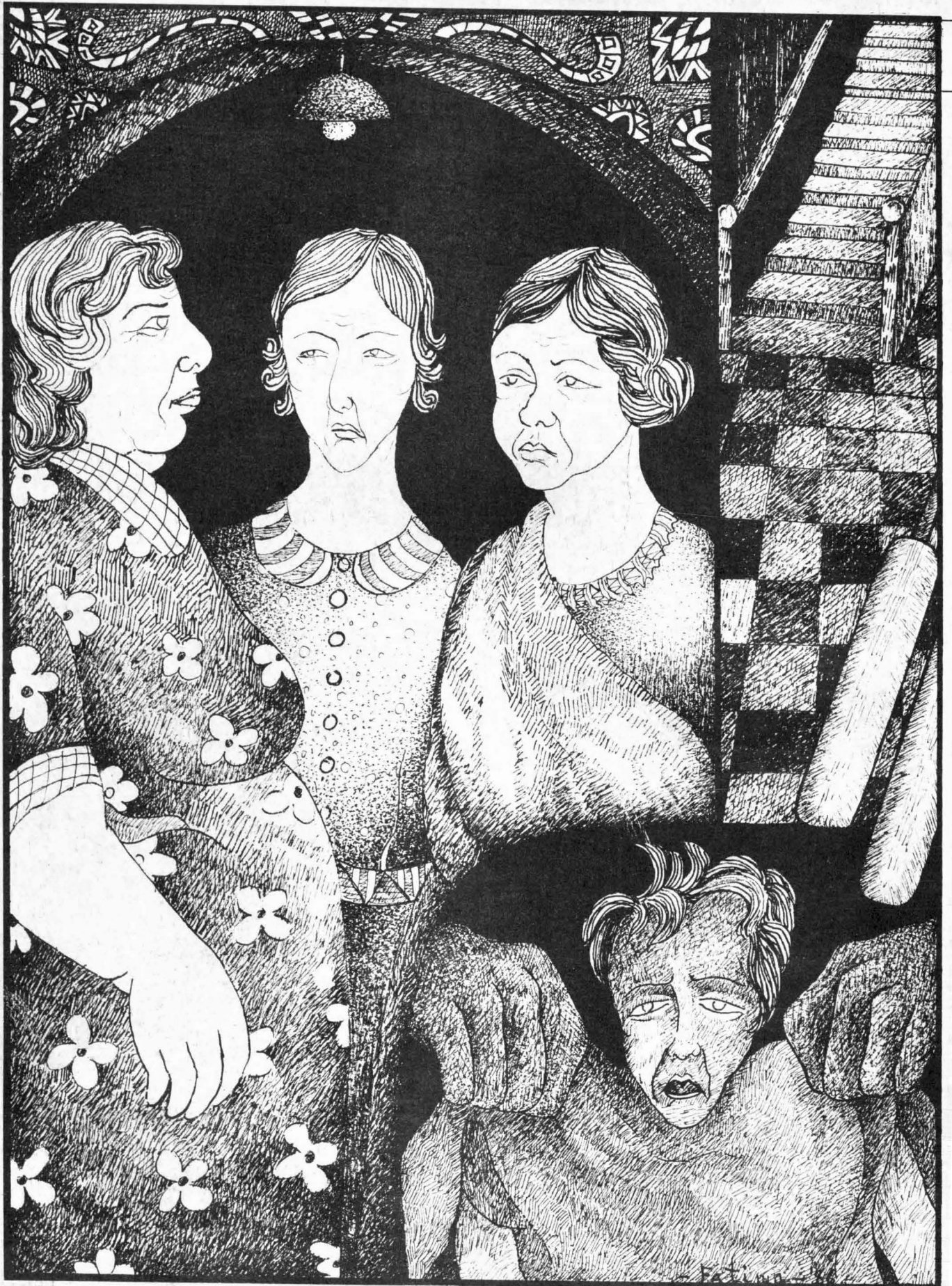
I was interviewed for Veerawali's role along with probably 50 other hopefuls. Rameshji outlined my role, told me (on my asking him for advice) that it was a very good part. So I took it up and as it progressed, I realised its potential. Today I'm quite overwhelmed by all the recognition and the popularity. I didn't think it would be like that.

