

May 1987 Rs 6

imprint



THE IRON MAN

DOM MORAES talks to JYOTI BASU.

Also:
Geising:
The God Of
Gorkhaland

Sunil Dutt:
The Man
With A Mission

Amitabh Bachchan:
An MP In Real Life

Sisim — Profile Of A Fearless Cop



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GROTESQUE

MR SATISH SHARMA, a former airline pilot and a buddy of Mr Rajiv Gandhi is a member of the Rajya Sabha. He is there because he is a buddy of Mr Gandhi. Mr Amitabh Bachchan, a film star, and a buddy of Mr Rajiv Gandhi, is a member of the Lok Sabha. He was given a ticket to contest the 1984 general elections from Allahabad as a candidate of Mr Gandhi's party — the Congress (I) — because he is a buddy of Mr Gandhi. Mr Ajitabh Bachchan, a businessman, and the brother of Amitabh Bachchan, is a friend of Mr Gandhi. His name appears in the press and has been mentioned in the Parliament, not in complimentary terms but in circumstances of suspicion of fiscal wrongdoing. A New Delhi newspaper has published a photograph of a swimming pool under construction at a farmhouse near Delhi. The swimming pool is being finished in Italian tiles. The tiles were imported the other day by air from Italy — all three tonnes of them. The consignee was Mr Satish Sharma's wife.

The Illustrated Weekly Of India has recently carried an interview with Amitabh and Ajitabh Bachchan. Mr Amitabh Bachchan lives in homes in Bombay and New Delhi. His children are studying in Switzerland. Ajitabh says he works and lives in Switzerland. His children are also studying there. Pritish Nandy, the editor of the *Weekly*, questioned Ajitabh about his work and his stay in Switzerland. At best the answers are confusing, and contradictory. To anyone who knows even a little about Swiss labour and residence regulations, some of what Ajitabh has told the *Weekly* is not the truth.

Until recently, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, was driving a Mercedes-Benz. This Mercedes-Benz is a gift from King Hussain of Jordan. The Prime Minister is now also driving a Range Rover station wagon. This car is also a gift from Hussain, whose tiny kingdom is not a particularly wealthy state. Yet, Mr Gandhi has accepted two expensive gifts from Jordan. Newspaper reports say that the Bachchan brothers and Mr Satish Sharma are Mr Gandhi's close friends. Mr Gandhi is entitled to them. But the newspapers also say these are the Prime Minister's close advisors. The newspaper reports have not been denied, challenged or sought to be corrected.

So we have a Prime Minister who accepts gifts of expensive cars from a state with which we have just ordinary relations; the Prime Minister has one buddy as an advisor who deems it necessary to import tiles for his swimming pool from Italy; he has another buddy who has his children studying in Switzerland, and yet another who too has his children studying there, and claims he works and lives in that country. The people of India are bewildered. Then you read in the papers that half the country is in a condition of severe drought for months. Large parts of the country are without power at frequent intervals. Then you see pictures in *The Times Of India* of starving men in Orissa, one of whom, according to the paper, dies of starvation within days of the photograph being taken.

And you wonder. You wonder if all this is in our stars.

*

I AM BEGINNING TO BELIEVE that beating of breasts is our favourite pastime. Why else do we tread into situations of our own making which we eventually rue? There is much beating of breasts all over the country at what is generally perceived to be a let down by Mr Rajiv Gandhi. On a smaller scale, some 2.8 million investors in Reliance Industries Ltd are howling that Reliance has let them down with poor 1986 working results, just published. I do not want to rub salt in your wounds but it is in the public interest to point out that not all of us are lacking in wisdom. I wish to recall what this writer had said long ago about Reliance and about Mr Gandhi: "...add to them the 'star' treatment he is receiving in the media everywhere, the you-can-trust-me image that is rapidly spreading, a beautiful wife and two lovely children, and watch out folks, and watch out Mr Gandhi, a romance is in the making. In this condition we are liable to be starry-eyed; where Mr Gandhi can do no wrong; where 'given time Mr Gandhi will deliver the goods' — no matter how little we citizens contribute to that effort. In no time at all, Mr Gandhi will not only be our hope but our God. He will be hung on walls in shops and homes next to Lord Krishna. There is just this danger then that from that height he may not be too concerned with our worldly problems. . ." — R V Pandit in *On The Marquee*, Imprint, February 1985.

"...there is no way Reliance Industries Ltd can repeat the profit generation of the past which had little connection with what they produced. Based on current operations, Reliance, at best, will be able to perform as other normal operations do. The shareholders of the company will realise this in the current fiscal year itself. . ." — R V Pandit in *Only Ambani*, Imprint, July 1986.

"... In fact, on current operations the (Reliance) share is worth only Rs 120, a little more than twice the current asset value per share." — R V Pandit in *Cancer Of Cleverness*, Imprint, August 1986. ♦



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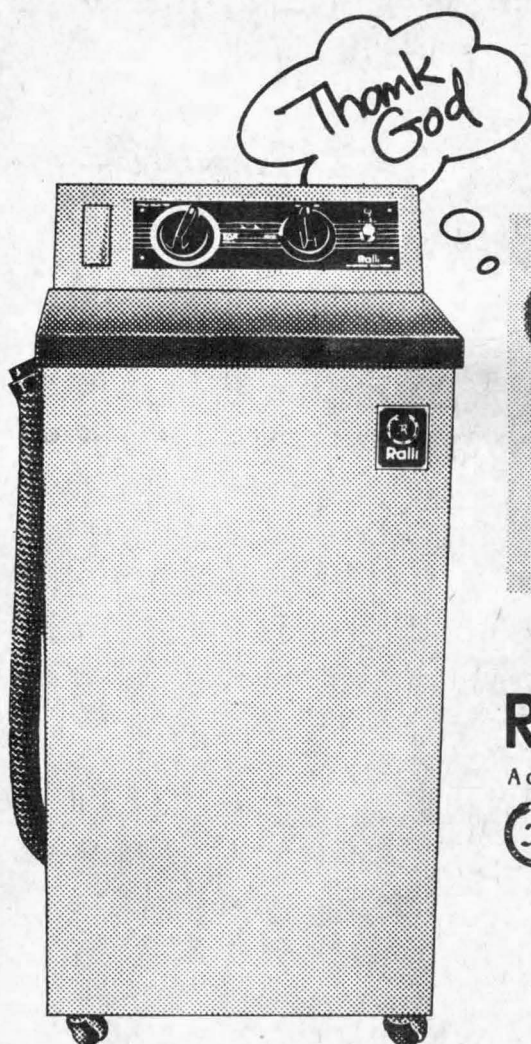
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6 COVER STORY: Jyoti Basu's recent election victory was a definitive one over Rajiv Gandhi, who had personally campaigned in the state. DOM MORAES talks to the popular Chief Minister against the backdrop of Calcutta: 'Basu City', now with its metro, its unemployment, and its always animated poets.



16 PACES TOWARDS PEACE: Sunil Dutt's courageous *padayatra* from Bombay to Amritsar, in the face of sweltering heat and hostility, has proved the power of a man committed to peace. MINNIE VAID-FERA puts together this first person account upon Dutt's return from walking a trail all his own.

36 DOES IT KEEP YOU 'POSTED': Bombay's newest newspaper, *The Indian Post*, launched last month with aggressive advertising, has proved disappointing, says HARISH MEHTA.

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23 GUARDIAN OF GORKHALAND: Subhas Geising believes he is the saviour of the Gorkhas. His agitation for a separate state for them took the form of a six-day strike recently. DOM MORAES, who was in Darjeeling during the strike, met this novelist in search of a separate identity for his people.



28 AMITABH IN ALLAHABAD: Amitabh Bachchan has been continually in the limelight in the recent past — the Fairfax imbroglio, his brother's Swiss deals, and the exit of V P Singh have raised several questions. But what has the MP done for his constituency? SHIRIN MEHTA reports from Allahabad.

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LETTERS

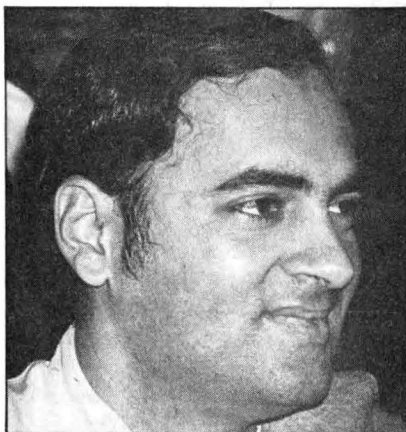


Convenient Amnesia

Harish Mehta's article *The Forgotten Refugees* (April 1987) was thought-provoking. It is indeed sad that the Pakistani refugees in Jammu, even after 40 long years, have been denied their fundamental rights. The fact that the successive governments in the state as well as at the Centre have turned a deaf ear to their problems shows our politicians' callousness towards these refugees, who constitute nearly 8 per cent of the total population of Jammu and Kashmir. Moreover, the matter is compounded by a peculiar provision for citizenship in the state's Constitution owing to which even the Supreme Court has been unable to intervene.

The need of the hour is to launch a crusade for human rights. Organisations like the PUCL and PUDR can help restore to these victims of partition their fundamental rights. The state government should be forced to make suitable amendments in its Constitution so that these people and their children can lead a protected and dignified life like other citizens of the state. Such a crusade is all the more necessary as the present government seems disinclined to amend the laws for fear of the repercussions this may have on the balance of power in the state. Apart from the political implications of granting the refugees citizenship, the human dimensions of the problem cannot be ignored.

Onkar Singh
New Delhi



Can We Survive?

The so-called firestorm (Cover Story, April 1987) is just a storm in a tea-cup. Rajiv Gandhi will surely remain the Prime Minister of India for a long time to come. Though he has made irresponsible statements, the frequent cabinet reshuffles indicate a clever move to squash any threats to his position. This is evident from the removal of Kamalapati Tripathi, Pranab Mukherjee, Arun Nehru, and now V P Singh. He has also tried to eclipse the political futures of people like Arjun Singh, P C Sethi and A K Sharma. But this is again a concerted effort to entrench himself firmly.

When Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister, people hoped that he would weed out corruption but he seems to be strengthening the positions of those close to him.

His strained relationship with the President has also not brought him much credit but this does not faze him as long as he is enthroned in the seat of power.

Panna Lall Mundhra
Calcutta

Decline Of Ethics

R V Pandit has rightly said (*On The Marquee*, April 1987) that nobody would believe that we as a nation want a clean administration or that we deserve one. The problem is not who has swindled money or how much has been swindled but the fact that corruption has penetrated to the

highest level without any regard for decency, ethics and morality. The shifting of V P Singh, Brahm Dutt's lie on the floor of Parliament and Rajiv's untruths proclaim that *Satya-meva Jayate* is a motto of the past.

Only in our country can politicians lie, mislead the people, embezzle money into Swiss accounts and still go scot free. The nation is not for the Amitabhs and the Ambanis. There is a growing trend among Congressmen to confuse the interests of the party with those of the government and the nation. Branding the Opposition as rightists or leftists and blaming the press for doing its job, clearly indicate that the ruling party is insecure and afraid of losing power.

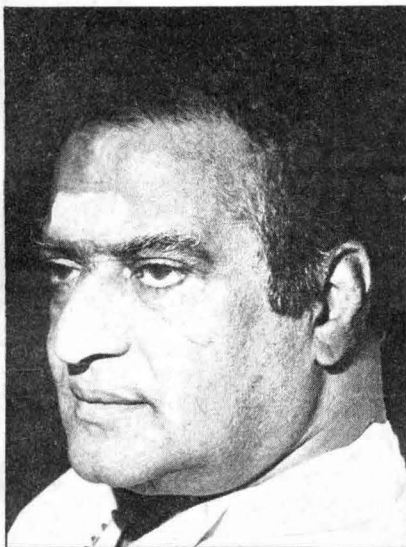
S A Srinivasa Sharma
Bombay

R V Pandit's editorial, *How V P Singh Was Scuttled* was excellent. The two letters (forged or otherwise) printed in the article throw a good deal of light on the Fairfax episode which resulted in the scuttling of a very able finance minister, V P Singh.

The writer must have done an in-depth interview of an invisible man, who knows virtually everything about an affair that has put Mr Gandhi in a tight spot. The editorial moves from clue to clue, unfolding much of the inside story about Fairfax.

Regardless of who is involved in the Fairfax inquiry or the Bofors arms deal, one thing stands out clearly. And that is: there are many shady characters (both in top business and politics) who are doing a great deal of damage to the country. They are harming the very fibre of a nation which is still struggling to come up. The writer is right when he says that what we have to fear are not always the forces beyond our borders, but the forces within. And no nation survives unless it has firmly eliminated these harmful elements that have a say in the decision-making processes of the country. The editorial has done a great service to readers.

Naresh Umrigar
Bardoli



The Celluloid Mirage

The special feature, *Superstars Of The South* (April 1987) on MGR and NTR was right on the mark. It is time we broke the celluloid myths. Both politicians are psychological curiosities — MGR being amazing and NTR amusing.

MGR's much publicised midday meal scheme has done nothing but turn students into gluttons and beggars and teachers into cooks and crooks. This scheme has further created a new class of embezzlers. If MGR suffers from intellectual paralysis, NTR has lost his sense of discretion. Both rely on the sympathy of the illiterate classes and the uneducated women-folk. Of late, MGR has been wreaking havoc with public money, increasing pensions and salaries, among other forms of expenditure. The Centre will only help so long as the AIADMK is in power.

NTR is a man of acute likes and dislikes. He is a political somnambulist without any knowledge of economics or logic. Both NTR and MGR are products of luck, both possess the dexterity to hoodwink the masses. The greatest bane of democracy is that it creates more buffoons and asks the people — the intelligentsia — to put up with them.

U S Iyer
Calcutta

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A STANCE



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Jyoti Basu is the only communist leader in India to have survived three elections. When Mr Rajiv Gandhi recently went to Bengal to campaign for the Congress (I), Mr Basu destroyed the opposition party at the polls. **DOM MORAES** flew into Calcutta to look not only at the city but the political leader who runs it, who has an individual stance, from which he has not flinched for 10 years.

IN THE EAST



COMING DOWN on Calcutta, through rain and haze, I thought of the previous times I had visited the city. In 1949, as a boy of 11, I bumped in on a Dakota from Burma, escorted by a fond father. Calcutta so far as I recollect was then rather beautiful, with parks and trees and a flowing river, and shops full of cakes, and restaurants, and people in dhotis speaking a language never mine. In 1959 I returned escorted by a fond if blind friend, the writer Ved Mehta, and then I encountered the latest aspect of the city. It was falling into exceptional decrepitude, governmental rule was very corrupt, transport didn't work apart from taxis, students rioted as a kind of serious recreation, the Hooghly had become one of the filthiest rivers in the world, and thousands were dying in the streets. This had also been true in 1949, and long before 1949. There had been the great Bengal famine of the 1940s, when people wanted rice, and not the wheat shipped in by the British, and ate bark and earth, and died.

They died in such numbers and in such misery, peasants coming in from the countryside to which they would never return, peering in through the windows of restaurants where wounded British officers and breasty Bengali society ladies were eating chicken sandwiches and cakes adorned with strawberries and cream, breaking these windows and dying on the floors of these places and on the streets of the cruellest city in the

world, that Marie Antoinette's words could be recalled, when she said of the French peasantry of the time immediately preceding the 1789 revolution: "If they can't eat bread, let them eat cake." Through this hellhole passed hundreds of young, liberal, British officers, on their way to death in Burma and in the passes of Assam, and of Imphal. Three or four of these hundreds were poets, who celebrated, if that is the correct word, the city. Rudyard Kipling had done so before them, saying not only what these young Britons said a half century later, but what Bengali writers were saying.

In 1959, back in Calcutta as an adult of sorts, I met some of these writers. I had met Sudhindranath Datta in London, Humayun Kabir in Delhi with my father. Buddhadeva Bose, Samar Sen, and others, I met in the teeming city, though to my sorrow I never met Jibanananda Das, the greatest of them all, greater even, I think, than Tagore. He, tall, white-bearded, and apparently with a very highpitched and squeaky voice, seems to have modelled his personal appearance on that of Lord Alfred Tennyson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, professional bards as he was. They also squeaked when they spoke. Once you have listened to Tagore's poems read in Bengali, you know he is a great poet. Like Tennyson if not Longfellow, he was a master of sound effects. But he never wrote, really, about the poverty he saw around him, the starvation and deprivation of Bengal. There is a sweetshop which he habitually patronised, sending his servants to buy huge quantities of delicacies. This is now near a place called Nirmal Hriday.

Nirmal Hriday is a sort of hospice run by Mother Teresa, where people dying on the streets are brought in to beds, food, and medicine, so that their deaths can be achieved with a certain dignity. Though I deeply disapprove of much that Mother Teresa does, such as propagating the rhythm method of contraception, thus setting the whole family planning programme

COVER STORY

back by years, underpaying her field workers, many of whom have large families to support, under the impression that they are like her, and accepting peace prizes from arms manufacturers, she is probably the nearest thing to a saint I have met, or that one has around today. I didn't meet her in 1960, which was my third visit to Calcutta, now even worse than in the previous year. I met her in 1968 or 1969, when things were much worse, even than eight years before. The dead were then stacked up in the streets, waiting for vans to collect them. The living were hardly alive, except those who were rich. The Naxalites had started killing.

This endless procession of the dead, the dying, and the not quite

living flowed past me every time I came to Calcutta. In 1947, two years before my first visit there, some of the most horrifying communal carnage in history occurred in the city. Ninety years before, there had been the Black Hole episode, when British prisoners were locked into a small cell for the night. They suffocated to death, or at least 43 out of 64 did. This was never forgiven (understandably) by the British — the prisoners included young women and small children, not combatants. When the British retook the city, there was more slaughter. The whole history of Calcutta is based on death. The brilliant poets of the 1940s, all of whom were communists and some of whom I knew, wrote about hardly anything else.

What, I wondered in 1970, was going to happen to this place? What happened was a great deal more than I expected to happen. The people voted in a communist government. They also found a man called Jyoti Basu.

COMING OUT of the airport, I found wounded buses and taxis, itinerant policemen, and taxi-drivers awaiting the innocent. One of these offered to take me into the city for what I knew was twice the usual fare. I refused this offer, and got into an extremely battered vehicle which took me to my hotel in twice the time at half the charge. I didn't really see which option was better, but that is half the problem in Calcutta. Where are the options? For a starving state,



A concerted drive against squalor.

where are the options? You either have a corrupted Congress-I ruler, or you have an honest communist. The leftist tradition prevalent in the state inclines its voters towards the latter option. Tagore's time, the time of the wealthy liberal, is long gone. Shantiniketan, the university Tagore founded, isn't notable for great students. The sweetshop he patronised, or sent his servants to patronise on his behalf, is doing very well, thank you. It is now patronised by another kind of person, or their servants.

The first time I went there, it was with an exceptionally elegant Calcutta socialite, and my wife. The lady we were with bought enormous amounts of cheap chocolates at a corner stall, then a small number of sweets from Tagore's sweetshop. "You see," she said, "Mother wants to know we have spent money." We then went to Nirmal Hriday, where she distributed the chocolates. She didn't distribute the sweets, which she said were intended for her children. "If I eat them," she said, with eyes that twinkled in so mischievous a way as to be deliberate, the mischievous eyes of a wet Indian film star under an artificial waterfall, "I'll lose my figure. Which is — but you can guess?" Much of her figure was on display since she had on an abbreviated *choli* and hipster sari, but at that time of morning, with a hangover, and after watching her earning her own esteem by shoving cheap chocolates down the gullets of the dying, I was in no mood to estimate what size her bust or any other part of her was. She said, giggling, "Don't guess — it'll be so naughty. . . . Every month when we go to Paris we buy lace bras." With these kind of people, Jyoti Basu had to deal, and it must be said for him that he dealt with them in the most intelligent way possible.

He dealt with the wives by quelling them, in the sense that he, amongst all the communist rulers in the world, started to do business with their husbands. The deals made were large. Businessmen who had fled Calcutta once the Naxalites started their parti-

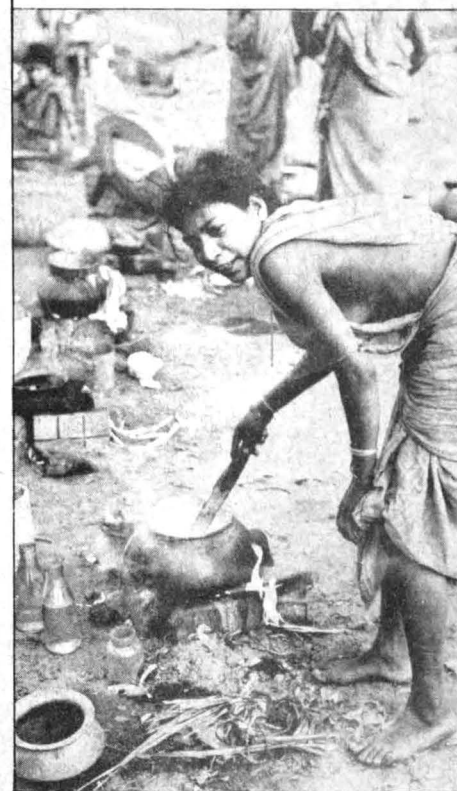
cular form of work returned. People now prefer to deal with Basu than with the Congress-I, packed with the cynical and corrupt. Calcutta may not look prosperous, but it is.

Its unprosperity is not demonstrated so much in those who sleep on the pavement, those who swell and die in Nirmal Hriday, or those who come into the city as Dick Whittington entered London, thinking the streets are paved with gold, and are very shortly disillusioned, but in the lives and deaths of the middle class. A Mrs Lovejoy, who inhabits a tenement in 13 Crematorium Street, is an example. She, when I met her, had an unemployed husband and six children, and was therefore fending for the family, or attempting to do so. She was a social worker for Mother Teresa, and was paid with a sackful of flour and some tins of condensed milk per month. Now it could be said that Mrs Lovejoy and her family were poor, but this would not precisely describe them. They were reasonably well educated, the children attended school, and they dressed in European clothes which, if not designed by Dior, set them a little apart from the unclad people starving in the streets. They had what they called 'standards'.

My wife and I once took the whole family to dinner at our hotel, and though none of them drank, I have never seen anybody get so drunk so fast, simply on food, to which they were totally unaccustomed. Had they not been Anglo Indian and Christian, I would imagine that they would have become Naxalite supporters. It was this kind of person whom Jyoti Basu initially set out to help. He restored relations with the rich, he made attempts to help the poor, but he aimed at first curing the disaffection of the middle class. This, to some extent, may have been the reason for the long and costly construction of the metro rail system, the only one of its kind in India. The bulging buses and teeming trams that carried the middle class to and from work were not only eyesores in a city which already had enough: they constituted the kind of



The glitterati: at the Turf Club.



Pavement dwellers on Russa road.

COVER STORY

inconvenience which not only damaged health but tempers. The Bengalis are sufficiently strident anyway: made to travel like this only aggravated an inherent violence.

The metro now extant has a rail stretch of about 16 km. Some 55,000 to 60,000 commuters ride it every day. This doesn't prevent the buses from bulging or the trams from faltering, sparks lifting into the sky. I travelled on the metro, for no purpose whatsoever except to see it, and I was amazed, after nearly 40 years' experience, on and off, of Calcutta, that it seemed to work. Travel is cheap, the stations are very clean and well maintained, and as in Mussolini's Italy, the trains are on time. There are 92 of them toing and froing every day. The length of the tracks are to be increased, and already they move tidily away, station by station, north-

ward and southward. But the whole thing was a very expensive proposition. One of the most remarkable facts about it, however, was that it was a purely Indian operation or almost so. Some of the equipment was acquired from the Soviets and East European countries, like the air-conditioners which keep the metro fairly cool.

But not very much was, and this was the principal achievement of Basu's metro. It has had its troubles. Power failures, congenital in Calcutta, have disrupted the service from time to time. The lines have been flooded, at one time for 2 1/2 days, because of faulty construction. Otherwise, not only do the trains perform well, but also the passengers. NO SMOKING, say various posters, and nobody smokes. NO SPITTING, say other posters, and passengers don't. Nobody

has disciplined the population of Calcutta in the streets, but in the metro they seem disciplined. Perhaps they are proud of it: they should be. I have travelled through subways in many parts of the world, and none, not even the one in Moscow, is as clean and efficient as this one. It is true that it is a tiny complex, but it works. Few other things in Calcutta, apart from Mr Basu, appear to do so. Apart from its mechanism, it works principally because of Mr Basu's mind, which is that of an intellectual.

A sign in the metro says, "The metro is yours, keep it clean." The citizens of Calcutta do. Various signs in Bombay say, "Bombay is yours, keep it clean." Nobody does. In my notebook on the day I went on the metro, I find a scribble saying: "Metro crowds: regimented or disciplined?" On reflection, I think they were



Calcutta's pride: the metro.

neither. They were simply proud of their metro. Basu had offered them something to be proud of. This does not erase the fact that 10 lakh of young people are unemployed in his state, and when the Prime Minister went campaigning there during the recent elections, he made a great point of this, saying that the Congress-I, if they came to power, would provide 10 lakh of employment slots. This seems to indicate that Mr Gandhi hadn't been properly briefed, since the various Congress parties have been promising all this to the people of Bengal in every election for many years. He was laughed at not only by Jyoti Basu but the entire population of Bengal.

I WAS GOING to meet Jyoti Basu, but it was not for the first time. In the meanwhile I wandered around

my previous haunts in Calcutta. One of these is the Olympia Restaurant, a place much frequented by writers. One of these writers, as utterly and simultaneously relaxed and angry as only Bengalis can be, said, "We would like a separate state." Astonished, having recently been to the Punjab and being on my way to meet Mr Subhas Geising, who was busily trying to create Gorkhaland, I said, "*Et tu, Brute?*" He said, "You see, we are not really Indians. We are more civilised and creative than other Indians. We have Tagore." He is a very good writer, but was not at that moment writing, since he had a fish finger dripping with ketchup in one hand and a very large glass of whisky in the other. I said, not without slight irritation, "Why does every Bengali I meet tell me he has Tagore? Does this mean that the whole Bengali assumption of

superiority revolves around Tagore?"

"No, no," he replied. "We have great writers besides Tagore. We have painters." Someone from the next table said, "We have Satyajit Ray. We have his son. We have Mrinal Sen. We have Ritwik Ghatak." Another, also listening intently to our conversation, an occupation prevalent in the Olympia, remarked, "We also have great footballers." Before I could remind him that most of these footballers were African, he added, "And great cricketers. Pankaj Roy, Probir Sen, Nirodhe Chowdhury, Dattu Phadkar and Subhash Gupte." The last two came from Bombay and played for Bengal because they had acquired excellent posts in Calcutta, but, not wishing to be attacked from all quarters, I didn't say so. It is a great joy for me to talk to Bengalis, because, silent by habit, I don't need to say



Youth Congress workers campaign for college elections.

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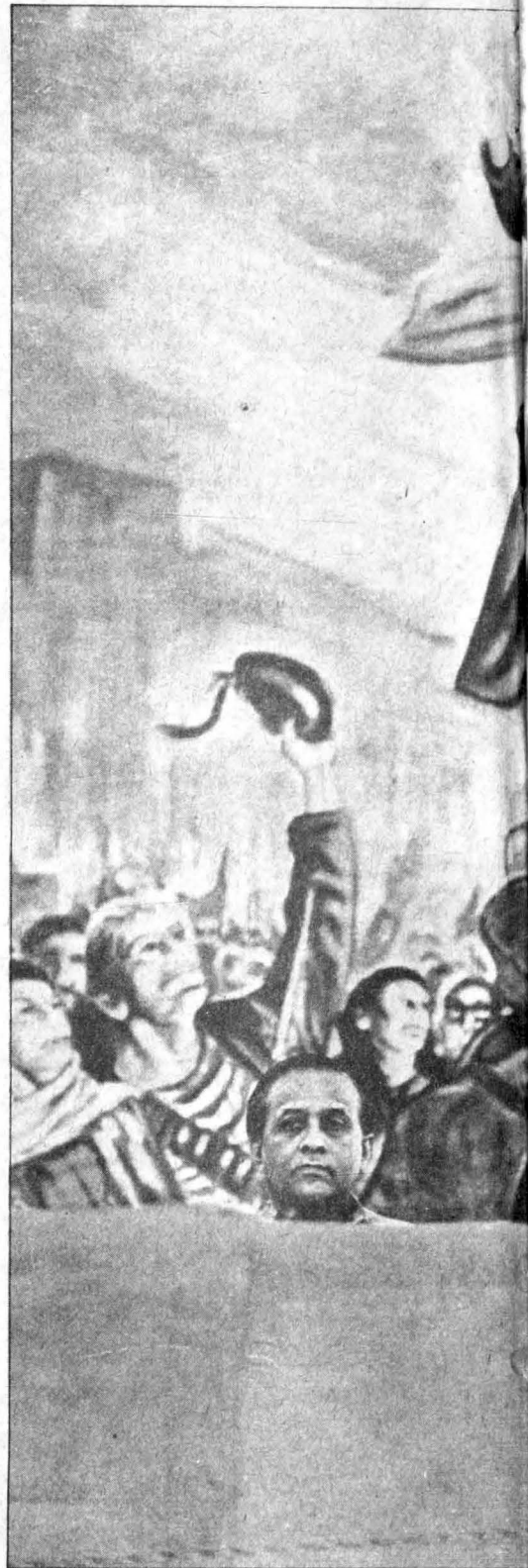
anything much myself. They do nearly all the talking, fast and certain. They cannot be contradicted. It is a wonder that they haven't turned out soldiers.

This particular conversation at the Olympia veered back eventually to the question of a separate state. By this time all the occupants of the neighbouring tables had come to ours. "We beat the Indians in the elections," a man said. "See you," (a term I had thought antiquated) "how did we beat them? Because we have our Jyoti Basu. All believe in he." I inquired if all believed in the metro. "It exists," was the most sensible reply. But they were all Bengalis and they all believed in another Bengali, not upstarts arriving from the north. Eventually, having established the warm friendship that Bengalis generally find with others (though they can, in the next moment, turn into terrible enemies), and lolling back on our chairs with fishbones, dal, lumps of rice, bits of pickle and spittle over the floor around us, *paan* by now being plentifully and scentedly spat, I said "If you want Bengal to be separate, why doesn't Mr Basu allow Gorkhaland?" "Because what Geising claims to be Gorkhaland is all Bangla territory," said an auditor, sounding rather like Churchill in his World War II speeches. "And we are Banglas, and we shall not yield an inch of our country to foreigners." These sentiments were echoed by other members of the now rapidly increasing group around our table. People were now talking very rapidly and with frenzied movements of the hands, and to an impartial onlooker, it might have seemed that they were going to lynch me. This kind of behaviour in Bengalis is, however, a sign of friendship. The atmosphere around the table was more and more fraternal. Someone began to quote a Bengali poet. I then quoted Jibanananda Das in English. Another of my new companions started to quote him in Bengali. This was the famous poem about Banalata Sen. It sounded even better when chanted by this person

than it was read to me very simply by Buddhadeva Bose nearly 30 years ago. Nowhere but in Calcutta could this have happened.

Nowhere but in Calcutta could something else have happened. I met Bharat Dev Varma or as he is popularly called, 'Habi', and his wife, the actress Moon Moon Sen, the daughter of Suchitra Sen, an actress still remembered in Bengal, their two charming children, and their enormous and highly vociferous boxer dog. My interview with Jyoti Basu still hung in the humid air. I was told he would grant me a great deal of time. When I interview people, I like to watch their faces and particularly their hands, since these tell much about them. If you are taking notes, your eyes are looking away from their hands and faces. If you use a taperecorder, the very aspect of it, and the fact that the interviewer has to continually fumble with it, which I constantly do, distracts them. My wife often takes notes for me, but she wasn't with me on this trip, and the cost of hiring a secretary for the day was colossal. Habi said, "Moon Moon knows how to take dictation. Take her with you."

I personally wondered if Jyoti Basu would welcome the arrival of an interviewer with a filmstar as a secretary. Then I reflected that my wife was also an actress. Since she had taken notes for me in the past, there seemed nothing wrong in my employing, or rather being done a favour by, another actress. I therefore told Mr Basu's PA that I would be accompanied by a secretary and a photographer. I did not specify the name of the secretary or the photographer. And with Habi and Moon Moon, I met two young film directors who talked earnestly about the future of Bengal under Jyoti Basu. Jyoti Basu is now 74, has been in power for a decade, and, I thought, possibly needed a rest. I was impressed by the force with which these people expressed their opinion that he shouldn't rest at all. Bengal seems to look upon Basu now as they still look upon Ta-



A grave Basu at an October Revolution



Anniversary celebration.

gore. Everyone I met the evening before meeting Basu seemed so enthusiastic about him that I thought I was meeting God.

THIS IMPRESSION continued as I went with Moon Moon Sen-Varma into the Writers' Building, bulky in red brick, his palace of power. My progress was much impeded by the people who wanted her autograph. Mrs Varma is a person of much power, because she is a Bengali in Bengal. When Jyoti Basu saw us enter, his eyes widened slightly in surprise, then in pleasure. He shook her hand, he shook mine, he shook that of the slightly nervous photographer. He had won the recent elections hands down, though Mr Rajiv Gandhi had campaigned there, in fact it was because Mr Gandhi had campaigned there that Mr Basu won with a surprising majority against an opponent who did not know who or what he was fighting. With Mrs Varma sitting on the floor between us, he explained his life, which is complex, and his policies, which are reasonably simple. He wants to supply the people with what they require. This is a hard task to perform, given the impossibility of funds to do it with.

Basu is a small man, but like a terrier, when he's in the right mood, fairly formidable. His office is not tremendously large, but gives an impression of space and is covered with maps. He appears to be rather tired, but then he had fought and won a campaign in his own state against the Prime Minister of the country. As he said to me, he had to fight rather harder than usual, but he also remarked that the behaviour of Mr Gandhi had helped him, because it was clear that Mr Gandhi didn't understand what he was doing. Mr Basu is an immobile man, in the sense that unlike most Bengalis he doesn't wave his hands around. At least not very much. He has had a heart attack and is possibly quietened by this. He is also perhaps quietened by the office he occupies and his sense of respon-

sibility to the people he rules over. He isn't exactly gentle but gives an impression of tremendous calm and control. If he wasn't excited by the Prime Minister's arrival to combat the election, he will not be excited by much else. He gave me a strong impression that he felt Geising was being used as a weapon by the government against him. He also gave me the impression that Geising was a rightist being used against leftists, and that a central government calling itself socialist shouldn't be using this weapon against him.

All through the interview he was peaceful, his hands folded in his lap, his face composed. He gave me the impression that he had gone through enough fighting to want to fight any more, though he would if he had to.

As I left the office, Basu, gentle but very taut, unsmiling, but pleasant, was beside me on one side. Moon Moon was on the other. I was reminded of a very pleasant set of verses by Hilaire Belloc which runs, "The moon on the one hand, the sun on the other. The moon is my sister, the sun is my brother."

The sun and son of Bengal faded behind me, while many people congregated around the moon, still asking for autographs. There was a beautiful violet sky in which the light was slowly fading. A star rose in that sky, and a star fell. Beyond the humped buildings lay Calcutta, horrible and still partially handsome. Beyond Calcutta lay Bengal. Beyond Bengal lay desolate and deserted India, not considered a motherland. What Basu has done to retrieve Bengal is beyond belief. What Rajiv Gandhi has done to destroy the areas lying beyond is also beyond belief. Moon Moon may not quite have understood what I felt, but inside this waste and wilderness exists the true India, buried within the hearts and minds of the people. I said to Moon Moon, "Let's go and pick Habi up." So we went and did so. Jyoti Basu stayed behind, no doubt, through the maps on his desk and walls, staring over his state.

