

MARCH 1988 Rs 6

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Miss India!

TIKAIT: A ONE-MAN CRUSADE
BHISHAM SAHNI DEFENDS TAMAS



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AN IRRESPONSIBLE APPOINTMENT

AS THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA, Mr Rajiv Gandhi is entitled to hack and pack his players as it pleases him. Any number of times. That is his prime ministerial prerogative. However, his recent and 23rd reshuffle of men and women around him to his Council of Ministers in less than 40 months of soft administration, begs a question one must reluctantly ask: Is he serious about doing the job we have elected him to do?

Some heads of important ministries have been changed upto four times in less than four years. More disturbing, persons found unsuitable to lead in the states have been brought to the Centre. Thus, Motilal Vora is plucked from Madhya Pradesh and put in charge of Civil Aviation, and Health & Family Welfare. Reliable reports say that Mr Vora had no clue he was to be put in charge of these portfolios. Bindeshwari Dubey is removed from the Chief Ministership of Bihar and, more disturbingly, appointed the Minister for Law and Justice. At a time when the judiciary is clogged, and obtaining justice in the courts, even in the highest court, has become extremely difficult, Mr Gandhi appoints a man who commands little respect in the country. Understandably, Mr Gandhi has not given us any inkling of the new minister's credentials or his suitability for this crucial post. However, Mr Bhagwat Jha Azad, who has replaced Mr Dubey as the Chief Minister of Bihar, has done so (although indirectly): "The state administration is a total mess. . . I have been told that the sons of some influential persons are involved in all sorts of criminal activities. . . I will try to bring back work culture in the secretariat and the government offices. . . Corruption is on the increase. . . I want to warn the mafia that they are not bigger than the government. . ." Implicit in this description of the state of affairs in Bihar, by the man now chosen by Mr Gandhi to lead that state, is the condemnation of the man who was in charge there for almost three years and the man Mr Gandhi has foisted on us as the country's Cabinet Minister for Law and Justice. During Mr Dubey's Chief Ministership, the Bihar administration was reduced to a total mess, criminal activities increased, the work ethic was lost in the secretariat and government offices, corruption increased and the mafia grew to such an extent that Mr Azad compares its clout with that of the government.

The Direct Taxes (Amendment) Bill 1987, a voluminous bill running into 189 clauses and which is supposed to reform our entire tax regimen, was rushed through both Houses of Parliament in less than 4 hours. Even ordinary citizens going through the Bill have discovered lacunae that will not withstand even simple scrutiny when examined in the context of the ordinary rights of citizens and the framework of our laws under the Constitution. There are legal problems in the Punjab imbroglio. There are disputes

in Centre-state relations. The Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill 1986 which was not signed into our statute books by Giani Zail Singh remains locked up by the new President. Several ministries seeking legal advice from the Law Ministry receive confused and conflicting advice. The law and order apparatus has collapsed. In this situation, Mr Gandhi gives us Mr Dubey to preside over the Ministry of Law and Justice! One can only hope that after Mr Dubey's accomplishments in Bihar, his appointment as the Law Minister is not deliberate.

As it is, there are signs that the government is vindictive and acting almost lawlessly. Anybody who has followed the sequence of events in the *Indian Express*-Gandhi Government confrontation can see evidence of this in its persecution of the newspaper group. In the short span of a few months, the government has launched more than 160 prosecutions against Mr Ramnath Goenka and his newspaper companies. The manner in which the judges of the High Court in Bombay and of the Supreme Court have dealt with some aspects of this matter reflects very poorly upon the government.

Another glaring example of lawlessness involves the controversial duo — Chandraswami and his aide, Kailash Nath Aggarwal. Government officials recently raided a clinic in New Delhi and arrested Chandraswami on the pitiful charge that one Mr Pathak, a Non-resident Indian, had complained to the Indian High Commission in London that Chandraswami had taken US\$100,000 from him on the basis that he would obtain for him a Government of India contract, but had failed to do so. Indeed it would be reasonable to assume that it is Pathak who had committed an offence against the Government of India and it is he who needs to be hauled up, if that is possible. The offence committed by Chandraswami is yet to be established, but in the meantime, it is obvious that the government has used its might and power to nail him. Observers of the shady happenings in New Delhi and the role Chandraswami has been playing on the international stage cannot but conclude that the government is lawlessly using any excuse it can to contain its detractors. In the midst of all this, the appointment of Mr Dubey is not very propitious for the cause of law and justice, and as I have said earlier, one hopes that nothing more than inept handling is responsible for the recent appointment of Mr Dubey as the Minister for Law and Justice in India.

*

IN HIS 2-HOUR LONG BUDGET SPEECH on February 29, 1988, Mr N D Tiwari, the Finance Minister, referred more than ten times to his leader, the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, for having said or done this and that, or for

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Cover transparency by Gautam Rajadhyaksha.

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Union (BKU), a non-political organisation, has taken UP and the entire nation by storm. SHEKHAR GHOSH reports from Meerut, talks to Tikait and to his principal detractor, UP Chief Minister, V B Singh.

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HEALTH FOR ALL? Every six minutes, a child dies in India, of preventable diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery etc. Malnutrition, water-borne diseases and most importantly, insufficient alloc-

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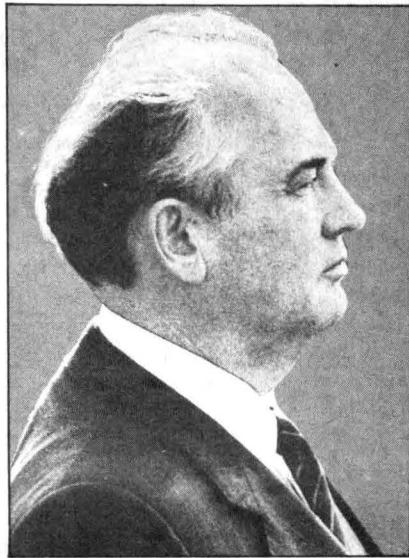
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LETTERS

Farewell To Arms?



Apropos the article 'Disarming Manoeuvres' by Graham Hall (**Imprint**, February '88), I feel that the two superpowers should destroy *all* nuclear weapons and stop all tests. They cannot act as 'super cats' and threaten other nations, especially the lesser-developed and developing countries. We cannot afford to have a nuclear war nor can we afford to be silent spectators while the superpowers arbitrarily decide the future of humanity. They have no right to demand or threaten other nations to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Billions are wasted in the search for peace. Ironically enough — through arms. Is it possible to stop fire with fire? The superpowers should try and look beyond, for the sake of future generations. They cannot impose their 'isms' on other countries and create civil wars therein, to find markets for the weapons they produce. Let humanism prevail and all other 'isms' die for the sake of human survival.

S A Srinivasa Sarma
Bombay

A Helping Hand

Kudos to Minnie Vaid-Fera for her thorough reportage and sensitive depiction of the tribulations of Bhopal's

gas victims (**Imprint**, January '88). It moved me to tears and to a deep awareness of my own helplessness. I would, however, like to send a cash amount to a family/families on a monthly basis till they receive compensation.

Might I also suggest that you follow up your good work, by giving your readers guidelines as to how they may respond effectively to 'The Fire Within' and mitigate the sufferings of the forsaken gas victims?

V P Nagarwala
Bombay

A Welcome Ban

With reference to the special report on Amniocentesis (**Imprint**, February '88), the Maharashtra Government's move of passing the much-needed bill banning sex-determination tests, deserves to be appreciated. Between the years 1978-1983, after the legalisation of abortion in India, people



ruthlessly misused these sex-determination tests. An estimated 7,800 female foetuses were aborted. If this state of affairs continues, very soon men will find themselves being compelled, by circumstances, to give dowry to get married!

Panna Lall Mundhra
Calcutta

Back To The Future

Hats off to **Imprint** (February '88) for publishing an off-beat feature — 'Predictions'. It was a treat to share the assessments and foresight of eminent people from all walks of life — an exhaustive selection.

Judging by the predictions made by the galaxy of stars, it is obvious that most of them hold an optimistic view of the Indian political scene. However, irrespective of the positive and negative predictions, we should realise that each individual contributes to the constructive development of the nation. Predictions may prove true or false, but it is ultimately upto the people to decide their own destiny and that of their nation.

R Harish
New Delhi

Setting The Record Straight

With respect to the section on Jammu and Kashmir in your 'Regional Round-up' (**Imprint**, January '88), we would like to clarify a few points:

1. Your article says: "While Farooq Abdullah cracked down on fundamentalists, beginning by closing all schools run by fundamentalist organisations, the MUF continued its secessionism without much success..." The state government has taken no such action of closing schools run by the Jamait-Islami, although Dr Abdullah did say that, if required, such schools would be closed.

2. You have also said: "Furthermore, Farooq Abdullah's decision in October to end the "durbar move" — approximately a century-old practice of transfer of the Secretariat from Srinagar to Jammu in winter — provoked furious protests in Jammu. Meant to maintain the power-balance between Jammu and Kashmir. . ." However, the state government did not issue any such order. It only kept a few offices permanently located in Srinagar and others in Jammu while continuing the century-old practice of shifting, every six months, the Governor's Secretariat, the Civil and

Legislature Secretariats, the High Court Of Judicature and the Public Service Commission.

*Director General,
Information, Public Relations
and Tourism Publicity
Jammu*

Imprint Replies:

At the very outset, it is necessary to clarify that for a round-up feature, the writer *has* to rely on secondary sources of information, viz, mainly press reports from responsible newspapers, magazines, and other published sources whose authenticity is more or less proven.

The first statement in question, regarding Dr Farooq Abdullah's decision to shut down all schools run

by fundamentalist organisations in Jammu and Kashmir was made in a report in *The Telegraph*, April 6, 1987, by M J Akbar (bylined).

The second statement regarding the decision to end the *durbar* practice is more tricky. It can be a matter of interpretation whether the move on the state government's part to stop moving certain departments from Srinagar to Jammu implies an end to the *durbar* practice. In this case too, most national English language dailies (eg *The Statesman* in its editorial of November 18, 1987 and *The Indian Post*, December 12, 1987, in an Insight feature by Kuldip Nayar) specifically used the words: *decision to stop the century-old annual practice of moving...*

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I, D S Sanvordekar, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated February 28, 1987. Signed by the publisher, D S Sanvordekar.

ON THE MARQUEE

(Continued from page 1)

having inspired Mr Tiwari to include this or that feature in the budget he was presenting. Yet, there is no mention of family planning or birth control in Tiwari's oration. The minister went out of his way to praise Indian workers and their achievements. Yet, not a word was said about the poor productivity, over-manning, and indiscipline which has afflicted much of Indian industry today, and which shortcomings together make our economy a high-cost guzzler of resources. The newspapers have described the budget as 'an election budget'. Between election budgets and election manifestos, the real problems confronting the nation and its people get shelved. Who cares?

*

FOR A NATION OF 800 MILLION PEOPLE, a projected deficit of just under Rs 8,000 crore is by no means an astronomical sum as some commentators allege. The sum represents just a fraction of what is generated in the parallel economy and is only thirty times what the Finance Minister said preventive agents had seized by way of contraband. The management of a deficit even larger than Rs 8,000 crore can be handled by a reasonably competent administration, but in the hands of the present government, the deficit could spark off inflation.

*

HOW MUCH ARE WE SPENDING on security in Delhi, the Punjab, the Northeast, and, as a consequence of our involvement, in Sri Lanka? If you were looking for an answer to this question in Mr Tiwari's 25,000-word long speech, as this writer was, you would have been disappointed. The Finance Minister has deliberately kept us in the dark. Newspapers have carried reports suggesting that the actual strength of our forces deployed in Sri Lanka far exceeds the number admitted to by government officials, and that expenses thus incurred run into Rs 10 crore per day. The government has denied neither the unofficial figures (estimated to be 1,07,000 troops) nor the daily cost. Neither has it confirmed them. This only pushes one more area of fiscal accountability into a 'grey' area.

*

ALTHOUGH MR RAJIV GANDHI had quite early on in his tenure as Prime Minister told us that he had broken several conventions, nobody was really prepared for what happened in the Rajya Sabha on February 23, 1988. According to news reports, the Prime Minister, by his presence and silence, colluded with and encouraged two of his junior colleagues, Mr P Chidambaram and Mr Rajesh Pilot, to confront the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and the Vice President of India, Mr S D Sharma. Parliament watchers have now pointed out that the special mention the Telugu Desam MP, Mr P Upendra, made in the Rajya Sabha and which the Chairman permitted, was similar to the one he had made in the Rajya Sabha last year and which had been allowed by the then Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the pre-

sent President of India, Mr R Venkataraman. Congress culture today is such that the recent shameful incident has provoked not a single resignation from the government or from the legislature — both of whose members are sworn to uphold convention, tradition and the sanctity of the House in which they meet to deliberate.

*

A CLUE TO THE OBSTACLES the Minister of State for Home, Mr P Chidambaram and his ministerial colleague, Mr Rajesh Pilot presented in the Rajya Sabha to Mr P Upendra's mention of the Andhra Pradesh governor, Ms Kumudben Joshi's expenses, can be found in the backgrounds of the six governors Mr Gandhi has suddenly appointed in the states of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, Haryana, Bihar and Rajasthan. The role that the Tamil Nadu governor, Mr Khurana, recently played in Madras and the role that Ms Kumudben Joshi has played in Andhra Pradesh, is obviously the kind of role that Mr Gandhi would want his new governors to play, just in case. There is a method in what some of us perceive as being the ruling party's madness.

*

NOBODY WILL GRUDGE what the Finance Minister is giving away in the budget to the farmers of India. From 1947 onwards, vast sums of money have been earmarked and spent on agricultural and community development. However, large parts of these funds have leaked in the course of their passage from Delhi to the state capitals and finally to the villages. At least in light of the recent agitation by the farmers, the government ought to establish mechanisms to ensure that the subsidies and benefits go directly to the farmers and not to the fertiliser manufacturers and the pump-set makers, not to mention the political middlemen.

*

ALTHOUGH NO ACCURATE FIGURES are available, people familiar with the development of the agricultural sector, aver that market produce to the value of Rs 5,000 crore is allowed to rot because of lack of storage and cold-storage facilities. A bold Finance Minister would have seriously considered substantial investments to prevent such grave losses and provide storage facilities instead of granting mere subsidies to the farm sector.

*

IN A BOUNTIFUL MOOD, the Finance Minister has listed workers, the poor, exporters and importers as recipients of benefits in the coming fiscal year. Curiously enough, the 3,00,000-odd Indians who work in adverse conditions in the Gulf and who remit approximately Rs 3,000 crore a year in foreign-exchange, do not even merit a mention in Mr Tiwari's calculations. The treatment that these foreign-exchange earners receive on their return to India either while on leave or on completion of their contracts abroad, leaves much to be desired. ♦



Miss India!

The Sridevi Phenomenon

She is stupendous, sexy, captivating, the darling of the masses. The undisputed numero uno of the silver screen, Sridevi reigns supreme, the star amongst stars. Why is Sridevi consistently at the top? How does it feel? What lies behind that alluring face? MINNIE VAID-FERA begins an arduous trek to discover the 'real' Sridevi.

COVER STORY

T IS A MAD, mad, mad, mad world in that peculiar fiefdom — the Hindi film industry. Where a select caucus commands, quite literally, the lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of devoted slaves dancing to their master's tune. Where the 'stars' are the only people that count, and everyone else is *persona non grata*. Where the hero or heroine's smallest, silliest observation is met with hushed reverence, the slightest command with instant compliance. Where obsequious fawning is the order of the day. For an outsider, the bizarre unreality of a commercial film set evokes utter incredulity and disbelief. Is there a method to this madness? Apparently so, because the Indian film industry is the largest in the entire world.

Pandemonium reigns on the first-floor corridors of Film City Studios (in the Goregaon suburb of Bombay), where Sunil Hingorani's *Ram Avtar* is

being shot. Half the corridor forms a part of the film's sets — a hospital, with large signs (the ever-ominous 'Operation Theatre'), green screens and white walls. Filmstar Sunny Deol lies prone under red hospital blankets. Since his contribution to the scene being shot consists of merely maintaining a death-like stance, one presumes he is snatching forty winks intermittently. From time to time, he surfaces to groan dramatically, "Hai Rabba!" (Oh God!) — the words are, however, not part of the script, and signify only his obvious boredom and discomfort. The room is claustrophobic, teeming with a handful of stars, director Hingorani, the camera crew, the spot boys, make-up men, still photographers, sound technicians, star secretaries, and determined groupies (star-gazers and autograph hunters). "Yahan pankha aa gaya tha, galtise," says Sunny sarcastically and a relay race ensues. "Fan chalu karo!"

says one voice, "Fan on!" says another, and another and another. Finally, the fan is switched on by some underling, who probably belongs to the lowest rung of the ladder of production minions. Every 15 minutes or so, this weird charade is elaborately played out — "Silence!" screams a stocky figure in white, probably the production manager, judging by his solicitous offers of "Tea, coffee or cold drink?" "Silence!" several voices roar in unison.

In the welcome silence that follows, an unshaven, barefoot, unkempt Anil Kapoor takes his cue and rushes to Sunny's bedside. An intravenous drip of what looks like congealed purple blood, an expressionless nurse and a benevolent doctor are the props of this particular 'shot'. "Doctor Saab?" chokes Anil, clutching the lapels of the helpless doctor, frantically. A sombre shake of the head and the doctor vanishes. Anil freezes.



The snake dance: a 'must' in every film.

So does the camera. This two-minute shot is finally recorded for posterity after about 10 rehearsals and an equal number of 'takes'. Director Hingorani, wearing a bizarre striped shirt and a perpetual frown, relaxes momentarily, and then goes over to a corner where a slim girl in a red *bandini* sari is quietly watching the proceedings.

A SMALL PIQUANT FACE (with typically South Indian features), heavily made-up with incredible eyelashes, a high-pitched voice and large, liquid eyes. Sridevi: Miss India, the silver screen's most alluring sex goddess, the No 1 heroine of Hindi commercial cinema for almost four successful years, the female Amitabh Bachchan, the totem of *oomph*, the only heroine whose presence affects the price of a commercial film . . . It seems rather a long list of superlatives for the demurely-clad, almost sedate figure, patiently awaiting her turn to face the whirring cameras. For the superwoman — the *femme fatale* — she is projected as being, Sridevi is remarkably unassuming, perhaps even dull. Apart from sporadic and friendly bursts of conversation with her *Mr India* co-star, Anil Kapoor, or her sister Srilata (dripping diamonds wherever she goes), Sridevi maintains a fairly low profile with absolutely no traces of arrogance or 'starry' behaviour. She signs autographs good-naturedly, greets visitors, hums to herself occasionally, sips from a tall, steel glass and stares into space pensively. Is this really the stuff legends or sex symbols are made of?

"*Sriji, shot taiyar hai*," whispers an obsequious voice, and she gears up for a scene that is almost identical to the earlier one — the same breathless rush towards Sunny's bed, the shocked gasp, the streaming tears, the frozen expression. She walks towards the bed and kneels beside it while Anil maintains his stricken pose.



The titillatingly tempting Hawa Hawa in 'Mr India'.

An age-old, clichéd drama is then enacted. Sunny stares at Sridevi glassily, holds out a hand, gingerly clasps Anil and Sridevi's hands together, tries heroically to rise and promptly slumps back, presumably dead, after this exhausting performance. Anil and Sridevi dissolve into tears and each other's arms while the camera dollies up to take an overhead view of the 'emotion-packed' scene. "This," Sridevi's obnoxious secretary, Hari Singh, informs me conspiratorially, "is the climax scene." It is also,

according to him, the reason for ruling out any possibility of an interview with his illustrious employer that day.

IF THIS WORLD OF make-believe is nauseatingly sordid, film secretaries — if Sridevi's Hari Singh is an example — are even more so. A unique species of *homo sapiens* — rude, insufferable, arrogant, with tiny minds and enormous egos — their envied proximity to the stars transforms them into larger-than-life caricatures,



Dilip Kumar: Thespian actor

Untapped talent is surging within Sridevi. I have worked with her in only one film, but I must say that she is a very fine actress who can play a gamut of roles.

Sharon Prabhakar-Padamsee: Stage-actress and Singer

I think it's the sense of fun that Sridevi puts into her acting that gives her the 'touch-me-not-I-am-a-heroine' look. I admire her, and hope that her roles don't become too predictable, but that's what usually happens...



Vijay Anand: Leading Film personality

If you could define Sridevi's magic, then everything would be solved. Sridevi has a screen presence which no other girl has today. Earlier, actresses like Geeta Bali or Mumtaz exuded such charisma — a real-life presence. Sridevi has got the knack of projecting her personality on the screen. Other girls may be very talented, but they lack this knack.

ACCOLADES GALORE!

Leading Film personalities talk to SANJAY A SAYANI about Sridevi.

Shashi Kapoor: Actor and Producer

I don't consider Sridevi very beautiful, but I do think she is very talented. She gave me a very difficult time — I wanted her to dance in my film, instead, she led me a merry dance!

Gulshan Rai: Producer, Distributor and Financer

She is a fantastic actress and really the No 1. No one can attain such heights without merit. After all, crores of people see her films and they are the right judges.



Rekha: Actress

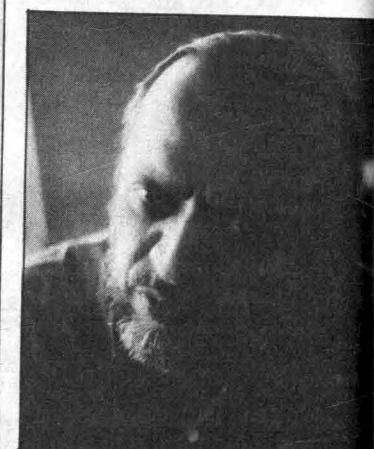
I am not the No 1 actress in India. Sridevi is.

Ramesh Sippy: Film Distributor

We have distributed the maximum number of Sridevi's Hindi films, and strictly, from the box-office point of view, she's the only heroine who commands a draw on her own. As for her screen presence, there is some magical quality about it, quite inexplicable — a kind of an omnipresence.

Simi Grewal: Actress and Film-maker

I think Sridevi's terrific and mesmerising on the screen; she's a bundle of talent. I really enjoy watching her films.



Shyam Benegal: Director

I have seen only one of Sridevi's films — *Mr India* — and I think she was terrific. She has a lot of vivacity and energy, a wonderful mind and a very exceptional sense of timing. She is obviously a good actress. I would cast her, if I had the opportunity.

Govind Nihalani: Film-maker and photographer

Bhai magic to *hai*. If I have a role in my film that demands her kind of personality, I would like her to do it.

**Amit Khanna: Producer and Director**

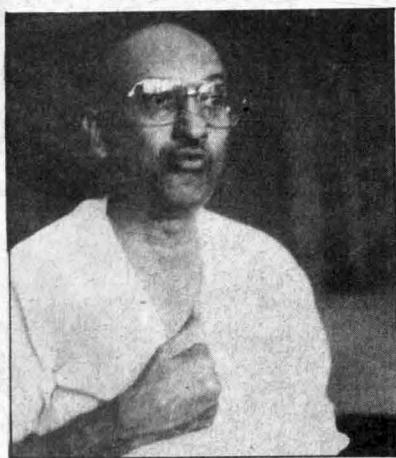
Sridevi is beyond doubt a competent actress. But her charisma prevails chiefly because there is a lack of adequate competition.

Sujata Mehta: Actress

I think Sridevi is a successful combination of talent and glamour, and that is the secret of her super success.

Javed Akhtar: Poet, Script, Story and Dialogue Writer

The secret of her success lies in the average Indian male's deprivation.

**Manmohan Desai: Director**

It is undeniable that Sridevi has what is really called 'star charisma', and unlike so many others, she knows how to use it. Unfortunately, I have not been able to cast her in any of my films, and sometimes I do wish I had . . .

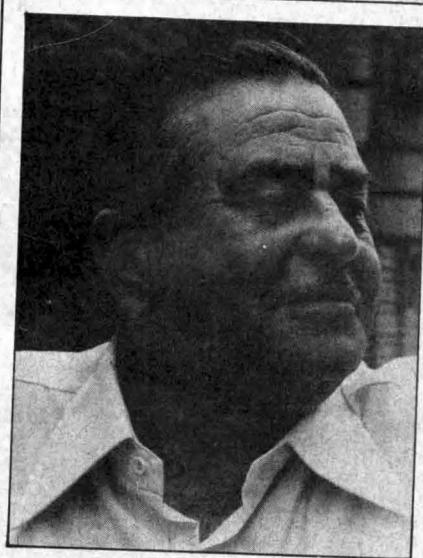
Shekhar Kapoor: Actor and Filmmaker

I think Sridevi is a very good actress. It was a great pleasure working with her. Her basic appeal lies in putting a lot of innocence in the things she does — things which would look vulgar if done by other actresses, but she gets away with it. In the yester-years, Mumtaz had this appeal.

As for her famous Charlie Chaplin role in *Mr India*, I conceived the role only after discovering that she really had a flair for humorous roles, while working in *Joshilay* with her. Her sense of timing is perfect and so together we worked out the gags.

**Soni Bhatt: Actress**

Ever since I saw Sridevi in *Sadma*, one of her earlier Hindi films, it was apparent to me that she was tremendously talented. And she has proved it! She is one of the top actresses today, and she deserves every minute of it!

**Raj Kapoor: Thespian film personality**

Bahot badhiya hain ji. She is young, beautiful, lively and very versatile — a real livewire. There is no problem about me casting her, but I must have an appropriate role to offer her. She is also a brilliant comedienne.

**Kiran Thakur-Singh-Kher: Actress**

I think Sridevi is just super. She's got a certain magic in front of the camera and flirts with the lens. I like the way she comes alive on the screen with her smile actually reaching her eyes. She's beautiful; she has a very proportionate figure . . . she is just very, very, very good!



With Mithun Chakravorty: a popular duo.

basking in reflected glory. Hari Singh is dressed in white, with greasy, slicked-back hair, and flashes *paan*-stained teeth in a transparently false smile. "I've told Madam (Sridevi) about your request but she is very busy today. Try after 18 days — that's when she will be shooting in Bombay again." The refusal is casual, the tones indifferent, despite the fact that the appointment has been specifically fixed after about 25 telephone calls and endless letters. How about talking to her in between shots . . . or perhaps at lunchtime? "You see, she has to prepare before giving a shot, and after lunch, she has to listen to the script." That insincere smile again and

Singh walks away, presumably to eat his lunch.

Slices of papaya and salads are ceremoniously ushered into Sridevi's make-up room by a puny attendant carrying huge, steel tiffin-boxes. I join the hordes of stragglers, visitors and unit-hands standing in the corridors, gawking whenever a small slit through the door gives them a glimpse of the superstar. Perhaps superstars eat differently. The crowds in the corridor and on the sets are, in fact, another fascinating phenomenon. The star-struck visitors who troop in, to pose with filmstars for a much-valued memento or an autograph, seem harmless enough, or merely silly. It is

the groupies — the many unit-hands performing some menial chore or the other — who behave like mini-dictators, shooing people away, issuing terse commands, puffed up with a sense of exaggerated importance, simply because they 'belong'. Sleazy-looking men with sleazy expressions.

In this instance, they do a better job of protecting Sridevi's privacy than ten Hari Singhs. "Madam is resting," — the obliging slit in the door reveals 'Madam' reading a copy of *Screen*. The ritual of lunch, 'rest', story-sessions over, Sridevi emerges from her lair. Clearing my way through the human wall flanking her, I approach her. She has no knowledge of any interview being fixed and stares at me, wide-eyed. "I can't talk to you today — we're shooting the climax! And I will feel bad if I keep you waiting," she warbles in heavily-accented tones. The sentiment, while doing her credit, is a delayed warning. Having watched her emote (run, gasp, freeze, cry and finally collapse — without *any* dialogue) for six hours, we reach a compromise. She will *definitely* grant me an interview, same time, same place, 18 days hence.

TWO WEEKS LATER, the tedium begins afresh. Phone calls, reminders, requests, pleading, cajoling, threatening with faceless, nameless identities who lack the basic courtesy of relaying, recording or even listening to a message. "Sridevi is sleeping . . . eating . . . shooting . . . away . . ." the voice barks, at regular intervals. Is this her sister, mother, hairdresser, assistant or friend?