Luckily the role wasn't very alien to me, since I have aunts and uncles who lived in Pakistan in the pre-Partition period; the mannerisms, and the costumes were familiar. I didn't have to make any extra effort. I just went on the sets, relied on my instincts and the shooting started. All the training I've received on the Buniyaad sets is really going to come in useful. It's been like going to a school that pampers you, in addition to teaching you.

Apart from stray criticisms lately that I look too young to be Satbir's mother, almost everyone has liked Veerawali. I was flooded with 'sister' roles all of which I merrily declined. This punctured many egos, but my role in Buniyaad has an identity of its own, it's not a mere 'sister' role. There are no heroes or heroines in Buniyaad.

On the whole, I'm unlikely to be typecast, at least not in the other serials I've accepted. I would love to do art cinema, in fact it's been a hang-up with me, but I feel it's on a downward trend now. Besides, I've always been on the fringes of cinema really. I'm quite contented with my modelling and I'll do whatever good role comes my way. I've never fished for roles and I'm not planning to start now.





One Sunday

JERBANOO was getting ready to lock up her flat and take the train to spend Sunday with her sister's family in Bandra.

She hustled her bulk around, turning the keys in the padlocks of her 17 cupboards, breathless with excitement and exertion.

Her breathlessness reminded her of the operation she had had three years ago to remove fat tissue from her abdomen and breasts. The specialist had told her, "You will not notice any great difference in the mirror. But you will appreciate the results when you are over 60. It will keep you from sagging."

Here she was, at 55, and would soon know the truth of his words if merciful God kept her alive for five more years. Jerbanoo did not question the ways of merciful God, even though her Soli had been taken away the very year after first Vera, and then Dolly, had gone abroad for higher studies.

This would be the first Sunday when the flat would be empty for the whole day. "In a way it is good," she reflected, "that Tehmina next door and the Bharuchas downstairs come around and use my fridge as much as they do. Anyone who has evil intentions about my empty flat will think twice when he sees the neighbours come and go. Tehmina will wander in for ice cubes; the Bharuchas will come to stock their Sunday shopping, and later for chilled water."

Thus reconciled towards her neighbours whom she usually looked on as nuisances, Jerbanoo set off for the railway station. Outside, it did not feel as hot, for there was a gentle breeze. Jerbanoo felt at peace; it was a 10-minute

walk, and she decided she would be in plenty of time to buy her ticket and catch the 10.15 express to Bandra station. She would arrive at her sister's well before lunch-time.

AT 11.30, Tehmina cautiously opened her door and peered down the hallway. Before stepping out, she liked to be certain that none of those Bharuchas were in the midst of their never-ending trips to Jerbanoo's fridge. "It is a shame the way those people misuse the poor lady's goodness," thought Tehmina. "All Jerbanoo said when she bought the fridge was to please use it and not feel awkward about it. It was only out of courtesy. Anyone would have said it. Now those Bharuchas behave as if they have a share in the ownership of the fridge. It is shameful. If Jerbanoo had not told me privately, several times, that she would feel insulted if I did not use the fridge, then I would not even go for these two or three ice cubes."

The hallway was free of the risk of any confrontation with a Bharucha, so Tehmina shuffled out, in slippers and duster-coat. She reeked of cloves, which she lodged in her mouth for two reasons: it kept away her attacks of nausea, and alleviated her chronic toothaches. Cursing the poor light in the hallway and fumbling with her bunch of keys, circumspect Tehmina moved on.

Even in the sunniest of days, this hallway persisted in a state of half-light. Tehmina faced her roughest trials at Jerbanoo's door after sunset: there, by twilight, she would struggle with the locks; for it was the hour of the most precious ice cubes, the ones that chilled her scotch-and-soda.

FICTION

But as Tehmina now grappled with the padlock and the latch, her armpits soaked with sweat, she admitted that life before the fridge had been even tougher. In those days, if she wanted her scotch-and-soda chilled, she had to go and buy ice from the Irani restaurant in Tar Gully. It was not the money she minded but the tedium of it all; besides, the residents of Tar Gully amused themselves by spitting from their tenement windows on all those who were better-heeled than they. In impoverished Tar Gully, Tehmina was



certainly considered better-heeled, and many well aimed globs had found their mark. On such evenings, Tehmina, in tears, would return to her flat and rush to take a bath, cursing those satanic animals and fiends. In the meantime, the ice she had purchased would sit, melting to a sliver.