"I Do Not See Any Party Unfit To Rule"

Jyoti Basu on his party, people and ideology.

Dom Moraes: In Indian politics there are few intellectuals. You are one of them, another is Mr Hegde. Why are most Indian political leaders so stupid?

Jyoti Basu: How can I answer? I don't consider myself an intellectual despite being more educated than some others. I'm happy to be considered an intellectual by you. I don't think others would consider me one. Hegde is intelligent and sincere — I can't comment on others. Nripen Chakravarty, former Chief Minister of Tripura is another. His has been a life of sacrifice.

Where were you educated?

During the late '20s and early '30s I was called to the Bar at the Middle Temple (in England). I have heard Harold Laski at the London School of Economics (LSE), but I was not really a student. By then, I was more involved in politics — anti-British politics. And because I was a Marxist, this aspect of me set me aside from the other Indian students. Those were stirring political times — after 1935. I also helped organise the Indian students in anti-British activities. I was a student and secretary of the London Majlis Federation. At that time, many Indian students were helping Krishna Menon's Indian League, several of whom were communist. I came into Marxism more through theoretical practice, I was not much of an activist.

There is a division in the words 'Marxism' and 'communism' today. What are the differences?

The objective of Marxism is ultimately to build a communist society. There's still a long way to go but it is our objective.

What is Marxism?

Equal opportunities and remuneration in proportion to an individual's work. The society we visualise is one in which each will be for the other, and there will be increased productivity.

But are people really likely to work like this?

Not at the moment. According to socialism, each is paid according to his work. But the difference in a communist society is that production will increase, and the quality of society will change for all. Everyone will be equal.

Rajiv Gandhi had also made similarly large promises when he chose to erect this image of himself as a pioneer. Did you believe him?

Rajiv Gandhi was voted into power because of the sympathy factor. The new promises he made disappeared soon, but the people were taken in. They were expecting something quite different. In the last 2 1/2 years, his budgets, his attitudes and all his speeches have kept changing. There have been several attempts by his party to stop the Left Front's progress in the state and this has done us great damage.

How much campaigning did you do in the recent elections?

I worked a little more than I should have since it was Rajiv Gandhi himself who had come to Calcutta. But in a sense, it was also easy because I had only to set myself against him. The Left Front simply had to fight him instead of the whole party. He kept promising all kinds of things — 10 lakh jobs, rice at Rs 2 per kg etc. Obviously he had not been properly informed by his advisors. They had been promising these things each time. But the people were not fooled.

Rajiv Gandhi may have behaved foolishly...

By now he should have picked up. Maybe he had no advisors, the facts and figures obtained by him were absurd. I didn't go to his meetings and conferences in Calcutta but learnt about them through the press.

Another issue that Rajiv Gandhi raised while campaigning was that the Bangladesh situation had worsened under your rule.

This is not true. The fortification in Bangladesh was not done by me. The road along the border is maintained by Bangladesh for reasons of security.

In the final analysis what do you think of Rajiv Gandhi?

My experience of him during the recent elections was bad. For two months he'd forgotten he was running a country. I told him that 'instead of your promising money, let our officers decide. Are you personally going to look into all this?'

How do you see the future of India under Rajiv Gandhi?

The Congress is not the only party. I do not see any party unfit to rule. The Janata rule failed, but given the circumstances in India in 1980, any party, anywhere, would have fallen.

What about Rajiv Gandhi's enumeration of Calcutta's problems, the loadshedding, the traffic congestion?

I have been working for the improvement of the power situation in Calcutta for the last 10 years. The condition of buses and trains is bad.

What difference has the metro made?

The metro is being kept clean and is running well. There are eight stations today, but we will have 16 more in the future. There is also river trans-

port, run both by the state and privately. This takes some load off public transport. As for new buses, unfortunately there's been no planning: there is an acute lack of finances to replenish the existing fleet. There are mini buses which relieve the load, as also the new routes we have chalked out to minimise congestion. But traffic is thus slowed down.

One reason for the traffic congestion is possibly overpopulation. In this respect, you as Chief Minister, and Mother Teresa, two of Calcutta's most popular heroic figures, hold differing views.

Yes, population is a perennial problem due to the continuing exodus of refugees from the neighbouring states of Bihar, East UP, Orissa. A Ford Foundation project did attempt to implement the idea of decentralisation by diverting capital from Calcutta, but it flopped because no one was interested. The centres for industrial growth are all situated outside Calcutta. The factories located in Calcutta are only old ones. Many are run illegally.

As for Mother Teresa, she is a Roman Catholic and that's her religion. She follows her own way of thinking. I was brought up by Roman Catholics so I know their views on the subject. I'm trying out various family planning schemes but not to much effect.

Some people say you have achieved nothing.

They should have made a study — our people are not fools to re-vote us in. The common man is more educated now than before. There may be those who are illiterate, but they are also more conscious of their rights as citizens.

There seems to be no Opposition in the country today. Do you feel the communist parties of Kerala and West Bengal can unite and form an effective Opposition?

It can't be automatic. The only other challenge came from the Janata but after their failure, people were cynical about opposition parties. We see a big opening now for opposition parties to get together, but they are fighting amongst themselves. They must organise themselves long before election time.

Many parties may be corrupt but surely some individuals within the parties are men of integrity. Can they not be used for such a purpose?

Individuals are all right but parties must play the major role because individuals can differ. In Kerala for instance, we put up important individuals and they did get elected. But ultimately, the party is the main thing. One can't get away from that.

But individuals within each party have differing radical views.

There are such individuals but the party is still essential.

Can individuals together form a central government?

Not yet. There is no cohesion in the Opposition. Individuals dissenting from Congress policies, but who are otherwise honest, have to find a common programme.

If you had to deal with the Punjab problem what would you do?

Mrs Gandhi did not accept the three initial demands of the Akalis for fear of losing the Hindu vote. The delay caused great trouble because the Akalis have now split and the extremists are stronger. The Marxists have a committee in Punjab and are advising the Prime Minister to accept those demands and strengthen Barnala's position.

You have your own problems: Subhas Geising — with his Gorkha National Liberation Front — is demanding a separate state for his people.

I have no objection to discussions with Geising but what can one discuss

unless he changes? But I am happy I didn't have to talk to him because it is the central government's problem. Geising's demand is to turn three sub-divisions of Darjeeling into a separate state. If these sub-divisions are granted it would be disastrous both for Nepal and for India.

Even in the past, until the British came, India has always been fragmented. Is this its natural condition?

No. Britain kept it together politically. It was an unnatural unity. After 1947 we visualised bigger states based on language. We (the Marxists) were for it, but not for divisive movements which are tearing India apart.

But apart from linguistic differences, there are other factors like corruption and communalism. With all this, how can India stay together?

The Congress was the fountainhead of all corruption. But we must not despair. We must keep India together, we must project ourselves as a viable Opposition. This is an attempt one must make.

But keeping India together depends to a great extent on whom India is friendly with. The ally whom Mrs Gandhi had chosen and Rajiv Gandhi continues to befriend is Russia rather than China, a close neighbour. China switched to the USA and today supports Pakistan, instead of India. Would it have been better to have been friendly with both nations?

We must be friendly with all. China is the more immediate neighbour with a larger population. But the problems of befriending both simultaneously should not be insurmountable.

Why hasn't Rajiv Gandhi visited our neighbours?

Why don't you ask him? It would be good for him to visit these places. The Sri Lankan problem is not entirely India's fault, but our initiative in solving it must be there. Otherwise the situation will worsen. ♦

FIRST PERSON

"I'm not a brainy guy, I just follow my heart," says Sunil Dutt, in a burst of candour. And he has followed it for 2000-odd kms, in the blistering heat and dust of the summer months, for 78 heroic days, from Bombay to Amritsar. Braving assassination threats and unconcealed hostility, combating jaundice, high fever and cauterised feet, and venturing forth unescorted into the Golden Temple, Sunil Dutt has amply demonstrated that he is the stuff that true heroes are made of. For him, it has been a journey of love and compassion.

Traversing state after weary state, Sunil Dutt and his band of faithful followers including his young daughter Priya, personified what hundreds had sought recourse to in easy rhetoric while talking about the Punjab problem – the healing touch. In literally conveying the message of peace and secularism and in creating an awareness of the Punjab problem in

hundreds of Indians, in the course of his padayatra, Sunil Dutt has more than achieved his mission.

The mood, consequently, in Sunil Dutt's Ajanta Arts office, in Bombay, is one of unabashed exultation. Secretaries and minions of his staff, bustle around importantly, flushed with his success. The phones ring incessantly, congratulatory messages all.

A few film associates – actors, directors, producers – sit clustered in Dutt's large, airconditioned sanctum that is decorated with personal memorabilia. Quite obviously, word of Dutt's return has not got around most of the film industry's circles as yet, for the group is a small, select one. As I enter, Sunil Dutt has just bid goodbye to two elderly Sikhs who beseech him in Punjabi to "take care of your health. We and the nation have great need of you."


Close up, the deepening creases on his weather-beaten face are all too

evident, as is his obvious and considerable fatigue. Dressed casually in jeans and a bright yellow shirt, Dutt is relaxed, almost subdued, in sharp contrast to the victorious atmosphere outside. Occasionally his face lights up, as he recalls a particularly interesting facet of his marathon padayatra. Inhibited by the presence of others in the room or affected by sheer fatigue, he mouths clichés, often repeating himself in the process. Despite the constraints of time, Dutt is courteously receptive to questions ranging from the padayatra to his involvement with cancer care, the Spastics Society and the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

Paradoxically, he seeks to shift the emphasis from Punjab – after all, the only reason he undertook the padayatra. "I preached the same message everywhere – not just in Punjab or for Punjab – the message of love and non-violence," he insists.

PACES TOWARDS PEACE





Sunil Dutt is a fighter — the champion of causes he believes in, be it improvement in cancer care in India, the rehabilitation of drug addicts, or most recently, the situation in the Punjab. In the course of a gruelling journey from Bombay to Amritsar he has successfully proved the power of a march for peace. On these pages, Sunil Dutt

speaks to MINNIE VAID-FERA about his **padayatra** and his convictions.

On The Achievements Of The Padayatra

I strongly believe that our *padayatra* was a concrete example of the victory of non-violence over violence. What greater achievement can there be than that? We faced hostile threats, refusals of entry (into the Golden Temple), all sorts of things, but with all that, we *did* what we set out to do. And we got a tremendous welcome at Amritsar. We knew we were on the right path, we had no personal profit and we had tremendous conviction in the philosophy of love, compassion and non-violence.

I met the five head *granthis*. I wanted to learn what they had to say about Punjab. I was only a listener, I had nothing I could give them but love. There were no political talks — I told them “I have come to you as a citizen of India, not as an MP or film-star.” They talked to me about the Jodhpur detenus, the deserters from the army (during Operation Bluestar), several things.

I never said I was going to stop the killings in Punjab or wipe out the terrorist problem. I only walked to demonstrate my love for the people of my country. I’ve done what I felt like doing for peace and I am happy with that. I felt that non-violence was the only way to solve problems. I never said I’m going to be a mediator. I only wanted to create an awareness of secularism among the people I met along the way. I told them all religions are linked together, and that acceptance of this fact would create a better environment. In that sense you could say that our *padayatra* did provide a healing touch, but not just in Punjab. I said the same things all the way — in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi, etc. Since Punjab is the most affected, burning point today, people focussed on my sayings in Punjab and didn’t take me seriously in the other states. But who am I to say that I am going to bring peace in Punjab? No one can give any guarantees — I could have perished on the way.

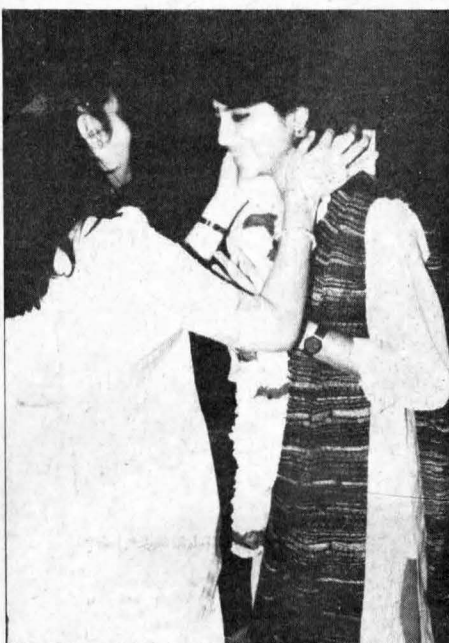
"I Have Tested Myself And Come Out Victorious"

Twenty-one-year-old Priya Dutt, 'universal sister' of the **padayatra**, describes her experiences

I'd always wanted to do something for my country, but I'd only kept talking about it. Being a part of the youth of this country, our inheritance, I felt strongly motivated to contribute. And I drew tremendous inspiration from my father. I saw the reaction the *padayatra* inspired the first few days — people really *wanted* someone to come forward and do something — and decided to join him. It took me a day to get permission from my teachers and principal (Priya is doing her final year BA, in sociology at Sophia College, Bombay) who were very impressed with the idea of my joining the mission and who told me that I'd be gaining a lot more instead of losing a year by missing my final year exams. My family also encouraged me and so I joined the *yatra* at Bhiwandi.

We had people from all walks of life, in the *padayatra* — rich, poor, students, young social workers, Buddhist monks, labourers, etc. It was like a large family, the atmosphere was very nice. Everyone shared the work, no task was below anyone's dignity to perform. Since I was the only girl, I became the universal sister. I was in charge of the medical side. I'd dole out medicines for stomach problems, mild fever, malaria. Fortunately, nothing untoward happened to anybody with my medicines! After all, I'm not a doctor, but I'd been trained a little (*smiles impishly*). I guess the reason that there were no other girls in the *yatra* was because parents didn't want to send their daughters on such a trip — I was lucky and at an advantage because of my father. Moreover we had a lot of accommodation problems. Often there'd be no room — the boys would sleep outside, or in verandahs. I would be with my father. We normally slept in guest houses along the way. We had our own kitchen in the truck, and followed a vegetarian diet.

We usually followed a gruelling pace, covering around 30 kms a day



Kudos for Priya from Shabana Azmi.

so we didn't really have time to talk to people. But on the way, here and there, we'd stop and explain about Punjab and where we were going. Though we drew large crowds, there was absolutely no misbehaviour, no problems, no agitations. We had their total support. People would then tell us, "We'll pray for you." Villagers would touch our feet, perform *pooja*, their prayers were always with us. They'd give us money, rice, wheat, etc. Often, they'd come to us with *their* problems — "Tubewell *nahin hai*" etc — thinking we'd come to help them. And so, Dad would point this out to the local MLAs who often welcomed us in their localities, and thus, incidentally, a lot of people were helped in this fashion. So, though we walked for Punjab, it wasn't just restricted to Punjab.

In any case, we never said we're going to solve the Punjab problem. I'd heard people say that terrorists are mad, they kill without reason, but we went with a clean heart and nobody did anything to us. We achieved a lot more than just a walk from

Bombay to Amritsar. We *did* find, on the way, that some Sikhs were hurt and angry — they'd say, "Why have you come now? Why didn't you come earlier?" But their attitude to us was absolutely fantastic — they saw a ray of hope in us and none of us felt threatened in any way. In fact, these Sikhs were our protection inside the Golden Temple. My family was very tense at that time, but we who had witnessed and were part of that atmosphere, were greeted with beautiful gestures.

Actually, when we finally reached Amritsar, we were numb. In the beginning we'd lost track of time. In between, sometimes I'd feel I just can't do it! But we kept going and finally, there was no reaction. We couldn't believe we'd really reached Amritsar.

I was present at my father's meeting with the head priests. The entire press was also there. It went off very well. He just sat listening to them, he didn't talk much. He wanted their side of the picture. After that, we went to Vaishno Devi and I flew back from Jammu, with no blisters, a slight weight loss, but feeling much fitter.

A major factor that has emerged from the *padayatra*, for me, is that I feel I've tested myself and come out victorious. I feel confident now that with determination, one can do anything. I want to do a lot of things now — I feel a new awareness. I would like to concentrate on working in villages, especially in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Every kid I saw was undernourished, some had to walk four to five miles to school each day, others didn't go to school at all. I would like to work to alleviate the suffering of villagers. I am against joining organisations — I feel they focus on self-promotion. Ideally, in every college, students should be sent to work in villages, for a while. The enthusiasm, amongst the youth, is *there*, but without support, they can do nothing.

On Criticism Of The Padayatra As A Five Day Wonder

Criticism can be carried to extreme cases. Even Jesus Christ was crucified, wasn't he? I have satisfied my conscience and that is enough for me. I cannot satisfy all humanity. As for allegations of publicity and self-promotion through the *padayatra*, tell me, having faced the kind of threats we did, would I have risked my daughter's life for publicity? Besides, do I need publicity? These are petty criticisms from people who retard the progress of our country. The majority has lauded our efforts and I'm grateful for that.

On The Response To The Padayatra

Oh, we had surging crowds all the way. People — children, women and old people — walked 20-30 kms just to greet us, to have a glimpse of us. They would touch *everyone's* feet, not just mine. In the villages, I wasn't recognised as Sunil Dutt, the film-star. And even in the towns, I have never experienced crowds like the ones I did now. People came with warmth, with reverence. The response of the people — from tribals to intellectuals — was tremendous. Everyone felt something was really happening.

On The Daily Routine Of The Padayatra

We used to get up at 4.30 or 5 am and start walking, after a prayer, from 6 am onwards till about 9 am. Breakfast was from 9-10 am, generally in the fields, under trees. Then we'd walk till lunch time, around 1.30 pm. Then again, from 3.30 pm till we reached our destination for the day. On an average we walked 28-30 kms a day, sometimes we'd go upto 42 kms. We wanted to keep the maximum number of days for Punjab. Wherever we faced large crowds, we'd stop and talk to them. I must have addressed hundreds of meetings.



On Health Problems During The Padayatra

Well, I do feel very weak now, I've lost almost 15 kgs. And I had five generations of blisters (*smiles ruefully*). Then we were attacked by bees near Gwalior but fortunately nothing really bad ensued. I had high fever and jaundice when Amritsar was only 185 kms away and my doctor told me walking further would be like a death sentence. But I felt I couldn't let go, when Amritsar was so near, no matter whether I die or not. So I went on. And I found that as I walked, the jaundice lessened, in fact.



Greeting prominent Sikhs in Bombay.

Then, in the cities, we'd have discussions with intellectuals, discuss problems of national integration.

We had our own kitchen facilities as a change of food might have upset our stomachs, but everywhere we went, people would give us *mithai*, fruits, milk. In Maharashtra in particular, there is this milk belt — every 10 kms or so, we'd be offered milk by the villagers.

On Police Protection

We never asked for protection at any stage. Every state that offered us protection did it for their own reasons. And in Punjab, I didn't need police protection to enter the Temple. I didn't need the government's support either. I was convinced the path I'd adopted was right and when you have conviction, you're not scared.

"We Felt Very Proud"

Namrata Dutt-Gaurav on the *padayatra*

I felt very great being Sunil Dutt's daughter when the *padayatra* achieved its goal. We (the family) had their route map and as they'd cover point after point, we'd feel very proud of them. At first we couldn't believe that Priya wanted to join Dad. I mean, I can take my father doing something like this, but my kid sister... We were initially against it, we thought it would be very dangerous and tiring, especially with Priya being the only girl in the *padayatra*. But she adapted wonderfully to everything.

Of course, as a family, we went through a lot of tension and anxiety when the *yatris* entered Punjab. And again, when my father had jaundice and fever, but his determination saw

him through.

We kept in close contact throughout the *padayatra*. I went to meet them at Indore and then again at Delhi but not at Amritsar. My father forbade us — he didn't want it to be a family thing.

What do I see as the *padayatra*'s major achievement? Well, I think it's made the people more aware of the situation in Punjab. I also had a wrong idea about Punjab, which changed after I spoke to Dad and Priya. The *padayatra* will make people aware that nothing can be achieved by violence. People have this wrong impression about violence in Punjab... Well, my Dad came back safe and sound, didn't he?



Namrata with daughter Saachi, and Priya.

On His Contribution Towards Cancer Care In India

It is entirely due to my wife's (the late Nargis Dutt) illness that I am today involved in the improvement of cancer care in India. After five surge-

ries and being in coma for 2 1/2 months at the Sloane Kettering Memorial in USA, my wife started recovering and the first question she asked me was "Why didn't you have me treated in India?" And I said, "I wanted the best for you." She then said, amidst

all her suffering, "Everyone wants the best for their near ones, how many can afford it? When I go back to India, I will try and create conditions that will help the poorest of the poor."

That remark of hers touched me profoundly. She didn't live to fulfil her ambition but when she died, I thought I would take on the task. And thus the Nargis Dutt Memorial Foundation was created in America. It collects funds each year to help different hospitals in India, to improve cancer care. The Foundation is doing sterling work in bringing new equipment to India. For instance, equipment worth \$ 40,000 was brought to the Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) in Bombay, to facilitate a bone marrow transplant on a nine-year-old girl, Vandana. Vandana lived to garland the Prime Minister during the inauguration of the Nargis Dutt Critical Care Unit at TMC on November 11, 1986.

At an eye hospital in Chandrani, the Foundation has installed a machine that helps dissolve cancer of the eye, thus preventing major surgery. Equipment for the treatment of cervical cancer, commonly prevalent in Madhya Pradesh, has also been donated by the Foundation.

We have also collected Rs 1 lakh in Benares towards research that combines allopathic cure for cancer with the age-old ayurvedic sciences. This time, when I passed Uttar Pradesh during the *padayatra*, I was able to collect an additional Rs 18,000 for cancer care in the state.

In Madhya Pradesh, similarly, we collected Rs 1,25,000 for cancer patients. It was quite a novel way of collecting funds. You see, everywhere we went (on the *padayatra*), people would come forth with garlands. I told them to save that money and give it to us for cancer care. They did both. I left the money with the collector of Indore.

I entirely agree that the need of the hour is several more centres for cancer detection and treatment in India, especially in the villages. Be-

cause a farmer who works on his land for 24 hours is only going to leave it when he is desperately ill, and with this disease, urgency is most important. But our Foundation lacks that kind of money, or infrastructure.

Why don't I discuss this problem with the Centre? Well, I'm just one of the 800 MPs and I speak on various issues. It doesn't help really.

On His Association With The Spastics Society Of India

This was also one of my wife's projects, one she nurtured herself. Thirteen years ago, along with Mrs Mithu Alur, she set up a school for spastics with three children. Today, they have

On His Role In Drug Rehabilitation Therapy

The Congress (I) created an anti-narcotics cell last year of which I am the chairman. So, in this capacity, I attend seminars and tour a lot, taking part in anti-drugs campaigns, highlighting the dangers of drug addiction. But all the work done is inadequate really. The government must come forward with more programmes, their contribution hasn't been much. Social organisations dealing with drug rehabilitation therapy have achieved greater results.

There is an acute need for follow-up treatment, for a detailed check on every addict's history. Unless this is



At the Spastics Society, Bombay.

branches all over India. After my wife's death, they (the Spastics Society) made me their patron, which I never wanted to be. But I feel this society performs the most humane service possible. These kids are much nicer than normal kids, they merely need more care.

done, we will keep losing fine talent — some drug addicts I have encountered have been fine human beings. It's just that they're not strong people, one has to build up their mental strength. And I feel that ex-drug addicts can and *do* make the best counsellors in this form of therapy. ♦

The Unsung Yatris

Members of the core group of the *padayatra*

1. Baldev Khosa, Congress (I) MLA, was the deputy leader of the *padayatra*.
2. Suresh Shetty, social worker, was its convenor.
3. H R Guru of the Western India Football Association, walked the entire distance from Bombay to Amritsar with Sunil Dutt and Priya. Some organisers walked in laps, while some *yatris* joined the *padayatra* at various points.
4. Umesh Khanna, social worker.
5. Narinder Varma, former president of the NSUI.
6. D Rajan, Sunil Dutt's personal assistant in Delhi.
7. Shiva, a young social worker from Thane district, whose village sponsored his participation.
8. Mohammed Ayub was in charge of the cooking and would race ahead of the *yatris* to provide meals at the scheduled times.
9. Ali was the driver of the van carrying the equipment and food.
10. Suresh Rawat, cooking assistant.
11. Prasad Murkar, still photographer.
12. Raju, cooking assistant.
13. Eknath Wagh, Sunil Dutt's personal attendant.
14. Ram Sharma, cooking assistant.
15. Morita and Kukuchi, two Buddhist monks from Japan who were in Bombay on a holiday, read about the *padayatra* and joined it, planning on walking upto Bhiwandi. They ended up walking the entire distance to Amritsar.

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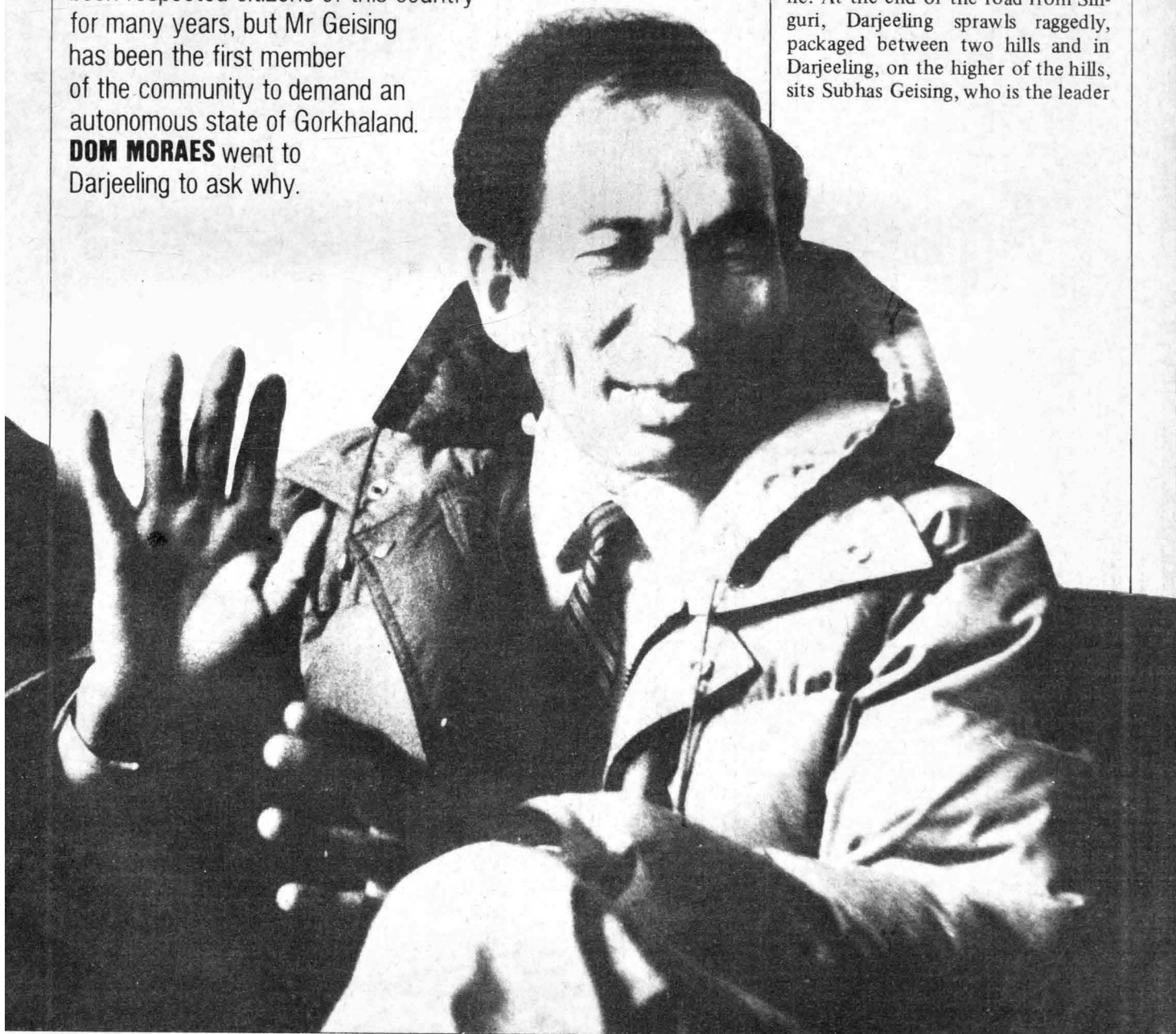


GUARDIAN OF THE GORKHAS?

Subhas Geising, author of 22 pulp novels and a book of verse, has recently proclaimed himself to be a politician, a guide and a sort of god to the Gorkhas in the northeast. The Gorkhas have been respected citizens of this country for many years, but Mr Geising has been the first member of the community to demand an autonomous state of Gorkhaland.

DOM MORAES went to Darjeeling to ask why.

ALL THE WAY beyond Siliguri, as the hills rise around you and the brown faces of the plains-people turn into the golden and slant-eyed faces of those who dwell in these hills, there are signs chalked or painted on the steep slopes around you, welcoming you to Gorkhaland or recommending death for all Bengalis. These are signs which say even more than they mean: they are signs of a new difficulty within the republic. At the end of the road from Siliguri, Darjeeling sprawls raggedly, packaged between two hills and in Darjeeling, on the higher of the hills, sits Subhas Geising, who is the leader





With his people: forging a separate identity.

of the recent movement demanding a separate Gorkha state within India. He also wants this state cut out of the already quivering flesh of West Bengal. Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the leader of India, who is opposed to separatism, keeps talking to Mr Geising. Mr Jyoti Basu, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, will not.

"Why should I?" Mr Basu had said to me in Calcutta. "This is not my problem. This is Mr Gandhi's problem. I have no objection to *talking* with Geising. But I am in no position to concede parts of my state to what will turn out to be a disaster for the Nepalese and a disaster for India." What Geising actually wants to turn into a separate state is three subdivisions of Darjeeling district. One may talk of the increasing Balkanisation in India, but this is absurd. I could

understand what Mr Basu was saying, in Calcutta. But all the way to Darjeeling I had seen, quite literally, the writing on the wall, and every Nepali I talked to appeared to be a supporter of Geising. It may be a ridiculous movement, like Khalistan, but it appears to have a considerable popular impetus propelling it. Such movements have a tendency to hang fire when people discuss them, and then suddenly and spectacularly burst into flames and explode.

In Darjeeling, everyone, from my taxidriver to the bellboy in the hotel, the proprietress, and the guests, seemed to know Geising. I sent a boy up the hill to ask him for an appointment, once a grey dawn had broken. The boy seemed delighted at the prospect of speaking to the Gorkha leader. But to me this seemed another indi-

cation of how sad this movement was. I had inquired from Bombay and from Calcutta how I could contact Geising, but nobody had known. He has no telephone and no ascertainable address. For the leader of such a movement to be virtually incommunicado is a strange state of affairs. I had had to come all the way to what he describes as Gorkhaland, and then, like someone in Kipling's days, send a messenger on foot to find him, before I could make contact. How, for example, does Mr Gandhi make contact in case of emergency? This is an indication that Geising's cause doesn't have very much financial backing. But I don't suppose Lenin, during his days of exile, had a telephone or an address either.

Moreover, there is no denying that Geising has a good deal of support.



He had declared a six-day strike from April 16 to 23, and I arrived the night before it started. The day that I sent my message to him, there was no traffic whatever on the roads (which is why the messenger went on foot) and no shop in the town was open. When the messenger came back, he said happily that Geising was sending his vehicle at 2.30. This was another indication of power. There were police cars on the roads, but if Geising should send Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) cars around, it was a symptom of strength. I awaited his car, which arrived flying a green GNLF flag. The driver and the accompanying guards said nothing, but took me uphill through a landscape stilled as though with shock, to my destination. This was a shabby house higher up the hill, and in the dingy corridors of his office were several armed youths drinking what seemed to be tea. Some of them accompanied me into his room. They appeared to want to be there all the time I was.

Geising sent them away with a few curt words in Gorkhali, also telling me that Nepal possessed Gorkhali, which he contradicted later. The arms, he also said, were not obtained by him but by people who stole them from the CPI(M). He appears to be much opposed to Marxism, though his party, fundamentally, is a party looking for land and money for a small section of people, who nevertheless form a large proportion of the population of the area they inhabit. This is the chief principle of Marxism.

Outside there were many armed men on the prowl, growling, or apparently so, to one another. The GNLF have nearly destroyed the economy of the hills beyond Siliguri by burning tea gardens, which at one point lost Rs 5 crore in 10 days, but also stopped the export of oranges and ginger — which is about all Gorkhali has to export except tea — to the south. Their activities have also put large numbers of people out of work. Geising may say these are Ben-



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With Rajiv Gandhi in Darjeeling: airing grievances.

galis, but they are Gorkhas. The youths around his office wouldn't hang around unless they were unemployed, since they are obviously unpaid by anyone else, and Geising has nothing to pay them with.

Geising is lean and wiry, and wears a Nepalese cap. Though he seemed rather suspicious at first, he also seemed to want to talk to someone from the outside world. He said that he was basically a fighter, and also a writer. This was why he had first entered the Army, then left it, and started to write novels. He has written 22 of these, also one book of verse. I attempted to find out what these novels were about, but the author seemed not to know. Also I perceived that what I had thought was suspicion of me was in fact sheer nerves. He kept glancing around him as though unseen enemies floated in the air. From time to time his eyes switched back to me and the interview would resume. I asked him how long the Gorkhas had been in the ter-

ritory he now claims as Gorkhaland. "For long," he replied "for long. We have always been here. This is our country. It is the Bengalis who are the intruders." He speaks rapidly in reasonably fluent English. "It is the Bengalis who have made us ask for our own state outside Bengal."

His hands wove patterns in the air. "I love Rajiv Gandhi. You know that? He is a great man. We understand each other. But Jyoti Basu... I will not talk of him. But I will talk to him. One day I will do that." I said, "He doesn't want to talk to you." Geising replied, "That does not matter to me." I asked him about what this conversation would be. He said, "About Gorkhaland." I said that the tendency towards separatism might be the eventual ruin of India. If he loved India as he said he did, why didn't he forget about Gorkhaland? He replied that if he did it would be the eventual ruin of the Gorkhas. "Understand," he said, "I am not asking for a separate state. I am ask-

ing for a state within India." How would it be economically viable? "It will be." But as to exactly how he had no answer. I also asked how the Gorkhas had formed so deep a hatred of the Bengalis that the slogans on the walls said they should all be killed and that an Anti-Bengal day was being declared.

"Look at history," said Geising angrily. "They have treated us like slaves. They have swindled us and cheated us." I asked if there was any question of the GNLF parleying with Nepal. "Why?" he replied. "We are Indians. This is our country." I said, "Aren't the Bengalis also Indians?" What he then seemed, rather clumsily to be saying was that though everyone in the country was an Indian, they lived in separate states and each was identified by a separate culture. Why shouldn't the Gorkhas live like this? "The reason for the movement is that we dislike being under the domination of the Bengalis and we want to develop our own culture in our own state. Once Gorkhaland comes to be, and it will be, I will not necessarily be the leader. There are others to take over. You talk about our using violence. It is not I who have told people to be violent. Our people are frustrated and they use violence individually. We are a peaceful people by nature. We want peace. We need it."

