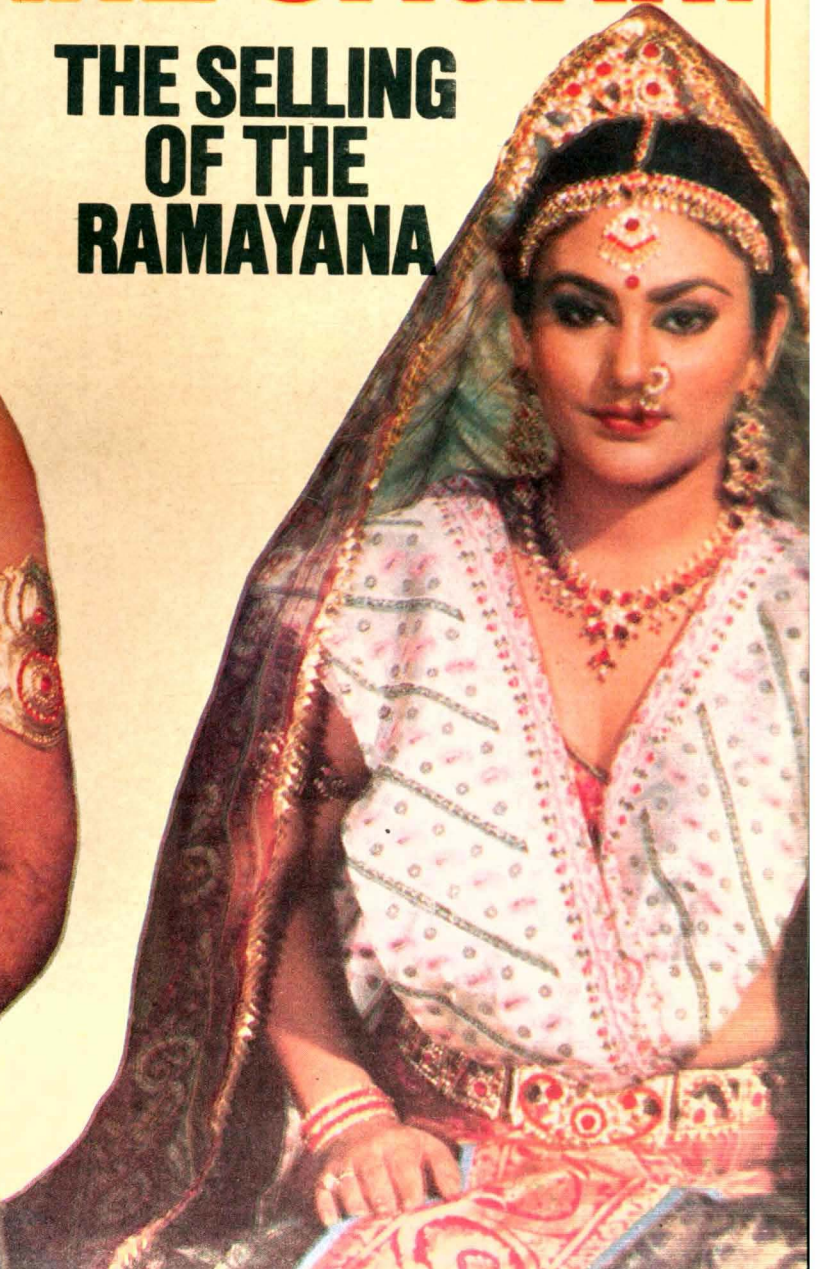


OCTOBER 1987 Rs 6

# imprint

## HARE RAMA, HARE SAGAR!

THE SELLING  
OF THE  
RAMAYANA

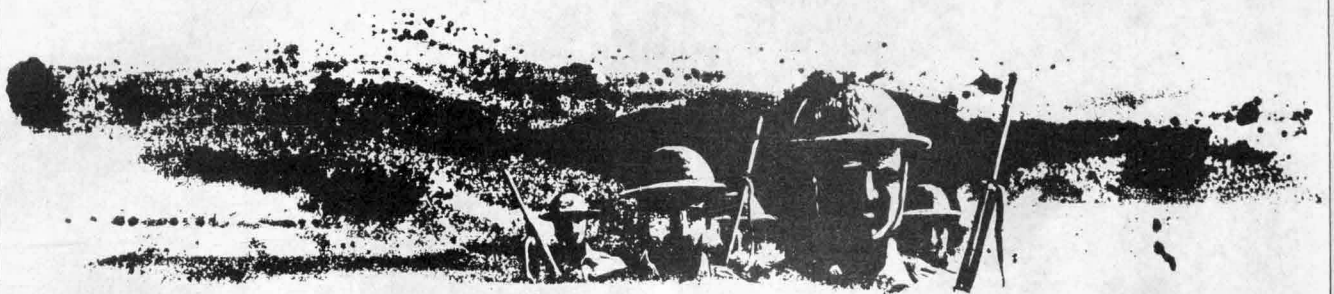


EVERY SATURDAY  
**EXPRESS WEEKEND**



BREAKFAST BONANZAS  
**INDIAN EXPRESS**  
SEVEN DAYS A WEEK

## GET OUT! SOONEST!!



**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SRI LANKA** offer the intricate Indian mind vast opportunities for justifying the unjustifiable. We can claim that death and destruction are inevitable in any peace-restoring exercise; we can claim that the Accord signed between Sri Lanka and India in July 1987 was a triumph for Indian diplomacy, and a feather in our Prime Minister's Gandhi cap. It may be so, but the grim reality that has emerged as a result of India's involvement in the internal conflicts of Sri Lanka, is that Indian troops are killing Tamil militants. And Tamil militants are killing both Indian troops and any Sinhalese that they can lay hands on; and the militant Sinhalese are yearning for a fight with the Tamils as well as the Indians.

These are the grim consequences of the immoral stance that we have adopted in Sri Lanka in recent years. The provision of training facilities for Tamil militants on Indian soil in the South, the emotive support they were given by Tamil Nadu, and the connivance of New Delhi in all this, rendered the Sri Lankan army action of five months ago, inevitable. Our response to that action — the air-drop of supplies for the largely Tamil area of Jaffna province — was the harbinger of the tragedy that followed. If India is to play a constructive role in Sri Lanka, it must realise that size and might must go hand-in-hand with generosity, with responsibility.

In Sri Lanka, we have evidently failed in our responsibility. We should have strengthened the hands of President Jayawardene by offering our utmost support to his Government, to tackle the Tamil militants. We should never have permitted ourselves to fall into a situation where we now have to virtually do the Sri Lankan Government's job for them. A military intervention in Sri Lanka, no matter what the compulsion and the temptation, is totally at variance with the principles of *Panchsheel* and any number of moralistic statements about the non-involvement of one state in the affairs of the other — declarations that we have been propounding for four decades and more.

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, American involvement in Vietnam, the involvement of the superpowers in Berlin and West Germany, as well as American involvement in Korea, are all living testimonies of why no country should use its own military power to become involved in conflicts occurring within other countries. In Germany, the Germans were opposing the Germans; in Korea, the Koreans were fighting the Koreans; in Vietnam, the Vietnamese were fighting the Vietnamese; and in Afghanistan, the Afghans are fighting Afghans. In Vietnam, the Americans succeeded in alienating their South Vietnamese allies, if not actually fighting them. Keeping Seoul in check has been a difficult task for the US administration ever since their involvement began during Harry Truman's Presidency. The Afghans and the Soviets are divided, and now, so are the Vietnamese and (the occupying) Chinese. There are lessons for India in all this, lessons that we simply cannot ignore. We cannot and should not stay in Sri Lanka.

All our efforts and energies in Sri Lanka should be directed at getting our troops out of that country. Fast. Such efforts must be accompanied by providing even more materials and resources to the Sri Lankan Government than what we are currently expending in Jaffna. Simultaneously, we need to educate the Indian public, particularly the people of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, that in the long run, it is in the best interests of the Tamils in Sri Lanka to deal directly with Colombo. It is for them and them alone, to learn to live with the reality that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese nation, and the Sinhalese are as entitled to nationhood, as you and I are, to India. ♦

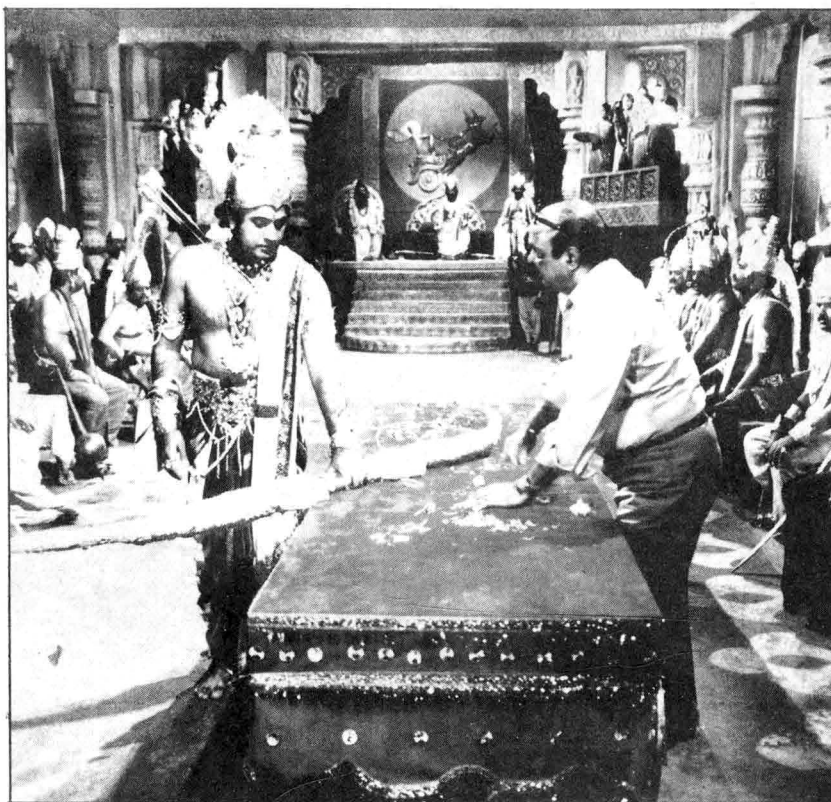
# 6

## THE SELLING OF THE RAMAYANA:

Unquestionably television's most popular serial, the *Ramayana* has succeeded in mesmerising millions of viewers. Its phenomenal success has surprised even its creators, the Sagar clan.

In this Diwali special, MINNIE VAID-FERA reports from Umbergaon on the making of an epic.

Cover photograph: Courtesy 'Dharmayug'.



## IN SEARCH OF A NATIONAL

**ALTERNATIVE:** "There is a growing restlessness among the people to find an alternative focus of political loyalty," says eminent politician MADHU DANDAVATE, who proceeds to analyse the current state of the Opposition parties and issues a call for a united front.

# 19

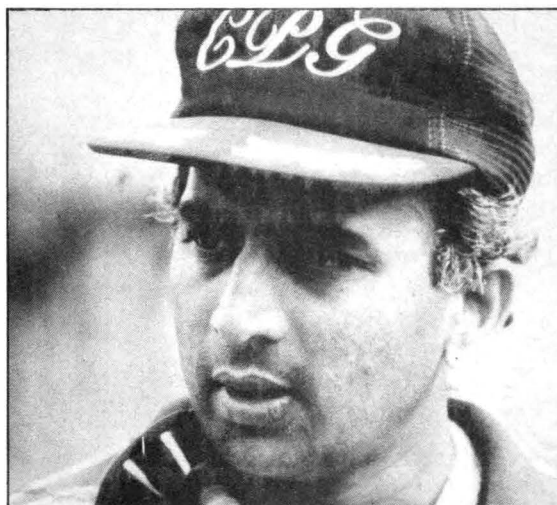
**SHOULD THE NOBEL PRIZE BE ABOLISHED?**

Ever since 1901, the announcements of the Nobel Prizes have invariably generated controversy. Omissions and mistakes have been common, and the Peace Prize has always been greeted with cynicism. MAHARAJ K KOUL argues the case for the abolition of this hallowed institution.

**35****41****GOODBYE TO ALL THAT:**

Veteran cricketer, Sunil Gavaskar, is all set to hang up his bat after the end of the Reliance Cup Series, much to the disappointment of his fans.

SHRISH NADKARNI pays a fitting tribute to the Little Master, who has excelled not only on the cricket pitch, but in several other fields as well.



**24 CHALK MARX:** A pot-pourri of the writing on the wall in the Soviet Union.

**26 MURDER BY DECREE:** In this socio-historical survey, SUDESH VAID and KUMKUM SANGARI trace the recent history of the revival of the grotesque practice of 'sati' in Rajasthan.

**32 WELDED WORDS:** A selection of poems from the pen of one of India's finest English poets, DOM MORAES.

**47 AIRING DISSENT:** Will the Government ever relinquish control of the broadcasting media? Two writ petitions have recently challenged the government monopoly of Doordarshan and AIR.

**53 IN OTHER WORDS:** A stimulating essay by SANJUKTA GUPTA, in which she provides an introduction to the themes and concerns of contemporary Indian women novelists and presents an overview of their work.

**59 ON THE TRAIL OF THE GODMEN:** MINNIE VAID-FERA meets B Premanand, who has launched a relentless campaign to expose greedy godmen and their crafty ways.

**67 THE VISIONARY:** Illuminating extracts from 'J Krishnamurti' by PUPUL JAYAKAR.

**76 THE HOME-COMING:** A charming fable by V SULAIMAN.

# LETTERS

## High Profits; Low Esteem



The routine inconveniences encountered while flying Indian Airlines are well-known. However, I was completely in the dark regarding the serious lapses that our prestigious domestic airline is guilty of. Thank you for bringing it to our notice. If Indian Airlines is guilty of even half the allegations levelled against the company by Abhay Mokashi, its culpability is unquestionable. When can we expect corrective action?

*Prahlad Bajaj  
Cuttack*

## Airport Security Crucial

With reference to the 'Marquee' (Imprint, September), pertaining to the security measures at Santacruz Airport, Bombay, I would like to inform you that similar procedures are being followed abroad, after an abortive attempt to blow up an El Al aircraft at Heathrow Airport, in London.

In this instance, although the bag containing the explosives had been examined under an X-ray machine, their presence did not register on the machine. And, had it not been for a thorough inspection by a vigilant El Al security officer, the explosives would have remained undetected.

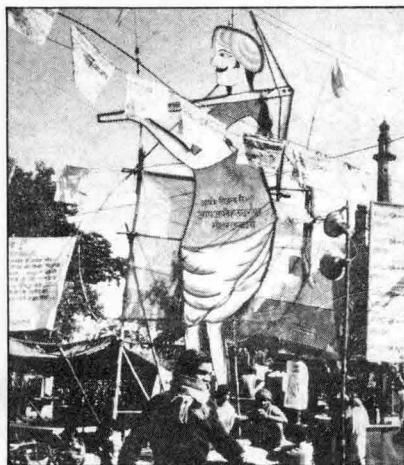
It is better to be harried and safe, than to be in a hurry and sorry. The security staff at Santacruz airport deserve an apology for your disparaging remarks.

*D N Handa  
New Delhi*

## Undue Pessimism

One cannot share the pessimism of K F Rustamji, expressed in the article, 'Poised for a Political Upheaval' (Imprint, September). We tend to view the country's political developments from two points of view: namely that of the Decline of the Congress and the absence of any viable alternatives; and in terms of the Left and the Right, as these are the only two distinct political ideologies available, and no other choice exists.

The Congress has been able to rule



for so long, only because of its claims that it has sacrificed a lot for the country. With the absence of any binding force, the Congress is bound to disintegrate and rapidly lose ground. It will not be surprising if it is reduced to a regional party soon. Despite the number of states being ruled by regional or national parties, there is a tendency among them to work at a national level, either individually or in conjunction with other parties. This shows that despite differences in ideology and approach, they all tend to think in 'national terms'.

Because of these factors, there may not be a period of national upheaval, but in the event of such an occurrence, some forces are bound to emerge to serve the country and to save it from catastrophe.

*V Sagar  
New Delhi*

## An Unbelievable Precedent



When the entire country is facing the alarming repercussions of the worst ever drought, Beed appears to be an almost unbelievable oasis of prosperity.

If Nanaji Deshmukh has indeed been so successful in his project, why don't expert environmentalists, as well as our all-important bureaucracy, profit from this illustrious example?

*Rohit Bapat  
Pune*

## The Need For Discipline

Discipline, as defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary, is "a system of rules for conduct; a mental and moral training." In addition to survival discipline, there are three others — institutional discipline, private discipline, and most importantly, public discipline.

In the enforcement of public discipline, legal and punitive action must be proportionate, swift, and firm, as without these, the administration of government becomes farcical and meaningless. Nobody, regardless of rank and status, should be exempted from the common disciplines applicable to all, and it logically follows that those charged with the imposition of discipline, must themselves be exemplars of discipline.

Our country is witnessing a serious breakdown in the essential disciplines along with a dangerous toleration towards those in power and irresponsible pressure groups — political, linguistic, religious, business, and

labour. A regrettable aspect in India is the strange conviction of large segments of people that personal freedom is super-comprehensive, above the national interest, and includes freedom from all disciplines, except those which suit them. Such beliefs, if not corrected quickly and firmly, must inevitably lead to the destruction of society and the disintegration of the State.

It is not too late. But discipline can only be effective when it is enforced at the point from which it emanates — the TOP!

*Col C L Proudfoot  
Bombay*

#### Jichkar Should Quit Politics



The profile of Dr Shrikant Jichkar, by Shirin Mehta (*Imprint*, September) elucidating his distinguished academic career, was very enlightening.

It is really remarkable that Dr Jichkar has acquired distinction in such diverse subjects. However, those who claim that he has bright political prospects, solely on the basis of his academic qualifications, are surely wrong, as his liaison with the masses is poor, and he has contributed little to his constituents in Katol.

Perhaps, Dr Jichkar should quit politics and concentrate his activities in the fields of education, business management and administration, where he has ample scope to succeed.

*J V Naik  
Bombay*

#### Some Suggestions

The subjects covered in the Marquee and the cover story on Ambani, (*Imprint*, August) were interesting. But more concise writing, please! It helps sustain the reader's attention.



A point of complaint about the Marquee in your September issue: I disagree that physical baggage checks at airports are unnecessary. In this day and age, when airlines are always subject to attack from terrorists, we cannot be *too* careful.

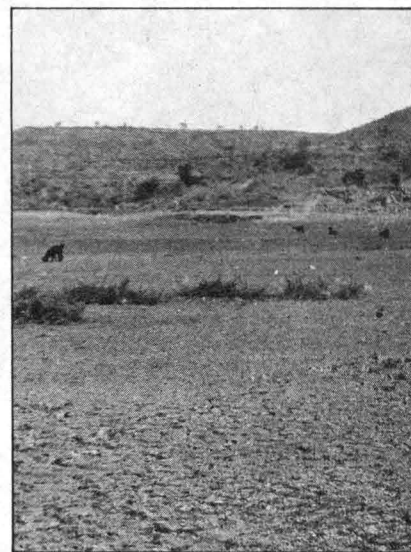
Congratulations for writing about Nelson Mandela — it was well-introduced, very interesting, and a subject not covered by other magazines. The article on Geet Sethi was also well-written. I have always admired *Imprint*, but I would welcome shorter, and livelier articles. If *Imprint* is to compete with the many other good magazines available, you should look for articles which will help foster social awareness.

There are many injustices in our country. They must be dealt with. The youth are doing their best to fight these, so are women's organisations. Why not give these people a voice?

*A Pandya  
Bombay*

#### Drought Appeal

Rajasthan is engaged in a life and death struggle against the century's worst ever drought which is threaten-



ing to spell misery, disease, and hunger, on an unprecedented scale. This is the fourth consecutive year of drought in the State as a whole, although certain parts of Western Rajasthan have been reeling under its impact for the past eight or nine years.

The Government will have to arrange employment for the lakhs of people hit by scarcity, as well as fodder for cattle. Despite the pooling of all resources, the expenditure for such a huge task cannot be met by the government alone.

I, therefore, appeal to all industrial and business houses and voluntary organisations to lend a helping hand in meeting the situation, by contributing generously to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

*Harideo Joshi  
Chief Minister, Rajasthan*

#### Deeply Inspiring

I was deeply inspired by the poignant profile, 'Goodbye Miss Stevens' (*Imprint*, August), which was related by C L Proudfoot with great sensitivity. This paralytic's story instills in one the courage to fight against all odds. Hence, I shall be circulating copies of this story among some blind friends.

*Ms Hena Basu  
Calcutta*

## COVER STORY



By Minnie Vaid-Fera



## Hare Rama, Hare Sagar!

RAMAYANA is, unquestionably, India's most popular television serial and has been so for almost nine months. Its phenomenal success has surprised its own creators — the Sagar unit, and director Ramanand Sagar in particular. While RAMAYANA's popularity ratings soar and advertisers await their turn in the wings, millions of television viewers sit transfixed, Sunday after Sunday, watching the familiar tale unfold itself. Revered personalities come to life, Gods deliver sermons, astounding miracles take place, and enthralling music fills the home, for the 45 minutes that RAMAYANA holds its audiences in sway.

In this Diwali special, MINNIE VAID-FERA reports from Umbergaon.

**E**UPHORIA AND PARANOIA are, for the Sagar family, two sides of the same coin. Almost deliriously happy with the immense popularity that *Ramayana* commands all over the country, they are nevertheless insecure and paranoid about any criticism of their much-loved serial. "What are you going to write about *Ramayana*? About Papaji (Ramanand Sagar)? We are extremely careful about allowing the press at Umbergaon (the shooting location). I've just refused permission to the

## "WE'RE TOUCHING THE SOUL OF THE COUNTRY"

Ramanand Sagar talks to Minnie Vaid-Fera.

"YOU WILL NEED PAPAJI'S (Ramanand Sagar) biodata," his devoted son, Prem Sagar, informs me importantly. The biodata, four pages long and neatly cyclostyled, is willy-nilly foisted onto me. It traces Ramanand Sagar's "entering the arch of life as a humble goldsmith's apprentice," elucidates the "difficult path he traversed as truck cleaner, soap vendor, typist, clerk, assistant editor," and describes his gallant struggle with tuberculosis (in 1941) which led to his "first famous literary work, *The Diary of a TB patient*". Then, the document informs you, "the writer in him outgrew the man. Journalism clasped hands with him and he began writing for *Daily Milap*. His novel *Aur Insan Mar Gaya* (And Humanity Died) on the Partition, put together the shattered pieces of human values into a strong picture of human greatness. The book became a best seller, spring splashed its colours. The writer dipped his pen in the nectar of his heart." The transition from novelist to film-maker was fairly swift and fruitful, according to the biodata: "*Barsaat* marked a new watershed in the Indian film industry, *Badi Bahu* vibrated with the greatness of Indian women, *Paigam* tackled the timely labour problems in true Gandhian traditions and *Ghunghat*, *Zinagi* and *Arzoo* (silver jubilees in a row) established him permanently as one of the biggest producer-director-writers in the Indian film industry."

This producer-director-writer is, today, the uncrowned king of the small screen, courtesy the stupendous success of *Ramayana*, the project he nurtured for over 20 years and realised early this year. The telecasts of the first few episodes of the serial proved prophetic enough — *Ramayana* was here to stay, and succeed. By the very nature of its content and characters — and their familiarity with millions of its Hindu audiences — *Ramayana*'s



popularity was guaranteed even before its quality could be evaluated. In fact, *anyone* making a serial based on an age-old, time-honoured epic, would be assured of a sizeable initial 'draw'. If he faithfully and religiously adhered to a revered and familiar text, without taking very many liberties, the applause would definitely increase. And finally, if the expenditure towards glossy and elaborate embellishments to an extravaganza, was a minor consideration, audience tastes could be easily gratified. It was, perhaps a relatively easy formula, one that just could not fail. Ramanand Sagar can indeed be congratulated for his foresight. Predictably, he violently disagrees with this conclusion. He informs you repeatedly that *Ramayana* has been a labour of love and credits its making to "spiritual powers". His modesty, however, is unconvincing, backed as it is by excessive flattery, a favourite pastime of members of the Sagar *Ramayana* unit and notably his own sons — Subhash, Prem, Anand, Moti, Jyoti — all of whom are involved in this "prestigious project", in one capacity or another.

Ramanand Sagar (Papaji) is a short and stocky man, with a genial manner. He is perched atop an old-fashioned bed in the centre of a sparsely furnished room at Vrindavan Studios, Umber-

gaon. It has been his haunt for the last nine months. "I'm living in my own world here," he says portentously. "I spend 28 days a month in this *ashram*. Whenever I go to Bombay, I feel like a villager entering a city," he chuckles. The bed is conspicuously strewn with various versions of the *Ramayana*; he is busy making notes, one from the other, on sheets of foolscap. "This is the hardest part," he admits, "making notes from each tome. This is the first time so many versions are being brought together." He settles down to talk about his favourite subject — the making of *Ramayana* and what it means to him.

Excerpts from the interview:

**Imprint:** *Ramayana* appears to be an all-time hit, not just here but abroad too — in Mauritius, the USSR, clubs in the USA...

**Ramanand Sagar:** Yes, various people abroad have sent us congratulatory telexes. It has caught peoples' interest worldwide. This interest, moreover, has transcended all communal or community feelings. I'm glad I made it as a television serial, it's a subject that could not have been made in 3-4 hours.

**As its creator, you're probably the right person to analyse the reasons for *Ramayana*'s overwhelming success.**

This achievement has been bestowed on me by God. It's not a human achievement. For an entire nation to rise in respect (to *Ramayana*) — I can't start putting on airs that the credit should go to me. I may be a good writer, I've made good films, but such things (he means *Ramayana* again) happen due to some other powers which use you as a medium.

**The religious content of your serial was bound to appeal to a fairly large number of viewers, wasn't it?**

If that was the case, why wasn't that

serial on Krishna (*Krishnavtaar*) more popular than *Ramayana*? And anyway, Muslims watch *Ramayana*, Christians watch it.

**But merely because a vast majority watches *Ramayana*, does it mean that it's intrinsically good? Is popularity necessarily linked with quality?**

You're echoing that critic.

**Who? Khalid Mohammed of *The Times of India*?**

I'm not going to mention names. But to equate the popularity of *Ramayana* to that of pornography... words fail me! You just laugh at such people, you pity them. There may be five persons who are unhappy with my serial, or even 500 in the entire country. I see them as Churchill did (*smiles benevolently*).

**Meaning?**

Didn't Churchill say that he never believed in Gandhiji because he dressed shabbily? Only a man who has read the *Ramayana* can criticise my serial. People have to be born several times to reach that spiritual level, after which they can qualify as critics. I don't take criticism seriously.

**Since we are talking of criticism, how do you react to the most common complaint about *Ramayana* — that quite often, it drags interminably and several episodes are lengthy and often boring?**

If it was long or dragging, it would not have sold! I have not written one extra sentence anywhere. Each dialogue has some bearing somewhere. You see, it's a matter of choice — Valmiki has described the story of the *Ramayana* in one sentence while others have written over one lakh *shlokas*. If I'd started abridging each of those, it would have meant 600 episodes. So I've selected what I found sensitive, poignant, meaningful.

Then, I've omitted sequences portraying blind faith. I've made *gurus* and *gurukuls* tell their *shishyas* to adopt only their good points. This is a Buddhist concept of a *guru's* res-

pensibilities. No *Ramayana* has elaborated on the education aspect — everyone said that Ram was a reservoir of knowledge; I've focused on that education aspect. What did the *rishis* teach? I've brought in yoga, *vedanta*, *karma*, miracles, mortality. But, I've not gone out of the story.

**What made you take up a topic that had been tackled before — so many times, in fact?**

I thought it should be done again. My only achievement — I could say, happiness — is that the youth of this country has been influenced. Of course, the number of individual victories that we've scored with *Ramayana* have been countless. People write in telling us how much the serial has helped them. We're really touching the soul of the country. I receive letters from scholars, *yogis*; an ex-Shankaracharya wrote to me, saying "you have done a great service. I want to give you a *padvi* (award)". Luckily, *Ramayana* has escaped any controversy — learned scholars could have raised objections. I guess they haven't because I've only been dedicated to what was already there.

**Are you very religious?**

I've always been deeply religious. In fact, there are very few real atheists anywhere. Scientists realised that *science* did not create the universe, so science gave in to spiritualism in the 20th century. They recognised the power of God. *Who* is not religious? Thanks to *Ramayana* however, people have started *not* feeling ashamed of being religious in public, the success of *Ramayana* proves that God is in everyone's heart, the love of goodness is in every heart.

**How about authenticity? You seem to have put in a lot of research: have most people found the serial authentic? Some characters, often entire episodes, appear quite garish.**

There's no question of authenticity. I'm trying to depict an atmosphere that *seems* right. You know, I went to H D Sankalia, the famous historian

and archaeologist in Pune, who is known to be an authority on that period. He told me that Sita and the other women then, went about topless. If I'd shown that, I'd have been lynched! I'm only recreating the image that people have in their minds of Ram, of Sita, of Hanuman.

Take Hanuman. The popular conception of Hanuman is one of a half-monkey with a prominent tail. For thousands of years, people have worshipped him like that. Now, I couldn't show him without a tail, could I? You may call it being backward, hackneyed etc, but people must accept our *Ramayana* as being true.

**Your stars have become cult figures. Audiences don't seem to be able to distinguish the actors from the characters they play. Don't you think this is an extremely foolish trend, to set up poor Arun Govil as Ram, for the rest of his acting career?**

Yes, Ram is in trouble, he can't even smoke! Actors do become Gods for *Ramayana* audiences, and my artistes ask me what they should do? What can I say? If you worship a stone, it becomes a symbol; so this was inevitable. People want to touch my feet, naturally it creates problems for me. But, surely one can help those people who see an element of goodness in you? All you have to be careful about is not to hurt their feelings — you can't have double standards. My *personal* personality, for instance, has to be consistent. I've given up doing in private what I can't do in public.

**After *Ramayana*, anything you do, in terms of creativity, is bound to be something of an anti-climax, isn't it? What are your plans?**

Yes, *Ramayana* has given me more joy than any of my other films. I may not be able to make a regular film — I was planning to make *Aankhen II* but now I will be restricted to making something spiritual or realistic. After all, you don't make films for yourself; I have to live up to people's expectations.

## COVER STORY

BBC," says Prem Sagar (one of the several Sagar sons associated with the serial), agitatedly. He proceeds to explain his reluctance: "You see, we are catering to 90 crore Indians, on a spiritual level. Nothing should disturb that. If you can assure us that no adverse comments will be published, we shall be most honoured to have you with us at Umbergaon."

Umbergaon, a tiny hamlet on the Gujarat coast, a three-hour journey from Bombay, turns out to be utterly charming. And Vrindavan Studios is even more so — tucked away from the main village (which consists of one street), and flanked by one of the loveliest natural beaches lined for miles with tall, willowy *saryn* trees. The landscape is beautiful and uncluttered, and one comes across a couple of idlers, resting in shady groves, at infrequent intervals.

The atmosphere inside Vrindavan Studios has probably been infected by the tranquil and leisurely pace of life outside, for everyone seems relaxed. The customary flap-and-bother of film shootings and film studios is notably absent, although a few minions scuttle around busily. The others lounge around, awaiting their turns — Papaji is immersed in planning the day's shooting schedule, Ram (Arun Govil), Laxman (Sunil Lahiri), and Hanuman (Dara Singh) are being made-up. Sita (Dipika Chikhlia) is resting, with curds in her hair, in her room, which is quaintly marked *Ashok Vatika* with chalk.

It is almost lunch time when Papaji emerges from his lair, and asks his son, Subhash, whether the scene is ready to be shot. Ram and Laxman troop out towards the sets in their *tapaswi vesh* (ascetic garb), faces shining, wigs in place. Hanuman and Sugreev, resplendent in orange satin bloomers, gold tassels, and tons of imitation jewellery, make their slow, rather ponderous way to the sets, their curly tails bobbing behind them enthusiastically. Sita, with her hair now washed and gleaming, and casually dressed in a pink shirt, decides to watch the shooting, although her pre-

## "It has been difficult to maintain my image"

Arun Govil talks to Minnie Vaid-Fera

*Arun Govil is undoubtedly the focal point of Ramayana, and its mainstay. To don the highly revered mantle of a religious idol was formidable enough; to achieve that placidity and maintain that equilibrium month after gruelling month, truly creditable. It has always been a virtuoso, if somewhat monotonous, performance. But the monotony, admits Govil ruefully, was the most challenging part; he had to sustain that unruffled facade throughout his performance. And, although the uncharitable might jibe at the rather fatuous and often condescending rigidity of his dead-pan expression, they would do well to remember that balancing oneself on the tight-rope between earthly and divine avataars (forms), is no easy task. But if audience-response is any indication, Govil has emerged triumphant.*

*Maintaining his 'holy' image off-screen as well, has proved to be an unholy task, avers Govil. "I feel like an animal in a zoo," he groans. Although Umbergaon has at last got accustomed to its 'divine' stars, his fans are still shocked by any display of 'human' frailty on his part, as when he smokes a cigarette. Govil is resigned to living in a glass-bowl, golden and godly though it be, since his audience fails to distinguish between Arun Govil, the actor, and Suryavanshi Ramchandra, his alter-ego.*

*Excerpts from the interview:*

**Imprint:** You have almost been catapulted into stardom; today, you are probably as popular as Amitabh Bachchan. In fact, by the very nature of your role, you are now a cult figure. How does it feel to be 'superman'?

**Arun Govil:** Well, it is not easy to obtain this kind of fame. I would probably have achieved this kind of success only after acting in say, 20 hit films as a 'solo' hero! God has been very kind. What more can I say? Yes,

initially it was all very thrilling — the adulation, the reverence — now it is just routine.

On the other hand, sometimes this 'reverence' bit gets uncomfortable, especially when elderly people come and touch my feet! I don't know how to react! Then, I have been told that I will have an 'image' problem after a role like Ram, but so far, I have received excellent responses from commercial film-makers, with no offers to do mythological roles.

As for being 'superhuman', it has been a difficult image to maintain. I have had to behave in a certain way, with a certain amount of decorum. But, it has definitely been worth it,

**How do you react to the criticism, that given this religious subject and your kind of role, any actor would have achieved a certain measure of success? That the audience would react favourably to a character like Ram, and accept him?**

I agree that religion plays as important a part, but an actor *has* to be good in order to be accepted. Religion helped us in the sense that people were familiar with the basic concept and the story. After that, we had to prove ourselves.

*Ramayana* is tremendously popular with each member of each and every family. It has transcended barriers of religion and community. I will give you an example—there was this Muslim family wherein there was a fight over some family property. *Ramayana* was only 15 episodes old then, yet it had a profound effect on this family — the elder brother made a decision which was unanimously accepted by the family.

**Why do you feel it has had this kind of effect?**

*Ramayana* has touched the hearts of the people. You see, the life we lead today is so fast and materialistic that



people have no time for feelings, principles and relationships. But these are essential factors. *Ramayana* has merely removed the dust and revived these aspects. Also, take the way *Ramayana* has been produced. Papaji (Ramanand Sagar) has consulted several versions of the *Ramayana* and selected the best from each. Then, the dialogues he has been writing are so crystal-clear that even kids can understand the feelings which are being conveyed. This is essential, as unless a thing is explained, it ceases to have meaning. Papaji is a real perfectionist, he takes pains over each frame and orders 10-15 takes if he is dissatisfied.

**Yet, I have noticed from today's shooting, that there are definite shortcomings in the performance of characters like Sugreev. Even Hanuman seemed very loud and theatrical.** They *have* to be loud, after all, they have to use their eyes a lot. You must have seen the difficulty with their masks. . .