Stumbling through the doorway, Tehmina wished her cataracts would hurry up and be ripe for removal. As always, she opened the fridge and stood for a while inspecting the contents, luxuriating in the rush of cold air. She picked up a curious-looking packet wrapped in plastic, squeezed it, sniffed at it, decided against opening it, and put it back. From the emptiness of the fridge, it was obvious that the Bharucha shopping had not arrived.

Tehmina swayed absently. From the flat downstairs, the strains of the *Blue Danube* reached her ears. Strauss! The music reminded her of a time when the world was a simpler and better place to live in, when trips to Tar Gully did not involve the risk of spit globs. As she reached into the freezer, the *Blue Danube* concluded. Grudgingly, Tehmina admitted that there was one thing about the Bharuchas, they certainly had good taste in music; those senseless and monotonous Hindi film songs never blared from their flat.

Her business at the fridge all done, Tehmina started to lock up the place. As she worked away at the keys, she heard steps behind her.

"Francis!"

Francis did odd jobs for all the neighbours. It was his sole means of livelihood ever since he had been laid off or dismissed, it was never certain which, from the furniture store where he used to be a delivery boy. The awning of that store still provided the only roof he had ever known. Strangely, the store-owner never minded, and it was a convenient location — all that Tehmina or Jerbanoo or any of the other neighbours had to do when they required Francis was to lean out of their verandah window and wave, or clap, and Francis would either see or hear them.

Grinning away as usual, he now approached Tehmina.

"Stop leering, you idiot," started Tehmina, "and see if this door is properly locked." It wasn't, so Francis asked for the key.

"When will Jerbanoobai come back? She had some work for me today," said Francis.

"Never. Could not be for today. She won't be back till very late. You must have made a mistake." With a loud suck, she moved her clothes to the other cheek and continued: "So many times I've told you to open your ears and listen properly when people tell you things. But no. You never listen."

Francis grinned and shrugged his shoulders. Humouring Tehmina, he replied, "Sorry, *bai*, it is my mistake." He stood only about five feet two, but possessed a strength that was out of all proportion to his light build. Once, in Tehmina's kitchen during a cleaning spree, he had picked up the stone slab used for grinding spices. It weighed at least 50 pounds, and it was the way he picked it up, between

thumb and fingertips, that amazed Tehmina. Later, she had reported this incident to Jerbanoo, and the two women marvelled at his strength, giggling at Tehmina's speculation that he must be as strong as a bull.

As humbly as possible, Francis now asked, "Do you have any work for me today?"

"No, and I do not like it, you skulking here in the hallway. When there is work we will call you. Now go away."

Francis went away. Tehmina could be offensive, but Francis needed the few paise the neighbours graciously let him earn, and the leftovers Jerbanoo let him eat whenever there were any. So he returned to the shade of the furniture store awning. •

DOWNSTAIRS, Silloo Bharucha had just finished cleaning and portioning the beef into seven packets. She disliked being obliged to Jerbanoo for the fridge, but it was a great convenience, and Jerbanoo had been sincere in her offer. "Besides," Silloo reasoned, "we do enough to pay her back in full and more. Every night she borrows our newspaper. And every morning, so she does not have to wake up early, I receive her milk and bread. Madam will not even come and pick up her stuff. My sons must carry it upstairs for her."

While Silloo was musing thus in the kitchen, her son Kersi finished gluing the cord around the handle of his size four cricket bat. The bat was now too small for him, and he did not play cricket any more, but he still lovingly looked after that bat; the willow still possessed spring enough to send a ball to the boundary line, in glaring contrast to his brother Minoo's bat. The latter was in sad shape. The blade was dry and cracked in places; the handle, its rubber grip and cord having come off long ago, had split; and the joint where the blade met the handle was undone. But Minoo did not care. He had never really cared for cricket, except during that one year when the Australian team was visiting, when he had spent days glued to the radio, listening to the commentary.

But Kersi had badly wanted to play serious cricket ever since he was in primary school. In the fifth standard he was finally chosen for the class team. On the morning of the match, however, the captain got diarrhoea, and the boy who took over relegated Kersi to the extras. That was the end of serious cricket for Kersi, and he now used this bat, as well as Minoo's, for killing rats.