Finally, Hari Singh gets the message and responds in the by now familiar fashion: "Madam is shooting for four films every day, she can't see you." I give up on Hari Singh as a bad (in fact, appalling) joke and trapse up to Film City Studios again, with fatalistic optimism. This time, the director is the classier, super-successful and debonair Ramesh Sippy, and the film being shot is *Zameen*, a multi-starrer with Vinod Khanna,

Rajnikant, Sanjay Dutt, and Sujata Mehta in addition to Sridevi.

A so-called 'rustic' scene is in progress, with a domed temple and several thatched huts forming the background. A bevy of garishly-dressed village belles, sporting blazing greens, yellows and blues and gaudy pancake make-up, rehearse dance steps under the expert guidance of an obese lady who cuts a truly comic figure, miming what are supposed to be graceful movements. An equal number of village lads with *daflis* (small hand-drums) hover around, awaiting their turn. Jostling past these 'villagers' and the ubiquitous groupies, I spot Sridevi in the distance. She is in full regalia — glittering in a heavily sequinned, red-gold *ghagra-choli* with masses of costume jewellery adorning every conceivable portion of her slim frame. She 'walks in beauty' and regally takes her place at the centre of the milling crowd. A minion rushes after her with an umbrella to shield her from the blazing sun. As the sound recordist plays the line (of the song) being shot, the little square suddenly comes alive with vigorous dancers, a vivid intermingling of bright colours and, of course, the sensuous movements of Sridevi who dances almost effortlessly, mouthing the words with a vivacious expression on her mobile face. The transformation is indeed startling. As so many film journalists have observed, the shy, reserved, aloof exterior undergoes a fascinating metamorphosis, once the camera focuses on her. She appears to have an almost schizophrenic personality — dumb and demure one minute and tantalising and sexy, the next. "She's pure magic," enthuses Sippy who has been closely watching the rehearsal.

WHILE SRIDEVI RELAXES in a deck chair in the shade, Sippy continues the eulogy. "Sridevi is the stuff superstars are made of — a combination of several factors. How many people possess that quality of magic that sets them apart? Take Bachchan,

for example. He does it all — comedy, emotional dramas, fights, the do-gooder acts etc. No one can do it *all*, better than him, can they? It's almost the same with Sridevi. She's glamorous, a fabulous dancer, with a sense of timing, a flair for comedy — a volcano of talent. . ." he pauses for breath. Distracted by a minor detail, he resumes what has become a litany. "Her style is lovely, you just have to know how to guide it, channel it. She's sensuous and yet, certainly not vulgar." He seems determined to project her as a paragon of cinematic virtues. (Sridevi's Hari Singh could pick up a few hints.)

Is there *any* trivial or insignificant flaw in the work of this wonderful superstar, I ask apologetically. "Well, her major (perhaps *only*) weakness is her voice — she lacks confidence in her dialogue delivery and her diction isn't too good," says Sippy thoughtfully. That, however, is no deterrent for Sippy (as with hundreds of other producers and directors) who is planning a heroine-oriented film with Sridevi. Naturally. But Sippy is not through yet. "Sridevi sells like no other actress," he says frankly. "I do believe that casting Sridevi in a film

affects its price, and ultimately, its popularity," he continues. "She is everyone's first choice," he drives the point home, with redundant emphasis, because, by now, one has been inundated with a long list of Sridevi's formidable assets.

WHAT IS THE SRIDEVI MAGIC that has millions drooling? What is this mindless, insensate adulation? She swishes past, sinks into a chair and recognises me: "Today I will talk to you." My gratitude and relief know no bounds. I tentatively try to pin her down to a specific time, but one cannot have everything! She goes through her routine — the same dance steps to the same line of the same song. Instead of the obese lady, this time, Sippy himself acts out the shot, waving an imaginary *dupatta* in the air, simulating some kind of sensuous ecstasy. Sridevi nods in comprehension. It is, after all, what she is expected to do in almost every film of hers.

While this comic miming goes on, Rajnikant, dressed in sober white *khadi*, is almost asleep in his chair. Sujata Mehta, also in fancy (rustic) dress, chats sporadically with who-



The vivaciousness, the glamour, the magic . . . the list goes on.



Enter the female Amitabh Bachchan.

ever is sitting next to her. "Aren't you taking any interviews," she asks me plaintively, and is clearly disappointed by my foolishness in not interviewing her. Little Master Antarksh (of *Buniyaad* fame), resplendent in a *dhoti*, *kurta* and jacket, runs around disconsolately, rebuffing all attempts to alleviate his obvious boredom and sullen mood. What a drab existence for a six-year old! Sridevi is back in her chair and discusses the finer points of the scene with Sippy. By now the words of the two lines

being shot are indelibly engraved in my memory — "maine darpan dekha, mujhko dekh darpan bola."

Despair begins to steal over me and I approach her again. "Oh, yes, let's talk," she agrees, flashing the famous Sridevi smile. A smile that had prompted a leading national weekly to proclaim (in a review of *Mr India*) that the merest quirk of her eyebrow resulted in a collective orgasm among theatre audiences. I am intrigued at the extreme sexuality she is supposed to exude and begin

questioning her. The all-too-brief interview, conducted inside the sham temple, with loudspeakers blaring the *darpan* lines again, is unquestionably, and extremely, difficult. Not because Sridevi cannot converse fluently in English, but because she *genuinely* seems to have nothing to say about anything! Even about her own roles, career, likes, dislikes, interests etc. Persistent questioning elicits brief, staccato replies, eloquent shrugs or total incomprehension. Close upfront, her immaculate face is expressionless in its vapidly. And her simplicity and reticence (in sharp contrast to her screen image), her tolerance and total professionalism are equally obvious characteristics of an apparently dumb personality. Excerpts from the interview:

Imprint: You have retained your No 1 position effortlessly, and despite cut-throat competition, for a fairly long time. What makes you so unique? What do you attribute your phenomenal success to?

Sridevi: I believe in hard work. It is very rare for anyone to have both glamour and talent. A little bit of luck, and all this put together, makes me so successful.

You have been in the acting profession since you were five — a child artiste. You could not have known then that acting was your forte, so how did you strike it so big?

I liked dancing as a child. My uncle launched me into films. I had never planned anything. Later, I was quite comfortable in the South films, till the Padmalaya unit approached me for *Himmatwala*. I had done *Solyaah Saawan* earlier, the Tamil and the Hindi versions.

But much earlier, as a child, did you not miss out on a normal, carefree childhood? School, fun and games, friends?

Not really (*smiles broadly*). I was a very lonely child (*she means that she liked to be left alone*). I liked being with my mother.

Do you believe that acting is an acquired art? That it can be learnt, improved upon, from film to film?

No (*emphatically*). Acting cannot be taught. I have seen actresses whose work continues to be hopeless after any number of films. And I've seen girls whose first films are outstanding. Acting should come from within.

You have stated elsewhere that you would like to do serious roles with

serious directors. Who did you have in mind and how do you choose a film anyway? On the basis of your role, the director, the banner or the money?

The director, first and foremost. Then my role. Because a director can make a bad character into a good one. (*She is referring to her roles.*) I have done serious films like *Tohfa* and *Nagina*. In fact, I have worked with almost all the top directors.

Any favourites?

All (directors) are my favourites. I would like to work with Raj Kapoor as well.

What about favourite co-stars, male and female?

(*Laughs*) Don't put me in trouble.

Favourites aside, who were the people who inspired you the most in this profession?

I liked South Indian films — I liked

The Success Story

JYOTHI VENTAKESH traces Sridevi's career.

SRIDEVI AYAPPAN was launched into the celluloid world at the tender age of five, in 1963, in the role of Lord Murugan in the Tamil film *Thunaivan*. That was perhaps her most memorable role as a child artiste, as following that, although she acted in quite a few films, including some with MGR, she went largely unnoticed.

It was in K Balachander's film, *Moondru Mudichu* (1976), that she made her debut as a leading actress, with Kamalahanan and Rajnikant as her co-stars. The film was a box-office hit and was instrumental in helping her gain a foothold in the Tamil film industry. However, her career in the Tamil film industry remained largely undistinguished and the most significant Tamil film she starred in was *Pathinaru Vayathinile*. To make up for her lack of success, she tried her luck in Telugu and Malayalam films. *Vettagadu*, in which she co-starred with NTR, was one of her more successful Telugu films. But as far as Malayalam films were concerned, she never graduated from the C-grade slot, and seemed destined to star in erotic, soft-porn films like I V Sasi's *Aalinganam*.

Sridevi's debut in the Hindi film industry was rather unobtrusive. Her first role in a Hindi film was that of a

kid-sister in *Julie* (1974) which few would recall. In 1980, she played the lead role in *Solvah Saawan* but the film, another in the erotica genre, was such a disaster at the box-office that Sridevi left the Hindi film industry embittered, vowing never to return. She plunged headlong into Telugu films and co-starred with popular actors like Shobhan Babu. But unbeknown to her, her relationship with the Hindi film industry had not quite ended and in 1983, Raghvendra Rao of Padmalaya Films offered her the lead role in *Himmatwala*. In spite of her resolve never to return to the Hindi film industry, Sridevi reluctantly accepted the offer. The rest is history.

With *Himmatwala*, she became a celebrity overnight — the heart-throb of avid film buffs. Following her spectacular success, she was deluged with offers and starred in a quick succession of films — *Tohfa*, *Mawaali*, *Karma*, *Aakhri Raasta*, *Jaani Dost*, *Nagina*, *Mr India* are only a few of her runaway hits.

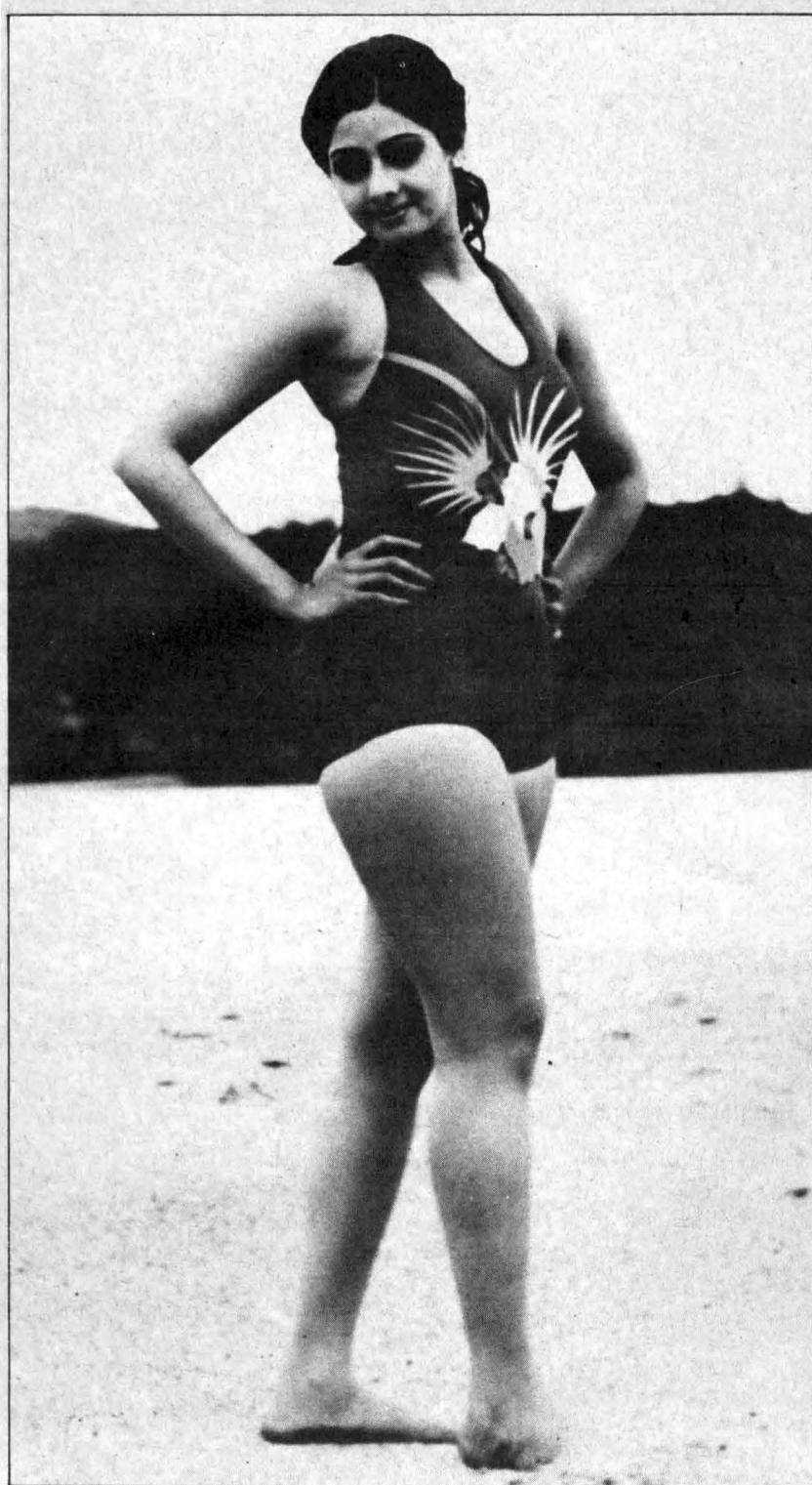
Although she has nearly two hundred films in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada to her credit, she has starred in only thirty Hindi films during the last seven years — an average number of four films a year.

With Amitabh Bachchan, she has

worked in *Inquilaab* and *Aakhri Raasta*. Currently, she is working in a record number of films with Vinod Khanna, but none with Amitabh because producers feel she has overpriced herself and that it is not feasible to make a Amitabh-Sridevi starrer. *Chandni*, directed by Yash Chopra, *Chamatkar*, directed by Harnesh Malhotra, *Garajna*, directed by K R Reddy, *Farishtay*, directed by Anil Sharma and *Zameen* directed by Ramesh Sippy are some of the films in which she has been teamed with Vinod Khanna, who talks of her in glowing terms. "Even when Ramesh Sippy asked me to pack up after the day's shooting, I stayed back on the sets because I wanted to observe Sridevi at work. She mesmerises her co-stars whenever she does a dance number on the sets. She is a fabulous person to work with," he gushes.

Obviously, her incredible popularity has given her the power to command exorbitant fees and the hike has been rapid and phenomenal! From approximately two to four to six to eight, and now to Rs 18 lakh — the highest price ever quoted by any actress! Previously, only Rekha had demanded and received an outrageous Rs 11 lakh. But Sridevi, the numero uno of the industry, has outpriced everybody!

COVER STORY



Oozing sex appeal: in the box-office hit 'Himmatwala'.

MGR. I've worked with MGR in many films when I was a child artiste. Of course, in those days, I didn't know he was a superstar or anything. But I remember he was very conscious of his looks and his figure. I was only six or seven then, yet he would give me tips on how to become a heroine and tell me that I would make it big.

After MGR's death, have you been keeping in touch with what has been happening in Tamil Nadu? Do you support Janaki Ramachandran or Jayalalitha?

I'm not interested in politics at all, not even in Tamil Nadu politics.

Have you worked with Jayalalitha in any film?

Yes, as a child star.

What about NTR? I believe you have worked with him in quite a few films?
Yes. He was very reserved and professional but an absolute gentleman.

Industry people claim that you charge an exorbitant price for a film?

If they are ready to pay me that much, to repeat me in their films, why not? All my producers want to repeat me in their films, so doesn't that mean they are willing to pay?

Ramesh Sippy has just compared you to Amitabh Bachchan. How do you feel about that?

I don't know how to react. I am very happy to be compared with Mr Bachchan.

You seem to follow an extremely hectic schedule, apart from commuting from Madras to Bombay several times a month. Are you not exhausted by this pace?

Yes, I keep going outdoors (*for outdoor shootings one presumes*). Then I work three shifts, two for shooting and one for dubbing. I work from 9 am to 11 pm and I can't cut it down. I can't afford to let go. But to get something, you also have to lose something.



Today Sridevi outprices everyone at a staggering Rs 18 lakh per film.

Your privacy, for instance?

Yes, I would like to go shopping or to see a film, or to swim. I love swimming but where can I go to swim?

You can build a pool in your house.
Yes, I will do that.

Do you not resent the continual pressure of your fans? Do you feel claustrophobic with all that mass adulation?

(Horried) No, no, no. How can I be angry with my fans? I owe my happiness to them. I am here because of my fans.

What about familial ties? Do you miss home?

Not really, because my mother or my sister always travel with me. I keep five days in Madras every month for my family. I miss my home-cooked food though. I like ice-creams and milkshakes.

Any other interests?

Painting, music. . .

What kind of music?

Soft music. I like seeing horror films

on video. I also like photographs.

Taking them or seeing them?

(Nods impatiently) I have no time to go around with a camera and take pictures.

Who do you like to shoot?

I shoot pictures of my family. . .

And children?

And children.

Do you have any friends in this industry?

(Emphatically and soberly) No friends. Not one. This is a professional scene — we come, do our work, go back. Anyway I have always liked to be alone. I'm not talkative and I take time to open up.

You have been at the pinnacle of fame and fortune for such a long time. Do you feel you have achieved everything and cannot climb any further? Any other ambitions or unfulfilled goals?

Well *(considers the question thoughtfully)*, I have done good films. But I am not satisfied as an artiste. I have

yet to feel that I've done something. And this doesn't mean only heroine-oriented roles — any good role.

Like Mr India?

Yes, *Mr India* was a good experience. They left me free to make suggestions and I really freaked out. *(The expression sits quaintly on her conventional features.)* And it was the first time I did comedy.

Having dominated the scene for so long, can you see anyone taking your place? A successor to the one-and-only Sridevi?

I haven't seen the work of today's newcomers so I can't really name any successor.

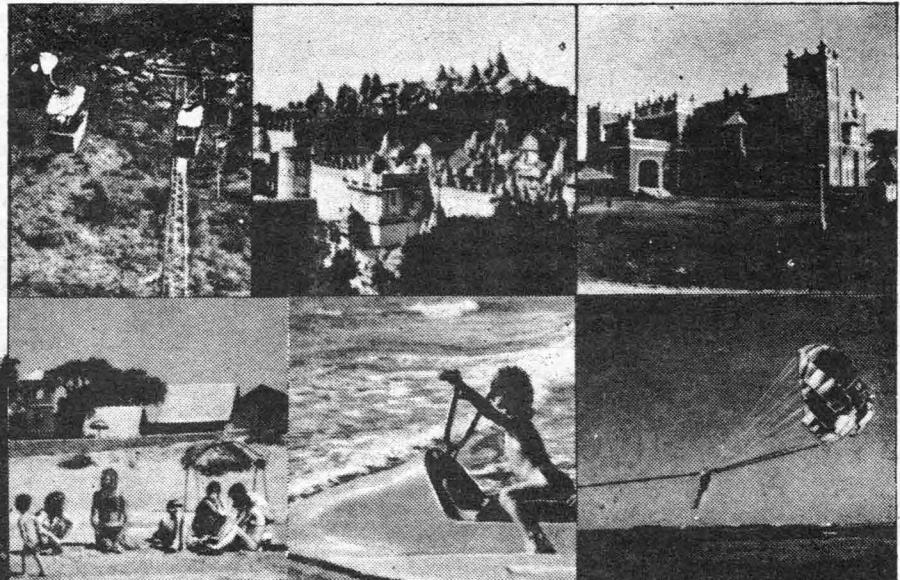
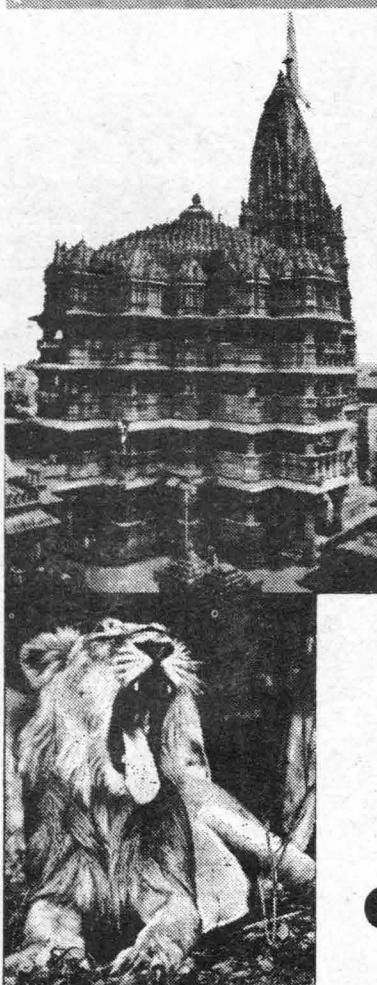
But you would like to settle down at some stage?

Of course, I would like to settle down, get married. I want to stop working so many shifts.

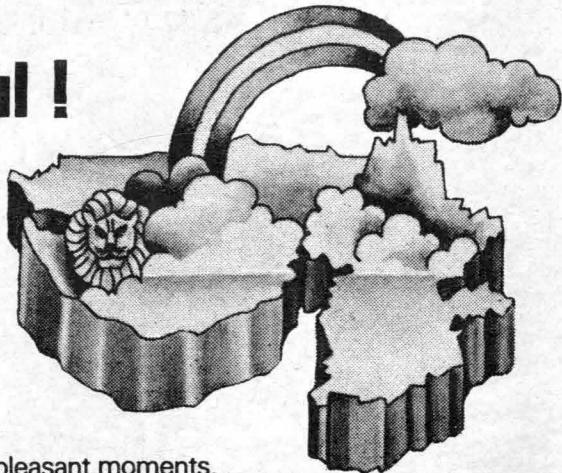
One final question. Why are you so inaccessible to the press?

I'm always available to the press. You didn't ask the right people.

She has the last word. ♦



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**GUJARAT
TOURISM**

॥ ઘરાતિ ઘરતો ભગ: ॥

DUST AND GRIME cover the sprawling Controller of Defence Accounts (CDA) grounds at Meerut. Under a pleasant wintry sun, braving a crisp westerly breeze, more than a lakh of farmers crowd around the barricaded dais. The 'Kalyug ka Mahatma', Chaudhry Mahendra Singh Tikait, who rose from obscurity to fame last year, has camped beside it since January 27. Every afternoon he ascends the dais. The eyes of the demi-god sweep over the mammoth gathering as he shooes a group of chattering women to silence, directs another group to sit down at the back, and admonishes yet another group of young farmers to maintain silence.

Without resorting to any histrionics, the Chaudhry has the multitudes hypnotised by his very first sentence: "Kya ye sarkaar hamen bilkoof bewakoof of samajhete hai . . ." (This government thinks we are fools. . .) For 40 minutes thereafter, he speaks in a language that is an amalgam of the main dialects of the area. The crowd sits spellbound. They are like putty in Tikait's hands; unanimously they pledge their commitment to their cause: "Isi dhoool me mit jayenge hum agar hamaari maange nahin

maani jayeengee." (We will die in this dust if our demands are not met.)

Two hundred yards away is the Divisional Commissioner's office which the farmers have placed under siege since January 27. On the road that it overlooks are eight crudely-drawn rectangles, commemorating the deaths of the eight martyrs of the cause — those farmers who met their death either from freezing temperatures or traffic accidents, since the agitation commenced.

At both venues, order is maintained by the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) volunteers, who guide visitors, control the traffic, and are willing to discuss their agitation with anyone displaying an interest. When asked what motivates them, the answer is offered without hesitation: "All these

arrangements are at the behest of Chaudhry sahib. For Chaudhry sahib we are all willing to die without a moment's hesitation."

Who is this Chaudhry sahib? He is Mahendra Singh Tikait — a semi-literate, 52-year old rustic, who catapulted to fame in April last year as the champion of the farmers' cause. Heading a *khan* of 84 villages in Western UP, the Chaudhry today is hailed by the farmers as their messiah — the only man who can step into Chaudhry Charan Singh's shoes, settle age-old grievances, and bring to an end the neglect that the farmers have suffered.

THE ROOTS OF THE CURRENT phase of the agitation can be traced back to August 11, 1987, when Tikait snubbed Chief Minister Veer Bahadur Singh at a massive rally at Sisauli, Muzaffarnagar — Tikait's base — and declared that no farmer of the area would pay any agricultural taxes and defied the government to collect revenues "if it had the guts."

In April 1987, the farmers had had a taste of victory when Tikait had effectively forced the government to decrease the electricity tariff from Rs 30 per horse power to Rs 22.50. But several other grievances were yet to be settled. And the BKU, under Tikait's leadership, was determined not to tolerate any further disillusionment with what they saw as the 'ur-

Sowing The Seeds of Revolution

It was an agitation that rocked the state. And which threatens to continue, possibly with renewed vigour. **SHEKHAR GHOSH** reports from Meerut on *kulak* power.

SPECIAL REPORT

ban' government. A *gherao* of V K Dewan, Meerut's Divisional Commissioner's office was proposed for January 27, 1988, on the basis of a charter of demands.

Acting on information received by the Intelligence department that more than a lakh of farmers would assemble at Meerut on January 27, the Chief Minister, after consultation with V K Dewan, state Home Minister Mr Gopinath Dixit and Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh, ordered Tikait's arrest. 'Operation Tikait', as it was dubbed, was scheduled for January 25. News that the police and PAC were coming to arrest Tikait spread like wildfire. The *Ranasinga* (a horn-like wind instrument traditionally used for war-calls) was sounded at Ramala and thousands of villagers armed with lathis, batons, stones, and bricks attacked the police, who, contrary to previous practice, were ordered to retreat. By 10 pm more than 4,000 armed farmers had assembled to protect Tikait who had meanwhile been whisked away to a 'safe place'. The call for a *gherao* of the Commissioner inevitably became an issue of prestige.

The local administration, which

had estimated a crowd of 15-20,000, was clearly panic-stricken and from January 25, Section 144 was enforced on Meerut. On January 26 and 27, tractor-trolleys were banned from entering the city, and all educational institutions were closed. Thirty units of the Provisional Armed Constabulary (PAC) were sent for, with demands for more. The administration was tense but prepared.

THE ENSUING TURN-OUT on January 27 was far beyond reigning expectations. Defying all the banning orders, farmers from Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Ghaziabad, Saharanpur, Bijnor, Bulandshahar, Aligarh and other districts started pouring in. Some farmers from neighbouring Haryana were also reported to have attended. By the time that Tikait arrived, the count exceeded 2.5 lakhs. Permission to hold a public meeting at the CDA grounds was granted. On reaching the dais, Tikait declared: "We haven't come here to deliver speeches. We have come for a *dharna*... The Commissioner should come and talk to us about our demands."

Two days later, an emissary from the local administration informed the

BKU that 13 of the 35 demands, chiefly the non-financial and non-political ones, had been agreed to. He also conveyed the administration's inability to concede demands outside its jurisdiction, and these had reportedly been sent to the Chief Minister for consideration. But Tikait refused to budge, and announced that the *dharna* would continue till *all* the demands were met.

By January 29, the number of farmers had swelled considerably and the evident show of solidarity was clearly unprecedented in the annals of the history of the Indian farmers' movement. In the fortnight that followed, the eight roads leading to Meerut were thronged with a constant stream of tractor-trolleys festooned with BKU banners and bearing provisions. The atmosphere reverberated with slogans supporting Tikait, the BKU, and the farmers' cause. Many who attended out of a sense of honour returned to their villages fired by zeal and a determination not to let Tikait down. The never-ending session of speeches, bhajans and songs by poets and singers also served to charge the atmosphere; one farmer confessed that they evoked a fanati-



Shastri's slogan commemorates the martyrs.



Convoys of tractor-trolleys converging on Meerut.

"I AM NOT GOING TO INTERFERE IN THEIR AGITATION."



UP Chief Minister
Veer Bahadur Singh
defends his stand.

CHIEF MINISTER *Veer Bahadur Singh is reputedly a shrewd politician, and appears quite unruffled by the recent farmers' agitation that has engulfed his state. He is quick to dismiss Tikait and the BKU as anti-farmers, and claims that their demands are detrimental to the interests of smaller and marginal farmers. But for how much longer can his government avert its eyes from an obviously rapidly developing and militant movement?*

Excerpts from the interview:

Imprint: In your view, is the discontent being displayed by the farmers justified?

Veer Bahadur Singh: It is not the farmers who are discontented. There are certain vested interests who are sowing the seeds of discontent amongst them.

Why then is there such a massive show of strength in Meerut?

Let me assure you there is no show of strength at Meerut. The farmers that you have seen there comprise just 10 per cent of the total, and that too, hail from only two districts — Muzaffarnagar and Meerut. The maximum belong to Sisauli (Tikait's village) and surrounding blocks.