**You must have been hampered yourself, having to perform within the narrow constraints of Ram's character – the sobriety which requires you to underplay. . .**

Yes, it has been very difficult. At first I was quite uncomfortable, there were too many limitations. You cannot behave in a loud manner, you cannot move your muscles, you have to smile in a certain way, you have to display piety, you cannot be emotio-

nal, except in certain scenes. That smile in itself (smiles ruefully) was quite something – it had to be all-knowing, half-divine. Somehow, I did it well. As for my voice, I had to maintain the same pitch, along with the same kind of expression, over lengthy periods. But I adjusted quite quickly to this. *Ramayana* has taught me several things, for instance, how to give an understated yet effective performance.

**But need your goodness only have been depicted by that fixed, 'divine' smile? Wasn't there any other way of portraying the goodness of the character?**

Well, his inherent goodness was revealed not only through the smile, but also through the facial expression. But the smile was needed to make it more obvious.

**How much stress do you lay on preparing in advance? Do you study your role and character in detail, before performing?**

I believe in spontaneous action. However, before enacting this role, I had studied Ram's character; I knew it. How I enacted it was a joint-effort between the director and myself. Initially, he used to demonstrate every emotion, but now he just keeps an eye on me. Fortunately, as my memory is quite good, I am able to just go on to the sets and perform. Sometimes, of course, routine scenes get mechanical. By and large, Ram's character is very straightforward. As far as its interpretation is concerned, I have only added my personal touch, almost unknowingly.

**Are you religious? Had you read the *Ramayana* earlier on?**

Yes, I had read it while in school – I used to read it for half an hour each morning. But I am not overly religious, although I believe in God, of course.

**How were you selected to play Ram?**

Well, I badly *wanted* to play Ram, so I approached Papaji. Since I had play-

ed Vikram in Prem Sagar's *Vikram aur Betaal*, I was screen tested, and of course, very thrilled when he selected me. I *was* worried, however, about how I was going to portray Ram successfully.

**Do you feel that the serial has done justice to the epic? Don't you feel the quality of the production could have been better – the sets a little less artificial, the monsters a little more credible, for example, like those in Walt Disney's films?**

I don't think that any compromises have been made in terms of production quality. The sets are good, and if a single shot has required an entire shift, it has been done. As far as technology goes, we have yet to reach the advanced level of Disney films. But then, do you think that Disney films have to consider economic viability? Of course, things could have been done in a more imaginative way – you can *always* improve quality. Even masterpieces can be improved. But, on the whole, I feel that Papaji *has* done justice to the epic. In fact, in some places, he has gone beyond!

**Most television celebrities have soon discovered the highly transient nature of success on television. Do you share the same fear?**

You mean, out of sight, out of mind? Somehow, I do not think that will happen in *Ramayana*'s case. The story is timeless, and our video cassette sale has been phenomenal. I don't think any other serial, unless it is really extraordinary, can ever be as smashing a hit as *Ramayana*.

**You are going to have to be quite choosy now, aren't you, in order to live up to your audience's expectations of your future roles?**

(Grins knowingly) Sure. If I do anything without considering it carefully, it might backfire. I *am* being more choosy. I have completed a few of my old films and taken on some new ones. But, I will not be bothered about any image-problems I might have until they occur.

## COVER STORY

sence is not required till late evening.

Studio No 1 (there are three in the compound) is vast and cavernous. In fact, quite literally so — tall structures, made to resemble enormous caves (Sugreev's depleted kingdom), form the backdrop for the day's shooting. The caves are offset by rows of closely-packed lights, strung just above the locale. As the sets begin to fill with artistes, technicians, spot boys, make-up men and assistants, Sita, sitting next to Papaji near the video monitor, asks me conspiratorially, "It's like a school play, isn't it? Most film shootings are so boring, but *Ramayana's* isn't." As Sugreev and Riche (the bear) take their places, later marked with chalk, Laxman rehearses his lines aloud. He groans about the Sanskrit *shloka* that he has to learn and repeatedly asks Papaji about its correct pronunciation. Papaji at once begins singing the *shloka* soulfully — "Laxman, try and sing it, you'll remember it better." He requests Ram, who has been listening quietly, to help Laxman. "Yeh jalebi jaisa tedha hai, ise kaise seedha karun," says Ram playfully.

**IT IS SOON TIME** for him to don his 'divine' mask — his half-smile intact, his facial expression benign and calm. Papaji is shooting short, remaining portions of an episode which is to be telecast barely five days hence, "Normally we shoot six seven episodes in advance, but sometimes, things are left until the very last moment; these small shots are very time-consuming," he grumbles good-naturedly.

His good humour endures right through the next three hours of shooting — he is seldom cross or impatient. Ram and Sugreev practise embracing one another, Sugreev rehearses his lines, Ram suddenly makes a monkey-face at him — the rehearsal dissolves in laughter.

The shot is soon ready for 'taking' — Ram delivers his lines flawlessly, in that familiar, low-pitched monotone. Sugreev stares at Ram fixedly, prompting Papaji to ask him to 'react' to what Ram is saying to him. The

## "Sita has been my best role so far"

Dipika Chikhlia speaks to Minnie Vaid-Fera.

*Your first impression of her is that she is amazingly petite and pretty. Later, you realise she is also incredibly predictable. Dipika Chikhlia, or rather Sita, is enthusiastically eulogistic — Ramayana is the best serial on air, Umbergaon was a fantastic experience, the Sagar unit was one big happy family, Sita was her best role, Papaji (Ramanand Sagar) was a devoted director. . . Her animated enthusiasm is understandable — Dipika seems essentially simple, and eminently biddable. Not for her the intellectual internalisation of a complex role, or an indepth study of its ramifications — she just goes onto the sets, is briefed by the director, and recites her lines. And is thrilled, as is her audience, with the result.*

*Off-stage, she is 'deeply religious', friendly, and chatters away amiably with anyone who cares to talk to her. Excerpts from the interview:*

**Imprint:** How does it feel to be a 'living legend'?

**Dipika Chikhlia:** Initially, I did not realise the importance of my role. Only now have I become aware of its tremendous importance. It is a role which thousands of actresses would love to play. It has given me more recognition than six years of acting in movies has — it has been worthwhile playing Sita.

**How were you selected for this plum role?**

I had acted in serials like *Dada Dadi Ki Kahani*, *Vikram Aur Betaal*, *Kathasagar*, *Rishte Nate* . . . Later, having been recommended to Papaji, I did three screen tests for the role of Sita. At first, there were a lot of controversies regarding *Ramayana* — people were not sure as to whether it would really take off. But the telecast of the first few episodes proved that it was not just ordinary stuff.

**How did you prepare yourself for this**

**role; how did you internalise it? Did it require a lot of homework?**

Not really. I had to read the *Ramayana*, of course, as part of my preparations. Earlier, I had read it as one might read a novel — now I read it, keeping the role of Sita in mind.

**What was the Umbergaon experience like? Your work there is almost over, isn't it?**

Yes, it is. But, in the last six months, I spent almost 25 days each month, at Umbergaon. Initially, it was quite problematic — after all, it was a remote place, it took time to get used to it. When we first came here, one could not even get bread and butter! Now, thanks to the *Ramayana* unit, you get ice-creams and soft drinks too!

**What about the unit itself? Being closeted in such a 'primitive' environment could have led to boredom, even friction. Were there any problems with co-stars and colleagues? What was a typical day at Umbergaon like?**

The unit was just like one big family — everyone was engrossed in roles. They discussed nothing else. I feel one works better in such an atmosphere. There were no hassles or ego-clashes at all. In fact, I share a good rapport with Arun Govil — he has no hangups whatsoever.

Our shooting schedule was quite erratic — we would begin at 12:20-1 pm and shoot through the night, sometimes, even until the early hours of the morning. Of course, I spent a lot of time just waiting around. Occasionally, I would do some knitting or reading. Before the monsoon, we would play badminton on a makeshift court or we would go for long walks on the lovely beach. (This, she admits frankly, was only in the beginning; the novelty of a deserted beach soon wore off.) Of course, when there's



nothing to do, it *does* occasionally get boring.

**Did you ever anticipate receiving the kind of response *Ramayana* has evoked?**

The response from fans is unbelievable! When I go to parties, elderly people touch my feet. . . it is so embarrassing. Once, when I attended a *havan* (puja) at Papaji's house, a woman came and touched my feet — she was part of the sophisticated crowd, mind you. The fans find it impossible to believe that Ram (Arun Govil) is married to someone other than me! I mean, no one can accept us as artistes!

**Isn't this going to create problems for you — this kind of typecasting or 'religious' stereotyped image?**

I do not think so. Everything fades away. Why, only six years ago, directors used to tell me that I would do well only in westernised roles — today, I am famous all over India as Sita. Of course, earlier I was not all that popular. I think I would like to retain my Sita image, or rather, the Indianised image.

**Why do you feel *Ramayana* has achieved the popularity and success it has?**

I think the success is basically due to the audience's *shraddha* (devotion). The *Ramayana* is part of our culture. I feel the serial has done justice to

the epic, and although we always had the religious audience, we have also won over the movie audience. *Ramayana* is educative without being boring; it's more message-oriented than the run-of-the-mill movie, but in a glamorous way. It is a big hit with kids too. But, ultimately, you have to have *shraddha* while watching it, otherwise it is like watching any other film.

**How do you react to the criticism that *Ramayana* exploits the religious sentiments of its vast audiences?**

(Not quite understanding) As it has a positive approach, it is fantastic. I mean, it is not doing any harm. In fact, it's teaching people several values — people tell us how their children have started imitating Ram, for example, by pressing their feet after watching the serial.

**What about the other criticisms levelled against *Ramayana* — that it is slow-moving and has gaudy, garish sets and 'tinsel' miracles?**

Well, actually, I have been so involved in it that I am not the right person to comment. But, (quite angrily,) *Ramayana* is not *Star Wars*! Today, especially in a city like Bombay, you have to rush around eternally. But in those days, thousands of years ago, nobody came rushing in and out — their actions were slow. You cannot have Ram dancing like Jeetendra, can you?

(A trifle defiantly) I think *Ramayana* is one of the best serials on air; thousands have told me so, as well. It has the best sets, the best costumes, a director who is so utterly devoted, and who looks after every minute detail. Then, each actor suits his role — Ram *looks* like Ram — and has given a fine performance.

**Has Sita been your best role so far? Do you feel you have done justice to it?**

I think I have done very well. I have always wanted an Indian image, I am glad I got it. Sita *has* been my best role so far, and I will remember it for the rest of my life.

camera remains in operation during the interruption. Subhash Sagar later discloses that all irrelevant or faulty portions are later erased. It seems a time-saving if somewhat extravagant style of functioning.

Pieces of sugared coconut are passed around, while Hanuman gets ready for his shot. A diminutive make-up man pats the monkey-mask into place, while a spot-boy gingerly wipes the perspiration from Hanuman's massive frame. "*Dadaji, hat lagao, hat!*" booms Papaji. Hanuman adjusts his golden crown, while Papaji looks on in amusement. "How innocent our Hanuman is," he tells Sita, *sotto voce*. "He's damn cute," she agrees coyly. Hanuman recites his lines jerkily and steps back as the camera zooms in on Ram. It is a powerful scene, full of emotion and drama. Ram mouths his dialogues impressively, and in the same tenor declares that "*iske aage mujhe dialogue bilkul yaad nahin.*" The camera switches off while he begins rehearsing, once again.

Meanwhile, Papaji chats with Sita, sips her tea, and plays with some little girls from the audience — solemnly he goes over to one of the 'monkey' men hanging around, detaches his 'tail', and presents it to one of the young girls.

Ram, having memorised his part quickly, enacts it with aplomb — his voice, unlike his customary dulcet tones, rises emotionally, accompanied by a definite hint of tears. Tears also glisten (assisted by a few drops of glycerine) in his eyes as he reminisces about Sita's devoted care of him, and then he vows to rescue her from her predicament. The shot is 'okayed' quickly to the accompaniment of enthusiastic applause. "Beautiful shot," gushes Sita, while Papaji sniffs in sympathy, and pulling out a handkerchief, noisily blows his nose. "*Wah, beta, wah,*" he enthuses, going over to pat Ram vigorously, and embracing him in silent congratulation. "The whole country will cry next Sunday," an onlooker pipes in. Papaji warmly agrees.

## COVER STORY

IT IS NOW LAXMAN'S TURN. He has word-perfected his Sanskrit *shloka*, yet, unfamiliarity with the intonation makes him fumble a couple of times. "Aankh mein pani, dil mein dard," instructs Papaji, in a singsong, mournful voice. The completion of this shot heralds a very welcome lunch-break.

Papaji leads the way to a shed-like edifice at the rear of the studio, which houses the unit's kitchen and long rows of wooden tables. The lunch is simple and vegetarian, and the latter point is emphasised several times. "I also don't smoke or drink these days; in fact, I haven't ever since *Ramayana* began," Papaji informs me solemnly. Hanuman, his mask now thankfully removed, regales the table with anecdotes of his wrestling days, long, long ago. Friendly though a trifle shy, Dara Singh seems a little too old to be the energetic and all-powerful Hanuman, although his director feels he fits the role like a glove. Age notwithstanding, Hanuman is going to be an increasingly popular figure in the serial in the days to come, especially with children.

Contentedly chewing *supari*, Papaji reclines in his room for a post-lunch, semi-siesta and agrees to answer further questions. How is the serial being financed? What is the cost breakdown per episode? What is its advertising revenue? Papaji wrinkles his nose as if in disgust. "You want to question me on *Ramayana's* finances?" he shudders. "I don't know anything about them — why do you want to know about such an irrelevant part of my work?" he exclaims scornfully.

The reaction is almost identical to that of his son, Prem Sagar, in Bombay. "*Ramayana* and money? How can you talk about them in the same breath? *Ramayana's* costs cannot be estimated, they are too large. I can't give you any details. But let me tell you, only a lion-hearted man like my father can make a serial like this," he comes to a halt, his chest heaving, several pitying glances later. But *why* is it such a top secret? Are the profits

## "People can identify with Laxman"

Sunil Lahiri as Laxman, the 'better' role.

*Sunil Lahiri is Ramayana's angry young man — a period Amitabh Bachchan. He fights Ram's battles, both verbal and military, defends him, champions him, loyally supports him, and slavishly cares for him and his wife, Sita. On screen, that is. Off-screen, Lahiri carries a slight chip on his shoulder vis-a-vis his role and Ram's. Although he admits that "Off-stage, Arun Govil has really been like an older brother, guiding me all the while," Laxman, or rather Lahiri, takes pains to inform you that his role is as important as Ram's, in the overall scheme of things. In fact, it is even better, as it has more shades to it than the staid and sober, godlike colours of the pivotal character, Ram.*

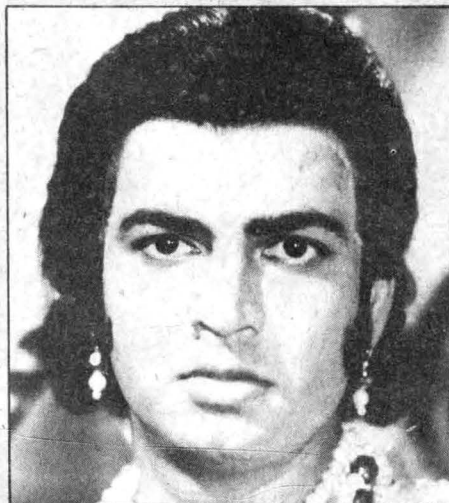
*Lahiri is, however, refreshingly natural, unassuming, and amicable. Excerpts from the interview:*

**Imprint: How do you rate your interpretation and experience of the character of Laxman?**

**Sunil Lahiri:** It is a great feeling. It is also inspiring — I have been putting in more work, trying to achieve more. Laxman's is a very challenging role, but the challenge here is that apart from the knowledge gained from reading the *Ramayana*, you have no other prior knowledge of how to actually play your role. So then, you have discussions, like I did, with Papaji. He taught me the variations of my role as Laxman — obedient, emotional, honest, faithful, loyal, and devoted to Ram (whom he looked upon as God) but also capable of anger, and even cheekiness.

**You have once said that Laxman's was a more powerful role than even Ram's. Would you care to elaborate?**

Yes, I did say that Laxman's role was better, in the sense that Laxman's is an extreme character, and he is capable of several emotions, including anger. Ram, on the other hand, can only depict subtle emotions. Also,



don't forget that Laxman goes through all that Ram and Sita do, but without sharing his sorrows or problems with anyone.

I have never wanted to play Ram and I have never felt my role to be subordinate. Also, our audiences are different and distinct. Most of my fans are youngsters and people can identify with me, which they can't with Ram. Ram and Laxman are two extremes — ice and fire — neither is secondary. My role has its own individual charm and appeal.

**Was it difficult to prepare for such a role?**

Well, at first I did not have a 100 per cent idea of what my role entailed; today, I know several details.

Moreover, I feel that spontaneous acting is better than advance preparation. I must give a lot of credit to the director — we don't *need* to prepare. He has often told us: learn your lines and come to me. He then explains entire scenes. My contributions have generally been on-the-spot, in terms of expressions, certain movements, and gestures.

It is not always possible to get the script earlier; Papaji reworks the details till he is completely satisfied and often there are last-minute changes.

He is a perfectionist — I think that's an admirable quality.

**You have a theatre background, don't you? How did you land the role of Laxman?**

Yes, I used to perform in Hindi plays for Majma. Then I worked in *Naxalites* for K A Abbas, and also in *Vikram Aur Betaal* and *Dada Dadi Ki Kahani*. Papaji asked me to keep in touch, and then, I was screen tested for Laxman, and selected.

**What feedback have you received from the audience?**

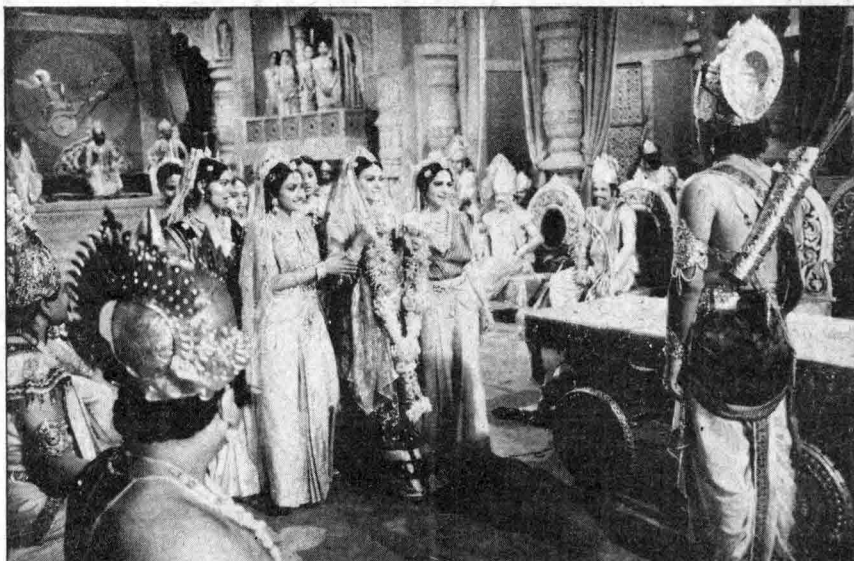
I do not think any serial has been as popular as *Ramayana* — we had a show in Talkatora stadium where we were welcomed by thousands of fans. I was so moved and happy that tears came to my eyes.

Imagewise, I don't think I will get typecast. I have just completed a role in Nari Hira's *Jazira*, which was quite a contrast to Laxman. I have also played a teenage lover-boy in *Phir Aayi Barsaat*. Of course, I can't deny that Laxman has given me a good image, although remarkably, I have not yet been approached to play a mythological role. I think that's because Laxman is an individual: he is fun, cheeky, angry. Ram is godlike, whereas Laxman is more human.

**What do you see as *Ramayana*'s basic strengths?**

*Ramayana* has taught people all about devotion, respect, family relationships, and so on. Then, the language used is pure Sanskritised Hindi, which has taught convent-educated kids a thing or two. Children have started calling their parents *Pitashree* and *Matashree*, instead of the usual 'Daddy' and 'Mummy'. (One suspects that is more tongue-in-cheek than filial.) We are trying to portray our basic culture.

I do not think people will forget *Ramayana* — the demand for the video cassettes will remain strong. As long as Indians believe in religion, they will want to see *Ramayana* again and again.



so incalculably large ( a rumoured Rs 3 lakh per episode) that its beneficiaries fight shy of disclosing the actual figures? Papaji does not deign to reply. Financial matters hold no interest for him, he informs you again, accusingly. Pride makes him add, a little later, that *Ramayana* provides Doordarshan with a tenth of its total revenue (the actual figure is near Rs 1 crore a month, he says). He further claims that Doordarshan has 135 advertisers on its waiting-list for the serial. This seems entirely plausible, given the fact that any *Ramayana* telecast is normally preceded by at least 32-35 advertisements. That is all the 'financial' information Papaji is willing to proffer. Envious colleagues, viewers, and journalists, can draw their own conclusions about the serial's monetary gains. However, in the aftermath of *Ramayana*'s record-breaking financial success, Papaji is fairly confident of Doordarshan granting him an extension, although he prefaces his remarks with a "Let's wait and see. If God wishes it, we can continue." The serial, which he says will probably end with the *Sundar Kand*, may just prolong itself for a lengthier period of time, God and Doordarshan willing.

**WHILE RAMAYANA'S FUTURE re-**

surrection will be joyously hailed by its indiscriminate viewers — a captive audience which lacks the courage to simply switch it off when it is excessively lengthy or boring — the desirability of such an eventuality is extremely suspect. As it is, in his fiery zeal to remain faithful to the epic, Papaji incorporated several events in microscopic detail, by monotonous camera movements. If Ram touched the feet of one of the *matas*, so did Laxman, in the very next shot, followed by Sita in the third. Following Ram's banishment, Bharat had tears almost fixed in place, episode after tearful episode, for about six weeks at a stretch. Bharat's subsequent obstinacy at the Forest Council, which was presided over by Raja Janak, is yet another minor example of details carried to extreme lengths. Both Bharat and Ram stand firm in their conflicting resolves. Janak, the arbiter, begins his speeches. As soon as he utters a sentence in Bharat's favour, the camera cuts in, in swift succession, to focus on the anticipatory joy on the three mothers' faces, Laxman's face, Sita's face, Shatrughan's face, the Minister's face, and of course, Bharat's face. The next sentence, loaded on Ram's side, leads to dismayed expressions, once again on Bharat's face, Laxman's face . . . This

'reaction' mania seems to be rampant in the *Ramayana* unit; the ploy is repeated again and again, regardless of the demands of the situation. One does not question the authenticity of the scenes described above — the epic itself quite probably devotes as much, or perhaps more time to each event. What is galling is the total absence of creative selectivity and interpretation.

To take a recent example, when Hanuman carries Ram and Laxman on either shoulder, it is enough for this miraculous feat to be shown once, or maybe, twice. Does one really have to watch Hanuman's enlarged frame against a changing backdrop for the next few minutes, in order to appreciate his strength? These are, of course, queries that can never be posed to the Sagars. Criticism of any sort is anathema to those who are fed on a daily diet of fulsome praise and soaring profits. To break free from the traditional and familiar *Ramlila* style of theatrical depiction, to innovatively explore newer possibilities of interpretation, to use unique techniques of production, hardly rate as high priorities.

What could possibly have been a sensitive and commanding portrayal of an equally commanding epic, has instead been put together rather like an ice cream sundae — with a dollop of values, several scoops of religion, drama and emotion, topped off with educative discourses on duty, love and friendship. The gooey mixture, palatable as it is, will be lapped up by eager multitudes.

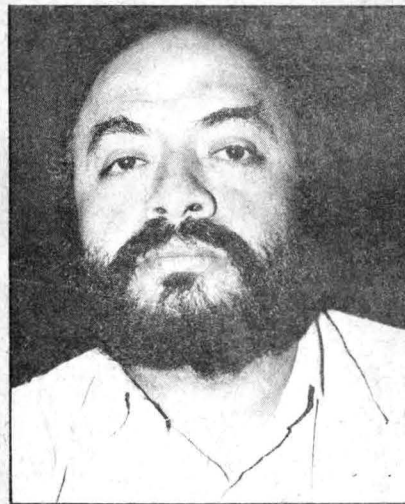
For most of *Ramayana's* audiences, familiarity does not breed contempt — in fact, the introduction of revolutionary ideas that could disturb preconceived attitudes would prove disastrous. In the absence of any choice, any treatment of such a topic is both welcome and popular. This popularity, as far as *Ramayana's* makers are concerned, is the clinching factor — if the serial is so phenomenally popular, it is necessarily as sacrosanct as the epic from which it is derived, and, like Caesar's wife, beyond comment. ♦

## BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS

Imprint ascertains viewers' views.

I have seen very few episodes of *Ramayana*. To me, the entire visual representation is kitsch — the kind found on cheap calendars. On the whole, the serial strikes me as being a strange combination of the folk theatre of rural areas, the company theatre of the urban areas, and calendar art. The serial has gained popularity because people feel very comfortable and familiar viewing it as it has the finish of a typical Hindi film, yet, is presented in the *Ramlila* style.

In the present socio-political situation, there has been a complete de-



terioration of public and private morality. Our social institutions (family, marriage etc) are under undue strain; politically, too, we are quite destabilised. So people are in search of something to focus their faith on. In such a state of affairs, *Ramayana*, which depicts a very simplified and uncomplicated way of life, was instantaneously accepted by people as a source of great comfort and reassurance. But personally, I do not think that the makers are doing any justice to this great epic at all.

**Govind Nihalani, cinema director.**

The treatment of the theme in *Ramayana* is neither very experimental or modernistic, nor very conservative. The director has tried to maintain the spirit of mythology, and yet, at places, there is a clear message for the modern society. Through several episodes in the serial, he has tried to make an oblique comment on the present education system and has also attempted to define the concept of an ideal ruler.

People have criticised the serial, its melodrama, and artificiality of costumes. But one must understand that the serial follows the tradition of *Ramlila*, a folk theatre form, which relies heavily on the element of exaggeration. As for the authenticity of costumes, we must not forget that *Ramayana* is not a historical document, but a pure mythological legend. To that extent, the serial has definitely captured the spirit of the great epic.

**Dharamvir Bharati, editor of 'Dharmayug'.**

The director seems to have missed the profundity of the epic and has instead given us a seemingly never-ending soap opera, that too, badly done!

**Nalini Desai, housewife.**

I think the entire serial is really awful. People are hesitant to give honest opinions because they do not want to offend religious sentiments, and also because they fear the 'wrath' of Hindu Gods. The common man must be definitely impressed by the 'special effects', but on the whole, the serial lacks quality, good performance, and has been shabbily produced. It could have been a very sensitive, authentic, and religious serial; but this is a very hopeless version of the great epic and a shameless emotional exploitation of gullible people. Also, it was really ridiculous of the director



to present the video cassettes of *Ramayana* to the President of India. It is really a pity that we have missed a wonderful opportunity and wasted a brilliant and beautiful epic!

**Dolly Thakore, columnist and TV critic.**

*Ramayana* appears to be a ludicrous exercise in sentimentality. Who is the director trying to fool, with those card-board sets and over-fed, painted actors? At best, it is like a comic book come to life, which may just succeed in amusing my three-year old nephew.

**Gayatri Pendse, college student.**

*Ramayana* is a very popular epic-story that has given some permanent values to our society. Therefore, whatever the form of presentation, it is bound to inspire people and have a mass appeal. Although this serial fails to be authentic and sublime, it nevertheless appeals to the cultural standards of the present generation.

**Pandit Narendra Sharma, poet and lyricist.**

If epics are to be dramatised or televised, they *must* be interpreted to suit today's context. Serials such as *Ramayana* are truly appalling: full of excessive 'effects', opulent images, and silly gimmicks, rather like *The Arabian Nights*. The value of such serials should be analysed, and their actual content examined. I wonder why

today's generation of supposedly modern-minded adults is tolerating such a serial.

**Chitra Palekar, actress and script writer.**

I have never bothered to watch this serial.

**Kaifi Azmi, dialogue-writer, lyricist and Urdu poet.**

I do not have a television, but I make it a point to watch *Ramayana* at my neighbours' place. I enjoy all the exciting events. It is as *paisa vasool* as watching an Amitabh Bachchan film.

**Laxmanrao Pawar, vegetable vendor.**

*Ramayana* is like a refresher course for all youngsters today. The production of the serial is not slick at all and leaves a lot to be desired. For instance, in most of the *darbar* scenes, they have used many cut-outs which are a rather shoddy short-cut for a subject as sublime as this. Even trick photography, which is quite simple for a medium like television, has not been carried out perfectly.

But the theme of the epic compensates for it all. The pure Sanskritised language of the serial is a very pleasant change from the Hindustani spoken today. The varying hues of human relationships portrayed, provide a very profound insight into Indian culture and the duties and commitments of people in society.

The serial has been successful in introducing the epic to people from other religions as well.

**Satish Shah, popular film and TV actor.**

I regard *Ramayana* as a creditable endeavour at national integration. Serials are not usually able to transcend the language barrier. In this case, Ram, the central character, does not belong to a Punjabi or Tamilian family; he rises above these mundane divisions, and serves to unite the viewers. At present, we have no hero at the

all-India level; no ideal figure to inspire the younger generation. Perhaps the revival of *Ramayana* in a televised version might serve to provide an ideal character, and some ideal relationships could be emulated by the present generation.

**Vibha Purandare, former English lecturer and a keen reader of the epics.**

I think it is quite wrong to televise a Hindu religious epic in times such as these. This particular version, apparently based on Tulsidas' *Ramayana*, is more anti-women than the others.



I think the dramatisation of myths and epics invariably vulgarises the issues, allows falsifications to creep in, and serves no useful function.

**Sonal Shukla, writer and columnist.**

From the little that I have seen of *Ramayana*, I feel the whole set-up — the sets, the actors, their costumes, etc., — look terribly artificial.

**Nirmala Mathan, a prominent media personality.**

I haven't watched the serial myself, but I know my car-mechanic, who is a Muslim, has now begun closing his garage on Sundays, because he says he enjoys watching *Ramayana* with his family.

**Murli Manohar Joshi, a BJP leader and a professor in Physics at the Allahabad University.**

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# THE SEARCH FOR A NATIONAL ALTERNATIVE

"There is a growing restlessness among the people to find an alternative focus of political loyalty; there is a discernible trend amongst political parties to respond to the people's need for a national alternative," says Madhu Dandavate.

Can the Opposition succeed in posing a viable national alternative to the ruling party? MADHU DANDAVATE analyses the current state of the Opposition forces and discusses the need for unity.

**T**HE HUGE MAJORITY won by the Congress (I) in 1984, following the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, was more an expression of mass sympathy than a popular mandate for a government with distinctive policies and programmes.

The new Prime Minister repeatedly announced that he would offer a clean government and foster a work culture in the country, to build a new India. The Rajiv euphoria continued for quite a while. One after another, various 'accords' were signed to settle problems, pertaining to Punjab, Assam, and more recently, Sri Lanka — all with little effect. However, due to the lack of a political will and foresightedness to tackle these problems, and in the absence of any commitment to a firm policy and programme with a definite direction, the process of a drift away from the Centre has begun. The initial euphoria of the new regime has started to dissipate — a logical consequence of a policy of ad-hocism, coupled with a fire-brigade approach, which relied on the implementation of short-term remedial measures rather than on long-term preventive steps.

These circumstances still exist, and the consequences are grave. Punjab

continues to bleed, and Assam remains in turmoil. Today, the problem of unemployment has become more acute and inflation has increased a lot: various sections like the peasants, workers, teachers, and the artisans are seething with discontent; communal and caste tensions have accentuated; and the exposure of corruption in high places in connection with several controversies — Fairfax, Bofors and the West German Submarine Deal — have further eroded the credibility of Mr Rajiv Gandhi's Government. The fact that the Prime Minister had to submit a written statement to Parliament, to clarify that he and his family members had not received any consideration from Bofors on account of the Howitzer deal, reduced the goings-on in Delhi to a pathetic level. A legitimate question that was posed was — whom does the Prime Minister represent in Parliament? His family, or his Government?

As if the socio-economic problems were not enough of a challenge, Mr Rajiv Gandhi got himself deeply involved in the Prime Minister-President controversy, with regard to the implementation of Article 78 of the Constitution which clearly lays down the duties of the Prime Minister in re-

lation to the supply of information by him to the President, whenever it is sought. The controversy shook the Government, and on the eve of the Presidential elections, the Government was gripped with the fear that the President could be instrumental in Mr Rajiv Gandhi losing his seat. The suspense that was created continued for a long time.

Before the cloud of uncertainty created by this controversy could be cleared, new scandals like Fairfax, Bofors, and the Submarine Deal, appeared on the scene. Not only Parliament, but the whole country was alarmed and bewildered by the allegations of corruption in high ranks. As far as the credibility of the Government was concerned, these allegations proved to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. More than the strength of the Government, its credibility is the true index of the people's faith and confidence in the regime. And when that was shaken, the debate about who could provide the national alternative at the Centre, gained ground.

**VERY OFTEN**, there is a tendency to view the alternative in terms of personalities. We must not forget that

## GUEST COLUMN

during Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's lifetime too, the question posed was — after Nehru, who? Following the death of Nehru, when Mr Lal Bahadur Shastri took over the reigns of the Government, he was considered a lack-lustre Prime Minister, incapable of instilling confidence in vast sections of the population. However, during the 1965 Indo-Pak War, Shastri proved his ability to face the challenge, and the short-statured Prime Minister rose to great heights and received popular acclaim. He demonstrated that whoever successfully faces the challenge confronting him, is in a position to provide the alternative.

Winston Churchill proved the same in the Britain of the 40s. During that tumultuous period, Mr Chamberlain was heading the British Government. The nation was disillusioned about his policies vis-a-vis defence and the war. This disillusionment was also echoed in the House of Commons. When Mr Herbert Morrison moved an adjournment motion against the Government, several mem-

bers of the ruling party voted for it. Chamberlain regarded this as a censure against his Government, and resigned. Thereafter, a national Government headed by Churchill, a relative back-bencher, was formed. His fortitude and courage enabled him to face

**When the Janata Party approached the electorate in 1977, no voter ever asked any questions about who would head the Janata Government at the Centre. The electorate was guided by the sole consideration that it was the Janata Party that had faced the challenge of the Emergency, and it must be that party to which the nation must be entrusted.**

the challenge of the war, and lead England to victory.

In India, the political situation of 1977 contains a lesson for those who are striving to build a national alternative. In the General Elections of 1977, the central issue was to face the challenge of the Emergency and restore democracy. The various opposition parties, which had combined to form the Janata Party, faced an arduous task. After the release of several of its members from various jails in which they had been detained during the Emergency, the leaders and ranks of the opposition parties had little time to forge an organisational alliance of their forces, or to raise the requisite resources to campaign for their candidates. Some leaders in the Opposition were hesitant to participate in elections held at such short notice, and felt that rather than a national alternative being able to emerge out of the elections, Mrs Indira Gandhi would manage to secure victory for her party, and then this would legitimise the Emergency. The only missing link in the logic of this argument was the lack of a proper understanding of the pulse of the people.

The opposition parties which had merged to form the Janata Party in 1977, *had* faced the challenge of the Emergency. They had actively participated in the JP movement against authoritarianism and corruption in the Government in the pre-Emergency period. When the Janata Party approached the electorate in 1977, no voter ever asked any questions about who would head the Janata Government at the Centre. The electorate was guided by the sole consideration that it was the Janata Party that had faced the challenge of the Emergency, and it must be that party to which the nation must be entrusted. However, in the midst of the unprecedented upsurge in the number of voters during 1977, it could not be denied that opposition parties like the CPI (M), Akali Dal, Forward Bloc, RSP, Workers and Peasants Party, amongst others, also stood by the Janata



*At the recent Opposition rally in Surajkund, Haryana.*

Party, and consequently, the Congress (I) could not capitalise on any splitting of the votes for the Opposition.