Kersi killed rats everywhere, wherever they showed up: in the kitchen, in the living-room, on the verandah. Traps were also set, but most of the rats, with a sixth sense, probably native to rodents, circumnavigated the traps, and so Kersi and his bat remained indispensable. Once, Kersi had even been asked upstairs to kill a rat in Jerbanoo's bedroom. The rat fled into the daughters' bedroom, and Kersi rushed in after it; Vera had just finished her bath and was not dressed; she screamed, first when she saw the rat, and then when Kersi entered after it. Kersi could not then keep his eyes on the rat, which escaped with its life. Soon after,

Vera had gone abroad for higher studies.

Kersi's reminiscing was interrupted by his mother: "Quick! Come quick, Kersi, with your bat," she implored. There was no need for further explanation. It was not uncommon for a rat to amble through the kitchen, and the creatures had to be tackled with unrelenting vigilance. Kersi raced into the kitchen, slammed the door shut behind him, and cornered the victim. It all took less than 30 seconds.

As he threw an old newspaper over the dead rat and picked it up, Kersi remembered the mess he had made the first time he had used his bat in this way. Perhaps it was the thrill of the chase, or his rage against the invader, or just his ignorance of the fragility of this creature of fur and bones. The bat had come down with such vehemence that the rat was completely squashed. A dark red stain had oozed across the floor, and he discovered how sticky that red smear was only when he'd tried to wipe it off.

The beef was now ready for the fridge. So with seven packets of meat Kersi left the kitchen and plodded lifelessly up the stairs to Jerbanoo's flat.

When Jerbanoo's daughters went abroad, they took with them the youth and sensuality that used to fill the flat, and could drive Kersi giddy with excitement on a day like this, with no one home, and all before him the prospect of exploring Vera's and Dolly's bedroom, examining their undies that invariably lay scattered around, running his hands through lacy, frilly things, rubbing himself with these, and almost having an accident on one occasion. Now, exploration would only yield Jerbanoo's huge underclothes. Kersi could not think of these as bras and panties; their vastness lost them the right to be called by these dainty names.

A feeling of sadness, of loss, of betrayal came upon Kersi as he descended the stairs. Each wooden step, with the passage of years and the weight of tenants, was worn to concavity, and Kersi felt as worn as this wood.

Francis was back in the hallway, but Kersi did not notice him. It disappointed Francis, for Kersi usually stopped to chat. Kersi got on well with all the servants in the building, especially Francis. Kersi's father had taught Kersi to play cricket, but Francis had instructed Kersi in kite-flying. With a kite and string bought with the 50 paise he had earned for carrying Jerbanoo's quota of rice and sugar from the rationing depot, and with the air of a mentor, Francis had taught Kersi everything he knew about kites. But the time they spent together was anathema to Kersi's parents. They had looked distastefully on their son's growing friendship with Francis, and the neighbours also said that it was not proper for a Parsi boy to consort in this way with a man who was really no better than a homeless beggar, and who would have starved had it not been for their thoughtfulness in providing him with odd jobs. No good would come of it, they said.

But when the kite-flying season of high winds had passed, Kersi and Francis started spinning tops and shooting marbles, which, too, were activities not considered appro-

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priate for a Parsi boy.

AT 6.30, Tehmina went to Jerbanoo's flat for two ice cubes; she'd just poured herself two fingers of scotch. The street lamps had now come on, but hardly any of their light illuminated the hallway. She saw a figure at the far end, and wondered who it could be. Her heart racing a little, she called out, as authoritatively as she could, "Who is it? What do you want?"

The answer came: "It's only Francis."

The familiar voice gave Tehmina courage, and she prepared to scold him: "Did I not tell you this morning not to loiter in this passage? Did I not say that we would call you if we had work for you? Did I not tell you that Jerbanoo would not be back till very late? Tell me then, you rascal, what are you doing here?"

Francis was hungry. He had not eaten for two days now, and had been hoping to earn something for dinner tonight. Instead, Jerbanoo had gone away and there was nothing for him, neither work nor food. He did not feel he could tolerate Tehmina for much longer. "I came to see if Jerbanoo had arrived," he replied sullenly, and turned to go. But Tehmina suddenly changed her mind: "Wait here for me while I get my ice." She remembered that she would need his help to lock the door in that darkened hallway.

Inside, Tehmina decided it was best not to push Francis too far; one never knew when this type of person would turn vicious. If he wanted to, he could knock her down right now, ransack Jerbanoo's flat, and disappear completely. She shuddered at these thoughts, then composed herself and stepped out briskly.