The main point of contention now is the waiving of the six-month old electricity bills. In fact, Tikait himself has gone on record as saying that if the six-month old bills are waived, he would call off the agitation. If this is granted, what is the loss that the government would incur?

The government will incur a loss of more than Rs 30 crore. How can we waive the dues of only a minority of farmers, and that too the rich ones, when the majority have paid their bills? Furthermore, it is not just a question of a waiver; there is a principle involved in government policies. Today they are demanding that elec-

tricity dues be written off, tomorrow they may demand something else. Where does one draw the line? As it is, considerable concessions have already been granted — the industries pay for electricity at the rate of Re 1.05 per unit but the farmers pay only Re 0.10 per unit.

What are your comments on the proposal that money be deducted from the Rs 141 crore drought relief that the Centre has allotted to the state?

How can money for drought relief be utilised for a purpose other than what it is meant for? It is not my prerogative to use these funds for any purpose that might take my fancy. The relief is being used mainly to generate employment to drought-affected farmers and labourers who are paid Rs 13.50 per day.

The farmers claim that electricity for industry has been heavily subsidised to the tune of 75.90 per cent. How much subsidy has the rural sector received?

The sugarcane remunerative price has been increased from Rs 25 to Rs 27 per quintal. And most of the farmers are quite content with the price. Despite the drought, the sugarcane production area was increased by 2 lakh hectares this year. For marginal and small farmers, we have introduced a free tubewell boring scheme in which these farmers get a Rs 3,000 subsidy, and 70,000 tubewells have already been bored. A 50 per cent subsidy is also being allocated to marginal farmers to buy pumping sets while the small farmers receive 33 per cent.

We are also linking a greater number of villages with roads and many irrigation works are being carried out all over the state. All the rivers of the state have been canalised. Our next target, which we are trying to attain with the assistance of the World Bank, is to bore tubewells all over

the state. We have also achieved a great deal in dispensing electricity to different parts of UP. Out of 1,12,000 villages, 74,900 have been electrified, and soon the entire state will be.

This year, the state has faced an unprecedented drought. Nevertheless, we have attained 72 per cent of production capacity. What is creditable is that we have shown a surplus of 35 per cent, and this has been sent to Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar and Tripura.

You have claimed that it costs Re 0.85 to generate one unit of electricity. However, reliable sources in the electricity department claim that it costs only Re 0.52 to generate one unit of thermo-electricity and the same amount of hydroelectricity costs only Re 0.38. Isn't your figure, then, rather exaggerated?

There are maintenance costs as well as the cost of conducting electricity to the villages and these raise the figure to Re 0.85 per unit. The state Exchequer is already undergoing a loss of 74 paise per unit in delivering electricity to the farmers for 10 to 12 hours per day. The entire loss is colossal.

Tikait, the BKU, and all the agitators have declared that they are prepared to prolong the gherao for forty days, if need be. Will the government let them?

Let them continue for as long as they want. It does not bother the administration. As long as rules are not broken and discipline is maintained, I am not going to interfere.

Will the Centre intervene in the near future?

Why should the Centre intervene? It is entirely a state affair and the state is amply equipped to deal with Tikait, the BKU, and his Meerut *dharna*. The Centre has no say in this affair.

"THE AGITATION WILL CARRY ON, FOR FORTY DAYS, IF NEED BE."

Mahendra Singh Tikait in conversation with Shekhar Ghosh.

IT IS NOT EASY to spot him in a crowd, and indeed there is little that distinguishes him from the scores of other dhoti-clad farmers that throng the CDA grounds, patience and determination etched on their haggard, weather-beaten faces. But then, Mahendra Singh Tikait is himself one of them – a son of the soil. It is only when he ascends the crudely fashioned dais to address the eager hordes waiting to once again be mesmerised by his fiery speech, that his charisma and his obvious sway over his faithful following is evident. He is, after all, their newly-crowned king. At once elevated, at once one of them, he maintains this balance with consummate ease. And in between puffs of his hookah, is prepared to articulate his grievances when prompted, in a rustic dialect peppered with aphorisms and a rich brand of country humour. Excerpts from the interview:

Imprint: What inspired you to take up the cause of the farmers?

Mahendra Singh Tikait: Forty years have passed since Independence. Despite the progress achieved, farmers have always been taken for a ride. Every successive government has relied on the rural vote bank to bring it to power yet the farmers have always been neglected and exploited. The gherao at Shamli last year was the beginning of the farmers' re-awakening to their plight. Gradually, every farmer began to realise what a fool he had been by keeping silent in the face of blatant discrimination. The rest was accomplished by the mercy of God. And the determination of the farmers.

Is this why you have been able to gather such a large crowd?

I don't think so. The people who come here are not from my *khap*, but from all over the state. The reason for their arrival is their total loss of



faith in the prevailing system.

Is the disillusionment with political parties total?

Yes. All governments have been callous towards us. No political party is really interested in our welfare, only our votes. After Charan Singh, I've found no political leader who could command my respect. We have at last come to realise the urban bias of all political leaders. How can they help the farmers when they are conditioned to think in pro-urban terms?

Is this agitation Jat-dominated, as claimed by certain sections?

You can see for yourself the number of Jat participants. Examine the crowd and see how many farmers from other communities are present. You can see for yourself the Muslim dominance amongst the farmers. The farmers who have come here are the sons of the soil, they have not come here as representatives of different communities. It is true that many of the BKU activists are Jats. But that is because the movement was initiated and developed in Western UP where Jats are in the majority.

Chief Minister Veer Bahadur Singh has claimed that all the farmers participating in this agitation are prosper-

ous, well-to-do Jat farmers, and that your movement is anti-farmers. What is your response?

Let him claim whatever he wants to. If someone has a little more money than the next person, are you going to snatch it from him? The average holding per farmer gathered here today is between 4 and 7 acres, which is hardly any evidence of prosperity. Besides, smaller farmers and labourers can only benefit when the well-to-do farmers are themselves able to earn more and become more prosperous. The government is trying to launch a disinformation campaign against us. What it does not realise is that it will not affect the farmers. The agitation is going to continue till our demands are met.

But what do you have to say in defence of the accusation?

Pick on any small farmer from this mammoth gathering and ask him how much he'll gain if all the demands are met. The Doab Canal project has been going on for nine years. Do you think its completion will benefit only the big farmers? We've demanded pensions for farmers, rich or poor, after the age of 55. The demand for a reduction in fertiliser prices from Rs 123.50 per bag to Rs 116 and then to Rs 105 will also benefit all farmers. The government had placed a ban on cane-crushing outside the mills. It is the small farmers who get their cane crushed in crushers, as transporting their canes to the mills is not often economical. We have sought to revoke the ban. Is that geared solely towards the big farmers? Once you scrutinise our demands carefully, you'll see that almost all the demands benefit all sections of the rural community. In fact, if our agitation didn't include the demands of the smaller farmers, we would have settled with the two negotiators from Lucknow (Said ul Hasan

and Hukum Singh) who are unofficially willing to overlook our non-payment of dues. Had we agreed, we could have been accused of betraying the farmers. However, the talks failed on this point. The government is not only cheating us, but is also trying to create a rift between sections of the farmers' community.

Why do you want the irrigation tariff to be reduced?

Why should we pay for something which is not worth it? Would you pay Rs 5,000 for this tape recorder? The government has always collected the tariff even when there were hardly any amenities being provided to us.

Is that why you have taken such a tough stand on the waiving of electricity dues?

Precisely. Electricity has tortured us a great deal. The power supply has never been adequate. In urban areas, twenty hours of power is supplied per day, whereas we used to receive only four hours of supply, and that too, erratically. The discrimination against us from both the urban and industrial sectors is intolerable.

The government claims it costs 85 paise to generate each unit of electricity. This is an absolute myth, because if it were true, why are the urban and industrial sectors being charged only 75 paise per unit? In any case, the actual figure is much less. And even this could be reduced if the line loss didn't reach 46 per cent, which is 31 per cent more than the permissible 15 per cent.

Eighty per cent of the population here resides in rural areas. The electricity being supplied to industries, where only 12 per cent of the population is employed, is 65 per cent, whereas the rural sector, the majority, receives only 18 per cent. The bias towards industries does not end here. Officially we are being given 10 hours of electricity. At the rate of 10 paise per unit of electricity, we pay Rs 22.50 per horse power (1 hp = 0.746 unit). Computing in a similar fashion, at the rate of 85 paise per unit, the

rate in the industrial unit for 20 hours of supply should be Rs 380.46 per hp. Yet the industries pay only Rs 1.05 per hp. How is the government able to bear this loss? No, the government has to waive our electricity dues for six months at least.

The government has declared that it has no funds.

(Laughs) We're not asking for money. The government has received a huge amount from the Centre for drought relief. No one has suffered more than we have from the ravages of drought. Why can it not make up for the loss from the drought relief fund?

The demand to increase sugarcane prices is also being seen as impractical. Is it not an excessive demand when, according to the Chief Minister, the mills will face closure if forced to pay Rs 35 per quintal?

Who is the Chief Minister trying to deceive? Not long ago, this same Chief Minister had passed an edict declaring that the permits of those mills which paid more than Rs 25 per quintal for sugarcane would be cancelled. The mill owners were even then willing to buy cane at Rs 35-36 per quintal. Besides, when Haryana, where the recovery is less than UP, can pay its farmers Rs 32 per quintal, why shouldn't we get Rs 35? I don't think it is unreasonable.

Now that talks with the state government have failed, what will be the next step?

We have unanimously decided not to have any further talks with the state government. The agitation will carry on for forty days, if need be. The *gherao* of the Commissioner's office will not be withdrawn. The rest is up to God. But we are determined not to leave without our demands being met. And in case we are forced to depart empty-handed, no taxes will ever be paid to the state government. We will run our own government. We will break all the rules. It will be chaos. That is why we prefer to remain here.

cal commitment to Tikait and the agitation. A 70-year old woman echoed his sentiments: "*Babu, likh lo ki hum log sar pe kafan baandh ke nikle hain!*" (Write it down that we have set off on a crusade prepared for anything, even death!)

A LAUDABLE FEATURE of the agitation has been the discipline that has governed every aspect of it, be it crowd-control, the direction of traffic, or the distribution of food and supplies. Curiously enough, members of the PAC, stationed to keep a close watch on developments, had also been given food and there was little ill-feeling between the police and the policed. The agitating farmers clearly earned the respect of both the local population as well as members of the police force with whom, after all, they share a common heritage. Perhaps this is why the jawans of the PAC lowered their rifles to salute the dead body of 50-year old farmer Bhagwan Singh, the first casualty of the agitation, who died of cold on January 30.

Tikait and the BKU, remarkably, maintained their non-violent stand. Quashing rumours of proposed rail and *rasta rokos* in Meerut, Captain Bhopal Singh, Vice President, BKU, said, "These are *our* roads and trains, *our* people, *our* country; why should we do anything to disturb or harm these?"

Another unique feature of the agitation was the evident communal harmony. It was not that long ago that Meerut had witnessed terrible communal riots, but the farmers' agitation seemed to have erased the sharp rifts and hostilities between the communities which now came together to fight a common enemy. Perhaps it was this discipline and solidarity that baffled the state and local administrations.

ON FEBRUARY 5, the farmers reduced the number of their un conceded demands from 22 to 5. These demands, in order of priority were: that electricity bills for the last six mon-

ths be written off for all the farmers of UP; that land revenue for the last six months also be waived; that sugarcane prices be raised from Rs 27 to 35 per quintal; that fertiliser prices be reduced from Rs 105 to Rs 85 in the co-operatives; and that all criminal cases against farmers following the rally in Shamli on March 1, 1987, be withdrawn. The Chief Minister, however, maintained his previous stance — that the movement and its demands were not representative of *all* the farmers — and refused to relent.

It was now ten days after the agitation had begun, during which period the administration had fervently hoped that it would lose momentum. On February 5, the government sent its two emissaries, Mr Said ul Hasan, Labour Minister of UP, and Mr Hukum Singh, Parliamentary Affairs Minister, to negotiate with the BKU delegation. The three-day talks were not conclusive. While the BKU delegation accused the ministers of trying to 'cheat' them by not agreeing to give any assurances in writing, the ministers in turn accused the BKU of unreasonableness. Chief Minister V B Singh described the agitation as 'politically motivated' and termed the farmers' demands to be counter to the interests of the farming community.

However, one of the main demands of the farmers, that of an increase in sugarcane price from Rs 27 to Rs 35, was settled. The government and the BKU agreed to fix the price on the basis of the recovery of cane in four mills of the area to be chosen by the BKU. On the question of the waiving of land revenues and electricity dues, the talks reached a dead-end. The offer of the two ministers to overlook the non-payment of dues by the agitators, but refusing to formalise the same in writing, was seen as a ploy. The BKU delegation, consequently, walked out of the meeting. Harpal Singh, Secretary of the BKU, announced: "The government is fooling us. It wants to create a rift between the farmers of the state by agreeing to overlook our non payment of dues but refusing to grant



Chaudhry Tikait: in conference with BKU activists.

the waiver throughout the state. This is why the talks failed yesterday. And now, seeing the lackadaisical attitude of the government, the Union has decided not to have any further talks with the state government." With the breakdown of the third round of talks on February 8, Tikait realised that an early settlement was not likely and announced that he would prolong the agitation for forty days, if necessary.

TIKAIT'S MOVEMENT has not escaped criticism. His hitherto strict adherence to a non-political representation within the movement has been regarded with suspicion by some. His refusal to permit Sharad Joshi of the Maharashtra-based Shetkari Sanghatana to share a platform with him, on account of Joshi's alliance with V P Singh, was viewed as parochial and egocentric. Still, Tikait has maintained this stand consistently, refusing to be wooed by politicians from left or right. Although some have averred that this has strengthened his credibility with the farmers, many of who believe politics to be synonymous with corruption, others have deemed it a shrewd tactic which has enabled Tikait to retain a monopoly over the farmers' lobby.

There is another allegation level-

led against the Chaudhry — it concerns the Jat dominance of the BKU. The movement, with strong roots in Western UP (a base of the Jat farmers), inevitably had a majority of Jats as its supporters. But the allegation does not hold — an equal number of non-Jats as Jats comprised the multitudes in Meerut, a fact that BKU activists repeatedly emphasised and which was amply borne out by those present.

The farmers' insistence that cane prices be hiked to Rs 35 per quintal has also been declared absurd by many. But Tikait's unwavering logic holds greater sway, with the farmers at least: "If Haryana can pay its farmers Rs 32 per quintal where the recovery is less than UP, we should get proportionally more!" This kind of reasoning is, of course, far more accessible and acceptable than the economics of market prices, state funds and credit loans.

However, chief amongst the allegations hurled at Tikait has been that of the class composition of the movement. Many, including state government officials, allege that his demands are designed to benefit the richer section of those farmers concentrated in Western UP. That the two major demands of the BKU are pro-big farmers, is beyond doubt. The BKU has



The 'gherao' of the Commissioner's office on January 27.

always remained a big-holding farmers' lobby. Following the Green Revolution, the prosperity of the farmers of Western UP, Punjab and Haryana has not only resulted in a heightened consciousness of their power but also a greater capacity to sustain any organised movement. Inevitably, this has increased their bargaining power, and demands that land and electricity dues for the last six months be written off, and that the price of cane be increased from Rs 27 to Rs 35, are undoubtedly pro-big farmers. Small farmers still crush their cane in crushers which are generally run by big farmers. They are paid between Rs 18 to Rs 22 while current mill prices are Rs 27. Despite Tikait's assurance that the payment rates of small farmers will also improve, past experience suggests that it is highly unlikely that the small farmers, who cannot afford to sell their canes to the mills, will receive an improved rate by the owners of the crushers.

Although the financial demands are definitely pro-big farmer, Tikait's irrefutable logic that small farmers can prosper only if the big farmers do, seems to have been accepted by most, small and marginal farmers included. The administration's claim that all of his demands are pro-big

farmer, however, does not hold as most of the non-political demands — for instance, that power be supplied to rural areas for 12 hours, that work on the Doab Canal be hastened, and that adequate compensation be granted for land acquired by the government — will benefit all farmers.

ON FEBRUARY 15, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi offered a package of concessions to all farmers to defer the collection of penal and compound interest on crop loans, to waive accumulated interest where it exceeded the principal loan amount, and to extend the reimbursement period for short-term loans for drought-stricken areas — moves that were seen as an obvious bid to placate the increasingly angry and militant lobby.

Tikait, however, remained unmoved and the farmers were united in their bid to continue the agitation indefinitely. The mood at Meerut was becoming sullen; the farmers were getting restless; Tikait's speeches were becoming more provocative. Although he was able to contain the violence in Meerut, he was unsuccessful in doing so in outlying areas. Soon the violence and arson spread despite Tikait's vehement denunciations and exhortations to stop.

With the Prime Minister's catego-

rical rejection, on February 20, of the BKU's demands for higher sugar-cane prices and the writing-off of electricity arrears, Tikait withdrew his agitation and declared, "The farmers will form their own government; they will not pay any dues to the central or state governments, and will boycott members of parliament and legislatures irrespective of their party affiliation." The crowds gradually dispersed and the 25-day old agitation finally came to an end.

The calling-off of the *dharna* was a shrewd move on Tikait's part. He knew he had failed to hold the government to ransom on his two major demands. He also knew that he would not be able to control the farmers' restlessness for much longer. And there was another, more urgent reason — the farmers' presence was required in the fields.

But the agitation is far from over. In one of his speeches at the CDA grounds, Tikait had exhorted the farmers to "thrash the government officials who come to collect the dues so that they never enter our villages again . . ." His call for civil disobedience bodes ill.

It is likely that any resort to force by the government, to enable the collection of dues, may result in violence all over Western UP. If the government chooses to overlook the non-payment initially, it is possible that the movement may soon spread to include central and Eastern UP as well. The present dilemma for the state government is a Catch 22 situation, and in the event of non-recovery of dues, the government may be left with little choice but to withdraw the amenities and subsidies provided to the farmers. Whatever the course of action adopted, there is a storm brewing.

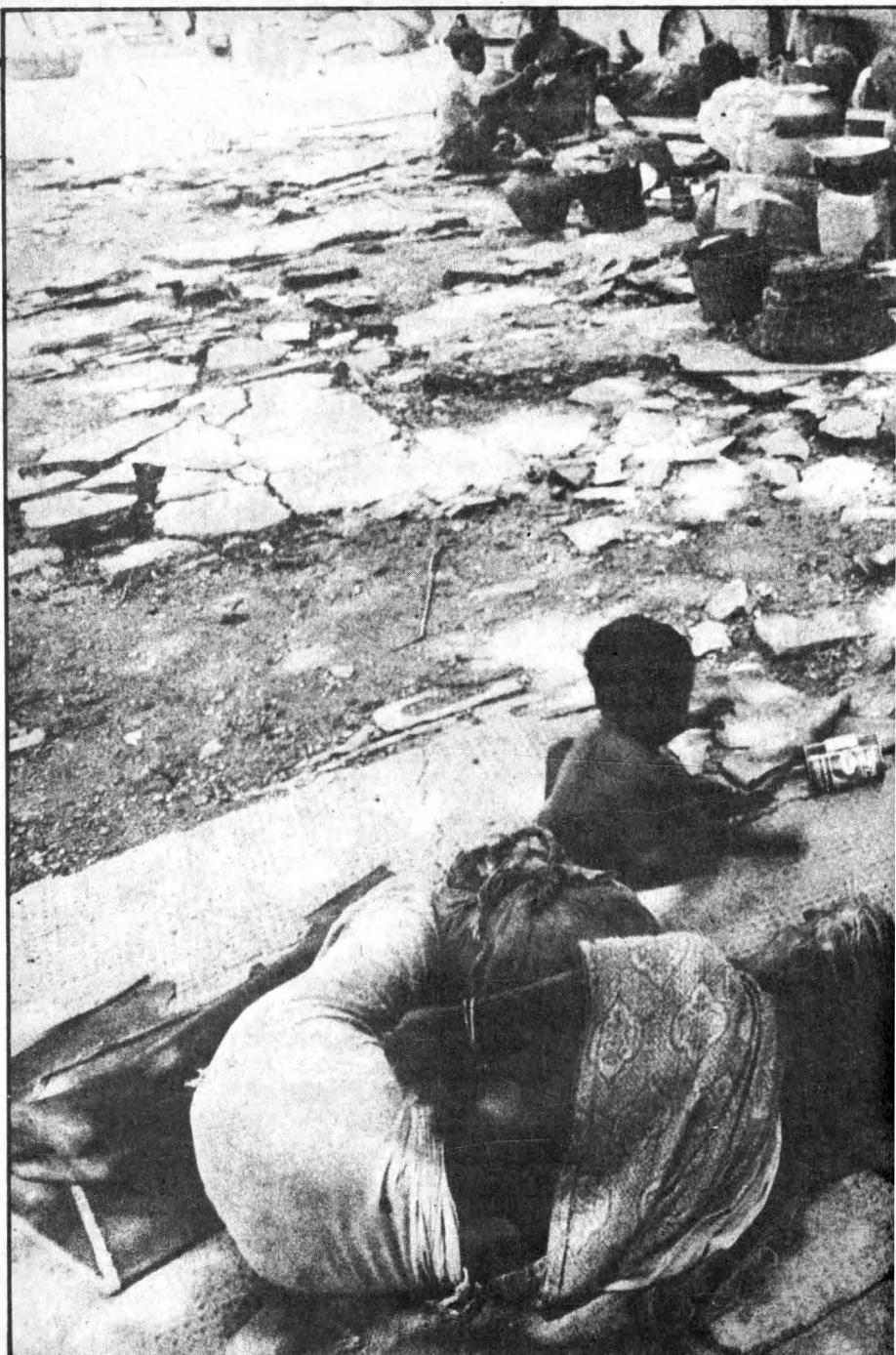
And lest the government feels that Tikait's hold over the farmers has diminished following his virtually empty-handed withdrawal from Meerut, the call for the March 1 rally at Moradabad, to commemorate the farmers who died in Meerut, threatens to prove otherwise. ♦

INDIA IS, IN MANY WAYS, the unhealthiest nation in the world. For a nation that boasts of the availability of top level medical expertise, this may sound strange. But, again, it is a question of the priorities that the government adopts and the channels into which it directs its resources.

More than half a million Indians die of tuberculosis (TB) each year (640,000 in 1985 alone, according to one estimate) while roughly 2.5 million fresh cases are estimated every year (see box) and yet, Streptomycin which is used to fight TB, accounts for the lowest sales among all antibiotics used in this country! Even according to the Central Minister of State for Health, Saroj Khaparde, as many as *400 children in this country die every hour* — more than six each minute — from preventable diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, chest infections etc. In Uttar Pradesh alone, 114 infants upto the age of four *die every hour* due to the lack of proper immunisation facilities — facilities which can be provided quite cheaply.

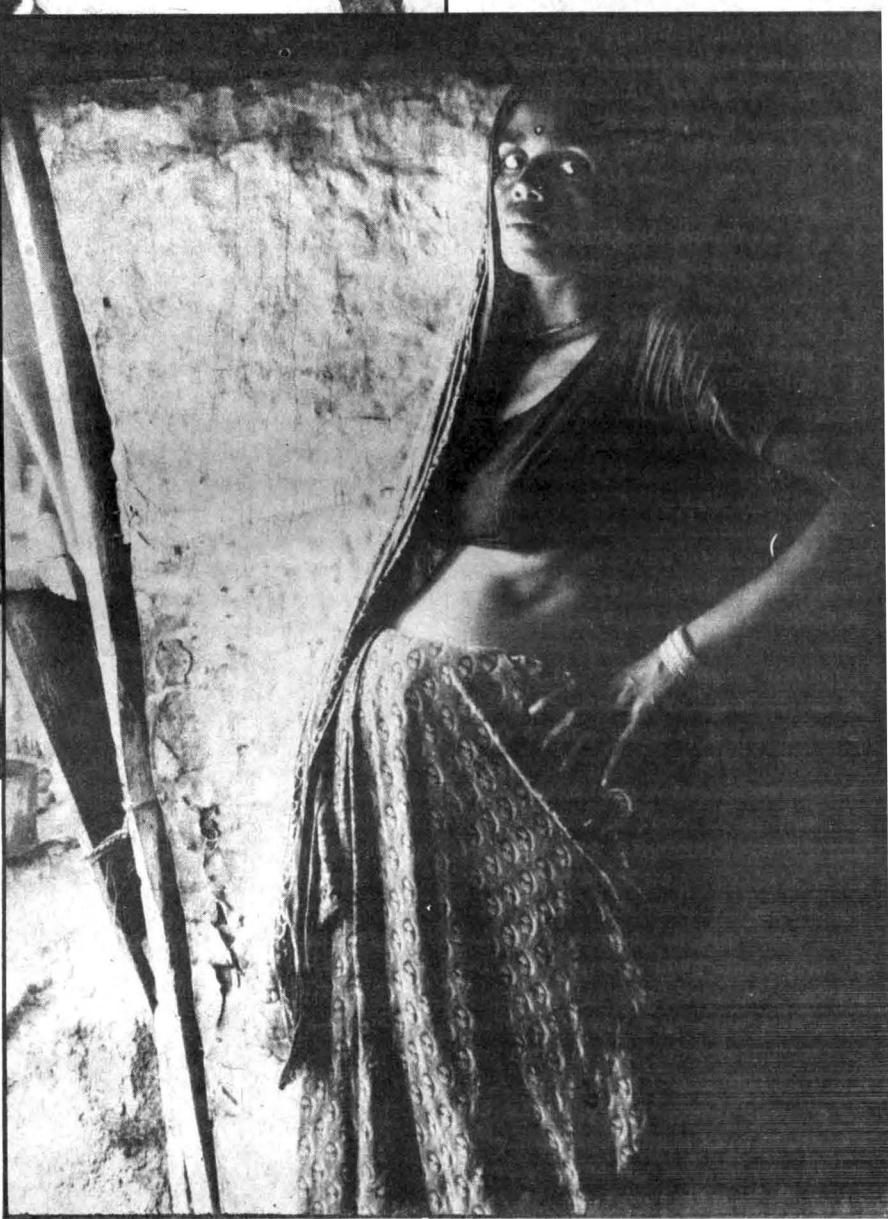
Out of about 4.7 million births in UP, 700,000 infants do not live to celebrate their first birthday. Two-fifths of the deaths occur in the first month, and many die in the first week itself. And yet, little or no attempt at all is made to provide those simple facilities which could avert this tragedy.

Since every third person in the world without safe and adequate water supply is an Indian, it is hardly surprising to learn that the Sixth Plan document had identified water-borne or water-related diseases as accounting for 80 per cent of all the public health problems of the country. What *does* come as a surprise is that more than 40 years after Independence, over 93,000 villages still have an acute water problem while many thousands cannot claim to have a safe and adequate water supply. Obviously, the health sector has been systematically downgraded by successive governments. Spending on public health (in terms of percentage of Plan outlay) has steadily declined. The spend-



A CRITICAL DIAGNOSIS

The statistics are appalling: 200 million people in India suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition; 400 children die every hour from preventable diseases; 1.5 million babies succumb to diarrhoea; 40,000 go blind annually; 7 million are born underweight... And yet the Indian government's allocation for health (as a percentage of the total Plan outlay) has been reduced from nearly 5 per cent in the First Plan to about 1.9 per cent in the Seventh Plan. P SAINATH examines the grim reality behind the slogan "Health for All by 2000".



ding on family planning, on the other hand, has escalated considerably. Allocations on family planning have gone up from 0.0005 per cent of the total Plan outlay in the First Plan to 1.80 per cent in the Seventh Plan. Even the ratio of allocation between family planning and health has moved from 0.002 per cent to an amazing 0.96 per cent.

This has happened, inevitably, at the expense of the health sector. As a percentage of the total Plan outlay, allocations for health have come down from nearly five per cent in the First

By P Sainath

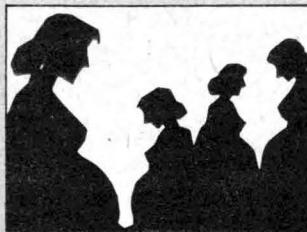
Plan to just about 1.9 per cent in the Seventh. The allocation was five per cent in the First Plan, 4.6 per cent in the Second, 2.6 in the Third, 2.1 per cent in the Fourth, and has stayed at 1.9 per cent since the Fifth Plan. *Can India's increasing health problems be, in any way, tackled by spending less and less on them?*

ONE OF THE WORST things that colonial rule did to India was to im-

pose on its people a health system largely irrelevant to, and unconcerned with, their needs. The British were concerned with the health problems of the Indian masses only to the extent that these constituted a threat to their own personnel or to the stability of their rule. Whatever 'system' they developed was concerned with maintaining the health of their civilian and military establishments. What is more shocking is that after Independence, Indians seem to have perpetuated several features of that system in newer forms.