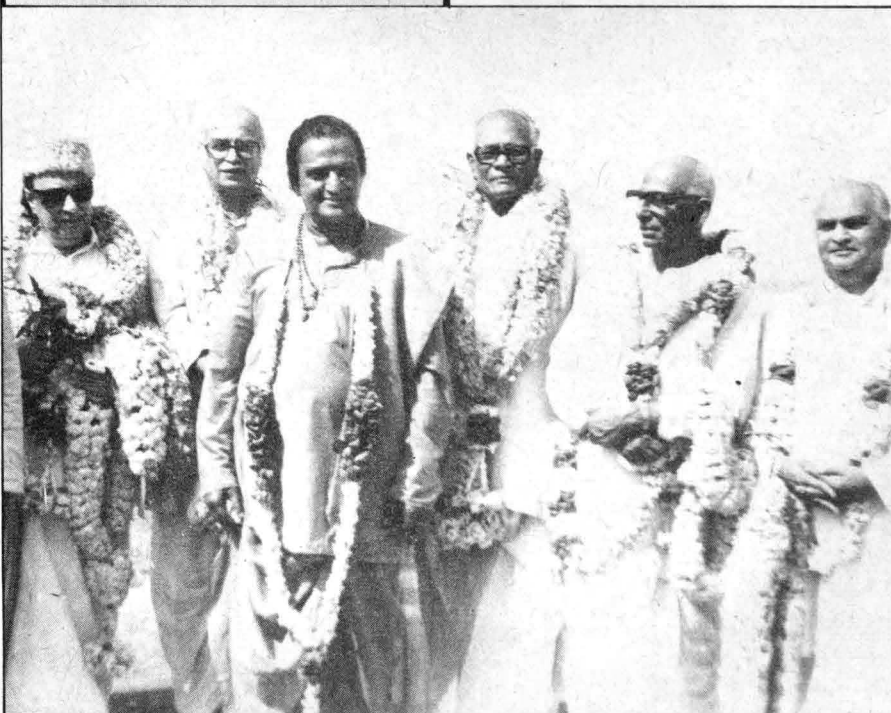
The present search for a national alternative must be viewed against this background. There is a growing restlessness among the people to find an alternative focus of political loyalty; there is a discernible trend amongst the political parties to respond to the people's need for a national alternative. Past history has clearly shown that whenever efforts for political consolidation have become bogged down in the manipulative politics of expediency, the process of consolidation has hardly succeeded. In 1977, the National Alternative did not emerge out of summit politics. The unity of action was effectively forged in the joint struggle against the Emergency. There was also the widest possible unity on the urgent need to restore democracy. This broad objective overshadowed all marginal differences, and as a result, a large coalition could be formed.

**TODAY, THE SITUATION** bears some resemblance to the past, but at the same time, some new factors have emerged which cannot be ignored in any plans to forge opposition unity as a potential national alternative. Some strains have been developing in the unity of the Opposition. It is desirable to face the situation with a determination to find a solution, than to evade the reality. At present, the political scenario of the Opposition is such, that at one end of the political spectrum, there are the communists and their allies who refuse to join any front of which the BJP is a constituent; at the other end is the BJP which is involved in an acrimonious debate with the communists and their allies, but has joined the combination of opposition parties which was forged at the recent conclave at Surajkund. Then there is the group of dissident or expelled Congressmen, led by Mr V P Singh, who have only recently organised themselves and formed the *Jan Morcha*. It is a forum, and its

members claim that it is not a political party. But, there are some indications that the *Jan Morcha* may convert itself into a party, and this will not be surprising. Spokesmen from the *Jan Morcha* have announced that in future, they will carry on their cam-

**It cannot be denied that Mr V P Singh has made a significant contribution in the Opposition's campaign against corruption. He has demonstrated that, notwithstanding the earlier projection of Mr Rajiv Gandhi as 'Mr Clean', vast sections of the people consider Mr V P Singh as a symbol of the fight for cleanliness in public life and administration.**

paings against corruption and other forms of injustice, only from the platform of the *Jan Morcha*. It is probable that Mr Singh has ingeniously devised this new forum in order to steer clear of the controversy between the communists and the BJP. However, as the tempo of the campaign and struggle grows, Mr V P Singh's *Jan Morcha* will have to come to grips with the political reality, and abandon this neutral stance. It cannot be denied that Mr V P Singh has made a significant contribution in the Opposition's campaign against corruption. He has demonstrated that, notwithstanding the earlier projection of Mr Rajiv Gandhi as 'Mr Clean', vast sections of the people consider Mr V P Singh as a symbol of the fight for cleanliness in public life and administration. Mr Singh's campaign in different parts of the country is drawing huge crowds. One does not know how much of this can be transformed into electoral support to build a national alternative. But the support of the masses, especially that of the peasantry and the working class, has undoubtedly lent a



*Notable Opposition leaders who assembled at Vijayawada in May '83.*

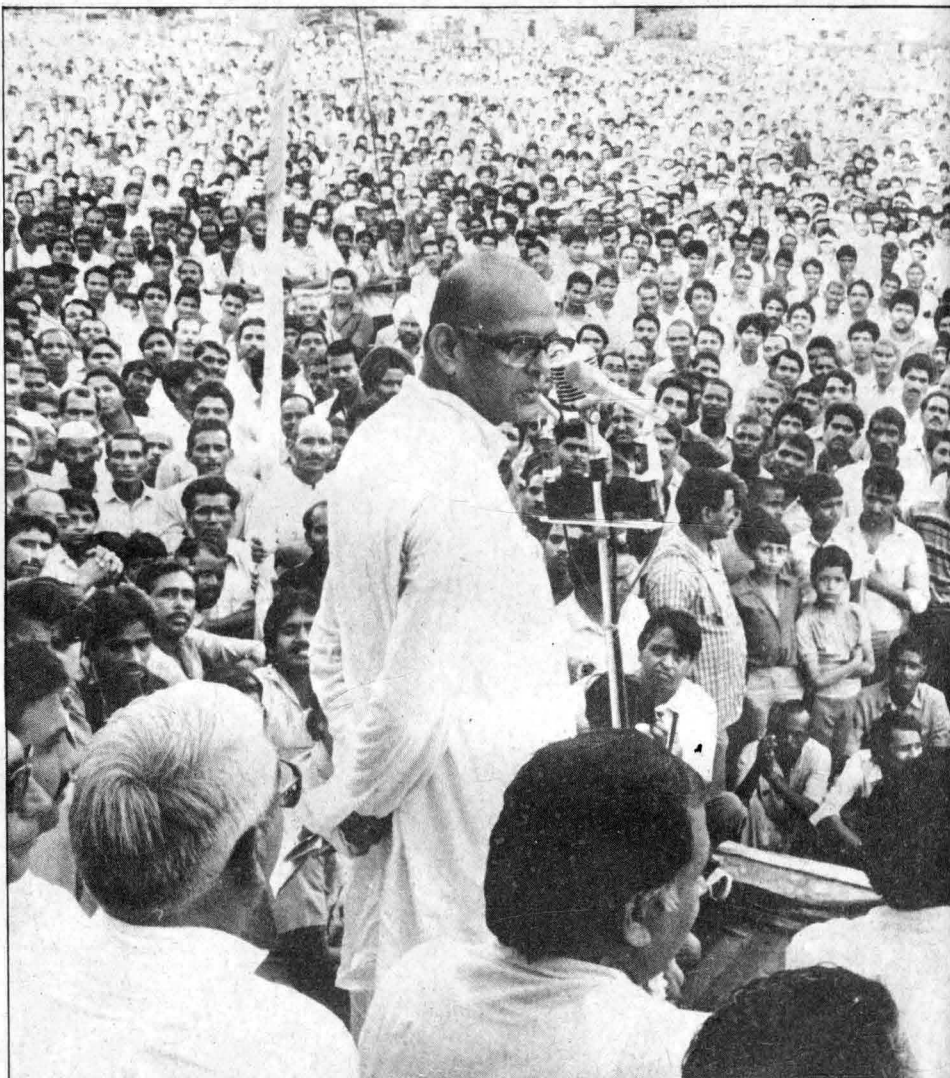
## GUEST COLUMN

sharper edge to the campaign against corruption.

**THERE IS ANOTHER ASPECT** of the emerging 'V P Singh phenomenon', as it is being picturesquely described. Following the debates in Parliament on Fairfax, Bofors, and the West German Submarine Deal, the voice of dissent has grown perceptibly within the Congress (I). The most vocal have openly joined forces with Mr V P Singh. There are others who are sitting on the fence, awaiting the report of the Chief Public Prosecutor of Sweden. The process of erosion within the Congress (I) will thus continue at a rate which is commensurate with the developments in the present situation. This growing voice of dissent will help in further weakening the Congress (I) monolith, and should be considered a welcome phenomenon. It will be complementary to the process of evolving a national alternative.

When the non-communist opposition parties, including Mr V P Singh's group, recently met at Surajkund, they unanimously decided to launch a united campaign on specific issues. These included national integration and communal harmony, electoral reforms to curb money power, the decentralisation of power to the grass-roots, remunerative prices for agricultural produce, workers' participation in industry, the implementation of constitutional guarantees to weaker sections like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and linguistic and religious minorities, and campaigns against corruption in high places, growing unemployment and rising prices.

When issues for joint campaigns and actions are identified, what is needed, in the interests of the people, as well as that of opposition unity, is the stress on areas of agreement and not on points of discord. For instance, on the question of Punjab, the approach of the BJP, with its emphasis on the intervention of the army and the imposition of President's rule, is basically different from that of the other parties. We often differ on the



*Mr V P Singh: posing a viable alternative?*

interpretation of certain situations, and the remedial measures to be adopted to curb communal riots. Opposition unity can never, however, be achieved on the basis of unanimity on *all* the issues. The unity will have to operate within the framework of the broadest consensus among the constituents. The time-honoured norm of all united fronts has been, that no single constituent of the front should have the power of veto to subvert the consensus evolved. In some European countries, where coalition governments have functioned effectively, it has always been on the basis of the

evolution of a broad consensus.

**WHEN ONE CONSIDERS** the vital question of a national alternative, there is one qualitative difference from the situation of 1977, which has to be borne in mind. In 1977, against the background of the Emergency, the Janata Party received massive support in several states. Today, the situation is different. Firstly, the Janata Party of 1977 has been split up into many parties. Secondly, there is not a single opposition party which can claim a sizeable electoral base in all the states from Kashmir to Kerala.



**Past history has a warning for the Opposition. The task of building a national alternative to the ruling Congress (I) must not be equated with the process of building a substitute Congress regime, which will move along the same old beaten path, bearing the burden of all the ills and legacies of the present regime.**

Thirdly, after 1977, regional parties have grown and gained power in some of the states. Fourthly, the force released by Mr V P Singh's revolt against the Congress (I) Government, has also contributed to the campaign against corruption. And finally, the plank of the Opposition stands divided into three fronts — the non-communist opposition front, the *Jan Morcha* led by Mr V P Singh, and the communist-led left front. It is unfortunate, that at a time when consolidation of the Opposition forces is urgently necessary to give impetus to the people's struggle and ultimately build a national alternative, sections of the Opposition still adopt either sectarian or doctrinaire approaches. In any case, given the attitudes of the three fronts, efforts must be made to ensure that they do not function in a mutually destructive manner, but adopt complementary roles and synchronise their actions. Mr V P Singh appears to be allergic to either joining any party or welding followers into a new one. In this context, it is worthwhile to recall certain lessons from history. Loknayak Jayprakash Narayan had gradually moved to the concept of a 'partyless' democracy. Being fully aware of the limitations of time and circumstances in the pre-Emergency period, he took the initiative of setting up a Peoples' Struggle Committee, with various political parties as its constituents. As one who had himself grown through the dynamics of mass action, Jayprakash Narayan had realised that people's mass participation is necessary for a struggle to be effective; but equally essential are both the organisational infrastructure and cadres, that are available with political parties. Consequently, he did not underestimate the significance of political parties in his experiment with parliamentary democracy. That is why he blessed and encouraged the formation of the Janata Party in 1977. When the Janata Party split, and the National Alternative thus collapsed — but not because of any major differences on the policies pur-

sued by the Janata Government — the Loknayak poignantly remarked: "The garden has been uprooted". Should we not learn from this tragedy of history?

**THE CONGRESS PARTY'S** monopoly of power at the Centre, which has continued for years, with the exception of the brief period of Janata rule, cannot be broken so easily. A vigorous campaign among the masses and education of the cadres, are needed. Without awakening the masses no transformation is possible. Our nation will have to pass through this phase of democratic struggle. The decisive electoral battle, in which a bid will be made for a national alternative, will only be the culmination of that determined action. The Opposition must not confuse the immediate objective with long-term perspectives.

Past history has a warning for the Opposition. The task of building a national alternative to the ruling Congress(I) Party must not be equated with the process of building a substitute Congress regime, which will move along the same old beaten path, bearing the burden of all the ills and legacies of the present regime. The search for a genuine national alternative must not be like a game of musical chairs in which only the occupants of the chairs change. The protagonists must conceive of a national alternative in terms of a new thrust and direction, an adherence to democratic norms and values, structural changes in social and economic organisations and institutions, the devolution and decentralisation of political power, an upliftment of the weaker sections, the liberation of women from the shackles of tradition, the eradication of poverty, and above all, the creation of a climate that will ensure the dignity of every man and woman. To the extent that those in search of a national alternative keep these objectives in mind, the national alternative, when it *does* emerge, will not only be viable and credible, but highly durable as well. ♦

**CAPITALISM:**  
the exploitation of  
man by man.

**SOCIALISM:**  
the opposite.

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ONLY HERE  
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## CHALK MARX

Apparently, there are no felt pens in the Soviet Union; spray paint too, is not easily available. This hampers the Soviet graffiti scribbler who, undeterred, courageously carries out his mural musings with a piece of chalk. And his perseverance has paid off. In a country where the only communications are official ones, graffiti is an important alternative; for here are exhortations to the public which have escaped the censor's scrutiny.

The following selection is from amongst those collected by dedicated graffiti-hunters who have scoured the nooks and crannies of various Soviet cities.

Here is 'socialist realism', but with a difference!

"LENIN DIED  
BUT HIS WORK  
LIVES ON

— Better  
other way  
YOU

RUMOURS ARE STARTED BY  
VOICE OF AMERICA  
DENIED BY PRAVDA,  
AND FINALLY CARRIED ON  
THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT

"Before 1917, 97% of the Russian  
population were  
illiterate peasants."

— SO WHAT'S CHANGED?

THE SOVIET ECONOMY IS A  
PLANNED ECONOMY—  
WHEN THERE'S NO  
HAM,  
THERE'S NO  
EGGS.

Glad to be alive?  
No,  
surprised!

If you have any  
requirements  
please contact  
RECEPTION.  
We'll explain why  
you can't have them.

The only thing  
a Russian  
Pickpocket  
gets  
is practice.

Selected from Graffiti 5, by Nigel  
Rees, published by Unwin Books.



*Roop Kanwar,  
the young widow  
who committed  
'sati' recently.*

# MURDER BY DECREE

Although the recent sati in Deorala village has caused a national outcry, it is not an isolated instance of this barbaric practice. SUDESH VAID and KUMKUM SANGARI trace the recent history of sati in Rajasthan in which powerful forces have colluded to bring about its revival.

**O**N SEPTEMBER 4, an incident that was to later spark off outrage in the country, occurred in a remote village in Sikar district of Rajasthan. Roop Kanwar, a young woman, immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre. The episode, purportedly heralded as one of the "greatest events" of the time by the Rajput community to which the young widow belonged, was witnessed by thousands. News of the sati spread like wildfire throughout the state. Strangely enough, the district administration and local police arrived too late to stop the incident, claiming that they had received no news of it. An FIR, based on some information that was reluctantly divulged by villagers, was then filed. Attempts to stop the *chunari mahotsav* following the sati, also failed miserably; despite a Supreme Court directive which prohibited any public assembly to commemorate the sati, thousands trekked for miles to Deorala to attend the ceremony. It was only after this that Roop Kanwar's father-in-law and brother-in-law were arrested on the grounds of allegedly encouraging Roop Kanwar, a minor, to commit suicide. The failure of attempts to prevent the sati and its subsequent glorification has been interpreted as tantamount to a collusion with the practice. It is unlikely, too, that much will be done to prevent the erection of a sati temple in the area. In fact, if not for those women's organisations in Rajasthan that took immediate steps to protest against the incident, a protest which then snowballed and resulted in the expression of national outrage, perhaps not much would have been done by way of pressing for severe punitive action. Meanwhile, Roop Kanwar's family continues to do brisk business, capitalising on this grotesque tragedy.

The inflammatory situation that has been created by sections of the upper castes and the Rajputs over Roop Kanwar's sati, is ominous not only for women in Rajasthan, but all

over India. Reactionary social and political forces, backed by massive finances, claim to be defending both Hinduism, and the "right" of widows to immolate themselves on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands. Their claims are patently false; they are actually seeking to safeguard upper-caste hegemony and an 'inalienable right' to suppress women. Thus, what they are attacking are the marginal gains women have made in education, employment, legal rights, and their family life. A covert attack is also being launched against the lower castes and the minorities through the hysteria generated by the Hindu fundamentalists. Although the lower castes are being ardently wooed to rally with the upper castes, they are usually not allowed into the sanctums of sati temples, or for that matter, into other temples. The pro-sati forces are thus by no means engaged in an innocent exercise of preserving "culture" and "tradition".

**THE PRACTICE OF SATI** is prevalent in a small area of Rajasthan, of which the *tehsil* of Neem-ka-Thana is the hub. It is located in the Sikar district which, together with the Jhunjhunu district, comprises the arid Shekawati region, situated in the northernmost part of the old Jaipur State. Dotted with innumerable *ghars* (houses), temples, and *havelis*, it has, since Independence, become a bastion of the revival of sati.

In the post-Independence period, the reforms instituted in this region had a varied impact on its three major castes — the Rajputs, the Mahajans, and the Jats. Numerically, the Rajputs (the landowners) and the Mahajans (the businessmen) were only a small percentage of the population. But, together with the Brahmins, the Bhats, and the Charans, they constituted the upper castes and enjoyed economic and social power over the lower castes. The Jats (the dominant caste among the cultivators), peasants, artisans, and service

castes were severely exploited by the Rajputs, the Mahajans, and the priesthood, who also imposed harsh restrictions on their own women in their attempts to maintain their dominance. But, the women of other castes were also affected. The custom of *ghunghat*, observed by virtually all Rajasthani women, was partly an attempt to protect themselves from the claims the *zamindars* and their henchmen made on them.

Land reforms were responsible for changing the relationship between the Rajputs and the Jats and other cultivators. Relations between the Rajputs and the Mahajans also changed, as the latter group profited greatly by the vacuum left in the business world with the departure of the British, and was instrumental in creating a strong socio-economic base for the revival of sati, financed by heavy investments from Mahajans who are now settled elsewhere in the country.

The Hindu revivalist ideology propagated in this area in recent decades has also contributed to the revival of sati. Amongst the earliest supporters of the Rajasthan branch of the RSS formed in 1944, were two men from the Sikar district — Thakur Surendra Singh and Thakur Mangal Singh. Danta Singh, an ex-army man and the leader of the Ram Rajya Parishad (RRP), also hailed from the same district. He was closely associated with the religious Hindu leader, Swami Karpatri, and also led the Bhuswami Sangh agitations against land reforms in the mid-fifties.

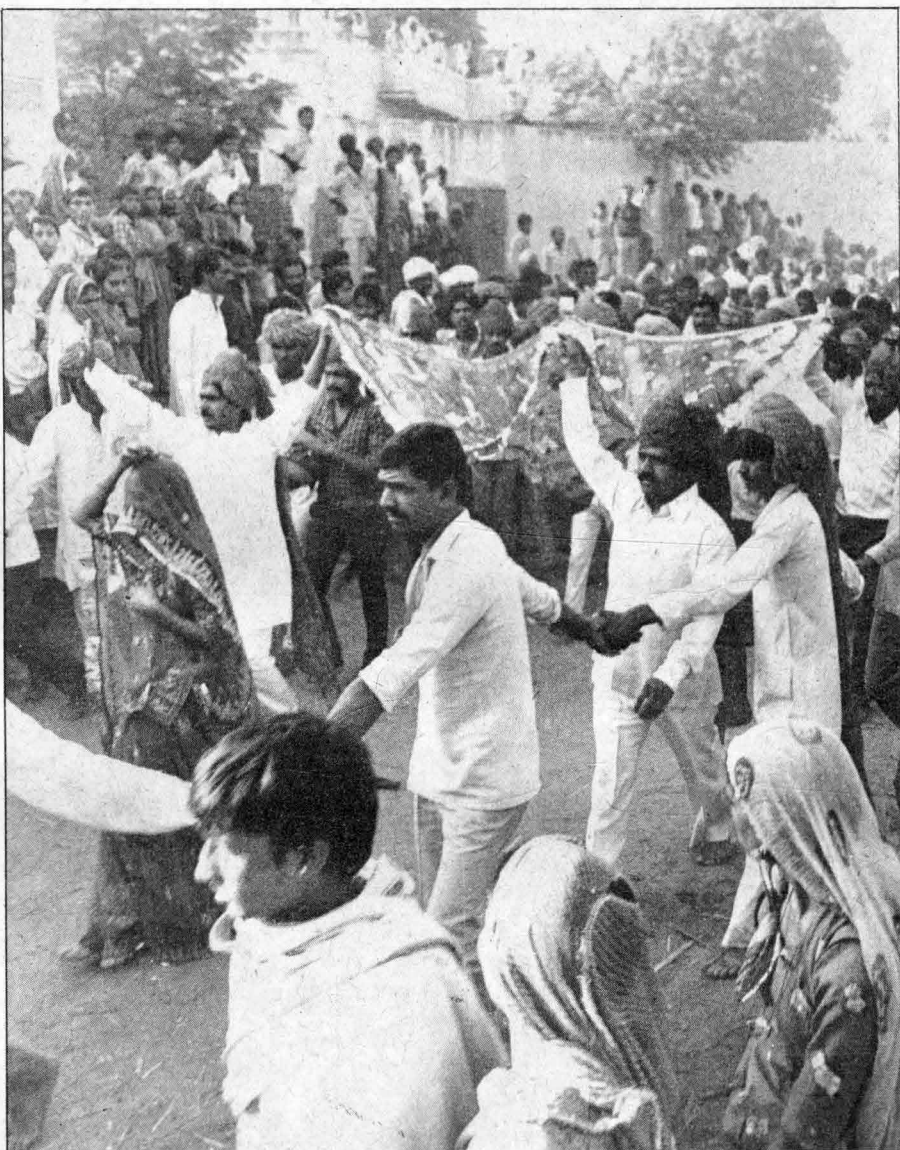
The Bhuswami Sangh's call for "religious dedication in the defence of ancient rights to the soil," was accompanied by the eulogising of both sati and jauhar. The hundreds and thousands of saffron-turbaned, lathi-bearing Rajputs who converged in Jaipur at the call of the Bhuswami Sangh in the 50s was similar to present day mobilisations in support of sati. Although the Sangh itself became defunct, it paved the way for the Jan Sangh, which likewise embraced cer-

# ANALYSIS

tain sections of the peasantry, the Vaishyas, and upper caste professionals. But clearly, it is not the Jan Sangh alone which has fuelled Hindu fundamentalism in this region; other parties, like the Congress (I), have also colluded in this process. Many members of the Kshatriya Maha Sabha, comprised of ex-Rajput rulers and prominent landowners, flocked into the Congress Party in the 50s; today, they are the most important and powerful patrons of sati temples.

**THE PRESENT-DAY ROLE** of the ex-rulers and the landowners should be viewed in the context of the unsavoury role they played during the abolition of sati in colonial Rajasthan. Known then as the Rajputana Agency, the region consisted of 18 states and principalities. These states had eagerly signed the subsidiary alliance treaties in 1818 with the British. The 1829 legislation to abolish sati applied in Rajputana only to the British territory of Ajmer Merwara. Attempts to abolish sati in other territories were more difficult — individual rulers had to agree to prohibit the practice, proclaim it a penal offence and finally, enforce their own anti-sati laws — but between 1846-1862, all the rulers passed laws abolishing sati.

However, the prevarications and hypocrisy of many of the rulers and upper caste groups close to the Durbār, in saving women from immolation, gave rise to an opportunistic use of religion in order to maintain their hold over women. The few chieftains who resisted the attempts to abolish sati, also used it as a means to settle scores with their own rulers and colonial masters — a practice which is echoed today in the faction-fights against the Centre in various states. Paradoxically, when the opportunity arose, during the 1857 mutiny, to liberate themselves from colonial rule which interfered with their "right" to make their women practice sati, the chieftains and rulers chose, instead, to assist the British in



*Despite court orders, Roop Kanwar's relatives held the 'chunari mahotsav'.*

quelling the mass revolt.

Colonial records also afford other insights into the practice and incidence of sati. Report after report highlights the pivotal role played by the family which invariably encouraged the widow, if not actually coerced her, to commit sati. That the family had a prime role in this crime is understandable, given the fact that the patriarchal family makes all the major decisions affecting its women anyway. The most important variable in whether a widow voluntarily

opted for sati or was forced to do so, was the family, both natal and conjugal. The former performed the important task of socialising its daughters, the latter functioned as the principal decision-making group in the event of their husbands' deaths. Wedding songs lauding sati were part of the social ethos a young girl grew up in; folk songs encouraging the practice were also popular.

**THE STAGE FOR SATI** in the post-Independence era was set in 1954, in

Madhav-ka-Vas, a small village 30 kilometres away from Neem-ka-Thana. It is a backward village which has only recently acquired a primary and a secondary school, and still has no girls' school. Yet, the family whose daughter-in-law committed sati was by no means illiterate.

Taradevi, the 'heroine' of the tragedy and a Chauhan, like most of the other Rajput women in the village, hailed from Haryana where, compared to Rajasthan, girls received more formal education and the *pardah* system was less stringent. After having attended school upto Standard VIII, Taradevi married Ugam Singh, the son of the village *thakur* and a Shekawati Rajput. Taradevi's elder sister was already married to one of Ugam's elder brothers, and being childless, had arranged Taradevi's marriage into the same family, hoping to adopt her children. In her eight years of married life, Taradevi had two daughters

and one son. When her husband died at the age of 25 and she committed sati, her son was only two years old, and her youngest daughter was a mere infant.

The story of Taradevi's death is recounted thus: she decided to immolate herself following her husband's death-bed wish. When he died, she displayed no signs of grief, and chose a cremation site for him on the family property (in preference to the *shamshan bhoomi* or community cremation ground) at the entrance of the village. She then dressed herself in her bridal clothes, asked her family to inform as many people as possible of the forthcoming event, and led the funeral procession. The 'ignorant' *pundit* was personally instructed by her regarding the proper rituals to be performed. When the *mukhias* (headmen) of the village confronted her with the legal problems which would ensue in the event of her committing

sati, she claimed that they would be safe since it was her voluntary action.

A *mela* sprang up and thousands gathered to witness the event. The *arthi* was judiciously carried by children of the family, all minors below the age of fifteen. In her last endeavour to save her still fearful family members from subsequent legal action, Taradevi instructed her two-year old son to touch the pyre. The pyre then lit itself!

All through the immolation, the pyre was surrounded by armed Rajput guards to prevent Taradevi from running away, and to ward off the evil spells of Tantrics. The local Special District Magistrate and the Collector, awed by the 'miracle', came to worship at the site. At some point in those two hectic hours, Taradevi also found time to raise a hand, upon which a well sprang up at the rear end of the site.

**AFTER HER DEATH**, she appeared to her mother in a dream, and supposedly told her that she had suffered no pain in the fire. Plans for a sati temple in her honour were underway. Her well-travelled uncle ordered a *murti* from Jaipur, and started a temple trust. Both Marwaris and Rajputs donated money for the temple, which was completed by 1959. It has since attracted many people, including the ex-rulers of Jodhpur and sundry politicians. Taradevi's three brothers-in-law and the *pundit* who performed the *havan* were arrested after the sati, but freed four days later. Their arrest was only a formality and no one was convicted. Today, Taradevi's son is the sole trustee of the temple, and an annual *mela* takes place at the village where the trains now make an unscheduled stop. And so the story ends.

The facts used to construct this version of the events were *all* dictated by a collective consciousness which knew that sati was illegal. The responsibility (or blame) for every detail was placed on the woman, who, being dead, was beyond the law. The



One of the many 'sati sthals' that dot the Sikar district.

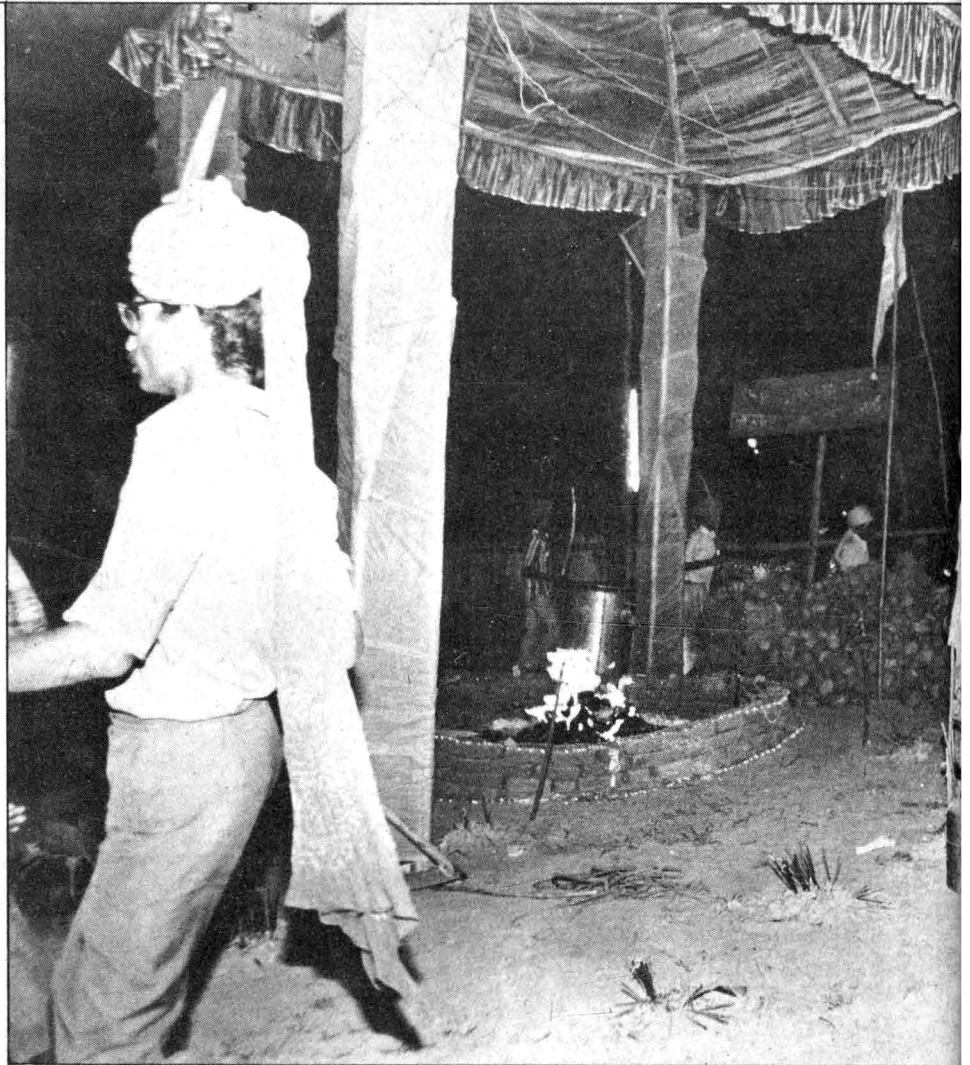
## ANALYSIS

catalogue of 'miracles' was meant to both disarm legal authorities from taking punitive action (which they did not seem too eager to do in any case), and also to shield the family and the large numbers of villagers who, in one way or another, had colluded in the event. This 'miraculous' aspect of sati has become a means for concealing and denying individual and community responsibility, and simultaneously is a means of deifying women. In this way, the entire issue of crime, punishment, and guilt, can be effectively shelved.

In actual fact, even today, the dim contours of those who are guilty *are* visible. It appears that a sati had occurred in Taradevi's natal family a hundred years before. The elders frequently talked of it and often speculated as to when the next sati in their family would occur. Consequently, there were expectant murmurs from certain members.

Inheritance, apparently, was the other instrumental factor. Taradevi's father-in-law's land was divided between his four sons, but the tenancy laws that had been introduced had divided the land among the cultivators, before the sati. The choice of the site not only saved a certain amount of land from being appropriated, but it also secured land for Taradevi's children and for her childless sister, who was to be their guardian. On Taradevi's death, the inheritance of the two brothers could be consolidated for a single son and heir, under the guardianship of her sister, and so be saved from family dispute. Curiously, but understandably, when her elder sister's husband died nine months later in January 1955, rumours spread that she too was going to commit sati. Had she died, the inheritance would have devolved on the two surviving brothers and their children. At this point, despite gathering crowds, her father, aided by the police, was able to prevent another sati.

**TWENTY-SIX YEARS LATER**, Om Kunwar of Jhadli committed sati on



*Young sword-wielding Rajput boys zealously guard the 'sati sthal'.*

August 30, 1980. In the intervening years, at least six satıs had taken place in the districts of Sikar and Jhunjhunu. A pattern seemed to be emerging — there was increased community participation from the village, the event gained a detectably urbane and literate character, and it was used to buttress upper caste values.

Jhadli, located 70 kms away from Jaipur, is a large village with a population of about 10,000. It has many Rajput and Bania households, many of who have sought employment in urban areas. The village has a few modern amenities. The social structure is rigidly caste-based and the land is primarily in the hands of Shekawat Rajputs and Jats. Although caste segregation (separate wells, se-

parate temples, etc) continues, there has been a slow improvement in the lives of the lower castes. For instance, the Banias now benefit from the schools and are able to live in *pucca* houses, whereas earlier, the Rajputs only allowed them to live in mud huts. The lower castes also have greater job mobility now.

The women of the upper castes are entirely economically dependent on their men and live in very strict seclusion. The frequency of female suicide, increasing dowry demands, and the continuing denigration of the widow, indicate their low status. Widows of the upper castes, especially Brahmins and Rajputs, are not permitted to remarry. Moreover, they have merely a moral right to the de-



ceased husband's property and a customary right to maintenance. However, the changes incorporated in the village are affecting women too. The new girls' primary school is attracting children from all castes. Although the literacy rate for older girls and women is low, the number of school-going girls between the ages of five and nine is as high as 61 per cent. Many of the young women (wives of army personnel, policemen and others who have found employment in urban areas) have one foot in the village and the other in the city. They continue to observe the rigid social norms when in the village but in the cities, these women are slowly discarding their traditional attire. They are keen on providing better lives for

their daughters, and want to give them formal education.

Om Kunwar was a Shekawati Rajput married to Ram Singh Rathore, who was employed as a truck driver in Bombay. He died after six months of marriage, following a prolonged illness. Her father-in-law, a small landowner, had retired from the army; her brother-in-law, Richpal Singh, is still in it. There had been some tension regarding financial matters between him and Om's husband before he died. The latter had been adopted by his widowed paternal aunt who had married into and was dependent on the Richpal family.

**ONCE AGAIN**, a familiar story unfolds. Om Kunwar performed the necessary 'miracles': water turned into *mehndi* and her bridal clothes rose to the top. She instructed relatives to supply her with a *chunari*, chose a site near the entrance of the village, instructed the priest of the rituals to be followed, leapt unaided onto a four-foot high pyre, and waved a stick of incense, upon which the pyre lit itself — surrounded all the while by armed volunteers. The *sarpanch* set off on foot to the police station, but the information was lodged too late. Arrests were followed by bail, and there were no convictions.