"Come, Francis," she said cheerfully, "help me lock this door. I will tell Jerbanoo that you will come back tomorrow for whatever it is she wants you to do." Tehmina held the ring of keys out to him, and slowly, deliberately, Francis reached for them. He stooped over the locks, and Tehmina was thankful she'd asked him to wait. "If it takes him so long, I could never do it in this darkness," she thought, as he handed the keys back to her.

Silloo downstairs heard the door slam when Tehmina returned to her own flat. The boys would soon be home. Their father was home already. It was time to start dinner. Silloo rose and went to the kitchen.

JERBANOO STEPPED OFF the train and stood for a moment on the platform. She gathered together her belongings; umbrella, purse, a shopping-bag containing leftovers, and cardigan, and debated whether to step into the taxi waiting in the night or walk. The station clock showed 9.30, and she resolved to walk. Even if it took her 15 minutes instead of the usual 10, she would still be early enough to stop at the Bharuchas' before they went to bed. Besides, the walk would be healthy for her, and help her digest her sister's *Papeta-Noo-Gos* and *Dhandar-Patiyo*. With any luck, tonight would be a night unencumbered by the pre-

ssure of gas upon her gut.

The moon was full, the night was cool, and Jerbanoo enjoyed her little walk. But she was glad when it was over. Breathing a little rapidly, she rang the Bharucha doorbell.

"Hullo, hullo — oh how nice to see the whole family sitting and reading," said Jerbanoo genially, as Silloo opened the door. "I just wanted to pick up today's paper — only if you've finished with it."

"Oh, yes," said Silloo, "I made everyone read it early so you could have it tonight."

"This is very sweet of you," said Jerbanoo, raising her arm so Silloo could tuck the paper under it. Then, as Silloo reached for the flashlight, Jerbanoo protested, "No, no, the stairs won't be dark, there's a full moon tonight."

Lighting Jerbanoo's way up the stairs at night was one of the many things Silloo did for her neighbour. Silloo knew that if Jerbanoo ever stumbled in the dark and fell down the stairs, her broken bones would be a problem for the Bharuchas. It was simpler to shine the flashlight and see her safely to the landing.

"Goodnight all," said Jerbanoo and started up. Silloo waited; the flashlight picked up the laborious swaying of Jerbanoo's huge buttocks, like a spotlight in some grotesque cabaret. She reached the top of the stairs, out of breath, thanked Silloo again, and disappeared. Silloo restored the flashlight to its niche by the door.

The sounds of Jerbanoo's preparations for bed and sleep now started to drip into the Bharucha flat, as relentlessly as a leaky tap. A cupboard slammed . . . the easychair in the bedroom, next to the window during the day, was dragged over beside the bed . . . footsteps led to the extremities of the flat . . . after a suitable interval, the flush . . . then, the sound of water again, this time not torrential but steady, gentle, from a tap . . . footsteps again . . .

The series of familiar sounds was torn out of sequence by Jerbanoo's frantic cries: "Help! Oh quickly! Thief!"

Silloo and Kersi were the first to reach the door, and were outside in time to see Francis vanishing in the direction of Tar Gully. Jerbanoo, puffing, stood at the top of the stairs. "He was hiding behind the kitchen door," she gasped. "The front door — Tehmina, as usual —"

The best that Silloo could offer right now was indignation: "I don't know why, with her bad eyes, that woman must mess around with your keys. What did he steal?"

"I must look in my cupboard," Jerbanoo panted. "That rascal of a loafer will have run far already."

Anxiously sucking at her cloves and looking very guilty, Tehmina now shuffled out. She had heard everything from behind her door, but asked anyway, "What happened? Who was screaming?"

Kersi decided to leave this fluster and go indoors. He sat down on his bed and carefully cracked the fingers of both hands. Each finger twice, expertly, once at the knuckle, then at the joint closest to the nail; he could also crack his toes, each toe just once, though; but he did not

feel like it right now. He inspected his hand. Don't crack your fingers, they used to tell him, your hands will become fat and ugly. For a while then he had cracked his knuckles more fervently and furiously than ever, hoping his hands would swell, so that he could possess a fist the size of a face. Such a fist would be useful to scare people off in a fight. But the hands had remained quite normal.