The health establishment that has sprung up over four decades in independent India is primarily concerned with the health problems of the urban elite. The rural-urban hospital distribution ratio is almost exactly the reverse of the rural-urban population ratio. Hospitals in urban areas account for 73 per cent of the total, while rural India, where the overwhelming majority of the nation's population lives, claims only 27 per cent (of the hospitals). Further, while urban hospitals account for 86 per cent of the total number of hospital beds, rural hospitals possess an appalling 14 per cent. As Professor N S Deodhar, a leading authority on the health sector in India, points out, there has been a tenfold increase in doctors since Independence, but 80 per cent of these practise in the urban areas. Moreover, 90 per cent of the threefold increase in the number of beds has been in the cities "where the hospitals work in splendid isolation".

This should not be taken to mean that no advances have been made at all in the sphere of health since Independence; compared to the precarious conditions of the pre-Independence period, significant progress has been made in specific areas of health. Importantly, unlike under alien rule, the Constitution and Government of India do accept the responsibility for the health of the people of the State. But achievements in this sphere are only a fraction of the ambitious targets the nation set for itself on attaining Inde-



At a Disadvantage

Female health problems in India begin in the womb — often due to deliberate, cynical discrimination. The practice of pre-natal sex determination tests (soon to be banned but only in Maharashtra), often leading to the abortion of the female foetus, can in some sense be viewed as a technological update on the older practice of female infanticide. Yet, this is only one of innumerable practices, traditions and circumstances leading to a sex ratio that is most unfavourable to women, giving rise to their particular vulnerability as a group.

The sex ratio has been falling with each decade. It declined from 972 women per 1,000 men in 1901 to 930 women per 1,000 males in 1971. Though the trend, as seen in the 1981 census, appears to have been halted, the ratio of 935 females to 1,000 males continues to be unfavourable to women. Kerala is the only exception, where women outnumber men — 1,034 to 1,000. Education and a higher status in other spheres enjoyed by women in Kerala could be a contributory factor. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh where the backwardness of women is perhaps the worst, has a ratio of 885 females to 1,000 males.

The intra-family distribution of food too, in most Indian households, is weighted against females; very often, the male child is nourished first, the female gets the left-overs. This discrimination continues and forms the basis for severe anaemia during pregnancy — a major cause of female mortality; according to one estimate almost 80 per cent of South India's pregnant women are anaemic due to insufficient food. The pattern of food consumption remains biased in favour of males despite the fact that, in India, nearly two-thirds of a woman's day is spent working, and that primitive technologies, the great distance between home and resource centres, and the double load of work in the field and at home, necessitate a higher calorie consumption every day in women. Women are thus more prone to illness.

Another study shows that 99.6 per cent of the women, in the sample, per-

pendence. Surveying 30 years of efforts at improving the nutritional standards of the Indian people in 1980-1981, a Study Group of the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) concluded that "the overall nutritional status of the people does not show any material improvement. In fact, it has deteriorated in some respect."

Diet, nutrition, purchasing power, accessibility of medical facilities, clean water, all these have their impact on the state of a nation's health. And on every one of these fronts, the performance of successive governments has been dismal. Less than 25 years after

Independence, Dr C Gopalan, President of the Nutrition Society of India, told the First Asian Congress of Nutrition that "a survey of the pattern of expenditure on food, among different sections of the population of India, indicates that the amount being spent on food by nearly 70 per cent of the population would be insufficient to provide even the least expensive balanced diet."

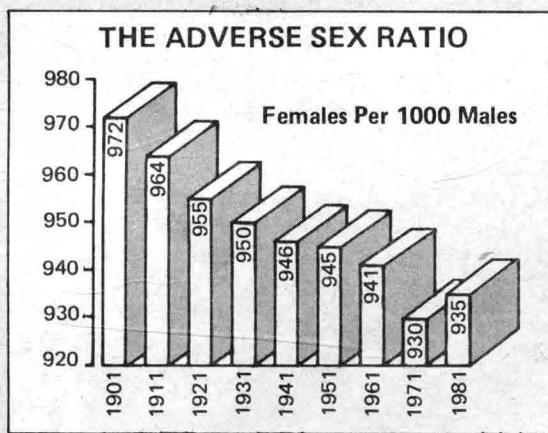
Even literacy has its impact on the sphere of health. And on that front, a nation that boasts a 5,000-year old tradition of learning, is all set to enter the next millennium with 500 million illiterates — a much larger figure than that obtained for any other country

formed all household chores right through their pregnancies; 65.9 per cent attended to normal manual work, and only 20 per cent received the luxury of rest after delivery — for just two months. This naturally affected both the rate of mortality and the degree of health of both mother and child. This health has, for long, been linked to the mother's education, and in India, where there is a 73 per cent dropout rate in schools among rural girls, this cannot but have a most negative impact.

Female mortality is much higher in India, particularly in the reproductive age group, owing to the various problems accompanying pregnancy and very poor ante-natal care. The infant mortality rate (IMR), that is, the number of deaths per thousand among infants between 0-12 months of age, remains significantly higher for females than for males — 131 female deaths per 1,000 live births, as against 120 male deaths to 1,000 live births.

Poverty-related factors like diarrhoea and malnourishment affect female children far more than they do males, despite the stronger constitution of the female child. The maternal mortality rate in India (5.0) is much higher than that in developing nations such as Ecuador (2.10), Kenya (1.90) and Tunisia (3.10).

There is little doubt that poverty, the inferior social status of Indian women, their marginal presence in the market economy and the predominant male-bias at all levels of society, contribute to their vulnerability on the health front.



in the world.

Leading Indian institutions in the field of health do not necessarily lack in commitment, dedication, expertise or enthusiasm. Organisations like the ICMR, AIIMS and others, have each, in their own field, often made splendid contributions despite inadequate funding and the adversity of circumstances confronting them. Some non-governmental agencies too have achieved a lot, under extremely trying conditions. Nor would it be true to aver that governmental structures have contributed nothing at all. Both medical experts within the government and those involved in gathering the vast ocean of data on Indian health,

have rendered service that commands respect. Where then does the failure lie? Why are we still where we are in terms of health?

THE ANSWER LIES in the path of development imposed on this nation since Independence, in the skewed, even stupid, priorities of the Indian health system, in the irrelevance of borrowed and transplanted 'models', and in the national policies within the framework of which this path of development is pursued. The problem of Indian health cannot be divorced from this larger social process.

Thus, even while boasting the most advanced level of development within

the developing world, while possessing its biggest pool of scientific, medical and technological expertise, India is unable to match even the achievements of tiny Cuba. At the time of its revolution, Cuba had an infant mortality rate (IMR) of 70 per 1,000 live births. By 1981, the Caribbean nation had reduced its IMR to 19. Over the same period, India has just about managed to bring down its IMR from a rate of 170 per 1,000 live births, to that of 120. One obvious defence would be to dismiss this on the basis of a comparison of the population of Cuba and India. But, following this criterion, neighbouring China has reduced its IMR from 170 in 1960 (identical to India's figure for that period) to 41 in 1981. And China's population is unquestionably greater than that of India's.

One of the major reasons for these failures can be traced to our Sixth Plan document which says: "The limited impact of the (Five Year) Plans on the well-being of the poor sections of the population is a consequence of our inability to restructure the distribution of assets." The same document also notes that "land reforms instituted (after 1951) were meant to redistribute this primary resource... but the pace of implementation has been slow and full of loopholes, so that the impact on the structure of landholdings has been minimal."

Having recognised this truth, precious little is being done about it. A narrow stratum of 4 per cent of landowners operate 34 per cent of the nation's land while the gigantic army of small and marginal farmers, representing over 70 per cent of all farmers, operate only 21 per cent of the land. Does this have an important bearing on the state's health problems? Crucially so. Because it determines, to a very large extent, the unequal distribution of the food resources of the country and their inaccessibility. Since a large number of people are simply shut out of the process altogether, it can hardly be a sound basis for the health of any nation.



The Leprosy Scourge

Every third person in the world suffering from leprosy is an Indian. And the number of those suffering from this disease — they also suffer from acute social discrimination that is no less debilitating — has steadily increased over the decades.

In 1961, the number of estimated cases was 2.5 million and in 1981, 3.95 million. The current figure is around four million, out of which about one-fourth persons suffer physical deformities; 20 per cent of these being children.

Close to 400 million people in this country live in high endemic leprosy areas like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. About 400,000 new cases are believed to occur each year. For years, independent India persisted with the barbaric Leprosy Act of 1898. Even after its abolition, a wretched discrimination persists. The still-operative Motor Vehicles Act forbids the granting of driving licenses to leprosy patients.

These prejudices can be more damaging than the disease itself. Hindu, Muslim and Christian laws recognise leprosy as a valid ground for divorce. Some laws bar leprosy patients from inheriting parental property and from using parental land or business for a living, while others debar women patients from claiming alimony on divorce.

Leprosy can be cured by regular treatment at one's own home. Infection can be ended, and deformity and disability prevented with some precautionary measures, without any risk to members of the family or the neighbourhood.

MALNUTRITION IS NOT so much a physical disease as a social and economic one. The existence of vast masses of under-fed people in a society claiming significant advances in agriculture is irrefutable evidence of this. Concentration of land in the hands of a few, limited purchasing power, skewed distribution and callous abdication of the State's responsibility towards the poor are the 'germs' that infect a society with malnutrition.

The results of a survey undertaken by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau in May 1985, revealed that even in surplus areas, where there was no shortage and, in fact, an abundance of food, widespread malnutrition still prevailed. Experts at a national seminar on the problem in October 1985 estimated that over 200 million people in the country suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition.

The importance of this factor in Indian health problems simply cannot

be exaggerated. Poverty-linked malnutrition lies at the base of diseases like diarrhoea which claims the lives of 1.5 million Indian babies every year. It also takes its toll in terms of deficiency; as many as 40,000 Indian babies are estimated to go blind annually owing to Vitamin A deficiency. Early childhood malnutrition has also been identified as the single greatest cause of mental and physical retardation. More than 7 million newborn babies in the country every year, are born underweight.

Thus the dangerous extent to which the masses are underfed is a fundamental cause of India's health problems. It is not as if there is not enough to feed them. The economy does produce enough to meet their needs, yet those needs are not met.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, 'Indian agriculture has been acquiring strength and resilience over the years'. Yet, official data show that the per capita availability of foodgrains has fallen to a level that is almost 10 per cent below that prevalent in 1953-1954.

The commercialisation of agricul-



Water Contamination

Every third person in the world without a safe and adequate water supply is an Indian. Water-borne or water-related diseases account for nearly 80 per cent of the public health problems of the country. Diarrhoea, a water-borne disease, kills 6 million children across the world annually — 1.5 million of whom are Indians.

Over 90,000 villages have no drinking water within a radius of 1.6 km. In over 37,000 villages, the water supply is highly likely to cause diseases like cholera, while over 24,800 have water with excessive salinity, iron or fluorides.

Malaria, another major water-related disease, affects over half a million Indians in some form or the other annually. Hook-worm infestation affects no less than 205 million Indians. While guinea-worm infestation (also water-borne) affects around 12 million people in over 18 districts across eight states. Many millions more, in districts of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, run the risk of guinea-worm infestation. Trachoma, responsible for about five per cent of all cases of blindness in India, can also be caused by using inadequate or impure water for personal hygiene.



TB: The No 1 Killer Disease

At any given moment, there are over 10 million cases of tuberculosis (TB) in the country of which about 2.5 million are infectious. A further 2.5 million fresh cases are estimated every year, but hardly a third of these are detected and brought under treatment. And, only a third of those detected complete the one year's stipulated treatment. Approximately 500,000 TB patients die each year.

According to experts at the last National Conference on Tuberculosis and Chest Diseases, TB remains the No 1 killer in the country. Yet, declining funds for the Health sector (with the solitary exception of family planning) mean that every little funding goes towards fighting this scourge. Furthermore, although tuberculosis kills an estimated 500,000 people annually in India — most of them children below the age of 15 — Streptomycin (which is used to fight TB) accounts for the lowest sales among all antibiotics used (10 per cent). Thus, though the incidence of TB is growing, the battle against it is most half-hearted.

ture (and the current obsession with exports) has adversely affected poor households. Cash crops have in many places monopolised fertile agricultural land while, in other places, high-quality but expensive varieties of grain have replaced the coarse cereals and pulses consumed by the poor. The problem of calorie deficiency is considered to be the most important factor in malnutrition. Calorie consumption is directly linked with purchasing power and, therefore, to poverty. More than half of India's population does not earn enough to purchase its minimum calorie needs. And apart from calorie deficiency, other deficiencies such as those of iron and other nutrients also cause great harm. While Vitamin A deficiency blinds 40,000 children annually, and while Vitamin D and calcium deficiency affect 15 per cent of Indian children, the combined sales of Vitamin A and D account for less than 3 per cent of all vitamin sales in the country, according to a Delhi Science Forum report.

An UNCTAD study as early as 1977 noted that, of the 51 vital drugs marketed in India, 28 were imported. Of a total drug production worth Rs 1,150 crore in the country, essen-

tial and life-saving drugs accounted for only Rs 350 crore (about 27 per cent). The rest was spent on tonics, digestive enzymes and formulations of medicines with marginal benefits. Such priorities have also helped create a situation where pharmaceutical multinationals flood the Indian market with unnecessary products often irrelevant to national health needs.

In the final analysis, Indian health problems derive extraordinary complexity from the social circumstances under which they emerge, from a system that makes no real effort to abolish the basic ailment of poverty, illiteracy and hunger. And for a government that has not even begun to address these issues, to talk in terms of the Alma Ata declaration and its call of "Health For All by 2000" is not even amusing. It is simply appalling. ♦



The Handicapped

As many as 12 million Indians, constituting almost 1.8 per cent of our population, suffer from one form of physical disability or another, according to a National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) report.

The same survey also records that about 10 per cent of physically handicapped people suffer from more than one physical handicap. The survey covered the blind, the dumb, the deaf and the crippled, but not other disabilities, including mental retardation. Those with locomotor disabilities number nearly 5.43 million. The visually disabled number nearly four million, while those with hearing disabilities number about three million. Another 1.75 million suffer from speech disabilities.

However, these figures (apparently related to the 1981 Census data) appear misleading. For instance, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) earlier estimated the number of blind people in the country to be 9 million. Even the figures relating to speech and hearing disabilities seem understated. The Indian Speech and Hearing Association estimates that nearly 30 million Indians suffer from some form of speech or hearing handicap — nearly six times the figure cited by NSSO and the Ministry of Welfare. Furthermore, almost 40,000 children turn blind each year, and almost 140,000 suffer from some degree of visual impairment before their sixth birthday.

Polio cases are high as well: more than one million Indian children are crippled by polio before they reach the age of ten. According to the Directorate General of Health Services, between 141,000 and 234,000 new cases come up annually. India accounts for 44 per cent of the world's polio victims.

FIRST PERSON

Tamas has broken all records as far as Doordarshan is concerned. Never before, in the history of Indian television, has any serial or programme evoked such savage criticism and unabashed adulation at the same time. While Bhisham Sahni (author of the book 'Tamas') and Govind Nihalani (the serial's director) have been viciously attacked for inciting communal feelings, a large section of the press and public have been overwhelmingly supportive.

When Bhisham Sahni's novel was first printed, in 1973, it provoked no controversy. It was just another Hindi novel, which nevertheless went on to win quite a few awards, including the Sahitya Akademi award. Despite the earlier literary recognition of the novel, the telecast of *Tamas* has not only been marred by muted public protest, but has also been instrumental in inciting sporadic violence in the country. On February 3, for instance, the police had to resort to firing to disperse angry anti-*Tamas* demonstrators indulging in vandalism and arson at the Hyderabad Doordarshan Kendra.

How and why, after 15 uneventful years, has *Tamas* provoked such an outcry? **ONKAR SINGH** talks to author Bhisham Sahni (who also has a cameo role in the serial) about the *Tamas* controversy.

MY BOOK IS TOTALLY secular: those who have read it will agree that it is not directed against any one community in particular; its entire approach is non-communal. I welcome the decision taken by the Bombay High Court, and later, the Supreme Court. The judges have taken a dispassionate and objective view of the serial.

For 15 years the book was read by thousands of people but nobody accused me of promoting communalism. After its serialisation on television, how can I now agree that I have deliberately tried to villify a particular community? It's just not possible. After all, it is a reputed book



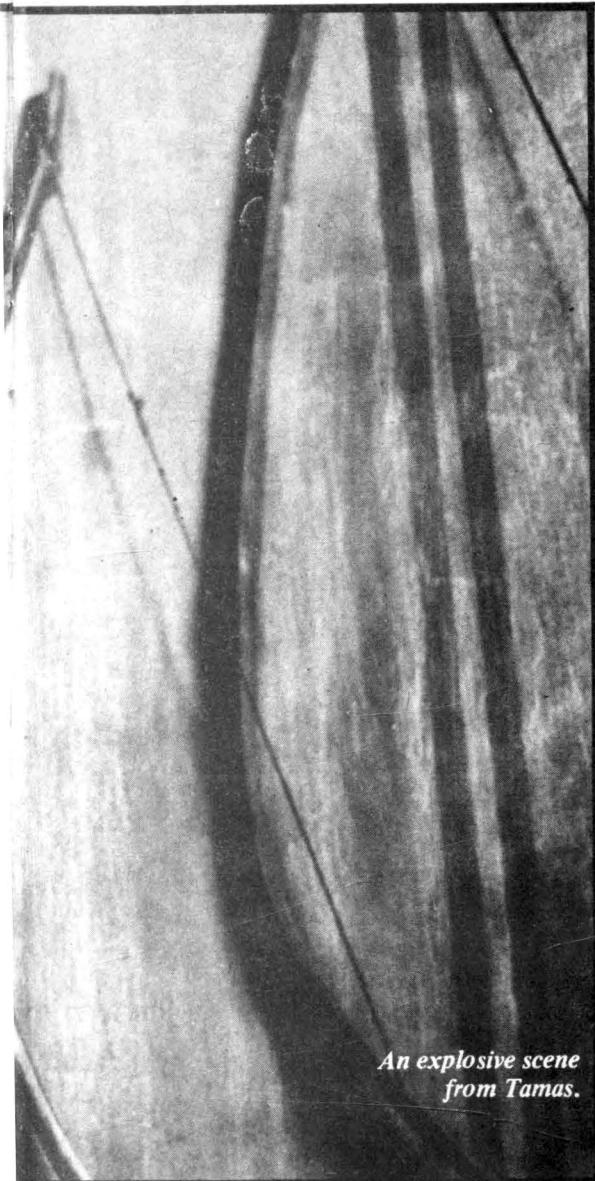
which has won several awards. And readers of Hindi novels are not only those from Leftist parties, but from all spheres of life. So I cannot take the comments made by certain people, seriously. They accuse me of distorting facts — I have done nothing of the sort. If at all there is any distortion, it is on *their* side, not mine. Perhaps if *Tamas* had been telecast as an entire marathon film, on one day, the continuity might have erased some doubts. But a serial is not meant to be telecast in one session.

I would like to repeat that no institution, religion or religious community has been singled out as a possible target of attack. The only target of attack is fundamentalism, in its different forms or manifestations.

People have said that the name of

the *agent provocateur*, Murad Ali (the man who gives Nathu Rs 5 to kill a pig), in my novel, has been deliberately changed to Thekedar, thereby annoying Hindu organisations. But an *agent provocateur* can belong to any community. If he happened to be a Muslim, it does not mean that the entire Muslim community was behind the riots. The same applies to the Hindu community. This kind of oversimplification is being deliberately resorted to. Changing Murad Ali to Thekedar was certainly not deliberate. In fact, an *agent provocateur* can be easily bought, with money. There has been no attempt to pinpoint any specific community.

Moreover, I had emphasised the same point in my introduction (just before the first episode of *Tamas* was



*An explosive scene
from Tamas.*

telecast). After the serial was completed, we felt we had to put things in perspective for the viewers; to introduce them to the point of view we were trying to project.

It is very difficult to recollect the exact impulse that inspired me to write *Tamas*; I think it took me about two years to complete it. Maybe it was the Bhiwandi riots of 1972, when I accompanied my brother, the late Balraj Sahni, and his friends, to Bhiwandi and was reminded of the Partition days. Maybe it was some other impulse... You see, the periodic occurrence of communal riots in this country keeps reminding you of what happened in 1947.

And though one's memories may be quite hazy at times, when one actually sits down to write and starts re-

"MY BOOK IS TOTALLY SECULAR"

Noted writer
Bhisham Sahni defends
TAMAS
(the television serial
based on his book) in
a conversation with
ONKAR SINGH.

collecting events, the past begins to emerge more and more vividly. Your memory becomes very sharp, all of a sudden, and you begin to remember details as if it all happened just yesterday. Moreover, my own experience of the Partition (I was living in Rawalpindi when the riots broke out), helped in the writing of the book. I was actively involved in implementing the policies and programmes of the Congress, before Partition. Even during Partition, we (as Congressmen) did our best to lessen the suffering of the people. When the riots sparked off, delegations were sent to the local Deputy Commissioner to prevent the killings. I happened to be a part of one such delegation sent by the Congress. When refugees started pouring in from the countryside and camps

By Bhisham Sahni

were set up, I was assigned the task of recording the experiences of the refugees during the riots. Later, I met other refugees in the villages and talked to them. All this added to my knowledge and understanding of that period, and thus, I was able to incorporate first-hand information into my novel.

Some of the characters, for example, were taken from real life — Jarnail, Bakshiji etc. In fact, when the serial was aired on the national network, I started receiving innumerable phone-calls from my old fellow Congress workers, who I had not met since 1947. When they saw *Tamas*, they recognised several characters.

People ask me whether the sales of my book have shot up, following its serialisation. It is hard to answer, because by the time *Tamas* was telecast, the novel had already run into 10 editions — it has been translated into English, Kannada and Punjabi. The National Book Trust has undertaken to translate *Tamas* into four more languages. But it is quite possible that there has been a spurt in the novel's sales, due to people wanting to read the original script.

Recognition of one's merit, while being pleasant and encouraging, is not a writer's primary goal. Most of the time, a writer lives in anonymity; his early struggle, for instance, is not known to the world. *Tamas* (the novel) was well-received and appreciated, for many reasons. It attempted to take a serious but detached (objective) view of a burning problem, my first-hand experiences lent credibility to the book, and finally, the episodic nature of the novel, the predominant emotion and perspective behind *Tamas*, gave it some sort of a unity and appeal. In spite of the fact that a novel in Hindi takes much longer to win public approval. But *Tamas* was exceptional. It has been prescribed in many universities, all over India, at graduate and post-graduate levels. Yet, until it was converted into a serial, nobody had said even a word against *Tamas*. ♦



Filipina Match Club



Signed, Sealed and Delivered

Brides for sale? Mail-order brides with door-to-door delivery? SHAILA SHAH profiles the flourishing sex traffic, under the innocuous guise of 'friendship clubs', between South East Asia and the West.

THE ADVERTISEMENTS LIE, often almost inconspicuously, in the seemingly never-ending columns of the Lonely Hearts classifieds of an assortment of West European newspapers and magazines. But they are markedly different from the Lonely Hearts personals. Some are enticingly phrased, often accompanied by alluring photographs, and promise a chance in a lifetime to older men. Others invite readers to marry "a sweet little Asian woman, tender, adaptable and faithful, who does not seek riches but only love, protection and understanding." Still others exhort men to "Stop being used and taken for granted! Contact a sensuous, warm, feminine lady who will love, honour and respect you."

Projecting themselves as friendship societies or as pen-pal agencies, the advertisers are really in the mail-order business, but one with a difference. For a few pounds, the prospective client can obtain a glossy brochure depicting a bevy of S E Asian women, distinguishable from each other only by their first names; a marginally greater financial outlay can secure introductions to a select few and permit a correspondence; and for anything upwards of £1,200





(Rs 28,600) the client can avail himself of the complete service, and buy himself a docile, ready-to-please Asian bride.

Those who have cast a cynical eye over the flourishing mail-order bride business have cited its existence as merely further evidence of a morally bankrupt society in the throes of decadence. After all, for people increasingly accustomed to thumbing their way through the glossy pages of a catalogue to see if a teddy bear or a new carpet or perhaps even a lawn mower takes their fancy, why not a specialist service which catalogues young women, at a purchasable price, with a promise of door-to-door delivery? That too, with the further proviso that the goods can be returned if the customer is not entirely satisfied.

The cynicism, however, is dangerous. An objective probe reveals that in fact an insidious trade is being conducted, a trade across familiar imperialist routes from East to West, from the exotic Orient to the international marketplace of Europe. And it is a brisk business that is raking in colossal profits. The purchase of mail-order brides, principally in Britain, Holland, West Germany, Sweden and

Denmark has, until recently, mostly gone unnoticed. And apart from the odd sensationalist 'scoop' along the lines of 'brides for sale,' by media hounds, the agents have more or less been left alone to ply their trade, and new entrepreneurs have ensured that hundreds of agencies now exist in various European capitals.

WHO ARE THESE WOMEN who voluntarily or otherwise find themselves displayed as marketable commodities and exported to the West? They come, eager and hopeful, from the other side of the globe, from the bleak urban ghettos and the economically ravaged countrysides of S Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Some are of peasant stock, daughters of farm labourers or even small-time farmers. Others are teachers, social workers and nurses — young professionals trying to eke out a living from within the confines of respectability. Still others are already engaged in the sex industry in their own countries — in its bars, massage parlours, hotels and brothels. And many, of course, are simply unemployed. United in their goal of extricating themselves from the clutches of an assured life-long penury, they aspire to a life of

luxury in countries whose promises of wealth and superior life styles cannot fail to impress. Unstable governments, spiralling inflation and chronic unemployment offer few choices. So the women permit themselves to be propelled into selling their labour as low-paid migrant workers in the homes, hospitals and kitchens of the West, or in its bars and nightclubs, or by offering themselves on the international marriage market. For these women, familial obligations run deep — the money they earn is vital to support their families, educate younger siblings, and sometimes even helps in the expansion of petty trade or investing in a piece of agricultural machinery.

And so they take their place in the queues of women eager to migrate to Europe, even though it may provide only temporary respite. Of course the opportunity of a possible permanent settlement, by being a mail-order bride, accelerates their excitement. Even if it means sharing an unknowable future with a stranger, in an alien country, far away from familiar landscapes.

THE AGENTS WHO PROCURE these women, both in the home coun-



SPECIAL FEATURE

tries and in the West, have reinforced and exploited the reigning stereotypes. Indeed their femininity, docility, obedience and submissiveness, all traditionally associated with Asian women, have been touted and marketed as assets; as particularly desirable qualities in the present day ethos of women's liberation in which women are clamouring for equality.

These very same qualities have played a major role in promoting the notorious sex tourism industry, a business that has reached unprecedented proportions in S E Asia in the past decade. It is a lucrative industry and a major earner: in Thailand, tourism (of which sex tourism is a signi-

Travel agents, in cahoots with the captains of the sex industry, have also capitalised, handsomely, by offering women as escorts, prostitutes, dancing partners, masseuses, and sex slaves. The result: they have lured a staggering number of tourists to their shores to experience 'paradise on earth', as one travel agent describes it, and fill the coffers of the Treasury. An advertisement for Rosie Travels is typical: "Thailand is a world full of extremes and the possibilities are limitless. Anything goes in this exotic country. Especially when it comes to girls. Yet visitors to Thailand cannot always find exciting places where they can indulge in unknown pleasures... Now you can book a trip to Thailand with erotic pleasure included in the price."

S KOREA, THAILAND and the Philippines have become the stamping grounds of male tourists, mostly European and Japanese, looking for a sex holiday. Japanese travel agencies handle tours in which *kisaeng* (prostitute) parties are included in the package. And companies frequently send their employees for 'rest and recreation tours' to S Korea (the number of male Japanese tourists to that country has trebled in the last decade). A white-collar worker claims, "In S Korea, the spirit of rendering oneself completely to a man still exists among women and their exhaustive service is irresistible."