He then remarked, "You have seen the beginning of the six-day strike. Soon I will declare a month-long strike. The people will obey me and the government will see my power." Apropos of the six-day strike, I asked him if he knew of any way I could leave the town to catch my flight next day. "Yes," he said, rather pompously. "I will send you in the GNLF car. That way you'll be safe." Next day I waited. The car didn't come. I missed my flight. The day after, a police vehicle took me back to Siliguri. I must say that I felt much safer in that than I would have done in Mr Geising's car, flying its conspicuous flag of dissidence. I also reflected that in this minor matter, he had not kept his word. ♦

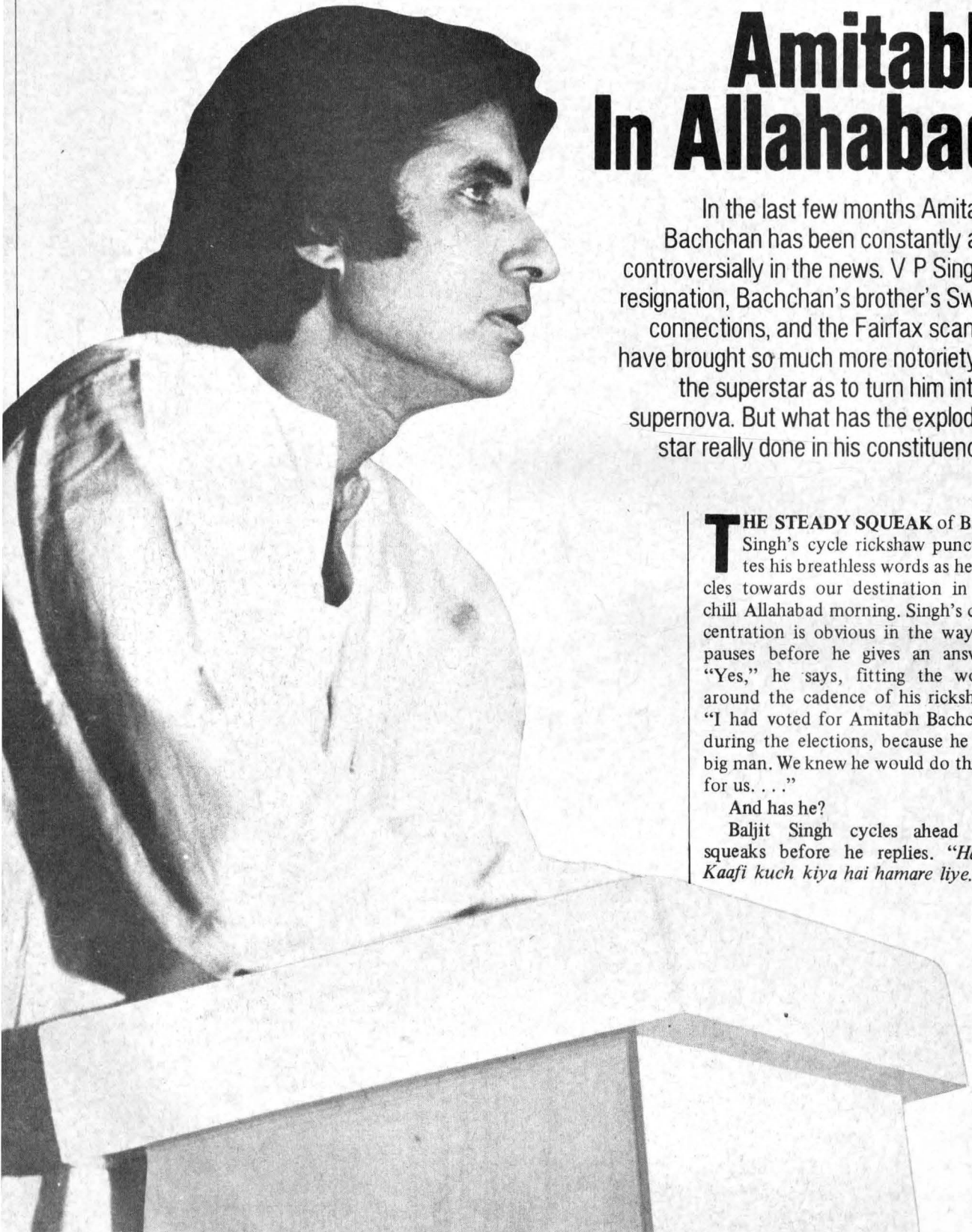
Amitabh In Allahabad

In the last few months Amitabh Bachchan has been constantly and controversially in the news. V P Singh's resignation, Bachchan's brother's Swiss connections, and the Fairfax scandal have brought so much more notoriety to the superstar as to turn him into a supernova. But what has the exploding star really done in his constituency?

THE STEADY SQUEAK of Baljit Singh's cycle rickshaw punctuates his breathless words as he cycles towards our destination in the chill Allahabad morning. Singh's concentration is obvious in the way he pauses before he gives an answer. "Yes," he says, fitting the words around the cadence of his rickshaw, "I had voted for Amitabh Bachchan during the elections, because he is a big man. We knew he would do things for us. . . ."

And has he?

Baljit Singh cycles ahead five squeaks before he replies. "*Haan. Kaafi kuch kiya hai hamare liye. Ye*



dekho, raasta abhi kitna achcha hai."

But some distance ahead he feels bound to qualify the statement. "*Ye sach hai ki chunav ke liye vo log sub kuch bolte hain. Abhi Amitabh Allahabad nahin aate. Lekin unhone raaste banaye hain.*"

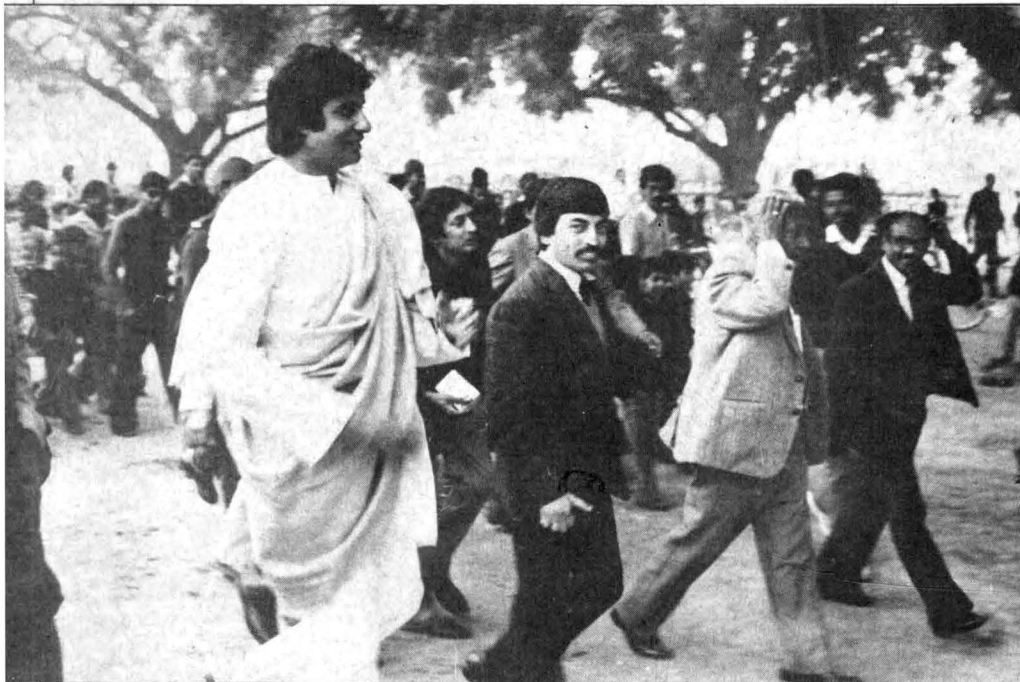
Baljit Singh was not to know it but the official statistics on road repairs were very impressive. According to K Srinivasan, political advisor to Amitabh Bachchan, Rs 70 lakh were allotted to do up the road from Mirzapur to Allahabad and an additional Rs 2 crore were sanctioned to do up the highways between Varanasi-Allahabad and Kanpur-Allahabad.

Sushanto Shome, Bachchan's representative in Allahabad, feels this to be a significant achievement. "The roads in Allahabad have always been deplorable," he explains. "Now they are fairly decent. Fourteen roads have been given to the PWD to manage. No road improvements were on the cards for Allahabad. It was Amitabh Bachchan's pressure on them that did it."

Not everybody would agree with this, however. "Ask anybody," Shani Varma, member of the BJP and a contractor by profession, says belligerently. "The people in Allahabad know that the roads would have been made anyway. Before the elections these changes were going to be carried out. It's just that Amitabh has come in to take the glory for the changes."

A senior official at the Mahanagar-palika is openly derisive. "It's all right





Inaugurating a community centre.

The complaint against Bachchan is that he hasn't done enough for Allahabad. "What has Bachchan done for the people of the city?" Dr Ram Naresh Tripathi asks. "He reintroduced a Vayudoot service, got a sanction for the Jamuna Bridge and laid 35 tubewells. But this has not raised the economic progress of the city."

cific. "It is true that Amitabh Bachchan is taking an interest in things. But, by and large, everything was in the pipeline and it coincided with him coming to power. A project for Rs 1 crore 25 lakh was already there. He may have got it expedited. But that's all."

Confronted later with the accusation, sitting in his cool Delhi office, Amitabh Bachchan is far from perturbed. Such allegations are normal. "If they say that the roads were already on the cards, then I say, 'Take it, I don't want it, let the credit go to somebody else,' " he says laconically. "But the fact is that it has been done, the city has been gifted with new roads. I don't care a damn whether I get the credit for it. But I *do* care that Allahabad gets the roads. If people are willing to accept it was done by me, fine for me. If they don't, so be it. So long as it's been done and it's been of some use to them, that's all that matters."

All the way through the speech, his voice does not rise even once from its well-modulated expressionless tones.

DR RAM NARESH TRIPATHI of the *Navbharat Times* is a patient man. Lovingly, painstakingly, he goes into the history of Allahabad and its politicians as he tries to explain why Amitabh Bachchan is a misfit. One has to understand, he says, that Allahabad is a very politically conscious city. The Nehrus came from here. But, unfortunately, in the interests of the nation, they did not have the time or the resources to develop the city economically. H N Bahuguna, who was there before Bachchan, did a lot more for it. Now, the people of Allahabad want Bachchan to do the same for them.

"And what has he done?" Dr Tripathi asks in his slightly nasal, singsong voice. "He reintroduced a Vayudoot service to the city which we badly needed, and has got a sanction for the Jamuna Bridge which is 110 years old and desperately needs to be redone. And he has laid 35 tubewells for the drought-stricken areas."

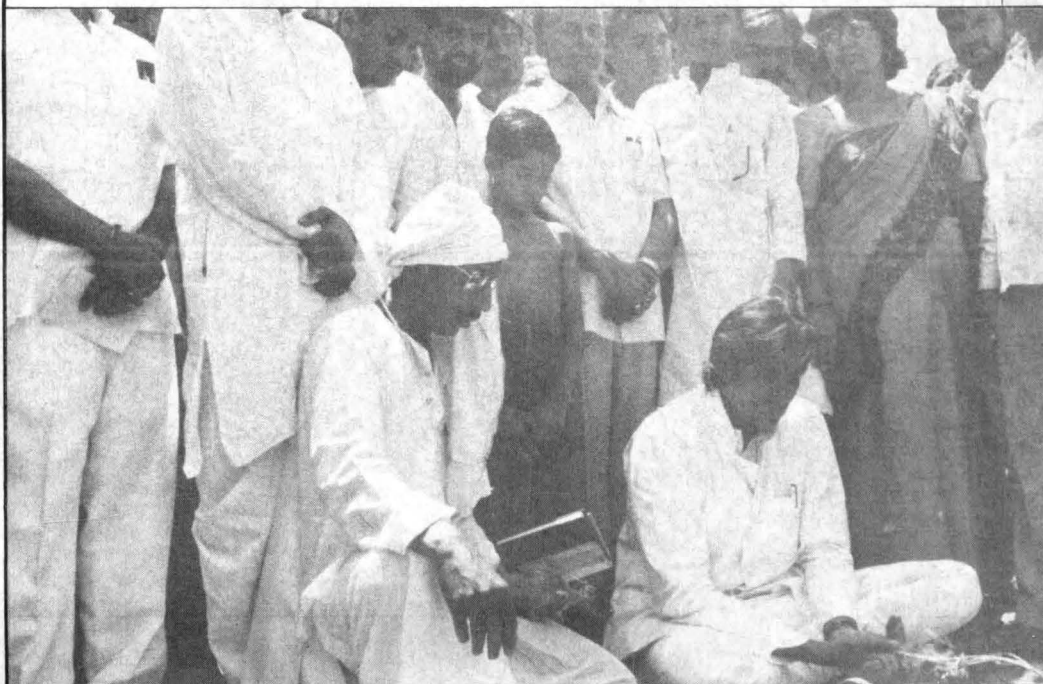
Of course, Tripathi concedes, there is more. A Sangam Darshan package tour was started this year, whereby people from Delhi could come into

Allahabad for a day, take a dip in the Sangam, see Anand Bhavan and go back home the next day. And yes, Amitabh Bachchan *has* supplied medical vans for the district from the money raised by Nirmaan, his own trust. "But there is a complaint even here," Tripathi says softly. "A rumour goes that Dr Arun (that's his name I think) is his relative and also that the drugs used in the vans are of a substandard quality."

Dr Tripathi himself cannot vouch for the fact that the rumour is true. But he *does* know that Bachchan has given Rs 3 lakh for the beautification of Chandrashekhar Azad Park (formerly called Alfred Park). But all these changes are not significant. All in all, Dr Tripathi feels that Bachchan has not given the people of Allahabad what they want.

"Whatever he's done has not raised the economic progress of Allahabad," Tripathi argues. "He said that he'd make Allahabad University a Central University. But this has not happened as yet..."

Sushanto Shome, Bachchan's man-on-the-job, claims that Bachchan has done a lot for the people of Allahabad, in spite of the constraints on his time. "The basic cry of the people is that he never meets them in Delhi and seldom comes to Allahabad. But he comes every alternate month and stays for about three days."



Laying the foundation stone for Allahabad's electric crematorium in 1986.

Bachchan is his usual, relaxed self as he explains why this cannot be. "There are some larger issues which are uppermost on my mind. I'm still working towards it though it's not something I'll be able to solve." A pause as he thinks of what to say next. "If somebody wants a tap or a bulb in any particular area it's easy to work on that... but to get the Centre to agree to converting the Allahabad University into a Central University is definitely more problematic. Because it's a national issue, because there are four other universities which also want 'central' recognition. What are the criteria for granting Allahabad 'central' status and not them? The Centre has to weigh all these problems. . ."

But back at home these arguments do not carry much weight. There are more severe accusations. "He brought down the press from Delhi," Tripathi says in his sad monotone, "for the Sangam Darshan and no invitations were given to the local press. Naturally we were upset. He's cut off from

his Congress colleagues. Mr Shome, his representative in Allahabad, who is supposed to handle his affairs, has never been in politics. All the people who are with him are hoping to get his post. . ."

Is that a fact? Tripathi looks uncomfortable and changes the topic: "Well, there is a feeling that he promised a lot and never did anything. He had once called a meeting at Civil Lines and said to us: 'The others also never did anything. Why pick on me?' He doesn't understand: Nehru and the others were very conscientious people and they had a duty to the nation. But Amitabh Bachchan has no such responsibilities. We expect him to do something. Our feeling is only that if such a powerful man cannot get us benefits, where is the advantage?"

"AMITABH BACHCHAN has done a lot for the people of Allahabad, in spite of the constraints on his time. The basic cry of the people is that he never meets them in Delhi and seldom comes to Allahabad. But that's not true. He

comes here every alternate month and stays for about three days. He tours the area extensively and meets the people who want to talk to him. I don't think he can be faulted for neglecting his constituency."

Sushanto Shome, a dapper, vivacious man, full of statistics and figures on Amitabh Bachchan's achievements, can be expected to say nothing less. He is, after all, Bachchan's man on the job. But as Shome talks on, filling the one-and-a-half hour meeting with statistics and counter-arguments, one is forced to sit back and listen. For if even half of Shome's claims are real, then Bachchan has not been exactly idle in the two years and some odd months that he has been MP.

Bachchan has, according to Shome, started a transport system — something that Allahabad sorely lacked. A hundred new buses were sanctioned for the city, of which 42 are already on new routes. (Later, in the quiet of the Delhi office, Srinivasan, Bachchan's political advisor, says the figure is closer to 30.) The buses are run regularly every half an hour during

SPECIAL FEATURE

peak hours and then spaced out to an hour apart each. It was Bachchan's direct intervention which got Allahabad the buses, Shome insists. For, although 800 new buses had been granted to UP, most of them were allocated for other cities.

Another sizeable achievement is the Jamuna Bridge. Allahabad is divided by the Jamuna river from Naini, the main industrial region to which most of the people have to travel daily to work. For 110 years the Jamuna Bridge has been the link to the industrial township, but now the bridge is too narrow, too old and just too worn out to serve its purpose any more. For 35 years a plan for a new bridge had been discussed – but nobody ever managed to get it passed. Finally, on November 14, 1986, at a Youth Congress rally held on KP Grounds, Amitabh Bachchan stood up and asked the Prime Minister for a sanction for this bridge. Rajiv Gandhi 'graciously consented' to give two-

thirds the amount (approximately Rs 35 crore) if the state government agreed to give the other one-third. Vir Bahadur Singh, the Chief Minister of UP, was trapped into giving his consent for Rs 15 crore. Was this not, Shome wanted to know, a remarkable victory?

Then there were the water problems in the area across the Jamuna or Jamnapaar, as it is called. Areas like Nari Bari, Koraon and Kheeri were too far away from the river. Since he became MP, Amitabh has supplied almost 60 per cent of his 12,000 villages with pure drinking water. Nearly 450 places have been sunk for water though not all have managed to yield a steady supply. (Srinivasan added later that nearly a 100 tubewells had been sunk of which 40 had become operational. Such a large number of tubewells had been possible only because of the World Bank sanction which, again, Bachchan himself had obtained.)

Add to that the Vayudoot flights, the Sangam package tours, the 500 km of new roads (not necessarily metal) made in the last 18 months – and the list becomes more impressive. To ease congestion in the city a Transport Nagar outside the city limits has been built up, and though the facilities are inadequate, Shome is sure it would be completed within a month or two. A cultural centre – with a grant of Rs 20 lakh from the government – had been procured for Allahabad. Amitabh Bachchan himself gave Rs 5 lakh from his trust.

And that was not all he'd given personally. Bachchan also gave Rs 9 lakh for the beautification of Minto Park and Rs 3 lakh for Alfred Park. Four mobile medical vans toured the district dispensing free medicines and advice to the rural people. About Rs 15-20 lakh were spent every year on keeping the vans well-equipped and operational, Srinivasan claims. In the two-and-a-quarter years since Ami-



Wooing villagers in his constituency.

Apart from the government grants that he pushes through, Bachchan also contributes to his constituency from his own trust, Nirmaan. Since he became MP in 1985 he has collected Rs25 lakh for this trust to fund the four medical vans that tour the district dispensing free medicines.

tabh became MP, Nirmaan must have collected about Rs 25 lakh — all of which is meant for charity.

What about the criticism that Bachchan has not helped Allahabad get any new industry, leaving it as economically backward as before? Srinivasan and Shome have statistics for that as well. Raymonds is setting up a polyester filament yarn unit worth Rs 250 crore in Shankargarh. Hindustan Cables would be setting up a fibre optic plant worth Rs 40 crore in the district. But the location had not been finalised as yet.

"Besides," Srinivasan says, philosophically, "you have to understand our problems. Banda which is the area adjacent to Bundelkhand (which lies in our district) gets a rebate on electricity. We have no such facilities to offer industrialists to lure them over to our side. In spite of which we are trying."

"People say that not only have we not brought in industry to Allahabad,

since Bachchan became the MP, industries have been pulled out of the city," Shome claims angrily. "That's all nonsense. Six years ago Mrs Gandhi had named Allahabad as a possible site for a coach factory along with Bangalore and Punjab. The industry is finally being set up in Punjab. That does not mean that it was snatched away from us. But nobody will understand our point of view."

OBVIOUSLY, in Allahabad, Bachchan can either do no right... or no wrong depending on how you choose to look at the superstar-turned-MP. "*Hum bhi rajniti me shoonya hain aur Rajivji bhi shoonya hain*," Bachchan is supposed to have said during his campaign speeches. "*Aur jab do shoonya judte hain, tab sau milta hai*." Detractors now snigger that by adding a zero with a zero you can only end up with nil. Pro-Bachchan stalwarts are quick to point out that he has more than fulfilled his

election promises.

Ashok Bajpai, a member of the Congress (I) and one of V P Singh's greatest rivals in UP, is emphatic that Bachchan has not reneged on his election promises. "He practically made no promises," Bajpai says in a baby-soft voice that ill suits his large frame. "Almost all he said was that he would work hard for Allahabad, get in more industries and spend some of his own money for the development of Allahabad. And his efforts towards fulfilling his promises are 200 per cent.

"How many people talk, for instance," Bajpai continues, "of the fact that, for the first time, Jamnapaar has had total saturation as far as irrigation is concerned? With the World Bank's clusters of 120 tubewells, there will not be a single part of the constituency untouched. I think these things are being underplayed by the press when it is his biggest achievement."

Shani Varma of the BJP violently

Criticisms that Bachchan has not helped Allahabad get any new industry are ill-founded. Raymonds is setting up a polyester filament yarn unit worth Rs250 crore and Hindustan Cables, a fibre optic plant worth Rs40 crore in the district. But Bachchan's detractors are still dissatisfied.



Addressing a meeting at Ramnagar.

SPECIAL FEATURE

disagrees. "Where are the new industries, the hospitals that he can build? Which tubewells has he put up? Each tubewell costs about 1 1/2 lakh to put up. Where is he going to get the money from? And if you think I'm lying, ask the bureaucrats. Ask them what *they* think. Has he really done anything or was most of it planned out anyway?"

Asking the bureaucrats is not an easy task. "Don't quote me," they all start off saying, before making very innocuous statements. Most of them didn't want to criticise a ruling MP. Finally, in his wood-panelled, red-carpeted office in Chaturvedi, Collector and District Magistrate, gave some clarifications. "He has definitely helped in getting funds for Allahabad. In the Jannapaar area 48 tubewells have been sunk and 52 more are going to be sunk. Now, a hundred tubewells is a very big thing. Just to give you an idea of how much of an achievement that is, let me tell you that in the state district plans for 1986-87, only six tubewells were to be bored. Just six."

That's not all. Chaturvedi unbends slightly from his stiff position and claims that a few more crore are being granted for the development of Allahabad since Bachchan became MP. Besides, the pace of the development work has increased. "I would say that he's done more in two years than any other MP from Allahabad. He is very keenly interested in the development of the city and his connections are getting us somewhere."

HARISH BAGGA, Secretary of the Prayag Vyapar Mandal, has a complaint. A complaint that one has heard a countless number of times — from laymen and tradespeople alike. Amitabh Bachchan is just never available. To listen to complaints of the Vyapar Mandal, set them right or even have discussions on matters concerning the traders.

Bagga's round, pink-cheeked face takes on an air of bafflement when he says: "The traders are not satisfied with the fact that he's inaccessible. When he comes to Allahabad he stays

at the Circuit House and there's usually such a crowd there that none of us have the time to hang around and hope he'll see us."

Bagga says that the traders have two or three problems they would like Bachchan to settle. "Our main problem is law and order. More and more shopkeepers are being looted and the police force is not strong enough to do anything. Seventy-one shopkeepers were looted at pistol point last year. We would also like Amitabh Bachchan to look into the problem of octroi. Traders in Allahabad pay twice or thrice the octroi rate on goods that come in. Can't this be stopped?"

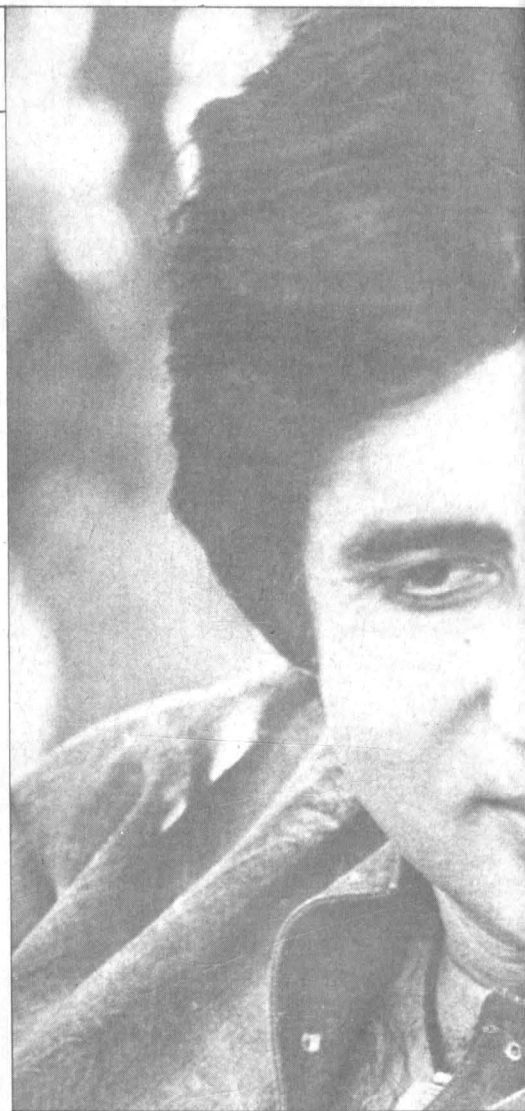
The Transport Nagar, according to Bagga, is another white elephant. The plan was to shift grain merchants and traders to the Transport Nagar which is 10 km from the city to avoid traffic congestion in Allahabad itself. "We had been promised bank facilities, telephone facilities and good roads but there are none of these there. The 106 traders who *did* shift there last year came back again. The District Magistrate gave a notice on December 18 that all of us would have to shift there by December 24. Fortunately, Amitabh Bachchan has stopped this."

Bagga's criticism, though, is tempered with praise. "There's no doubt that whenever Mr Bachchan gets to know of a problem he does something promptly," he says. "But since he's always in Delhi all he can do is send down a letter to us which authorises a bureaucrat to deal with the problem. And for one year it worked. Any letter or complaint signed by Amitabh Bachchan used to be noted and action taken. Now, if you take a letter from him to the DM or to the SSP they don't take note of it."

A senior official at the Mahanagarpalika is openly derisive. "It's all right if we get complaints from an MP to be looked into. But we found that we were getting something like 200 letters a day — sometimes for reasons as silly as somebody's drain overflowing — and we had to look into them. Now, is it possible to do such close,

personal monitoring? Don't we have work besides what Mr Amitabh Bachchan sends us?"

Bachchan's reply to the complaint is typically laid-back. "There was a time when I kept track of all our letters," he says now. "When they arrived, what we did with them, where they went. . . And at one point of time we found that of the three major departments, that we were writing to — viz the DM, the police (at the SSP level) and the Mahanagarpalika — action taken was absolutely negligible. When I talked to the administration about this then there was a change of attitude. . . I think that things are now better as far as the administration is concerned. But if people feel that they are not getting the same kind of response, well, then I need to work hard on it. That's all I can say."





BACHCHAN'S OFFICE on 2-A Motilal Nehru Marg, New Delhi, is a modest building with the usual accoutrements of metal detectors and security guards. Inside, white kurta-clad men buzz around officiously, while others wait patiently for their turn to see the MP. Bachchan himself, bespectacled and serious-looking, seems to have hardly any time to spare, but answers all accusations in his monotonous, smooth voice with great ease.

Most of the questions are not new. When asked how he would expect the poor people in his constituency to get in touch with him since he's mostly in Delhi, Bachchan shoots off the answer almost without thought.

"That is a problem which confronts me," he says, toying with his pen, "and which I really can't find a solution to. Because when I get to

Allahabad there is a lot of crowding around. . . It really has become difficult to meet each one individually though I'd love to do that. I would love to walk into somebody's house and ask, 'What's your problem?' But generally I find that I've walked away from somebody's house and he's left behind with broken walls and shattered panes."

But if he visited Allahabad more frequently wouldn't the novelty disappear. . . ?

Bachchan doesn't think so. "I've tried various means — to get them all together in a compound and then go round meeting each one of them — but there is no discipline and everybody breaks queues and crowds around. . . . I have tried to work out an alternative by opening an office in Allahabad and having a staff. . . ."

But where is the office? In Allahabad itself there was total confusion as to who was managing Bachchan's affairs. Did he not know that people like Harish Bagga of the Vyapar Mandal were still talking to Ravi Wadhwani, President of the Amitabh Bachchan Fans Association when they should, in fact, be addressing their grievances to Shome?

Bachchan admits that 'these are all the edges that we need to sort out' and denies that he's visited Allahabad only 20 days in the two years he's been an MP. "I try and be there every alternate month for at least three or four days."

Was it true that he spent more time touring the villages than the city itself? "No, I think it's equally divided," Bachchan claims patiently. "But the villages think that I spend too much time in the city and the city feels I spend too much time in the villages. So, it's a very normal sort of complaint."

"That's what they say about the work I'm doing also," Bachchan continues. "The urban people say you're only concentrating your efforts on the villages because you know that 75 per cent of your votes come from there. And the people in the villages say, 'What's the use of getting new roads

and buses? What use is it to us? You don't do anything for us. . . ."

Bachchan shrugs philosophically. The superstar seems to have learnt a lot since he came into politics. He knows how to dodge awkward questions for instance. When asked if it was true that VP Singh (then Finance Minister) had been holding up important industrial projects that Bachchan wanted to bring into the region, he is straight-faced. "No, I don't think that's true," he says, his voice tinged with surprise. "I read about it somewhere in the press but why should he want to block projects? After all, Allahabad is his city also."

But Bachchan talks, more than generously, about his plans for his constituency. His hopes that the Jamuna Bridge, which is such a basic need for Allahabad, will come up within two years. "Ideally I'd like it to come up within two-and-a-half years," he says unemotionally, "because by then my tenure as an MP will be over. But so long as the work continues in the right direction and I'm given the assurance — whether I'm there or not — that the work will be completed within a certain time frame, and I can assure the people of Allahabad of that, then I think I would be very happy. Yes."

And he listens to the complaints. Some, like the allegation that standard medicines were being administered in his mobile vans, he promises to look into. He dismisses the rumour that the doctor is a relative of his with the same studied patience as before. He talks of the schemes for the rural people that Jaya, his wife, is working on. And he admits that if the same circumstances were to exist again, he would definitely join politics to help out his friend.

It's been a long hard initiation into the rites of politics for Amitabh Bachchan. With controversies and calumny. With loud criticisms and little praise. As he himself admits, "The question is not really of enjoyment any more. It's a work that I've been given to do and I'm going ahead and doing it to the best of my ability." ♦

DOES IT KEEP YOU

A FEW EVENINGS before *The Indian Post's* first issue rolled off the press, the newspaper's chairman, Mr Vijaypat Singhania, climbed on a chair and delivered a brief, inspired speech amid a welter of popping champagne corks. It was celebration time at the *Post's* editorial office situated at Bombay's commercial showpiece — the staid Ballard Estate. At the midnight party reporters toasted one another in champagne. A cake, shaped like the *Post's* own front page with headlines fashioned out of icing, was duly cut. The paper's launch, delayed by over three months, was now only hours away. And much of the private hoopla hinged on the expectation that the Atex Complete Computerised Composing System, acquired with all the frills, including 16 video terminals where reporters and editors would punch in and edit their stories, would help the newspaper leapfrog to publishing success. However, the centre of the euphoria, the Atex, costing the astronomical sum of Rs 1.10 crore, had scarcely been operational for a couple of weeks and many staffers were still fumbling with its complex functions.

Like icons of progress, the serried rows of computer terminals were the stars of the evening which ended with speeches by the editor, Nihal Singh and chief executive, J C Jain, who are both directors in the company called The Indian Chronicle Private Limited.

When the paper did finally appear on April 13, weeks of speculation were silenced. Some of the doubts remained, though. Market hype has it that the *Post* has been unable to hire the big name journalists it wanted, and had to settle for the lesser lights. Bikram Singh, former *Filmfare* editor was offered the job of editing the Sunday magazine section *Postscript*,



The Post advertised itself with statistics and imagination.

'POSTED'?

For over a year **The Indian Post** promised it would stand out — with its latest technology, in-depth features and wider rural coverage. But is it any different from the other dailies?



but he turned it down perhaps because the section is, in fact, merely a run-of-the-mill colour supplement, not an independent entity. Then Prem Shankar Jha, who had resigned from *The Times Of India* in a huff over Arun Shourie's appointment as Executive Editor, was offered the job of the *Post*'s Resident Editor, Delhi. But when the editorship of *The Hindustan Times* came his way, Jha said a polite no to the *Post*. These, however, are normal gestation pains that a new newspaper suffers. Other problems also beset the fledgling newspaper when negotiations to purchase office space large enough to accommodate men and machines fell through. And this has further delayed plans to purchase a press, forcing the *Post* to print at Khalid Ansari's Inquilab Offset Printers in Bombay.

J C Jain's office may be described as possessing a cramped plushness. In fact, most of the cabins are squeezed on either side of a narrow corridor. The sound-proofing works, the typewriters don't. There is, amongst all this bristling gadgetry, only one solitary typewriter which has perhaps been retained in the newsroom as a reminder of that dying species of machine. Said Jain: "The negotiations for acquiring premises are in an advanced stage. Once finalised we will import a high-speed press that can print 50,000 copies per hour." Jain plans to either purchase the Goss Urbanite, an American press valued at around US\$ 1.9 million or go in for a cheaper press manufactured by a breakaway group from Goss priced at US\$ 700,000.

Until the press and the premises are acquired the *Post* will not hit full stride. And when it does, the total project outlay will be in the rarefied region of Rs 4 crore, which makes the

Post as large, if not larger, than a medium sized manufacturing company quoted on the Indian stock markets.

The *Post*'s first issue scored several firsts, some distinctive, others dubious. It is the only Indian newspaper to be completely hooked up on the Atex computer system. It is also the only Indian newspaper that claims in its advertisements to be written in the 'crisp reporting style of *The Independent*, London' which is one of many tedious comparisons drawn with *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The *Indian Post* on the morning of the 13th, or on any following morning, did not even remotely have evidence of the 'wide coverage of *The International Herald Tribune*'. Nor did it have the editorial bite of *The Sunday Times* or the business coverage of *The Wall Street Journal*. Said Resident Editor Rahul Singh: "I would have preferred an ad campaign that did not draw comparisons with foreign newspapers." Added Nihal Singh: "Readers obviously know the qualities of *The International Herald Tribune*."