Kersi picked up his bat. The cord was doing well and the glue was dry, so he slipped the rubber grip back over the handle. He posed before the mirror and flourished the bat, satisfied with his repair work. He sat down on the bed again, thinking. When he thought of Francis, he felt angry and let down. His anger, coupled with the emptiness of this Sunday, which, like a promise unfulfilled, had primed him many hours ago, now made him succumb to the flush of heroics that started to sweep through him. Picking up his bat, he glanced at himself in the mirror again and went outside.

A small crowd of neighbours and their servants had gathered around Jerbanoo, Silloo and Tehmina. "I'm going to find him," Kersi announced grimly to this group.

"What rubbish are you talking?" his mother exclaimed. "In Tar Gully, alone at night?"

"Oh, what a brave boy!" cried Jerbanoo. "But maybe we should call the police." Tehmina, by this time, was muttering *non sequiturs* about ice cubes and scotch-and-soda.

"I'm going to find him," Kersi repeated.

This time Silloo said, "Your brother must also go with you; alone you'll be no match for that rascal. Minoo! Bring the other bat and go with your brother." Obediently, Minoo joined his brother, and they set off in the direction of Tar Gully, with their mother shouting instructions after them: "Be careful, for God's sake! Stay together, and don't go too far if you cannot find him."

In Tar Gully, the two drew a few curious glances, as they strode along with cricket bats. But the hour was late, and there were not many people around. Those who were, waited only for the latest *matka* figures to decide their financial destinies. Some of these men now hooted at Kersi and Minoo: "*Bawaji!* Cricket at night? *Bawaji!* What will you hit, boundary or sixer?" Ignoring them to perfection as though it were a well-rehearsed plan, Kersi and Minoo walked on. Minoo let his bat drag along, but Kersi rested his on his shoulder, to keep the puddles created by the overflowing gutters of Tar Gully from wetting it.

"It's funny," thought Kersi, "just this morning I did not see any gutter spilling over when I went to the *bania* for salt." Now they were all in full spate. The gutters of Tar Gully had gained a notoriety for their erratic behaviour and their stench, although the stench was never noticed by the denizens.

The *bania's* shop was now closed for regular business, but a small window was still open. The *bania*, in the role of bookie, was accepting last-minute *matka* bets through this open window.

There was still no sign of Francis, as Kersi and Minoo approached the first of the tenements, with the familiar cow tethered outside. It was the only cow in the neighbourhood; it made the rounds of these streets every morning, accompanied by the owner's comely daughter and a basket of cut green grass. Pious people would reverentially feed the cow, buying grass at 25 paise a mouthful. When the basket was empty, the cow would be led back to Tar Gully.

Kersi remembered one early morning, when the daughter was milking the cow, and a young man was standing behind her seated figure. He was bending over the girl, squeezing her breasts with both hands, while she was doing her best to work the cow's udder. Neither of them had noticed Kersi as he hurried past. Now, as Kersi recalled the scene, he thought of Jerbanoo's daughters, the rat in the bedroom, Vera's near-nude body, his dispossessed fantasy, and once again felt cheated, betrayed.

It was Minoo who first spotted Francis and pointed him out to Kersi. It was also Minoo who yelled "Stop thief!" and galvanised the waiting *matka* patrons into action.

Francis never had a chance. Three men in the distance heard the uproar, and tripped him as he ran past. Without any delay, they started to punch him. One of them tried out a clumsy version of a drop-kick; but it did not work too well, so he returned to punching. In a few moments, the others caught up, and began pounding Francis. The ritualistic cry of "Stop thief" had rendered him fair game in



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Tar Gully, but Kersi was horrified. This was not the way he wanted it to end. He watched in terror as Francis was slapped and kicked, had his hair pulled and his arms twisted, and was abused and spat upon.

It was Minoo who shouted out, "Stop! No more beating! We must take him back to the *bai* from whom he stole. She will decide!" It was a small crowd, and the notion of delivering the criminal to the scene of his crime and to his victim appealed to it. Now Kersi managed to shake off his numbness, and following Minoo's example, grabbed Francis by the arm and collar, as if to say he was their captive, no longer to be bashed around. In this manner they led Francis back to Jerbanoo, past the tethered cow, past the *bania's* shop, past the overflowing gutters of Tar Gully. Every once in a while, someone would punch Francis in the small of his back or on his head, and Minoo would remind the crowd of the *bai* who had been robbed, whereupon the procession would resume in an orderly way.