In Thailand, it is estimated that some 200,000 prostitutes are engaged in the sex tourism industry, a statistic that has given Bangkok the dubious distinction of being christened 'the biggest brothel in Asia'. This prostitution explosion was caused by the siting of US military bases at various key positions in S E Asia during the Vietnam war. Siriporn Skrobanek, a social worker who provides rehabilitation to women wishing to leave the sex industry in Bangkok, declares that over 700,000 GIs flew into Thailand for 'rest and recreation' in which prostitution played a major part: "Their expenditure ex-

ceeded 40 per cent of the country's export." It has also been alleged that a former Vice-President of Thailand, and an internationally well-known banker, encouraged provincial governors in Thailand at the beginning of the 1980s to "improve the sex spots in the provinces to attract more tourists and thereby create more jobs."

In the Philippines, sex tourism continues to thrive, despite promises from the Aquino regime to eradicate it. The continued presence of US military bases has also ensured that, in their environs, entire villages have sprung up to service the military personnel.

IT WAS THE REALISATION that what was on offer in S E Asia could just as easily be made available at 'home', that inspired astute entrepreneurs into importing the services of these women into Western Europe — as temporary workers in the indigenous sex industry or as more permanent settlers, ie, as mail-order brides. Of course the newly-developed infrastructure of jet-age travel helped.

At last count, at least 300 mail-order bride agencies — termed 'Thai-frau' agencies in local parlance — boasted healthy balance-sheets in West Germany; one notorious agent based in Munich claims to arrange at least one match per day and offers a cosmopolitan selection of women from all over the world (South American, especially Peruvian women, are specially favoured alongside their S E Asian counterparts) in a 34-page glossy colour brochure.

British agencies sprang up in the early 1980s and quickly mushroomed — even the sleepy little Welsh town of Llanelli has one — as a response to evident demand. Today, they are still operational and progressing well. Some have even diversified into related spheres, undeterred by the occasional lambasting from concerned groups and the media. The pioneering Filipino Friendship Club (FFC) mailed its first catalogue in 1979. Nicely timed. Its inauguration coincided with changes in legislation

Filipina Match Club



A man is not expected to fulfill any prerequisite. His role is simple — he pays his membership fees, receives photographs and other details and is free to write to as many members as he chooses.

fificant part) is reportedly the third largest earner after rice and sugar exports; in the Philippines, the Marcos dictatorship ensured that sex tourism was developed with such rapidity that it soon commanded a significant role in the economy as the fourth largest money-spinner. A fact which has led many to question the integrity of a regime that props up an ailing economy by prostituting its women.

Indeed, an entire industry has emerged to exploit the vulnerability of poor women to the fullest — witness the hundreds of hotels, brothels, massage parlours, nightclubs, strip clubs and sex shows that litter the streets of Bangkok, Manila and Seoul.

which affected Filipino immigration: cuts and the eventual demise of special quotas for jobs in the hotel and catering industries resulted in making it almost impossible for most Filipinos to enter the country as migrant workers or indeed in any other capacity except as wives.

The FFC, which bills itself as 'Britain's largest and most progressive', is typical of other friendship clubs and offers two basic services: introductions and tourist flights, and related arrangements. It is owned by a Douglas Knight, evidently a prosperous proprietor as there are plans to extend operations. It claims to have almost 7,000 'friends' and witnessed 'hundreds' of successful marriages, but stresses that it has never married anyone — "We only open the door." It advertises extensively and not just in the classifieds — a recent full-page advertisement introduced 37 women, each of whom tacitly invited the male reader to sample her: "I am V, a Filipino Chinese girl, 85 lbs, 5 ft 1 in tall . . . I am very feminine and would like to meet a nice young man for a lasting relationship."

FEMALE MEMBERS OF the FFC are assured that 'gentlemen members' are "sincere, marriage-minded and prepared to visit the Philippines or make arrangements for ladies to join them in the UK." The women, in turn, are expected to be "sincere and of good moral character" and to subscribe to a strict code of conduct. The Club will then do its best to provide for her future happiness. To the man, she is presented thus: "Like most ladies, they want to meet a gentleman and settle down and have a home of their own and enjoy companionship. They are not seeking great wealth, just a good and happy future with the men of their dreams . . . They come from a part of the world where family is paramount. Their devotion to their husbands and family is second to none." The women are also projected as easily adaptable and undemanding; their customs, faith, language and culture pose "no

problems at all".

A male member is not expected to fulfill any prerequisites, neither is he vetted; it is merely suggested that he contemplate whether he can offer his bride-to-be a secure life (he is not even required to answer in the affirmative). His role is simple — he pays his membership fee, receives photographs, details and addresses, and is free to write to as many women as he chooses. The FFC also offers a selection on video — hence the description 'progressive' — which has proved a successful marketing strategy, and also arranges for visits to the Philippines, the recruiting ground, where the man can have a wider choice.

The woman is more carefully scrutinised. She is required to submit exhaustive details about herself, including a legal declaration attesting that she has no criminal record and is free to marry (unlike the man, she is not given an 'ideal partner' form). The formalities completed, she begins her wait for a letter in her mail-box.

When a woman is selected and finally invited to Britain, she enters the country on a visitor's visa. If the match is clearly unsuitable, she can either try her luck with other men, or is compelled to leave. If, however, the man expresses his satisfaction, the FFC is happy and willing to arrange legal and other formalities, including a wedding. If settling in proves problematic, Douglas Knight has a solution: a holiday back in the Philippines — once she sees that there is no running water and no toilet, her homesickness will be cured.

It all sounds fairly straightforward, and other agencies more or less follow this *modus operandi*, with slight variations in the services offered. Curiously enough, some of them justify their activity in bizarre ways — Europhil claims that the ratio of women to men in the Philippines is 1:6 and if not for services like theirs, many Filipinas would find themselves on the shelf. One agent has also claimed that he pursues his profession because the Filipinas like and admire the English and have a penchant for

letter-writing. Between them, agencies in Western Europe have arranged thousands of marriages — 11,000 mail-order brides live in W Germany alone. But in an exercise relying largely on 'discretion', true figures are impossible to obtain.

THE TRANSACTION INVOLVED in purchasing a mail-order bride, is based on simple lines: the man pays and chooses, the woman is paid for and chosen; and *presto*, the man acquires a bride who will keep house, service him and his needs, perhaps even work to pay off any debt incurred in obtaining her. In exchange, or so the woman is led to believe, she will

Filipina Match Club



The woman is carefully scrutinised. She is required to submit exhaustive details about herself, including a legal declaration that she has no criminal record and is free to marry.

be provided for by a decent husband who will offer her permanent economic stability and kind, caring companionship.

The reality, however, can be quite different. Those who have been concerned about this new form of trafficking in women have reported alarming findings. Many mail-order brides have been sold into prostitution or have had their husbands double up as pimps; some have been sold to vice rings or been forced to work in the sex industry. Others, less blatantly exploited and abused, often find themselves isolated, totally unfamiliar with their surroundings, the language, life styles, food and customs.

SPECIAL FEATURE

All are often unaware of their rights and completely reliant on their husbands; many are unable to take any decisions without his sanction. A West German magazine comments: "These women are totally controlled by their men. Their husbands hold their passports. They can't speak German and know nobody. They must be ready to work and to have sex. It is a form of slavery."

The police have also confirmed the severe exploitation that such women are frequently subjected to. The Federal Police Authority in Wiesbaden, West Germany, reported: "According to our knowledge there have been cases of forced prostitution of Asian women in the Federal Republic. Generally, pimps have gone to Asian countries and there recruited women for ostensible work in the catering trade or married them. After moving to the Federal Republic, these women have been forced into prostitution, mostly after having had their passports taken away from them." As statistics have revealed a sharp increase in the practice, the police have had to step in with greater force — vice rings have been smashed, kidnapped women rescued and racketeers caught. A women's group in West Germany has attempted — violently — to deal a more lasting blow to the business and fire-bombed three marriage bureaux that advertised mail-order brides.

WOMEN WHO HAVE MANAGED to extricate themselves from their frightening predicaments, have provided tragic testimonies: one woman, identified as Flor, complained bitterly, "My husband was a mechanic and out all day and most evenings. I was stuck at home in a small apartment, taking care of his invalid mother. I knew nobody else and anyway, I could not speak German. I kept house, cooked, looked after my mother-in-law and spent my free time looking out of the window — waiting for the postman, my husband, anyone." Another bride suddenly found herself confronted with the immigr-

ation authorities. Three months into the marriage, her husband had declared himself unsatisfied and wanted her out of the way. The easiest option was to have her deported, which he executed with ease — after all, her right of residence was inextricably linked with his citizenship. Two others faced a similar plight earlier this year and were returned to the Philippines.

A 17-year old from Thailand claimed that once she arrived in Munich and got married, it was made clear that she was to 'be nice' to her husband's business colleagues. She sub-

they told gruesome tales of abuse.

Only a few have managed to escape. Thousands are still literally locked away in the kitchens and bedrooms of the West, in permanent servitude to their masters, almost in penal servitude for being women, poor and from the Third World. Purchased by their husbands, they are condemned to serve him for years to come; inexorably their fate is handcuffed to his every whim and fancy.

IN AN ATTEMPT TO HALT this insidious practice, concerned women's groups, church groups and social workers are demanding that the entry of Asian brides be more strongly monitored, and once they arrive, their rights be made known and protected. But this is a solution racked with problems. As immigration controls clamp down further, thus preventing Asians from entering Western Europe even on legitimate grounds, any 'monitoring' could be potentially dangerous and abused in order to harass genuine entrants.

In their home countries, women in Thailand and the Philippines have formed networks not only to protest against the trafficking in women and urge their governments to ban their exploitation in the sex industry, but also to offer rehabilitation, training and employment opportunities, and counselling for those who have returned. But only very powerful legislative action can stop what is clearly a profitable and well-organised enterprise. It is not only the agents, pimps, hoteliers, racketeers, club owners and the like that the women are up against, but an abject poverty which throws up few choices.

sequently garnered that a number of Thai women had had this condition foisted on them as an extra 'wifely duty' that they must perform. Her passport had been impounded, she had little idea of her rights and no means of escape. It was only after the police intervened, following a tip-off, that she was released and returned to Bangkok. She now has to grapple with the consequences of having been discarded and to start life anew. In a similar case, two Filipinas were recently rescued from the clutches of a vice ring with the help of a Dutch women's group and volunteered to go back home whereupon

Until such time as radical changes are effected, the columns of the classifieds promise to be littered with seemingly innocuous advertisements. And a constant stream of women from S E Asia will continue to flow to the West. In pursuit of an illusion. ♦

Filipina Match Club



Only very powerful legislative action can stop what is clearly a profitable and well-organised enterprise.

It is not only the agents, pimps, hoteliers, racketeers, club owners and the like that the women are up against, but an abject poverty which throws up few choices.

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AHUNTER WAS SEPARATED from his companions. Night came on suddenly. He sighted a small hut, and knocked on the door; an old woman came out.

"I have lost my way, mother, give me some food."

"You look a noble man, Sir, and what would I have fit for you to eat?"

"Anything. I am hungry."

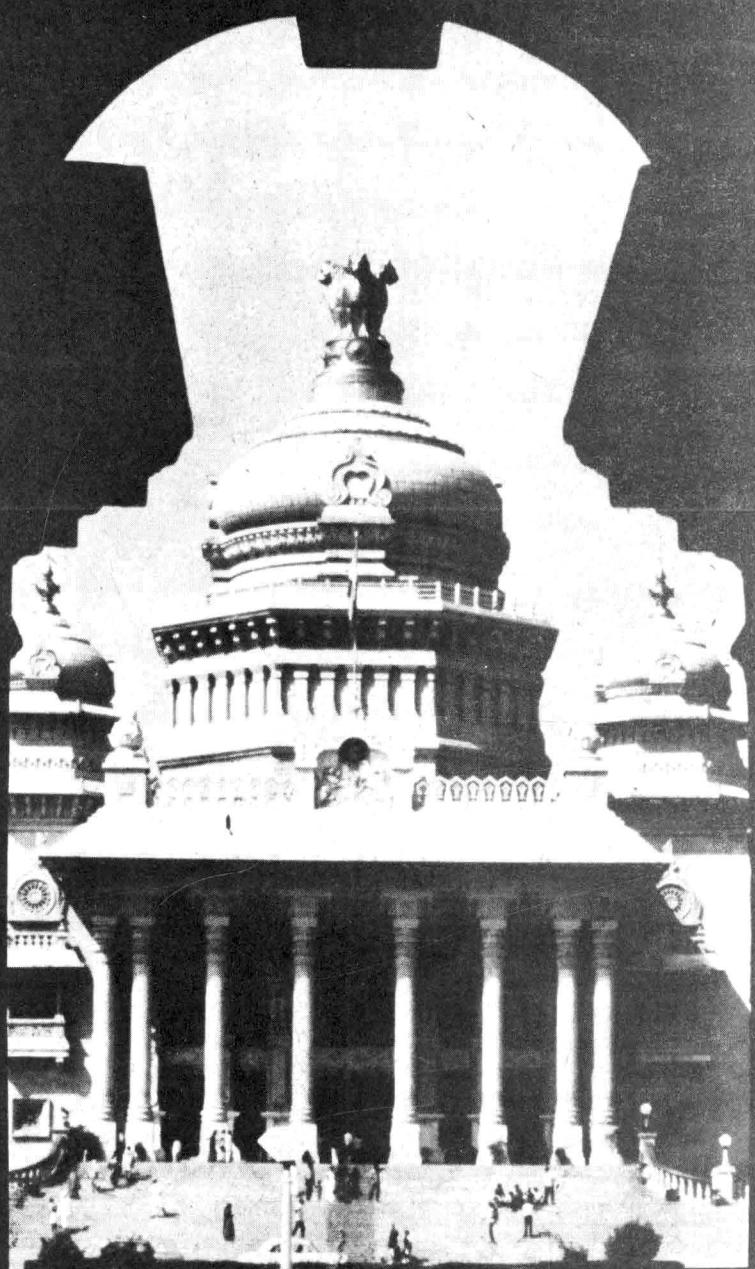
"I have a bean-field behind my house and it has yielded me a good crop this year. If your taste permits it..." Presently she placed a plateful of beans before the visitor, and he ate it with great relish, found grass for his horse too, and was on his way again.

It was later learnt that this visitor was none other than the king himself. The village came to be known as the Town of Boiled Beans. (*Bendha Kaluru* later abbreviated to "Bangaluru".)

When we emerge from the mists of tradition, we learn that Kempe Gowda I built the town in 1537 AD and constructed a mud fort around it. Sensing that this town was bound to grow beyond the walls of his mud fort, he built watch-towers at four points to indicate its future boundaries. On the North at Bellary Road, South at Lal Bagh, the Eastern one on a rock near Ulsoor, the Western, overlooking Kempambudi Tank.

An astrologer studied the conjunction of stars and fixed an auspicious day on which Kempe Gowda marked off, with the sharp end of a plough, two streets, one running East to West (between Ulsoor Gate and Railway Goods shed) and the other running North to South (from Yelahanka Gate to the fort). Thereafter he built temples for Vinayaka who brings luck, and Anjaneya, the God of Power. He also built the famous Bull Temple (Basavangudi) and many others.

The astrologer had displayed great astuteness and foresight. The area within the markings of the plough, now throbs with life and activity (even too much of it as it may seem), if one watches the flow of traffic and the jam of pedestrians in the streets running East to West, and North to South, intersecting, cutting, weaving them-



A PASSAGE THROUGH BANGALORE

Founded almost 500 years ago, today the city of Bangalore pulsates with the bustle of modern day existence juxtaposed with the charm of past glory. This historic metropolis comes alive under the pen of celebrated writer R K NARAYAN who proffers vivid and evocative portrait of the city – its winding bylanes, exquisite gardens and magnificent monuments.

*Excerpted from R K Narayan's "The Emerald Route: Passage Through Karnataka".
Published by Vision Books Pvt Ltd. Price Rs. 50.*

selves into a bewildering maze of main streets, proliferating into side-streets, lanes, bylanes, and blind alleys, without a square inch of space being left unused.

THE OCTOGENARIAN one notices on a *pyol*, spiritedly arguing with a circle of cronies, must have learnt or taught the alphabet in that children's school under a faded signboard; those pawn-brokers seated cross-legged, in their narrow parlours, amidst a heap of used clothes and metal-ware, probably have been philosophers and guides to desperate souls seeking ready cash. And ranged along further, yarn-brokers, cycle-repairers, and grain merchants; vendors of sweets displaying seductively a hundred delicacies on trays, all these must have come of a long line of octogenarians, sweet-vendors, pawn-brokers, and the rest, forming the warp and weft of the social fabric.

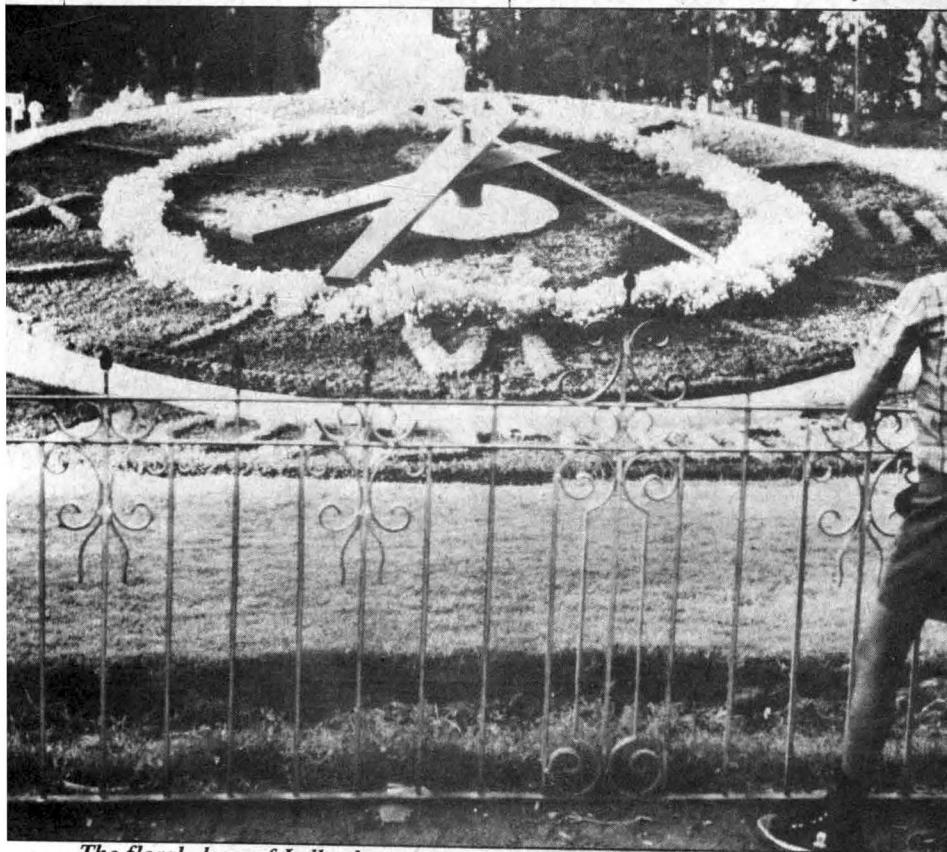
Passing down, one may also have a

sudden glimpse of the face of a god, shining in the soft light of a wick-lamp inside a shrine, of devotees kneeling in silent prayer inside a mosque, and a church too, where I step in to read the inscription under a portrait in the foyer: "*Rev Benjamin Rice (1814-1887) – an unwearisome labourer in various departments. An excellent Kanarese Preacher, who delivered his sermons in Kannada for over fifty years.*" That was in 1830 or thereabouts. The loungers, one notices, reclining on the rusty shutters of a closed shop also have a look of permanence about them. Everything and everyone here bears an institutional touch, giving one a feeling that they must have gone on living here generation after generation, never stepping beyond their teeming orbit, and may not have even noticed the development of Bangalore in other directions. Sadashivanagar, Jayanagar and Raj Mahal Extension may sound alien to their ears, accustomed as they are to

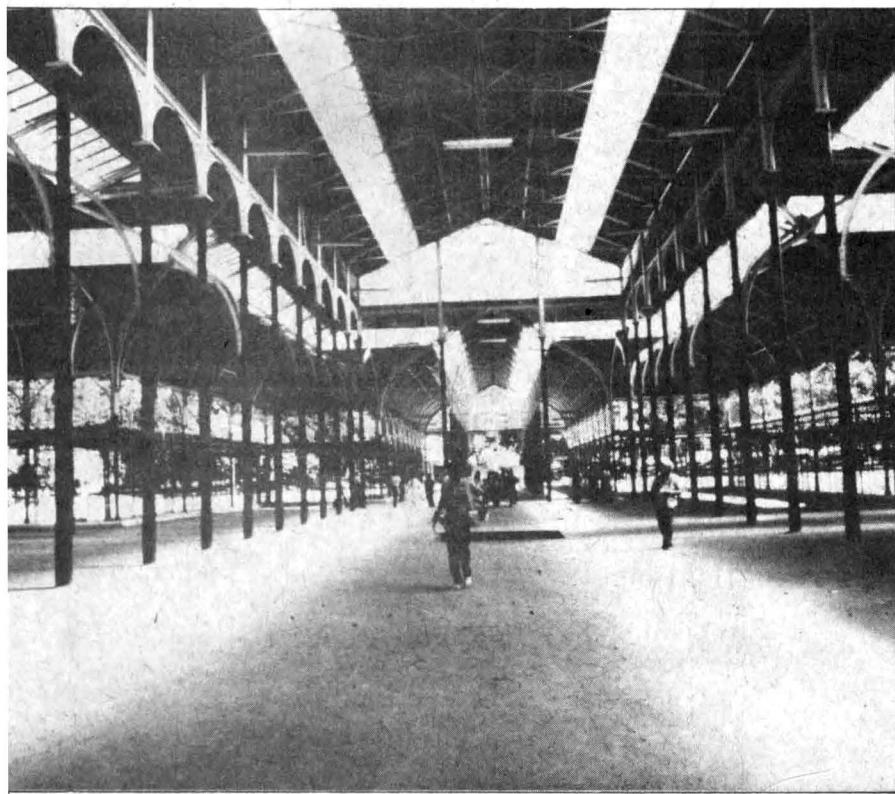
'Nagarathpet', 'Tharagupet', 'Chick-pet', and 'Doddapet'.

This hoary nucleus of the city retains an indescribable charm, although the architecture may look outdated, and one's passage at first may appear hazardous through its traffic. But actually the wheels steer off within a hair's breadth and spare the pedestrian's toes, who must survive by lightly leaping aside, and recovering his balance from the very edge of the granite pavement, and may not suffer more than an occasional jab from a cycle handle or a bump from its mud-guard as crack-riders dash past, weaving their way through. Here the shops may look unsophisticated, being mostly without glossy counters, glazed windows, or furniture, except a desk for the proprietor at the entrance, but you could get anything and everything you may desire within this ancient perimeter (crowned by the magnificent Krishnarajendra Market), if you stand on the threshold, catch someone's eye and make your demands clearly heard over other people's demands and general conversation. Anything and everything including a full regalia with sparkling crown and robes for an emperor in a court scene for a theatrical production, and also false hair, beards, lace-caps, and masks. A whole row of them I had seen some years ago, although in a recent visit, I could not locate these shops as they seemed to have got hemmed in between watch-repairs and automobile spares and tinkers.

FOUNDER KEMPE GOWDA'S vision has been fulfilled and exceeded. One has only to go up the Corporation multi-storey 24th floor to appreciate the vastness of Bangalore spreading out in every direction for 130 square kilometres. I was overwhelmed with its extent again, during a drive through the city with the Corporation Administrator, Mr Laxman Rao (who leaves home at the dawn of each day to inspect this vast city methodically, inch by inch, and pass orders on the spot to his staff accompanying him, dedicated as he is, to the



The floral glory of Lalbagh.



Walking through Cubbon Park: a peaceful experience.

task of maintaining Bangalore as a city of beauty and comfort. "It is like house-keeping, you have to be at it continuously," he remarked), from Jayanagar Shopping Complex (the biggest of its kind in Asia, with its 225 shops, super bazars, fruit and vegetables market, offices and a cinema-theatre) at one end, to Ulsoor Tank at the other. Parks and mini-forests, that are being created and cherished all along the way, seemed countless. Eliminating congestion by demolition and widening of roads, construction of pavements, garbage removal through slow-moving trolleys into which people are encouraged to throw all waste and rubbish, and the building of a huge wholesale market at Kalasaplayam to draw away the concentration of lorries and men at Krishnarajendra Market, are major plans that are being executed without respite or a pause.

A section of the city where you can hear statements such as : "Winston Churchill lived here," or "We were suppliers of cigars to Churchill," or

"Duke of Wellington's descendants have always ordered their shoes from us. They are still sending us Christmas greetings." One can hear such claims in and around Commercial Street or Brigade Road or Russel Market, which prospered in the days when this part of the city was very much anglicised, being occupied by British or Anglo-Indian officials and military personnel.

This part of the city enjoyed a topographical caste superiority at one time being a 'Cantonment' area distinct from the 'City', which was 'Native'. Even today certain streets and areas retain their British associations, such as Richmond Town, Cox Town, La-valle Road, Fraser Town, St Marks, Kensington, Johnson Market and so forth. I fervently hope that some zealot will not think of changing them but appreciate their historical flavour — at least to honour the memory of men and women who set forth from far off Britain in those days with dreams of a flourishing career in the 'Orient' and sadly enough, laid their

bones in Bangalore soil. I visited an old cemetery in the Cantonment, in order to look for the grave of a soldier who was court-martialled and shot for indiscipline, the said act of indiscipline being nothing more than quaffing a glass of water, while the Commandant had ordered the company to drink only beer. The soldier had no taste for beer (or any alcohol) and had to face death-penalty for it. In that forest of tombstones, overgrown with weeds and thicket, I could not find this particular grave of one who was forbidden to drink water, perhaps as a protection against cholera, but could not escape death any way. The inscriptions over the tombs have a harrowing tale to tell of men, women and children, who could not survive the Indian climate or conditions of those days, and seemed to have come thousands of miles only to die. In addition to Smiths and Ogilvys, Captains, Lieutenants, or Corporals, dead in their thirties, their wives passed away mostly in their twenties or even less and the children never lived beyond ten, and infants aged a few days. In early 18th century, before the discovery of inoculations and antibiotics, when pneumonia, dysentery or malaria struck, there could be no hope of survival. I noticed in a whole row, an entire family wiped out by cholera.

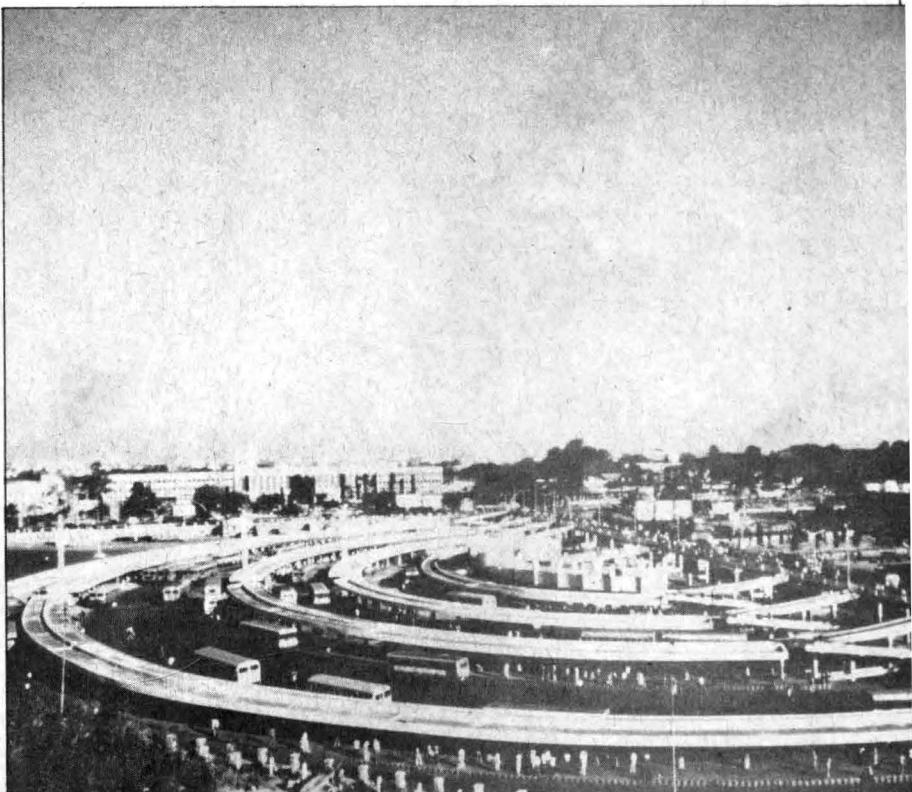
IN AND AROUND BANGALORE are located industrial establishments of the first magnitude. Hindustan Aeronautics, New Electric Government Factory, Soap Factory, Hindustan Machine Tools, Bharat Electronics, Indian Telephone Industries, to mention only a few, each one employing several thousand workers, handling a variety of sophisticated, up-to-date machinery. To list them all would cover several pages. On the road to Whitefield alone are situated a hundred-odd major factories. The Industrial Estate at Rajajinagar at the other end of the city has hundreds of small-scale and ancillary units — with a well-ordered 'Tool Room' to help in designing machine tools for any

special purpose.