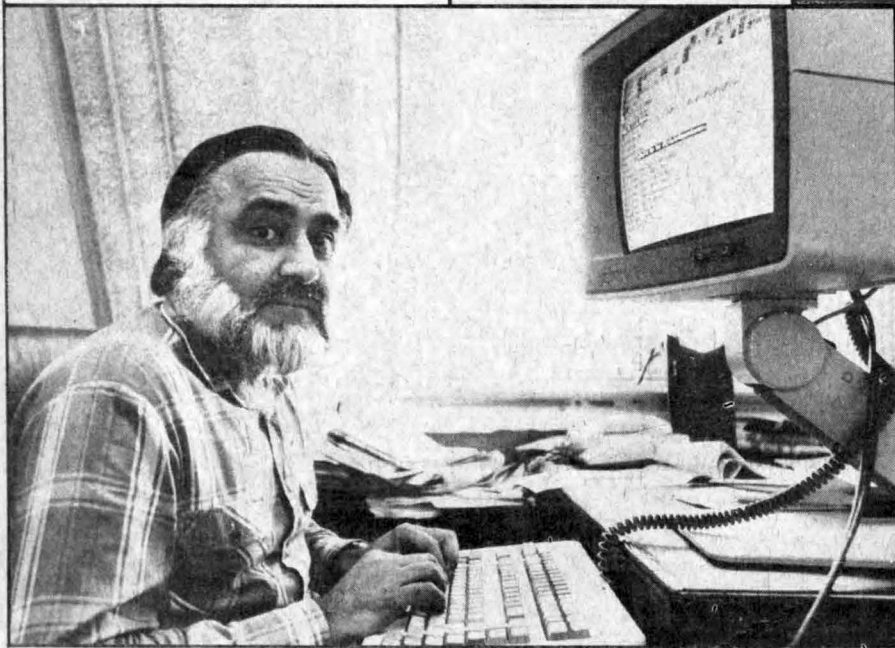
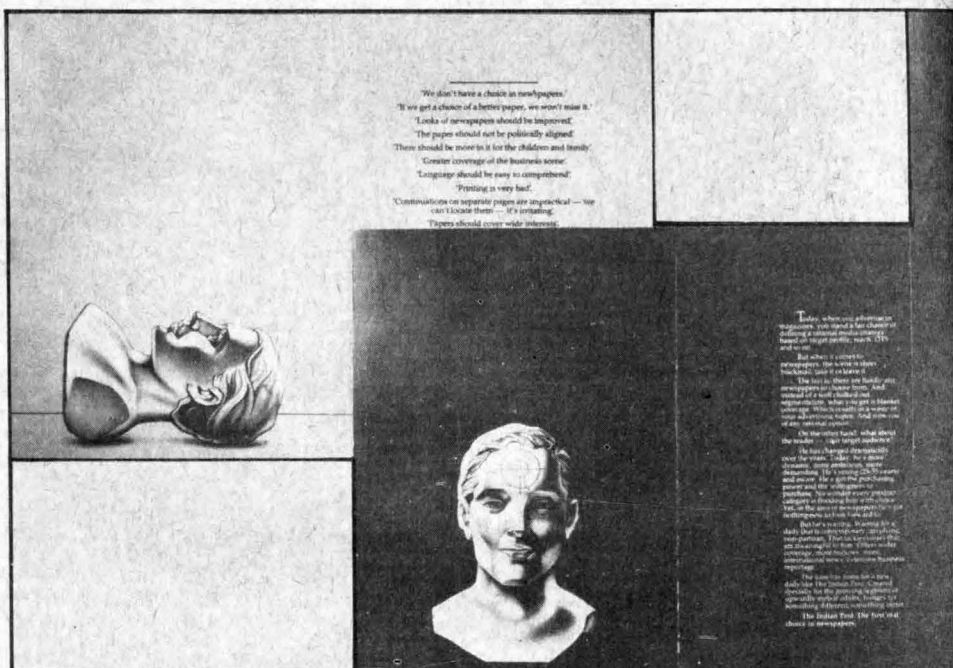
Somebody had goofed badly because the initial reaction of people who saw the hoardings was of instant disbelief. A journalist at the *Post* revealed that the ads were designed by Contract, a Bombay advertising agency and not by them, thereby palming off the onus of responsibility on the agency. But the damage, however peripheral, had been done.

The *Post* weathered that bit of criticism and rammed home other advertisements on TV and in the press. Predictably enough, both *The Times Of India* and *Indian Express* being the *Post*'s frontline competitors refused to publish the *Post*'s half-page adver-

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tisements in any of their editions. Insiders in *The Times* reveal that the main planks of their objections were that the ads were 'excessively aggressive' in tone and content, and had to be rejected. The *Post*, nevertheless, managed to generate quite a clangour through the smaller Bombay papers like *The Sunday Observer*, the eveningers and on TV, none of which see themselves as competitors to the newcomer.

Clad in the armour of high technology, the *Post's* entrance was low key for a flurry of political reasons. Said an editor of a Bombay weekly, "It isn't the best of times for the *Post* to appear because *Indian Express* is at an all-time high." The *Express* crusader quartet consisting of Ramnath Goenka, Arun Shourie, S Gurumurthy and S Mulgaonkar had, by their



Rahul Singh, Resident Editor

anti-government writings, injected a shot of adrenalin into an already excited political scene. They gave the lie to critics who charged that the *Express*, under Suman Dubey's stewardship, (Dubey resigned subsequently) had gone to pasture. For there was Shourie taking potshots at the Lok Sabha

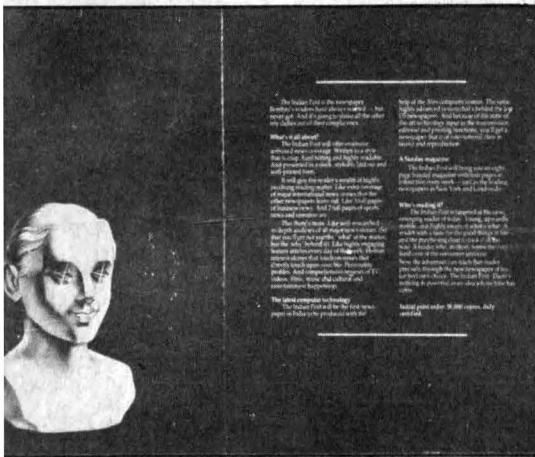
Speaker, Balram Jakhar, calling for a popularly supported investigation against Rajiv Gandhi, who he said was corrupt. Gurumurthy was in jail and Goenka's front page statement bespoke his anger and disapproval at the Centre's high-handedness. And with Mulgaonkar's thinly veiled alle-

Some of the slickly produced brochures

gations against Rajiv, the *Express* rode high. *The Times* too, with a series of front page articles authored by editor Girilal Jain kept the Fairfax-V P Singh controversy alive. In the surcharged atmosphere where Shourie was every morning breaking and analysing stories, the *Post* made its quiet entry, provoking the comment: "They look good but they've got no big stories." The more affluent reader echoed this reaction.

In the looks department the *Post* rates high, it being the only designed paper in the city (the other designed paper being *The Telegraph* in Calcutta). It is too early, however, for the newcomer to break 'big stories'. In a practice run-up to the launch date the *Post* produced a string of dummy editions in April which put the staff through their paces: reporters learnt to think and keyboard their stories directly on to computer terminals, editors weaned on typewriters learnt to edit off video screens, and the Atex machine did the rest — from proof checking (the entire dictionary is fed into its memory) to page making.

In the fear of treading on unfami-



Post threw down the gauntlet in mid-1986 and the Bombay dailies reacted instantly — *The Times* introduced a daily supplement carrying features on a phalanx of subjects from life-style, adventure and technology to birth control. *The Express* too, jazzed up. It quickly reduced the size of its masthead and added a weekend supplement and a daily business section. However, *The Daily*, itself in the throes of a takeover, followed a wait and watch policy.

Next, the *Post* issued an aggressive mailer sent to advertisers headlined: "Blackmail." It claimed: "When it comes to newspapers, the scene is sheer blackmail: take it or leave it. The fact is there are hardly any newspapers to choose from." *The Times*, which has a virtual stranglehold over the advertising market, did not take

Nihal Singh: "We hope to fill 30 per cent of our space with advertising. On Day One we had 38 per cent advertising support. Our rates are lower than those of *The Times* and *Express*."

If their bragging billboards caused some embarrassment, there was more about themselves in the pages.

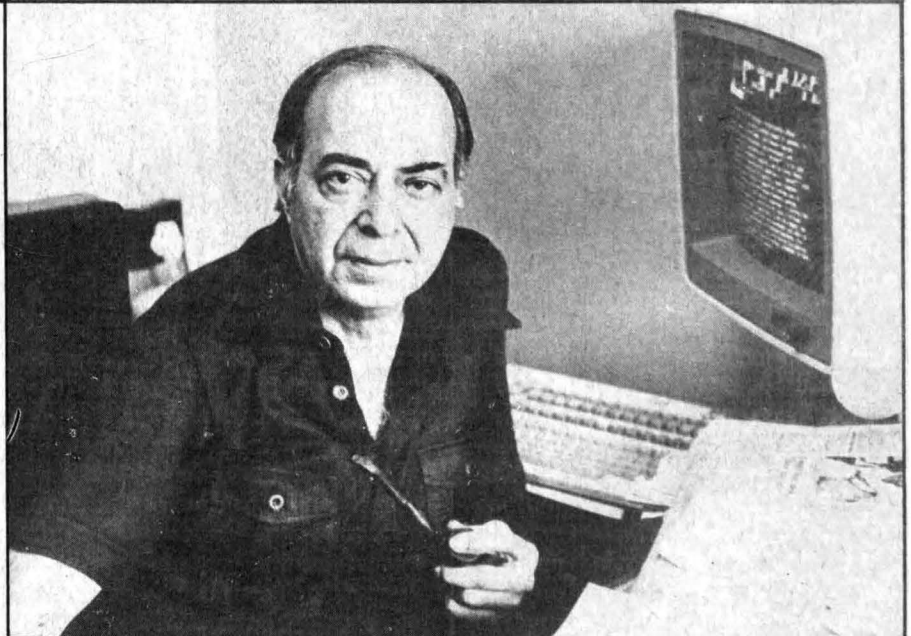
The April 16 issue of *The Indian Post* carried an advertisement (on its sports page) that explained fulsomely the paper's singular effort at covering racing. It said: "... *The Indian Post* will give you the kind of racing coverage that you have been waiting for. There will be a detailed race card and selections, though in a neat, attractive, easy-to-reckon format. There will also be track notes, race-day reports and a weekly review of racing. Also for the regular ones, there will be occasional notes on handicapping

they used to sell themselves.

liar terrain, the *Post* conducted a survey to find out what readers thought of *The Times*, *Indian Express*, *Free Press Journal*, and *The Daily*, the four Bombay-based English dailies. Their findings were presented in a slickly produced brochure, which read as follows:

- * "We don't have a choice in newspapers."
- * "If we get a choice of a better paper, we won't miss it."
- * "Looks of newspapers should be improved."
- * "The paper should not be politically aligned."
- * "International news is not given enough importance."
- * "Printing is very bad."
- * "Language should be easy to comprehend."
- * "Continuations on separate pages are impractical — we can't locate them — it's irritating."

The feedback had much truth in it. Editor S Nihal Singh said he wanted to improve upon the deficiencies of the other newspapers in the areas of foreign coverage, features, business, sports and, not the least, style. The



Nihal Singh, Editor: "There is a lot of room for improvement."

this remark kindly. But with their advertising rates pushing an all-time high of Rs 150 per column centimetre and the *Express* rates at Rs 65 per column centimetre, they had much to fret about because at Rs 45 per column centimetre, the *Post*'s initial strategy was to undercut the competitors. Said

and ratings. In short, *The Indian Post* will give you all you have been missing."

The 'easy-to-reckon format' notwithstanding, a look at the issues of April 18 and 19 shows that of the tips offered for nine races, only three were valid. And according to the April 19

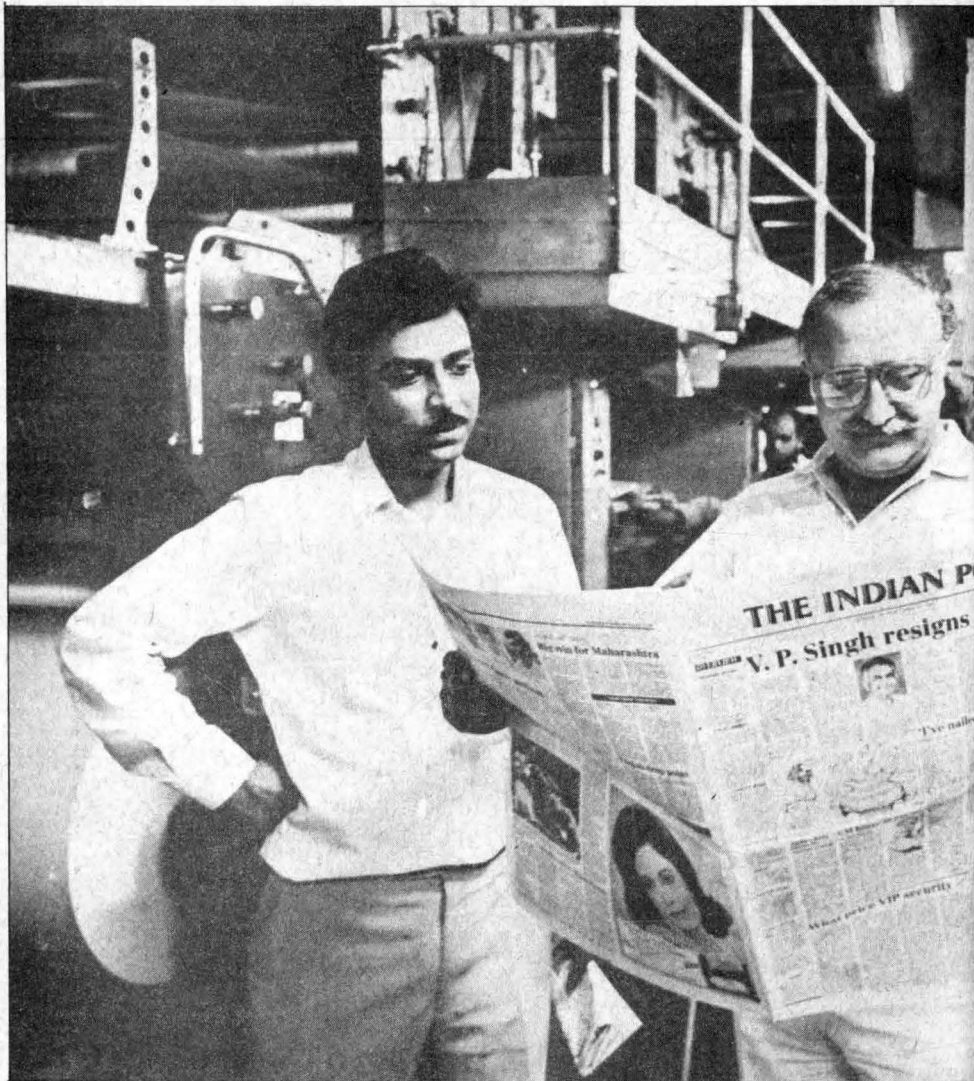
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issue, of the eight tipped to win, only two did. While one does not expect *The Indian Post* to be infallible in its prophecies in such matters, excessive self-congratulation may make for a specious appearance.

SILENTLY, Nihal Singh punches the keys of the terminal that sits on his otherwise uncluttered desk. In an adjoining cabin Rahul Singh plans an edit piece on Gheising. Outside, in a largish hall, three assistant editors, a resident editor (economics), a features editor, a magazine editor, the chief reporter, news editor, sports editor, and the sub editors work in silence, which is uncharacteristic of newspapers, occasionally erupting into laughter. Mohan Ram, roving foreign correspondent, and the two roving national correspondents, Dina Vakil and Rahul Bedi, complete the picture.

A day in the life of the *Post* begins with a 10.30 am meeting at which the editor, resident editor and news editor commission authors to write editorials and the main features. Thereafter, a series of meetings with the news editor follow and gradually the paper takes shape. Presently the dak edition goes to press at 11 pm and the late city edition at 12.30 am, but once the Goss Urbanite press is operative the entire paper will be printed in two hours flat. At present, though the *Post* has an edge over *The Times* and *Express* since it uses Finnish paper, the two older newspapers still retain their edge over the new-comer in that they possess their own presses. About the competition Nihal Singh adds: "We are an independent paper and we're not out to carry on campaigns. We aren't going after any one person like some papers."

Not only is the *Post* a 'designed' paper, it has made many departures from the older dailies: its editorial page features three articles instead of one main article which, traditionally, has been the 'thought piece', neglecting the most important issue of the day. Reacts Nihal Singh: "Why should



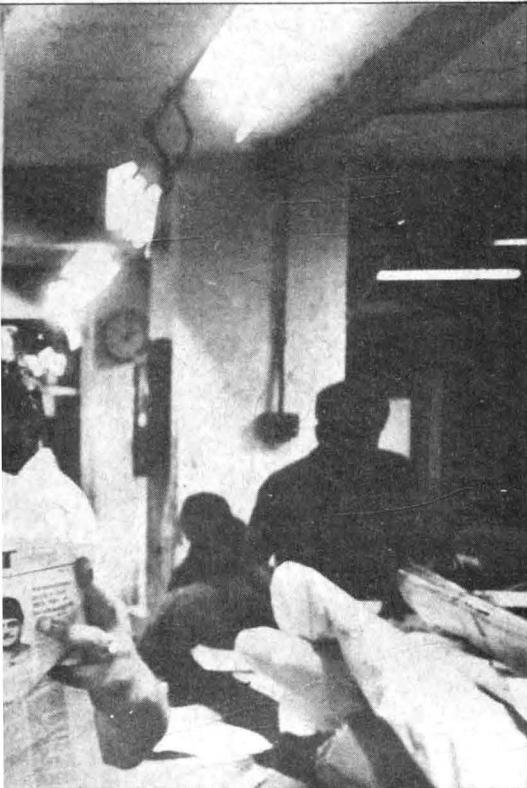
Vijaypat Singhania, Chairman, with Jatin Vakhani, Systems Manager.

there be one main article? We are breaking the mould."

Rahul Singh, who had never touched a computer keyboard in his life, met Vijaypat Singhania last February over dinner when he was told about the paper but no offer was made at the time. Later, Nihal Singh contacted him last July and asked him to be an editor based in Delhi, but Rahul said he preferred to be in Bombay. At the time Prem Shankar Jha agreed to be the Delhi editor and Rahul Singh said he would be the Bombay editor. With Jha having taken over as the *Hindustan Times* editor (he has since resig-

ned), Coomi Kapoor is slated to join the *Post* as the Delhi bureau chief.

In an atmosphere empowered with high technology, Rahul Singh is wearing several hats: learning to use the Atex, subbing copy, interacting with reporters and editing stories in addition to writing one column a week on politics. He often stays up at the office as late as 1 am. Producing a 16-page daily demands long hours, especially since this includes two pages of sports, three of business news, two pages of city news, one page of regional news, three 'nation' pages, one edit page and a features



page.

Dina Vakil, a former editor of the *Express Magazine* spent two years in New York with the United National Development Programme for Asia and the Pacific before joining the *Post*. Says she: "The editor's concept for my job as roving national correspondent is not one of breaking stories but going in after a story has broken and doing a combination of reportage and analysis — two ingredients the editor feels are missing in Indian newspapers."

Just back from a tour of starvation-hit Bhawanipatna, Vakil adds: "What's missing in Indian newspaper journalism is the 'context'. One has to make sense out of the small stories that keep appearing and then to provide links and the context for the reader." Though no Indian newspaper has roving national correspondents on their staff, Vakil feels that she would be able to do many Bhawanipatna-type pieces, roughing it out

considerably, meeting farmers groaning under debt and fighting a system stacked heavily against the poor. She shoots remarkably good pictures on her Ricoh autofocus camera, which she claims is 'a very advanced machine'. Her concerns for the rural poor weigh heavily in shaping the kind of stories she is likely to pursue. "The goings-on in high places eclipse whatever's going on in the low places. The rural people are thus neglected."

Chief Executive J C Jain is a picture of optimism, much of it based on the joy of seeing his paper down in black and white. A canny strategist, Jain fixed the launch price of the paper at Rs 1.20 because "I wanted to compete with *The Times*, which is also priced at Rs 1.20." Having pegged the *Post* as an upmarket paper, he has made the *Express* appear slightly downmarket at its Re 1 selling price.

To soften up the resistant market, Jain marketed the paper free for three days. At the time he printed 95,000 copies each day. From Day Four, he cutback the print run to the realistic level of 55,000 copies, of which the Bombay market would absorb 40,000 copies, the inner line Maharashtra cities will take 10,000 copies and 5,000 are airfreighted out of the state. He cannot resist saying, "We hope to reach 1 lakh copies within a year," and remains confident of advertising support. ("We've received encouraging notes from advertisers and they've liked the paper and have promised support.") At any rate, *Post* insiders, as well as Jain, maintain that the paper will gestate for two years and only then emerge from the red. But this is only feasible on the assumption that 40 per cent of its space is filled with advertisements. Ralph Pais and Munir Nabi, the advertising managers feel that "Stability will come in around August 1987." Meanwhile, they are offering advertisers a variety of sops and carrots, like free death announcements. As for the *Post's* own future, it must remain in the hands of the ultimate arbiter: the reader. ♦



Nihal Singh with a section of the staff.

TELEVISION

ONE ROSE somewhat bleary-eyed, but with a grateful heart, after watching *Ek Pal* late that night on television. Grateful, because Doordarshan's month-old magnanimous gesture of a slot for films of 'artistic quality' enabled viewers to see a film that will not be forgotten in a long time. *Ek Pal* is a sensitive study of a woman who, after eight monotonous years of marriage to a hard-working but unromantic husband, finds herself responding with familiar ardour to an old flame. The boldness of the theme and its treatment lies in the woman actively opting to bear her lover's child, because it is a symbol of all she had longed for for eight, empty years.

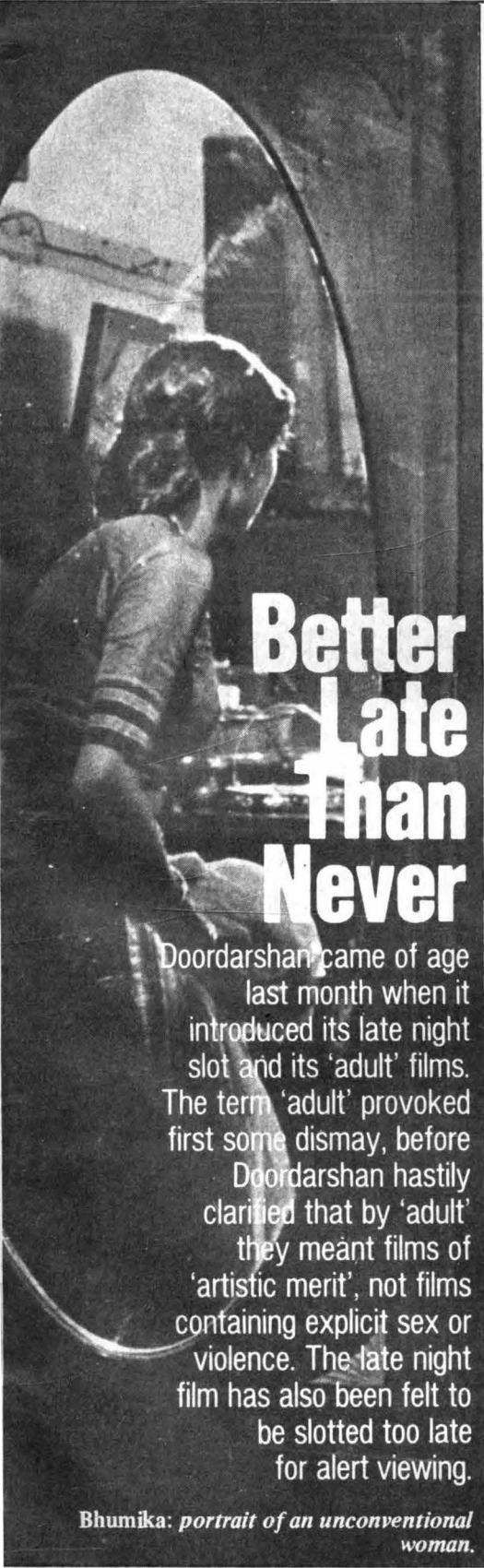
For an Indian woman to have wants of her own and to realise them in so unconventional a way must have raised many a self-righteous eyebrow. Ever since Doordarshan decided to air movies with 'adult' themes, at 11.30 pm, it has come in for a lot of flak. In all the hot air that has been generated, Doordarshan's history of keeping a generally staid, low profile on all issues — including issues of morality — was forgotten. It was made out to be a satyr, when it has hardly ever been anything more than a lamb.

The protests were provoked by what seemed to be a hurried, inaccurately phrased press release that announced Doordarshan's decision to telecast 'adult' films at the late hour of 11.30 pm on Tuesdays and Fridays. Those who were alarmed must have had visions of their television screens filling their homes with scenes of sex and violence. What would happen to public morality, to young people's minds, they wondered. The Delhi Khatri Samaj, in a letter to Ajit Kumar Panja, Information and Broadcasting Minister, said it was difficult to talk of preserving Indian culture while showing such 'vulgar and adult classified films'.

In Delhi again, on April 7, the day the first late night film (*Arth*) was to be screened, a hundred students demonstrated outside Doordarshan Kendra on Parliament Street to pro-



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY: NFDC



Better Late Than Never

Doordarshan came of age last month when it introduced its late night slot and its 'adult' films. The term 'adult' provoked first some dismay, before Doordarshan hastily clarified that by 'adult' they meant films of 'artistic merit', not films containing explicit sex or violence. The late night film has also been felt to be slotted too late for alert viewing.

Bhumika: portrait of an unconventional woman.

test against 'obscene television programmes'. The demonstrators who belonged to the All India Democratic Students' Organisation carried banners and placards railing against government policy which they alleged was 'aimed at degenerating the quality of students and youth of the country, tearing the moral and cultural fabric of society and inculcating an unscientific bent of mind in them'. The Mahila Morcha and Yuva Morcha, Delhi Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), also took out a procession to protest against late night films as they would lead Indian youth astray and cause a degeneration of morals.

Such protest from the conservative sections of our society was entirely to be expected, but it was not so necessary, for by the time the protests were made, Doordarshan had already clarified that the aim of the late night slot was to show films of artistic merit which could only be seen by a select audience and the certification of the film — adult or universal — would not be a criterion for selection.

On April 10, Mr Panja, speaking at the Congress (I) Parliamentary meeting, further clarified that a totally false impression had gone round that the late night shows would be purely adult stuff, the connotation being that they would be replete with sex and violence. This was not so: the decision was purely to screen high quality films that had won critical acclaim. If some of these films carried the 'A' certificate, it would be purely incidental. The late night slot had been created for such films (serious films dealing with important social themes) because the average Sunday viewer was not so appreciative of them, he said.

"If the idea is to encourage film appreciation and promote a film culture, it is not clear who is deciding on what film is of artistic merit. The choice of films seems debatable," says Khalid Mohamed, film critic, *The Times Of India*. "While the quality of films in the late night slot is better on the whole, a lot of harmless films

get 'A' certificates. There should be a proper perspective in all this."

Officials at the Bombay Doordarshan Kendra remained tight-lipped when asked who was selecting the films for the late night slot: it was being done in Delhi, they said, but by whom they did not know, it was not their business to know since they were only one of the kendras. Mr Bhaskar Ghosh, Director-General Doordarshan, inexplicably enough, would not grant an interview.

In distinguishing then between the Sunday feature film (which now may be of dubious artistic merit) and the late night feature film, which as is implied, is caviar to the general, no objective criteria for selection of the latter have been laid down. (The Sunday regional films are award-winning films and therefore have certified merit.) In the absence of this, there may be a lot of producers and directors who are completely ignored, and accusations of graft in selection are not to be ruled out.

Or as one TV critic points out, "It will also be asked why a Fassbinder was chosen for the first Friday and not Herzog. Why a German and not Italian or French or for that matter an American. . . but, knowing the resources of Doordarshan and its discernment, the selection may well depend on what ready material it can lay its hands on or on the generosity of consulates." And for a start, Doordarshan laid its hands on a print of *The Marriage Of Maria Braun* that was unconscionably bad, with vital sequential episodes being oddly absent such as the scene in which Maria murders her black lover and her husband assumes guilt for the deed, and the end of the film, which came with elided abruptness. "It was a rotten print," says Shyam Benegal, film director, almost apologetically. "It was not cut at all. If they had only checked . . . It was a sin of omission."

If as Doordarshan professes, its commitment is to serious cinema, then that was a grievous omission. However, while Doordarshan's defini-

TELEVISION

tion of 'artistic merit' remains nebulous, the selection of the films that have been screened so far and are to be screened in the forthcoming weeks, is worthy of commendation. With *Arth*, *Bhumika*, *Ghatashraddha* and *Ek Pal* behind us, other classics that may be looked forward to are *Swayamvaram* (Malayalam), *A Lover's Romance* and *Ice Man* — provided the prints are good.

As for the furore in Delhi over the likelihood of the films being salacious and therefore, a corrupting influence on the youth, (who will stay up and watch), this seems a prudish reaction and an ill-founded fear. For it is highly doubtful that Doordarshan will go

vision viewing having come to India is a cultural evolution that has gradually come about, Dharker says. "TV is an expanding medium. Like the morning transmission, we now have grown-up movies."

"We're simply following the TV hours in other countries," says Benegal. "The classic methodology of TV is to extend the viewership time. And popular viewership cannot be moved from prime time, nor can films of this sort be forced on the audience by showing them at prime time." The late night slot is an experiment, he thinks, that may just work.

"TV policy in this country has undergone change ever since TV went

as a slot for a film of even superlative merit has been deplored because most people are just unable to stay awake and be attentive. "It's an insult to good movies to show them so late," says Khalid Mohamed. "The best time is 10 pm, which is when they don't have good programmes anyway." And how does one spend an hour between 10.30 and 11.30 without falling asleep? But according to Dharker, "Grown-up films have to be shown at grown-up hours, but maybe showing them on Friday and Saturday nights, with an occasional mid-week screening, on the eve of a public holiday would be more practical."

"The timing completely rules it out," says Rajam Thirumalai, who is personal secretary to the editor of a Bombay magazine, lives in the far-flung suburb of Mulund and has two teenaged children. "I get up at 5.30 every morning and after a long day's work, I don't have the time or the energy to stay up till 11.30 to see a film. My children too have no inclination to stay awake because of the late hour." She worries though about bringing a potential 'bad influence' thus closer. "How can you stop the children if they are determined to see it?" she wonders, since secluded viewing is not possible in most homes.

Meher Pestonji, freelance journalist and mother of two teenaged daughters agrees that it is difficult to keep the children away from the TV when they can hear it in the next room. This therefore makes it imperative that the quality of the films be good — it's porn and violence that have to be kept out. "Watching a film in a theatre, one still has control over whether one takes the kids or not, but now with the late night films in the home, this decision is taken out of one's hands," she says.

"But at home," says Manju Gupta, TV script writer, "one at least has the option of switching the set off." It may also be argued that it can just as easily be switched on by a compulsive viewer.

While it seems simplistic to suggest that aberrant behaviour or delinquen-



A still from *Giddh*: film with a 'social' theme.

overboard when it comes to showing films with explicit sex or violence in them. As Anil Dharker, Editor, *Debonair* and TV critic, says, "TV in India is a government medium and it is guarded very rigidly. The films proposed to be shown on the late night slot are not pornographic at all. People are so wary of even the slightest explicitness: Doordarshan will exercise a form of its own censorship. For instance, when they screened *Siddhartha* recently, two crucial scenes, the kissing scene and the one that has Simi silhouetted in the nude, were cut."

The very concept of late night tele-

national, ever since it became commercial," Benegal observes. "This is a medium that should educate in the broader sense of the term. The educational element is now peripheral because commercial interests will obviously consider popular ratings. Take *Hum Log* — it had the content that would succeed. It was populist and that's where the market lies. This is how the view of the world changes." The late night slot, he therefore thinks, cannot be roundly criticised, for it is an attempt at enlightening the willing and more relevantly, the wakeful.

Doordarshan's choice of 11.30 pm



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TELEVISION

cy are a direct consequence of watching a 'late night' film, the power of the medium cannot be underestimated. The West is labouring under a surfeit of TV-watching. "This medium does affect people a lot," says Roma Malkani, a school teacher and the mother of two teenaged boys, "especially in the long run. All these crimes, these robberies that have been taking place, it's because of watching too much TV," something that she is confident her own boys won't do. As for Manju Gupta, she didn't watch *Arth* because her five-year-old son wanted to watch it with her!

In fact, Ajit Panja himself jocularly remarked (during his visit to Bom-

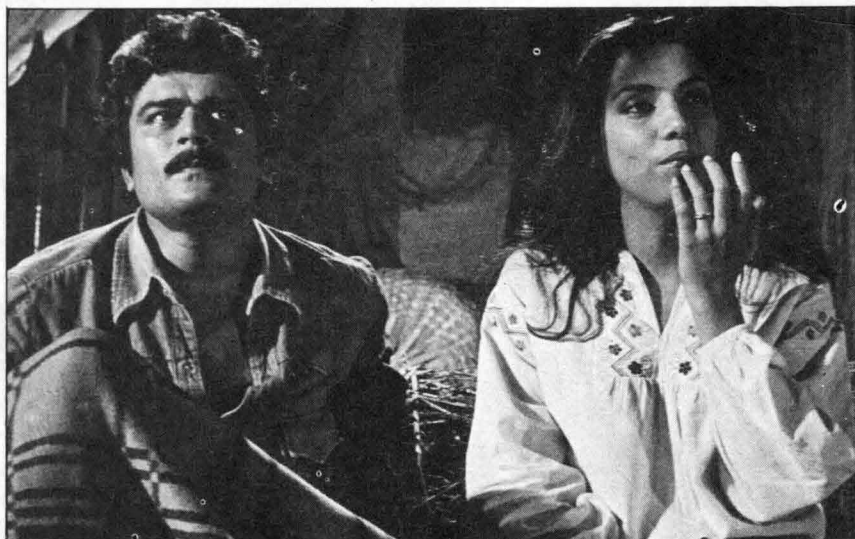
vision screens cause cancer and mental illness and that in Boston nearly 600 children suffered due to excessive television watching; that Doordarshan is aping the West blindly; and that people are groggy and unproductive the day after a late night film. Mr Shah's petition, it is believed, is unlikely to come up for admission for a long time: while his concern for public mental health is touching, his reasons are tenuous in the extreme. "That people's productivity at work goes down next day, is not reason enough to eliminate the late night slot," says Meher Pestonji. "One may also be staying up late reading a book." It's true, the hour is late, but

monitored. (For a start, according to a viewership survey conducted by IMRB, *Arth* got 45 per cent viewership and *The Marriage Of Maria Braun*, 6 per cent.)

While the likes of Mr Shah cannot be dismissed for being prudish, one has to recognise that the introduction of the late night slot does mean change. Says one freelance journalist, "The concept fits in with the lifestyle of the intellectual, urbanised Indian. And being on the national network, it will expose a lot of people who wouldn't normally get the opportunity, to see good films. The dangers are there too — for the urban and the suburban viewer — but culture is not a static thing, and the late night film is part of this growth and change."

It is also part of Doordarshan's own larger bid to change and improve. The late night slot is one aspect of it. There are others. Doordarshan now finds that good films on issues of national importance such as the environment, drug abuse and child labour are not getting advertising support or sponsorship. It has cleared many of them and allotted these a slot after the English news or outside prime time, for only those who are interested in a particular issue, will make an effort to watch it at a late hour. "Doordarshan is now seriously thinking of buying such films from producers at a negotiable price," writes Usha Rai in a report in *The Times Of India* (March 16). But the fact remains that while the government controls TV and AIR in this country, it is unable to project important national issues for want of advertising support.

So given Doordarshan's absence of logic in slotting the programme so late, and the misgivings many may have about the quality of the selection, it is perhaps advisable for the moment to receive the manna when it comes: the late night feature films are of acknowledged excellence and have set a precedent. Perhaps a wider range of programmes will follow, but then Doordarshan may just revert to its familiar practice of giving alms. ♦



Yeh Nazdeekiyan: adultery on the late night slot.

bay recently to attend a video piracy seminar), that "The youngsters will watch these adult movies and parents will go to bed." But most parents agree that Doordarshan's late night film is only one of many factors to which young people are constantly exposed to these days, what with the glut of glossy magazines and 'those' explicit films from the South.