A crowd was waiting at the building. More neighbours had gathered, including the solitary Muslim tenant and his Muslim servant; both had a long-standing grudge against Francis over some incident with a prostitute, and they were pleased at his predicament.

Francis was brought before Jerbanoo. He was in tears, and his knees buckled. "Why, Francis?" asked Jerbanoo, "Why?"

Suddenly, a neighbour stepped out of the crowd and slapped Francis hard across the face: "You have no shame? You eat her food; you earn money because of her. Then you steal from her, you rascal?"

At the slap, the gathering started to move in for a fresh round of thrashing, but Jerbanoo screamed and the crowd stopped. Francis threw himself at her feet, weeping. "*Bai*," he begged, "you hit me, you kick me, do whatever you want to me. But please don't let them, please!"

While Francis knelt before Jerbanoo, the Muslim servant saw his chance and moved swiftly. He swung his leg and kicked Francis powerfully in the ribs, before the others could pull him away. Francis yelped like a dog and keeled over.

JERBANOO was formally expressing her gratitude to Silloo: "How brave your two sons are. If they had not gone after that rogue, I would never have seen my 80 rupees again. Say thanks to Kersi and Minoo, God bless them, two such fine boys."

By this time, the crowd had dispersed, but Tehmina was chatting with the Muslim neighbour. He had few friends in this building, and he now tried to ingratiate himself with Tehmina. By the light of the full moon, he sympathised with her version of the episode. "Jerbanoo knows my eyes are useless, yet she wants me to keep her keys, use her fridge, look after her flat," complained Tehmina. Her clothes ventured to her lips, agitated, but she expertly sucked them back in. "How was I to know what Francis would do when I asked him to lock the door? If only I could have seen his

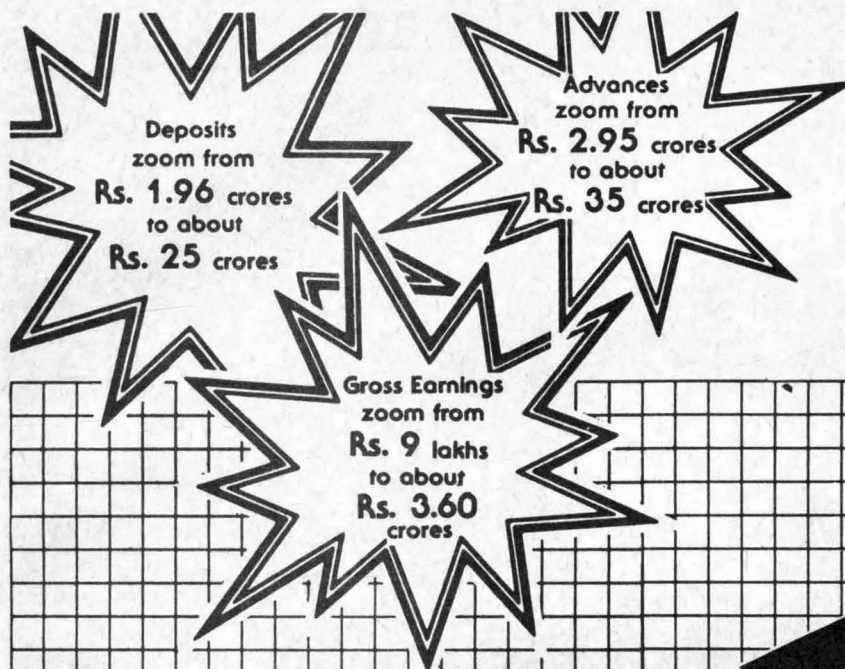
eyes. It is always so dark in this hallway."

Back in her flat, Jerbanoo chuckled as she pictured the two boys returning with Francis: "How silly they looked. Imagine going after poor Francis with their big bats. I wonder what the police will do with him now." She went into the kitchen. A smell of ammonia was in the air. She sniffed around and found a pool of yellowish liquid where Francis had been hiding behind the kitchen door. She bent down, puzzled, and sniffed again, then realised he had lost control of his bladder and urinated when she'd screamed.

Jerbanoo mopped and cleaned up the kitchen, planning to tell Silloo tomorrow of her discovery. She would also have to ask Silloo to find somebody to bring the rations next week. Finished in the kitchen, Jerbanoo went to her bedroom, lowered her weight into the easychair, and picked up the Bharuchas' Sunday newspaper.