Bangalore has been essentially a centre of scientific, technological and research activities. The old palace of the Maharaja, I learn, is to be converted into a Museum of Living Science, which will concentrate in one place, exhibits of permanent value for experts and students alike.

Sir M Visvesvaraya whose vision and practical genius gave shape to modern Karnataka in its civic, industrial, and engineering fields, lived and died in Bangalore, a centenarian, active to the last in the pursuit of his ideal of modernising Karnataka. The Industrial Museum at the Cubbon Park stands as a tribute to the memory of this rare and unique personality.

LIVING IN BANGALORE, no one can complain of a dull moment. There are nearly a hundred cinema-theatres, the largest concentration perhaps, for any place, regular theatrical productions at Rabindra Kalakshetra, or in the professional repertory theatres. Sporting events, racing, classical concerts or jazz and pop music, not to speak of seminars, conferences, art and religious festivals, attract an enormous influx of visitors by road, train and plane. It is estimated that at any time a floating population of five lakhs could be counted in Bangalore, a city so cosmopolitan in character, that all languages of India could be heard there, if one is inclined to go on a linguistic hunt. Bangalore is connected to the very ends of the earth by air, road and rail and that seems to me one of the finest advantages of life in Bangalore. I have discussed the subject of Bangalore with persons in other parts of India, and have found that 90 out of 100 dream of settling down in Bangalore after retirement, and a few have already, with foresight, built houses, and are preoccupied with the strategy to get their houses back from the tenants now occupying them. For youth and middle-age, life in Bangalore offers many attractions. For the aged, Bangalore air has proved salubrious. There are more pensioners settled in Bangalore than in any



Central bus stand: in the nucleus of the city.

other part of India. Many an old guard, in different walks of life, well-known names, might be out of view for decades and presumed to have left the world, but one will have an agreeable surprise coming upon the venerable gentleman at a City club playing bridge, or strolling quietly along the garden paths of Lal Bagh or the pavement of Whitefield, or occupying an unobtrusive seat at the Gayana Samaj concerts. Bangalore is actually a walker's paradise; in spite of its crowds and traffic and buildings, it still provides a hundred places where one can walk in peace according to one's choice, Cubbon Park right across the city, Vidhana Soudha terrace gardens, Lal Bagh, around Gold Course or Sankey Tank, not to mention the promenades in a crowded shopping area such as Mahatma Gandhi Road or Narasimha Raja Road.

There are many attractive places within a 30 to 60 kilometre range of the city — Nandi Hills, Hesarghatta, and Mekedatu — Bannerghatta, within

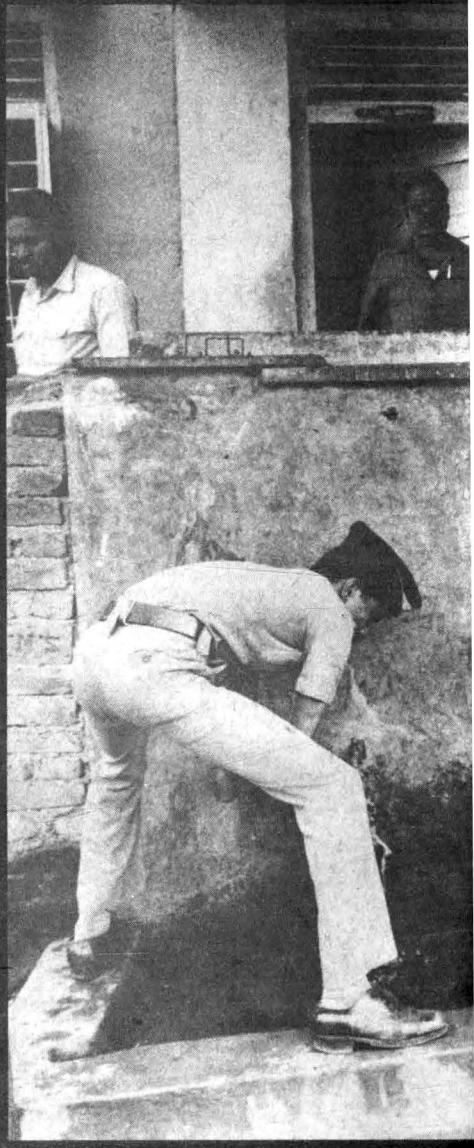
an hour's drive of Bangalore, would, however, be my first choice for a week-end. Bannerghatta is now being developed as a National Park, without in any way spoiling its mountainous and jungle characteristics, which possess a rugged charm. A safari area is being created where one will be able to move on an equal footing with lions in a free state. Besides the larger wild life, birds (one hundred kinds of birds have been observed), monkeys, bison, and elephants, panther, wild boar, sambar, spotted deer, jackal, Indian hare, barking deer, hog deer, and sloth bear will tenant this Park without being cramped in captivity.

Another place I would recommend is Thippagondana Halli, where river Arkavathi is impounded for supplying water to Bangalore. About 32 kilometres away from Bangalore, the range of hills around, and the water-spread, afford an inspiring scene, especially when the birds dive in the lake, with the evening sun sliding behind the hills. ♦

REPORT



The Police: callous and insensitive or merely indifferent?

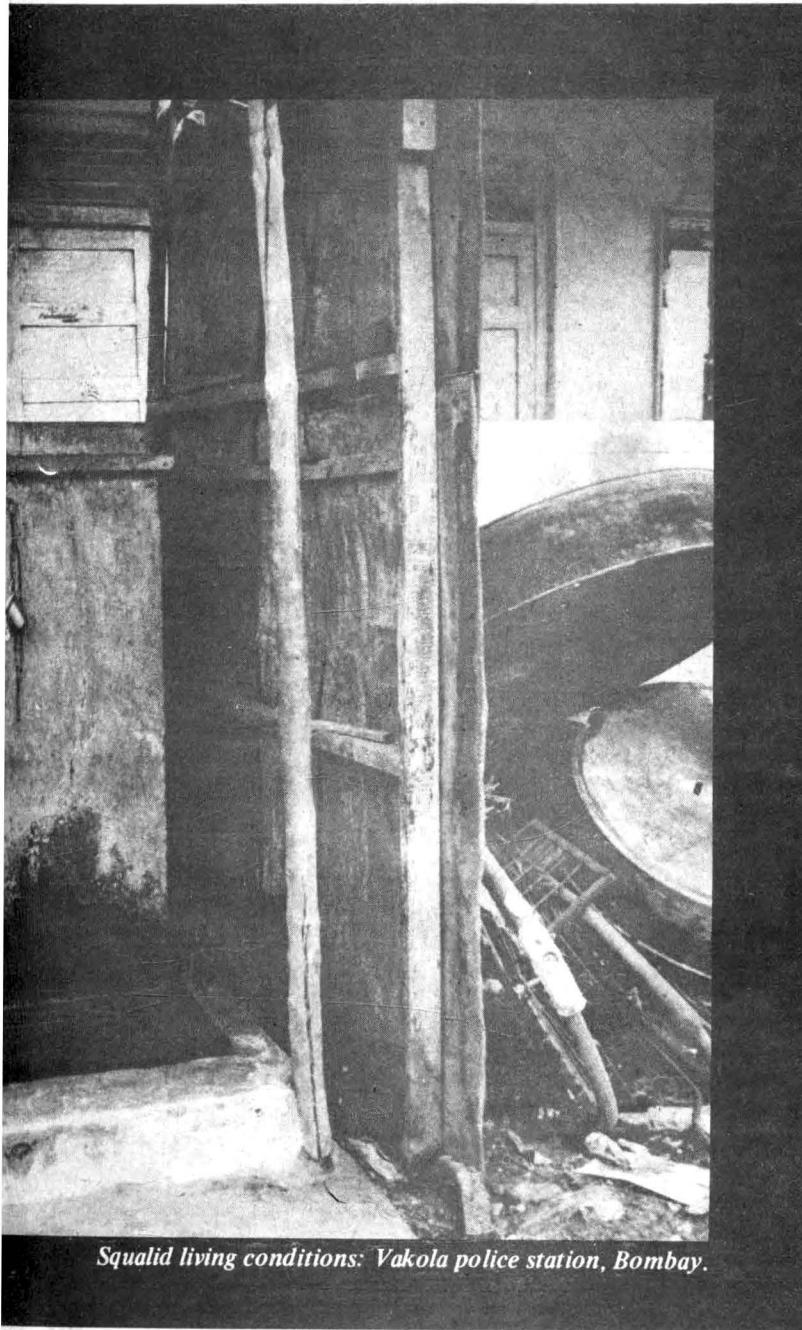


IN ONE CORNER OF a crowded, unsterilised ward of Bombay's Cooper Hospital, Police Constable Suryakant Chavan, 22, battled for his life, against formidable odds. His pain-filled eyes stared out of a pallid face and a frail body bearing numerous stab wounds on the stomach and hips. As he lay passively on a filthy and blood-stained sheet, soiled tubes connected his lungs to an oxygen cylinder while other tubes, emerging

from the dirty and equally blood-streaked blanket, removed waste products from his system. Why was Police Constable Suryakant Chavan subjected to this kind of callous indifference? How did he land in hospital?

At approximately 8:30 pm one evening, the unarmed Chavan and his colleagues had been grappling with criminals who were wielding knives and *guptis* (small, sharp daggers) near

a milling crowd on Bombay's S V Road. While indifferent shopkeepers and busy commuters watched apathetically, Chavan's superior, Police Inspector Godbole, beat a hasty and inexplicable retreat, apparently chasing one of the criminals. Two of Chavan's colleagues followed suit. Seeing them flee, Chavan also released his hostage and started running. Unfortunately, a slab of cement obstructed his flight, tripping him. As he fell, his assailants



Squalid living conditions: Vakola police station, Bombay.

whipped out their *guptis* and stabbed him repeatedly. No one cared. No one helped lift him into a police car that arrived later, with a Police Inspector in tow.

I stood near Suryakant Chavan's hospital bed. He looked drowsy and defeated. But he had once been an ambitious lad, trying to qualify (through departmental examinations) as a Sub-Inspector. In his short career as a constable, he had helped trace and arrest

several armed miscreants as well as infiltrate and identify *charas* dens. It had been, in fact, his very courage and daring that were responsible for his pitiable condition. Despite continual pleading on my part, that Chavan be shifted to a clean, ventilated room with sterilised bed linen, the hospital authorities remained implacable. Suryakant Chavan died that afternoon, not of stab wounds but of double pneumonia contracted at the hospital.

He died because he had risked his own life in order to maintain law and order in society.

Constable Chavan was a fool to risk his life for a salary of Rs 600 and a 10ft x 10ft room with a tiny kitchen and common toilet facilities. Working an average 10-hour day, he was foolish not to be deterred by the rule that personnel belonging to the constabulary

POLICE: THE HUMAN FACTOR

The oppressors or the oppressed? Powerful and desensitized enforcers or hapless victims of debilitating circumstances? In a vivid and personalised account, intrepid journalist and activist SHEELA BARSE profiles the humane problems and vicissitudes of our police force.

cadre (comprising Police Constables (PCs), Lance Naiks (LNs), Head Constables (HCs) and Assistant Sub-Inspectors (ASIs)), are given only Rs 5,000 if they get seriously injured on duty, and that their families receive a paltry sum of Rs 15,000 if the policeman dies in action. The family, of course, then also has to vacate the official quarters. Chavan's dependants include his paralysed father, unemployed mother, and two siblings, still studying. What will they do now?

What does our socialist, democratic republic offer a Police Constable? Let us consider Maharashtra — one of India's more progressive states — as a case in point. Statistical evidence shows that basic amenities for the police in this state are dismal, even damning. A Police Constable's take-

REPORT

home pay (dearness allowance, etc included) is approximately Rs 850 a month. His annual increment, on basic pay which is Rs 235, is a meagre Rs 5, for the first few years of service. After 15 years of service he can be promoted to a Lance Naik and after 20 years, a Head Constable. A mere 20 per cent of the state's HCs can hope to retire as ASIs. Only one per cent (of the constabulary) can become Sub-Inspectors (SIs) after passing the qualifying examination.

A POLICEMAN'S LIFE IS FULL of processions, marches, bandhs, riots, communal conflagrations, VIP *bandobasts*, disaster duties, etc, in addition to crime prevention and detection activities. An arrest procedure or a *bandobast* duty almost always extends to a period beyond the normal span of physical endurance. Curbing riots or terrorist activities can keep a policeperson on duty for several days, with no family contact. Neither meals nor even tea are provided at some police stations. After hours of stressful and exacting activity, a policeperson must want to rest for half-an-hour.



Spartan facilities: Dharavi police station.

A lull in a riot may give him this chance, but there is no rest-room in any police station. Moreover, a policeman has to work at all hours of the day *and* night; his duty hours may extend from a minimum of eight hours to several days in a row. If his duty extends beyond the stipulated eight hours — it could be 10 or 24 hours — he is entitled to Rs 5 as refreshment allowance. To claim this,

bills have to be submitted and duly certified by a series of officers.

The plight of personnel attached to rural police stations and outposts is much worse. Only one SI is posted at a small rural police station; he polices a cluster of small villages and hamlets. As the only officer in charge, he is expected to work 24 hours a day and so are his staff, comprising some HCs and a few PCs. An outpost is manned by one HC and one or two PCs — there are 715 outposts in Maharashtra. So, on an average, 1,800 to 2,000 police personnel man these outposts, an immensely difficult and trying task with very poor rewards.

Dakshata, the Maharashtra State Police magazine, invited wives of the constabulary to express their views on their husbands' profession. Every wife (from a sample of 20 entries) was distressed because of the nature of her husband's work. Each one recalled how her husband was often summoned for duty despite more pressing circumstances at home: a sick child or some important function. A policeman can rarely take his children out, or help them with their studies or minor school problems. A festival almost invariably means *bandobast* duty for the police official, instead of festive participation on his part. Leave is denied at such times due to the fear of communal tension. In any case, a



Shoddy and dilapidated toilets: Worli police lines.



Close encounters with a criminal kind.

policeman's leave can be arbitrarily cancelled for a variety of reasons — VIP visits, morchas, bandhs, disasters, terrorist threats, a sudden spurt in robberies, election duty . . . the list of emergencies is endless.

Vilasini Gaikwad, the wife of a havaldar posted in Meeraj, wrote ruefully, "When my husband returns home, I accept it as off-duty time; when he sits down to eat, I accept that as a mealtime." Others echo her sentiments. "If you marry a policeman, you first learn to adjust to the police department and only later to his family," says Vandana Inamdar, wife of HC Vithal, posted in Pune. Vijaymala Mahadik, wife of a police-driver posted in Satara, goes further. "Just as a dog is tethered to a post in his master's house, a policeman is tethered to the orders of his superiors." The wives bitterly rue the fact that a policeman's first priority is to his work — he has to set aside filial responsibilities, callously if need be, if he does not want to be suspended.

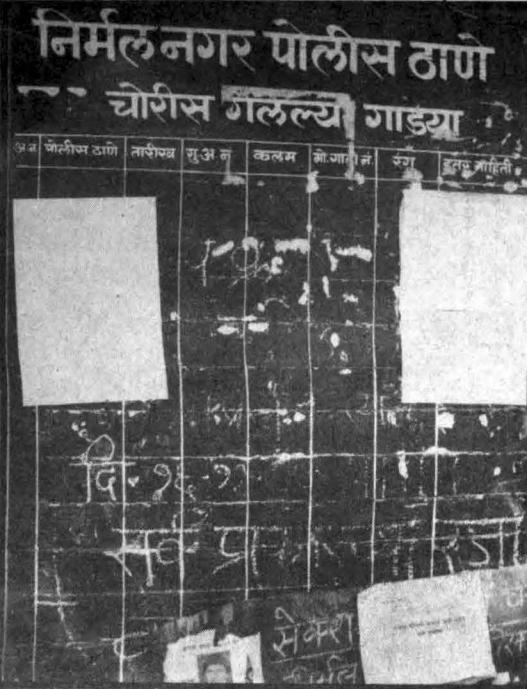
Almost all policemen's wives admit to feeling nervous whenever their husbands are called — to deal with arson, pursue criminals or dacoits to their hideouts, curb riots, pick up corpses, cope with all kinds of emergencies and disasters (house collapses, floods, accidents etc). More often than not, the miscreants are armed and may out-

number the police 'party' equipped only with *dandas*.

Woman Police Constable Mangal Moghe emphasises that there is hardly any public recognition or appreciation of a policeman's laudatory work during riots and uprisings. Instead, the accompanying tension and pressures of living such a difficult life are almost considered to be occupational hazards of a policeman's life.

AS FAR AS FIELD WORK is concerned, the infrastructural facilities and requisite equipment are hopelessly inadequate. Forty out of Maharashtra's 784 police stations do not possess jeeps. Others have access to one or two, which may or may not be in working order. Yet an officer is expected to reach the trouble spot as soon as a crime is reported. Police work requires a range of vehicles — patrol vans, prisoner-carriers, large vehicles and mini-vans for troop movements, jeeps, motorcycles, cycles and cars. Motorcycles are available for only VIP outriders and messengers in cities; not for SIs at police stations. Out of the 3,543 vehicles (including motorcycles, jeeps, vans, patrol cars . . . in Maharashtra) 900 are certified as unfit but are nevertheless pressed into service. An average area under jurisdiction is 400 square kilometres: how are the police expected to reach the trouble spot? As far as looking after their own is considered, the Maharashtra State Police do not own a single ambulance, not even in riot-prone police stations.

Police transfers are another major



Denial of leave: a common occurrence.

REPORT

hurdle, especially as they take place more frequently than the stipulated span of three years. Such a transfer means fresh admissions for children in new schools, transferring ration cards, bank accounts — the whole works. With absolutely no guarantees from the department to fulfilling even the basic need for housing.

Shockingly, in fact, of the 1,05,000 men in the constabulary cadre in Maharashtra, more than 42,000 are not provided with government accommodation, while nearly 4,000 officers out of the 7,500 posted at police stations, are obliged to find living premises for their families on their own. A recent survey of 12 of the state's 29 police districts, conducted by the Maharashtra State Police, at my behest, revealed that in some cases, even 20-30 years of service did not merit living quarters, after a change in posting. Constables and havaldars who are not allotted accommodation, either keep their families in villages, or look for rented rooms. In all such cases, there is a tremendous strain on the family's fiscal resources.

Meanwhile, the houses given to 62.7 per cent of the constabulary are in an appalling condition. The Home Department is primarily responsible for the disreputable state of these buildings, as it does not allow the police to employ their own civil engineers to maintain and repair police buildings. Nor does it grant them the freedom to manage their own funds. For example, the Home Ministry sets aside approximately Rs 1 crore each year to be given to the constabulary as subsidy on purchase of grains from the ration-shops. A constable has to submit several bills for the purchase of grains from authorised ration-shops to claim a trifling sum of Rs 8 per month. Understandably, the constable does not have the time nor the inclination to stake a claim for Rs 8 each month, nor do the accounts department feel enthusiastic about processing several lakhs of small ration bills. Consequently, the money allocated invariably lapses. The police leadership have been clamouring that this



Eking out an existence: police quarters at Naigaum.

amount be spent instead to repair old and build new quarters, but to no avail. As the years go by, the backlog of housing is increasing; according to the latest assessment, the police department will need Rs 1,70,608 crore over the next 15 years, to achieve their target of houses for all their personnel.

THESE DEBILITATING material and psychological circumstances notwithstanding, what is the public perception of the police? We expect the police to judiciously enforce the law; to ensure that people queue up in a disciplined manner at bus-stops; to remove beggars from the streets; to resolve petty quarrels; to grapple with armed assailants; to take a mentally ill person in custody; to prevent robberies; to detect thefts (from wrist watches to cars to diamonds); to curb riots; to protect property; to extinguish the narcotics trade; to regulate traffic. . . Yet we treat the police as harijans were treated over the centuries — we give them a task to perform, a task that we ourselves are unable or unwilling to do, then we categorise and judge them, without any knowledge or understanding of their problems.

We seem to have our own *Sutras* or Moral Penal Code for policemen. The first *Sutra* establishes the fact that policemen are not entitled to a decent quality of life. They must work for long hours, for several months,

without relief or leave, in depraved conditions and without any self-esteem. The second *Sutra* demands that policemen must remain non-violent in an increasingly violent society, even though they have legal recourse to the use of weapons — guns and *lathis* — as well as other forms of physical intimidation.

Furthermore, policemen must retain their sensitivity even as they rush from one scene of violence, arson and rioting to another. They must also preserve a calm balance of mind, while performing stressful tasks such as locking up criminals, recording the evidence of injured and dying people, examining mutilated or rotting corpses, etc. And finally, they must endure deprivation, injustice and assaults on their self-esteem, in non-combative silence. This last moral command is supported by the Police Restriction of Rights Act, 1966, which provides upto two years in jail for a police-person who communicates with people without the permission of the government.

Approximately 10,00,000 citizens are doing the jobs that most people shy away from. A much-maligned section of society, the police certainly do not offer the other cheek! But how much violence can 10 lakh people do to 90 crore? In the welter of public criticism of police brutality, does anyone consider the flip side of the coin and analyse how we treat our police? ♦



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HEADING FOR A CRISIS

Our wilful negligence in recognising the close nexus between poverty and poor natural resource management has today resulted in imminent ecological, demographic and economic disaster, warns environmentalist B B VOHRA.

HERE CAN BE LITTLE doubt that one of the biggest tragedies of our times has been the failure of the country's leadership in particular, and its intelligentsia in general, to appreciate the very close nexus which exists between poverty and poor resource management. That we have paid an extremely heavy price for this failure is evident from the fact that 40 years after Independence, nearly 40 per cent of the country's population still exists below the line of absolute poverty. India enjoys 116th place in a World Bank list of 126 countries graded in order of per capita GNP; the only countries which rank below it are Uganda, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Zaire, Burma, Mali, Nepal, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Chad. We are in very distinguished company indeed.

Common sense demands that if we are at all serious about securing the country's future, and indeed its very survival, the mistakes we have made in the past in the field of natural resource management must be corrected with the utmost energy and determination. This will, however, be possible only if the threat

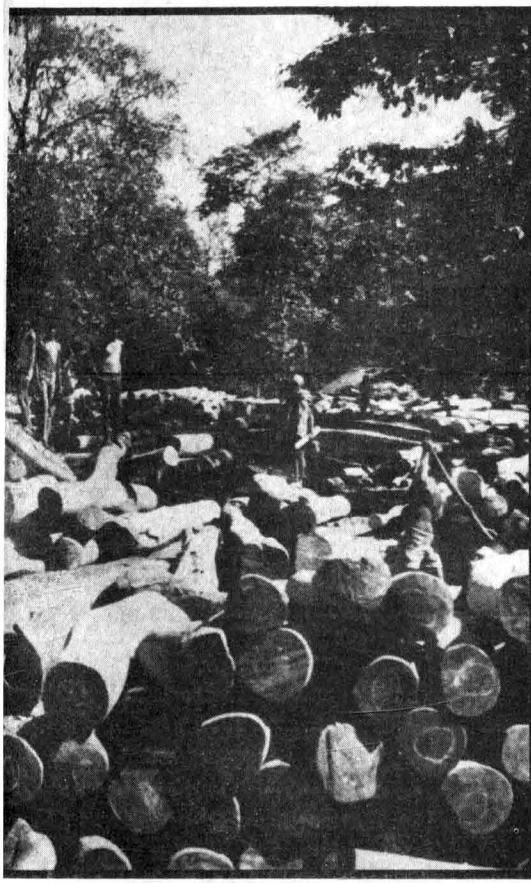


which the poor management of our natural resources poses to the economy is viewed realistically and not underplayed or pushed under the carpet. It is necessary to sound this word of caution because we have already got rid of one of our most urgent problems by successfully propagating the myth that we have achieved self-sufficiency in food. In the process, what we have conveniently ignored is the fact that our granaries are full only because some 300 million people are too poor to be able to buy all the food that they need, let alone meet their other minimum requirements.

THE ADOPTION OF A SIMILARLY self-delusive approach to resource management problems would have the most disastrous consequences because these problems have already assumed critical dimensions and can afford no further delay. An alarmist, rather than a complacent, view of the emerging scenario is in fact unavoidable if we take note of the fact that while, on the one hand, our basic life-support systems have already suffered grievous depletion and damage

and are clearly unable to cope with even their existing burden, on the other hand, the pressures to which they are being subjected continue to mount relentlessly. In spite of all the efforts which have gone into the family planning programme, our population is still increasing at over 2 per cent per annum and, according to experts, will not stop growing till it has more than doubled and crossed the 1,600 million mark. Our huge animal population of around 450 million is also increasing at about the same rate. The simple question is whether our natural resources, which are already depleted, over-stretched, and in a state of considerable disarray, will be able to sustain, at anything like an acceptable level, the enormously increased human and animal populations which are projected for the future. It would be a very brave person indeed who would be prepared to answer this question in the affirmative today.

THANKS TO A PERVERSIVE 'resource illiteracy', and a general lack of interest in the subject from which even our most distinguished economists suffer, the scope and complexity



of the major tasks which lie ahead are not sufficiently well-known. It would accordingly be appropriate to describe them in broad terms:

The country possesses only around some 266 million hectare (mh) of land which has any potential for biotic production (after excluding areas which are under urban uses or are intrinsically unfit for production on account of being perpetually snow-bound or rocky etc). Out of this area, at least 90 mh or over a third is so badly degraded that it has already gone out of production as a result of denudation or water-logging and salinisation etc. These lands must be reclaimed and restored to the production they are capable of — even though this may be in the form of trees, shrubs or grasses.

Around 85 mh, or almost another one-third of the area, suffers from degradation to some extent or other and can be described as only partially productive. These lands form part of the 143 mh which are under cultivation, and must be saved from further deterioration

— whether caused by soil erosion or rising water tables — in the interests of safeguarding the country's food production potential.

Of the 67 mh which are officially notified as "forest lands" under one section or another of the Indian Forest Act, not more than around 28 mh possess good natural forests (with a crown cover of at least 40 per cent). Such forests are being lost at the rate of at least 1.5 mh per annum and must, under any circumstances, be saved from further depletion by effective legal and administrative action.

The incidence, as well as the severity, of both droughts and floods are increasing because of the growing deforestation and denudation in water-sheds. However, this problem has not yet been made the clear responsibility of any designated authority and is receiving little attention even though it constitutes the biggest single threat to the economy.

Water-logging and salinisation of the soil had already claimed 13 mh of once-productive agricultural lands by 1980. The present position is bound to be much worse because problems of drainage have received hardly any attention during the intervening period at the hands of irrigation establishments.

Although very large investments have been made on big irrigation projects, their productivity continues to be disappointingly low. This situation can be improved only if more attention is paid to command area development programmes than to the construction of new projects. Such a major change in policy is, however, something that irrigation establishments are still reluctant to accept, in spite of the fact that new projects have long ceased to be either cost-effective, or ecologically desirable.

There is an urgent need to bridge the big gap of over 5.2 mh which

By B B Vohra

exists, in the major and medium irrigation sectors, between the potential (20.8 mh) which has been created and the potential (15.6 mh) which has been actually realised.

Ground-water levels have fallen dramatically in most intensively-cropped areas of the country, thus showing that withdrawals have exceeded recharge levels. There is urgent need to regulate pumping in such areas and to pay greater attention to problems of recharge.

Thanks to extensive denudation and soil erosion, the siltation of reservoirs which represent a highly valuable and irreplaceable potential for irrigation and power, is taking place at much higher rates than was envisaged at the time they were built.

The per capita availability of agricultural land which stood at 0.48 hectares in 1951 will be reduced to 0.14 hectares in the year 2000 AD. Good agricultural lands must, therefore, be jealously guarded against depletion and degradation. An important threat to such lands is posed by the growing demands of urbanisation. A proper land use policy must ensure that only relatively poorer lands are used for urban purposes and that too, with utmost economy.