This sati was a community affair. The entire village participated in the preparations, and the event was witnessed by thousands from neighbouring villages. In this case, the priest, Jamnalal Shastri, played a crucial role in deciding whether Om Kunwar was divinely inspired, helped, no doubt, by his experience in presiding over a sati one-and-a-half years earlier in the neighbouring village of Hathideh. He now runs the Om Sati Sanget Kutir. When we visited the village in 1981, there was a noticeable difference in the perception of the event among different castes. It was the literate upper castes who, through leaflets and booklets, propagated the "exemplary" and "ideal" nature of this event representing wifely devo-

tion and *nari-dharma*. The village youth club (of course, wholly male) had even written a play on the Sati Ma. The village now enjoys an increase in honour, prestige and revenue. The power-axis of the village *panchayat*, its priesthood, traders, and literati, seem to have been in a better position to exploit the event than the family. At that time, Om Kunwar's brother-in-law claimed to have been denied his "rightful" place in, and profits from, the temple trust, because his political affiliations were different from those of the *panchayat*.

When we revisited the village in 1986, we found that the case against the culprits had been dropped after a year due to "want of witnesses". A palatial marble temple had been constructed from donations given by Rajputs and Marwari businessmen. The sati *murti* had been installed during a ceremony in 1983, graced by Sawai Bhawani Singh, the ex-Maharajah of Jaipur. A large number of the worshippers were from outside the village. Even today, a bus plies daily between Jhadli and Jaipur for their convenience. One of the commemorative booklets is written by a lawyer from Bharatpur, the others by local writers, including the priest, Jamnalal Shastri. Rajput women from the towns were sitting and chanting songs lauding Om Kunwar, composed during the intermediate years, while priests were getting ready to perform the *arti*.

Given such organised and well-funded efforts to propagate the 'glory' of sati, it is no small wonder that villages like Deorala seek to have their 'own' sati. The powerful groups parading their might in the streets of Jaipur, have such a taste of power that they wish to obliterate the "inconvenient" facts of their own history. They would do well to remember that two Rajput kings sought to abolish sati even before the British did, and also that Jaipur State led the cause of abolition in 1846. If they choose not to remember their past, we hope that others from Rajasthan will. ♦

## GLADIATOR

### I

*I come from a cold island,  
Rivers, mist, unclipped trees.  
Undership, chained after lost battle,  
I was brought to this country.*

*Warmish, but not unpleasant.  
The wine's better than at home,  
The matrons tauter in the tit.  
I get plenty of both, no problem.  
Thrice in a year, I fight.*

### II

*Pink paps rubbed on my scars.  
Sucked off by the choicest matrons,  
Oiled by the wives of Senators,  
Taught death daily by my trainer,  
I enter the arena alone.*

*The vultured visor fitted,  
Leather greaves buckled to my thighs,  
The round shield to my left arm,  
The sword dealt to my right hand.*

*Forty thousand wait for me to die.  
One, Caesar, decides if I should live.*

### III

*Stench of blood and scent in quenched sand  
I looked up to see my opponent  
Watching me, aghast, trident high  
In one hand, net low in the other.  
'Gareth,' I said: my elder brother  
Taken before me in battle.  
We gambolled like boys in the sand.  
The net caught my heel. I fell,  
The trident and his eyes above me.  
So much sorrow in his eyes.  
I cried above the crowd, 'Remember Moana,  
Streaming fires on the shore, druids screaming,  
We two waistdeep, swords raised from the eddy,  
The Romans breaking before us?'  
He lowered his trident and his eyes.  
I took him. How he cried as he died.*

### IV

*Now is the last place.  
Deformed Caesar in his box.  
And forty thousand more, are screaming.*

*Selected from Dom Moraes – Collected Poems  
1957-1987. Published by Penguin Books India Ltd.  
Special Indian Price: Rs.50.00.*

## WELDED WORDS

*I'm dreaming my blood: it's everywhere.  
It's never been like this before.  
Impartial the eyes and sword above me.  
Dumbly I lift my eyes.*

*Old men, unslapped, fumble  
The rotundities of lush matrons,  
Whose hands knead their laps as they watch  
The extent and nature of my death.*

*Forty thousand others are laughing, or eating  
Sausage and bread: my arms move for mercy,  
Looking towards Caesar: so much blood.*

*I can't see his face, but I see  
The twist of his thumb downward.*

## FOURTEEN YEARS

*Fourteen years, the same mixture  
As when I first met her:  
Tulip her skin's texture,  
Gold and olive its colour.*

*Her breasts always ready:  
Mindmarks and handmarks on each other:  
I study the landscape of her body  
As architect, husband, and brother.*

*Sometimes I am too tentative  
In my approaches towards fate.*

*Her heart and mine have one beat  
Her helplessness looks through my eyes.  
Since we are both learning to die.  
We had better first learn how to live.*

## FITZPATRICK

*In the warped shack, burlap between the slats,  
For three days in September  
I scattered random ash  
Between room and damp room.  
I played patience while the maned  
Sea moaned. It stank like a zoo.  
The mudflats shone after dark.  
Fitzpatrick did not come.*

*I recalled his face of a pharaoh  
Or a dissolute camel, his long hands  
Commanding new pyramids of words*

DOM MORAES commands respect as one of India's finest English language poets today. Below, we offer selections from **Collected Poems**, "pyramids of words" which bear testimony to the poet's sensitivity and finely-wrought craft.

*Such as he had erected when young.  
But Fitzpatrick's sharp tongue  
Had swollen with drink: what had rung like an icicle  
Now like a clapper with no bell  
Swung: had grown adipose,  
Prosing the days away.*

*Lights out, kelp on the shore.  
Phosphorus in the bladed waves.  
Heavy rats moved in the wall.  
Blind footsteps shushed the sand.  
A clawed hand clutched the latch.  
From the dark Fitzpatrick came.*

*He brought his failure in his face  
And darkness in his closed palms  
To this last beach where the waves strike  
Irregularly on rock.*

*He showed me his hand and went away.  
He said nothing but limped away.  
Moonlight on mudflats shone  
And on the harsh ablutions of the sea.*

## VISITORS

*The tireless persuasions of the dead  
Disturb the student of the dark.  
Hunched over derelict hands, they rock.  
Cobwebs and pennies stop their eyes,*

*Dishevelled creatures, still unready  
To be dead, heard only by his mood,  
Casualties of a commonplace event:  
The surprising conclusion of it all—*

*Needs for liquor, the moaning bed,  
Oblivion in orchards, memories  
Of smells, voices: the hand at work,  
The mind at work, denying death.*

*Warned, they could not believe—  
Clarities drawn from the known flesh:  
Clutched at crosses when it came,  
At hands, at the slipping world.*

*From earth, air, water, fire,  
Hewn stone, welded words,*

*Coloured shapes left on canvas,  
Breath from the nostrils of flutes,*

*The dispensation of absolutes  
Disturbs the student in the dark,  
Listening to the whispers in his work:  
Knowing the impermanence of moon and star.*

## SEA

*Neap tide, last statement of dusk.  
Domesticated, one half of a couple  
Walks with the other by the rocks,  
Revoking the beached boats.*

*The vituperation of gulls  
Turns his mind to more odysseys,  
Opium and amber rowed ashore,  
Panic loosed in tossed woods,*

*Separate islands, wet blades  
Drawn and dipped in some other time.  
He marshals his rhymes and pictures.  
Truly he writhes between consonants,*

*While her deep inhalations of dusk  
Tauten and swell her blouse, armpits  
Stained, redolent of herbs and musk.  
Familiar flesh, it still disturbs.*

*His known hand on her arm cold,  
Pressed between it and her leant breast,  
He smells her scent, their eyes hold.  
Islands come together in silence.*

*The later pardons of the dark.  
Muted vowels he writhes between.  
Gullery heard, odours of brine  
Sniffed as slow waves heave and lift.*

## AUTUMNAL

*Trees dying, leaves shaken  
Down on this country or that:  
No autumn kiss will awaken  
What has gone away.*

*Clown in the peaked hat,  
Dissemble before you die:  
The beaked birds will peck at  
What has gone away.*

*Paint your smile into truth.  
Questioned by silence, say  
Yourself and your youth  
Are what have gone away.*

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## The Nobel Prizes: **SHOULD THEY BE ABOLISHED?**

**F**OUNDED at the beginning of the century, at the behest of Alfred Nobel, a Swedish industrialist, the Nobel Prizes are an internationally acclaimed institution. The six prestigious Prizes are announced in the autumn and acknowledge achievements in the fields of Physics, Chemistry, Physiology (or Medicine), Literature, Economics and Peace. The laureates, judged under the terms of Alfred Nobel's will to "have conferred the greatest benefits on mankind," are honoured with money, medals and instant acclaim. These Nobelists constitute a sort of international 'House of Lords', holding lifetime appointments to pontificate freely on any subject.

However, since the inception of the Nobel Prizes in 1901, many of the awards have been the subject of controversy, and some have been greeted with rancour, disbelief, and outright protest. There is, today, a growing school of public opinion, which believes that our Swedish and Norwegian friends could perform a great service to science and society, by dissolving the institution altogether.

Should the Nobel Prize be abolished? The presumed merit of awarding these accolades for intellectual achievement, is that they not only acknowledge excellence, but also encourage it. However, there are aspects of the Nobel sweepstakes that raise serious questions regarding both the credibility and the intrinsic worth of this 86-year old institution.

The awards for Physics, Chemistry, and Physiology (or Medicine) were first presented in 1901. The Swedish Royal Academy of Science determines the Nobel Prize-winners for Physics and Chemistry, and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, the Prize-winner for Physiology (or Medicine). The Nobel Peace Prize-winner is selected by the Norwegian Nobel Committee

Artur Lundkvist, an influential member of the Nobel Academy, has declared that "The true mission of the Nobel Prize is to focus attention on efforts which are not gaining the respect they deserve." But does it? Each October, the announcements of the Nobel Prizes, invariably generate a degree of controversy. And with good reason. In the past, eminent scientists and litterateurs have been omitted from the honours roll, Prizes have been awarded erroneously, and the presentation of the Peace Prize has almost always been greeted with cynicism.

MAHARAJ K KOUL highlights certain problems that have beset this hallowed institution, ever since its inception in 1901, and argues the case for its abolition.

in Oslo. These Prizes, the world's most prestigious awards, are selected by a small group of little known professors, politicians, and writers, living in a remote corner of Northwestern Europe. As would be true of their counterparts in any other provincial place, these Committee members too, are not without their personal preferences and prejudices. The results of their selection, and the selection process itself, have often generated much controversy, as omissions, inconsistencies and mistakes have occurred often.

**IT IS RELATIVELY EASIER** to identify achievements in the exact sciences than in the fields of peace and literature. Scientists speak an international language and their theories are based on clear-cut criteria. However, the workings of the Nobel Committee are not totally devoid of non-scientific considerations, and current trends can, and often do, influence decisions. Consequently, mistakes are always possible, and have, in fact, occurred, as in the case of Sir Fredrick Banting (Canada) and J J R Macleod (Scotland), who were jointly awarded the 1923 Nobel Prize for Physiology (or Medicine), for the discovery of insulin. In actual fact, Macleod had nothing to do with the discovery; he was simply the head of the laboratory where Banting worked with his young, summer-vacation assistant, Charles Best. Indeed, Banting and Best made their discovery while Macleod was away on a vacation! Banting eventually agreed to accept the Prize, on condition that the money be shared with Best. Nevertheless, Macleod continues to be listed as the joint award-winner. The matter did not end there. N Paulesco, a young Rumanian, had published the same discovery six months prior to Banting and Best, only, no one had nominated him for the Prize. The

Nobel Committee was subsequently forced to admit that Paulesco deserved to share the Prize, but regretted that it was too late to take any purposeful action about it.

In another instance, Johannes Fibiger (Denmark), who had won the Nobel Prize in 1926 for the discovery of 'a parasite that causes cancer', was proved wrong three years later. Largely because of this embarrassment, Francis Peyton Rous (USA) had to wait until 1966, when, at the age of 87, he was declared a Nobelist for his work on virus-related cancers, which he had conducted in 1911 at the age of 32! The understandable anxiety of the Science and Medical Committee to minimise such blunders, explains why there is now a stipulated gap of 13 years, on average, between completion of an area of research and the presentation of the award.

In addition to the gaffes mentioned above, there have been some notable omissions from the list of Prize-winners in the Sciences. The English biologist, Sir Peter Medawar, who shared the Physiology (or Medicine) award with the Australian biologist, F M Burnet, in 1960, was forced to comment, "some such omissions, notably that of O T Avery (an eminent biologist), are so strange as to actually diminish the stature of the Nobel Prize." Avery, who laid the ground for modern molecular biology, including DNA research, did, however, win the Royal Society's Copley Medal, regarded by some scientists as being a more prestigious award than the Nobel Prize.

**EVER SINCE** the French poet, René F A Sully Prudhomme, collected the first fruits of Alfred Nobel's will in 1901, the Nobel Prize for Literature has been viewed by some as an unpalatable joke. According to Arthur Almuhi, an authority on the Nobel Prize, the Academy's decision was greeted by strong criticism. A total of 42 Swedish authors, artists, and critics, sent a message of sympathy to Leo Tolstoy, the celebrated Russian

**The Nobel Academy has managed to overlook several literary giants. A number of significant writers were rejected on account of a conservative interpretation of a clause in Nobel's will, which stated that the award be given to a writer, "who has produced the most excellent work in an ideal sense."**

novelist, who, they claimed, should have been the Prize-winner. Leo Tolstoy was denied the Prize, as the Committee felt that he preached 'theoretical anarchism and mystical Christianity'. In subsequent years too, the Nobel Prize for Literature has often given cause for surprise.

Who are the people responsible for selecting the laureates? Under the terms of Alfred Nobel's will, the 18 members of the Swedish Academy are required to choose the recipient of the world's most prestigious literary award. The five aged nominators and their 13 venerable colleagues in the Academy, have, over the years, managed to overlook several literary giants. A number of significant writers were rejected on account of a conservative interpretation of a clause in Nobel's will, which stated that the award be given to a writer "who has produced the most excellent work in an ideal sense." Thomas Hardy was rejected because 'his heroines seemed to lack any religious and ethic substance', Emile Zola, on account of his crude 'cynical naturalism', Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, for their 'negativism'. So were many other novelists and poets such as James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka, D H Lawrence, Marcel Proust, Aldous

Huxley, Anton Chekhov, Nikos Kazantzakis, Paul Valery, Maxim Gorky, Stefan George and Bendetto Croce. Further, the absence of *djupsinning* (Swedish for 'heavy things'), in the works of Graham Greene, a master of plot, clarity, and learning, probably accounts for the fact that the most significant, living, British novelist of the last 40 years, has not and may not ever receive the Prize. The Academy has, instead, bestowed the honour on relatively unknown writers, including Yasunari Kawabata (Japan, 1968), Eyvind Johnson and Harry Martuson (Sweden, 1974), Eugenio Montale (Italy, 1975), Vincent Alexandria (Spain, 1977), Odysseus Elytis (Greece, 1979) and the Yiddish novelist, Issac Bashevis Singer (USA, 1978), many of who swiftly faded into oblivion. Writers like the great German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, who was not really appreciated until after his death, did not receive the Prize for the simple reason, that he was never nominated.

This conservative attitude gradually gave way to a more liberal one in the 1920s. Illustrious writers such as G B Shaw and W B Yeats, who had earlier been rejected, were honoured. In 1930, the Academy also awarded the Prize to John Galsworthy and Pearl Buck, in order to popularise the Prize.

**SOME PEOPLE** are of the opinion that the Nobel Prize for Peace is loaded with much too much controversy to command any respect. Alfred Nobel, who died in 1897, could not have imagined how explosive a business 'peace' would become in the 20th century. No one really knows why he entrusted the awarding of only one Prize, the Peace Prize, to Norway, and not to his native country, Sweden. Perhaps, it could be attributed to the fact that during his lifetime, Sweden and Norway were joined in a Union which was peacefully dissolved in 1905. When Alfred Nobel drew up his will, it may have been only natural for him to assign

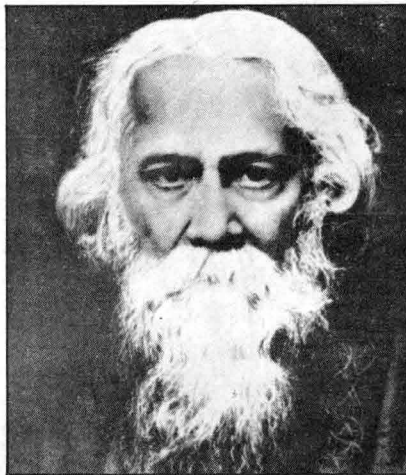
the responsibilities to both parts of his homeland. Whatever his reasons for doing so, Alfred Nobel directed that from the interest earned on his fortune, a prize should be awarded by a committee of five persons, elected by the Norwegian *Storting* (the Legislative Assembly), "to the person who shall have done the most for the abolition of the standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."

However, the criteria for the selection of the Peace Prize-winner are ambiguous and do not seem to be based on any consistent principles. The Peace Prize invariably generates controversy and there is always someone who will denounce the Committee's choice. Sometimes, it is given on the basis of straightforward, humanitarian labour, as in the case of Albert Schweitzer (France, 1952). On other occasions, it has been given to men who have performed a single, remarkable act of peace, for example, Theodore Roosevelt (USA, 1906) and General George Marshall (USA, 1953). At still other times, it has been awarded to make a political gesture against a particular regime; Carl Von Ossietzky (1935), the German pacifist imprisoned by Adolf Hitler, and Andrei Sakharov (1975), the dissident Soviet physicist, are cases in point.

The Peace Prize Committee came in for its severest criticism when Henry Kissinger was proclaimed the Nobel Peace Prize-winner in 1973. Two members of the Oslo Nobel Prize Committee resigned in spite of the fact that the nomination of the former Secretary of State had been balanced by that of the North Vietnamese peace negotiator, Le Duc Tho, who, incidentally, refused the award. The bestowal of the Joint Peace Prize of 1978 on Menachem Begin (Israel) and Anwar Sadat (Egypt), was also met with outrage, as was the conferring of the Prize on Eisaka Sato (Japan, 1974) and Willy Brandt (Germany, 1971). In fact, the bestowal of the award on Sato, caused a minor scandal. An affluent Japanese

## INDIAN NOBEL LAUREATES

### Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)



Rabindranath Tagore, the internationally acclaimed Bengali litterateur, philosopher and educationist, was the first Indian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1913. He won the award for his anthology of spiritual poems, 'Gitanjali'. At a time when the country was in the throes of the Freedom struggle, the international recognition that Rabindranath Tagore gained, did wonders to salve the bruised ego of the nation.

### C V Raman (1888-1970)

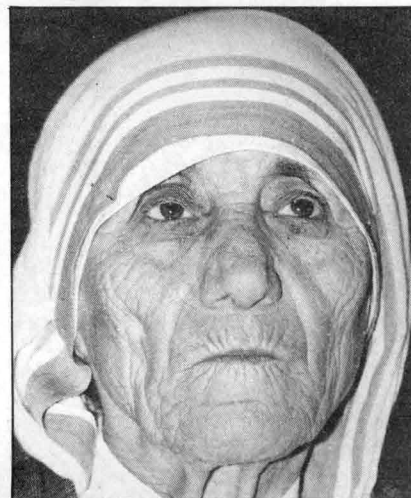
Almost three decades after Tagore's Nobel recognition, C V Raman, an innovative Indian physicist, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics, in 1930. He won the award for his pioneering work in the study of the dispersion of light, a theory named 'The Raman Effect' in his memory. The discovery, and its recognition, are regarded as an important milestone in the field of science, in India.

### Hargovind Khorana (b. 1922)

The First Nobel honour in Independent India, was conferred on Dr Hargovind Khorana. The Nobel prize for Physiology (or Medicine) was given to him for having conducted the first-

ever laboratory synthesis of a yeast gene. The significance of the experiment lies in the fact that it became an important point of reference in the field of genetics, and led to several successive experiments in that field. Hargovind Khorana is now an American citizen.

### Mother Teresa (b. 1910)



An Albanian by birth, and a native of Yugoslavia, Mother Teresa, the modern-day messiah of Peace, accepted Indian citizenship in 1948. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1979 at the age of 69. Originally baptised as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhin, this frail little woman, clad in white, came to be known as Mother Teresa, on account of her evangelical service to the poor and suffering all over the world, particularly in India.

### Subramaniam Chandrashekar (b. 1910)

Almost half a century after C V Raman was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics, another Indian physicist, Subramaniam Chandrashekar, received the same honour in 1983, for a discovery in the field of astrophysics. The discovery, now-known as 'Chandrashekar's Limit', determines the minimum mass of a dying star.



*Henry Kissinger, the controversial Peace Prize-winner of 1973.*

businessman had launched the most furious and expensive campaign to secure Sato the honour, having been inspired by the precedent set by a similar successful campaign, undertaken for the British publicist, Norman Angell, in 1933. Thus, it would seem that heavy lobbying has also influenced the conferring of the Peace Prize, although not always successfully. In the early 1960s, the Soviet Union was openly lobbying to acquire the Nobel Peace Prize for Nikita Khrushchev, but the effort proved counter-productive.

How are the winners selected? Nominations for the Peace Prize close in February. The five members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee — a professor of philosophy, a businessman, two lawyers and a politician — then consider these nominations for a period of nine months. On the basis of preliminary research conducted by the staff of the Nobel Institute, some of the nominations are promptly eliminated. Additional information is then discreetly sought to help sift

through the remaining nominations. Sometimes, the choice is obvious. On other occasions, the final selection is not made until the day of the announcement. A few journalists are then invited to the Nobel Institute, an old gloomy mansion, where they are handed a one-sentence-long statement, disclosing the name of the winner. No reasons are given and no explanations offered; in fact, no information whatsoever, relating to the proceedings, is made available.

**THE NOBEL PRIZE** in Economics, a recent addition, was the brainchild of Peter Asbrink, the Governor of the Central Bank of Sweden. The Nobel Foundation was reluctant to lend its prestige to Asbrink's dream, fearful that a cheapening precedent would be set, as no such award had been provided for in Alfred Nobel's will. But the persuasive Asbrink was supported by an equally persuasive Gunnar Myrdal, who may have had good reason to see himself as a future recipient of the award, and their efforts

## THE WEALTH OF THE NOBEL FOUNDATION

**UNDER THE TERMS** of Alfred B Nobel's will, a sum the equivalent of (US\$9,000,000) was to be distributed amongst those judged to have "conferred the greatest benefit on mankind" — these were the first Nobel Prizes.

How much are the six Nobel Prizes worth today? The amount has been rising steadily over the years. In 1984, each Prize was worth Kr 1.8 million (US\$280,082); in 1985, an 11 per cent inflation-related increase resulted in the figure rising to Kr 2 million (US\$311,202).

The Nobel Foundation registers a new high in profits every year. In 1985, it was estimated to be Kr 36 million (US\$5,607,631). This included Kr 21.5 million (US\$3,345,419) from interest earned, Kr 6 million (US\$933,606) from share dividends, and nearly Kr 8 million (US\$1,244,807) from real estate, a phenomenal increase of Kr 10 million (US\$1,556,609) since 1983.

Undoubtedly, the Foundation is rich. Despite a hefty expenditure of Kr 5.6 million (US\$871,365) in 1985, it still boasted a profit of Kr 30.5 million (US\$4,745,826). Latest available figures indicate that in 1985, the total market value of the Foundation was a staggering Kr 711 million (US\$110,632,207).

proved successful. (Much later, Myrdal did share the award with Fredrich Von Hayek (Britain), in 1974.)

The first three winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics were, indeed, distinguished economists — Ragnar Frisch (Norway) and Jan Tinbergen (Netherlands), 1969, and Dr Paul

Samuelson (USA, 1970). Since then, with the exception of two other economists — Simon Kuznets (USA, 1971) and Wassily Leontief (USA, 1973) — the Committee has experienced difficulty in finding other such 'superstars' to grace with the Nobel laureateship.

A major problem with the Nobel Prizes is that they confer invidious prestige on only a few fields of basic research. The awards in science are categorised under Physics, Chemistry and Physiology (or Medicine), thereby omitting major areas of research in this wide-ranging discipline. No Nobel Prize exists for research conducted in the field of mathematics or psychology, or any of the social sciences other than Economics. Further, the Nobel Prizes exclude engineering and most of the medical sciences, as they are awarded exclusively for basic research. The developers of the polio vaccine, for instance, never received Nobel recognition, because their work was considered to be a case of medical engineering that drew upon Nobel-honoured techniques for its success. Research studies in relatively recent sciences, for example, in the fields of environment and oceanography, do not come within the purview of the Prizes, nor do the important but less fashionable fields of botany and zoology.

Another major drawback is the clause in Alfred Nobel's will, which states that Prizes can be awarded only for a 'discovery', 'invention' or 'improvement'. This excludes, for example, the formation of new conceptual frameworks and new statements of scientific principles which have made significant contributions to science. This has resulted in a paradoxical situation of several illustrious scientists being honoured for relatively insignificant discoveries, rather than their major contributions. An outstanding example is that of the German scientist, Albert Einstein, who received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921, not for his most celebrated work, 'The Theory of Relativity',



*Corazon Aquino: one of the nominees for the 1987 Peace Prize.*

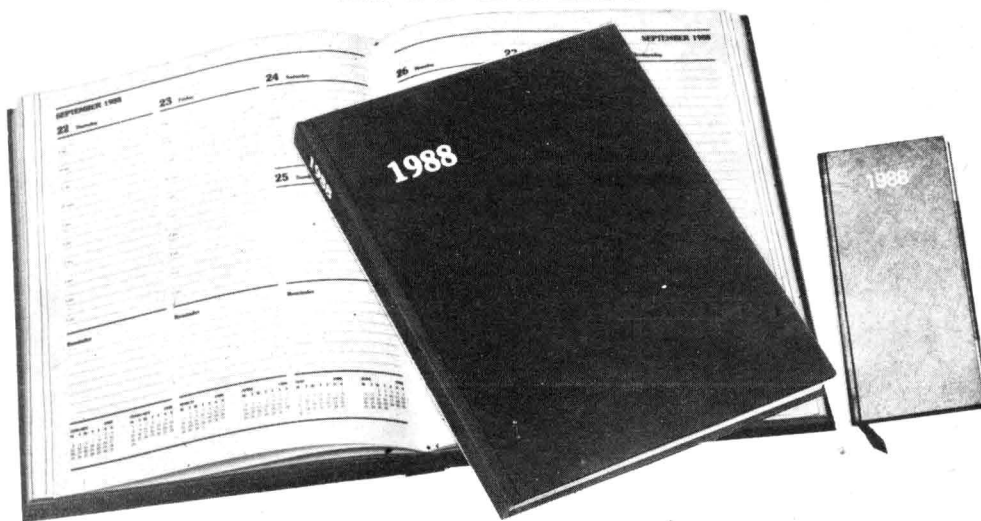
which would seem to be the obvious choice, but for the discovery of the Photo-Electric Effect. This could be attributed to the fact that an obsession for research dominates the selection process. Consequently, certain works have won awards at the expense of others that may have made more significant contributions, yet possessed less award-winning potential. The English physicist, Max Born, is said to have spent a major part of his life working on one 'Nobel Project' after another, as he was embittered at not having shared it with Werner Heisenberg (Germany) in 1932. He eventually did share it with Walter Boethe (Germany) in 1954.

The Nobel Prizes have undoubtedly caused a great deal of bitterness and cynicism amongst the science and literary fraternities. Still, despite the adverse criticisms and the inevitable controversies, the annual announcement of the Prize-winners in October is always eagerly awaited. The names of several candidates for

the 1987 Prizes, are already being bandied about, although the list of nominations is supposedly a closely guarded secret. Among the several contenders for this year's Nobel Prize for Literature are Gunter Grass (W Germany), Max Frisch (Switzerland), Octavio Paz and Carlos Fueno (Mexico), Joyce Carol Oates (USA) and Mario Vargen Llosa (Peru). Jacob Sverdup, the Nobel Committee's Permanent Secretary, also recently disclosed that the names of Corazon Aquino, President of the Philippines, and Raoul Alfonsin, President of Argentina, are amongst the nominations for the 1987 Peace Prize.

If previous precedents are anything to go by, the announcements of the 1987 Nobel Prize-winners are bound to be greeted by a wide spectrum of reactions, ranging from pride to protests. Further, there is little doubt that the institution of the Nobel Prize will once again come under fire, and cries for its abolition will, once again, be voiced. ♦

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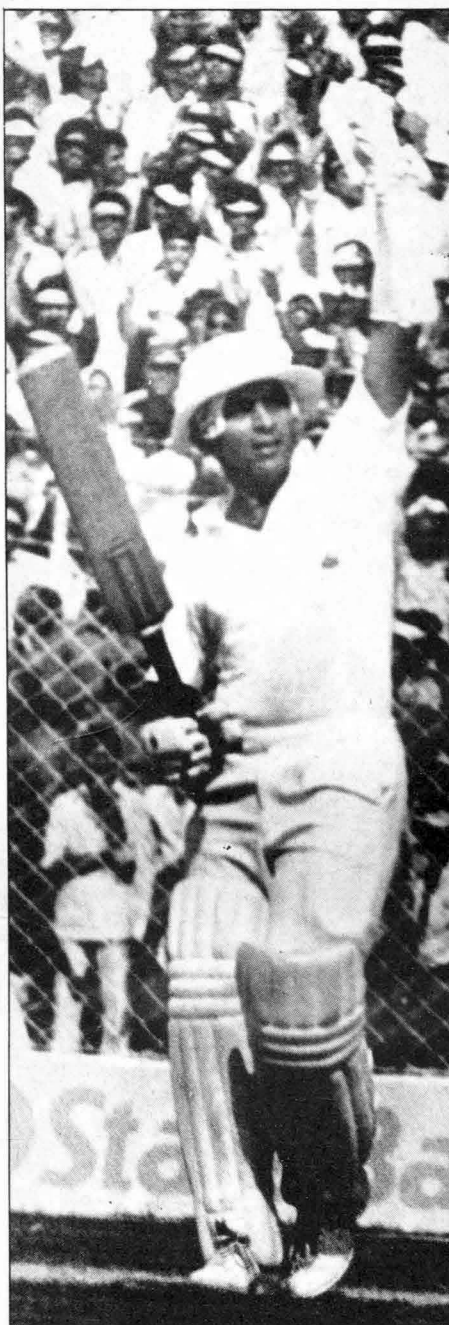
# GOODBYE TO ALL THAT!

"It is time for me to say goodbye to big-time cricket," announced Sunil Gavaskar, recently, much to the disappointment of thousands of fans, for whom the Reliance Cup series will afford a last glimpse of the veteran sportsman.

Shirish Nadkarni pays a fitting tribute to the Little Master, who, apart from having excelled himself on the pitch, has proved himself in many other fields as well.

**A**T THE END of the Reliance World Cup Season, a legendary batsman will finally end his innings. After assisting India in the campaign to retain the symbol of international limited-overs supremacy, one of the greatest batsmen the game has known, Sunil Manohar Gavaskar, will hang up the bat that has been the scourge of bowlers the world over for sixteen long years.

It will mark the passing of an era in Indian cricket, an epoch when the position at the pinnacle of the batting order remained unchallenged. The search was always on for a partner for Sunil Gavaskar, but there was never any question that the diminutive Bombay batsman would not



open the innings in his inimitable, stylish manner. His batting, a perfect combination of technical excellence and single-minded concentration, has been giving pleasure to millions of cricket-lovers for a decade and a half.

Although it is universally accepted that at the ripe old age of 38, the Little Master is still batting as well as

he ever did in his halcyon days, Gavaskar himself has decided that he has had enough of international cricket, and that it is time to call it a day.

By rights, he should have faded from the international scene much earlier, considering the enormous demands that representative cricket makes on the individual. Most top cricketers call it a day well before they hit the midpoint, between the 30s and 40s. But the Little Man has gone from strength to strength, managing to hold centre stage with the same panache that thespian Dev Anand has displayed on the Indian silver screen.

Apart from his prowess on the pitch and his propensity for breaking every record in the annals of cricket, Gavaskar has distinguished himself in several other fields. His fortnightly column, syndicated to a dozen newspapers and journals in the country, is one of the most eagerly-awaited and widely-read sports features in India. The four books he has penned — a fifth is currently at the press — continue to be popular and net him regular royalties. He has distinguished himself in many roles, that of editor, public speaker, company director, entrepreneur, organiser, model — a man who has marketed himself shrewdly and with optimum returns.

**AS HIS FATHER**, Manohar, says proudly, "A son like Sunil is a God-given gift. He is a genuine all-rounder, but not just in the cricketering sense. He writes well, speaks articulately, is respected all over the world, and yet, is very level-headed. He has been an excellent son, and is a very fine father himself."

It is worth examining each of these facets in some detail, to get an idea of the complete personality of the man. The manner in which he organised the Indian squad into a professional sporting side, bears mute evidence to the commanding personality that lurks inside his diminutive frame. As they say, the best things come in small packages!

But, at 5' 5", Sunil is much below even the Indian average, and has, at times, encountered a unique problem. As he says, "Fans often come in groups of 40 and 50 to meet me; and they keep crowding around, shoving autograph books and pens in my face. Now, because I am short, I am terrified of being poked in the eyes with a pen or a sharp instrument! I can tell you, I have had quite a few close shaves. I have been hurt at least twice at the corners of the eyes; a centimetre here and there, and I could have lost an eye! That is why there have been occasions when I have had to be curt with fans, although such occasions have been few and far between."

Normally, he shows exemplary patience with fans, especially youngsters. "Patience, I suppose, is a prerequisite for an opening batsman, and has hence been second nature to me all these years," he says. "Not that I was very patient when I was at school. My parents tell me that I had an absolutely awful temper as a child — so much so, that they took me to a child psychologist to have me examined! He told my parents not to worry, that I would grow out of it. And so I did."

"I suppose, as an opener, I had to learn patience. And as far as fans are concerned, I am fond of young people, and would go to great lengths to avoid hurting them. I mean, how would a child feel if he came up to his idol with stars in his eyes, only to find the person treating him with contempt? When I put myself in the place of my fans, my patience only increases! For I, myself, have gone through the hero-worshipping phase..."

Apart from being mobbed by fans wherever he goes, Gavaskar is inundated with fan mail. "I receive mail at three or four different addresses — my own apartment, my parents' home in Dadar Hindu Colony, my office at Nirlon, and even at my old office, ACC, which I left a decade ago!" he exclaims. "At home alone, I get more than 40 to 50 letters a week, throughout the year. About

the same quantity arrives at the office, and almost an equal number to my parents' home. During the cricketing season, for instance now, I could get anything between 15 to 20 letters per day at *each* of these places, pushing the weekly average to more than 200. Lately, ever since I announced my retirement from Test cricket, it has increased."

The letters form a mixed bunch. These days, most of them are requests imploring him to reconsider his decision to call it a day. Others are merely requests for an autographed photograph; still others offer praise, some criticism, and advice. Then, there is the odd complaint from upcountry cricketers — that they are trying to make a breakthrough in their hometown, but politics prevail within their district association, and what advice can Sunny give?

Incredible though it may seem, Gavaskar handles all this voluminous mail himself, without the help of a personal secretary. "Right through my career, I have made it a practice of answering mail myself, in my own handwriting, just as I write my syndicated column," he says. "My wife helps me with some of the letters, but I always fall hopelessly behind in my attempt to send timely answers. There are some letters, as much as three and four years old, lying unanswered, only because over the last three years, I have been travelling almost non-stop. It was only during the recent four-month holiday that we were given, that I have managed to do a bit of catching up. And even then, it was a struggle, because I had so many other commitments — like producing the TV serials."

**BEFORE GAVASKAR** took over the captaincy from Bishen Singh Bedi, cricketers representing the country in the past were paid a pittance for their participation in Tests, and were put up in extremely modest hotels at Test centres. Sunny's coming changed all that. He not only successfully agitated for more remuneration from

**"It is time for me to say goodbye to big-time cricket," he says matter-of-factly. "I have had a long and enjoyable innings, and achieved everything I wanted to. Now I have other challenges in front of me. One of these is to be a good father to my son Rohan; I have been getting so little time with him, that it has been pricking my conscience." Gavaskar's ambition is to make him "a contented, balanced human being."**

a Cricket Control Board blessed with overflowing coffers, and for better living conditions at Test venues in India and on overseas tours, but also netted the team better deals outside the cricketing arena.