Gopalji Shah, a city Rotarian has, however begged to differ and filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court challenging the screening of the late night adult films on Doordarshan. The petitioner's points of contention are: that X-rays emitted from tele-

vision screens cause cancer and mental illness and that in Boston nearly 600 children suffered due to excessive television watching; that Doordarshan is aping the West blindly; and that people are groggy and unproductive the day after a late night film. Mr Shah's petition, it is believed, is unlikely to come up for admission for a long time: while his concern for public mental health is touching, his reasons are tenuous in the extreme.

Mr Shah need not also worry too much about the taint of television: at the general body meeting of the Congress party in Parliament on the demands for grants of the information and broadcasting ministry on April 10, several MPs, while appreciating the concept of late night films on Doordarshan have cautioned the authorities that only films of cinematic and artistic merit should be shown. They also said that public reaction to the late night film should be closely



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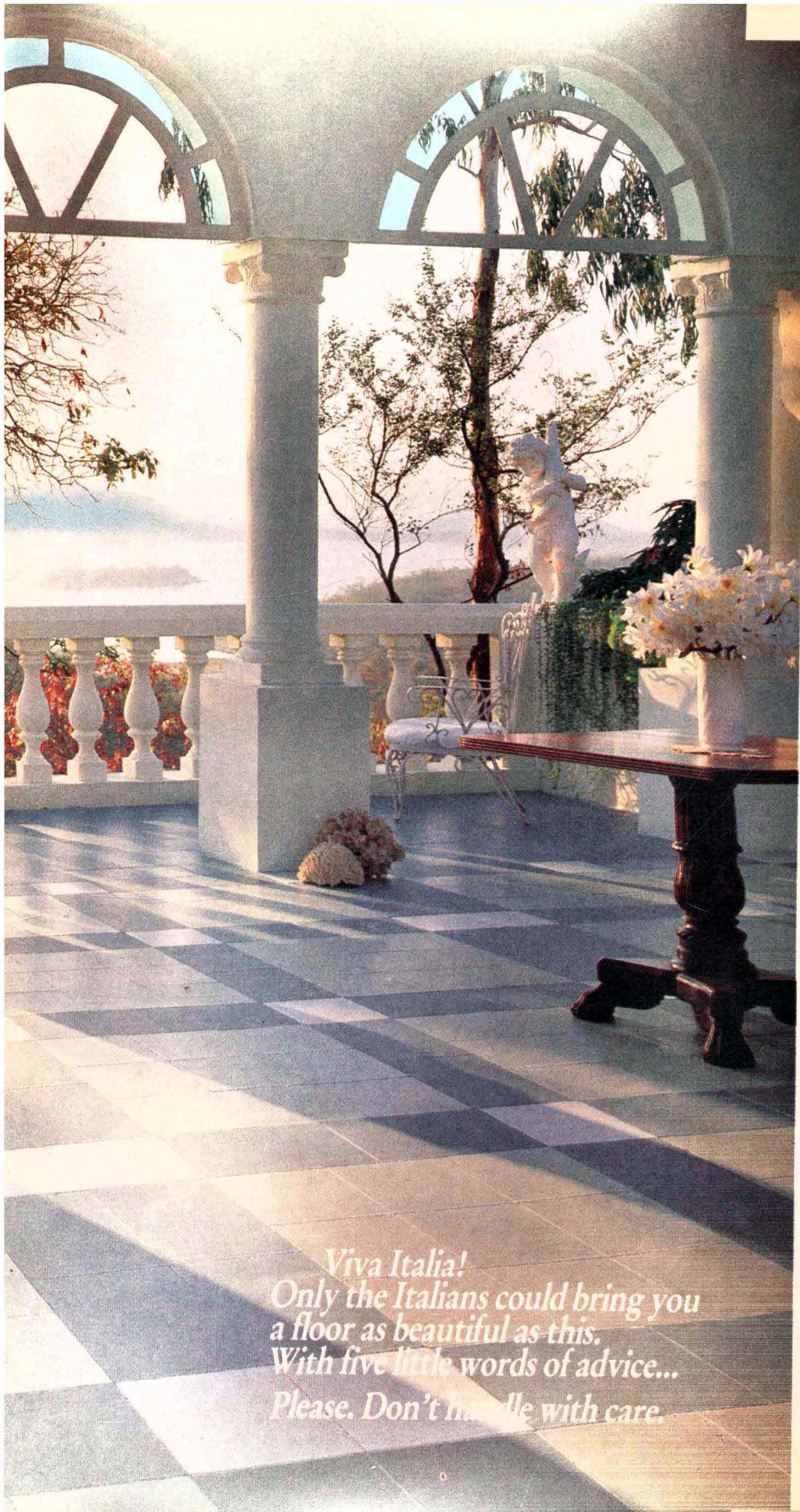


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Romen The Roamer: Profile Of A

LEISHI, a tribal village in Nagaland, is an ideal place for an ambush. Mountains encircle it and there the terrorists hide. They belong to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) who operate in the area. The danger as well as the cold were palpable on a day in December 1984 as Rishang Keishing, Chief Minister of Manipur, and his escort, armed with files and rifles drove to the CM's constituency in Ukhrul district. The CM's elections had been sprung on Keishing in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Keishing feared that, if not re-elected, without the support of his 40 jeeploads of bodyguards, he would be a prime target for the insurgents, who had threatened him with death for 'his crimes against the people'. As it transpired, Keishing need not have been afraid: he had with him as security officer, Ahanthem Romenkumar, Special Superintendent of Police and Commandant of the 1st battalion of the Manipur Rifles, today the most decorated police officer in Manipur, and almost in the world.

They had travelled nearly halfway without any untoward incident occurring when Romenkumar sensed trouble. Halting the caravan, he put Keishing in an inconspicuous jeep behind it. The cavalcade was negotiating hairpin bends near Leishi at a very slow speed when NSCN commandos attacked with machine guns, grenade launchers and mortar. The first fusillade killed four people in the pilot jeep. Though confused at not locating Keishing, the insurgents continued firing, injuring nine others.

An apparently unperturbed Keishing later said, "When the insurgents opened fire, I was terrified till Romenkumar pulled me out of my jeep. I was dumped in a roadside ditch and he ordered a sepoy to lie down over me. After leaving orders with the sepoy to fire at will with his sten gun, Romenkumar advanced towards the

insurgents ordering his own people to open fire. However, after a few minutes the insurgents fled."

Recognising his extraordinary courage, the President of India decorated Romenkumar with the police medal for gallantry. The citation reads: "In this encounter Romenkumar, Commandant, displayed conspicuous gallantry, courage and devotion of a high order."

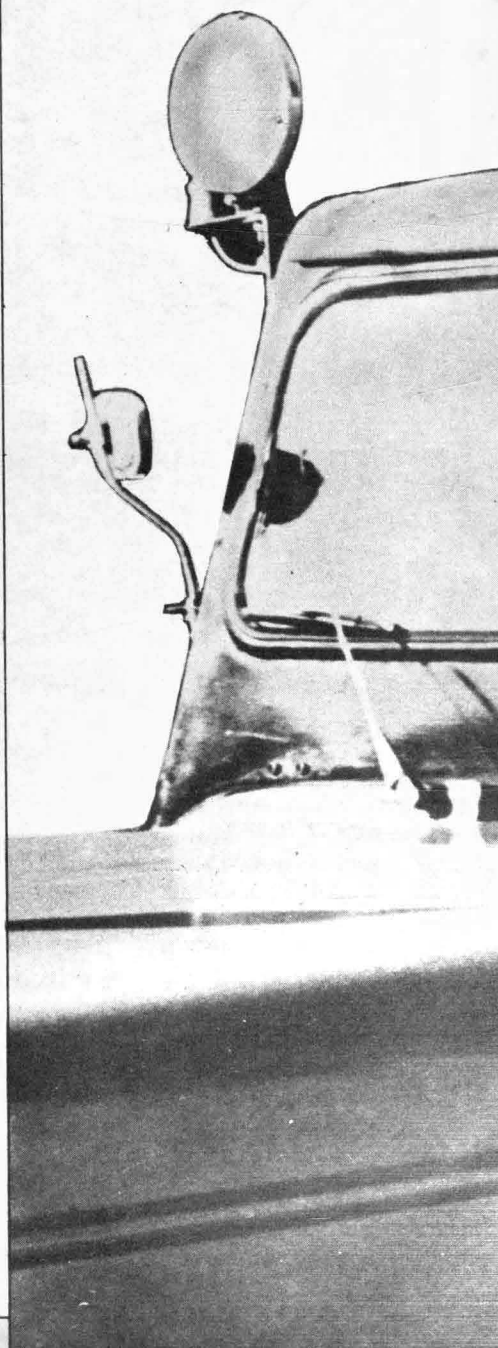
Romenkumar, presently SP, Imphal, is six foot tall. He is a teetotaler (though most Manipuris drink hard) and a vegetarian. His sense of discipline has created a precedent with the local police, like that of a higher ranking officer, DGP Julio Ribeiro in the Punjab.

Romenkumar was appointed DSP in 1974. His relentless crusade against the insurgents won him several honours. After 13 years of service he is able to clank about under the weight of four gallantry medals from the President of India, three gallantry medals from the Chief Minister of Manipur, one gold medal for outstanding service in the entire country, two gold medals from the Manipur Associated Chambers of Commerce. He has earned over Rs 90,000 as a cash reward for arresting hardcore insurgents. In recognition of his outstanding performance he was granted 13 years' increment in salary. On September 11, 1986, he was formally shifted to the IPS by superseding 11 senior officers of the state cadre: the superseded officers swear by him.

Whenever Romenkumar was not in direct command of anti-insurgency operations, he was involved at the intelligence level in the arrest or liquidation of several insurgents. During the height of the insurgency in the late '70s and early '80s when underground organisations unleashed a reign of terror, he tracked down terrorists like a terrifying terrier. While the insurgency problem is far from resolved,

officers like him have managed to check it.

Out of a series of operations carried out by Romenkumar, two incidents stand out. The first one earned him the first President's medal of his



By Iboyaima Laithangbam

Policeman

career; the second turned him into a hero.

The first was in 1981. Romenkumar was returning from supervising

the Moidangpok police station, when he intercepted a speeding jeep; to his trained eyes the driver of the oncoming jeep appeared nervous. He ordered the driver to take a U-turn and chase the jeep. A B-grade Hollywood

movie-type chase followed, lasting for about 30 minutes. This provoked the terrorists in the pursued vehicle to open fire. Eventually, the jeep which was carrying insurgents belonging to a Chinese-connected organisation PREPAK, turned turtle at a sharp bend. The police took from the wreckage a rich haul of arms and ammunition as well as vital information





'Conspicuous gallantry and courage' being honoured.

from the five insurgents arrested.

The second case was that of Sorojibala Devi, a beautiful girl from Imphal, who was kidnapped and murdered in a most gruesome manner. The post-mortem report stated that she was raped repeatedly and then tortured to death. Outrage resounded through the state over the police's failure to arrest the criminals.

Romenkumar realised that an overt police raid would not work since it would only alert the culprit. So he and his commandos, disguised as fishermen, drove in a mini bus to the forest where the alleged murder-

er was camping. The driver of the bus pretended to attend to some engine trouble, while the other 'fishermen' hung around inconspicuously for 30 minutes. Then Pungoba, the murderer, emerged from the thickets and walked towards Romenkumar. A scuffle ensued before Romenkumar's commandos overpowered Pungoba.

Several underground organisations would like to see Romenkumar dead, and the danger of his family members being held hostage is ever present, but the other supercop of India is unfazed. Today he moves around with two jeeploads of police commandos

and armed police commandos are around him even as he sits in his spacious office, a loaded revolver ready on his lap. But then, he is living a charmed life, having escaped death at least four times when the guns of the insurgents, fired point blank at him, miraculously misfired.

The dreaded People's Liberation Army also made two abortive attempts to kill Romenkumar on April 8 and April 24, 1981. Ten hardcore members of the hit squad, the Militia Wing, were entrusted with the task of assassinating him. Around 9 pm when Romenkumar came home, which is about three km away from his police station, the 40 insurgents manned positions on either side of Keishamthong bridge.

As Romenkumar and his commandos approached, he saw the insurgents and brought his jeeps to a screeching halt. One insurgent, crouching near him, opened fire with a .38 revolver. But since the ammunition, probably been buried under the earth was moist, all 16 rounds misfired. Two police commandos rushed through the bridge and cordoned off the escape route. Two insurgents escaped but two others were shot dead and six were arrested. From the statements extracted from these people Romenkumar picked up vital clues based on which he found the secret factories where bombs were manufactured.

Then on April 24, 1981, terrorists took up positions near his house. When a flashlight signal indicating the approach of Romenkumar appeared, the insurgents aimed their guns at the supercop. The engines of two terrorist trucks were revved up to confuse the police drivers. The first bullet smashed the window-screen, injuring Romenkumar's hand. There was a hail of bullets but nobody was hit. After sometime, reinforcements arrived and the insurgents were left with no option but to escape into the darkness. After these two major abortive assassination attempts, the PLA could not rustle up enough courage to make a third attempt to kill him. However,

Hiding In Their Holes

Romenkumar talks of kills in the hills.

Laithangbam: What are the reasons for the growth of insurgency?

Romenkumar: The most important reason is growing unemployment: many of the hardcore leaders resorted to arms when they could not get employment, and took sanctuary in foreign countries. Whenever we step up counter-insurgency operations the insurgents simply lie low in these sanctuaries till the dust settles. Free movement across the Indo-Burmese border also needs to be checked since insurgents return with arms, masquerading as common smugglers. Several among them are misguided youths who generally come from broken families. Above all, political patronage of the insurgents is a major factor for their increase.

Is Burma giving sanctuary to the north-east Indian insurgents?

I do not think the Burmese government is giving them sanctuary. The Burmese government is facing insurgency from their own underground organisations which are operating along the international border. Manipur's insurgents have come to an understanding with their Burmese counterparts on sharing the inaccessible jungles. The Burmese government cannot penetrate and smash these hideouts since they are inaccessible.

The Chief Minister of Manipur has been demanding the withdrawal of the army from the Imphal valley since the police can cope with insurgency. What is your view?

Well, insurgency has been contained in the valley area. Besides, the police in Manipur have been revamped. It is for the first time in India that the state police are armed with self-loading rifles (SLRs). The Manipur Rifles has received the first consignment of 300 SLRs. Besides our boys are undergoing training in hand-to-hand



combat, guerilla warfare and other commando tactics. The reports of sporadic violence pale into insignificance if compared to what is happening in other cities and states. The police can easily cope with the outbreak of violence in the valley area. But the army should stay in the hill areas where the NSCN insurgents are active.

Various underground groups of the north-east are reported to be trying to join hands for a concerted onslaught. Do you think this will happen?

Our reports confirm such unity moves by R K Meghen, the leader of the United Nations Liberation Front. But it will never materialise because the groups are incompatible ideologically. Besides, the leaders of the different groups, who regard themselves as supreme commanders, will never play second fiddle.

How many insurgents have been arrested by the police?

From January 1, 1980 to December 31, 1986 we have arrested 667 insurgents excluding those killed in encounters and ambushes.

What about the arms captured during this period?

Altogether 123 guns, many of them sophisticated foreign ones, were recovered from various insurgents and their hideouts. Besides, we recovered a number of grenades, bombs, explosives and a huge cache of ammunition.

Do you think the police can solve the insurgency problem?

The police alone cannot do anything. All sections of people, especially the intellectuals and politicians should join hands with the police to work towards a lasting peace.

Do you hope to stop insurgency by involving the youth in sports, as you are now doing?

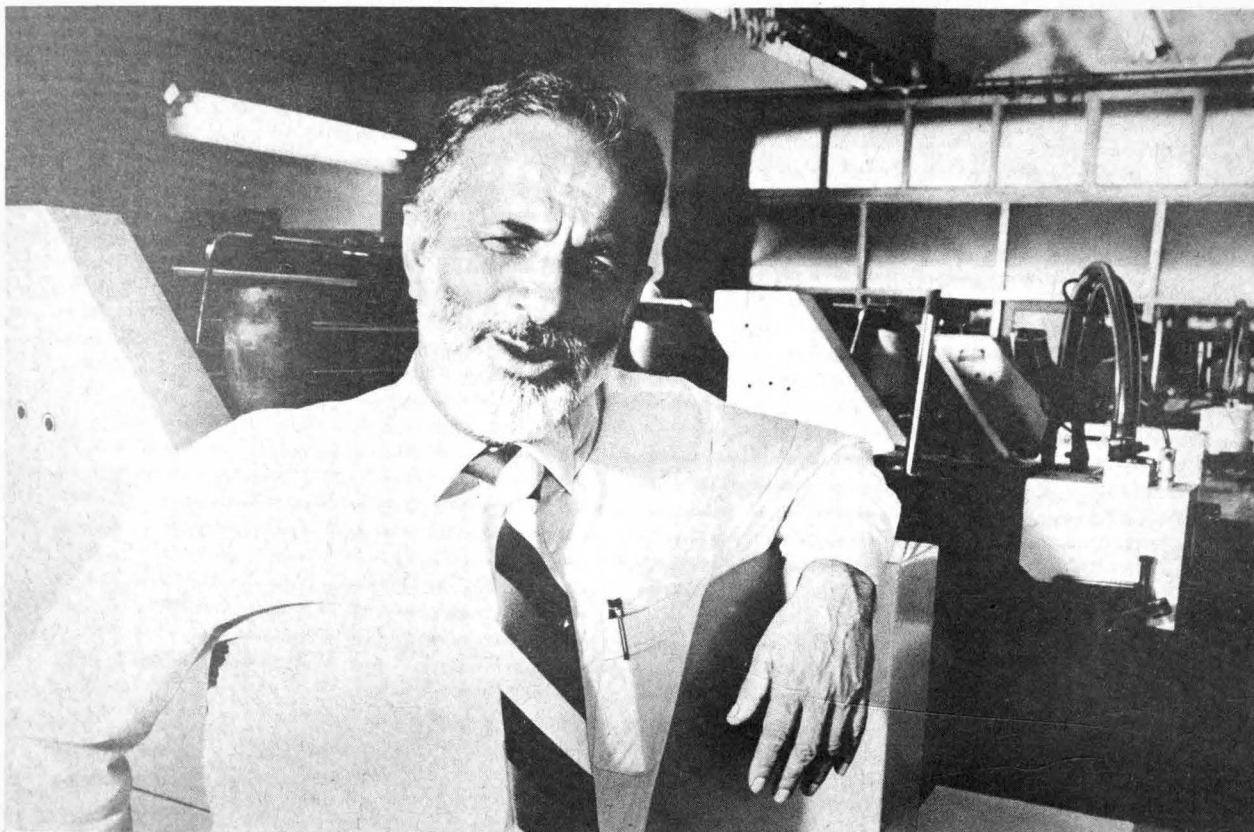
I believe that an empty mind is the devil's workshop. The youths who are unemployed become susceptible to anti-India propaganda. That is the reason why I am organising sports tournaments.

How serious is the drug problem?

It is really alarming. At present, addicts are resorting to daylight robberies to purchase drugs. Burma falls within the golden triangle and Burmese insurgents are bringing huge quantities of drugs into Moreh which is only 100 km from Imphal. They are doing it for hefty commissions.

It is rumoured that some ministers in Manipur are involved in the lucrative drug business.

So far we have not stumbled upon anything concrete. The arrested drug smugglers are mere carriers who do not know who their bosses are or who is paying them.



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PEOPLE



On the terrorists' trail.

the rank and file of the PLA have been clearly instructed to kill Romenkumar during any encounter. Three insurgents, who were intercepted by Romenkumar at Thangmeiband, opened fire only a few yards away from him. He was saved, this time, because the bullets misfired. During another encounter at Yaiskul, though many PLA insurgents were arrested and killed, one terrorist, hiding in a truck, opened fire at Romenkumar standing nearby. The bullets were deflected, hitting the truck's tarpaulin roof, giving Romenkumar time to duck under the vehicle. Another providential escape.

ROMENKUMAR was made the SP of Imphal district on May 7, 1986, and under his command the police made a considerable dent in the underground organisations' operations. Currently the Manipur

government is urging the central government to withdraw the army from the Imphal valley since the police can cope with insurgency without military help.

Romenkumar has not forgotten the basic duty of the police: to fight anti-social elements, and he has declared a war against drunkards, encroachers, those abetting pornography, gamblers and anyone else indulging in illegal activities. Today the state exchequer is netting around Rs 30,000 a month by way of fines from law breakers from Imphal district alone. Between May and December 1986, the police in Imphal district arrested 6,174 persons under these stringent drives. Those arrested were altogether fined Rs 1,87,930, a remarkable sum.

The response from the local people to Romenkumar's special drive against anti-social elements has been over-

whelming. Now almost all the localities have anti-drug organisations. Romenkumar receives about 30 applications everyday for these organisations and from women requesting him to round up drug peddlers and bootleggers. He is furnished with information about their whereabouts and their method of operation. Romenkumar has also forbidden policemen from drinking. They are made to start 'duty' early in the morning: he takes them jogging. And if any police personnel is found drunk, apart from strict punishment, Romenkumar, who is also a stickler for short hair, personally supervises the shaving of their heads.

Romenkumar has formed the theory that the gun alone cannot reform the misguided or the extremists. These youths, who are highly susceptible to anti-India propaganda and have visions of making Manipur an independent country, need to be guided and their energy channelised into something constructive. New sports clubs have sprung up in Imphal to wean away frustrated young men from terrorism. He has been quite successful in alienating them from the pro-China insurgents and this is heartening since Chinese interference in the north-east has become quite an irritant to India.

As long as insurgency is not scotched, Romenkumar will be restless. He stays in his office till midnight, chalking out his future plans. He consults his law books to ensure that the courts do not find loopholes in his charge sheets. Despite his full-time involvement in counter-insurgency, other law-breakers tremble at the mention of his name. In the first week of January 1987, he arrested three persons in possession of one kg of heroin worth Rs 4 lakh. (Two weeks later some peddlers ran away after ditching a tin containing 850 gm of heroin valued locally at Rs 3 lakh when Romenkumar badgered them.)

And, the Chief Minister of Manipur does not dare come out of his fort-like residence without Romenkumar's hawkeye watching over him. ♦

EXTRACT



ON APRIL 23, 1985, the top executives of the Coca-Cola Company held a press conference in New York city. News had leaked out that Coke, the king of soft drinks, would no longer be produced. In its place the Coca-Cola Company would offer a new drink with a new taste and would dare to call it by the old name, Coca-Cola. At the Vivian Beaumont Theatre in Lincoln Centre, some 200 reporters, photographers, and cameramen eagerly awaited confirmation of the sensational news, while hundreds more participated via satellite hook-up in Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, and Toronto.

Why, after all, was there so much interest? Because Coke is more than just a soft drink. What the famous Kansas newspaper editor, William Allen White wrote is true: "Coca-Cola is the sublimated essence of all that America stands for. A decent thing, honestly made, (and) universally distributed."

Coke had grown up with 20th century America, where rites of passage are marked by moving from sipping Coke as a soda pop to mixing it with rum as an adult's elixir. And that famous Coca-Cola logo appears on signs and billboards in virtually every other country as well, linking America to the rest of the world and looming as large as a symbol of the United States as the Statue of Liberty. Coke is so strongly identified with the United States that when countries fall out with us politically, Coke's exile sometimes closely follows the expulsion of our ambassador. Anti-western insurgents often identify Coca-Cola as the most visible example of capitalism in their countries and have blown up or taken over more than one Coca-Cola bottling plant in retaliation for some alleged grievance.

At home, Coke is more than a drink: it is sandlot baseball, high school pep rallies, that first driver's



A Tale Of Two Sippies



Coca-Cola is more than a drink: it is a way of life, particularly in the USA. In the 1940s Coca-Cola was what all GIs dying in Europe and Asia drank – it was 'a decent thing, honestly made, and universally distributed', as an American editor said. When one of the world's most successful companies decided to stop making the drink and changed to a new taste, there was public outcry. THOMAS OLIVER, the American journalist, recounts the rivalry between Coke and Pepsi. We carry an extract from his book, **The Real Coke, The Real Story**. Courtesy: UBS Publishers and Distributors Pvt Ltd.

license, hot rods, swimming pools, and street dances. It is the pause that refreshes and reminds us all of the good times, and it has even helped us through some of the bad.

With that passionate public concern in the background, amid the television lights and the red wash of Coca-Cola banners, on that April day in 1985, Roberto C. Goizueta, the chairman and chief executive officer of Coca-Cola, announced that the 'best has been made even better'. The world's largest soft-drink company had developed an improved taste for the world's number-one soft drink. After one hundred years, Coke would have a new taste.

Goizueta said that his company's decision to make the change was based on nearly 200,000 consumer taste tests, which had revealed a resounding preference for the new flavour. "To market research experts, to our bottlers, and to the retail trade, these numbers represent a staggering superiority," declared Donald R. Keough, the president of Coca-Cola. In no uncertain terms Goizueta told the press that the bold change was backed by tremendous confidence and enthusiasm on the part of the Coca-Cola Company. It was 'the surest move the company ever made', he said.

And so the new Coke was launched – and the reaction of the American people was immediate and violent: three months of unrelenting protest against the loss of Coke. So fierce was the reaction across the country that it forced a response from the Coca-Cola Company. On July 11, 1985, Goizueta and Keough called another press conference. This one took place at the company's headquarters in Atlanta, and this time there was no hoopla, no dog-and-pony show, no bragging and arrogance – only unadorned humility. Stunned Coca-Cola executives stepped up to the microphone and publicly apologised to the American people. They announced that the company would reissue the

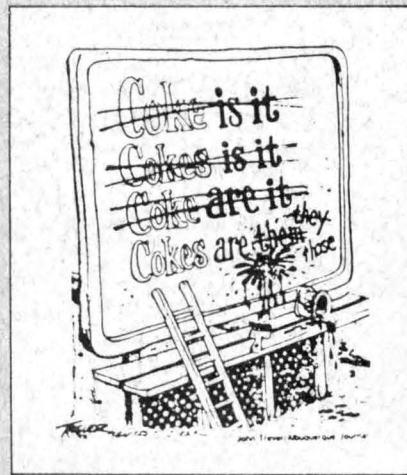
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original Coca-Cola formula under a new name, Coke Classic.

Never before had a major corporation told the American people that it was sorry, never before had a corporate giant begged consumers for forgiveness — and never was an apology so quickly accepted.

But how could the company that owns the world's most famous trademark have been so wrong about its significance? How was a £7 billion corporation, which produces not just Coke but diet Coke, Tab, Sprite, Minute Maid orange juice, and movie hits like *Ghostbusters*, brought to its knees by consumers? Could Coca-Cola's management team, with its sterling track record, really have been so blind that it didn't foresee the fiasco? Or was the whole event a huge publicity stunt, a carefully calculated plot to launch a new cola and boost the sales of the old one?

The Coca-Cola Company's news of April 23, 1985, sent shock waves across America. The unique taste of Coke would soon be a thing of the past, no more than a memory evoking a different era, a different way of life. Some people cried, some scoffed, some wrote scathing articles, and others frantically set about to stockpile enormous hoards of their irreplaceable long-time favourite. But everywhere Coke's large and loyal following asked, "Why did they do this to Coke?"



Cartoon by John Trever; Copyright 1985 by John Trever/Albuquerque Journal



DAN LAUCK, a reporter on KHLO-TV in San Antonio, Texas, drinks little else but Coke — no beer, no coffee, no tea or milk.

Although he may have a mixed drink three or four times a year, he never mixes Coke with alcohol — "Why ruin a good Coke?" he asks. The 35-year-old insists on drinking only Coke that comes in the original six-and-a-half-ounce bottle, and his habit which has gone on since his college years, is to consume 12 of these bottles a day. If he plays tennis in the hot Texas sun, he may drink a whole case in a

single day. To compensate for his immense caloric intake from Coke, Dan has had to forgo both breakfast and lunch.

Everywhere he goes, Dan carries a hand-held cooler. If he finds himself in a restaurant that doesn't serve the real thing, he'll bring in one Coke at a time from the ample supply in his VW convertible. And when he and his wife, Meg, go to a movie theatre that serves a cola other than Coke, Meg lugs along an insulated pocketbook that is really a camouflaged cooler packed with bottles of Coke.

Dan will do just about anything to maintain his habit. At one time he was living and working in New York and the local Coca-Cola bottler stop-



Cartoon reprinted from Copley News Service; Copyright 1985 by Copley News Service



ped producing Coke in six-and-a-half-ounce bottles, so for five or six years Dan periodically drove all the way to Wilmington, Delaware, to buy his stash. Once he rented a truck and brought back 150 cases.

When Dan arrived at work on April 23, a day that Cokaholics have dubbed Black Tuesday, his managing editor asked if he felt as if his life had just gone down the toilet. Dan didn't know what she was talking about and didn't believe her when she told him that they were changing the taste of Coke. He called the Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta, and the people there

confirmed what the world was just beginning to learn.

"I couldn't have been more surprised if someone had told me that I was gay," said the husband and father of two. "I was flabbergasted, and after 20 minutes in the funk, I asked our director if I could borrow his pick-up truck." Dan drove to the San Antonio bottler and purchased 110 cases for £ 979. The next day he was torn between feeling guilty about spending so much money and wanting to stockpile even more Coke. "I thought about cashing in some of my wife's stocks and buying more," he said.



LIBBY LAVINE IS A short, auburn-haired woman who gets teary-eyed when she hears the old Coke song "I'd like to teach the world to sing, in perfect harmony; I'd like to buy the world a Coke, and keep it company." In the basement of her comfortable home in Birmingham, Michigan, stands an old Coke vending machine stocked with ten-ounce bottles. Libby's kitchen telephone is shaped like a Coke bottle, with the push button numbers located under the base. Nearby is a transistor radio shaped like a modern-day Coca-Cola vending machine. Using all the discipline she can muster, Libby restricts herself to three ten-ounce bottles a day.

When Libby Lavine heard the Coca-Cola Company's news, she not only rushed out and bought £ 700 worth of Coke, she also got angry. She called the *Daily Tribune* in nearby Royal Oaks and placed a classified ad asking for letters from other old-Coke fans. A *Daily Tribune* reporter picked up the story about her letter-writing campaign, and Libby was so swamped with mail that she rented a post office box to receive the letters. Within the first three days she got 100, and there would be many, many more.

"Cheeseburger and a Coke... Is that the new Coke or the old Coke, or the new old Coke or the old new Coke, or the old, old...?"



Cartoon by Terry Allen; Copyright 1985 by Terry Allen



BLACK TUESDAY caught John Coit, a *Rocky Mountain News* columnist in Denver, hard-up for a story. Coit was a Vietnam veteran from South Carolina who had joined the *News* only a few years before. He was plugging along, trying to find a niche as a personal columnist in a strange town, a southern boy trying to tap into the sensitivities of the West. That day he happened to be walking past a newspaper street rack when he saw the *USA Today* headline about Coca-Cola changing its formula:



Roberto Goizueta, chairman, Coca-Cola

'Sweeter Taste to Woo Pepsi Generation'.

"I reacted as a consumer, not a columnist, and I was outraged," said Coit, a 38 year-old Coke enthusiast. But at least he had his topic for the day, and he sat down to write the first of what would be six columns about new Coke. First, he good-naturedly warned Coca-Cola that it had better not start pushing some 'sugar-plum fairy gag juice' on the populace in place of 'daddy juice', as some kids called the drink their fathers loved. And he ended the column with the kicker — "The new stuff better be good." Like many journalists who initially wrote about new Coke, Coit had not yet tasted it, but that was beside the point — he didn't like the idea, period.

The Denver Coca-Cola Bottling Company was quick to respond to Coit's article. They sent him a whole case of new Coke with a promise that he would like the new taste.

"It was awful — worse than I imagined," recalled John. "I wondered who they had tested it on." And the headline of his second column blasted, "If IT Is Awful, Lousy, Then New Coke Is It." Among the many criticisms John levelled at new Coke was that it 'tastes like a lousy imitation of Pepsi', and he predicted the stuff would fail.

Coit's protest against new Coke be-

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came a crusade, and he became the talk of the town, appearing on all the local TV and radio shows as the 'mouse that roared'. The subject of Coca-Cola proved to be very close to the hearts of many Denverites, earning Coit a new and faithful following for his column.



IN BROOKINGS, South Dakota, Duane Larson, the owner of Nick's Hamburgers, heard the news in his living room the night of Black Tuesday. He couldn't believe it and he didn't like it. A feisty, stubborn man, Duane had recently threatened the local Coca-Cola distributor that he might change to Pepsi because the last delivery of Coke (the original) had tasted flat.

Duane sponsored a softball team called Nick's and Coke, which had won the town championship a few years back. He always took Coke along when he went pheasant hunting, and he displayed a collection of Coke bottles in his hamburger shop on Main Street.

Two weeks after the news broke, Duane brought home his first can of new Coke, poured it over ice, waited a minute for it to get cold, and then took a swallow. When he told his wife it tasted lousy, she accused him of having been biased from day one. But when she took a sip of the new Coke, she said, "You'd better call Pepsi."

Like many vitriolic protestors against new Coke, Duane became something of a celebrity. A photo of him pouring a litre of new Coke out into the street appeared in the local paper. The *New York Times* called and interviewed him, and he was quoted in *Newsweek* magazine.



ON APRIL 23 a novelty songwriter and singer named George Pickard turned on the midday news in Shoney's Inn in Nashville, Tennessee. When he heard the an-



Roger Enrico, president, Pepsi

nouncement about new Coke he reacted instantly. He put aside the album he was in Nashville to record for Wayne Hodge's Stargem Records and, within 45 minutes, wrote some lyrics for a new song called 'Coke Was It'. He convinced Hodge to make a quick cut of the ballad, and the two worked the rest of the afternoon perfecting the lyrics.

Early the following morning Hodge had six musicians and three background singers ready to go. 'Coke Was It' was recorded by noon, mixed and ready for stamping by six that Wednesday evening. The next day 5,000 copies were pressed and sent to most of the nation's radio stations. Another 2,000 would be pressed in May.

Pickard estimated that 'Coke Was It' was played on the radio between 300,000 and 400,000 times. In addition, the TV programme *20/20* and several local TV stations around the country broadcast the song. Even Coca-Cola headquarters itself apparently wanted the record. Roberto Goizueta, the chairman, got his own personal copy of 'Coke Was It' and one hundred others were distributed throughout the rest of the company.

Consumers felt they had been excluded from the marketing mainstream of America. Their likes and

passions obviously did not count; they were expected to be passive recipients of whatever the corporate world decided to give them. But, as it turned out, the public did not so easily relinquish Coke, nor did they want it to be improved. As one native of Atlanta remarked, "I don't think there's anything you could do to make it better. It's perfect."

Although consumers of Coca-Cola felt like puppets in the hands of a whimsical puppeteer, the Coca-Cola Company did not come to its radical decision easily or quickly. How could it, without good cause, have tampered with the taste of a drink that was distributed to 155 countries and consumed more than 303 million times a day? Indeed, years of planning preceded the arrival of new Coke and years of internal problems contributed to the demise of the old one. Some of the seeds of those problems were in fact planted in the original formation of the Coca-Cola Company but would go unnoticed during the company's exciting boom years.



THE TASTE OF

Coke which became so much a part of American life, dates back over a century.

In 1885, John Pemberton, an Atlanta pharmacist, registered a trademark for 'French Wine Cola—Ideal Nerve and Tonic Stimulant', a brew he had developed in a three-legged pot he apparently stirred with an oar. The name was appropriate, since the stimulant is said to have contained cocaine, along with wine and a few other ingredients. After about a year, Pemberton decided to change the formula; he removed the wine and added caffeine and, for flavour, extract of kola nut. At that point, his partner and bookkeeper, Frank Robinson, changed the name to Coca-Cola because he thought the two Cs, written in the Spenserian script that was popular at the time, would look good in advertising. Coca-Cola, which joined the ranks of the many mysterious potions being

peddled by travelling salesmen, was sold as a cure for both hangovers and headaches.