KERSI was in the bathroom. He felt like throwing up, but after retching without success, returned to the bedroom. He took up his bat, pulled off the rubber grip, and slowly, meditatively, started tearing the cord from the handle, which only that morning he had repaired with glue. When all the cord had been removed, the handle looked bald, vulnerable, naked. Kersi had never before seen his cricket bat in this weak, almost foetal state. He stood up, grasped the handle with both hands, rested the blade at an angle to the floor, and smashed his foot down upon it. With a tremendous crack the handle snapped. ♦





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BEJAN DARUWALLA'S PREDICTIONS



ARIES: March 21 to April 20: Mercury conjuncts Jupiter and this indicates a busy time ahead. You will launch a new venture and may undertake a business trip. April is a good month for starting a new assignment. Partnerships and journeys are foretold around the middle of April. After the 21st, you will devote your time to augmenting the family income.



TAURUS: April 21 to May 21: Expenses will soar this month but it will be for a good cause. Travel is one of the salient features of the month and you will have business collaborations with a person living in a distant place. On the personal front, you will be lonely and in an introspective mood. The spotlight is on secret deals. The New Moon on March 29 makes you intuitive.



GEMINI: May 22 to June 21: This is a lucky phase and you will sign a major deal or receive an award. You will also receive public acclaim. A Sun-Uranus trine helps you to win friends and influence people. Success will crown your efforts. Friends will stand by you and rivals will be in awe of you. A journey undertaken around the 22nd should turn out to your advantage.



CANCER: June 22 to July 22: The influence of the first quarter of the Moon in your sign brings about a surge of activities on the professional and personal fronts. You will work with vigour and important policy decisions will be taken now. It's the right time to initiate a new enterprise. Old projects will also gather momentum. You will have to coordinate several loose ends. After the 21st, you will enjoy yourself.



LEO: July 23 to August 23: You will work hard and make a great deal of progress. A Sun-Saturn trine will help Leos to consolidate their financial position. Make the best of this lucky phase. Let your intuition guide you. Salesmen, editors, teachers, film stars and those in advertising will win plaudits. Contracts and important documents will be signed in mid-April.



VIRGO: August 24 to September 23: There are two trends in operation: till the 14th the focus is on partnerships and thereafter, matters related to a legacy and finance in general, will be of paramount importance. Therefore, it is a good month for industrialists, brokers and those engaged in commerce. Important documents will be signed. Pressures at work will increase.



LIBRA: September 24 to October 23: The Full Moon is in your sign and this helps you to reach out to people and places. Alliances on the professional front seem probable and a trip in this connection is indicated. Jupiter is well-placed and an engagement and subsequent marriage are indicated between March 21, 1987 and 1988. Children will be a source of joy.



SCORPIO: October 24 to November 22: A Mercury-Saturn-Uranus trine indicates a possible change of job or a promotion. This lucky trend starts from April. Subordinates and colleagues will help you in your career. Loans will be available for an enterprise since your ruling planet Mars moves from its present sign. Intimate ties are foretold. You will get interested in religious matters and subject yourself to soul-searching.



SAGITTARIUS: November 23 to December 21: The New Moon on March 29 ushers in a hectic phase for Sagittarians. This is a favourable period for investing in shares. Your spouse and children will bring you a lot of joy. Hobbies and creative pursuits will keep you occupied. It's the right time for important decisions. You will have an edge over your rivals this month.



CAPRICORN: December 22 to January 20: Mercury sextiles Mars and the emphasis is on home and personal matters. Renovations at home will keep you busy. Sudden financial gains from buying and selling are not ruled out. Parents and other elders will play an important part in your life. Architects, industrialists, artists and editors will think of new projects. Health is, however, suspect.



AQUARIUS: January 21 to February 18: The Full Moon helps Aquarians to communicate with skill and imagination. You will clinch deals or bag an assignment. April is a key month for Aquarians. Scientists, inventors and astrologers will win plaudits. If you have been feeling low, this is the time to return to form. The prospects of making a comeback are bright. Your advice will be sought.



PISCES: February 19 to March 20: You are under the influence of the first quarter of the Moon and this prompts Pisceans into buying, selling, investing and shopping. The home is under favourable planetary influences. As Mercury-Venus also influence your sign, travel, trade, negotiations and settlements are predicted for you. Channelise your activities and you are bound to be successful. Businessmen will do well. ♦

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