There is a need to monitor the health and productivity of over-worked agricultural soils which are cropped two or three times a year and to which heavy doses of fertilisers and pesticides are applied. Such soils tend to lose their fertility if micro-nutrients and trace elements are not replaced in time. We must pay special attention to the rectification of such deficiencies as soon as they arise.

INCREDIBLE AS IT MAY SEEM, adequate attention has not been paid to any of these problems and no systematic attempt has been made to compute the full extent of the enormous losses to which the country is being subjected for the failure on this



Will tapping our depleting water resources help restore the ecological balance?

front. It would be useful to carry out such an exercise urgently for it would reveal that, at a conservative estimate, these losses are of the order of some tens of thousands of crores every year and therefore, need to be controlled as a matter of the highest priority.

Be that as it may, things have reached such an impasse that an agonising reappraisal of our present policies in the entire field of natural resource management can no longer be put off. Such a review will show that we have erred most grievously in two ways. In the first instance, we have failed to pay sufficient attention to problems of land management and have allowed the bulk of our non-renewable and limited land resources to suffer serious, and in many cases, irretrievable depletion and degradation. What is more, we have, in the process, also inflicted enormous damage on our renewable resources of water by permitting vast quantities to be lost to the sea, often after causing flood havoc on the way. We have also, of course, permitted our water resources to inflict great damage on our soil resources, through water-logging and salinisation.

The second serious mistake we have made is to have placed much

too much reliance on big irrigation projects as a means to greater agricultural production, and therefore invested disproportionately large sums on them. However, thanks to inexcusably poor planning and execution, this investment has not yielded anything like the results expected of it. This was indeed pointed out by the Prime Minister in his address to the state irrigation ministers in July 1986 in words which deserve to be repeated:

"The situation today is that since 1951, 246 big surface irrigation projects have been initiated. Only 65 of these have been completed; 181 are still under construction. This is not a happy state of affairs. We need some definite thrust to the projects that we started after 1970. Perhaps we can safely say that almost no benefit has come to the people from these projects. For 16 years we have poured money out. The people have got nothing back, no irrigation, no water, no increase in production, no help in their daily life. By pouring money out to a few contractors or a few *theekedars* and labourers to build canals and maybe Public Works Departments to construct the dam, we

are not really doing our people a favour. The favour comes when the project is completed, when the benefits of the project start flowing."

THE UTTER LOP-SIDEDNESS and lack of overall perspective inherent in these two mistakes is revealed by the fact that as against the Rs 15,206 crore spent on big irrigation schemes during the period 1951 to 1985, only Rs 2,723 crore were invested in forestry and soil and water conservation programmes. Since the big irrigation projects were meant to benefit only around 20 mh of land while the other schemes were meant to serve the interests of some 175 mh, the investment per hectare works out to around Rs 7,600 in the first case as against only Rs 156 in the latter. These figures represent a differential of 50:1, and tell their own story.

We have paid heavily for these policies and there is now no option but to take a conscious and deliberate decision to redress the balance in favour of land management in the widest sense of the term. Such an approach will, strangely enough, not constitute any neglect of our water resources, but, in fact, prove to be the best possible way of enhancing them by preventing the excessive run-off losses which are taking place today on denuded slopes. It will also result in the increased replenishment of our invaluable ground-water resources which today serve a larger area than big projects and are nearly 100 per cent more productive in terms of agricultural yields per hectare. The new policy will also, of course, result in better use being made of existing irrigation potential, in improved drainage in commands where water-logging is an existing or potential threat, and in the enhancement of the productivity of some 175 mh of degraded lands — both agricultural and non-agricultural. Above all, it will save endangered reservoirs from premature siltation, and help to curb the incidence and severity of the recurring floods and

droughts which are bleeding the country white, so to say.

It must be appreciated that such changes in policy are not going to be easy to bring about and will call for the exercise of a stern political will and of administrative skills of the highest order. It will indeed be a most formidable task to cut down on the huge allotments for new projects which irrigation establishments have got used to, and to rechannel their energies into the hitherto neglected but more relevant tasks of command area development, drainage and ground-water studies and regulation. But even this task will be but child's play when compared to what needs to be done in the fields of afforestation, watershed management and soil and water conservation, where we will have to begin almost from scratch and redefine our goals.

IN THE FIELD OF FORESTRY, although we have organisations which are often over a hundred years old, our record has been dismally poor. In 1952, when the Forestry Resolution recommended a national target of around 100 mh of forests, it is very likely that the country possessed around 65 mh of good natural forests. However, the area of such forests has probably shrunk to something like 28 mh in 1987. What is more, although 3.7 mh of new plantations were made during the period 1950 to 1980, not many of these have survived, as has been pointed out in the M S Chaudhary Report of 1984.

However, not only have our forestry establishments failed to prevent the country's forest wealth from being depleted at an alarming rate — let alone add to it — they have also been unwittingly responsible for a remarkable cover-up operation. This was made possible by an incredibly defective system of estimating and reporting the country's forest wealth. According to this system, all that was reported year after year was the extent of the areas which stood notified as 'forest land' under one section or another of the Indian Forest Act,

irrespective of whether such lands had good or poor tree cover, or none at all. This is why, according to official statistics, the 'area under forests' has remained constant at around 70 mh over the decades in spite of the heavy denudation that has taken place in it. Not only did this system create an entirely unjustified feeling of complacency among foresters, but it also prevented the public from becoming aware of a most serious development. This system obviously needs to be urgently replaced by one which permits the country's forest wealth to be measured and monitored in a scientific and accurate manner at appropriate intervals.

IT IS AGAINST THIS rather bleak background that we must view the commendable efforts which have been made during the last two or three years to create man-made forests in response to the Prime Minister's call for a massive afforestation programme. These efforts have resulted in the plantation of around 5 mh since 1985, at a rate of somewhat less than 2 mh per annum, which is only marginally higher, if at all, than the rate at which natural forests are being depleted. However, apart from the fact that official figures must never be taken at face value, one cannot be too sure that all these plant-

ations will survive till maturity and that some, at least, will not meet the fate of earlier plantations. The programme also suffers from two other serious constraints. For one thing, the costs involved — between Rs 6,000 and Rs 10,000 per hectare — are much too high to permit a much bigger programme to be taken up. For another, it has come up against acute difficulties of land availability, which slow down its progress.

It is urgently necessary to do some fresh thinking on this subject and to realise that in the long run, we have no option but to depend increasingly on the forces of natural regeneration if we wish to restore vegetal cover on denuded lands at the kind of cost and within the kind of time we can afford for this purpose. However, in order to release the forces of natural regeneration, it is necessary to satisfy two pre-conditions. Firstly, the areas which are sought to be regenerated must be effectively protected against grazing and browsing as well as against human intervention. Secondly, and particularly in areas of moisture scarcity, there must be effective soil and water conservation programmes like contour-trenching and the construction of check dams and small storages in all mini-catchments in order to give a chance for plants to survive. It is necessary to



Water management: a need for a coherent and holistic approach.

point out in this connection that even highly arid areas like Western Rajasthan receive heavy rains once every four or five years and that if all such precipitation could be conserved by effectively controlling run-off losses, there would be adequate moisture to sustain grasses and trees during the drier years.

Both these conditions can, however, be satisfied only if local administrations and local communities join hands in controlling grazing by domestic as well as by nomadic herds, and co-operate in carrying out soil and water conservation work on a massive scale on all denuded lands. This will require the education of local communities in the benefits to be obtained from better resource management — and what is more, ensuring that such benefits actually flow to them in an equitable manner. Such an approach will also demand that soil and water conservation works and natural regeneration should henceforth constitute the core of all rural development programmes, and that the funds which are at present being used more or less infructuously on a large variety of employment guarantee, poverty alleviation, and other schemes, are diverted to such works on a priority basis. Admittedly, such a change in the status quo will constitute a tremendous challenge, but it will be one well worth accepting in view of the stakes involved.

SIDE BY SIDE WITH programmes for natural regeneration of denuded soils, attention must be paid to the amelioration of the 85-odd million hectares of degraded agricultural lands, most of which are rainfed and subject to erosion. While lands which are situated on very steep slopes or have very shallow soils must be diverted to tree or grass farming, the rest must be saved from further damage by appropriate terracing and contour-bunding so as to conserve their top-soil and make the best use of the precipitation they receive. Such lands must also be provided with large numbers of small storages — ideally,

The situation demands that we should learn to look at the total resource management scene in a coherent and holistic manner, take energetic steps to correct past mistakes, and chart a bold new course of action for the future.

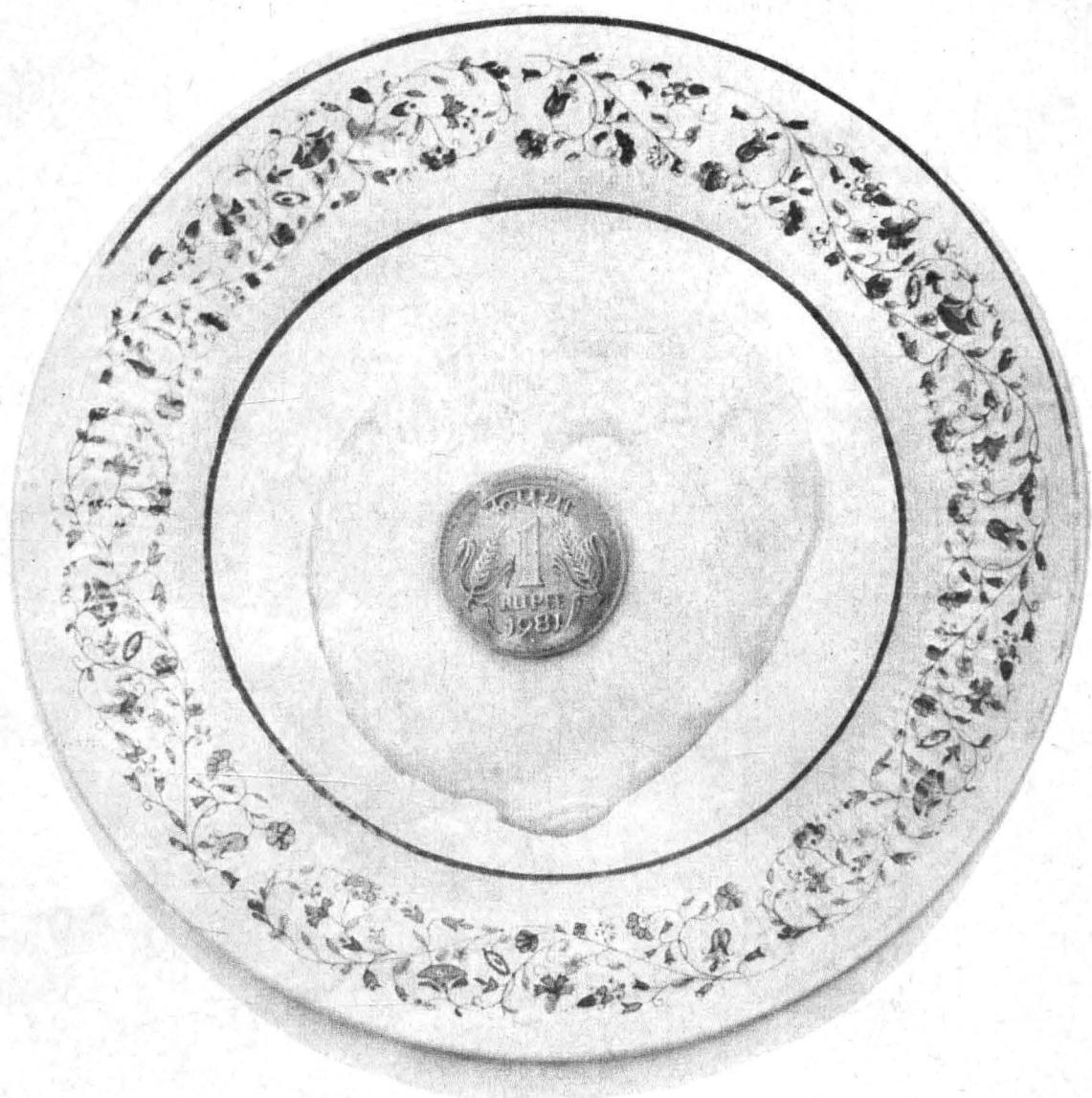
one in every mini-catchment — for irrigation as well as for enhanced ground-water recharge. Experience shows that the treatment of such lands can be best done as part of an effort to simultaneously treat all the lands in a small watershed so that excessive run-off from denuded public lands in the higher reaches does not undo the work done on private agricultural lands which are usually situated on lower slopes. This points to the need for the creation of suitably constituted and empowered watershed management authorities which should be representative of the various disciplines concerned. At present, such agencies are conspicuous by their absence because such programmes have never been taken up in a really meaningful way. The task of bringing such organisational infrastructures into being is going to be a very challenging one indeed.

IT IS NECESSARY TO point out in this connection, that in view of both the nature of the works required to be carried out in the field of land management, as well as of the need to actively involve local communities in their execution, it would be desirable to decentralise various decision-making processes and to bring them as near to the ground as possible. The works in question — levelling and terracing of land, trenching and bunding, the construction of small check dams and storages, the digging of drains and the planting of trees and grasses

— are of a nature that, given a modicum of technical guidance, can be generally carried out by local communities without bringing in outside contractors and labour. It would be most desirable, from all points of view, if village communities could exercise the necessary initiatives and leadership in this field. However, most such communities are, by and large, incapable of playing such a role today, because they are feudal and fragmented, and not egalitarian and homogeneous in structure. They are also often dominated by musclemen and mafias and have become distrustful of authority on the one hand, and, on the other, incapable of taking joint initiatives for their own betterment. Again, they enjoy little or no autonomy, have access to no financial resources worth speaking of, and possess no viable institutions for democratic self-government. It will be an enormously difficult task to carry out the far-reaching political, administrative and social changes in the entire rural sector without which better resource management will remain only a distant dream. But this task must be accomplished, however formidable it may be.

We stand today on the very brink of ecological, demographic, and economic disaster. The situation demands that we should learn to look at the total resource management scene in a coherent and holistic manner, take energetic steps to correct past mistakes, and chart a bold new course of action for the future. The battle for survival will be long and hard, and will be ultimately won only by appropriate physical action at the grass-roots level. Village by village, micro watershed by micro watershed, field by field, steps will have to be taken to enthuse local populations to participate in programmes to improve the productivity of all available land and water resources, so that the future of the present generation, as well as of generations yet unborn, may be secured. Will the leadership and the people of the country prove equal to this enormous challenge? ♦

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THE BENARES GHATS INSTANT KARMA

TEXT BY MINNIE VAID-FERA



Benares' majestic ghats on the banks of the holy Ganga, are a weird combination of sacrosanct tradition and commercialised tourist gloss. It is a symbiotic relationship: each survives due to the other. The transition from the mesmeric beauty of the ghats to the din and clamour of tinsel godliness, is both immediate and jarring. If you can somehow blank out the everyday routine of humdrum commercialism and instead soak in the undeniably awesome atmosphere of the ghats, you can possibly escape the inevitable disenchantment.

An imposing flight of steps widens onto broad platforms which seem to permanently house that famous institution of Benares – the omnipotent Pandas. Swarthy and

By Ivan Fera

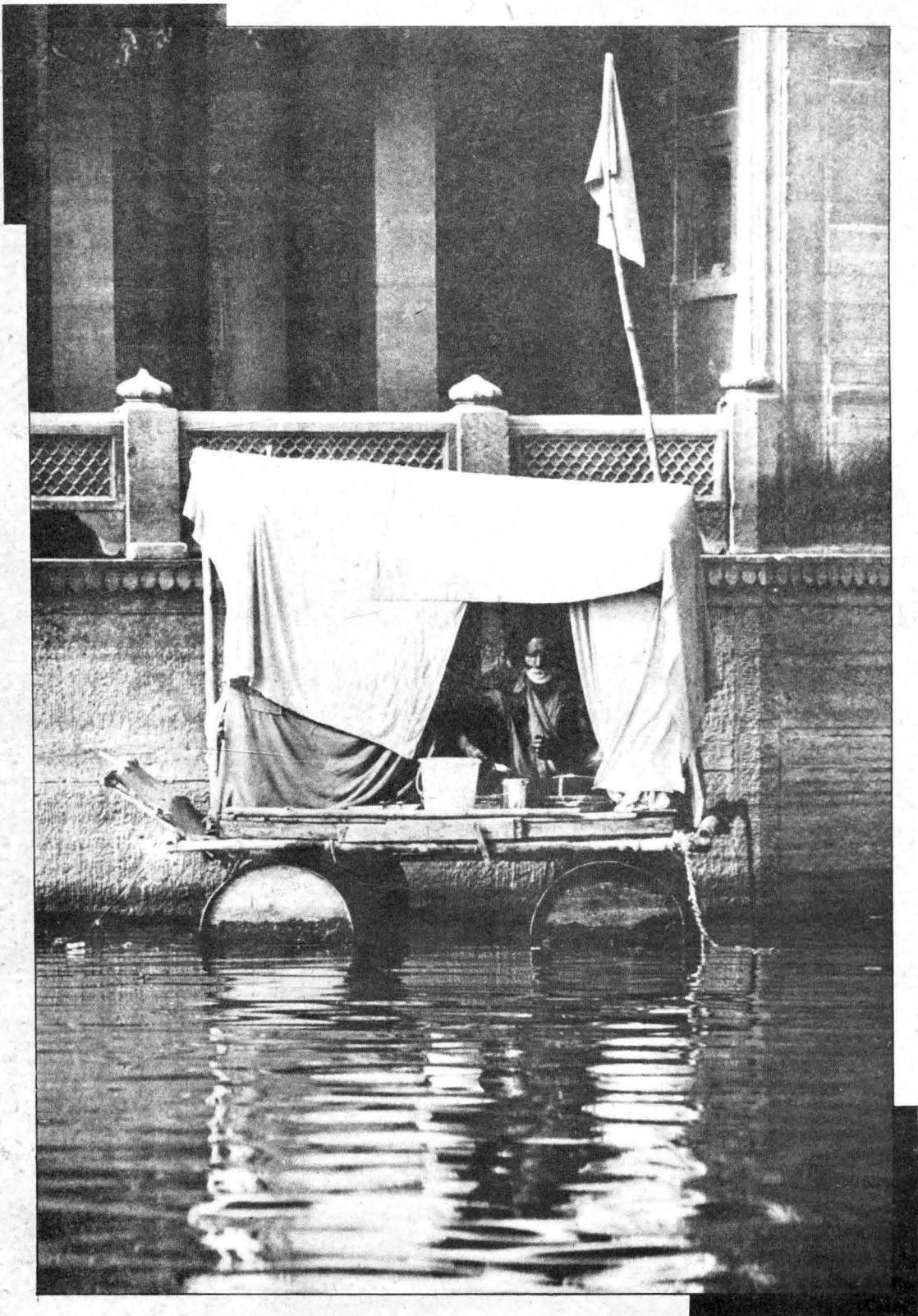
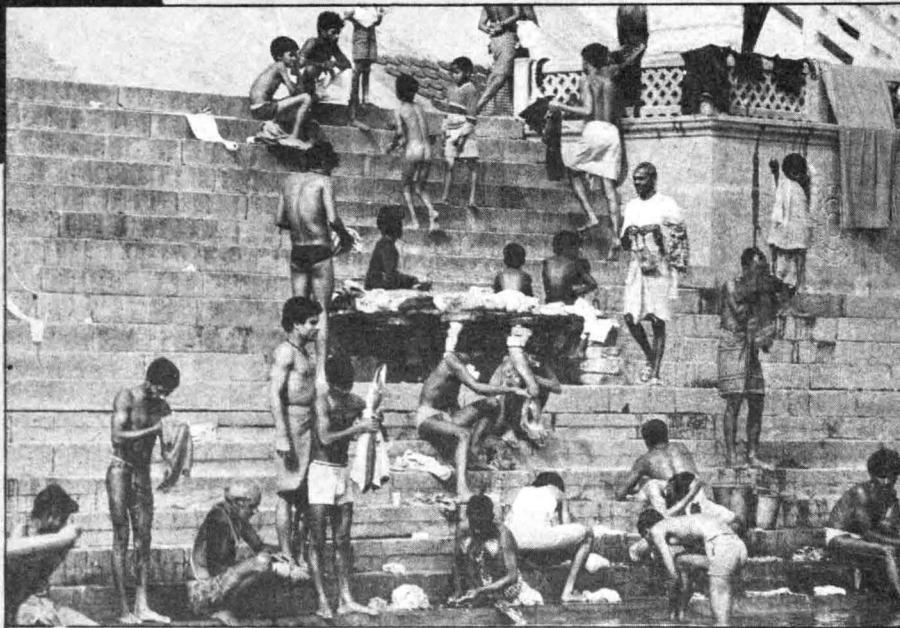
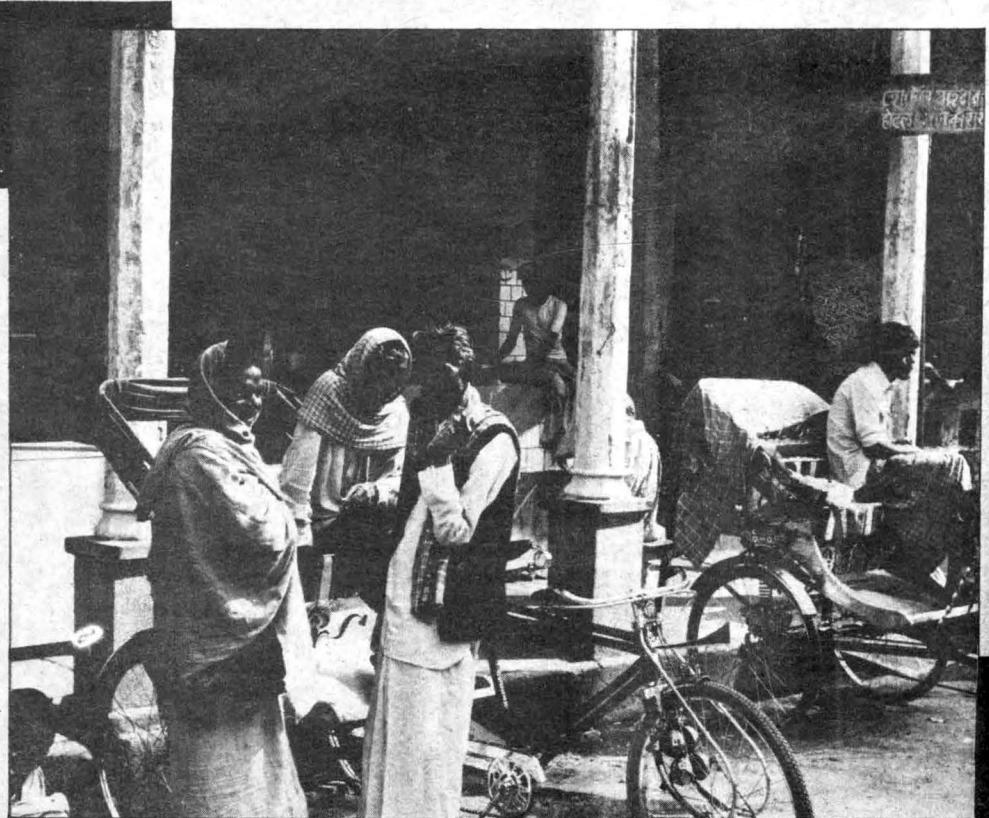


PHOTO FEATURE



future in exchange for some "paltry" dakshina (Jo aap khushi se dena chahein). It is a superb con game that wins your reluctant admiration. Emulating their intellectual superiors, lesser known and a rather more humble species of palmists, astrologers and hakims also hold court, the latter doing a brisk sale of dubious 'miracle medicines', mostly aphrodisiacs. Amidst a religiously charged atmosphere, a lone barber languidly shaves a customer.

pot-deueea, with ouy smirks and raucous voices, these pandas or pundits maintain an almost tenacious hold over innocent passers-by — mainly tourists — guaranteeing every plausible bliss on earth. From instant success in college examinations to instant nirvana after death. Comfortably perched under quaint Japanese-like canopies, these benevolent prophets can trace your ancestry to a hundred years ago, tell you how many children you will be blessed with, how many 'foreign' trips are in store for you, match your janampatrikas — generally, paint you a comfortably roseate



The ghats, apart from catering to devout Hindus and gawking foreign tourists, also propagate the cult of physical fitness. Burly wrestlers display almost obscenely gleaming muscles, relaxing after a rigorous oil massage. Other, newer recruits exercise with determined zeal. A couple of cows look on in amusement.

The throng of devotees gingerly step into the holy Ganga – quite literally, however, the swirling waters are murky, black and soiled



beyond recognition. Though the ghats boast several posters (in English and Hindi) urging you to keep the Ganga clean, it is anything but. The peace and tranquillity normally associated or expected in a place of worship is also conspicuously absent, as persistent boatmen let loose a perfect cacophony of entreaties: "Boatride on the Ganga, memsahib," "Experience, madam," "Very cheap, Sir." The boats are fairly large, spacious and look alarmingly rickety. Resisting the combined overtures – almost commands – of assorted boatmen, shopkeepers, pandas, hakims and

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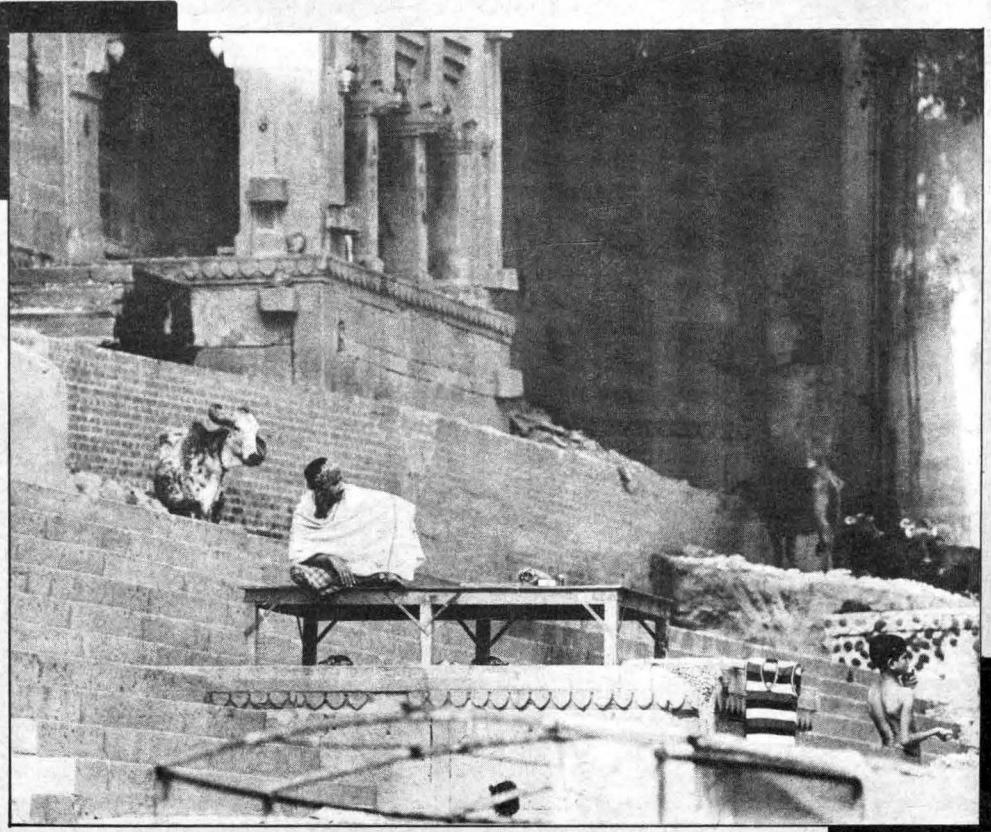


rigid stances, unperturbed by inquisitive glances, though a small mound of money in front of them quite obviously states their intention. A truly unique kamal is that of a 'maharaj' who lives in a shack, balanced on two huge drums, right on the Ganga. As the water level rises, so does he, 'miraculously'.