Georgia businessman Asa Candler bought the (sole) rights to Coca-Cola from John Pemberton in 1889. To expand the business Candler began to sell Coca-Cola syrup to wholesalers, who in turn sold it to drugstores. There it was mixed with carbonated water and served at soda fountains. Candler also dreamed up the idea of serving Coke in the shapely little glasses that are now collectibles, and he sold these to wholesalers as well.

In 1889, Benjamin F. Thomas and Joseph P. Whitehead of Chattanooga, Tennessee, approached Candler with a proposition to bottle Coca-Cola. The two men are said to have thought of this merchandising scheme while they were in Cuba, where they noticed a beverage of some sort being consumed from bottles. Candler believed that sales of his drink would remain predominantly in the drugstore, and bottling was such an expensive operation that he wanted no part of it. Still, he saw the advantage of distributing his syrup to new markets, and he obliged the businessmen by selling them the right to bottle Coke throughout nearly all of the United States. The price was one dollar — possibly the steal of the century.

Thomas and Whitehead, assisted by financier John T. Lupton, promptly sold regional bottling rights to other businessmen in the South and later in the rest of the country. They created a network of independent bottlers numbering about 1000 by 1930. Each bottler had an exclusive right *in perpetuity* to bottle Coke in his area, and no one else except the soda fountains could sell Coke in that market. The bottlers actually owned the Coca-Cola trademark in their territories and the company could not refuse to sell them syrup. This set up, which formed the heart and soul of Coca-Cola's system, would come under attack nearly a century later when the Federal Trade Commission charged the company

with violating anti-trust laws by restricting competition.

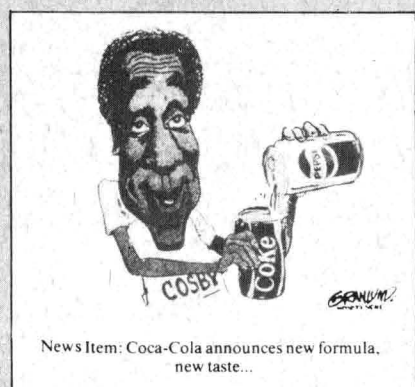
Candler's budding Coca-Cola Company did well enough to sell for \$25 million in 1919, in what was the largest financial transaction to date in the South. The purchaser was entrepreneur Ernest Woodruff, president of the Commercial Travelers Savings Bank, later the Trust Company of Georgia, whose vaults still guard the recipe for Coke. Woodruff was head of a syndicate of investors who had helped build not only one of the state's largest banks but also the Atlantic Ice and Coal Company, the Atlantic Steel Company, and the Continental Gin Company. But Woodruff was in business for more than just the money. Hard work, to the exclusion of almost everything else, was his *raison d'être*, and he assumed that the principle applied to his family as well. Legend has it that when the board of directors of Atlantic Ice and Coal recommended a raise for his son, Robert, Ernest entered a resounding veto, and Robert quit.

Despite Woodruff's unflagging commitment, Coca-Cola fizzled in the early twenties. Sales of Coke syrup dropped from 18.7 million gallons in 1918 to 15.4 million gallons in 1922, and the price of Coca-Cola stock plummeted from \$40 to \$18 in the same years. Profits fell primarily because the company's cost of syrup

skyrocketed while its cost to the bottlers stayed the same. Back in 1899 Candler had contracted with his bottlers to sell them syrup at a fixed price, and that contract was still binding. In Candler's day, sugar, a key ingredient, cost only seven cents a pound, but by the time Ernest Woodruff was in charge of things, postwar inflation had quadrupled that figure. When the staggering company tried to pass on some of the burden to the bottlers, they sued.

In 1921 the opponents agreed to a decree that fixed the price of syrup at the 1921 current price, subject to quarterly adjustments based on the price of sugar. Thus the costs of all the ingredients in the syrup *except sugar* were locked at the 1921 level. The bottlers had to pick up any fluctuations in sugar price, paying whatever Coke had to pay for it. Woodruff may have been farsighted — the agreement worked fine for 50 years — but even he could not have forecast the wildfire inflation of the seventies, when spiralling costs of the other syrup ingredients would make it scarcely possible for the company to make a profit on Coke.

Swamped with legal battles against its many imitators, threatened by bankruptcy, the 1920s Coca-Cola Company was at an impasse. To restore morale as well as profits, the board of directors turned to a new generation. Robert Winship Woodruff, 33, was then pulling in a hefty \$85,000 a year as general manager of White Motor, a truck company in Cleveland, Ohio. In April 1923, Robert became president of Coca-Cola.



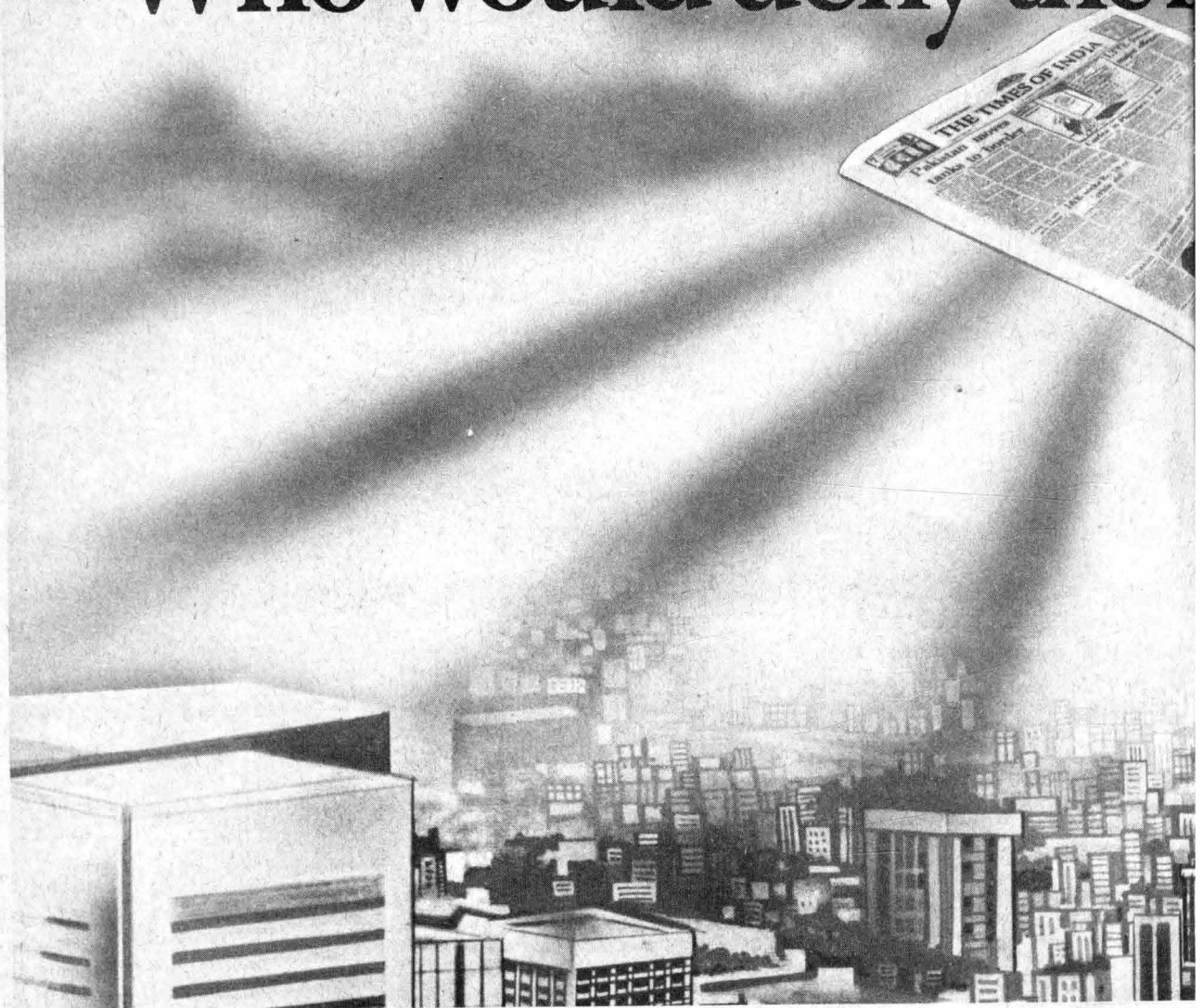
Cartoon featuring American comedian Bill Cosby

Cartoon by Granlund; Copyright 1985 by Harte Hanks Communications, Inc.



THE BOSS, AS HE came to be called, would make the name Coke virtually synonymous with that of America around the world. Yet this dominant figure worked behind the scenes in relative anonymity. He hired a public relations man to keep his name *out* of the newspapers and told the publisher of *The Atlanta Constitution* that he did-

Who would deny the i



For almost a century and a half, The Times of India has chronicled the life and history of the nation. In the process, it has come to be an inseparable part of the Indian scene.

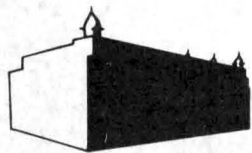
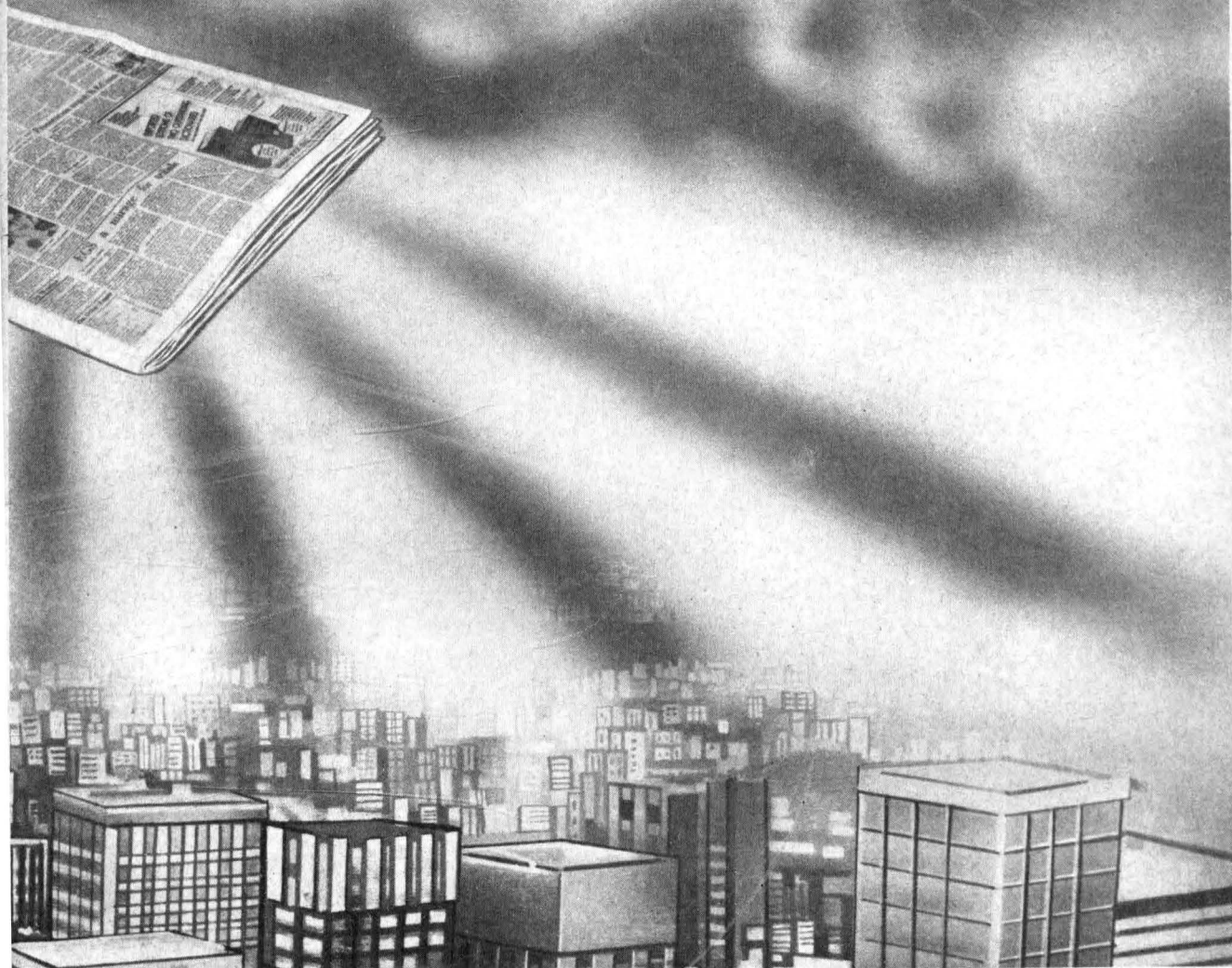
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influence of the Times?



**Times change.
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n't want to see his name in that paper again unless he was convicted of rape. A plaque on his desk read, "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit," a saying that perhaps no other corporate president before or since has endorsed. With his fedora, and a cigar permanently jutting from his teeth, he led the company through the strength of his personality.

The Boss was a stocky, gruff, and strong-willed man who did things his own way from an early age. As soon as he got to the troubled Coca-Cola Company, he launched radical new programmes, insisting on quality control and firing-up the bottling industry to help make his product ubiquitous. These strategies may seem obvious to a generation raised on soft drinks, but in Woodruff's day they signalled singular foresight and acumen. He seemed to know instinctively what was right for Coca-Cola.

Early in his reign Woodruff called a meeting of his sales force and, without warning, announced to the shocked members of the audience that they were fired. The company had eliminated the sales department, he said. The next day he called back the

stunned employees and re-hired them for his new 'service' department. Now they were called 'servicemen', and selling Coke syrup was only part of their job. At the soda fountains, they would help install new machinery, train retailers to dispense syrup properly, and find better methods of mixing the peppy drink. At the bottling plants, servicemen would increase productivity and efficiency by advising on all aspects of the operation, from machinery to shipping. With Woodruff's sweeping quality-control programmes now underway, Coke enthusiasts could expect to find one and only one unmistakable Coke taste in the North and in the South, from coast to coast.

Placing Coke 'within arm's reach of desire' anywhere and everywhere in the country was another of Woodruff's ambitions. Why not make it available at gas stations, factories, office buildings, movie theatres, baseball parks, even churches? Wherever there are people who get thirsty, make Coke an option. Woodruff realised the enormous potential of the bottle as a means to carry out his dream. Coke in bottles could go anywhere, be sold anywhere, and be consumed anywhere. If people sipped

Coke at the drugstore soda fountain and then saw bottles on the grocery-store shelf, they'd probably buy it.

Within Woodruff's first five years at the helm, Coca-Cola in bottles began to outsell Coke sold at the soda fountains. Coke cropped up, as the 1927 advertising slogan claimed, 'around the corner from anywhere'. Today some observers hypothesize that Pepsi eventually caught up with Coke not because of inventive advertising or a better taste but because Pepsi finally became as ubiquitous as its rival. In the 1980s soft drinks became so widespread they overtook tap water as the number-one beverage in the United States.

When Woodruff took control, Coca-Cola had trickled into Canada, Cuba, and Puerto Rico but otherwise was unknown around the world. Curious about its potential to please the foreign palate, Woodruff outlined a plan in 1926 to test the drink in Europe. When the board of directors balked, he proceeded in secrecy, establishing a foreign sales department and showing a profit within three years. Only then did he inform the directors of his disobedience. Spreading Coke around the world was the feat Woodruff was proudest of, yet he remained unassuming and reluctant to give himself too much credit. "I didn't have vision," he remarked. "I was just curious."

Yes, Woodruff was persistently curious, but he was stubborn, too, and in marketing Coke abroad, he again stood up to the executives. Once it was clear the drink would be sold overseas, there were those who recommended modifying its flavour to suit the taste buds of each nationality. But Woodruff stuck to his belief in the universal appeal of Coke's single, secret formula.

During World War II Coke deluged the globe. Wherever the GIs went, there went Coke. "See that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents wherever he is and whatever it costs the company," Woodruff ordered his staff in 1941. Considered a morale booster and



Singer Tina Turner promoting Pepsi

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emblem of home for the homesick soldier, Coke's catchy new slogans like 'It's the real thing' and 'The global high sign' spoke to the GIs far afield, and they responded with unequivocal enthusiasm. In the course of the war, they drank five billion bottles of Coke.

What was the company's financial situation in the fifties? Coca-Cola ruled the soft-drink world, and its name was as universally known as that of any other product in commercial history. Sales were \$144.7 million in 1955, bringing in net profits of \$27.5 million. Woodruff was not one to skimp when it came to telling the world about Coca-Cola: the advertising budget was \$30 million that year. Radio and TV intoned, 'What you need is a Coke'.

No other soft drink could touch Coca-Cola in the fifties. The favourite outsold its nearest rival, Pepsi-Cola, by better than two to one. In the early thirties Pepsi-Cola had, in fact, faced bankruptcy and Woodruff could have bought the company for a nominal fee. He declined on the grounds that it wouldn't be helpful to market a drink that would compete with Coke. Had Woodruff had a crystal ball showing scenes from the seventies, he would probably have leaped at the chance to eliminate what would become Coke's fiercest competitor.



EVEN THOUGH Pepsi's challenge didn't directly affect Coca-Cola's pocketbook, it scored a victory which can't be measured by market share or volumes of sugar-water sold. "The pride of the company and bottlers was wounded," said Charles Millard, chairman of the New York bottling company. And wounded pride led to an obsession with Coke's image as number one.

This theme became the focus of Coca-Cola's next retaliation on TV. The company hired Bill Cosby, the popular comedian, to ridicule the Pepsi Challenge in a series of commercials known as the 'Rat Pack',



Cartoon by Bob Gorrell; Copyright 1985 by Bob Gorrell/The Richmond News Leader

which referred to a pack of drinks that wished they were like Coke. "If you're number two or three or seven," Cosby mugged in the spots, "you know what you want to be when you grow up." And then he held up a can of Coke. "The number-one soft drink in the world. . ."

"Fundamentally the rules changed. All of a sudden taste superiority became the point, such an important issue," explained Sergio Zyman, a Mexican-born dynamo who defected from Pepsi to Coca-Cola in 1979 and eventually became director of marketing for Coca-Cola USA. A thin, fit man with an abundance of carefully barbered, curly hair, Zyman recalled the shift in focus at Coca-Cola during the onslaught of the Challenge which lasted until 1983: "We were obsessed with the Pepsi Challenge and the Nielsen share — not sales."

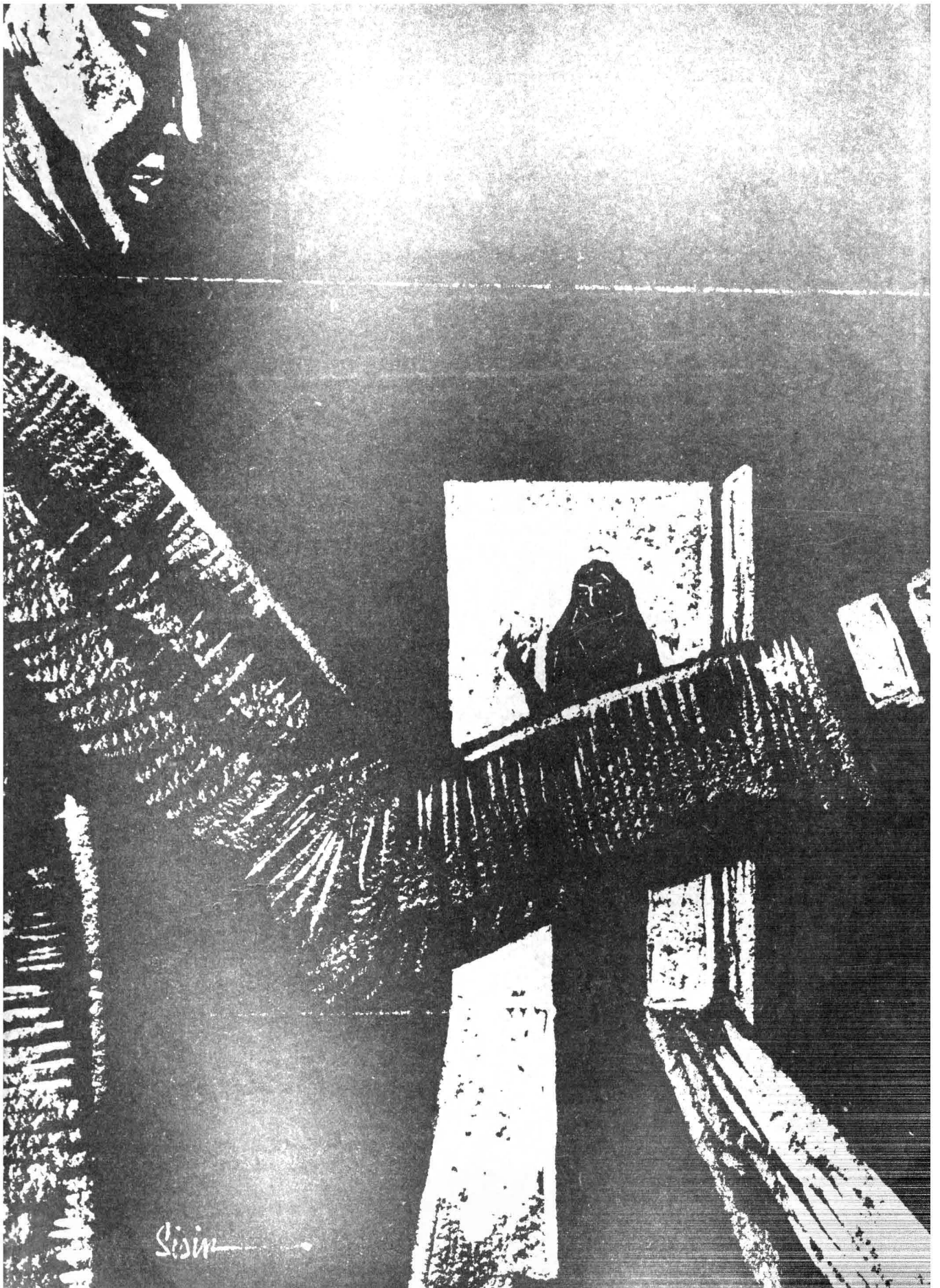
The Pepsi Challenge indeed challenged the heart and soul of the Coca-Cola Company — its sacred cow, the secret formula, so secret that no more than three people at any time ever knew the proper mixture of its ingredients. "We had a formulation that had been in place since the dawn of our history, but consumers were changing and we shouldn't take it as given that consumers' tastes hadn't changed," Keough said. "We should be certain that our product fits con-

sumers' tastes and we shouldn't be embarrassed to explore."

In 1979 Roy Stout, the director of marketing research, was given the first of several new colas to test. All he was told at the time was that it was a product the technical division said would beat Pepsi's taste. Stout's department conducted consumer taste tests and concluded that the new concoction, in fact, did *not* beat Pepsi. "It only tied Pepsi," Stout said. But at least the flavour chemists were getting closer; it was parity at least.

"The way it was left," Stout recalled, "was for the technical division to develop a taste that beat Pepsi, and then we'd decide what to do with it."

The Pepsi Challenge threatened Coca-Cola's heritage during a troubled decade, when the kingdom in Atlanta was fractured by civil wars and its leader was ageing. The company's structure and practices were under attack. Perhaps Coca-Cola was feeling overly sensitive. Perhaps, as Millard said, "The company and some of the bottlers . . . overreacted to the Challenge." When Coca-Cola chose so drastic a course as exploring for a new formula, Alan Pottasch (a Pepsi advertising executive) felt 'it had to be pride, because we weren't hurting their numbers. They overreacted and if they hadn't history would have been different.'



Sisim



By Ruchira Mukherjee

AS THE HOTEL understood it, the wedding was definitely over. Arun loosened his tie, and placed the pink turban carelessly into his mother's elbow. It amused him to see the vibrant disarray of marigold and rose, two people before their moment of truth; the log fire by the smoke of which he had been wed, breaking down in the hands of faceless hotel staff into geometrical shapes — the flat disc, the cube, the long red cylinder — and being borne swiftly away. A matter of blocks and rods and a canopy, really, from which would emerge in a profusion of flowers, ghee, and incense tomorrow, a whole fresh-faced wedding. An American woman, her eyes wide with wonder, a green acetate dress thick above her knees, handed the bride her gift of red roses. As the lights in the gallery dimmed, a hotel manager skidded across on nervous polished shoes: would the lady and the gentleman come this way? The bridal suite was ready. A titter went through the guests, the hotel's traditional gift of a free suite. A wedding night. The crude bastards, Arun thought, have they no feeling? How disgusted she must feel, how shamed, this lovely creature beside me. Like candyfloss she looks tonight. How has she chosen to marry me? Arun looked coldly at the manager, and turning to his mother, said: "Mummy, I'm coming home."

THE WICKED TULIP

His mother looked confused. "If that's what you want, *beta*. . . The air-conditioning at home is not working too well." But it was settled.

Arun had known all these years that his father was waiting for him to finish his studies so that he could join the business. The manufacture of cloth, cottons mainly, in the tax-free haven of Kandla. Arun had expressed the wish to go in for post-graduate studies in history and attend art classes in his free time. His father had agreed to the plan provided he studied management for a further year. Three very full years in Bombay they had turned out to be, leaving Arun more confused than before about what he really wanted to be. Only one thing had become clear: that he would need a great deal of money to do the things that pleased him, visit beautiful monuments, look at old sculptures, for instance. To keep himself from falling completely into absurdity. Afterwards, he was sent on a holiday to Europe. The boy is too withdrawn for his age, his father said. It may be a good idea to get him married. So a photograph reached Arun in the midst of the skiing season

FICTION

in the Austrian Tyrol, in the midst of the beer and the singing and the gargantuan meals of sausage and potatoes. Her name was Vineeta, and she was as lovely as the early Indian morn. An engagement ceremony had already taken place. After a few days of silence and an excess of beer, he began to dream of the face in the photograph. And on his 22nd birthday, he was wed.

Arun pushed open the bedroom door. "This, ma'am," he announced with a small flourish, "is your kingdom. Your little acre. Till I can find the real thing." She giggled. "Seriously," he said, "Dad has been looking around. We shall have our own flat quite soon." A mess of parcels, garlands and clothes, greeted them on the bed. Arun began dumping armfuls of stuff onto the floor. Vineeta watched him. The air-conditioner was not cooling the room at all. The stale flowers would take up all the air. He opened a window and poured himself a drink. She still stood near the door, a visitor, waiting for him to ask. He asked: "Won't you sit down? It's been a long day." She nodded, and came slowly forward, taking the pins out of her hair. A whole person exclusively for me, Arun thought looking at her small ears, to love and to protect. She'll never belong to anybody else . . . funny word, belong. . . Meet my husband, she'll say to her friends, my husband. He liked the sound of it, its cool proprietary ring.

His mother put her head in through the door. "Comfy, children? Oh, it's disgraceful, I haven't even had the sheets changed." She darted to the cupboard, and threw a heap of fragrant linen onto the bed. Arun watched his mother speak to Vineeta in low tones.

Years ago, she had stood just so at the foot of the bed on which his father lay, saying nothing. Dimly, he heard himself say, wake up, daddy, it's 11 o'clock. Mummy's waiting for you with breakfast. She'll wait me into my grave, his father had replied, eyes shut. Mummy had said, after breakfast, will you take the children to my mother's? He had sat up suddenly then, his face fleshy and purple with rage, telling her to go to hell. Stop hounding me, woman, I've told you before, I'll do nothing. He had gone on for a time, then sunk again into his pillows, eyes shut. A silence. The relief. And then his mother had asked with the gentleness of power, so what time are you taking the children to my mother's? He had said nothing, only his fingers had gone up to his brow the way they did when he was tired.

His mother left the room. "Come and sit down," he said. "Did your parents ask for your consent before the wedding was fixed?"

She nodded.

"What did you say?"

"I said that if they liked you, I would marry you." She smiled apologetically.

"Yes, but what did you really think?"

She lowered her head, this exquisite creature with translucent nostrils, and her hair came tumbling about the shoulders.

"Vivek, my brother, spoke of you often — of the years you were in school. He told me that in the third standard your best friend was accused of stealing money from the headmaster's room. Wrongly, I think? They wanted to expel him. So *you* ran away from school." She held her arm out, "This bangle, it really is too tight. Could you, do you think. . . ?" Arun saw the veins in the wrist, the little hollow on the inside of the elbow, the deepening stain at the armpit of her silk blouse, and he could not move.

"Will you try some vermouth?" he asked. "Excellent stuff." She shook her head, and her faraway eyes were dark above a pale full curve of cheek. "Where you went," she said, "were the women beautiful?"

"If they were, they hid themselves away from me. The ones I saw had splotchy red skins and thick calves. Their hair was tied up in braids across the crown, like this. . ."

She seemed satisfied. "The country is marvellous to see, is it not. . . the mountains and the lakes?"

"The best," he replied. A pause. "You must be. . . as you sit there. . . the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." He placed a finger under her chin. Her eyes blurred, and her cheek came to rest upon his palm. He looked at her face, then the young breast, and as suddenly, withdrew his hand. Her head fell forward. The Irishwoman who had taught him his prayers, kneeling beside him in kindergarten, had blazing eyes. 'And lead us not into temptation.' The deep blue of her eyes had seemed to fill her face. 'But deliver us from evil.'

She lay then on the bed, quiet, and he watched her from across the room, holding his vermouth tightly with both hands. "Aren't you sleepy?" she asked, turning and smiling at him. "Very," he replied, and sat in the same posture, unmoving. When he awoke, it was morning, and his mother stood over the sofa, holding a cup of tea. Her face looked drawn. Vineeta was not in the room.

"Your first day at work, and you haven't even had a bath," his mother said. Through the door afterwards, he saw his mother put her arm around Vineeta's shoulder and lead her into the dining room.

WHEN ARUN RETURNED from the factory, it was already past nine in the evening. He asked for dinner to be sent to his room.

She sat on the edge of the bed, small and unprotected, her hair in a pony-tail, doing a crossword puzzle. She did not look up when he entered.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "leaving you alone like this. It won't always be this way. It's just that there was a partial strike at the factory . . . my first day too. I couldn't get away. Have you had a nice day?"

She sat silent, her body tense, about to relent. "I'll show you something I've got for you. . . for us. I booked them some time ago." He held out two tickets to Spain. She smiled but did not look at him.

"What have you done with yourself all day?" Arun asked.

ed, stirring his soup.

"Shopped with your mother. I wanted proper curtains for this room. This print is so old. I had something like it in the nursery when I was a baby. What else. . . I learnt to make a soup with dumplings, the one you are eating. And I watched a movie. An ancient one. It had Grace Kelly in it. A murder mystery. Yes, at home." Her voice had such cadences, such surprises of tone, he wanted her to go on speaking, even about trivia. It was like the mountain air to a labourer newly up from the plains.

"Aren't your parents wanting to come by and see you?" he asked. "You could be crying your eyes out for all they know."

She tossed her pony-tail. "Crying is for babies. I'm planning to go and see them myself tomorrow."

"When will you be back?" he enquired.

"When I find I'm needed here," she replied. Arun was alarmed, but could find nothing to dispel the tiny fog that hung between them. Nothing that would be both effective and unsentimental. Then her fine nose crinkled and she began to laugh, a soft gurgling laugh. "I'll be back before you've had time to notice that I've gone."

She moved to the dressing table mirror, and began removing with brisk little movements, her jewellery, her make-up, and finally, her sari and blouse. The petticoat sat low on her hip, and a fine gold chain straddled her pale little waist. Arun saw large nipples pushing through a lacy brassiere. My little tulip, he thought, and as he shut his eyes, he could feel his hand close around the tender bulb, her body. She caught him shutting his eyes from across the room, and pulled a quick robe over her shamed limbs.

Afterwards, Arun switched off the lights. As they lay on the big bed, Arun told her about a haunted *pension* he had once stayed in back in the Austrian hills. In the room where Arun had stayed, a ghost was said to come and light a candle each night in a corner of the rough wooden floor. Arun had sometimes found the candle-ends in the morning. An old Jewish woman escaped from Dachau, it was said. She had died on her arrival at the little Austrian village.

Soon all the household sounds died down. The dogs had been walked, the coffees downed, and the cook's vessels had made their concluding crashes. He felt Vineeta's tiny hand on his elbow. He could have grasped it then, tightly against his chest, as he wanted to. Or again later, when she placed her finger on his eyelid. But a racking self-loathing rose within his breast, his gorge rose — 'I cannot' — and with that a resentment towards her. Does she never sleep? His desire was gone. So when she slipped her arm round his waist, he muttered that he was sick, rose and entered the bathroom. Before it could get any further, he had let himself out of the bathroom door, and escaped into the night.

He ran for a while hard, then harder, in the direction of the wood. After a stretch, a barking dog began to chase him, so he sat down panting upon a stone bridge, and placed his

head in his hands. He had never, he realised, been like the other boys in school. It was not that he had not joined the general banter about boobs and bottoms, but somewhere in the centre of himself, he had believed that girls were beings inhabiting a sphere that was cleaner, more rarefied than his own. They seemed incapable of viciousness or lust, incapable of violence.

There were nights, when he was 15 years old, when he had lain awake, riven with imaginings of the female form. One evening, he had followed a girl home through the park. She was older and bigger than he, and the boys had declared her to be a hot number. All the way, walking, rushing, running, to catch up with her long strides, he had said to himself, if she talks to me, I shall surely kiss her. At long last, he had seen that her eyes were wide with fear, and that she was trembling. He had turned to stone. The girl had turned on her heel and walked away. Afterwards, in the years through college in Bombay, Arun had never once made friends with any member of the opposite sex. Nor wanted to, particularly.

He thought of Vineeta, the gurgle in her voice when she was amused, and of his own grating laugh. He rubbed the calluses on his palm against his cheek, and thought of the tender skin around her navel. He grew pale. How can I, this lewd, hard, hairy animal, my brain liquefying with lust, touch that tulip on my bed? I will *not* violate her with prurient intention. With my coarse body. Never. For if I do. . . I will be punished. She will be taken away from me. He was whispering aloud now. By death. His body rocked backwards and forwards on the stone.

Later, he walked home thinking about his mother, stately and patient. Her suffering. She always forgave father. . . forgave his anger, his fetid passions, the smell of unhappiness he brought into the house every time he entered it. He never really spoke to mummy, if he could help it. It was mummy who would recount to him each evening, all the new things the boys had done, what *chachaji* had written in his letter and who was getting married to whom. And daddy would go on eating silently. Snarling sometimes at the bearer who was serving dinner. . . Afterwards, they would close the door of their bedroom, his mother and his father, and Arun would struggle for hours trying to sleep. Thinking of his father with loathing, with fear. The cruel animal with his mother. He would have liked to kill him. Not that mummy ever complained about anything he ever did, how could she. . . She was a giver all the way. That was women for you. He lay down on the bed, his legs hurting.

In the morning, his mother announced that Vineeta was dressed and ready to leave for her father's house. He sipped his tea slowly. Sounds of the car starting up, changing gears, rolling gently out of the gate. . . It had all been a big mistake.

* * *

FICTION

TWO DAYS WENT BY. Arun phoned Vineeta from the office. She was having the time of her life with her people. It was like going back to her childhood, she said, only better. Sounds of laughter came over the wire, Arun felt that he had interrupted something. Vineeta was going off to Udaipur for a few days with her sister, and brother-in-law, who came briefly on the line. The lake palace in which they were to stay was beautiful. Wouldn't Arun like to come along? Arun declined. Tense moments at the factory, he said. His brothers were away. Father would have to handle the strikers all on his own if he left town at this stage. In fact, it was Vineeta's family he did not want to meet. Or her along with them. They would be kind to him, force his hand. And here he was, the enemy.