It was he who negotiated a deal with Parle Exports, makers of the soft drink Thums Up, whereby the team would wear the product logo on T-shirts, which they would then model for advertisements. Each member of the Indian team today receives an annual payment from the soft drinks giant, as well as fringe benefits like apparel and kit-bags. There have been occasions when the Board has even fined the players for sporting these logos on their shirts during matches, but more often than not, the tab has been picked up covertly by the company. In Delhi, the team refused to sign the Board contracts because they were being forced to wear the logo of the Reliance Cup sponsors; the Board was reminded of its past actions and was consequently made to look foolish. It was several days before the team consented.

Again, it was Gavaskar who introduced the concept of sharing the prize money equally amongst members of



*Australia, 1985: Flanked by the captains of the participating teams.*

the side, regardless of who had won individual prizes like 'Man of the Match' and 'Man of the Series'. This promoted unity among the team members, essential in a highly competitive team game, where every member's contribution to the side is more important than an individual performance.

Sunil Gavaskar is also an excellent public speaker, with a dry sense of humour that leaves a more lasting impression than the 'ho-ho' variety. At a banquet, at around the time

that reports of a rift between him and skipper Kapil Dev were circulating, Gavaskar quipped, "Every morning, before we go out onto the field, Kapil and I sort out our differences. We don our boxing-gloves, and slug it out!"

Itinerant correspondents who toured Australia during the World Championship of Cricket series in March 1985, still recall the manner in which he put one over on Javed Miandad, who was leading Pakistan in the three-week long competition. India, consi-

dered rank underdogs at the onset of the tournament, played against Pakistan in their first encounter. In reply to Pakistan's modest total of 183, India lost Shastri, Srikanth and Vengsarkar quite cheaply, and was left reeling at 27 for 3 wickets.

Skipper Gavaskar joined Azharuddin at this stage, and the two boosted the tottering Indian innings. Early in his innings, Sunil snicked Rashid Khan faintly to the wicket-keeper, but the Australian umpire rejected the impassioned appeal. The Pakistanis never got another chance, and that fourth-wicket partnership brought India to the threshold of victory, before Gavaskar was dismissed.

Later, at a press conference, Miandad was bitterly critical of the Indian Captain's refusal to 'walk' after he knew he had been out, and said that it had cost his team the match. In his book, *One-day Wonders*, Gavaskar readily admits that he *had* snicked the ball, but adds "I stood my ground, because though my first inclination is to walk, there are two teams against whom I will never do so. One is Pakistan, and the other is Mafatlal in the inter-offices tournament."

It so happened that both teams eventually reached the finals of the competition. Pakistan batted first, and was in big trouble until Imran Khan played a fine, belligerent knock. But the all-rounder had been palpably out to a bouncer from Chetan Sharma before he had scored, gloving it to wicket-keeper Sadanand Vishwanath. The umpire had ruled him not out, and Imran had continued with a sheepish grin.

Finally, Pakistan scored 176, and India obtained the requisite runs for victory, without undue fuss and bother. At the press conference, Miandad came in first, and Gavaskar followed, but only after the former had finished answering the questions of the scribes. Sunny quietly answered all the questions that were put to him. Then, when the press corps seemed to have finished, he spoke up: "Gentlemen, I have one question

for you. Javed was here earlier; did he say anything about the quality of the umpiring or the sportsmanship of the players? No? Okay, thank you!" and walked out.

The after-effects of that quip lingered for several moments as the chuckling men admired the quiet, dry manner in which Sunny had made his point. But, as the cricketer himself puts it, "I enjoy the banter I can engage in with the foreign pressmen, because they understand when I say something that is tongue-in-cheek. In India, on the other hand, the humour is almost always lost, and somebody invariably gets uptight, claiming that I have said something offensive!"

**AMONG SUNNY'S NUMEROUS** off-field activities has been the formation of Professional Management Group (PMG), an agency formed on the lines of several abroad — like International Management Group (IMG) of Hong Kong or McCormack's in the USA. These international agencies manage the playing schedules as well as off-field commitments of top players in several sporting fields. IMG is especially active in the tennis arena, and has had several players from among the top 20 on its rolls, at one time or another.

These agencies serve as intermediaries between the players and prospective clients who would like to use the sportsmen in their advertising campaigns. For example, the Rumanian, Ion Tiriuc, is responsible for handling the twice Wimbledon champion's, Boris Becker's, business dealings. Becker's deals with the various apparel manufacturing companies, footwear companies, and racket-makers, have all been drawn up by Tiriuc, who is known to be a shrewd and hard bargainer.

Such a concept was new to India when Gavaskar joined hands with former advertising executive, Sumedh Shah, to form PMG. Players, in particular cricketers, were usually approached to participate in advertising or promotional campaigns directly by

the companies; they often agreed to feature in campaigns for a fraction of the price that they could have otherwise commanded.

Shah does the actual bargaining on behalf of the players, while Gavaskar utilises his superb contacts to best effect. It says much about the cricketer's acumen that he rarely interferes in the actual workings of PMG, leaving the nitty-gritty in the hands of Shah, who has plenty of experience in this area.

The agency not only syndicates the fortnightly column that Gavaskar writes, but also markets columns written by eminent personalities in several sports fields. Similarly, it has syndicated columns on important sporting events, like the World Cup Hockey and key cricket tournaments played around the globe, nationally and internationally.

The fact that so many cricketers have signed lucrative advertising contracts, speaks volumes about the drive of the men behind PMG. The agency has also presented the extremely popular serial *Sunil Gavaskar Presents*, and has been at the forefront of the marketing and popularisation of the Reliance Cup Tests, being held in India for the first time. Gavaskar's *Reliance Cup Special*, telecast over two successive Sundays, has been widely appreciated by cricket-lovers and the general public.

**APART FROM WRITING**, Gavaskar has also performed stints as an editor. A few years ago, a monthly magazine floated by a well-known newspaper group in Eastern India, utilised the fund of goodwill that Gavaskar's name commands, and made him editor. But Sunny was not just a name on the masthead, he took his editorial responsibilities seriously and contributed an average of two articles to each issue. Three years after *Indian Cricketer* folded, Gavaskar's name is still associated with a magazine, this time, the Marathi fortnightly, *Chaukaar*.

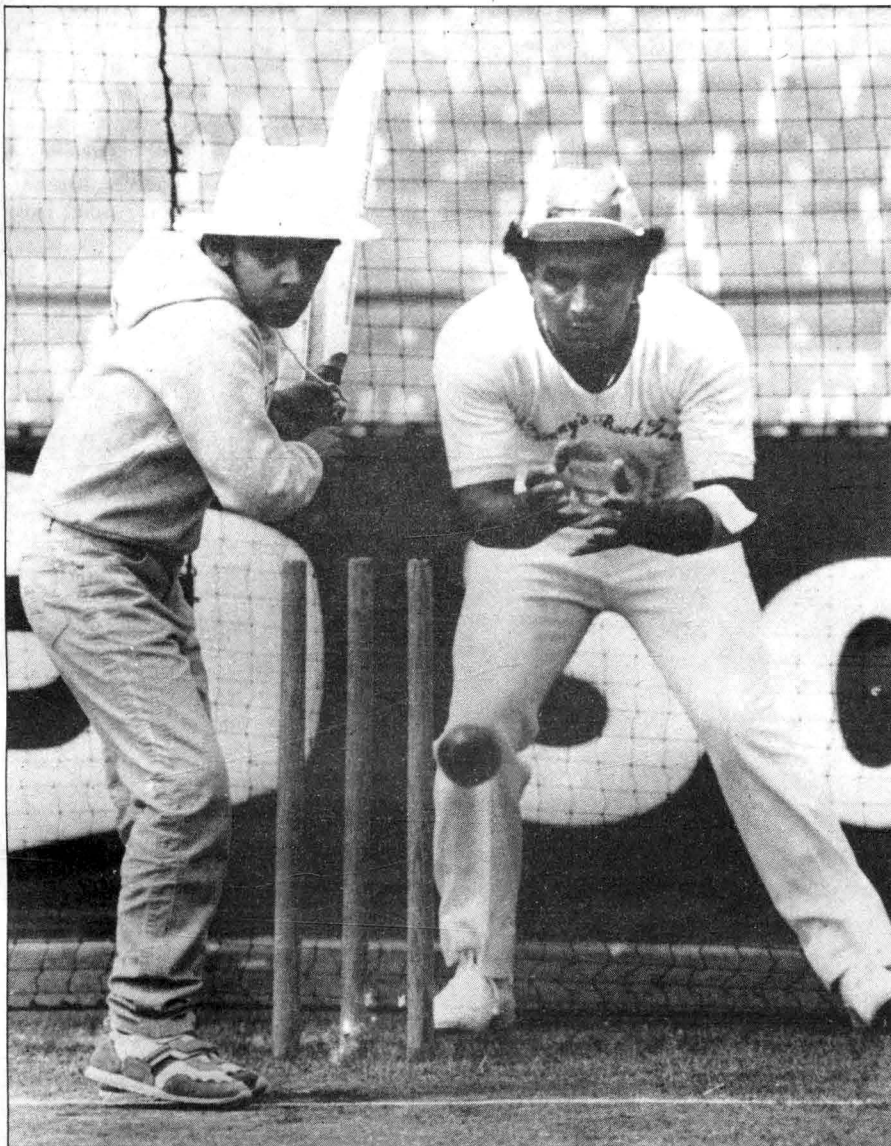
Along with a friend, Raju Mehta from Pune, Sunny went into business

**Again, it was Gavaskar who introduced the concept of sharing the prize money equally amongst members of the side, regardless of who had won individual prizes like 'Man of the Match' and 'Man of the Series'. This promoted unity among the team members, essential in a highly competitive team game, where every member's contribution to the side is more important than an individual performance.**

with 'Sunny's Sports Boutique', a small store which markets sports goods like T-shirts and sports shoes, under the Sunny brand. In all these ventures, Gavaskar is assisted by his wife, Marshniel (known to all as 'Pammi'), a vivacious, articulate person, on whom the cricketer depends a great deal. The couple epitomises the truth of the old cliché 'Behind every great man, there is a woman'.

After Gavaskar became the first man to cross the 10,000-run mark in Tests (which happened during the Ahmedabad Test against the Pakistanis earlier this year), it was fairly apparent that he had achieved his life's ambition — to become the *first* player to cross the magical five-figure mark in Test cricket. He achieved this feat in his 212th innings in his 124th Test, and played one more game at Bangalore. But even at that time, he did not announce his retirement, although those close to him knew that his gargantuan appetite for runs had finally been satiated.

He waited until he had crossed one more long-dreamed of milestone — making a century at Lord's, the Mecca of cricket. In four previous attempts, he had never been able to touch the



*Like father, like son: An excellent partnership!*

three-figure mark at Lord's. Almost providentially, a five-day celebratory Test match was held, in which England competed against the Rest of the World. Gavaskar was an automatic choice to fill the role of one of the opening batsmen, and he celebrated the occasion by running up a magnificent 188, the highest score by any batsman in the match!

**IT WAS A LOGICAL 'HIGH'** on which to announce his farewell to Test cricket; and with his usual, su-

perb sense of timing, he wrested the opportunity. There were many who felt that he still had the ability to continue to accumulate runs. But Gavaskar had always been obsessed with the idea of bowing out on a high note; and there could hardly have been a better occasion to do so.

He had toyed with the idea of retirement on more than one occasion. The first time was after the unbeaten 236 he had hit at Madras, two years ago, against the touring West Indies, his favourite opponents. However, he

had been persuaded on that occasion to continue. Again, in Australia, after the third Test in Sydney, when he scored 172 glorious runs, he had thought seriously about announcing his retirement; even on that occasion, Pammi had asked him to keep going for a little while longer.

Many scribes felt that Sunil would have acceded to the wishes of his father, who had expressed the hope that his son's illustrious career would come to an end only after the West Indies's tour of India, which starts immediately after the end of the Reliance Cup Tests. "He had started his career in a match against the West Indies and had scored 774 runs in four Tests. It would have been ideal for him to end it by playing against the same opponents, and repeat his previous glorious performance." Yet, finally, it was Sunil's unerring instinct that told him that the Lord's century was the ideal final Test innings.

"It is time for me to say goodbye to big-time cricket," he says matter-of-factly. "I have had a long and enjoyable innings, and achieved everything I wanted to. Now I have other challenges in front of me. One of these is to be a good father to my son Rohan (named after Sunil's boyhood idol, West Indies batsman, Rohan Kanhai); I have been getting so little time with him that it has been pricking my conscience." Surprisingly, Gavaskar's ambition is not so much to turn his son into a cricketer, as to make him "a contented, balanced human being."

Yes, incredible though it seems, Sunil Gavaskar, the insatiable cricketer who has scored so many runs, is finally satisfied. Every cricket-lover is hoping that he will leave the international arena with as much of a flourish as his initial foray into it. Every one of his runs during the Reliance Cup will be scrutinised with avid interest, for there will be no further opportunity to watch the amazingly intricate, innings-building procedure, of one who is considered among the greatest players that cricket has ever known. ♦

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# AIRING DISSENT

When questioned recently about the granting of autonomy to the broadcasting media, Rajiv Gandhi declared that the country was not ready for it. Every successive government has maintained a monopoly over AIR and Doordarshan. P G MENON discusses the implications of government control and reports on two recent writ petitions which challenge it.

**I**T IS A WELL-KNOWN FACT that on October 31, 1984, when Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, was assassinated, Rajiv Gandhi, who was away from Delhi at the time, tuned in to BBC Radio World Service to learn the details of the event. His reluctance to rely on the news broadcast by All India Radio (AIR) is a grim comment on the standards of broadcasting that prevail in the country. But it is not just AIR that has come under fire for its reporting standards. Rajiv Gandhi is also known to have dismissed television news as "terrible", qualifying his statement by alluding to the broadcasts as being simi-

*Sisir*

# REPORT

lar to advisory bulletins or announcements. In fact, the Prime Minister of India voiced the feelings of many in the country when he asked, "Who can expect the latest news from Doordarshan?"

A severe indictment, indeed. And bitterly ironical, coming as it does from the Prime Minister, whose own government maintains control over both media. The accuracy, quality, range, and bias, of both AIR and Doordarshan, have been criticised repeatedly, leading to the question — how much do Doordarshan and AIR reflect current political realities and inform viewers and listeners of significant events and developments in the country?

A study of any broadcast of Doordarshan's "News in English" is revealing: On October 11, 1987, the lead story reported on events in Sri Lanka. This was followed by news of a plane crash in Burma, Rajiv Gandhi's proposed visit to Canada to attend the Commonwealth summit, and the fact that the Prime Minister had been interviewed by *The New York Times*. The fifth news item announced the increased allocation of funds for drinking water and drought relief. Then followed a string of news items concerned with development issues including the harvest of paddy in Punjab, the near-

completion of a power plant in Himachal Pradesh, and the discovery of oil in Assam by ONGC — all of which pointed to successes and achievements in various fields. Very brief news items about Zail Singh's ill health, terrorism in the Punjab, and the BJP conference followed; and then, to add a 'foreign' flavour to this pot-pourri was news about the Iran-Iraq war, followed by an item about a demonstration against a nuclear waste processing plant in W. Germany. Finally, the programme was rounded off by the inevitable sports clip. Just as in most of Doordarshan's news broadcasts, there was not much that was contentious or critical, a lot that was self-congratulatory, and little that was of any real significance. In fact, what was significant were the omissions from the day's news — the mammoth rally to commemorate the 86th birth anniversary of Jayprakash Narayan addressed by V P Singh, the continuing agitations in Tibet, and the ravages of the drought in Kutch — items which were reported by the press. Thus, a study of any day's broadcast will reveal that a pro-government bias is evident, and that Doordarshan has been successfully used to prop up and maintain the government's interests and image.

**GROSS INSTANCES** of manipulation, distortion, and suppression of news have been analysed in a report published by The Indian Committee

for Cultural Freedom and the Indian Liberal Group, in early 1987. Based on data collected following a monitoring of Doordarshan's English news broadcast for a period of ninety days, from April to August 1986, the report confirms what is already well-known — that Doordarshan, in its news broadcasts, has departed from standards of objectivity, fairness and good reporting. The report charges Doordarshan with the suppression and censorship of 'inconvenient' news, distortion of news, unnecessary and excessive projection of ministers, and concludes that the government is guilty of using the medium as a tool for propaganda.

A review of the news broadcast on a single day, as outlined in the report, revealed gross discrepancies and blatant suppression of news. On August 12, 1986, Gulam Nabi Azad assured the Lok Sabha that General A S Vaidya's assassination was unfortunate and had occurred in spite of the introduction of tight security measures; the press, however, contradicted this and stressed that existing security measures had failed miserably. The TV news broadcast on the following day mentioned, as its eleventh item, that the Centre had asked the CBI to investigate Vaidya's murder and the failure of the security personnel to prevent it. But this was preceded by news of the SAARC inauguration, the *Quami Ekta* seminar on peace, and a programme held in Kohima, Nagaland, for communal harmony, all of which were obviously deemed to be more important. A news broadcast also announced that peace prevailed in Pune, despite the assassination. However, there was no film clip to assure viewers that this was so. And the papers told a different story. *The Times of India* reported on the centre pages that "frightened Sikhs may quit Pune", and added that business establishments belonging to Sikhs were looted and damaged.

**THE LIBERAL USE** of the scissors to delete items detrimental to the



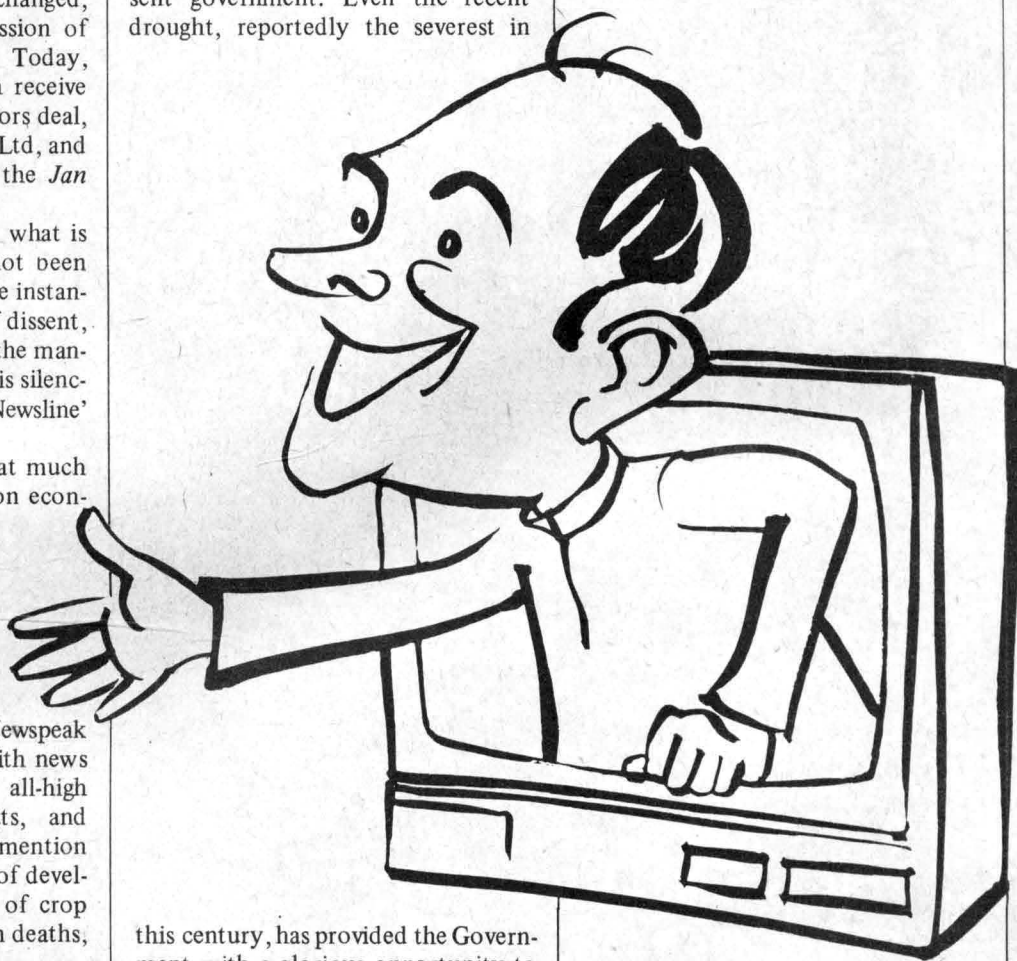
image of the Government has also been shown to be a hallowed practice. During the period of the survey, the items that did not receive coverage included Sobhraj's escape, the Chernobyl disaster (not broadcast until much later), the Gorkhaland agitation, communal clashes in Ahmedabad, and the Karnataka-Maharashtra border dispute. Little has changed, and the practice of suppression of news continues unchecked. Today, there are other issues which receive the same treatment — the Bofors deal, the hiring of Fairfax Group Ltd, and the rapid strides made by the *Jan Morcha* led by V P Singh.

In this scheme of things, what is more relevant is what has not been covered, and why. In the rare instances that we do hear voices of dissent, when the medium does don the mantle of 'conscience-keeper', it is silenced — witness the fate of 'Newline' presented by M J Akbar.

The report also claims that much of Doordarshan's broadcast on econ-

cently, on October 8, 1987, viewers were treated to a visual demonstration of the efficiency of the Bofors gun, which, according to the report, "outperformed" other medium-range guns. No mention was made of the national controversy that the Bofors issue has generated, a 'scandal' which has serious implications for the present government. Even the recent drought, reportedly the severest in

The report was not startling in its discoveries or conclusions. It merely confirmed and provided evidence for what was obvious anyway. It was on the basis of the irrefutable evidence collected by this study that Minoo Masani and P C Chatterjee filed a joint writ petition in September 1987,



omic issues is an exercise in Newspeak — viewers are bombarded with news about share market booms, all-high investments, record outputs, and other successes. Rarely is mention made of rising prices, failure of development policies, the failure of crop insurance schemes, starvation deaths, and the like.

The government seldom misses an opportunity to pat itself on the back. Witness the following: On March 11, 1986, Charles Sobhraj's escape from Tihar Jail found no mention in the news broadcast of that day. However, when bread containing concealed morphine was discovered being handed over to one of the prisoners in the same jail, Lieutenant Governor H L Kapoor applauded the efficiency of the jail administration staff! More re-

this century, has provided the Government with a glorious opportunity to congratulate itself in its role of benign benefactor to the millions affected. Of course, the failure of government policy in preventing drought in each successive year, has not even been alluded to.

"It is fortunate that the Government's propaganda is so blatant," says Anil Dharkar, well-known TV critic. "The people are not fooled. . . it would have been dangerous if the propaganda had been more subtle."

challenging the legality of the government's current monopoly of the media (see box for interview). But they were not the first to have done so.

**EARLIER THIS YEAR**, (the late) Mr Romesh Thapar had filed a writ petition demanding that greater autonomy be granted to the media. The petitioner stated that:

"At present the entire organisation is run and/or is capable of being

## CHALLENGING GOVERNMENT MONOPOLY OF THE MEDIA

Minoo Masani discusses the implications of his petition with Shekhar Ghosh

*On September 11, Justice Variavadi admitted a writ petition filed by Minoo Masani, former MP, and Mr P C Chatterjee, former Director General of AIR, in the Bombay High Court. The petition challenges Government monopoly of Doordarshan and AIR as well as the government's refusal to grant the petitioners a licence to establish an independent broadcasting company.*

*Although the petition is unlikely to be successful in the near future, given the demands it makes on the Government, Minoo Masani refuses to be deterred in his campaign to establish that government control of the media is illegal and unconstitutional.*

*SHEKHAR GHOSH talked to the sprightly 82-year old about several pertinent issues raised by his petition, and future plans.*

*Excerpts from the interview:*

**Shekhar Ghosh:** Since when have you been aware of the need for greater autonomy of the two Government-controlled media, Doordarshan and All-India Radio (AIR)?

**Minoo Masani:** Since Independence. All of us, including myself, are to be blamed for not having done anything sooner. Also, it had never struck me that the monopoly of the media by the Government could also be constitutionally illegal.

**That Mrs Gandhi did not take any steps to grant autonomy to these media is hardly surprising. But why did the Janata Government, in its three-year tenure, also fail to introduce even partial autonomy?**

Mrs Gandhi had accepted the recommendations of the Chanda Committee (1966) which proposed, amongst other things, the formation of corporations which would run broadcasting services. But then, given the shrewd diplomat that she was, Mrs Gandhi

did a *volte face* and shelved the idea. The Janata Government was no better. In those days, it was going through the ostrich syndrome, oblivious to everything.

**Recently, the leftist Government in West Bengal refused to use AIR for its election campaign, as a protest against the existing bias; an action for which Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, was severely criticised. What do you think of Basu's boycott?**

I think Basu was amply justified in boycotting the AIR platform. When I met him, he expressed utter helplessness in trying to curb the Centre's monopoly of the two media. In the circumstances, he did the right thing. I would say that the press, rather than analysing the reasons for his boycott, displayed a shallowness in criticising his move.

**All the opposition governments in the states have a similar complaint against AIR's and Doordarshan's pro-Centre bias. How have they fared in attempts to change this?**

Mr Hegde has spoken out against the Government monopoly of the media. However, much more has been said than actually done. If I were the chief minister of, say Karnataka, I would ask the Centre to withdraw AIR and Doordarshan from the state, unless the state is granted a degree of autonomy in these media. The Constitution provides for it. Besides, it would be easier for the states to take the Union Government to court than for ordinary citizens like ourselves.

**Like yourself, Shashi Kapoor was also denied permission to establish an autonomous TV channel. Why is the Government averse to this idea? Wouldn't the competition it offered help to improve existing standards?**

That is a naive assumption — when has Doordarshan ever expressed a de-

sire to improve the quality of its broadcasts? This Government only wants to maintain the status quo and exploit its monopoly of the media for its own gains.

**Why had your co-petitioner, Mr P C Chatterjee, done nothing to challenge Government monopoly of AIR, during his tenure as its Director-General?** Actually, it was the very fact of government interference during his tenure that prompted Mr Chatterjee to campaign for independent broadcasting services. According to him, the prevailing system, in which ministers insist on bullying AIR officials on the telephone, is what disgusted and disillusioned him.

**If your petition is successful and you are granted the licence, what are your plans?**

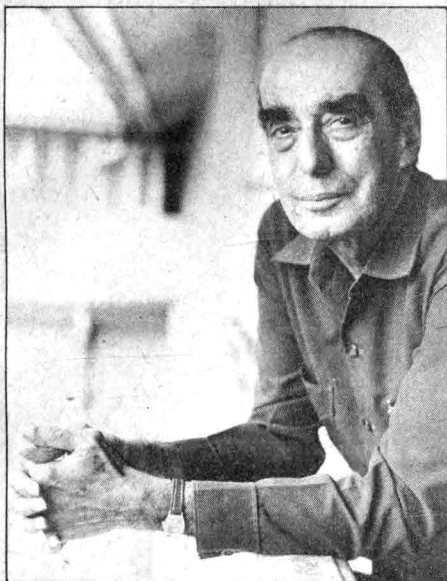
If we are granted the licence, we intend to establish a public limited company, with a board of directors whose integrity, and neutrality are beyond doubt. We will also recruit professionals knowledgeable in the technical aspects of broadcasting. We intend to establish a radio station and a television channel, both of which will broadcast to Western India, with headquarters in Bombay.

**Do you think your project will be commercially viable?**

Yes, professionals in the field have repeatedly told me that it will be. In fact, experts maintain that it will take less than a year for an independent broadcasting service to break even.

**Will your company adopt a particular slant?**

No. The idea is to introduce objective broadcasting with a professionalism hitherto not experimented with in the country. The Congress (I) will still get the lion's share of the time, as it is the largest party. The differ-



ence will be that other parties or fora will also get ample opportunities to air their views; the amount of time given will depend on the strength of the party. The only slant, if you can call it that, will be in favour of objectivity, neutrality, and, of course, unbiased reporting.

**The illiterate, rural masses and sections of the middle class are dependent on AIR and Doordarshan, as the press is out of their reach. How do you plan to woo these sections?**  
We are not going to 'woo' them at all. We will merely place a range of options before them. Our job will be to appraise them of what the various parties, other than the ruling party, have to say — up to now, they have not had the chance to be aware of their policies.

**What kind of proprietorial interference do you foresee occurring in such private autonomous bodies?**  
I do not believe that there is much proprietorial interference in the independent media — the few reports of interference within the press are either exaggerated or deal with exceptions. In any case, it is easier to cope with interference from one proprietor than from the entire Government machinery!

**Do you think it necessary to have some kind of governing body which will keep a check on standards and prevent any possible abuses from occurring?**

We're not averse to a degree of social control. Some broad guidelines could be introduced or some sort of Code of Conduct drawn up; a Standing Committee consisting of eminent members from the two Houses could be set up to constitute a body which would keep a check on any defiance of social norms, rather like the Independent Television Authority which supervises the Independent Television network in Britain. But I definitely do not see any need for any other means of control.

**Do you have any ambitions to increase the scope of the project to cover the entire country?**

That will amount to putting the cart before the horse. The matter is still sub-judice. We haven't even received the licence, so, talking about nationwide expansion at this stage is indeed very ambitious.

**Have you introduced your petition only to bring the issues into public focus, or is your demand for an independent broadcasting authority an end in itself?**

The petition serves a threefold purpose. Primarily, it is intended to establish a point, to dramatise the crying need for autonomy of the two Government-controlled media so that a strong public opinion is built up against the current Government's monopoly of them. Secondly, we hope that the petition will force the Government to pass legislation to regulate and encourage objective broadcasting through its own media, or through independent ones. And finally, we *do* want to establish a company that will be able to broadcast objectively and exist independently of all the machiavellian manipulations and biased reporting that the present media are riddled with.

run entirely according to the wishes and to promote the interests of the political party in power at the Centre ... as a result of political control and excessive centralisation, the functioning of the public media has come to be characterised by sheer ineptitude and arbitrariness."

Thapar's petition, however, was not designed to confront the government, but only to provoke reaction, to "make people think".

Masani and Chatterjee's petition seeks to do more than foster awareness about media bias, and is deliberately confrontational. The petition has challenged the 'illegal' monopoly of the media, by the Government, and has sought to urge the courts to permit them to establish broadcasting stations in Western India.

A year-long correspondence with the Ministry had preceded the writ petition. In September 1986, Masani and Chatterjee had applied to V N Gadgil, the then Minister for Information & Broadcasting, for a licence to set up two broadcasting stations. By way of reply, Mr Gadgil sent them a proforma of an application for a licence to own a wireless set! Clarifying that they were, in fact, interested in setting up independent broadcasting stations, the duo then submitted their application to Arjun Singh, Minister for Communications, on March 10 1987. A categorical refusal prompted them to file the writ petition in the Bombay High Court.

The petition demands that the Government's monopoly over the two media be declared *ultra vires* of Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution, which grants the citizen freedom of speech and expression. The Constitution does not permit the Government to restrict this right except on the grounds outlined in Article 19(2), whereby reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right can be imposed in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, etc.

## REPORT

**SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS** have refused to relinquish control of both AIR and Doordarshan. During the Emergency, the use of the broadcasting media as the official mouthpiece of the Government, was at its most obvious. The then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, while addressing a meeting of the Akashwani Station Directors on September 9, 1975, questioned the "fuss" made about AIR's credibility. "I have said in a public forum that it (AIR) is a Government organ. It is going to remain a Government organ. We are proud that it is a Government organ," she proclaimed. V C Shukla, the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, went on to add his own 'informed' view that Government controlled media would inevitably reflect the policies of the ruling party and stated that "... among the truth we pick and choose..."

Over the years, little has changed as far as the government's version of the 'truth' is concerned. Distortion, suppression, and censorship of "inconvenient" news continue.

Of late, however, the Opposition parties have voiced their protests. Mr Hegde had expressed umbrage at the Government's refusal to permit the States to use the media. "Why not a channel for the different States?" he asked. Mr N T Ramarao, too, had expressed discontent at the suppression of news from Andhra Pradesh. The latest instance of suppression of news was the complete blackout of the seminar held at Netaji Stadium in Calcutta on September 11, in which V P Singh and other prominent national opposition leaders had participated. On September 14, 1987, the West Bengal Government challenged the Centre's ownership of the media and Doordarshan and AIR's partisan and politically motivated coverage. Mr Pritin Bhattacharya, the West Bengal Government's representative on the Inter-Media Publicity Board (AIR) and the TV Advisory Committee, resigned, following a directive from Jyoti Basu's government.



The history of television and radio in India has been one of uninterrupted (since Independence) control and interference. In 1948, Nehru spoke of modelling AIR on BBC radio. But qualified it by announcing that this was not the right time for it.

Mehra Masani tells us that even the Janata Government, which professed to support greater autonomy for the broadcasting media, did not hesitate to introduce the Prasar Bharati Bill in Parliament, which "provided for the government's right to issue directives, whenever necessary, to be carried out by the radio and TV organisations!"

Today, Rajiv Gandhi echoes his grandfather's sentiments. Early in 1985, on the dais of the National Press Club of Washington, when questioned about plans for granting autonomy to radio and television services in India, his answer was "At the moment, none," and added, "India is not ready for it yet."

Will it ever be? ♦

**T**HE HISTORY of written literature in South Asia goes back almost three thousand years. At the very beginning of this period, there were women like Vak and Gargie, who composed hymns together with male poets, for the Vedas. In the Middle Ages, too, there were many women who ranked amongst the most sophisticated and cultured writers. A relatively large number of women in the upper classes were literate, and the daughters of aristocratic families were encouraged to practise writing poetry, as part of their education. Moreover, since Indian literature had a strong oral tradition, it was even possible for women who could not read and write to achieve lasting fame. There were also women who excelled in the composition of hymns.

The modern period in Indian literature dates from the encounter with Western philosophy and literature, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, through contact with the East India Company, and with the introduction of the English educational system in several metropolitan cities. It was the middle class intelligentsia who benefited the most from this new form of education. Many of them had liberal views, and were aware of the terrible social injustice and exploitation inherent in the position of women. By the end of the nineteenth century, male champions

of the women's cause had brought about a number of social reforms, and done much to foster education among Indian women. The latter was, perhaps, the most important reform of all, for towards the end of the Middle Ages, women of all classes had sunk back into illiteracy; even among the higher castes, educated women were thought to bring bad luck.

Contemporary literature reflected this new awareness of discrimination against women. In the early decades of the twentieth century, many male authors wrote on social themes, such as the pitiful conditions of child-widows, and the torments which child-brides were subjected to by their mothers-in-law and other members of the family. They also wrote about the horrific consequences of the dowry system, and the evils of polygamy.

Yet, although these authors showed great humanity and compassion for the victims of these abuses, they held quite a conservative view of the 'ideal woman', seeing her as a protective, indulgent, self-sacrificing mother, and a docile, self-effacing, long-suffering martyr of a wife. The strength of women lay in their capacity to patiently and cheerfully accept life's trials, more often than not at the hands of men. The epitome of womanhood was Sita, Queen of Rama, the tragic heroine of the *Ramayana*. The emancipation of women was to be brought about by men, and women were to ac-

cept what befell them as their *karma*.

**FROM THE EARLY PERIOD** of modern literature, there have been female poets of considerable stature. Women rapidly distinguished themselves as novelists and short story writers as well — the two genres which were characteristic of the new literary development during the modern period. Most of these authors upheld conservative values of the androcentric society. They idealised both child-widows and neglected wives, regarding them as meek and passive creatures who succeeded in transforming their misery and frustration into religious fulfilment, in the service of God or their families — their ultimate duty. Like their male counterparts, these writers reserved their highest praise for the female *character* who proved to be an ideal mother. They, themselves, were usually housewives or young widows, and any attempt made by them to challenge the male norms and values of their society, would have put an end to their literary activities.

Thus, until the 1930s, movements concerned with women's emancipation concentrated mainly on the more practical problems arising from their oppression; very little attention was paid to their spiritual emancipation. There were, however, a number of female poets, such as Radharani Devi (who wrote under the pseudonym

## INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS IN OTHER WORDS

When Virginia Woolf urged women to take up their pens in 1929, it was because there was a dearth of women writers internationally. Times are changing. Although women writers continue to face many of the obstacles that their predecessors did, many more women are succeeding in getting their work published. In this essay, SANJUKTA GUPTA offers a stimulating introduction to the concerns of contemporary Indian women novelists, and provides an overview of their work.

*Courtesy "Unheard Words", edited by Minneke Schipper. Published by Allison and Busby, UK.*

Aparajita Devi), who had the courage to challenge the traditional ideal of womankind, and tried to show that women, too, are individuals. Predictably, they were seen as nonconformists, and received harsh criticism.

**THE 1940s**, and the granting of independence to the countries of South Asia, marked the beginning of a new era for women authors in India. Together with their male contemporaries, they began working towards a new kind of self-determination in which sex played no part. The new Indian Constitution granted Hindu women political equality, as well as equal rights of inheritance, and introduced monogamy and divorce. Moreover, rapid urbanisation and the economic hardships faced by the middle classes led to the emergence of two new phenomena: more and more women receiving education, and many women leaving the confines of the home to take up jobs outside. As a result, a number of good women writers have emerged, whose works are valuable contributions to Indian literature. Many are highly educated women, aware of the changing patterns of Western social philosophy and literature. They are well-read, well-travelled, progressive and emancipated. Some of them, such as Kamala Markandaya and Usha Priyamvada, live in the West. Others, like Chitra Fernando of Sri Lanka and Anita Desai of Delhi, although living in South Asia, write only in English.

Although, traditionally, the literary activities of women have centred mainly on poetry, most well-known women authors today, choose prose, usually essays and novels, as their literary medium. Talented writers like Amrita Pritam and Nabaneeta Deb-Sen began their literary careers as poets, but later took up prose because it is more popular and effective. A number of women writers also teach at universities. Many are involved in women's emancipation in their own country, and contribute to modern feminist magazines such as *Manushi*,

**The 1940s, and the granting of independence to the countries of South Asia, marked the beginning of a new era for women authors in India. Together with their male contemporaries, they began working towards a new self-determination in which sex played no part. The new Indian constitution granted Hindu women political equality.**

published in Delhi. They are keenly aware of the problems which women face today, and closely follow developments in women's movements all over the world. Most of the hardships faced by women in orthodox or impoverished situations, are echoed in their works.

The main character in Chitra Fernando's *Missilin* (1981), is a poor village woman who works as a cook for a middle class family in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Whereas, in her village, she had an identity of her own and a sense of belonging, in Colombo, it is different. To her employers, she is merely a 'convenience', and she is not made to feel like a member of the family. While her employers are neither cruel nor insensitive, they fail to see her as a person. There are many *Missilins* in modern cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi.

Ismat Chughtai too, depicts the unwanted and uncared-for, those who exist on the fringes of society. In *Tiny's Granny* (1976), she portrays a Muslim woman who is never recognised as an individual by the people around her.

Shanta Rama Rau lived in England

for many years, and her autobiographical stories, "Home to India" and "Gifts of Passage", as well as her novel *Remember the House*, all display a proud awareness of her Indian identity. Like all contemporary writers, she is aware of her own modernity, and defends the freedom she has won from orthodoxy and narrow-minded bigotry. Similarly, in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Silence of Desire* (1960), Kamala Markandaya relates with empathy to the frustrations of poor rural families.

Ashapura Devi, now in her seventies and one of the foremost Bengali writers, is at her best when dealing with socio-historical themes. Her recently published trilogy is a chronicle of three generations of women — mother, daughter, granddaughter. It spans some one hundred years, and is concerned with the struggle of well-educated, middle class, Bengali women, to free themselves from the social chains of a male-dominated society. The heroine of the first novel, *Pratham Pratishruti* (1964), is Satyavati, the only child of a progressive father. She grows into an intelligent, spirited young woman, and with determination and self-confidence, resists the narrow-minded orthodoxy of her mother-in-law. She persuades her weak and docile husband to move from the village to Calcutta, where their sons will be able to receive a better education. There, a third child is born, a girl called Suvarnalata. As she is intelligent, Satyavati is determined to see that she too receives a good education. She also hopes that she will be able to delay the girl's marriage until she is of age. But her husband, fearful of incurring social disapproval, enlists his mother's help and marries Suvarnalata off from his mother's house in the village. The second novel, *Suvarnalata*, tells of the miserable life which the girl is doomed to, in the house of her authoritarian husband. Her intelligence, her writing talent, and her education, are all wasted in the rigid orthodox atmosphere which exists within her hus-

band's family. The only person who understands her is her youngest daughter, Bakul, who has inherited her writing talent. The last novel in the series is entitled *The Story of Bakul* (1973). It unfolds against a backdrop of a rapidly developing Calcutta, wherein changing circumstances enable Bakul to defy her despotic father. Not only is she able to avoid an arranged marriage, but she also succeeds in fulfilling her literary talents. While she is unlucky in love and chooses to remain single, she finds independence, harmony and commitment through her work. She achieves all those things which her simple, poetic mother dreamt of, and her strong-willed and spirited grandmother fought for. But, she is also painfully aware of the crises of modern womankind. The conflicts between new and old values produce an ambivalent situation, which would trouble less strong-minded individuals. This seems to be the main message that the author tries to convey.

**THE CRISES DESCRIBED** in her book is indeed the result of a changing culture and its changing values. Today's women are faced with problems of adjustment, which often cause intense suffering. Divorce is one of these problems. Although it is a fairly recent phenomenon, it is already threatening the social stability of certain sectors of Indian society. The conflicting values of husband and wife, combined with the ambivalent attitude of the husband, often result in divorce or separation. There are many men who want their wives to be modern and intelligent, but only to a certain degree. Underneath, they must still remain chaste, loyal and submissive. Nowadays, however, women are brought up to believe that they are individuals in their own right. The novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), by Nayantara Sehgal, highlights this problem, which has become more acute with men and women interacting freely, both before and after marriage.

As more and more South Asians



Anita Desai.

settle abroad, a new problem of adaptation presents itself. In her novel, *This Time of Morning* (1965), Nayantara Sehgal relates the story of Leela and Nita, two young girls who live in the USA. Leela has a strong need to feel at home in the US, which leads to her becoming pregnant. She never succeeds in reconciling her new life with the traditional values of her own culture, and in the end, commits suicide. Her sister, Nita, experiences similar feelings of alienation, even though she lives with her parents.

Another serious problem affecting expanding cities and industrial towns, is that of working wives. Sociologist Pramila Kapur examined this problem in *Marriage and the Working Woman in India* (Delhi, 1970), and *Love, Marriage and Sex* (Delhi, 1973). Until then, only male authors had tackled this subject. Anita Desai has, since then, successfully broached this theme in a novel. In *Voices in the City* (1965), she presents in Amla, the new type of working wife, who considers her job as her only lifeline. Manisha, her sister, committed suicide because she could not bear the drudgery of a purely domestic existence. She had

no life of her own, no individuality, and was not appreciated by her family. To escape the same fate, Amla takes up a job, hoping to discover her identity through her work. Brinda, the heroine of Usha Priyamvada's short story, "Paper Flowers", has a different attitude. She feels imposed upon because she has to go out to work in order to help support the family, and blames her brother, who cannot find a job.

**FEMINISM** has also reached the subcontinent. This is evident from the many volumes of protest literature, which are the works of the more modern women writers. In the foreword to her novel, *The Friend of the Great City* (1969), Rajani Panikkar says: "love, marriage, divorce — these are the phases of our conjugal life, in Indian families. Wherever traditional control is operative, there is suffocation; and wherever we have freedom, there is divorce. This problem is the burning issue of the day. Everybody experiences it, but no one has a solution. . ."

Her pronouncement is supported by Shanti Joshi's novel, *Fish and the Dead Net* (1971), in which Mandira meets her future husband at a swimming-pool, and falls in love with him immediately. After a brief courtship, they get married. But then, her husband forbids her to go to the swimming-pool or to see her friends and family. He is extremely jealous, and thinks she is unfaithful to him. In his eyes, she must be fickle, or else she would not have allowed him to win her so easily. He is suspicious of her individualism, and to demonstrate his authority as a husband, he demands her constant attention, even at the cost of their children. In the end, Mandira leaves, taking the three children with her, and asks for a divorce. The author stresses the ambivalent attitude which the modern male displays towards women. The old stereotype 'ideal woman', the epic Sita, still holds sway, and is supported by popular films. No matter how attracted

a man may be to a smart, modern, emancipated woman, he will more often than not, find her too complicated and unreliable for a permanent relationship. Although, in India, the cosmic, active force of the divine is seen as feminine, and is thought to be present in all women, in everyday life they must be mastered. Women must be made passive and submissive, so that they will not bring about chaos and danger. Authority must remain in the hands of men. Yet, modern Indian men seem unable to make a choice, and, in the meantime, their wives become more and more confused and frustrated until, finally, they rebel.

Pramala, the heroine of *Some Inner Fury* (1955), by Kamala Markandaya, has no wish to be a modern emancipated woman, but in order to please her husband, she wears shorts, plays tennis, and gives parties. Her husband, Kit, however, treats her more as an inferior than as an equal. Pramala, who is childless, is overwhelmed by loneliness. She becomes involved in social work, and much against her husband's will, adopts a poor low-caste girl. At the end of the book, Pramala impetuously — almost deliberately — rushes into a burning school to rescue trapped students, and dies in the flames.

**THE HEROINES** of feminist literature rebel against the double standards and hypocrisy of their husbands. They refuse to be suffocated, as is demonstrated by contemporary literature. In addition, the modern novel shows women regularly defying sexual taboos, for example, by having extra-marital relationships, as in *Storm in Chandigarh*, by Nayantara Sehgal. So does Ratti, the principal character in Krishna Sobti's *The Sunflower of the Darkness* (1972), who is depicted as suffering from severe psychological problems related to sex. As a child, she was molested by an older man; her schoolfriends, who found out about the incident, taunted her instead of trying to help her.

**The heroines of feminist literature rebel against the double standards and hypocrisy of their husbands.**

**They refuse to be suffocated, as is demonstrated by contemporary literature. In addition, the modern novel shows women regularly defying sexual taboos, for example, by having extra-marital relationships.**

The whole affair wounds her so deeply, that she becomes a confirmed man-hater and a cynic. She likes to flirt with young men, to toy with their feelings, but never lets any of them get close to her. She ridicules marriage, which she calls an empty relationship, but then falls in love with a married man. She truly loves Divakar, and wants to sleep with him. But, when he offers to divorce his wife, she begs him not to, because she cannot bear the thought of the suffering it would cause his child. Besides, she believes that her temperament makes her unsuitable for marriage. Therefore, she refuses Divakar's marriage proposal, but accepts a sexual relationship. Divakar is free to come to her whenever he wants to; she will always be waiting for him.

The female characters in Rajani Panikkar's *Duriya* (1974), are not advocates of sexual abstinence either. Namita lives with her lover Hari, who has a wife and a child, and is awaiting a divorce. After a quarrel with Hari, she leaves the house and goes to a women's centre, run by a militant feminist named Sushila. She meets a young man there, and falls in love

with him. In the meantime, however, Hari has obtained his divorce, as well as custody of his child. Namita returns to Hari, to be a mother to his child. Charu, another character in the novel, is an adventurous young woman who has had a great many affairs. She finally marries a young man who is willing to forget about her past adventures. The entire novel may be seen as a young woman's somewhat exaggerated protest against the traditional authority of a father or husband.

In the novel, *Her House* (1972), Mehrunissa Parvez portrays two young women. Elma is a well-educated, cultured and charming young lady, whom her husband divorces because she suffers from chronic asthma. Elma is left to suffer alone, and is even exploited by her own brother. The other young woman is Rashma. Her mother is a fanatical Christian, who, when Rashma becomes pregnant, refuses to accept the girl's Hindu lover. She would rather have her daughter remain with her as an unmarried mother, and she sees to it that she cannot marry her lover.

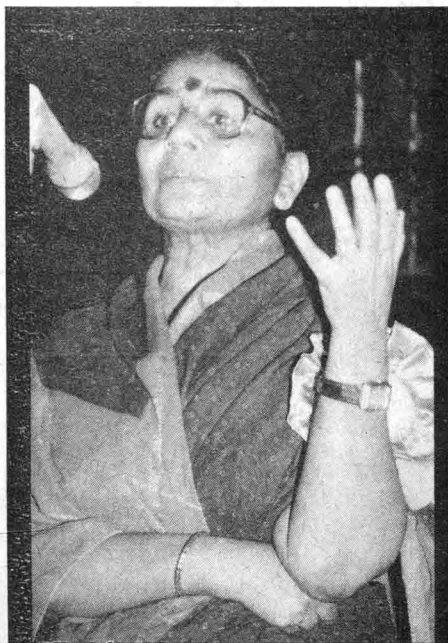
Mamta Kalia, another young writer, delights in ridiculing those young men who believe in sexual liberation for themselves, and yet demand chastity of their wives. Paramjit, a character in Kalia's novel, *Beghar* (1971), is a member of the intellectual middle class of Bombay. He has a sweet and tender romance with Sanjivani, who comes from the same milieu. She is modern, but also gentle and cultured, and they are very much in love. On their first sexual encounter, however, Paramjit discovers that Sanjivani is not a virgin. He is indignant and rejects her. Later, he marries a girl chosen for him by his parents, who is not only uneducated, but also narrow-minded. Paramjit cannot put Sanjivani out of his mind, and five years later, dies broken-hearted.

In her short novel, *Inni* (1973), Malati Perulkar shows the other side of the coin. Inni is modern and emancipated, but at the same time, clings

fiercely to traditional moral values. She is in love with Raj, a playback singer in Hindi films. Long ago, Raj left home, deserting the wife he had married against his will. He is popular as a singer, and has had many affairs, but when he meets Inni again, he realises that he still loves her. When he asks her to marry him, she refuses, because she cannot marry a man who is no longer a virgin. Inni finally marries a childhood friend, a Muslim named Sahil, whom she admires for his shy innocence. But she can no more forget Raj, than she can love Sahil. Raj dies a horrible death, and, at that moment, Sahil realises that Inni has always loved Raj. Knowing this, he is no longer able to love her, and they become estranged. By clinging to the empty ideal of chastity, Inni has ruined both their lives. The author seeks to show how senseless and dangerous it is to stick to the old myths and values, in the rapidly changing, westernised, urban society of the modern middle class.

An even more daring iconoclast is Mridula Garg. In her novel, *Sunshine of her Share* (1975), she declares that sexual enjoyment is life's highest good, and that the physical ecstasy of orgasm is totally unrelated to romantic love. When two people are attracted to each other, physically, no hollow ideals or romantic myths should be allowed to interfere. Manisha, the principal character, is a university woman who writes short stories and teaches Hindi literature at a college. She consistently stresses the physical side of the male-female relationship, and rejects the idea that love or loyalty are in any way involved. She even seems convinced that marriage is a hindrance, rather than a help, in achieving a satisfying sexual relationship. While married to her first husband, Jiten, she has an affair with Madhukar. And once she is married to Madhukar, she has an illicit relationship with her ex-husband.

**BUT NOT ALL** women authors are proponents of sexual promiscuity.



Mannu Bhandari.

Some of them are deeply concerned about the effects which the failure of a marriage, and later divorce, can have on children. The knowledge that his mother has committed adultery, can have grave psychological consequences for a child. Moreover, children always suffer when they are forced to choose between their parents, to decide where their first loyalty lies. This is the theme of Mannu Bhandari's novel, *Apka Banti* (1971). Banti's parents are separated, and he lives with his mother while she awaits her divorce. During this time, he enjoys her undivided attention. But then, his mother marries a widower with children from his first marriage, and Banti finds it impossible to adjust to the new situation. His conduct causes problems, and he is sent to his father. But the father has also remarried, and has a child by his second wife. Thus, Banti feels rejected by his mother, and cannot accept his little half-brother. He is both miserable and unmanageable, and is finally sent away to a boys' school. Mannu Bhandari makes no value judgements; she simply depicts the child's emotional anguish on his parents' divorce

and subsequent marriages.

Nirode, the principal male character in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* (1965), discovers very early in his childhood that his mother actually hates his father. He also sees his mother flirting with another man, and suddenly, his affection and love for her vanish. The loving mother he adored, that symbol of perfection, is shattered. He is filled with hatred, and this brings him to create a new image of his mother, that of Kali, the dark goddess of destruction.

Anita Desai and Amrita Pritam are the two most talented Indian women writers. Their writings have a lyrical quality that sets them apart. Desai mainly writes psychological novels. In *Cry the Peacock* (1963), she presents a detailed analysis of the complex personality of her heroine, Maya. Superstition, libido, a father fixation, mental maladjustment, and a thirst for life, all combine to make her an emotional cripple. As a child, her nanny once took her to the temple of Siva to have her horoscope read. The red phallic symbol of the god, the priest standing next to it, his hoarse, monotonous voice speaking of love and sex and death, as symbolised by the courting and mating peacocks — all this aroused her, but frightened her as well. The priest predicted that in the fifth year of her marriage, either she or her husband would die an unnatural death. She remembers the priest as a lascivious-looking albino, who described the eerie cry of the peacocks as the haunting call of sex and death — two concepts inextricably entwined. The awful symbolism, and the fear of death hanging over her, drives Maya to the brink of insanity in the fourth year of her marriage. Her husband, an intellectual, knows nothing of the prophecy, and when Maya is once again tormented by nightmares in which she hears the cry of peacocks, he attributes it to a form of suppressed sexual perversion, a type of Electra complex. In a moment of acute mental stress, tortured by the thought

## ESSAY



*Amrita Pritam.*

that one of them is to die, Maya murders her husband, and commits suicide. The book is a remarkable piece of literature, in which the greater part of the story is related in interior monologue. There are frequent flashbacks, interspersed with ordinary conversations, between Maya and her husband. It bears the stamp of Anita Desai's personal style, evocative and suggestive, with a charming lyricism, and a striking power of expression.

Amrita Pritam began her literary career as a poet, and her novels and

short stories also have a poetic quality. Her early work focuses on the inner life of her characters, many of whom seem to be projections of the author herself. Pritam's mature work is characterised by a search for harmony and truth. She is strongly influenced by Freud, and intrigued by the way sentimental young girls always seem to be in search of unselfish, maternal love. Her story, "The Ghost", is narrated by a young girl, who has always been closer to her mother than her father, and feels the need to be

loved by other mother-figures as well. She is crushed by her grandmother's rejection. Then, suddenly, she is informed that her mother is actually her foster-mother, and that the lonely, sad but loving aunt, who lives behind their house, is her real mother. She cannot accept the truth; shaken and confused, she falls ill. Eventually, she recovers, only to discover that she has lost both her 'mothers'.

The sorrow and loss experienced by the little girl, and the manner in which she deals with these emotions, have autobiographical overtones. Amrita Pritam lost her mother when she was eleven, and with the encouragement of her father, she managed to cope with her loss by writing poetry. In a sense, Pritam represents the modern, progressive female. Her view of life was radically altered by the political partition of Punjab, and the accompanying chaos and cruelty. Much later, when she settled in Delhi, she felt strongly attracted to a more radical modernism. In her autobiography, she focuses on these events since they have influenced her work.

There is an old saying that there is an author behind every story, and a society behind every author. Does that mean that the works discussed represent the female psyche of South Asia? Not quite, for we have talked mainly about some of the more progressive writers. Only Ashapura Devi can be regarded as a representative woman author. She belongs to the well-educated, middle class — the upper caste society which has produced most of India's contemporary literature. Yet, typical or not, all these women writers are acutely sensitive to the changes their world is undergoing, and are well aware of the fact that they, themselves, are products of these changes. They realise that urban society is in a state of flux, and that modernisation can be a painful process. Together with prominent male writers, they are trying to provide models for the world of tomorrow, while keeping sight of the crises in which women find themselves today. ♦

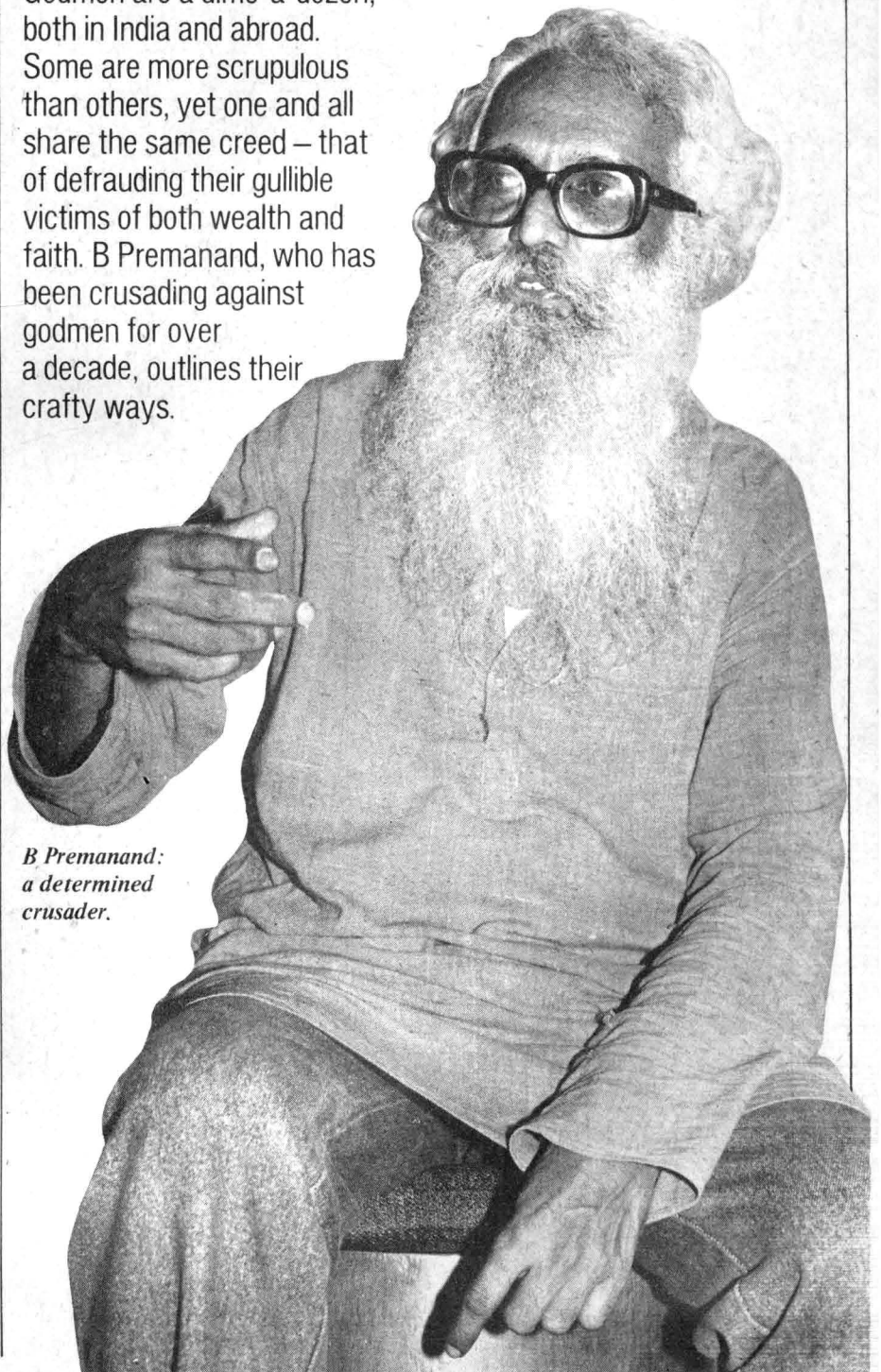
# ON THE TRAIL OF THE GODMEN

**R**ONALD REAGAN MAKES a transatlantic call to ask for your advice. Margaret Thatcher wants her future political career foretold. Adnan Khashoggi requests an audience with you. A former Indian Chief Justice is one of your close friends, so is a state Chief Minister. A Prime Minister in India wants you to perform a *mahayagna* on the lawn, to neutralise 'evil spirits'. Pritish Nandy begs you for an interview. Thousands of less-important but fervently devoted minions obey your slightest bidding. What does it take to be a Godman?

Nothing very special or exacting, really. Primarily, a basic knowledge of elementary magic is essential: 'produce' a gold ring here or some *vibhuti* (sacred ash) there, 'eat' a piece of burning camphor or turn water into petrol (See box 2). Secondly, a cavalier (and unscrupulous) disregard for right or wrong, and an ability to dupe gullible audiences and defraud them of their money, are crucial. So, also, are a gift of the gab and a fluency with ornate and trite phrases that ring with conviction. And finally, a mesmeric 'presence', a personality that radiates confidence and power, and an imposing appearance that fascinates and enslaves its victims, are tremendous assets. A volatile combination of all these qualities produces that all too common phenomenon in India, the godman, the intermediary between you and the Almighty, the 'living' God who is prepared to make petitions on your behalf. For a price, of course.

The vistas open to a godman, here and abroad, are both endless and lucrative, thus providing a probable explanation for the mushrooming of such figures, generation after generation. When an unintelligible mumbling of a few *mantras* or a few sleight-of-hand tricks can conjure up a com-

Godmen are a dime-a-dozen, both in India and abroad. Some are more scrupulous than others, yet one and all share the same creed — that of defrauding their gullible victims of both wealth and faith. B Premanand, who has been crusading against godmen for over a decade, outlines their crafty ways.

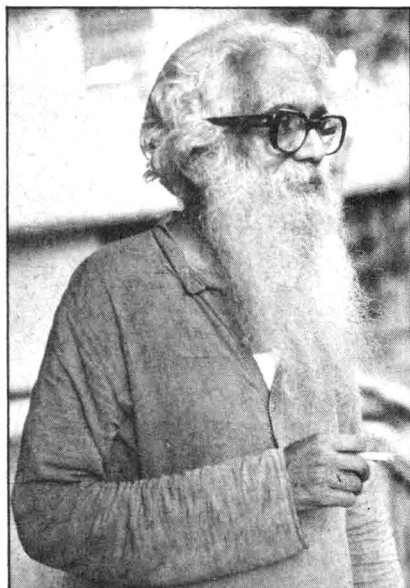


*B Premanand:  
a determined  
crusader.*

fortable, often even luxurious, life-style, why bother to earn an honest living? Unfortunately, despite innumerable exposes of these perpetrators of hoax, the unsuspecting victims of such chicanery remain under-terred in their belief in miracles and miracle-men. So, the game goes on: one 'divine' mystic replaces another, cheap 'tricks' are vested with a grave religious significance, and new 'miracles' are added to lengthy repertoires.

The introduction, or rather exploitation of religion is, of course, what lends credibility to what are, essentially, conjuring tricks. And, in this welter of phony spiritualism, the voice of the sceptic is often easily smothered. One man who has carried scepticism to great and, in fact, logical lengths, is B Premanand — a one-man crusader against the machinations of Machiavellian godmen.

**AT THE AGE OF 57**, B Premanand cuts an impressive figure — he can (and does) perform amazing 'miracles', his mellifluous tones can easily hypnotise listeners, his long, flowing beard sets off the unusually perceptive eyes in his cheerful face. He could have been a godman par excellence, but for his scruples about practising deception. He prefers, instead, to expose godmen for what they are:



**FABRICATING** gold and gold ornaments from thin air is a miraculous task indeed — at least it would appear so, to grateful recipients of Sathya Sai Baba's largesse. But, die-hard sceptics and disbelievers would call both the act and Baba's benevolent performance, undoubtedly phony. B Premanand is the first to term it 'criminal'.

Writ petition No 9796, filed in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, against Sathya Sai Baba by B Premanand on August 1, 1986, was probably the first of its kind. Mr K N Balgopal, a Supreme Court advocate, representing the petitioner, argued that Sai Baba had violated several sections of the Gold Control Act by 'making' gold and gold ornaments out of thin air. This illegal manufacture of gold, he argued, had constituted a contravention of the Act, which would have serious repercussions on the economy of the country.

Premanand claims that the activities of Sai Baba violate Section 8 of the Gold Control Act, which enforces restrictions regarding the acquisition, possession and disposal of gold; Section 11 which prohibits the manufacture of primary gold — articles, ornaments etc; Section 14, which necessitates the submission of monthly accounts; and Section 16, which requires that gold articles and ornaments in one's possession be declared.

He also points out that Sai Baba either possesses, or has custody of, the said gold, gold articles and gold ornaments. Nevertheless, in all these years, he has not filed any of the required declarations regarding quantity and type of gold owned, held, or controlled by him.

Justice Anjaneyulu dismissed the petition on the grounds that, the instantaneous 'materialisation' of gold through spiritual means, did not amount to manufacture.

Premanand comments, "Sathya Sai Baba is connected with various eminent personalities in all walks of life. But this does not give him a licence to violate the law. Further, when asked to take action, the Gold Control Authorities did not do so." He has now filed a writ appeal which will be heard by the Supreme Court later this month.

Here, we present a list of just a few of the gold articles gifted to various devotees by Sai Baba over the years. The information is extracted from several books including *Sathya Shivam Sundaram*, Parts II and III (1968 and 1975), *At the Lotus Feet* (1968), *Baba* (1971), *Suvarna Pushpanjali* (1975), *Sai Baba and Sai Yoga* (1975), *Sai Baba: The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist* (1975), *Vision of the Divine* (1976), *Sai Baba Avatar* (1978), and *The Golden Age — Kingdom of the Sathya Sai* (1979).

ruthless exploiters of religious fanaticism.

His *modus operandi* is quite simple. "Whenever I read or hear of any 'supernatural' phenomenon or 'miracle' being performed, I go there and watch the trick carefully," says Premanand, twinkling. "All you need is a basic knowledge of magic. Unless any phenomenon can be rationally explained, it will be seen as a 'miracle'. I have been 'exposing' godmen and their miracles for over a decade,

## The Gold Rush

and I have found that no miracle can take place without the necessary expertise on the part of the 'miracle-man'," he smiles benevolently. His denouncement of godmen strikes one as being extremely good-natured. But, despite the lack of stridency in Premanand's arguments, they seem both unassailable and provocative.

"Why do people go to godmen?" he asks rhetorically. "Because they believe that God has supernatural powers which will help solve their numer-

No:	Description of the gold and other precious jewels 'created' and distributed:	Presented to:
1	A golden idol of the Sai Baba of Shirdi	Repalle Temple
2	<i>Navagraha</i> idols and a plate of gold.	For <i>yagna</i> at Puttaparthi
3	A 30-inch long pearl necklace set in gold.	Indra Devi, Mexico
4	One US\$10 bill in gold.	Howard Murphet
5	A golden spoon.	Howard Murphet
6	Two gold rings studded with large precious stones.	Mr and Mrs Howard Murphet
7	Two gold rings studded with a big emerald and small diamonds.	Sheshagiri Rao and G Venkateswara Rao
8	A <i>navaratna</i> gold ring.	Alf Tidemand Johannessen
9	A necklace of 108 pearls on a gold thread.	Swami Sadanand Saraswathi
10	A statue of the Sai Baba of Shirdi, in solid gold.	Dr S Bhagvantam
11	A gold medal.	Violinist, T Choudiah
12	A gold necklace.	Rukmini idol at Pandharpur
13	A gold statue of Krishna, 15 inches in height.	Jamnagar Palace
14	A sapphire ring worth US\$125.	Arnold Schulman
15	A particle of sand transformed into a beautiful golden statue of Krishna.	(Witnessed by V K Gokak)
16	A pearl and diamond necklace.	Ratan, daughter of Jind Rani
17	A gold ring studded with precious stones.	Paul from the USA
18	A gold medallion.	Dr E B Fanibunda
19	A double-faceted <i>rudraksha</i> with an ornamental gold shield on each side, on a golden chain; and a gold cross with a ruby top.	Dr Haroldson
20	A ring, a yard-long necklace and a lotus — all in gold.	S D Krystal

ous problems. Unfortunately, they also have an unshakeable belief in the powers of the 'living Gods' or His incarnations," laughs Premanand. "People who promote God in the guise of being Gods themselves are merely exploiting your wealth. God doesn't need your money," he adds disparagingly. "Faith is nothing but blind belief," he continues, in a more serious vein. "And belief is a thing of the future. Belief is based on selfishness. Aren't most prayers rooted in

selfishness? 'Oh God, cure my rheumatism and I will present you with Rs 1,000,' or 'God, give me *moksha* after my death,' or 'Help me win this election' — aren't these attempts to bribe God?" he mocks. According to Premanand, if you truly believe in the God of your definition, then you must also acknowledge that everything on earth is the will of God in which case, why should you want to change it?

Convenor of the Committee for

the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, based at Coimbatore, B Premanand is relentless in his witch hunt for godmen and fake *sadhus*. He has travelled extensively, all over India as well as in 20 other countries, and has given over 4,000 lecture-demonstrations, as part of his *vignan yatras*, to cultivate a spirit of inquiry and reform, and to promote a scientific and humane temper. Premanand and his fellow rationalists and free thinkers, also launched a magazine, *The Sceptical Inquirer*, in 1976. Published from New York, the magazine is widely circulated amongst members of scientific forums, atheist groups and secular thinkers.

What prompted his decision to take up cudgels against greedy godmen? Premanand replies, in mock seriousness, "When I was 12, I was a great believer in miracles and wanted to possess 'miracle' powers. At 19, I left home in search of God, and miracles. No one could give me a real definition of God, but I did see several miracles! Six months later, I returned, convinced that all miracles were fraudulent." He also discovered, soon enough, that all godmen had something to hide; that they could perform 'miracles' only under special circumstances. He cites an early example to illustrate this conviction. "When I was 8 years old, Professor Vazhakkunnam,

**At the age of 57, B Premanand cuts an impressive figure — he can (and does) perform amazing 'miracles', his mellifluous tones can easily hypnotise listeners. He could have been a godman par excellence, but for his scruples about practising deception.**

## FIVE WAYS TO BECOME A GODMAN

B Premanand teaches Minnie Vaid-Fera five easy godmen's tricks.

### The Vibhuti Trick:

For this 'miracle' you will need:

*One large handkerchief;*

*Several small balls of 'vibhuti'.*

(These are easily purchasable in Palani, Tamil Nadu, or from grocery shops in any other state in India. One kg of 'vibhuti' costs Rs 15. According to Premanand, approximately 10,000 devotees can "benefit from 1 kg of vibhuti".)

#### Method:

Wipe your hands in front of your audience, with your own 'special' handkerchief, which should contain small balls of *vibhuti* already mixed with *kanji* (rice water). Palm the ball in your left hand — being quite tiny, it will not be visible to the audience if you move your hand around, palm upwards, in swift movements for about 30 seconds. (At this speed, only a video camera can detect that an item is hidden in your palm.) Display your right hand, which conceals nothing, with the open palm facing the audience. Next, move your left hand, palm downwards, and crumble the ball into powder, and then bestow the sacred *prasad* into the outstretched hands of your audience.

You have now successfully 'created' *prasad* with your bare hands! Naturally, each time you wish to perform this holy feat, you must use a fresh handkerchief containing new balls of *vibhuti*.