In another week, the strike was over. His father had promised medical benefits and 20 days leave in the year to every worker. With wages. Arun had watched with surprise the ease with which his father had agreed to the terms demanded by the men. Some deadlines had now to be met. Work became normal at the factory.

One evening, Arun sat in the canteen, slowly sipping tea with Sant Ram, the union secretary, when his mother phoned. She had been to see Vineeta's mother in the afternoon, and had brought the girl back with her. Arun was to come home at once.

Sant Ram ambled in, chewing tobacco. "You said you would draw up the minutes of the meeting between the management and the union today. You promised. It's the last day before we..."

Arun switched on the lamp on his office table, and sat down again. When he finally reached home, dinner had just ended. There were visiting relatives scattered all over the front rooms of the house. Arun asked the cook to send his tray to the bedroom. For a long while he sat there, chewing his cold fish and cold vegetables. Even the soup was cold. His mother came in briefly to say he was late and to remonstrate on the fact that he had not greeted *dadiji* and *bade chacha*. They were all leaving now. Send me some coffee, he replied. You're becoming like your father, she added, it's all money and the consignments that have to go, and deadlines, and profits. That's it, profits. People don't count.

Vineeta came in as his mother bustled out. With Arun's coffee. "Hullo," she said. "Still moping over the strike? Or is it a post-mortem? I read in the papers that it was over two days ago."

"How have you been?"

"Oh, marvellous. Just marvellous. What did you expect? I went home, didn't I, to the house where I was born." A little laugh that was self-mocking.

This is your home, he wanted to say, I want you to be happy here, but something in her eyes warned him. "You look thinner," he said instead, and knew instantly that it had been the wrong thing to say.

"I do?" She stood above him, without her bride's jewel-

lery, her light eyebrows arched. "Funny you should say that, you know. The food may be ordinary, but in my mother's house, at least you get your meals on time."

"Oh, you should tell mummy about the hours to which you are accustomed. We are so disorganised here. . . She can't guess what you want, the poor lady."

"I was saying that my mother's house runs like a proper home," she replied. "Regular meals, the family together at mealtimes. Babies bawling, laughter. Rooms," she added, after a pause, "with real people in them."

"How did you like Udaipur?" he enquired. Vineeta was unpacking her attaché case, and did not reply.

He watched her for a few minutes, hesitating. Finally, he said, "Where's the ring?"

"What ring?"

"Oh, c'mon, the one I gave you the evening you arrived here. Surely you haven't forgotten already. A diamonds and emeralds affair. . . belonged to my grandmother."

"Oh, that," she said, twisting the corner of her mouth. "It was a bit large for my finger, so *Mataji* put it away in the locker."

"But I want you to wear it. It's from me to you, see?"

"Or from your great-grandmother to my great-grandmother?" She laughed, not very pleasantly. "Your mother must have handed it to you the evening you were married: 'Don't forget, Arun, give it to the bride. She brings the Patels luck'," Vineeta mimicked.

Arun stared at her. Mummy had handed the ring to him on the evening of the wedding, saying . . . He felt in his depths that Vineeta was not saying something very friendly. He tried again. "But why will you not wear it?"

"Because, Arun Patel, you say that ring is an old one, but it's cheap, cheap. A jeweller wouldn't give you three grand for it today." Her face tilted, challenging him.

"Who's been telling you all this?"

"My mother, who else? Her father was a diamond seller. She's seen the stuff since she was born. *Mataji* says she'll get me a proper ring to wear with my everyday clothes. A *solitaire*."

"Your mother," Arun whispered, in disbelief, "must be mad." He was no longer smiling.

"Oh, is that right?" she asked, stretching herself tall. "And what leads your fine mind to that conclusion?"

"She . . . she obviously isn't saying the things that are said to a bride. . . Surely, even you can see that. These are the wrong things to start with. . . if you want a girl to like her new home."

"Wrong, perhaps, but true. You don't know what else she told me."

"What?"

"Oh, never mind."

He raised both his hands, then dropped them into his lap. "You stupid girl, is it really the price that matters to you when your husband gives you a gift? I am beginning to believe that your mother. . ."

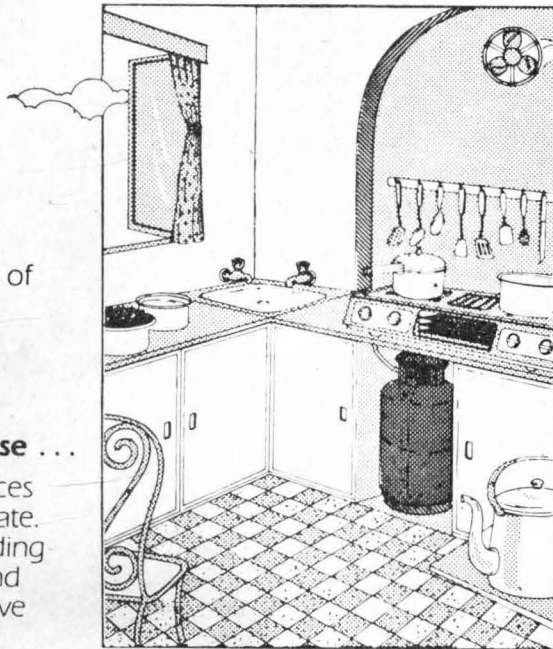
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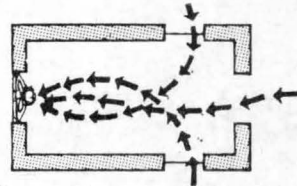


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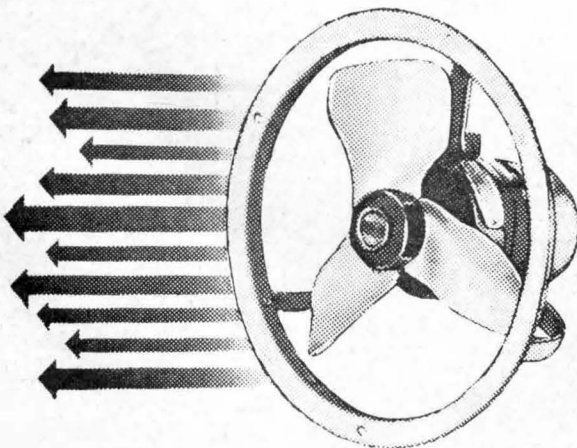
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FICTION

"My mother, my mother . . . Isn't there anything else you can find to speak about on the first day I return? I'm getting quite tired of this conversation." There was a silence, during which Vineeta went into the bathroom, and washed her face and neck. She came out with her evening clothes still on. She fiddled a moment with the jars on the dressing table, then began speaking with a kind of resolve. About her own mother. "She's not clever, and she says awkward things, but there's none of that comic, mincing, holier-than-thou air that hangs about your family."

"My family!"

"Yes, yours. Especially, about that silly, snooty, sly creature, your mother."

"Vineeta!" He stood up, shaky on his feet. "I must have heard wrong."

"But we all know what lies behind that placid, martyr-like facade: *'Beta, are you comfortable? Don't those clothes bother you? Take another helping, do.'*" She mimicked his mother's abject, singsong voice. "Such a show of concern. And all the time, she's thinking: 'The poor thing. Not quite good enough for my son, is she? Not enough refinement. He won't touch her'." Her voice grew thicker, trembling with each sentence.

"Shut up," he said, "just shut up. I don't want another word. . . Somebody will hear us in a minute."

"And about time, too, that somebody told them a few hometruths about themselves . . . You disgust me, you do, the lot of you, with your airs and graces. Do you know that your mother declined to stay on at my house after my uncles came calling on us this afternoon? She had to rush home, she said. Home, she calls it. You have to laugh. With all its members rolling yarn at the factory all day. A spook-house, more likely. . . Actually, the men at my mother's bothered your mother no end, in their enormous checked suits, their cigars, big money, loud laughter. Couldn't take it, the squeamish thing. Never could take real men, I suppose. Came home to drink saffron tea, and to listen to the radio."

This was different, this was something nobody had told him about. Girls didn't speak like that. Not girls like Vineeta, anyway. Mummy never spoke like that. She'd never find the animus. . . or would she? He was confused. "I'm warning you," he said, "I don't like the tone of voice you are using for my mother."

"Of course, you don't, mama's boy, the question really is what you do like!"

"But what have you got against my poor mother? What's she done to you?"

"Oh nothing," she replied, "not yet. A perfect lady, isn't she? So noble-minded. Incapable of unkindness or coarse words. So calm, so gentle, she can't manage anything. She's left all the cruelty and the hard gestures to your father and to your brothers, don't you see? Left them to take on the world, to become the beasts. So she can hide away and be genteel indoors. She's insincere. Oh

yes, she positively inspires evil in others."

"You lie. My mother has never escaped anything difficult. She has borne us in pain."

"And never let you forget it? You're hurting my arm. . ."

"She has suffered much on account of my father," he said, angered, but anxious to see his mother as before. "He used to be an insensitive, cruel man."

"But why? Why? Have you ever asked yourselves that? The woman is so self-righteous, she has forgotten to be herself. How to be human. Day in and day out the same virtue, the same complacency. No humour, no inner sympathy. They say your father grew mad."

She's like me, he thought in a flash, no better. Reckless and brutal. "You bitch," he said, his teeth clenched. "You ugly bitch. Now you've got it coming to you." He grabbed her by her long hair, then in a sudden movement, pushed her against the wall. Her head connected with a thud.

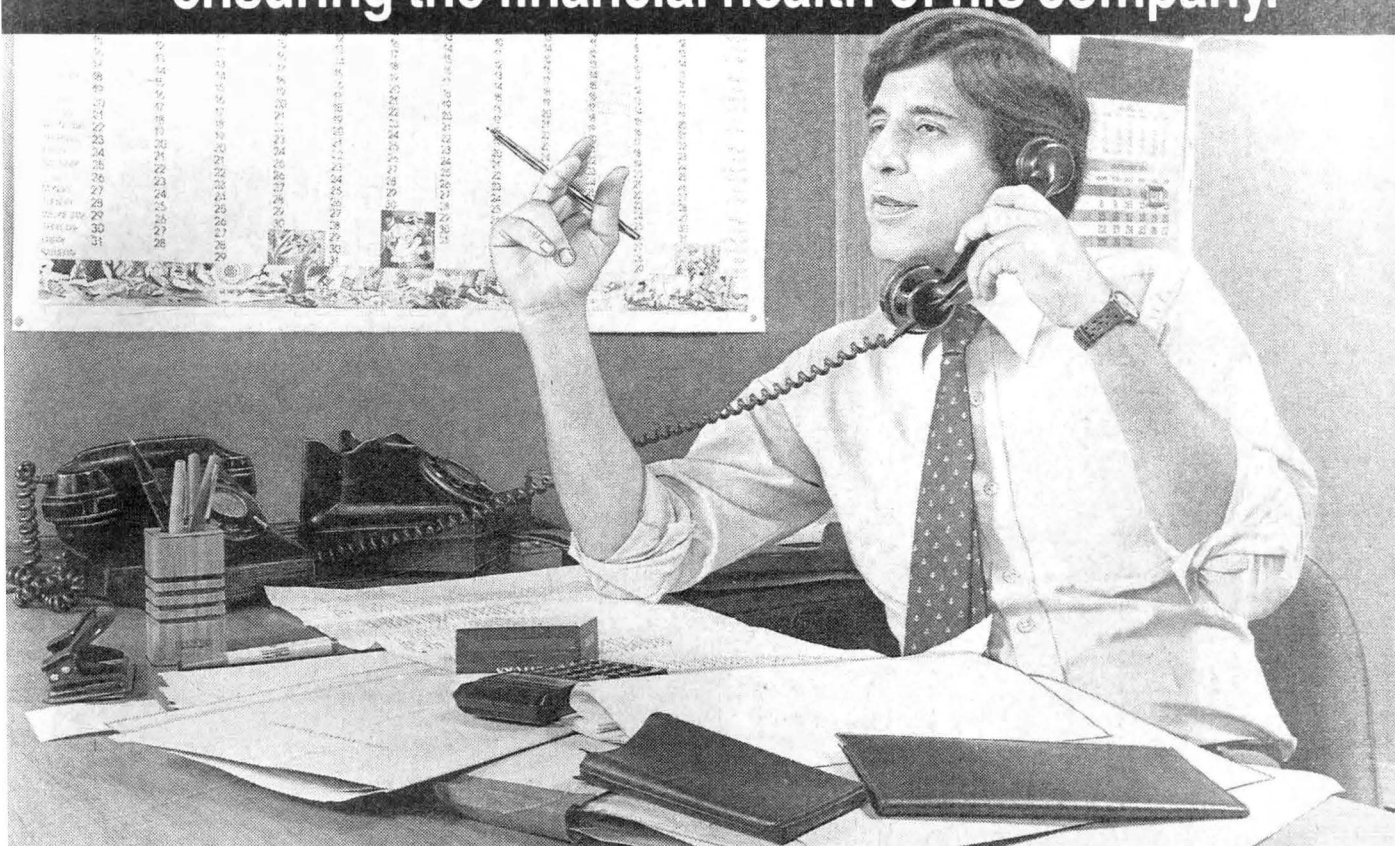
"My mother also told me," she panted, her upper lip beaded with sweat, "that your father, frozen by the dullness, found another home. Another woman. She lives even now at the edge of the town. In a tiny house with roses, and three fierce cats. He should have left your mother, but she was a saint. And who can leave a saint. . ? The three of you were there already. So they reared you, petted and pampered you. Fruits of a loveless marriage. Eunuchs."

He felt he was going to cry. Instead, he grabbed her breast in his large hand. She screamed. His weight was pushing one leg and most of her body onto the inner window ledge. He tore at her petticoat, a string came undone. But there were hooks, pins. He lifted her high in the air, then flung her on the bed. Brutally, he entered her. She whimpered, the petticoat drawn high above her waist. She clawed at his neck, his chest. Again and again, he thrust into the quivering tender body, lashing himself with her scorn, his past and the pain that had been part of his consciousness ever since he could remember.

* * *

HE AWOKE LATER that night with the sensation of having fallen off a precipice. Then washed ashore by the sea in one piece, a little cold. He watched her sleep for a long time, her lips very pink in the lamplight, the remains of mascara smudged on a full, nacreous cheek. She lay on her stomach, serene. Her ankles were chubby below the petticoat. Arun rose and kissed the dreaming foot. My tulip. My wicked tulip. She'll be bad, but then she's real. Perhaps too real. There'll never be a dull life. He lay down again, stroking her hair, begging her forgiveness, silently. Into his mind slipped the figure of an old man standing in a corner of their garden, beside a very tall cactus. Very still, and cold and tired. It was his father. Oh, mummy was all right. But father should have left her, he thought, as he slowly switched off the lamps. He really should have.

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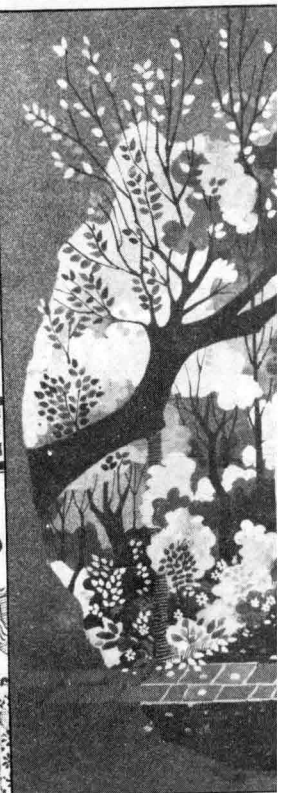
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New York New York.

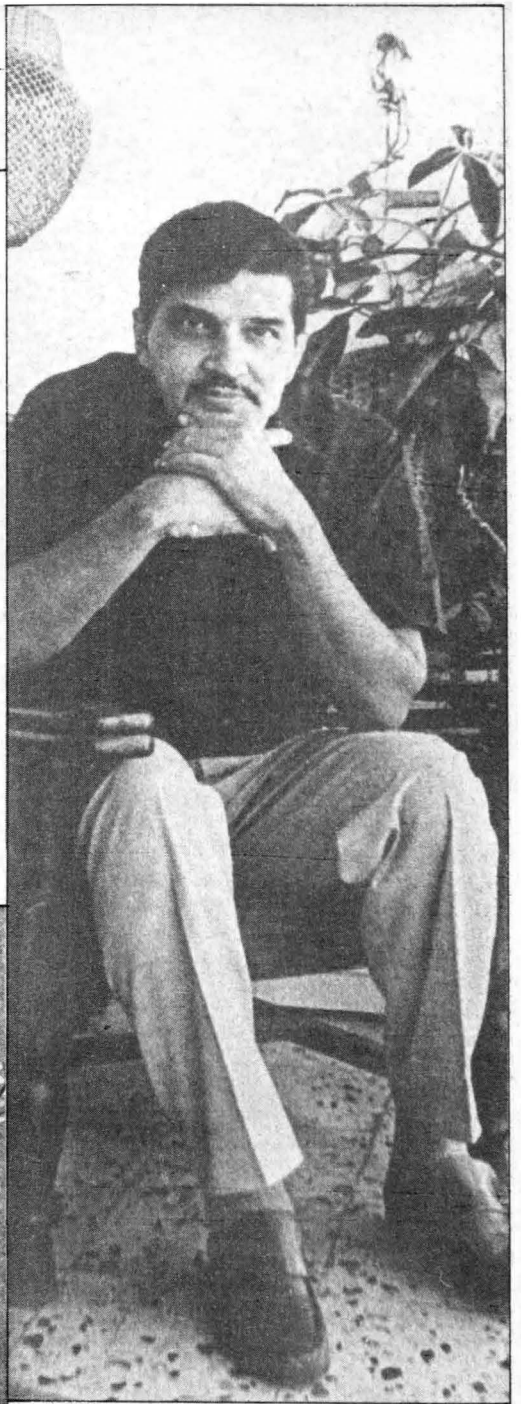
By Mario Miranda

MARIO'S NEW YORK

New York and Mario Miranda suit each other. New York has its own style, Mario one of the greatest Indian cartoonists, has his. When they met, they fell in love, the result of which were the cartoons reproduced below. Mario wandered around the great city, his eye ceaselessly questing. He saw Chinatown and the Bowery which few visitors to New York normally care to enter. He saw the jumble of races, faces and cluttered spaces which make the metropolis what it is. Reflected from his eye, here they are from his hand.



Cottage in Staten Island.

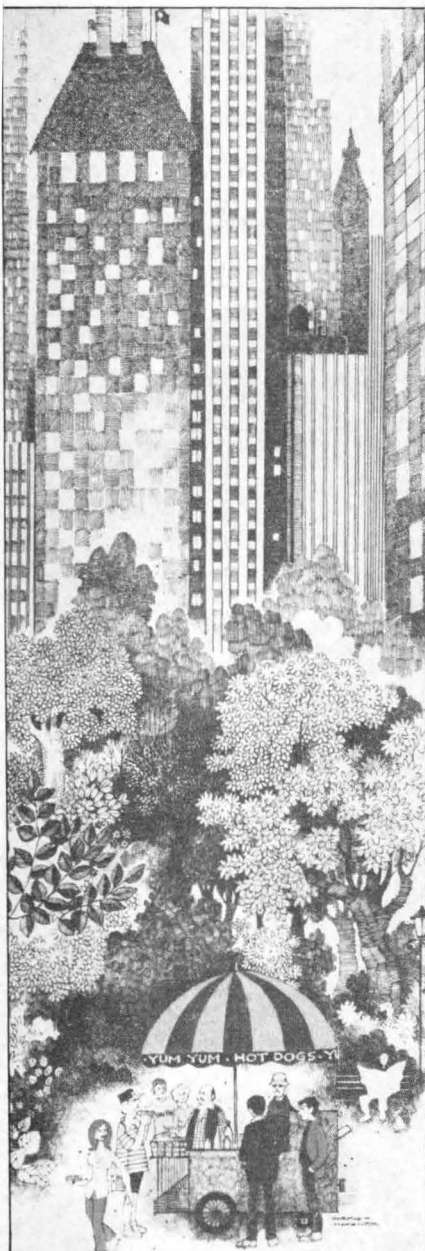


In China Town.



Breakdancing on Broadway.

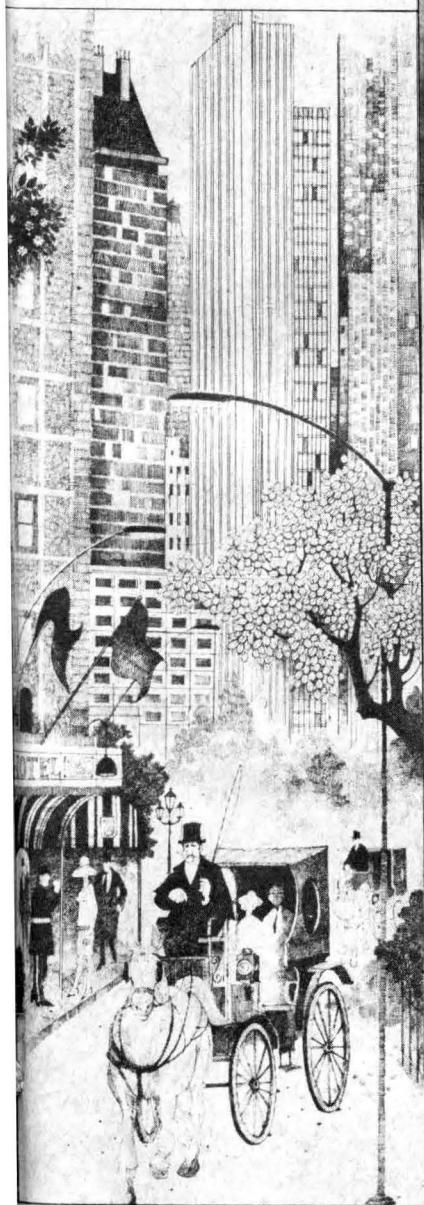
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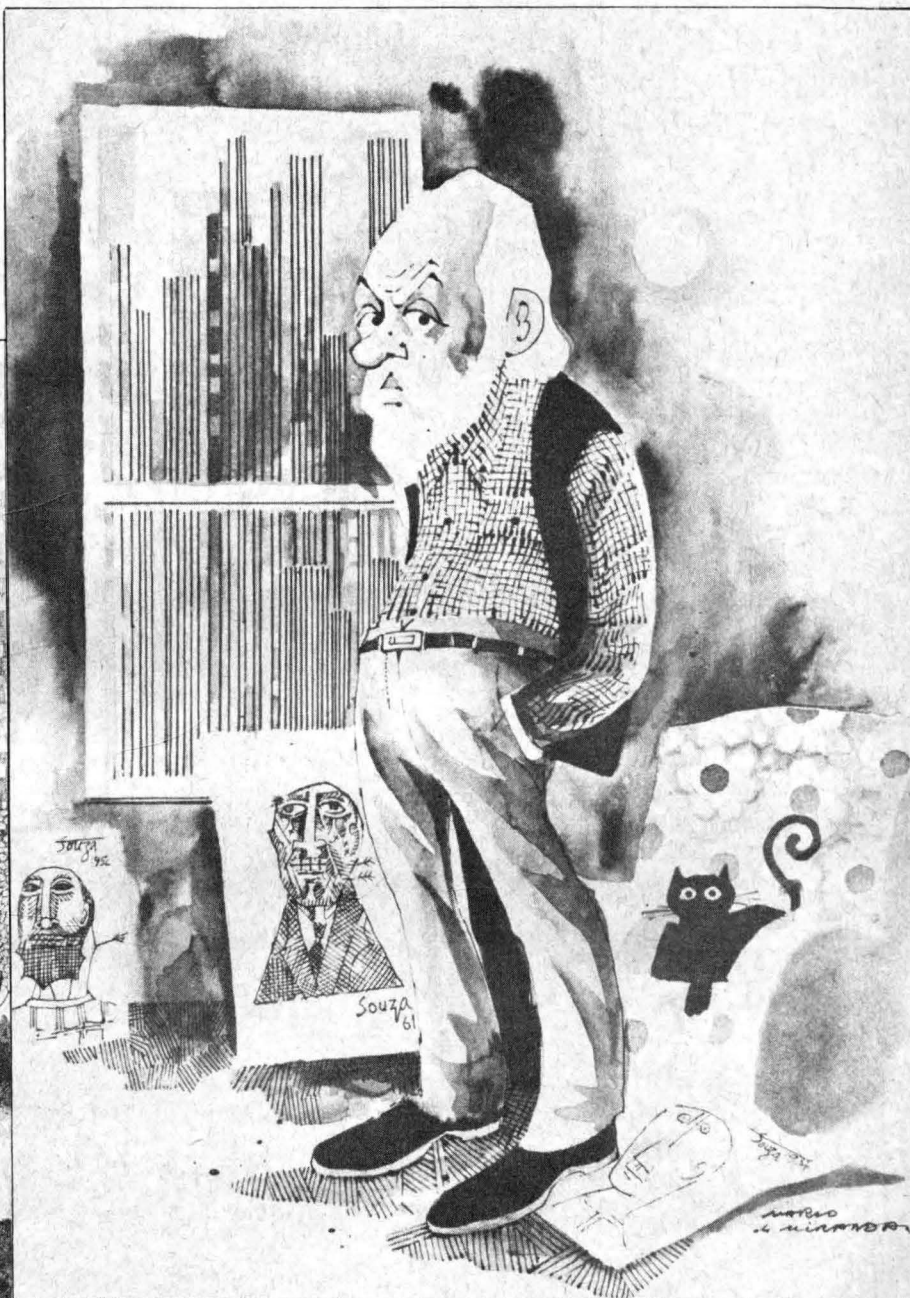
Hot dog stand near Central Park.

Little Italy.



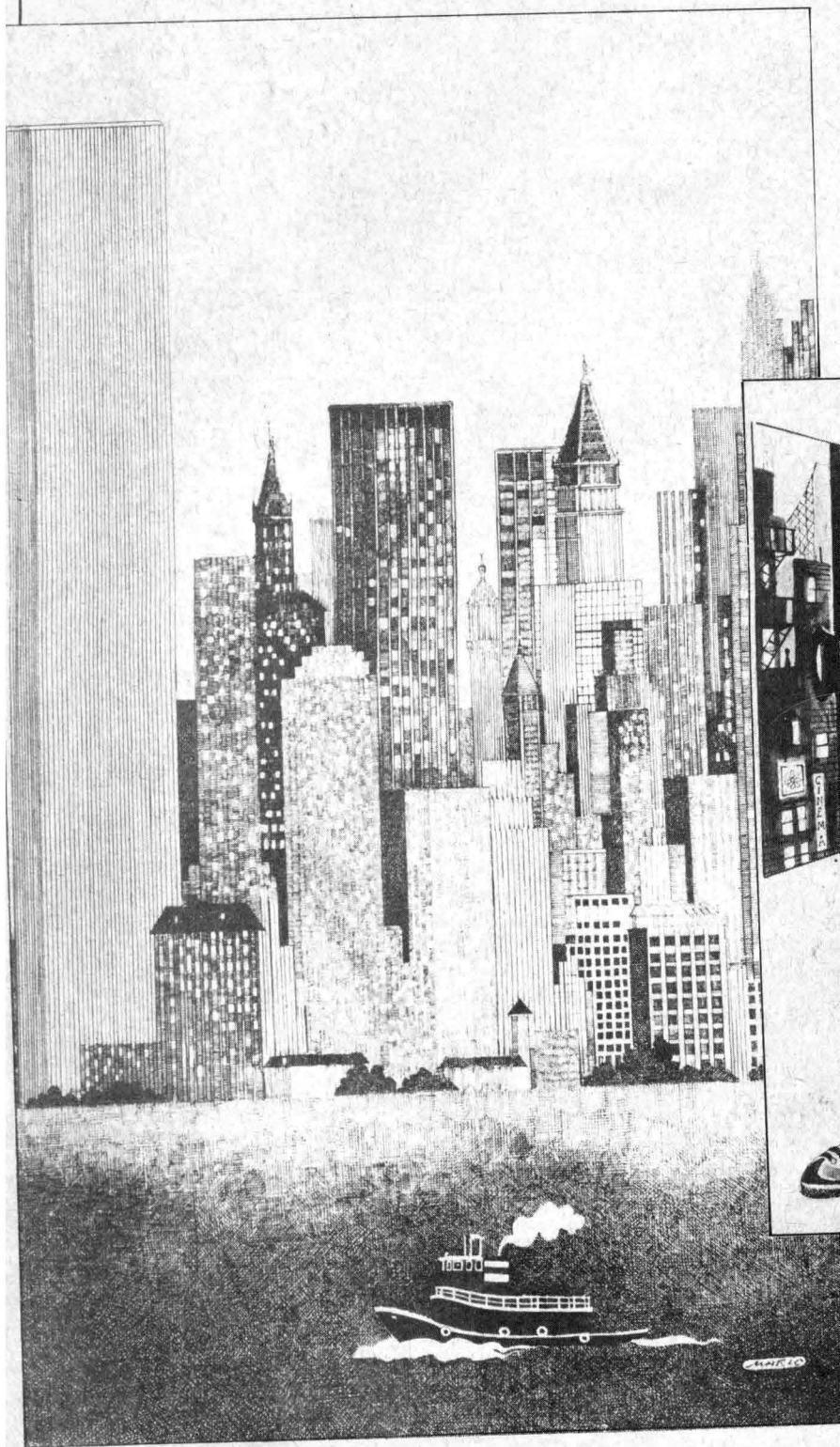


Horsedrawn carriage near Central Park.

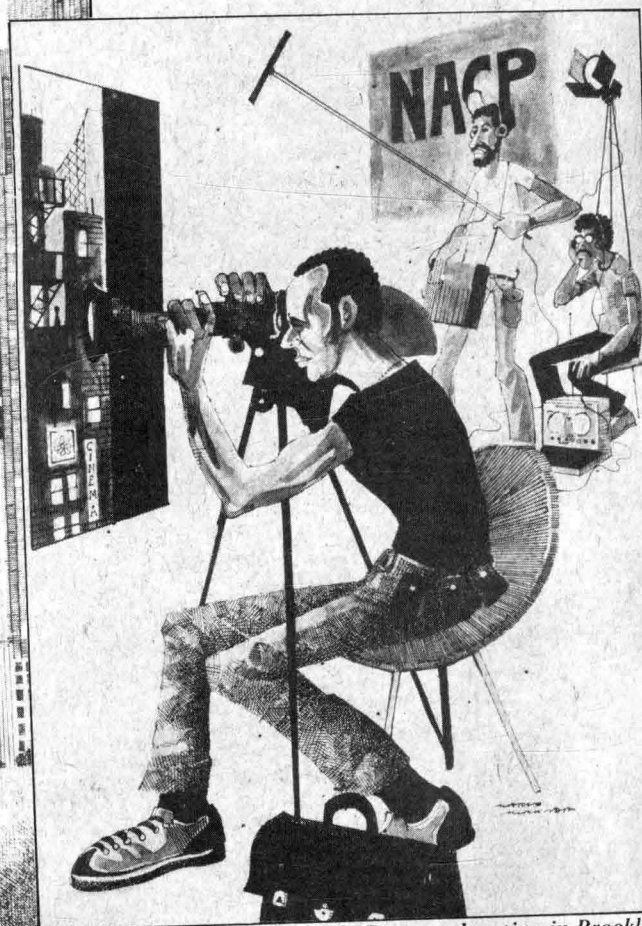


Francis Souza in his Manhattan studio.

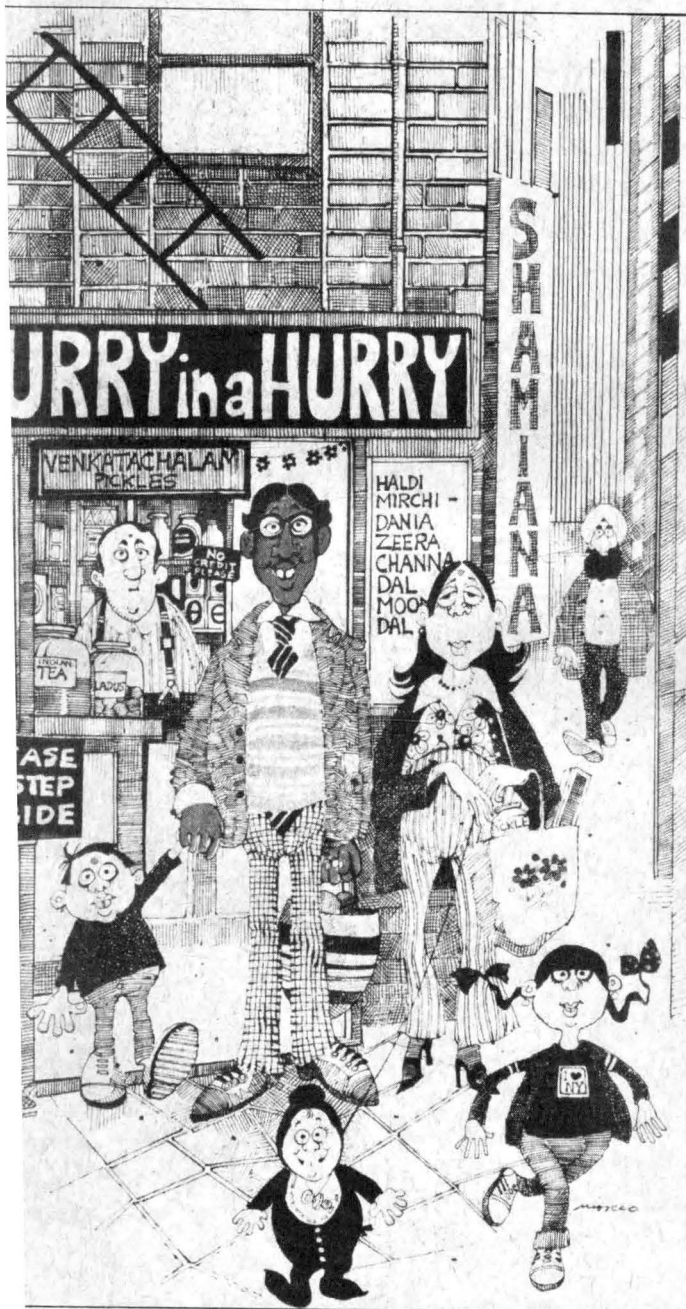
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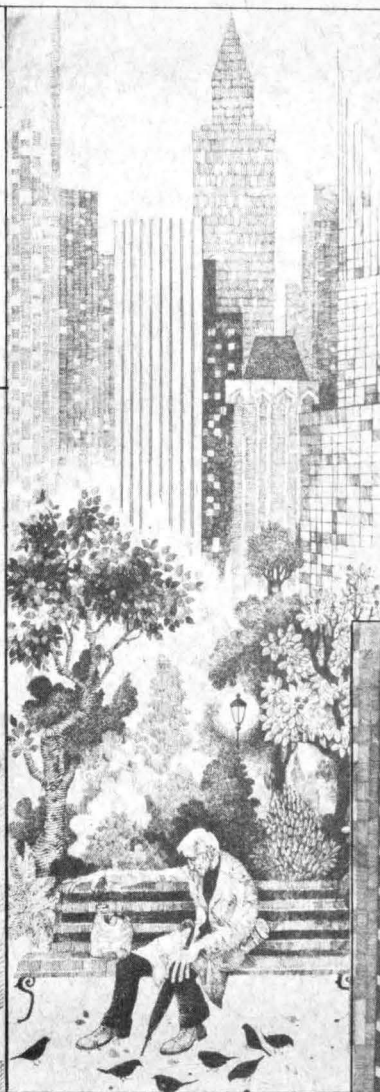
Manhattan Skyline.