### How To Eat Fire:

For this 'miracle' you will need:

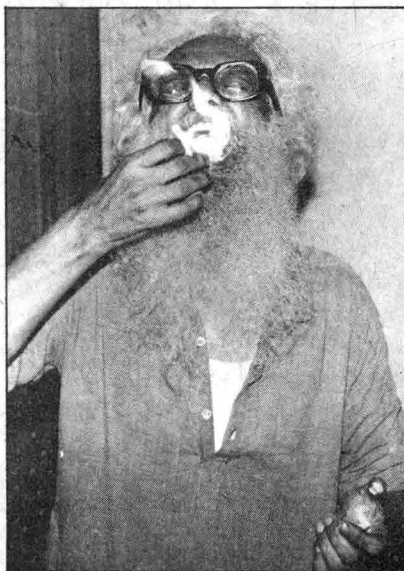
*Small pieces of pure, unadulterated camphor.*

#### Method:

Very similar to the preceding trick, this one basically operates on the same principle. Place a small piece of camphor on your outstretched palm, set it alight and move it vigorously, in rotation, as if performing



*Set alight a piece of camphor.*



*It is safe to pop it in your mouth and there! you've eaten fire!*

*aarti*. After you have swirled it around energetically for a little while, pop it into your mouth.

No harm will come to you, since the mouth is the safest place for tricks involving fire. This is so because fire only burns in the presence of oxygen, while one breathes out carbon dioxide, which immediately extinguishes the small camphor 'fireball'.

A precaution: ensure that the camphor is pure, as impure camphor will not react in the same way.

### How To Set Your Arms Alight:

For this 'miracle' you will need:

*One medium-sized, wooden stick wrapped in cloth at one end, like a wick;*

*A small amount of kerosene.*

#### Method:

This trick is extremely simple. It is based on the lesser-known fact that any surface on the human body will get burnt only if it is in contact with fire for more than three seconds.

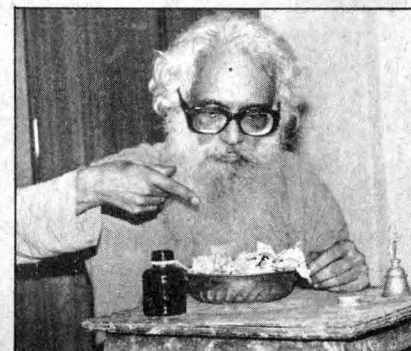
So, soak your wooden stick with kerosene and set it alight. Next, move the stick rapidly (in under 3 seconds) over both your arms. You will find that only your hair gets singed in process. Jump around frenziedly, with both arms ablaze, and shriek aloud, as if your soul were 'possessed'. And, while you do not feel any pain, your audience applauds your fiery performance.

### How To Perform 'Yagnas' And Create Fire Through 'Psychic Power':

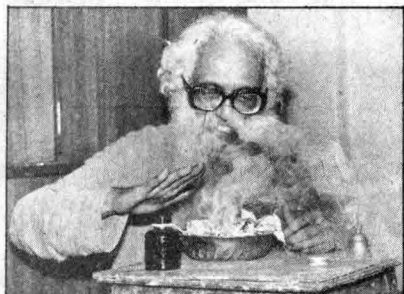
For this miracle you will need:

*Potassium Permanganate, glycerine, and ghee.*

If the *yagna* is a small one, you may use crushed pieces of paper. In



*Arrange your ingredients.*



*As a chemical reaction occurs. . .*



*Hey presto! the smoke changes to fire.*

this case, you will need 1 gm of potassium permanganate, crushed at the time of performing, to avoid oxidation. You will also need 1 or 2 drops of glycerine. The quantity of *ghee* is immaterial, you may use small or large amounts of it.

If the *yagna* is a large affair, use pieces of wood, as in any other form of *puja*. For this, you will need larger quantities of both potassium permanganate and glycerine.

#### Method:

Arrange the pieces of wood or paper into a suitable receptacle such as a *havan kund* (a triangular, metal vase-shaped structure, frequently used in *puja*). Add the crushed crystals of potassium permanganate while 'preparing' for the *yagna*. Then, with an exaggerated flourish, add a liberal amount of *ghee*, already mixed with the requisite amount of glycerine, to the wood or paper. As soon as the glycerine is added to the potassium permanganate, combustion will take place, and smoke will begin to appear.

Focus a penetrating gaze on the smoking wood or paper, and within seconds, your 'mental power', which is basically demonstrated by assum-

ing an awesome expression of concentration, and an accusatory arm flung towards the smoky wood, will then transform the smoke into fire!

Such *yagnas* are extremely common in India, and are performed with monotonous regularity to 'cleanse one's soul' or destroy 'evil spirits'. Swami Sadachari is believed to have earned a staggering Rs 85 lakh for every such *yagna* that he performed at the behest of prominent politicians, including the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi.

### How To Deliver a Shivalingam Through Your Mouth:

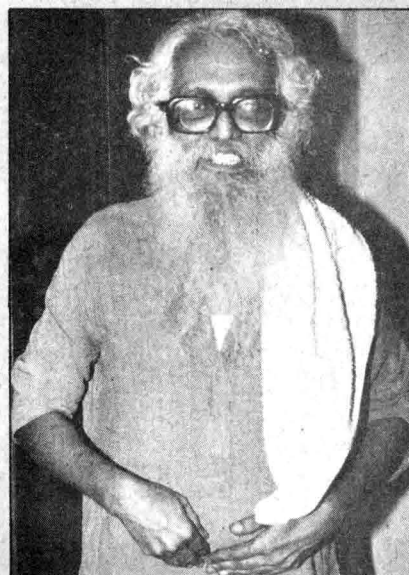
For this you will need:

*One small, transparent, pure, egg-shaped crystal of glass;*

*One small towel.*

#### Method:

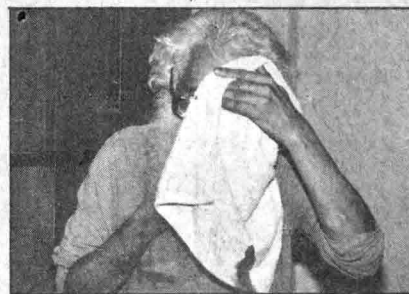
This 'miracle' is based, very simply, on sleight-of-hand. Palm the egg-shaped crystal in your left hand; then, begin massaging your stomach with both hands, as if to ease pain. Take



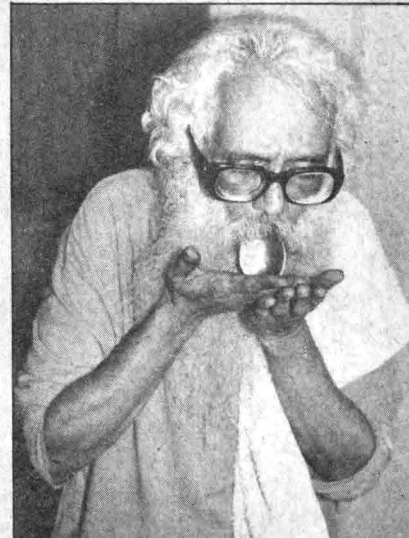
*Conceal the crystal.*

care to keep the crystal hidden from prying eyes, all the while clutching your stomach.

Next, pretend that the spasms of



*Slip it in your mouth under the towel.*



*Now produce it from your mouth.*

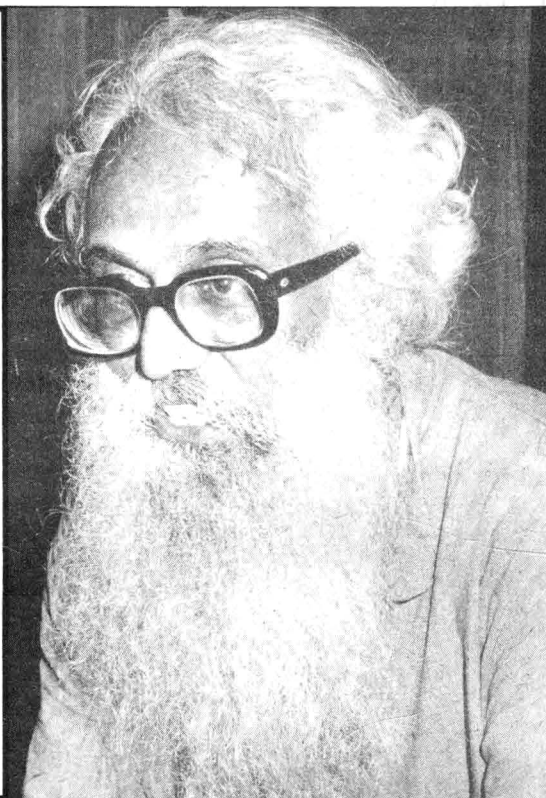


*Hold the 'shivalingam' dramatically for effect!*

pain have travelled vertically upwards to your chest.

Go through the motions of sweating profusely, and ask for a towel. Whilst wiping your forehead with the towel, quickly pop the crystal into your mouth. Throw away the towel with a flourish, and then, triumphantly, 'produce' the *lingam* from your mouth.

**Unfortunately, however, what Premanand is up against is not merely exploitative godmen, whose nefarious deeds can be easily detected, but an entire system in which people want to believe in miracles. As long as this hankering after miracles persists, Premanand's playing David to the godmen's Goliath, will not be of much help.**



a friend of my father's (who was a Theosophist), promised to show us a miracle. He invited us, my friends and I, to his home. We found him bathing in the tank in his garden. As we approached him, he splashed water at us. The water turned into bananas! Later, of course, he told us he could not do this at our tank, and invited us to visit his kitchen for an explanation. We found the kitchen empty of all bananas."

"TAKE SAI BABA," he adds, "and all those bogus claims of water turning into petrol in his hands. We challenged him; we told him to dip his hand into a dry well, during the drought season, and 'create' perennial water. After all, if one has such omnipotent powers, they should be put to good use, shouldn't they? Naturally, the challenge wasn't taken up."

Sathya Sai Baba, India's most famous godman, is Premanand's favourite *bête noire*. The feeling is prob-

ably mutual. Premanand recounts several victories in his campaigns to bait the godman. The most successful was Sai Baba's refusal to take up the challenge thrown open to him in 1976 by Dr A T Kovoov, a Sri Lankan professor, who asked him to perform a miracle and permit him to verify it. If the miracle was 'proved' beyond the shadow of a doubt, Sai Baba would be richer by Rs 1 lakh. Premanand, taking up where Kovoov left off, has reiterated the challenge. To date, Sai Baba has failed to respond. "Moreover, I've literally scared him off on certain occasions," declares Premanand with childish glee. Sai Baba, it appears, has often actually changed his itinerary on hearing that Premanand was going to examine his performance. Today, claims Premanand, Sai Baba only performs within the hallowed and 'safe' precincts of his own *ashram*, helped by almost 5,000 devotees.

In addition to giving lectures, Premanand has written booklets and

pamphlets exposing Sai Baba's perfidy and his unscrupulous means to reach a 'divine' end.

**PREMANAND'S EYES** take on a mildly militant look as he dismisses Sai Baba as "the biggest fraud in his business." While Sai Baba's miraculous powers have been questioned by several rationalists, including Dr H Narasimhaiah, ex-Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University, Premanand is the first to have taken legal action against the godman. In what was definitely one of the most unusual writ petitions witnessed in our courts of law, Premanand took Sai Baba to court last year, for violating the Gold Control Act, for supposedly making gold out of thin air, and then bestowing it on the more fortunate of his admiring devotees (See box 2). The petition, filed on August 1, 1986, at the Andhra Pradesh High Court, Hyderabad, was dismissed by Justice Anjaneyalu on the grounds that the instantaneous 'materialisation' of gold by spiritual means, did not amount to its 'manufacture'. Justifiably incensed at this, Premanand has filed a special leave petition, due to be heard by the Supreme Court later this month, specifying that any defence based on spiritual powers cannot and should not be recognised in law. He feels that if such a loophole exists, it could indeed provide blanket protection to all manner of fraud or crime.

While the outcome of this controversial appeal is uncertain, Premanand's commitment to his self-proclaimed crusade is not — where there is a crafty godman, there will be a craftier hunter. Unfortunately, however, what Premanand is up against is not merely exploitative godmen, whose nefarious deeds can be easily detected, but an entire system in which people *want* to believe in miracles. As long as this hankering after 'miracles' — which offer readymade external solutions to life's harsher problems — persists, Premanand's playing David to the godmen's Goliath, will not be of much help. ♦

# THE BOMBAY DYEING & MANUFACTURING CO. LTD.

## CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT 107TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

There is, as you have seen from the Report and Accounts for the 18-month period ended 31st March, 1987, light at the end of the tunnel. The problems your company has had to face in putting the DMT Plant on stream are behind us.

These 18 months have been difficult. In the first few months of this period, while the DMT plant was still to settle down, we were unable to sell even the limited quantities of DMT we were producing because unnecessary imports of DMT and PTA were freely allowed. Added to this was the allegation that we had imported a junk plant. Fortunately, this too is now behind us as the false propaganda has been nailed by the performance of the plant, quality of the product and our ability to sell what we produce.

Because of the wide and uninformed publicity our DMT project has received, and the 'junk' label which it was given, I feel obliged to state here some relevant facts and figures:

The 60,000 tonnes per year capacity DMT plant had a total foreign exchange cost of US\$23.8 million, inclusive of plant, equipment and all offshore expenditure. Paraxylene, the main input, is imported by the company. After taking into account the total cost of this imported raw material, your company's net contribution to foreign exchange savings through import substitution of DMT is US\$20 million per annum. The entire foreign exchange spent on the plant has, therefore, already been fully recovered as of now.

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The plant has produced, month after month, at more than 100% of its name-plate capacity of 5,000 tonnes per month — this has been achieved after taking into account maintenance, power cuts and the like. A service factor of 90 — 95% is considered good for most petrochemical plants, which in our case is between 4,500 — 4,750 tonnes, but, in fact, the total production of the plant from January to August 1987 has been 40,500 tonnes or an average of 5,062 tonnes per month. I am particularly pleased to point out that these figures and the outstanding performance of the DMT plant now confirm what we have always believed: we have bought one of the best performing petrochemical units in the country at a very favourable price.

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Of the total turnover of Rs. 330 crores registered by the company, DMT contributed Rs. 101 crores. Every single polyester fibre and filament manufacturer, consuming DMT in the country, has bought your company's DMT and has been satisfied with the quality of the product which conforms to the highest international standards.

Your company's efforts in earning foreign exchange in the traditional business, textiles, are also noteworthy. For the 18-month period under review, we exported cloth worth Rs. 37.33 crores to Australasia, Europe, America and many other parts of the world. Therefore, your company's foreign exchange contribution during these 18 months is over Rs.60 crores.

While the fortunes of the DMT industry have improved, that of the textile industry have not been so good. This industry is going through a severe crisis on account of an unimaginable escalation in the cost of all inputs. Cotton prices have gone up by as much as 100% in the current season. Sadly, the cotton shortage during this season is of our own making. The government permitted exports of cotton before the current crop was evaluated and domestic requirements met. Cost of power, wages linked to the cost of living, water and other charges have escalated at a frightening pace.

It is these circumstances that make the picture for the textile industry look none too bright. Your company, however, is better placed than most to face the difficult times ahead. We have, thanks to your Board's foresight, substantially modernised our plant and equipment, and have also established ourselves as a leading exporter of textiles from India, and to that extent, we are less dependent on the domestic market.

The company continues to modernise its textile plants and as a consequence streamline its operations. We have introduced the latest open end spinning technology at Spring Mills and are installing additional such machines. Your company, with 428 machines, has now one of the largest Sulzer weaving machines installation in Asia — 60 have been installed recently. The company is also in the process of implementing a Rs. 30-crore Modernisation Programme with assistance of IDBI's Textiles Modernisation Fund Scheme.

We are also now in the process of finalising the expansion of the DMT plant from 60,000 tonnes to 100,000 tonnes per year. We expect to conclude the technical collaboration for this shortly.

After many years of sacrifice by the shareholders because of the very modest dividends of 7% per annum, the Board this year is pleased to recommend a total dividend of 22% for the 18 month period or the equivalent of 14.66% for a 12 month period. All in all, I am optimistic that the prospects for your company for the current year will be better than last year. However, I make this statement on the assumption that no extraneous factors or unnecessary impediments are placed in our path.

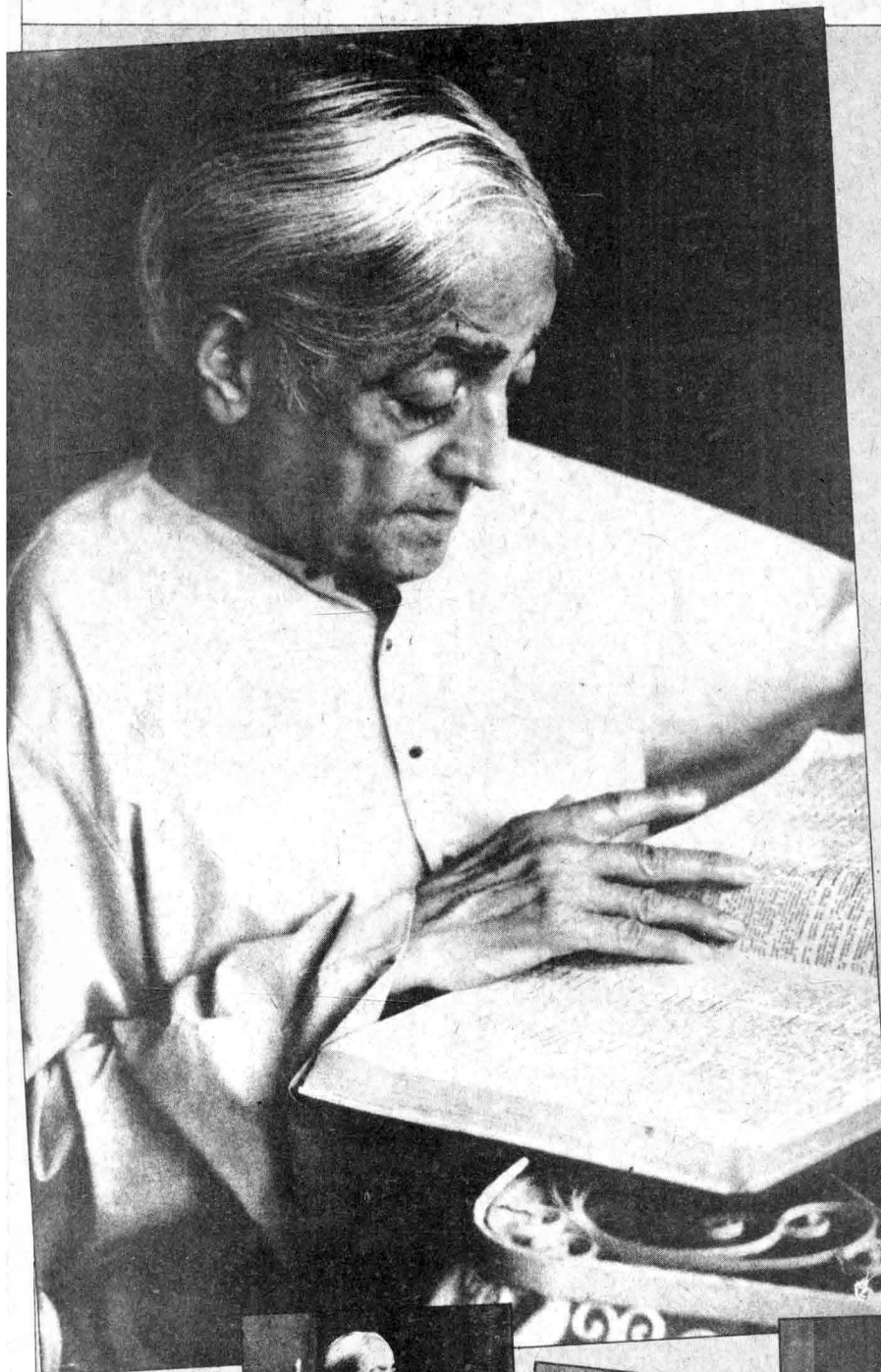
As I mentioned earlier, this has been a trying period of extreme ups and downs. It is only because of the forbearance, ability of our workers, staff and managers, that it has been possible to have achieved the results we have. I am indeed proud of the way in which they have managed the affairs of the company. My colleagues on the Board have guided the destiny of your company through these difficult times and to them I am particularly grateful. Last but by no means least, dear shareholders, we are all grateful to you for your patience, understanding and support during the past few difficult years.

Nusli N. Wadia  
Chairman

(This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.)

**BOMBAY  
DYEING** 

## EXTRACT



### J Krishnamurti: The Visionary

On the death of J Krishnamurti in February 1986, the world mourned the loss of one of the greatest philosophers and spiritual leaders of our times. But his teachings promise to inspire people all over the world, for years to come. The following extracts from "J Krishnamurti: A Biography", authored by PUPUL JAYAKAR, present him in conversation with eminent thinkers, writers and politicians.

#### On Meeting Huxley And Others

**K**RISHNAMURTI had occasional visitors. Aldous Huxley, who had settled in California, and who was losing his eyesight, walked with Krishnamurti for long hours. At times they spoke of the senses and blindness. Krishnamurti helped Huxley; the power to heal was alive. He used it sparingly and in secret, was rather shy of it, and apologised before he even spoke of it.

*Excerpts from "J Krishnamurti: A Biography", one of the first titles to be published by Penguin Books India Ltd., PTI building, Parliament Street, New Delhi 110 001.*



## EXTRACT

It was a curious relationship. Krishnamurti, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, was very shy, and, perhaps, had not allowed the limitless within him to reveal itself. Otherwise, it is impossible to understand Maria Huxley's comment on him. She said of him during the years 1938 to 1939, "He is charming and amusing and so simple. How he must suffer when he is treated as a prophet."

By the mid-1940s, Krishnamurti and Huxley had become close friends. They met often and went for long walks. Huxley talked and Krishnamurti listened. Huxley was perplexed; his formidable intellect found it difficult to comprehend the pliant strength of a mind born of perception, untainted by knowledge. In turn, Huxley listened and learned to be silent when Krishnamurti spoke of perception, of time, and of awareness. That Krishnamurti's mind interested Huxley is evident. On one of their walks, he told Krishnamurti that he would give everything for one direct perception of the truth, but his mind was incapable of it. It was too filled with knowledge. Christopher Isherwood recounts a conversation he had with Huxley. Isherwood had been telling Huxley about the instructions for meditation given to him by his guru, Swami Prabhavanand, "thus, prompting Aldous to tell me that Krishnamurti never meditated on 'objects' such as lotuses, lights, gods and goddesses, and even believed that doing so might lead to insanity."

Recalling his relationship with Huxley and Gerald Heard, Krishnamurti says, "I was terribly shy. They were all tremendous intellectuals. I listened to them. I interjected one or two statements." Later, Huxley was to write the introduction to Krishnamurti's book, *The First and Last Freedom*. In 1961, just before his death, Huxley heard Krishnamurti speak at Saanen in Switzerland. Writing to a friend, he describes it "as amongst the most impressive things I have listened to . . . it was like listening to the discourse of the Buddha — such

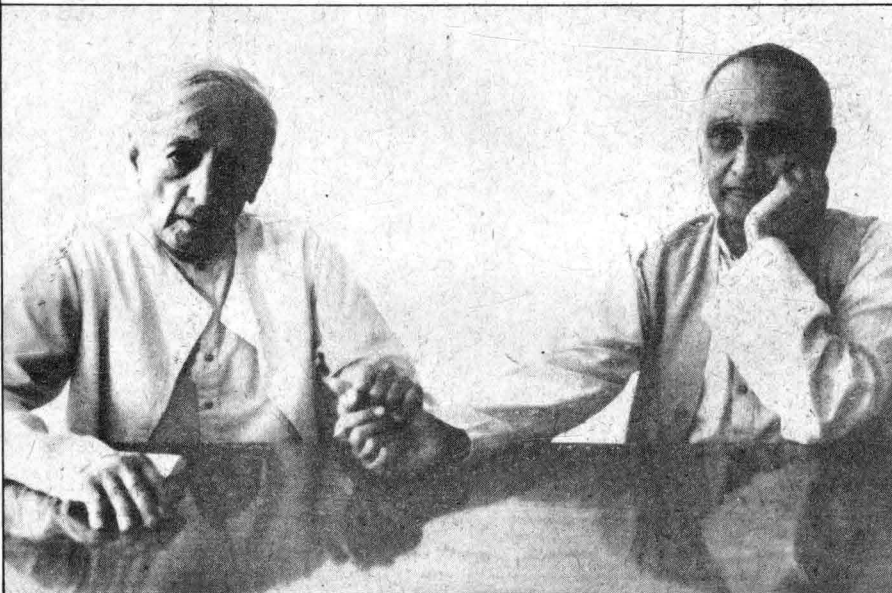
power, such intrinsic authority, such an uncompromising refusal to allow the *homme moyen sensuel* any escapes or surrogates, any *gurus*, saviours, *fuhrers*, churches."

### Disillusioned Freedom Fighters Confer With Krishnamurti

**ACHYUT WAS** an intellectual, a word that, in India, has very special connotations. He lived in an age that hailed Karl Marx as the prophet of the new awakened man, and Achyut, along with his friends, Jai Prakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev,

left Krishnamurti, and he and Rao Sahib plunged into the struggle for independence — fighting the British colonial rule, going to jail for long periods, making friends within prison walls, reading, and contemplating.

In 1938, the last time Krishnamurti was in India, before 1947, Achyut met him in Rishi Valley. Madrid had fallen in the Spanish Civil War, and Achyut was in tears. Speaking to Achyut, Krishnamurti said that in this defeat he saw the beginning of World War II. He commented that he did not see much difference between fascism and communism. Achyut



*Krishnamurti with Achyut Patwardhan, who often sought his advice.*

grew impatient with the older traditional leadership of India, which was concerned primarily with maintaining the status quo. Together, they founded the Socialist Party of India.

In 1929, when the Freedom struggle in India was at its peak, the brothers had gone to Krishnamurti. Achyut had asked, "Do you really mean it when you say 'negate all authority'?" Krishnamurti had replied, "Yes. The mind has to reject authority and examine everything." Achyut's response was that, for him, the freedom of India was the only freedom that was important. On this note he

vehemently denied this. Krishnamurti repeated, "They were both tyrannies." It was a major truth that Achyut was to realise in later years.

In 1947 he came to Krishnamurti, weary and disillusioned. With freedom, the petty urges to power that had lain in abeyance amongst Congress leaders, were surfacing. During the struggle, the anti-Brahmin feeling in Maharashtra had little vitality. The leaders, the constructive workers, the intelligentsia in Maharashtra, were mainly Brahmins. With Independence, the drives for the loaves and fishes of office, had given stimulus to the for-

mation of groups within the Congress. Very disturbed by the intrigues, and with a fractured emotional life, Achyut turned back to his roots and sought advice from Krishnamurti.

Achyut expressed his conflicts, and Krishnamurti took Achyut for a walk. Pointing to a tree, he turned to Achyut and said, "Look at that tree — the leaf that was tender green has turned yellow. The leaf has nothing to do with it. It is born, dries and falls. Any decision to stay in politics or to leave, any decision taken by choice, is wrong. Things happen in their own course. Stop fretting."

Achyut spent the next year with Krishnamurti in Bombay, Ootacamund, Poona, Delhi and Varanasi. At the end of the year Achyut told Krishnamurti that when he was with him, all his faculties were wide awake. Krishnamurti's response was, "Be careful, don't take a little of this, to gild what you already know. What you think you feel, is only a theory. On no account allow your mind to be stimulated by me." In early 1949, Achyut returned to Delhi to edit a socialist weekly; but his comrades were aware of the deep changes taking place within him, which were to lead to his final break with the Socialist Party, and politics.

### **The Seer And The Romantic: Discussions With Pandit Nehru**

**ALTHOUGH KRISHNAMURTI** was resting and in retreat, the news of his presence in Ootacamund had spread rapidly.

Jawaharlal Nehru, now the Prime Minister of India, was in Ootacamund, and I got a message from his secretary that the Prime Minister would like to call on Krishnamurti. But the problems of arranging for security were found to be tiresome, and so, Krishnaji went to see him instead, at Government House. Maurice Friedman and I accompanied him, and were present during the meeting in the Prime Minister's private sitting-room. There was an open fire, and

large bowls of carnations were placed on the tables. Krishnaji and Nehru sat on a sofa, facing the fire. The flames lit the two noble Brahminic heads, their chaste, finely-drawn faces — one from the Northern highlands; the other born amongst the most ancient southern rocks of Andhra. The faces were sculptured, sensitive, with fine translucent skin that accentuated the bones, and heightened mobility — the eyes of the seer, encompassing vast distances, emanating compassion and silence; the other, with the swift, nervous energy of an arrow. Nehru was a romantic, a man of action, with a high-

**Achyut expressed his conflicts, and Krishnamurti took Achyut for a walk. Pointing to a tree, he turned to Achyut and said, "Look at that tree — the leaf that was tender green has turned yellow. The leaf has nothing to do with it. It is born, dries and falls. Any decision to stay in politics or to leave, any decision taken by choice is wrong. Things happen in their own course. Stop fretting."**

ly cultivated intellect; concerned, committed, restless — seeking the unknown within the tangle of political adjustments.

Both men were shy, hesitant. It took some time for them to establish contact. Nehru started the conversation by saying that he had met Krishnaji many years earlier, and that he had often thought of what he had said. He had been anxious to meet Krishnamurti again. Achyut Patwardhan and other friends had spoken to Nehru at length on the profound work Krishnamurti was doing in Madras and Bombay. Nehru appeared anguished at the massacres and violence

that had erupted after Partition and Independence. He spoke of it at length; he saw the two forces operating in India, the thrust for good and evil. These forces were in conflict; if the good could not contain the spread of evil, the world would perish. Krishnamurti said good and evil were always present; while it was more difficult for the good and the compassionate to function, evil was waiting for a crack in which it could gain a foothold. It needed a great awokeness and awareness to ensure that evil could not enter and gain strength. To be awake and aware, said Krishnaji, was what would sustain man.

Nehru asked Krishnamurti whether his teaching had changed since they had last met. Krishnaji said it had, but he could not say exactly where and how. Nehru then spoke of what Krishnamurti had to say on transformation. He felt there were two ways in which transformation could be accomplished: by the individual transforming himself and so transforming his environment, and by the environment working on and transforming the individual. At this point, Krishnamurti intervened, "Isn't that the same? The two cannot be said to be separate processes." Nehru agreed. He was groping, trying to express the desperation he felt at the state of chaos in the world, and at what had happened in India in recent months. Greatly troubled, and not knowing which way to turn, he started to question, in depth, his own thoughts and actions.

"Tell me, sir," he asked Krishnaji, "I wish to be clear of this confusion within me. Tell me, what is right action and is right thought?" To us, who listened, it was the perennial question of the awake Indian mind.

There was silence for over three minutes. We were discovering that the silences that surrounded Krishnaji in dialogue formed part of communication; a silence of the mind, in which distances between the minds diminished, so that there was direct mind-to-mind contact and communication.

## EXTRACT

Then Krishnamurti spoke slowly, pausing at every word. "Right action is only possible when the mind is silent, and there is a seeing of 'what is'. Action that arises from this seeing is free of motive, of the past, free of thought and cause." He then said that it was difficult to go into this vast problem in a short time. Nehru was listening deeply; his mind appeared fresh and sensitive, capable of receiving and responding. Krishnaji leaned forward, his hands eloquent. He said that with the growing chaos in India and the world, man could only start the process of regeneration with himself. He had to begin anew. For the world to be saved, a few individuals had to free themselves of the factors that were corrupting and destroying the world. They had to deeply transform themselves, to think creatively, and so transform other people. It was from the ashes that the 'new' had to rise. "Like Phoenix from the ashes," said Nehru. "Yes," replied Krishnaji, "for there to be life, there must be death. The ancients understood this, and that is why they worshipped life, love, and death."

Krishnaji then spoke of the chaos of the world being a projection of individual chaos. The human mind caught in the past, in time as thought, was a dead mind. Such a mind could not operate on chaos; it could only add to the confusion. Man had to free himself from time as becoming, the projection into the tomorrow. He had to act in the 'now', and so transform himself.

The seer and the hero-politician spoke for over an hour and a half. The evening sky had darkened and the evening star had sunk behind the horizon, when we came out of the room. The Prime Minister saw us to the car and there was affection and grace in the parting. They promised to meet again in the winter, when Krishnaji was to be in Delhi. Later, Krishnaji, who wrote in a notebook every day, recorded these observations:

He was a very famous politician, realistic, intensely sincere, and ardent-

ly patriotic. Neither narrow-minded nor self-seeking, his ambition was not for himself, but for an idea, and for the people. He was not a mere eloquent tub-thumper or vote-catcher, he had suffered for his cause and, strangely, was not bitter; he seemed more of a scholar than a politician. But politics was the breath of his life and the Party obeyed him, though rather nervously. He was a dreamer, but he had put all that aside for politics.

### Vinoba Bhave And Krishnamurti Share Experiences

ON AUGUST 13, 1959, Vinoba Bhave and his followers visited Krishnaji.

him of his wisdom. Krishnaji appeared shy and was silent. A record of the discussions was kept by Nirmala Deshpande, who was present during the meetings, and who took down notes as the conversation took place.

Vinobaji said, "How do we start?"

"It depends on what you are interested in," answered Krishnaji.

"Life," responded Vinobaji. "Everyone is interested in life. But discussion depends on words, and words are necessary."

"Not too many words, otherwise discussion loses significance," Krishnaji replied. "Discussion implies..."

Before Krishnaji could proceed, Vinobaji said, "Sharing experiences."

"Yes, and also to penetrate deeply.



*Krishnamurti was impressed by Pandit Nehru's sincerity and patriotism.*

Vinobaji said this was the first time he had seen Krishnaji. The Gandhian pilgrim asked, "How old are you?"

Krishnaji answered, "Sixty-four."

"So you are my younger brother. I have come to pay my respects and seek your blessings. Rao and Achyut Patwardhan, Dada Dharmadhikari, and Vimla, have told me about you several times. But I am always on the move, and so are you. So, we have never met."

After the pleasantries were over, Vinobaji asked Krishnaji to speak to

Experience is limited – I distrust basing action on experiences."

"Is that because experience conditions man?" asked Vinobaji.

"Yes," replied Krishnaji, "that is why it is important to have a free mind. A mind that is not full of experience, but free to see beyond experience. One has to die to experience every day. One is always translating experience in terms of the old. As a Hindu, I translate it in terms of Shiva, Krishna – but they are just words. The division taking place as Hindu,

Muslim and Christian has to be wiped out," said Krishnaji.

Vinobaji responded, "Yes."

"You say 'yes', but it is a verbal statement. Do you cease to be a Hindu? In science, one drops past experience, to discover a new insight. From the very beginning, one should be taught to be free of conditioning as — a Hindu, Muslim or Christian. None of us let go. We only pretend to do so. One has to cease to be Hindu or Muslim; one has to be a human being. But that is very difficult. Thinking about being free leads you nowhere. First, one must be free. Freedom first, not through thinking about freedom."

A follower of Vinobaji asked Krishnaji, "What is the meaning of self-realisation?"

"What does it mean to you?" was the reply.

"Union with *Brahman* — with God," said one of Vinobaji's disciples.

"God is a phrase. To realise God, you must have a free mind, a good mind that does not follow anybody. A mind that has no *guru*, no system. Try it."

"How does one get such a mind?" came the reply.

"There has to be self-knowledge. Not knowledge of the *Atman*, but how one thinks, why one thinks — how one acts. What is the 'oneself'? I am not speaking only of the conscious self, but of the deep levels of the unconscious. What is needed is a revolutionary mind. You cannot have that by *sadhana*. If you see only through one window, your view is limited."

"Why have the majority of thinkers in India given themselves to reform? Reform is a small thing. In the small, the great can never be included. In the great, the small can be included. Whenever I come to India people ask me why I am not concerned with poverty, corruption? I ask, why don't we tackle these problems from a different angle? Surely it is the political approach that distorts.

"And why do so-called spiritual minds concern themselves with reform? Reform is not going to lead to

deep revolution."

"What do you conclude from this?" asked Vinobaji.

"Not conclude, but observe," answered Krishnaji. "There is a deep contradiction in the Indian mind. We talk about ideals, and do the opposite. We are too inhibited from becoming something because we feel we should not be ambitious. So, frustration leads to superficial reformation and we pursue that with passion. I say, act and observe the result. But tradition and the *gurus* say the opposite. In this country one sees frustration, contradiction, and the sense of being a very old race. We search for God, but we have not lived life. That may be the reason we turn to the superficial,

**"There is a deep contradiction in the Indian mind. We talk about ideals and do the opposite. We are inhibited from becoming something because we feel we should not be ambitious. So, frustration leads to superficial reformation and we pursue that with passion. I say, act and observe the result. But tradition and the gurus say the opposite."**

which we call 'reform'."

Later, on the evening of August 14, Vinobaji spoke to crowds that had gathered to hear him at Pahalgam. A different direction was present in his talk, and he acknowledged that this was the influence of Krishnaji's meetings with him. He said that men like Krishnaji were the sentinels — their voices and statements were warnings, and must be listened to with gravity. Some months later, a friend was to tell Vinoba Bhawe that Krishnaji had remarked, "Vinoba says he agrees with me, but goes on doing

his work as before. So, his saying that he agrees has no meaning." Vinoba responded, "Krishnaji is right."

Many years later, Nirmala Deshpande told me that Vinobaji had said, "Krishnamurti may deny the role of the World Teacher, negate the church built for him, deny his role as the supreme *guru*, deny being the divine Krishna; but Dr Besant could not be denied her role as Yashoda, the foster mother of Krishna."

## A Dialogue With Ivan Illich

ON NOVEMBER 27, 1972, Ivan Illich was in Rajghat. He was staying in the room at the guest house; the river Ganga in all its majesty lay before it. He was having his meals with Krishnaji, and the first meeting between the two took place in the afternoon. It was a seminal meeting of two minds; Krishnaji with an observing mind, alive, perceptive, and Ivan Illich, erudite, rational, rooted in the finest traditions of Western thought, yet prepared to listen. The river Ganga listened to the dialogue, as it had listened through the centuries, to the sound of voices questioning, listening and counter-questioning.

Although the minds of Krishnaji and Illich flowed as two distinct streams, they came together in their shared passion for transformation and the need to free man from illusion.

I introduced Illich to Krishnaji, and spoke of his criticism of modern society and his concern with restructuring society and its tools. Krishnaji and Illich discussed the chaos and corruption of contemporary education in the world. Illich spoke of his concern with liberating the individual from the illusions about what he owed society. Krishnaji had been listening, trying to contact the man behind the words. Sensing that the minds were not meeting, Krishnaji pointed to the river. "There lies the Ganga. It is flowing and all human beings are being driven by the flow of the stream — surely the individual is one who steps out of the stream. The word

## EXTRACT

“individual’ means one who is not divisible, one who is whole — not fragmented.”

Krishnaji and Illich shared a sense that compassion was essential, and that it did not demand of people that they change into “this or that”. Illich had sensed the rootedness of Indian women and remarked on it, and the danger of their losing this contact with tradition and life. He felt grateful for his own roots in certain traditions. He did not want to let go of the great help and discipline that traditions sometimes give.

To Krishnaji, however, all discipline and control was violence. It is only when man felt responsible that he was free, compassionate. Freedom and compassion were one thing. “We have tried for the last fifty years to see if a few could get out of the stream, get out without motive.” He spoke of learning as the essential factor for freeing of mind, a learning that creates its own momentum.

Krishnaji developed the theme of compassion. He asked Illich whether he saw that freedom and compassion and the sense of not belonging went together. Illich said yes, for to belong gave people the feeling of power; not to belong meant powerlessness. Krishnaji felt that to belong gave people the sense of changing, producing, acting. “Can one say, ‘Let me not belong’, and see what happens? Most people are Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, and the tradition of that is destroying them.” Illich discussed the possibility of setting up enclaves, communities outside the stream; but they agreed that historically, such communities have not worked. Krishnaji spoke of the terrible things happening in the world. He asked, “What can we do?” Illich felt that possibly it was because the world’s elite lived on a belief in the ‘better’ — better education, better health. To him the concept of the ‘better’ was a falsification of consciousness.

“You see, Sir, we are second-hand human beings — all knowledge is second-hand. To be free of the second-

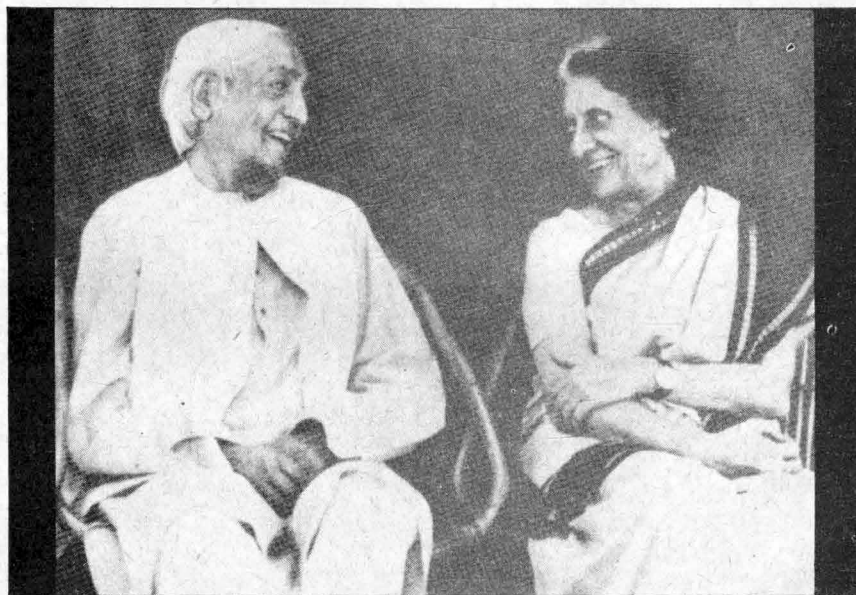
hand is not to belong to a thing — not to accumulate knowledge,” said Krishnaji.

Illich asked whether not accumulating knowledge meant immediate experience. Krishnaji set experience aside. To him, experience was dangerous. “When the mind is totally awake, why do you need experience? The whole world is concerned to experience, to acquire knowledge, to be attached within the stream and so to belong.”

Krishnaji turned to what for him was the central issue. “There has to be right perception. I would like to

It was first necessary not to belong to any society, any nation. The mind had to extricate itself. It had to be free to look, and freedom was action. The very seeing was action.

Krishnaji said that nationalism divides man. But Illich’s response to this was equally intense. He again emphasised the need for roots, which meant much more than being held in nationalism. Krishnaji said he too had roots, because he was born in India into the Brahmanical fold. That root — it might be thousands of years old — was his conditioning, but so long as the mind was so conditioned,



*Krishnamurti was deeply touched by Indira Gandhi's ability to listen.*

say to people, ‘Look, just look, don’t argue, don’t translate, don’t say this is right, that is wrong. Don’t ask how shall I live if I don’t belong. Just look — have an eye that has no corruption in it’.”

Illich’s concern was to show people what they could not do. To Krishnaji, to know what not to do, was to do the right thing.

Illich perceived this instantly. A new movement had started. He felt responsible for translating in extremely lucid terms what they were talking about, into concrete knowledge. To Krishnaji, that came later.

it was not free. It was the past as thought that essentially divided man. Thought was knowledge. “If I want to live with you in peace, thought must come to an end. That in which I have my roots prevents my relationship with you.”

To Krishnaji, observation without the introduction of thought was necessary; that alone was total action. Illich said he had begun to understand. The problem was one of language. But to him the danger was that the younger generation had lost the capacity to distinguish and to deny the false.

Drawing the strands of the discussion together, and responding to Illich's concern with roots, Krishnaji said, "When I step out of that stream, I am not fragmented, not contradictory — I am whole — the whole has no root."

Illich, however, felt the intense need for roots, he was not prepared to let go.

Krishnaji felt that without a solution to this central problem, there could be no flowering of man. The flowering had to take place. Illich felt there was little hope of solving the central problem. He was prepared to accept and live and die with something short of perfection. Krishnaji and Illich had come to a parting of ways.

For Krishnaji, Illich's response was not good enough. Suddenly Krishnaji started to speak of the central issue as an ending to suffering. He could not visualise life as meant for perpetual suffering.

To Illich, suffering had to be accepted. "Why," asked Krishnaji, "should human beings suffer psychologically?"

"Because God accepted it," said Illich.

Krishnaji was merciless in his enquiry. "Why should man suffer?" For man to accept suffering psychologically was the essence of his ignorance. Why should human beings suffer? Because they were ignorant? Because they were in conflict? Because they were contradictory in themselves?

Illich was equally passionate. He said that he believed suffering was the human condition.

"Ah, that's it," said Krishnaji.

Illich felt the need to recognise his conditioning fully, lucidly, and sensitively, and be shaped by this conditioning. But Krishnaji refused to accept that sorrow was essential to the human condition.

The two minds were face to face. Illich asked, "What does compassion then mean?"

Like a rush of water came the

reply. "Compassion means passion for all; love, Sir, does not suffer."

## Indira Gandhi Meets The Prophet

**INDIRA'S FIRST MEETING** with Krishnaji was at dinner at my house, in the late 1950s. Indira appeared shy and hesitant to speak. Krishnaji was also shy, but soon started relating anecdotes. One Zen tale in particular delighted her. Two Buddhist monks came to the bank of a river and found it flooded and difficult to cross. A woman was waiting on the

**Krishnaji turned to what for him was the central issue.**

**"There has to be right perception. I would like to say to people, 'Look, just look, don't argue, don't translate, don't say this is right, that is wrong. Don't ask how shall I live, if I don't belong. Just look — have an eye that has no corruption in it'."**

banks and she begged them to help her across, as her children were alone and hungry. One monk refused, the other picked her up and crossed the stream, holding her on his back. When they had crossed and were on their way again, the first monk protested vehemently. He was horrified that a monk should touch a woman, let alone carry here on his back. The second monk turned to him and said, "You mean you still carry the woman in your mind? I left her behind on the river-bank long ago."

In the winter of 1970, Krishnaji came to dinner at my flat. Indira Gandhi, Karan Singh, my sister

Nandini, G Parthasarathi, and Jim George, the High Commissioner for Canada, were present. The talk at the table turned to the youth of the world. Someone at the table asked, "Why are the youth in India so concerned with security?" Krishnaji spoke of a growing materialism in India; we discussed the fact that the young in India seemed to be losing their roots, turning to the affluent West for their outer and inner needs. Krishnaji asked, "Why is there deterioration in India at all levels of society?"

Indira listened, but seldom spoke. Karan Singh was in a mischievous mood, and asked Krishnaji, "Is it true that no politician can perceive truth?" Indira was listening, and later wrote to me:

... I was very glad of the opportunity of meeting Krishnaji again. His views are always stimulating. After a while it seemed as if we were all questioning him. But can the situation of the young rebels in the United States or France be equated with the situation here?

Indira had apparently made no special impact on Krishnaji. He did not comment on their meeting.

**THE EMERGENCY** had been on for over a year and, although I was aware of the strain and anguish it had caused Indira, I also knew she had been tough, turning a blind eye to many happenings reported to her. It was only by the autumn of 1976, that the anger and fear felt by the people started to reach her.

It was about this time that I spoke to Indira about the possibility of Krishnaji speaking in India, in the winter of 1976. She said, "He is most welcome to come to India and he can speak freely." She knew of Krishnaji's passionate concern for freedom; he was a religious revolutionary, and for him life without freedom was death. Krishnaji arrived in India in October 1976, and stayed with me at 1, King George's Avenue.

On October 27, Indira arrived at

## EXTRACT

my home for dinner at 7.30, wearing a sari printed in soft pinks. She told us it was her birthday according to the Indian calendar. She expressed a desire to speak to Krishnaji, and was with him in his sitting-room until nine.

At dinner, she was very silent, hardly aware of what was happening around her. Achyut, who had been passionately critical of the Emergency, was silent, even grim. L K Jha and Krishnaji did most of the talking. Krishnaji did not look at Indira, or talk to her throughout dinner. He sensed that she was vulnerable, and did not wish to intrude.

After dinner, when everyone had left, Krishnaji took me to his room and told me that Indira was going through a very difficult period. For a long time after they met, they had sat silently. He could feel that she was very disturbed. She told him that the situation in India was explosive. Krishnaji had sensed something very fine within her, which politics was destroying. He also hinted at a current of violence that surrounded her.

The next morning, the Prime Minister wrote to me to say that Krishnaji had promised to meet her again, and she wanted me to arrange a suitable time. I had telephoned Seshan, her special assistant, when suddenly at eleven o'clock a car arrived at the door with Indira in it. There were no security personnel, and it was only some time later that her escort car, with its anxious security personnel, arrived.

Indira spent over an hour with Krishnaji. She came out of the room visibly moved, and tears were streaming down her face. When Indira saw that my grand-niece, Aditi, was in the sitting-room, she quickly took control of herself, asked Aditi what she was reading, and spoke to her for a few moments. I saw Indira quietly to her car.

During the months Krishnaji was in India, he held Indira in his consciousness. He asked me many questions about her and her early life. He had been deeply touched by her abi-



*For Krishnamurti, 'the very seeing, was action'.*

lity to listen and her refusal to react or defend herself. He told me that she was possibly the only person in her position who was prepared to listen. Most people were either arrogant in their positions, and so, could not listen, or broke down under adversity and cracked up. She appeared different. He was to write to her before he left New Delhi.

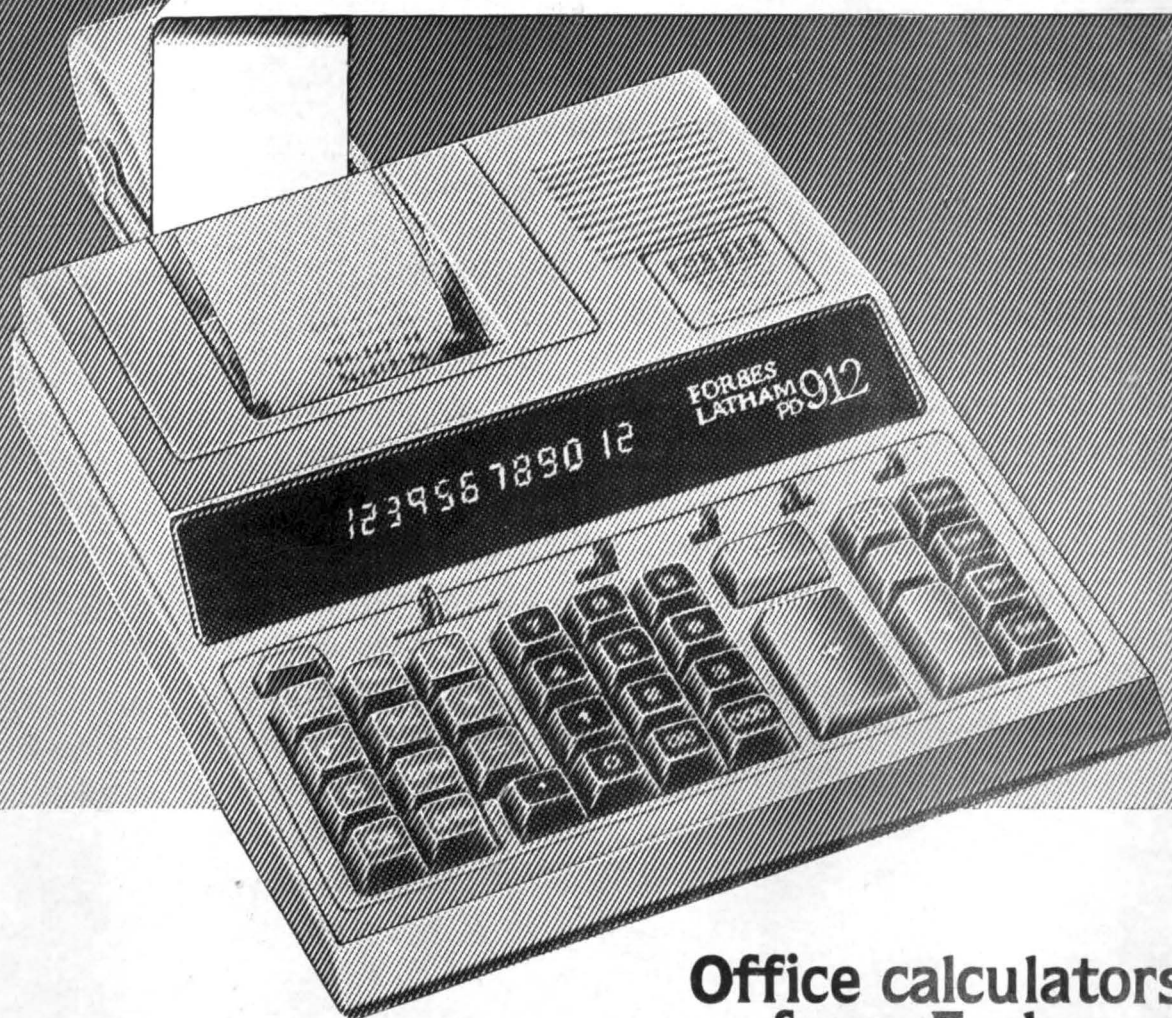
Years later, after her son Sanjay's death, I asked Indira whether she cried easily. She thought for a while, then said, "No, sorrow does not bring tears. But when I am deeply moved, especially by great beauty, I weep." She said she had cried when she met Kamakoti Sankaracharya of Kancheepuram, and that she had wept copiously when she came to see Krishnaji at 1, King George's Avenue in November 1976. "I sobbed and could not stop my tears. I have not cried like that for years." She also told me something of what had happened during the conversation. Krishnaji and she had spoken of the events in India over the last few months, and Indira had said, "I am riding the back of a tiger, but I do not know how to get off its back." Krishnaji had replied, "If you are more intelligent than the tiger, you will know how to deal with the tiger." She had asked him what she should do. He had refus-

ed to tell her, but said that she should look at the conflicts, the actions, the wrongs, as one problem, and then act without motive. He said he did not know the facts, but that she should act rightly, without any fear of consequence.

In later years, she told me that it was on October 28, 1976, the day she met Krishnaji for the second time, a frail movement had awakened in her, suggesting an end to the Emergency, whatever the consequences. She had mulled over this feeling, talked to a few people close to her, and finally took the decision to call for elections.

Krishnaji was in Bombay, about to leave for Europe, when the announcement was made that Indira had ordered the release of people held under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, and had also announced elections. Krishnaji was very happy and spoke to me at length. He told me that he would have liked to have seen her, before he left India. He was even prepared to go to Delhi, but I dissuaded him, knowing that she would be greatly preoccupied with the coming struggle. The day before he was to leave, he asked me to keep him informed about Indira. Then suddenly he asked, "What happens if she loses?"

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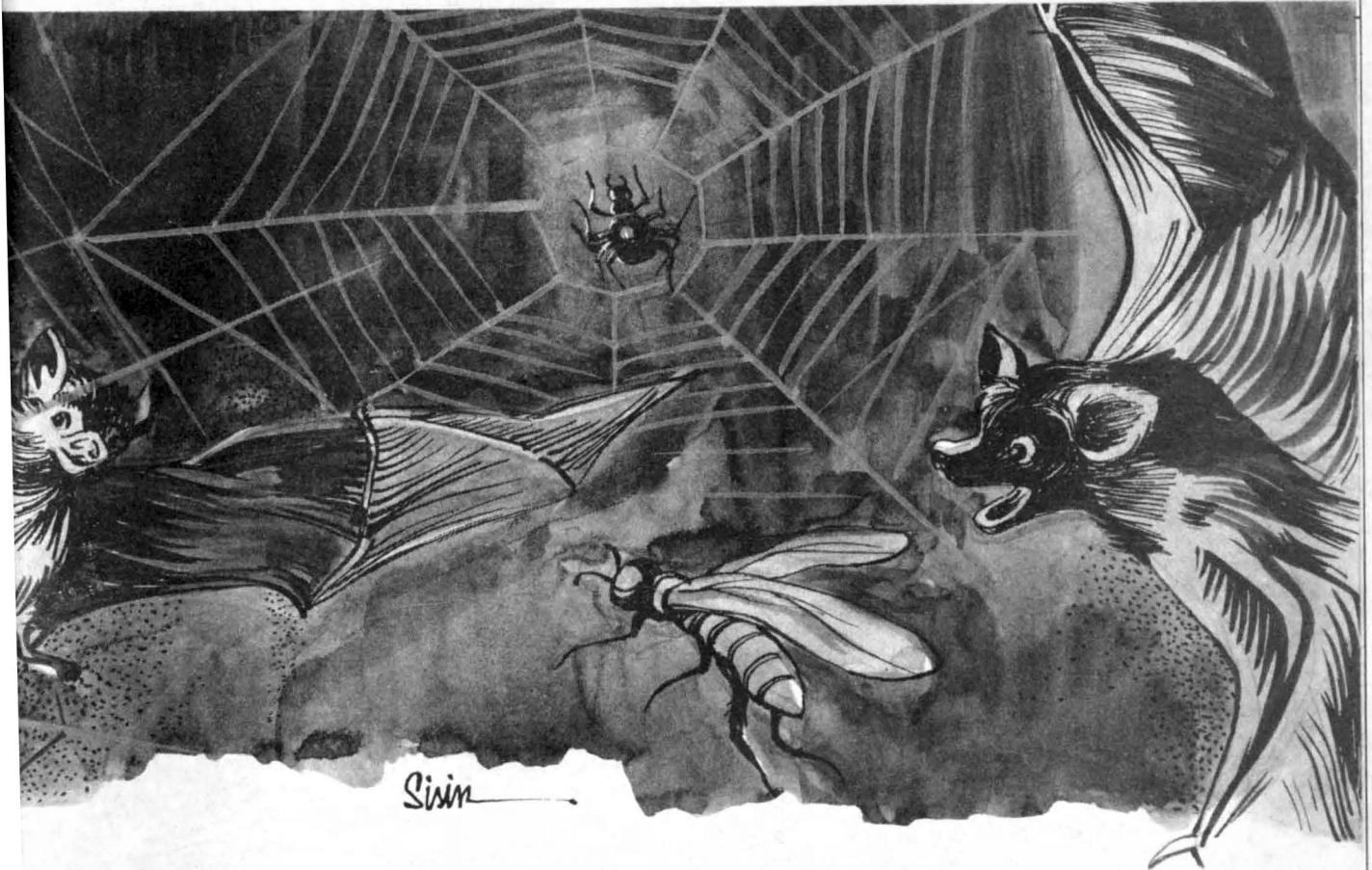
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## THE HOME-COMING

**T**HERE WAS ONCE a large and beautiful house. Although it belonged to one family, many others lived in it as well. There were not only families of other people, but also families of ants, spiders, bees, beetles, frogs, squirrels, lizards, butterflies, fire-flies, ordinary flies, rats, bats, mongooses, mosquitoes, monkeys, ducks, sparrows. . . and an elephant. Their ancestors, those of the people and of the animals, had together moved into this house, years and years ago, when it had just been built. Each one loved the house, and they all lived happily as one big family.

The bats and the birds never took advantage of an open



window to enter the house; the mongooses were careful not to knock things over; the rats never nibbled at the carpets, no matter how delicious the occasional crumbs were; and the spiders only spun their cobwebs in the sheds and out-houses. It was unthinkable for them to even go near the tinkling chandeliers, or the paintings framed in ornate gold. Each animal had a place of his own. They had come to value this more than anything else, and had, therefore, learnt long ago, not to step on each other's toes.

One day, however, something out of the ordinary happened. The bees and the butterflies were the first to notice it. Trucks of people dressed identically, in green, with green caps on their heads, were driving past the gates.

"Look! Look!" cried a mongoose. "Have you ever seen such animals before?" he asked a wide-eyed squirrel. "No, I haven't! But they do look strangely human, don't they?" replied the squirrel. "And what could they want — so many of them?"

Puffs of yellow butterflies hovered around each stranger. They could not understand a word of what they said, but they definitely did not like the sound of it. "What on earth is happening?" they all cried on seeing their leader, the elephant.

**NOW, THE ELEPHANT** was kind and loving. For the smaller animals and the children of the house, he was like

a fun-fair, with all its amusements rolled into one. Some used his trunk like a ferris-wheel, and others, his back as a slide. The little ones mistook both his tail and trunk for merry-go-rounds, while the daring somersaulted on his bar-like tusks. He was also very wise, and among other things, a scholar of languages. There was nothing that he could not and did not understand, whether it was the whispering of the butterflies, or the humming of mosquitoes. Why, he could even interpret the sharp voices of the green men in green caps: "There are things going on in the world it seems," he explained vaguely, straining his ears to make sense of the cacophony. Suddenly, straining his ear-flaps, he cried: "Good heavens! A war has started somewhere!"

"What in heaven's name is that?" asked a spider.

"Bah! So childish! Trust humans! Only they can fight over anything, and everything, even when it is none of their business. We . . . we . . . animals don't have wars!" the elephant trumpeted angrily.

"But why have these green men come here?" the animals cried in unison.

"Oh! Do stop pestering me, and let me listen!" chided the elephant, who was finding it increasingly difficult to follow the green-coats' conversation. No matter how carefully he listened, he could not discover the reason for their visit. So, taking care not to attract their attention, the elephant moved a step or two closer to them.

He stared at the green men, all grouped together in animated discussion on one side. He just stared and stared. Then, after having stared at them for a very long time, he glanced at the family which was waiting in fearful anticipation on the other side. He had barely turned his head when it finally struck him. "The shape of their noses! That's what it is this time! Would we ever, but ever fight over such things?" the elephant pondered. But, he conveyed neither his upsetting discovery nor his sentiments to the other animals.

There was no need. They had already seen the effect that the whispered words were having on their beloved friends. The children were frightened, and while the head of the family stood ramrod-straight, everyone could see that he was broken-hearted. Upset beyond words on seeing their friends suffer so, many of the animals broke down and sobbed bitterly.

**THEN, THINGS HAPPENED** quickly. Huge locks were hung on all the doors and then sealed in white cloth, in the presence of the head of the family. The entire family collected together in front of the house, carrying suitcases and trunks. Before long, more trucks appeared, and the family, whose house it was, left. A cloud of dust rose behind them, as their car drove out of the gates.

Barely had the dust subsided, when the green men moved in. They pitched tents in the compound, and settled down to what seemed like a long visit.

"This is a very serious matter!" the elephant informed the animals gathered by the well, late that evening. "These green men may be guards who have been posted here until the war is over, but, in any case, we will have to be careful. It won't be long before their minds turn to mischief. We are now responsible for the house, we *shall* protect it," explained the elephant, speaking slowly and simply to make himself understood.

They were well-equipped to perform that mammoth task, for, you see, the animal elders knew all there was to know about the house. They knew, for example, that it had great treasures. Not just ordinary treasures like jewels and sacks of gold, but unique ones, quite unlike anything that could be found elsewhere.

Behind the locked doors, stood a child's cup carved from a piece of the moon, and bottles made of camel gut, full of perfumes which were hundreds of years old. There was a sword whose blade, it was said, could cut through anything in the world, yes, anything! There were ancient books, which did not look like books, and held great secrets. Then, there were treasured items whose beauty the animals had appreciated more than the family had done. They were especially proud of the golden ball of amber, which had a prehistoric insect trapped in the middle. The insect still glowed, no one had ever seen anything like it. People, in short, had gossiped about this treasure for generations, and so had the animals.

After the elephant's lecture that night, hundreds and thousands of spiders sidled into the grand rooms through the keyholes, for the very first time. "How sad," they bemoaned. But, oh! Did they not love every minute of it! Before the night ended, under the supervision of the lizards, they had spun cobwebs everywhere — across the paintings, the chandeliers, and the mirrors which reflected some of the treasures.

Never before had so many animals enjoyed themselves so much. Bats of all sizes came in droves through the ventilators. They hung themselves all over, except over the beautiful carpets. All the winged animals and insects — the birds, butterflies, moths, flies, and bats — whipped up a small dust storm, so that it was not long before the main rooms were covered in sheets of dust.

Soon the rooms were an awful sight. It was actually quite frightening to see the dust, the enormous cobwebs and the bats; and to hear the eerie orchestra of insects, the hurry-scurry of rats, and above all, to listen to the hooting owls. Night after night, and day after day, the animals worked industriously behind the locked doors. Yet, the work was really all play. The animals were having a ball!

Meanwhile, the green men were idle, and getting increasingly bored with each passing day.

**THEN, ONE NIGHT**, when there was no moon and it was very still, what the elephant had wisely foreseen, happened. The bats, who were on duty, did not think it was necessary to wake any of their colleagues. They just watched, carefully. They saw a short man, with a football-like belly, shake his companion, who was fast asleep. "Get up! Get up! I know how to open the front-door lock. Let's go in before the others wake up." "Oh yes, yes! Let's go!" agreed the rudely roused man, sitting up in a fluster, and rubbing his shiny, greedy eyes. He was much taller, and had a face which resembled a burnt potato.

Carrying a lantern, they noiselessly broke the seal and opened the lock. They knew that they would not be able to make the lock appear untampered with, but they did not care. It was just too good to be true — to be able to walk into a treasure-trove in the dead of night, with nothing and no one there to stop them.

Strangely, they were both uneasy and having second thoughts about the smoothness of the operation ahead, when, all of a sudden, they bumped into each other. Both had been trying to enter the door at the same time! "Don't be so impatient, man!" the short man ordered. "Let me go in first."

Once in, it was quiet, and very dark. "What a foul smell!" said the potato-faced man, crinkling up his nose. "Don't be so ridiculous! What does the smell matter?" retorted his companion. "There are treasures here . . . that's what matters!" He whispered these words, careful not to alert the treasures to their presence.

"Whooooooooooooooooo . . . Whooooooooooooooooo . . ."



"What was tha-that?" potato-face whipped around in fear. The owl moaned slowly and deliberately, in reply.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, an army of rats attacked their legs; tiny sparks moved through the air towards them in single file (how were they to know that these were just lovely fire-flies?); huge bats stirred the dust on either side; and then, without prior warning, the insects struck up their orchestra, when their conductor, the grasshopper, gave them the sign.

Oh! It was worse than any nightmare. Both the men believed that they would not live to see the dawn of a new day. But, somehow, they came out of the room, *somehow*, neither of them could ever remember how. All they knew was that the word 'treasure' now sent such shivers down their spines, that they would almost pass out whenever they heard it. They never dreamt of treasure again, and no one ever went near the rooms until one cold day, when a young boy ran up the steps and tried to peep through the front-door. The lock hung there, just as the two men had left it.

The birds on the roof and in the trees, and the other creatures from here and there, all watched this little boy, who had come to the house with an older man, by car. The man's manner and appearance resembled a school master's. He appeared a little cross, and walked very stiff and very straight.

"Oh! They're back, they're back!" the beetles cried. "Yes, yes, they have returned home! How I hoped that I would live to see this day," the old elephant said, with a huge tear in his eye. They had just celebrated his hundredth birthday. "We have work to do! They mustn't see the sight we have deliberately created over the years. That just wouldn't do! We have to prepare for their home-coming," the elephant continued in excitement.

**SO, ONCE AGAIN**, the animals gathered to receive their instructions. In no time at all, platoons of different animals moved into the rooms. The birds worked especially hard

this time. They flew through the cobwebs until they had brushed them all away, and beat their wings madly, so that the dust rose from everything. The bats gave up all thoughts about taking their morning siesta, and joined in to help. But, they were very wobbly because they were so sleepy. Yet, they had to do their bit of work since many wings were needed, because the animals had overheard the older man tell the young boy that they would be returning tomorrow with the rest of their family.

When the job was finished, the rooms, although still a little smelly and dusty, and with traces of cobwebs here and there, looked lovely once again.

"I was playing by the fountain," the man informed his son, while entering the house (with the animals discreetly looking on with pride), "when those men in green uniforms drove in through the gates. I don't remember very much, I must confess. I was, perhaps, younger than you are now. . . But, I remember that Father took it all very badly." The man paused, and then, with a nervous laugh continued: "Well, well, we're back again. Just as well we didn't bring the others with us. I've been thinking. . . don't you think we're better off where we live now. . . we can't possibly live here! I suppose we'll get something for this if we sell it. . ."

The boy left his father's side, as his talk was making him impatient. He ran around the rooms, eagerly investigating them. But not even a minute had passed when the boy returned, shouting excitedly. "Father! Father! This is a magic house! The rooms are full of treasures!" The man only looked at his son, more cross than before.

"Father," the boy continued, his enthusiasm undampened, "when I peeped through this door earlier, all that I saw was cobwebs and bats. . . and . . . and there was a . . . a horrible stench!" The boy was breathless with excitement.

"Come on! Let's have a look," his father said, infected by his enthusiasm.

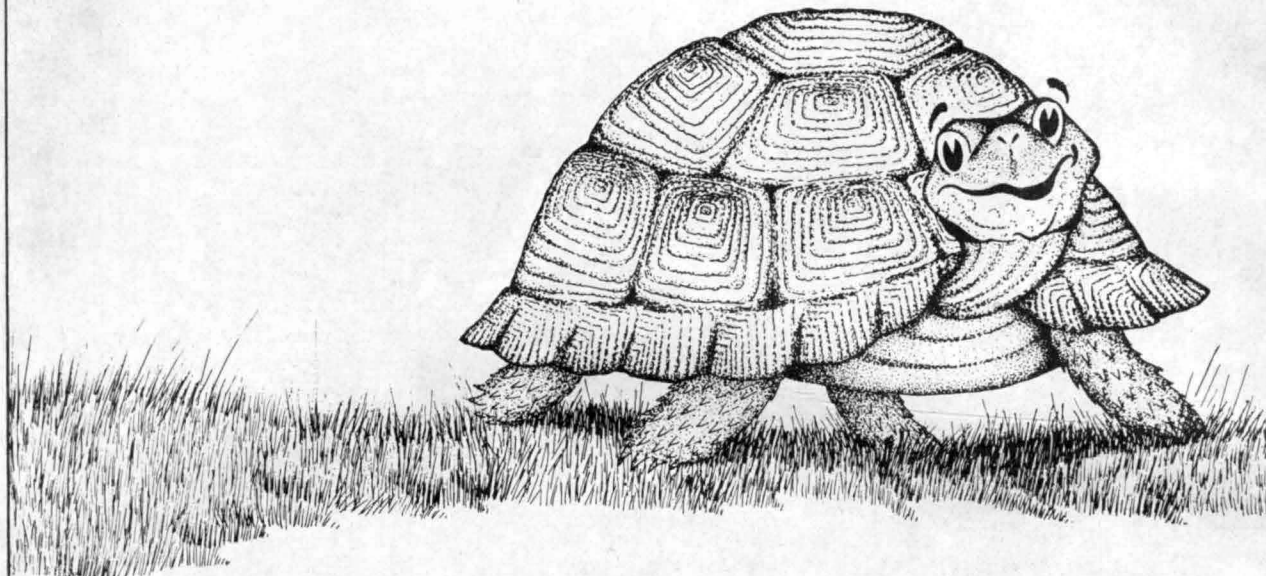
**THEY WALKED INTO** the spacious hall together. For several moments, the man stood stock still. Only his eyes moved, and they looked surprised. "Well! I must say!" he exclaimed, taking a deep breath. He then turned to his son and said: "Now, my dear boy, I expect you to remind me to thank the guards. They've really been exemplary! The house is in as good a condition as we left it!"

The boy glared at his father in disbelief for a moment or two, and then turned away. He knew that it was not the guards who had guarded the house. He continued to watch the tiny sparrow in a far corner of the room, who, all the while they had been chattering, had been bravely attempting to gather cobwebs. Occasionally, a little 'ping' sound could be heard. Then, all of a sudden, the little sparrow flew away. She had tried so hard, but some cobwebs still clung stubbornly to the crystal-bird bursting with light.

The boy laughed in delight. In fact, he was moved to tears.

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