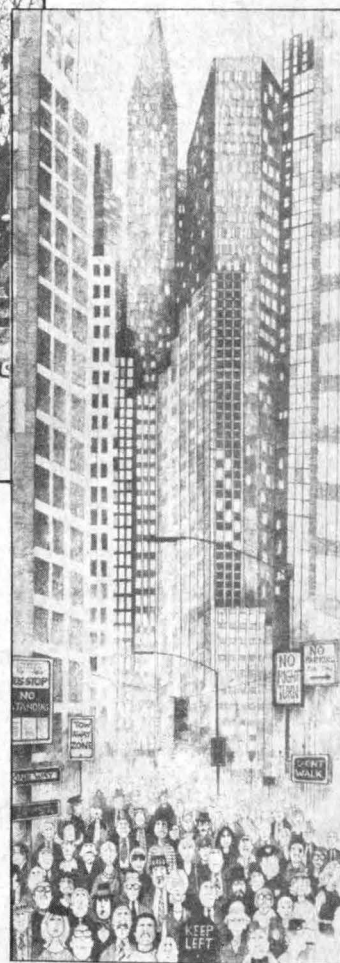
Bill Greaves shooting in Brooklyn.



In Little India.



Old man in Central Park.



Rush hour in downtown New York.


Passion In Prākrit

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, the famous Indian poet has spent 2 1/2 years translating poems from Prākrit erotica into English. These are the first translations ever made of such poems and we take immense pride in publishing them in IMPRINT, together with a scholarly introduction by A K Mehrotra. This translation conveys with classic restraint all the emotion, humour and irony of amorous entanglements.

The *Gāthāsaptasatī* of Sātavāhana Hāla, one of the oldest anthologies of Indian poetry, is a collection of Prākrit *gāthā*-s (songs) dating from the second century AD. There are usually 700 verses in its recensions, but they are not always the same or in the same order. The verses are *muktaka*-s — detached or independent stanzas — in the Arya metre, which is of two lines, a first line of 30 syllabic instants followed by one of 27. Though belonging to the same period as the poems in the Eight Anthologies of classical Tamil, and to which they bear resemblance, the *gāthā*-s are free from all conventions of subject and imagery, and do not identify the speakers. Fortunately, several commentaries are extant and the commentators, without always agreeing, give each *gāthā* an effective context and also draw from them the last ounce of erotic pleasure. About Poem 11 a commentator says that the wife laughs when she sees the penitent husband at her feet and the boy on his back because she suddenly remembers a coital position; and in Poem 564 crows are not the point of the poem: rather, a woman is telling her lover not to be afraid and not to hurry as no one is likely to be around in such weather. But by and large, the situations are clear enough and, given the thematic framework, the dramatis personae is exhaustive. We hear — or hear about — young women (10, 155) and old (233, 239), go-betweens and elderly confidants (444), wives (98, 583, 656) and girl-friends (123, 237), bawds (258) and prostitutes (474), and, less frequently, husbands (707) and *flâneurs* (599). As often happens with Sanskrit and Prākrit anthologies, we know nothing about the *Gāthāsaptasatī* sources, and though half the verses are ascribed, the authors are mere names. Hāla himself is no exception to this since none of his coins or inscriptions have survived. According to Puranic accounts, which in any case differ from one another, he was the 17th Sātavāhana king and reigned for five years. (The Sātavāhanas ruled over the Deccan from 230 BC to 225 AD, traded with the Roman Empire, and though they were orthodox Hindus, were tolerant of other religions.) Hāla's anthology, however, has seldom been out of the educated public's consciousness. Its verses are quoted widely in works of aesthetics, poetics, and grammar; its situations are borrowed by later writers; it has inspired over a dozen commentaries; and it has been translated into the major Indian languages, and into German. Its best known edition is still Albrecht Weber's *Das Saptacatakam des Hala* (Leipzig, 1881), whose arrangement I have followed in this selection.

— AKM





*The quarrels, the tears:
Did no one tell you
The cucumber's coiled tendril
Was love's condition?*

10

*The remorseful husband
Fallen at her feet
Their little boy
Jumps onto his back
And the sullen wife
Laughing*

11

*Distance destroys love,
So does the lack of it:
Gossip destroys love,
And sometimes
It takes nothing
To destroy love.*

81

*Lovemaking over,
He gets up to go,
And doesn't reach the door
But is back to kiss me:
A grass widow waiting
For the exile's return.*

98

*In her first labour
Tells her friends,
"I won't let him
Touch me again." They laugh.*

123

*As to a traveller
His shadow in hot summer,
So to a niggard
His comfortless gold.*

136

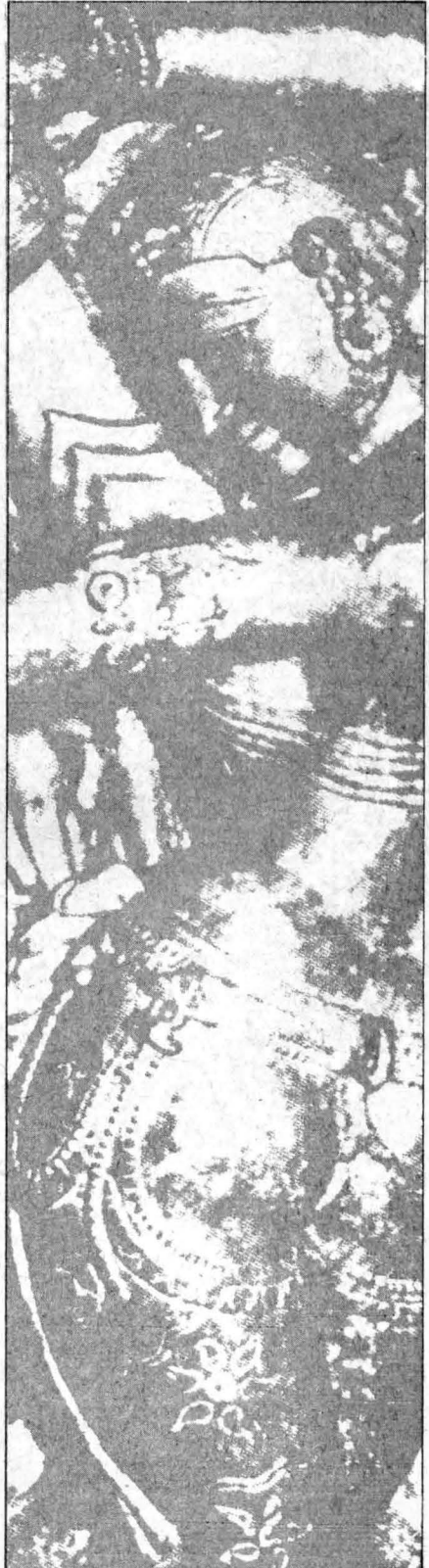
*Ignorant of how it ends,
The bride
Looks up from her orgasm
As if to say 'Go on'.*

155

*Will my grief
Get through to him?
When has image
Fraught mirror?*

204

*With trembling eyes,
Like a caged bird,
From inside the pale-fence*



POETRY



She watched you go.

220

*Nailmarks on jaded
Breast thigh buttock:
The basement of the god of love's
Derelict house.*

233

*"A scorpion's bitten her,"
they cried,
And as she thrashed about,
Her shrewd friends
in her husband's presence
Rushed her to her
physician-lover.*

237

*It's no untruth,
My death-bed's
Near the sacred waters
Of the Tapti
And the eye
Just as before
Roves over
That thicket.*

239

*Castor-oil leaves
Jutting out through the hedge
To young men prove
Here the ploughman's wife
Has big ones.*

257

*Her cursed breasts,
Solid and cleavageless as bosses
On a calf-elephant's forehead,
Restrict her movement,
Make even breathing a struggle.*

258

*The firm breasts
Of his new wife:
Through hollow cheeks
The old one sighs.*

382

*We're trugs all right
And you're paragons,
But at least we don't
Fantasise chiropodists.*

417

*The deft bee,
His weight held back,
Endues the bud and sucks
The white jasmine's nectar.*

442





*Before the white jasmine
Could unfold, impetuous bee,
You'd mangled it.*

444

*Her petticoat misplaced,
The highborn woman
Concealed her thighs
In her husband's embrace.*

459

*Who's spared?
Who's escaped defoul?
Who's not been gulled?
Nailmarks
On whores' bodies
Tell everything.*

474

*As though she'd
glimpsed the mouth
Of a buried pot of gold,
Her joy when
under her daughter's
Wind-blown skirt
She saw near the crotch
a toothmark.*

508

*For him I forsook
Shame, chastity, honour,
And he's just another man now.*

525

*Liquor on their breath
And hair tousled by lovers
Is enough to make young girls
Fatal.*

545

*Looking restless,
Breathing heavily,
Yawning, humming,
Weeping, fainting,
Falling, mammering:
O traveller,
You'd better not go.*

547

*They've embraced
Underwater,
And her eyes
Make no secret of it.*

559

*Wings hanging down,
necks drawn in,
Sitting on fences
as though spitted,*



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*Crows get soaked
in the rain.*

564

*Ah, brother-in-law, turn away
From the night sky:
Rows of crescent moons
Rise in your wife's armpits.*

571

*The cock crows and you
Wake up with a start:
But you spent the night
In your own bed, husband.*

583

*All he wants
Is to see the florist's armpit,
So asks her
The price of flowers.*

599

*Away from you, her face
Is a hovel,
A dry spring's hollow,
An empty cowshed.*

611

*Deerslayer
Aiming at doe.
Doe's eyes
Fixed on a stag.
Deerslayer
Discovers his wife.
Deerslayer's bow
Drops.*

620

*Ask next door
For deerskins, traveller:
Our men don't stalk
Blameless creatures.*

631

*The Pulinda's jealous wife
Finds his lip swollen,
And not knowing he's been stung
Moves into the next tree's shade.*

636

*Always wanting me
To come on top
And complaining
We're childless,
As if you could brim
An inverted waterjug.*

656



Niranjan Mahavar is a businessman from Raipur district, Madhya Pradesh. He owns a rice mill in Jagdalpur, which is incidental, a family inheritance. What is perhaps more remarkable is what Mahavar has actively acquired: 2,000 statues in bell metal, bronze, brass and terracotta from the

tribal heartland of Bastar district in Madhya Pradesh, parts of adjoining Andhra Pradesh, the Chhotanagpur region of Bihar and Orissa. His collection also includes articles of daily tribal use like utensils, tobacco pouches, toys, ornaments, beadwork, combs, baskets made of bamboo (for every conceivable purpose), traps for animals and birds, and textiles. "It is not a very large collection," says this burly, soft-spoken man. "But it is genuine. These are no imitations and therefore it is valuable." Since 1962 Maha-

var has travelled about 1.7 lakh km ("this was for my business purposes also") in search of antique tribal art. He had to ferret around a great deal for no research has been done in this field. Ruth Rives, in her book, *The World Of Man*, makes an extremely cursory mention of the tribal artefacts of Bastar. But most research by foreign anthropologists remains sketchy. "I feel my work can fill the void that exists (in our awareness of the tribal

art of India)," says Mahavar. "We think their art is the product of a primitive mind. But the social and cultural aspects of their lives have never been highlighted." Mr Mahavar looked gloomy under the artificial suns of a Bombay flat:

Imprint: How did your interest in tribal art begin?

Niranjan Mahavar: After completing my M A (in economics) and L L B from the University of Sagar, I went to Jagdalpur to look after the family's rice mill. I'm a poet, I also paint and sculpt in wood. In 1962, the Collector of Bastar district came to me for funds for the National Defence Fund (this was at the time of the Chinese aggression). He found I was working on a sculpture. Later, visiting me at home, he happened to see what I was reading — *The Kenyon Review*, *The London Magazine*, Chinese literature — and was amazed. He wondered if I was interested in tribal art. It was he who introduced me to tribal artists.

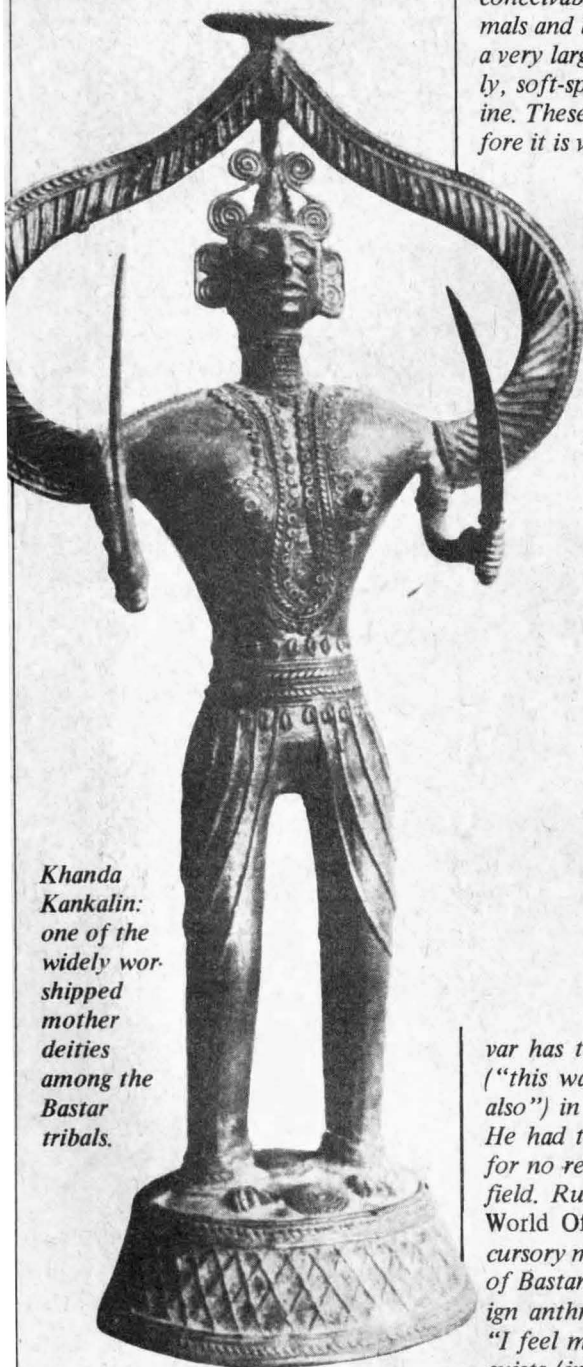
How did you talk to the tribal people?

Those coming into the city can converse in Hindi. But I had picked up Halbi, a dialect spoken in Bastar district, which is where my travels began. I then went on to adjoining Orissa, made four cross-country tours, collecting artefacts from western tribal Orissa and coastal Orissa. I was soon deeply involved in this business.

What has been the main theme of your collection, your findings?

My interest in tribal art is at three levels: first its mythological and cultural significance. For instance, in Bastar, I found a number of deities which are from the Dravidian pantheon and the Aryan too. It suggests that there must have been a long cultural interaction between the two communities and the tribals. Also, I found the strong presence of the mother cult: each area has a different mother deity and each village, a temple dedicated to the 'mother' of the region. For instance, there is Mavalin Mata, one of the most important deities for the

Breathed From Bronze



Khanda Kankalin: one of the widely worshipped mother deities among the Bastar tribals.

var has travelled about 1.7 lakh km ("this was for my business purposes also") in search of antique tribal art. He had to ferret around a great deal for no research has been done in this field. Ruth Rives, in her book, *The World Of Man*, makes an extremely cursory mention of the tribal artefacts of Bastar. But most research by foreign anthropologists remains sketchy. "I feel my work can fill the void that exists (in our awareness of the tribal

Gonds, who are predominant among the tribals of Bastar or a Banjara Mata, wearing a *ghagra* and earrings, a plate in one hand and a peacock feather fan in the other. According to me, she was brought by the Banjara tribals in Bastar who used to operate on the ancient trade route passing through the Chanda and Godavari rivers.

Are there any regional peculiarities in the mother cult?

In no other place except Bastar, has the mother been shown riding a horse. It suggests the superiority of the mother cult, and the association of the mother with valour and strength. The tribals' belief in magic is common to the states I visited. There are some animals that are totems and believed to possess occult power, like the tortoise, the fish, the tiger, the cobra and the dog. The horse and the elephant are associated with royalty, the result, I think, of the tribals' long association with the Aryans.

I am also interested in the technique and the metallurgy involved in bronze casting: the *cirepurd* process (wax loss). The most ancient bronze casting, as early as Mohenjo Daro, was done by the *cirepurd* method.

How did you locate/buy these pieces?

I got hold of some from scrap shops, old utensil shops, from the weekly *haats* (open-air markets) where tribal craftsmen would come to sell their produce or to order from other tribals.

What do you plan to do with all the research you have done?

I am writing a book on the tribal art of India. It's a very big project. It will be in five volumes and it will cover tribal arts and crafts from Nagaland and Mizoram to Kutch.

Also, in the course of touring different parts of the country, I have come across different forms of folk theatre: for instance, there are still some theatre forms that remain at the level of dance dramas, they are not fully developed. I am document-

ing this too. It will be in three volumes: dance dramas, pageantry and rural theatre, and traditional theatre, that depicts themes from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. This will probably involve eight to 10 years work. I am working on both simultaneously. I also plan to do two mono-

national museum of tribal arts like they have of archaeology. It would help dispel our ignorance. We consider tribals backward, *junglees*. Raipur, where I live, is surrounded by tribals, but those who live in the city ask me such shocking questions — 'Will, they kill us, will they snatch our belong-



Jhitku-Mitku: the legendary god and goddess of love and sacrifice in bronze. Jhitku, a poor young man, drowns while working one rainy day in his father-in-law's fields. When Mitku finds her husband's body she commits suicide.

graphs: one on the native terracottas of Bastar, and the other on the bronze castings of Bastar.

It is said you wanted to found a museum.

Yes, a museum is the best place for such a collection. Financially, I haven't the resources to establish one, but it can be done with help from the government. Our country should have a

ings?

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has created a small museum of tribal art, but their approach is so academic, as if they are examining the tribals under a microscope. The tribals are human, full of flesh and blood and life. But because of our false superiority, we are unable to appraise them in a proper light.

There are very few private museums in our country. Our capitalist

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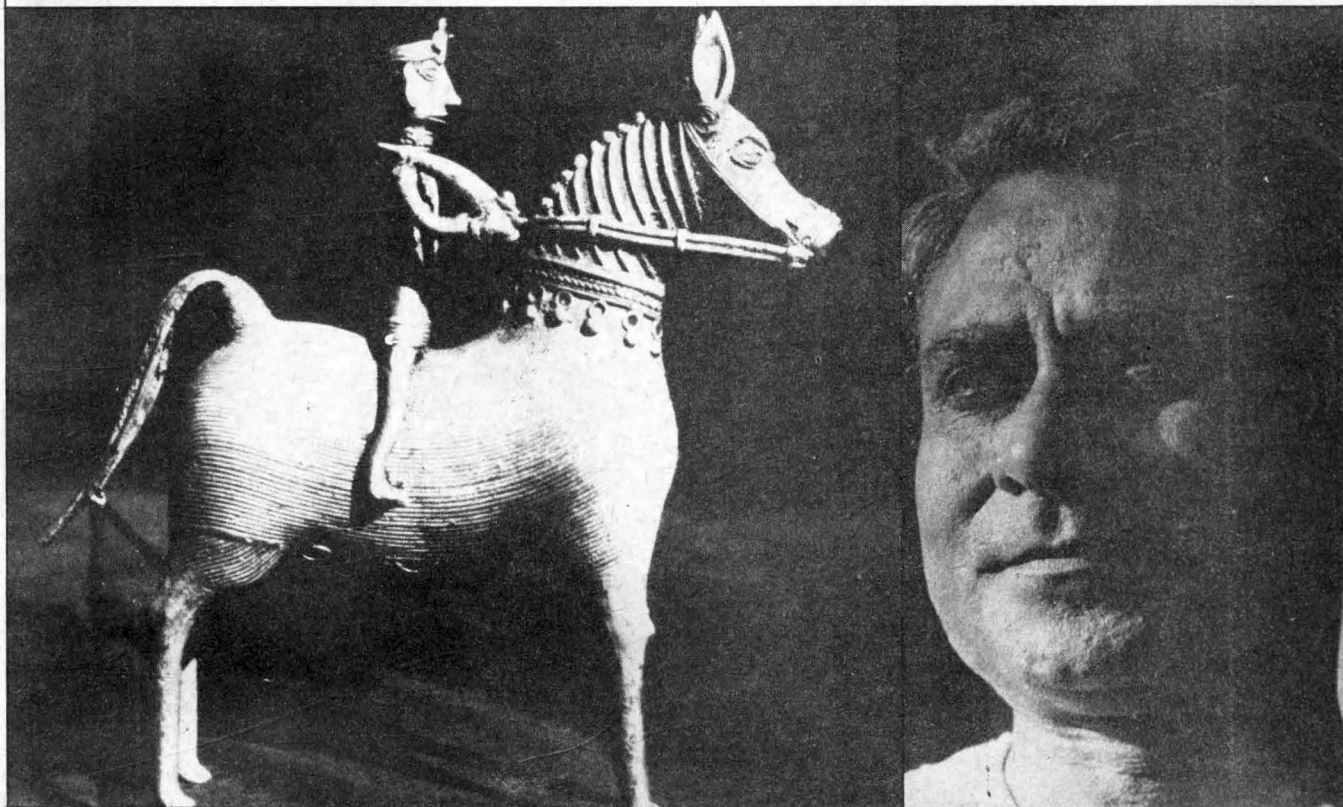
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Bhavana

ART



The horseman is a leitmotif in Mahavar's collection. (Right) Niranjana Mahavar: businessman and connoisseur.

class is not as enlightened as it is in the West. Besides our bourgeoisie are not very old. In Europe, art and culture has always been patronised by the rich. But here patronage of tribal art comes from the tribals alone. It is part of their lifestyle to have in their temples things of beauty and they continue to patronise tribal crafts rather than the mass-produced variety. I have seen in Bastar and in Orissa: they will not purchase a cheaper, mill-made sari, but the cruder one made by the traditional weavers. This is how their craft has survived.

In what way then is tribal art distinctive? Is there any room to improvise?

Art in tribal society is a very deep-rooted part of their mythology and ritual. It is not totally aesthetic or decorative, which is the concept of art in developed societies. For them, it is in the fabric of their life, while we are detached, we view art in isolation. Consequently, the notion of

improvisation does not arise. To improvise would be to make tribal art lifeless, to swerve it from its original purity.

The Handicrafts Board and the Handicrafts Promotion Council are trying to bring these artefacts to the fore. But they are asking the tribals to make paperweights and ashtrays according to a standard weight and size. The tribal artist has always worked with freedom and abandon: now the Handicrafts Promotion Council buys bronze images for Rs 55 per kg. This is to do disservice to tribal art, not promote it.

Would it not be expensive to set up such a museum at the national level?

It would cost about Rs 1 crore to set up a national level museum of tribal art consisting of films, cassettes, a library and artefacts. And if we can spend a few crores on Apna Utsav, what's one crore for this? For the

Festival of India monkeys and bears were taken abroad, but what were the people on the Festival of India committee trying to project? Only people with intimate knowledge and concern for our heritage should be involved in promoting it.

Will you ever sell what you have collected?

No, I could never do business in art. My collection is now like a part of me. I cannot sell it or dispose of it. When I started off, I did not aim to have a museum, but now that it has grown, it should be preserved for posterity. Why I wanted to work with the tribals — to observe their philosophy of life: they are able to live so happily with such meagre resources, and still retain their music, dance, drama. It is their ethos, their *anguish* that communicated itself to me rather than any intellectual understanding on my part. Otherwise, I am theirs. ♦

DOES ANYONE remember Tim Piggot-Smith? Unlikely, in India at least. But there is immediate recognition if one mentions Ronald Merrick, that half-tragic, half-sadistic police officer in *The Jewel In The Crown*, who symbolised the dark side of British imperialism in India. Quite a few Indian viewers of the Granada television serial must have had a lot to say about the unpopular character, played by actor Tim Piggot-Smith, whose recently published book *Out Of India* (Constable, London, pages 224, £8.95), contains among other things, his impressions of this country. The book, however, is not likely to create an impact here. But this anthology — if you can call it so — has been shaped by a keen sensibility. The hand of the anthologist guides

historical landmarks, for example Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' speech. The entire speech is not quoted in the book — a general pattern the book follows, as only crucial passages are underlined. The unfamiliar is also included, so if you have Alan Ross and A G Gardner on Ranji, you also have Wicham describing the Maharaja of Kashmir going in to bat whenever he felt like it, regardless of which side was batting. "He was padded by two attendants and gloved by two others, somebody carried his bat and he walked out to the wicket looking very dignified. . . In one of the matches, I happened to be bowling and my first ball hit his stumps, but the wicket-keeper, quick as lightning, shouted 'No Ball', and the match went on."

The book begins with the creation hymn from the *Rig Veda*. "There was neither non-existence nor existence then, there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep? There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. . . Darkness was hidden by darkness."

Then follows an extract from Forster's *Passage To India* on the birth of the Ganga, a short poem *The Gateway Of India*, by Alan Ross, a page from Piggot-Smith's diary, five pages from the *Adventures Of Thomas Coryat* (a buccaneering surgeon who wandered through India in the 16th century and met Thomas Roe) as he helps in the delivery of Mohini (in a bullock cart), a dancing girl from Rajasthan. A page from Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* on the death of Daphne Manners and the birth of Parvati, is also reproduced here.

An entire section titled 'Early Images' is devoted to Piggot-Smith's first encounter with the swarming, chaotic reality that is India. Smith lands in Delhi after midnight, finds his travel agent missing, leaves his baggage in a dark, candle-lit, cavernous 'Left-Luggage' and leaves for his hotel. Says his cab driver, "Good mornny,

sahib. You first time Delhi." "I was too worried about the fact that it showed — and the driving — to do more than nod. We drove in the middle of the dark streets. We drove fast. We drove on the wrong side of the road, dodging the ghost-like cows that loomed out of the mist." At the hotel, the driver demanded sixty rupees but the 'magnificently-costumed hotel flunky' who opened the door, advised him to pay forty. A deal was clinched. "Since my arrival three long hours ago, I was introduced to three Indian national games — the telephone, the driving, and the bartering."

Indians who return from abroad also experience a similar and immediate onslaught on their senses, that makes the foreigner positively reel under the first impact. Sally Belfrage writes, "The first view of urban India is surely the worst in the world. It can never again be so shocking." And there it is — the hordes of people on the streets, the barefoot taxi driver racing through crowded roads and the cab festooned from dashboard to sun visor with limp flowers. And at the lights, 'mutilated stumps poking through the window'.

Readers pick up little details in the course of the book. For instance in October 1866, street lamps lit up the Bombay roads for the first time, and the lamp lighters who went from lamp to lamp 'were followed by crowds of inquisitive natives who gazed in mute astonishment at the new wonder'.

There are bound to be some peevish Indians who will take offence at all this, but I failed to detect any traces of a patronising attitude in the book. There is, instead, a healthy mix, with no attempt to be either extra pleasant or abrasive. This objectivity is epitomised in the section 'Bonds Of Hatred'. There is a description of Hari Kumar, educated at Chillingborough, haunted by the sights and smells of England and nauseated by conditions in India: 'The fat amber coloured cockroaches that lumbered heavy-backed but light-headed with feathery antennae from the bedroom to the adjoining bathroom where

Of Cows And Cockroaches

passages culled from various sources, the ultimate result being a finely wrought work.

Tim Piggot-Smith came to India in January 1982 to play the role of Merrick, and visited Delhi, Udaipur, Bombay, Bangalore, Mysore, Simla and Kashmir. He kept a diary and recorded 'some fairly detailed stories, bits of history, passages of description, of sensation and impression'. He writes, "I am no writer: that is why I have selected other people's words." Crammed with literary exotica, this book promises to be of great interest to those thus inclined.

The book is neatly divided into sections: birth, childhood, gods and gurus, woman, time and stone, bonds of friendship, love, and of hatred, departures, death and reincarnation. Any knowledgeable Indian reader will possibly experience a sense of *deja vu* as he spots familiar literary or

there was no bath — instead, a tap, a bucket, a copper scoop, a cemented floor to stand on and slimy runnel for taking the dirty water out, through a hole in the wall from which it fell and spattered the caked mud of the compound, draining him layer by layer of his Englishness.'

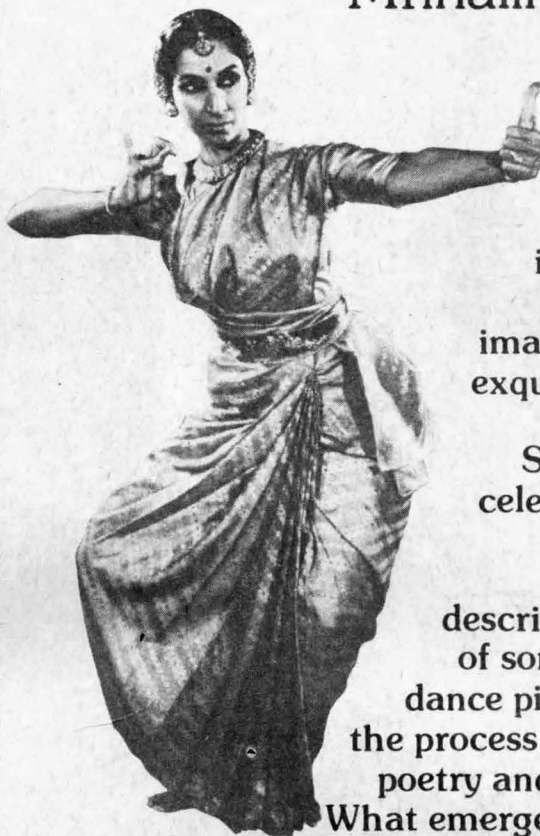
His diary tells us that in the sack of Seringapatnam, the British booty amounted to £ 1,143,216 with Wellesley receiving £4,000 and the sepoy getting £5 each. There is a poem on *Pagett MP* by Kipling. And if there is a passage on the Black Hole of Calcutta, there is also an extract from F Engels, published in the *New York Daily Tribune* dated May 25, 1858, which talks of Lord Canning confiscating, by order of his superior, Viscount Palmerston, 'the lands of a whole people, every road, perch and acre, over an extent of ten thousand square miles. A very nice bit of loot indeed for John Bull!' One would have liked to know what else Engels had said instead of the mere half-page of abuse that is reproduced here. This kind of visceral excerpting leaves jagged edges, though the economy thus achieved offers ample compensation.

The book is replete with material from the *Vedas* to Ved Mehta. One can hardly quarrel with the selections though I noticed a poor translation of a passage in the *Mahabharata*, with its drum-beat rhythm and monotonous rhymes. The book will eventually face the charge of being a quickie. The haste is evident in several instances: "Tamburlane the Great overthrew Delhi in 1398, and established the Moghul Empire. They ruled in Delhi until Akbar the Great transferred his court to Fatehpur Sikri." There are misprints too. *Tilak* becomes *talik* on page 17 and Kamini Kaushal is twice referred to as Khamini, though I enjoyed the reference to Kamini discussing consonants and 'wobels'.

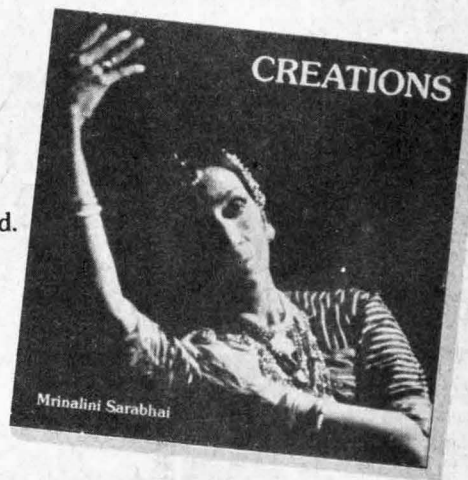
The book may not be strong on ancient or Moghul India or even the present era. It is not meant to be so. But the clank and shunt of the British empire come through as does the ambience of the period. ♦

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BEJAN DARUWALLA'S PREDICTIONS



ARIES: March 21 to April 20: The conjunction of Sun-Mercury on the seventh paves the way for buying, selling, trading and brokerage. This is the time to socialise, circulate and entertain. This month is ideal for the boosting of sales and the manufacture of goods. It is also an ideal time for romance. Family and money will form a happy duo for Arians now. Disputes will be resolved easily.



TAURUS: April 21 to May 21: The new moon on April 28 helps you to take the initiative, come to terms with yourself, make important decisions, plan projects and go on a trip. The first two weeks are particularly important in this respect. You can expect help from unknown quarters. Taureans will indulge themselves and their loved ones, perhaps to excess.



GEMINI: May 22 to June 21: A strange introvert-extrovert tug of war will be in progress now as the Sun and Mars pull in contrary directions. Auguring trips and ties, rendezvous and liaisons, secret deals and a burst of creativity, hard work mixed with fun and games and opportunities to make a fast buck. The last 10 days will help you to move on an even keel and to come to a decision.



CANCER: June 22 to July 22: This is the time to reach out to people and places through all possible means of communication, as Venus is in conjunction with Jupiter. For Cancerians, Venus signifies art and comfort, Mars the creative impulse. Friends, acquaintances and relatives will cheer you, boost your confidence and help you shed your inhibitions and phobias. A financially profitable month for you.



LEO: July 23 to August 23: The moon's first quarter in your sign focusses on your work sphere, where there may be a struggle due to problems of status, prestige or popularity. Travel and collaboration come your way in May. The sun changes signs on the 22nd, helping you to rout your foes, to socialise and entertain and take things easy. This month will see you signing deeds and documents.



VIRGO: August 24 to September 23: The full moon will keep you active mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Ceremonies, rituals, transfers, shifting house, are other strong possibilities this month. Many Virgoans will find time for leisurely festivity. Salesmen, teachers, editors, artists and executives are in for a good time. In short, this month is full of activities.



LIBRA: September 24 to October 23: A puissant Jupiter-Saturn formation or trine will lead to funds, loans, capital raising, buying, selling, joint finance, insurance policies, whose full impact will be felt at the end of the month. Renovations, decorating and a house-warming ceremony are also foretold for you. Passion and intensity will characterise your activities and interests.



SCORPIO: October 24 to November 22: Though there are hurdles ahead, they won't be very serious. Paradoxically, this is also a time for partnerships and permanent relationships are probable. A journey with a possible stop-over is in the offing for quite a few Scorpions. A Venus trine Uranus effect will be felt on the monetary front and money will be available for a project in May-June. Intimate ties are predicted.



SAGITTARIUS: November 23 to December 21: Hard work and service before self is the name of the game now. You may be in for a particularly heavy workload, with additional responsibilities taking a heavy toll. Therefore, rest, recreation and occasional amusement is absolutely essential. While some opposition to plans and projects should be anticipated, they will be overcome soon.



CAPRICORN: December 22 to January 20: A time for fun, Capricornians. Your creative impulses will also receive full play. Children, sports, hobbies, socialising and love will entrance you this month. Your home will need your attention. The Neptune effect will be responsible for moments of inspiration and exultation. You will take time off for religious matters.



AQUARIUS: January 21 to February 18: The moon's last quarter in your sign will emphasise dealings in real estate, buying and selling, loans and funds. Parents, in-laws, a legacy, public trusts and middlemen will also feature prominently in your life. An important journey will help you in different ways. Architects, property owners, engineers, traders, and scientists will be successful.



PISCES: February 19 to March 20: Letters, news, advertisements, interviews, meetings and group activity will characterise your life this month. So keep the lines of communication alive and buzzing and clear off your pending mail. Deeds and documents will be signed. A trip is in the offing. Research scholars, writers, editors, fashion designers, painters, photographers, musicians, astrologers, architects and directors do well. ♦



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