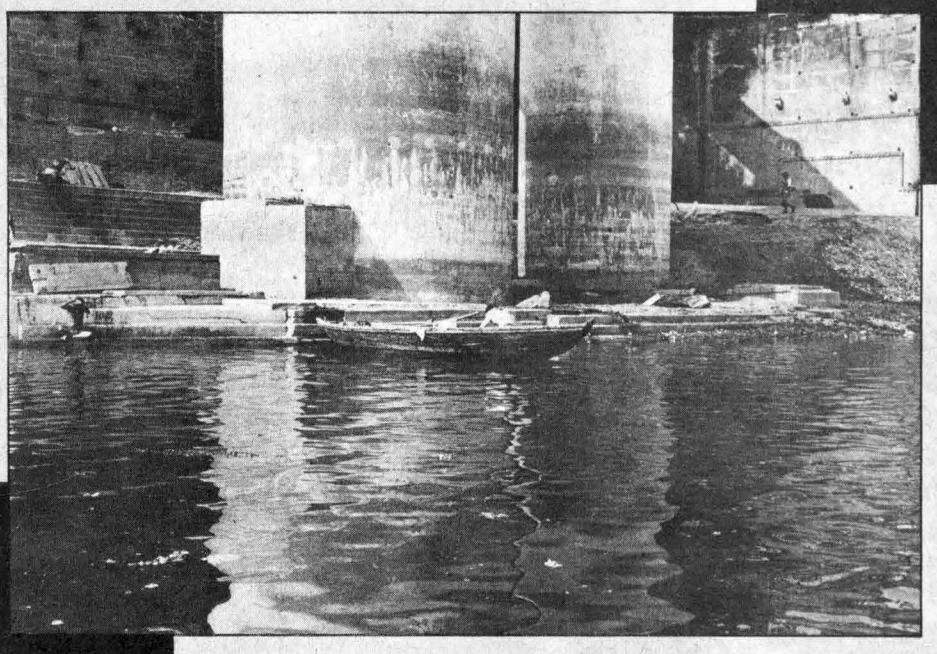
The real ghats, however, come alive late evening as the last rays of the setting sun highlight the splendour of the myriad temples circling the ghats and

guides, swarming around like flies, is an impossible task. Some of the 'authentic' wares exhibited in the tin-roofed little khokhas (rough structures) look remarkably spurious and are outrageously priced. Copper and brassware are most common while the more unscrupulous shopkeepers openly sell hashish, ganja etc, along with native chillums.

Others, more enterprising and perhaps publicity-conscious, prefer to sell their 'tricks' – a whole bag of kamals (miracles). These take the shape, not just figuratively, of fanatic self-mortification or penance. They adopt



bathe the rippling waters in an incandescent glow. Haunting chaupais (verse couplets set to soothing tunes) fill the air, boomed over loudspeakers craftily placed in strategic corners of the ghats. In a welcome and unexpected link with a bygone era, the music does not emanate from pre-recorded cassettes sold by the million. Instead, a single group of four minstrels sits on a rug just inside a temple dedicated to Gangamai, singing melodiously and with easy devotion.

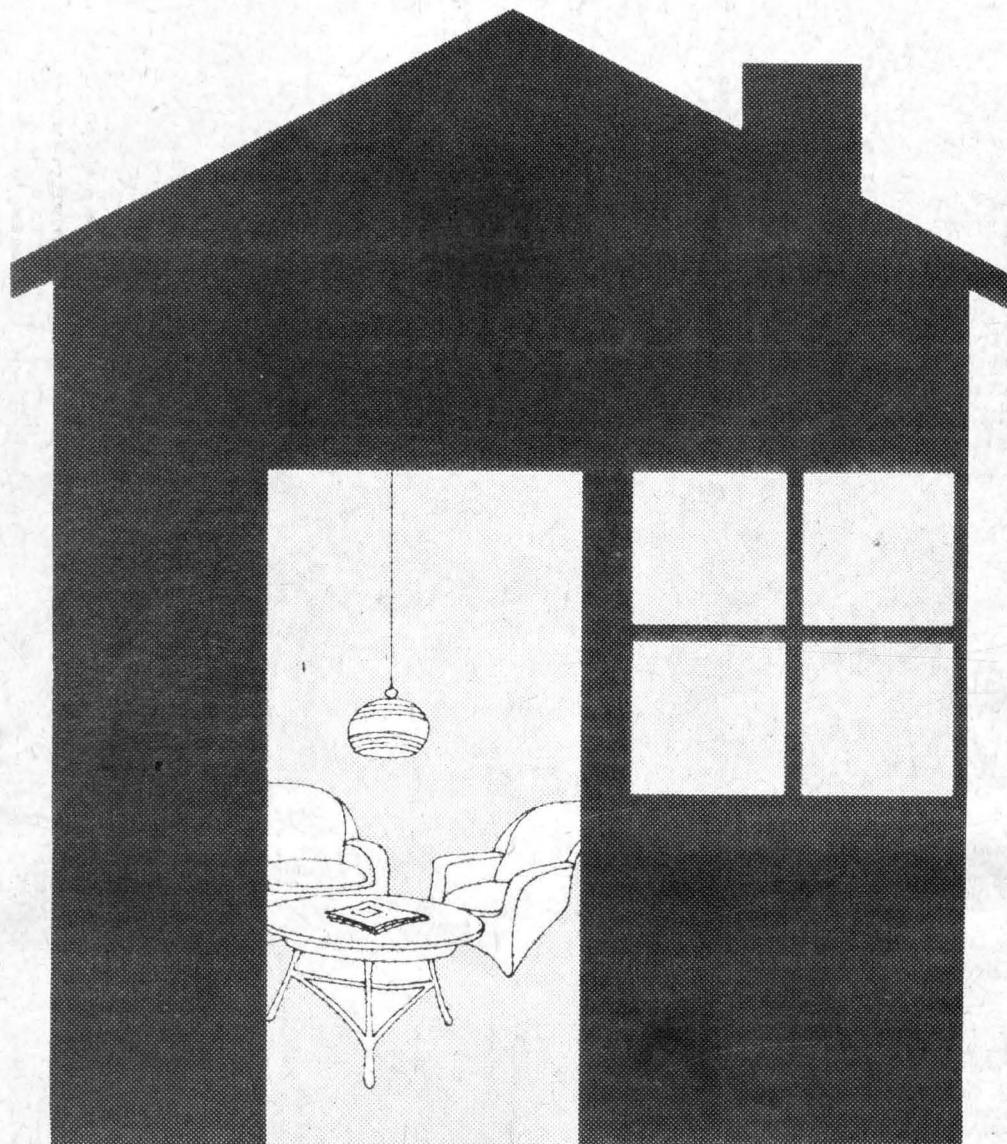


The temple priest is friendly but unobtrusive, unlike other groupies on the ghats, peddling instant salvation and success.

As the day fades, however, so do the fortune peddlers. A serene calm envelops the age-old monuments of peace and religiosity. As the gently lapping waters break over the steps of the ghats and the twinkling lights seem remote and distant, you gradually realise how conducive the ghats must have been to the meditative contemplation of our rishi-munis, centuries ago.

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PESTONJEE: OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

PESTONJEE IS A STORY about relationships charged with ripples and undercurrents; where sulks speak louder than words and realisations that awaken the soul do not need to be vocalised. It is a warm portrait of friendship. And yet it is a lot about privacy; narrated from the point of view of one who wastes most of his time sitting in judgement on his friend's life instead of practising what he preaches. And the protagonists are all Parsis who, until today, were stereotyped as buffoons in commercial Hindi cinema.

What brought about this shift? Vijaya Mehta, veteran actress of the Marathi stage and director of cinema-

tic cameos like *Rao Saheb* and *Hamidabai Ki Kothi*, read a short story by B K Karanji, *The Cost of Dying*, and was impressed by his portrayal of a community she both "knew and admired" (she is married to Farrokh, a Parsi) that treated them as humans. The only other full-length feature film on Parsis is Basu Chatterjee's *Khatta Meetha*, which used the community's reputation for being fun-loving as an excuse for adapting a Turkish festival film and the American *Yours, Mine and Ours* rather than holding up a mirror to nature. "I know they are capable of breathing like anybody else," explains Vijaya Mehta, "and they are not only fun-loving — they are human

For generations of Indian cinema buffs, the Parsis have been portrayed in exaggerated stereotypes — eccentric, snobbish and most importantly, funny. Vijaya Mehta's latest film 'Pestonjee' attempts to erase this caricatured image. SHERNAVAZ COLAH offers a sneak preview of 'Pestonjee'.



Pestonjee : a sensitive period film evoking Parsi nostalgia.

CINEMA

beings with certain qualities. I realised that a human interest story could take place with that backdrop."

The thrust of Karanjia's story is the expense of a Parsi funeral. Not wishing to ruffle any feathers, Mehta shifts her focus to the friendship between Pestonjee and Pirojsha, adding flesh to Karanjia's character-sketches. While the film's storyline — a friendship between two absolutely disparate characters — is not very elaborate, its strength lies in its warm portrait of a friendship with all its shared laughter, caring, misunderstandings, jealousies and hurt.

Pestonjee is a film about Parsis with a lead-quartet of talented stars: Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Anupam Kher, and Kher's wife, Kiran Thakursingh. "I wanted the lead characters to be actors who could give sensitive performances. At no point of time did I think of having only Parsis," clarifies Mehta.

The supporting cast, however, apart from those actors with theatre backgrounds, like Veera Sorabjee (as the deaf and old *fuiji*), Dadi Sarkari (as Jeroo's father), Rusi Sethna (as Burjor, Pesi's neighbour) and his wife Mary (as one of the crowd), Rooki Dadachandji (as Vispy, Burjor's cricket-crazy son, and Pesi's young friend), and Mehra Vakil (as the *kaajwali*), comprises Vijaya Mehta's Parsi friends. B K Karanjia, ex-editor of *Filmfare* and editor of *Screen*, who has collaborated on the screenplay, points out, "We did not select some outstanding actors who have performed in productions like Adi Marzban's, because we were worried that the moment they would act they would become caricatures." Being caricatured has obviously been the bane of the community.

YET VIJAYA MEHTA has not gone to the other extreme and presented the community through rose-tinted spectacles. There are no frail old ladies offering peppermints to little children nor any grand philanthropists and models of moral rectitude. Each



A moving saga of interpersonal relationships.

protagonist is flawed, and therefore, very real. This treatment of character is definitely not sentimentally indulgent and the recreation of the milieu is not nostalgic for the sake of nostalgia; the treatment is crisp, unsentimental, subtle, and humorous.

"I have portrayed them as they are," Mehta asserts. "As I have seen them," she qualifies with a laugh. "Maybe I have been able to get a definitive quality in their attitudes which a Parsi perhaps would have taken for granted," she admits. There is a sequence in the film where Pirojsha, on his early morning walk, comes across two men sticking posters on a 'No Entry' board. This upsets him very

much and he not only berates them but finally peels off the posters himself. "This is the ultimate honesty," says Mehta. "These are things that, as an outsider, I have been able to respect more than the Parsis themselves."

It is Kher, Shah and Azmi who are the three main Parsi characters in the story, since Kiran Thakursingh Kher as Soona, the other woman, who is the offspring of a mixed marriage, is more Punjabi than Parsi. Since the three lead non-Parsi actors have captured the *parsipanu* so adeptly one would expect them to have noted certain characteristics as representative of that community. "I do not consciously go around observing the

MIXED REACTIONS

Parsis on Pestonjee.

Daisy Sidhwani: Designer

All the performers in *Pestonjee* initially appeared to be mild caricatures — hardly genuine. They should have come through as *people* rather than just Parsis who make you laugh. Unfortunately, that is how Parsis are generally portrayed in Hindi cinema — as caricatures. Maybe some Parsis found it fascinating — non-Parsis acting as Parsis. But if the actors had spoken simple Hindi, it would have been preferable because then they could have concentrated much more on the storyline rather than on acting as Parsis.

Banoo Batliboi: Housewife

I thought *Pestonjee* was well done, considering the fact that none of it came naturally to the main characters. I didn't like Anupam Kher however, he slipped up often, especially in the way he spoke. His occasional lapses into *shudh* Hindi, affected the natural flow of the story. But Naseeruddin Shah was consistent right through. The way he says 'Hello' (slowly) on the phone, his stoop, his walk. The way he nags about 100 gms of vegetables. The way he waves away the *mithai-ka-dabba*. It was so typically Parsi — that humble ungraciousness. He has worked subtle nuances into his performance.

Pestonjee is an endearing look at the Parsis, without even the slightest snigger, as is usual in other films. I love the pace of the film. You could really soak in the atmosphere. Kudos to Vijaya Mehta for capturing the essence of our community.

Farrok Mulla: Former Tata employee and amateur artiste

I enjoyed it. It was authentic as far as it was possible to reconstruct a period piece — *Pestonjee* was more or less true to the era it reflected. Con-

sidering it was a small budget film it was much better than I had expected it to be.

Of course, there was not much of a story. The second part was livelier than the first, with a fairly nice ending. Actually, *Pestonjee* is a human story, which could be set in any community.

Jehangir Ardesir: TISCO executive

My reaction would be slightly biased as my daughter had a minor role in the film. I liked it immensely. The most important factor is that it is a story pertaining to a minority community and not *on* the minority community. Usually this kind of enterprise tends to focus on the community while the storyline becomes secondary. Here they were letting the story carry the film. The Parsis were an incidental factor. As far as the essence of the community is concerned, it was captured to a certain extent, despite certain flaws. Some of the characters were not 'Parsi' enough in their attitudes or appearance or maybe they were directed that way. On the whole, the storyline, direction and attention to detail was fairly laudable.

Shiamak Daver: Choreographer

Pestonjee is a very well-directed film. A little slow but I still liked it very much. Naseeruddin Shah is one of the finest actors in Indian cinema. He was so natural and consistent; Shabana did not impress me much this time but then her role was limited. The actors did not come across as 'Hindi' Parsis, instead the dialogue — a mixture of Hindi and Gujarati — was very natural. However, I don't think *Pestonjee* will be a commercial success or run to packed houses but then, no good film ever does, because all the masses want is *mirch-masala*.

kind of people I am portraying or learn their mannerisms," confesses Naseeruddin Shah, who gives an understated and sensitive performance as Pirojsha, Pesi's friend, through whose point of view the story is narrated. "I do not believe that *that* can be learnt in the course of 15 days or a month. If I had not already observed Parsis deeply, empathised with them and liked them immensely it would be no help whatsoever to go out 15 days before this shooting began and watch a few Parsis."

Vijaya Mehta did introduce her cast to her own Parsi friends at a party she threw, but even Anupam Kher who plays a happy-go-lucky Pestonjee brilliantly, admits to having attended the party only in order to get an earful of their speech rhythms. "Maybe I went to observe what not to do," he says. "I do not think I really *had* to. It is also not possible to go to a party and to scrutinise the people there. One does not really snap a photograph and then see the photograph and use the gestures," he explains. "I do not work on gestures. Except when I saw a Parsi gentleman pulling up his trousers from behind, every two minutes, and did the same in the film." By contrast, Shah emulated quite a few: the stoop, the blink, the crick in the neck.

Besides observing the Parsis at Vijaya Mehta's party, there were other ways to learn about them. "Vijaya was always sending people to me, with little notes on what she wanted me to observe about them," reveals Shabana Azmi who artfully plays the syrupy Jeroo whom ten years of marriage reveal to be a shrew, wallowing in self-pity.

THE MILIEU OF THE STORY is the 1950s and early 1960s, with a light-hearted Pestonjee living in a sprawling apartment chock-a-block with carved furniture, antique statues and clocks, ornate lamps and Chinese porcelain which he slowly disposes of to meet his strained circumstances. In actuality, this set is Dina Hakim's house,

which Roshan Kalapesi, ex-President of the Crafts Council of India and the film's art director, says has remained unchanged since her childhood. Kalapesi claims she was like a policeman on the sets, watching hawk-eyed for any items that were anomalous with the era projected.

"Another problem," admits Kalapesi, "was that we were working on a shoe-string budget." *Pestonjee* is an NFDC (National Film Development Corporation) production (the production work was managed by Mehta's own organisation, Rangayatan Productions), which has spent approximately Rs 14 lakh. "Luckily we were portraying a family that was down and out, so it somehow looked right," laughs Kalapesi.

"I have always believed," says Vijaya Mehta, "that in any creative venture, whether theatre or film, one has to give the feeling of authenticity and not be authentic. For example, the film has an engagement ceremony scene which depicts only three minutes of the actual 45-minute ritual, to create the feeling that they are getting engaged. Likewise, I also had to see that the sari the bride wore went well with the background. This is where the artistic filter comes in," she points out.

However, with the aid of costumes and make-up, the three leading actors, despite being non-Parsis, look authentic. "I was both very petrified and excited by the prospect of doing this film," recounts Azmi, "because everybody said, 'It is impossible. Shabana cannot look like a Parsi'. At one point, I rang Vijaya and said, 'I do not think I am going to manage to do it. I am too dark and Parsis are not dark!' She laughed at me. At the party she held, where she had invited 30 Parsis, almost 18 were dark! Vijaya then said, 'Come on, don't act so stupid. They are the same colour as you.'"

The costumes and period jewellery were contributed by the director and the Parsis on the sets, and the saris were selected by Kalapesi, the costume consultant, from this collection. They include *garas* (embroidered

Chinese silk saris), *kasbi kors* (borders embroidered with *jari* and sequins), *khyals* (self-coloured, interwoven Chinese design saris), *kadabatatas* (big white dots woven on black saris) and *chinai chirmins* (a Chinese material with *khakha kors* or borders embroidered in French knots). "Every type of sari worn by Parsis is there in the film," says Kalapesi with pride. "Even the subtle change in the men's costumes is visible — the earlier tight-fitting look with the coats gradually becoming looser, boxier, and checked."

WITH HIS LONG INNINGS in film journalism, B K Karanjia has no illusions about the box-office success of this leisurely-paced film with its palpable characters, old-fashioned and complex relationships, and an evocative atmosphere. "Considering the run-of-the-mill films I see at press shows, I think *Pestonjee* will not have much of a run," admits the editor of *Screen* ruefully. "There are no chases, no villains, no smugglers, no disco dances," he says with vitriol. And yet, he surmises, the fact that the story deals with Parsis, will increase its appeal rather than limit it, because of the curiosity factor. The film's director also agrees. "Besides, people will be quite amazed to see the extent of integration of ceremonies and rituals in the film," she adds.

The Parsis being such a closed community, Mehta has taken pains not to upset any of its members. "At no point of time did I want to pry into the privacy of the Parsi religion," she emphasises. She did not even inquire whether she could shoot inside an *agriary*, although her film's highly devout protagonists are seen leaving Fasli *agriary*. Mehta also diluted the thrust of Karanjia's story, which, as its title suggests, was cynical of the high cost of dying in the community.

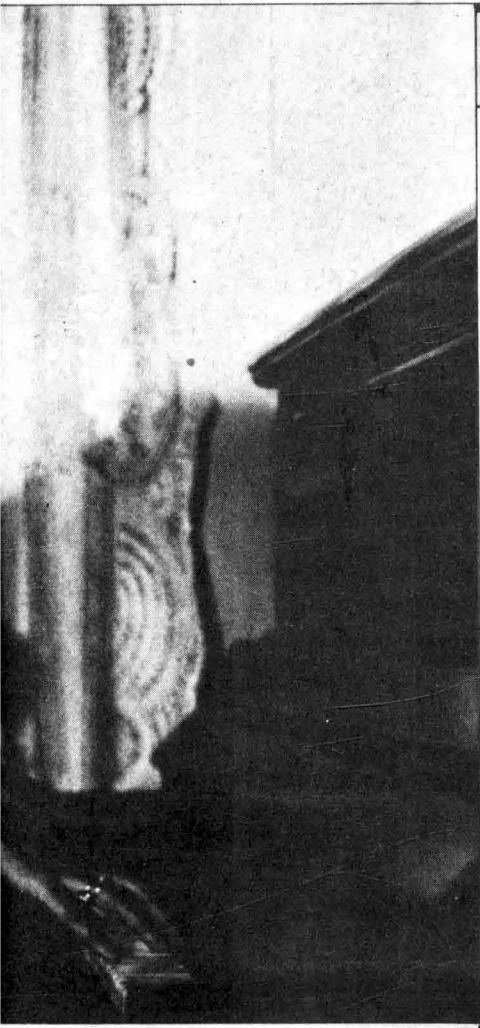
"In my 30 years in theatre, I have always believed that one does not produce something because one wants to make a social comment. One produces it, or at least I do, when the characters interest me. But I have never believed in making a political



Shabana Azmi as Jeroo: a challenging role.

or social comment and therefore using the characters. For me the human element of each character is more important," elaborates Mehta.

It is in her characterisations that she really scores. . . Pirojsha and Pestonjee are such close friends that they are called "two Ps in a pod", and yet, Piroj is over-cautious, staid, finicky and a chronic grumbler whilst Pesi is flamboyant, untidy, and a fun-lover despite always being penniless due to a property feud with his brother. Unwittingly shown the same girl as Pestonjee, Piroj delays his answer because he wants to match their horoscopes. In order to make her characters come alive, Mehta has not only rooted them in a distinct milieu, she had even given each of them detailed biographies. "It is very important to give the character the entire background of the film because it leads to the formation of roots," explains Azmi. "An actor needs that stimulus and background



research," adds Naseeruddin Shah. "If the director does not do it for you, then you have to do it for yourself."

HOW DO THESE TALENTED stars assimilate their roles? "I am not very sure about my system of work. I have not sat and analysed how it happens. Many times I feel that I have not worked on a character at all, but my friends around me say, 'That's rubbish, you have'. So, maybe it is an in-built process of work which is a sort of guise in the sense that I'm not aware of it," analyses Azmi. "But basically what I like to do is to get the background correct. I *must* know where the character is centralised for my own understanding," she smiles. "In acting, the truth of acting can be discovered only if the two actors are communicating with each other," propounds Azmi.

Shah takes over: "I approached my part in *Pestonjee* the way I nor-

mally approach the rest of my work, which is to read the script as many times as I can — as many times as is physically possible. Maybe 200 times," he confesses, on prodding. "Unless it becomes a part of my system, I don't think I can contribute fruitfully. I must know the script as well as the director." He claims that he does not consciously observe the person he has to portray just a month prior to the shooting but, instead, resorts to a sort of mental catalogue of traits observed over the years. "From childhood my only passionate interest was watching human beings going about their business and interacting with each other. I find that the most interesting thing life has to offer," Shah reveals. "I think in commercial film circles I am considered an introvert," he smiles. "But I am not really introverted; I would rather be a silent observer. I find that more stimulating."

"There is a school of actors who work from the outside in; they decide the physical look of the character first, and then work inwards. I prefer to work from the inside," says Shah, "to empathise as closely as possible with the man. It is a valid method and helps you get very close to the character. The character must be played subjectively. What I do is to try to start thinking like him, and then I let him decide what kind of clothes he wears, whether he has long hair or short hair, a beard or moustache. Most directors let me decide all that. The rest is sheer slogging."

Anupam Kher relies more on instinct than analysis. "I could tell you that I did a study and read Parsi books and this and that, which is nonsense. I did not do any such thing. I don't think that emotions vary from community to community," he points out. "Basic emotions are almost universal. Similarly, there were no particular Parsi mannerisms I had to emulate, because I was portraying a 40-year old man with his problems, his innocence, his warmth. A nice person, not a historical figure. If I was portraying Hitler or Dadabhoi Naoroji,

I would have had to study particular gestures and mannerisms. As an actor, emotions are more important than gestures and speech; what matters finally is whether the performance moves you or not. If it does, you don't really register whether the pronunciation is absolutely correct or not.

"It was difficult," Kher admits, "working in this film. More so since I was working with two excellent and famous actors. I also found it difficult because I am working in 50 films at present and I had to make time for this particular film as it needed concentration. That was my main problem — to get out of a rape scene and to get into a *Pestonjee* sequence."

THE MOST OBVIOUS innovative aspect of the film is its employment of what has been termed a *dhansak* of Parsi, Gujarati and Hindi, adapted to the speech rhythms of the Parsi dialect. This concoction is Mehta and Karanji's very own recipe. "We were faced with a peculiar problem," says Shah, explaining the rationale for this dialect, "because, why would Parsis speak to each other in broken Hindi? They would speak in their own language. But then, we were not making a film in that language. Neither could we use only Hindi. So we thought it would help the characterisation if there was an amalgam of sorts."

Mehta and Karanji collaborated on the screenplay. "It was a very stimulating experience for me," says Karanji. "I discovered that while, as a writer, I thought in words, Vijaya thought in images. That, I realised is how a good director should think. I also realised my shortcomings, although it took me some time to adjust to her way of thinking. Another thing I discovered about her, was that she enacted each role while composing the dialogue," he adds admiringly.

Innovation, dedication and expertise have produced a brilliant cameo of the community. True, there are flaws, errors of dubbing and pace, but the story breathes and the Parsi community comes alive. ♦

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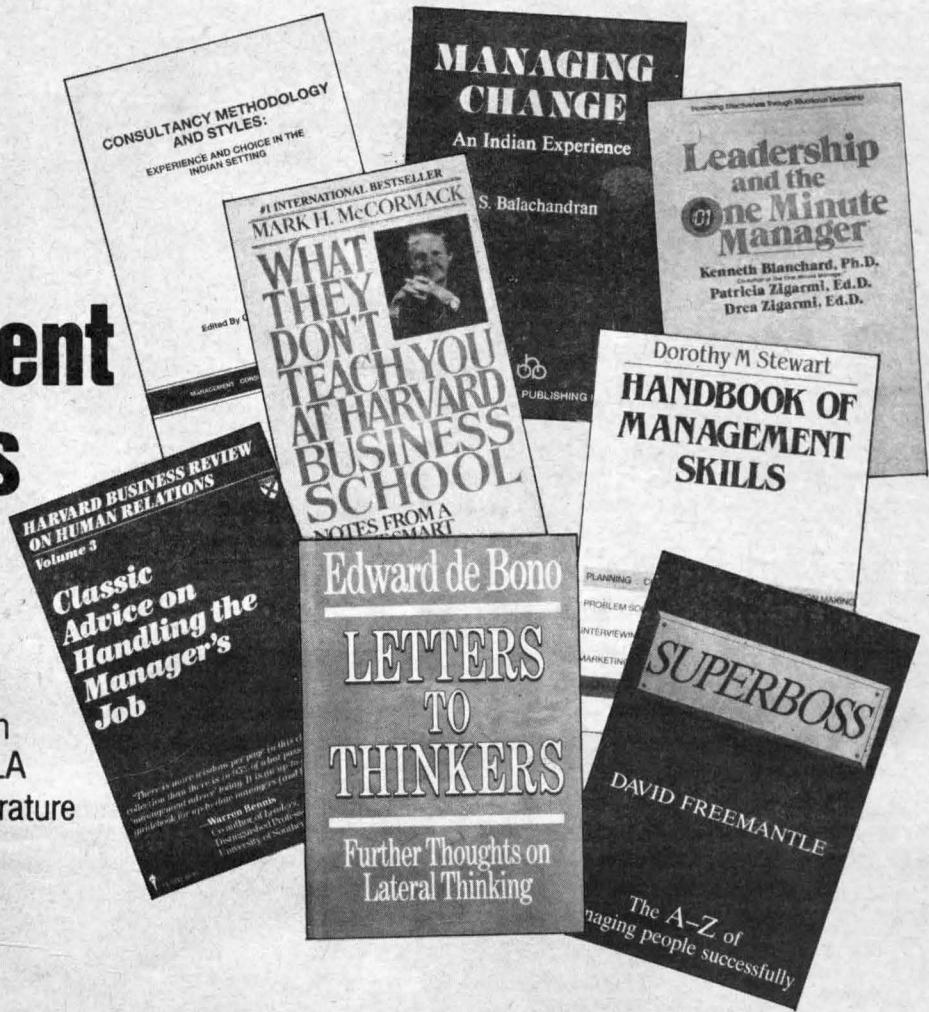


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The Management Mandarins

How to write a book on management and make a fast buck — that could well be a profitable primer today, given the indiscriminate glut of management bestsellers in the market. RUSI DARUWALA reviews the management literature of the eighties.



SAVONAROLA, THE 15TH century scourge of Florence, compared the listeners to his sermons with crows in a belfry. When they hear the bells for the first time, they fly away in panic, but later, as they become accustomed to the noise they keep still.

Many readers of management books appear to react in the same way. Ever since management became a buzz-word, we have been swamped by a veritable Niagara of books on management. Decades ago, books on selling and salesmanship were the rage when Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* had taught the publishing industry that such works could cause greenbacks

to rain on everybody connected with them. You could not toss an egg over your shoulder in any bookshop without splattering books like *How I Raised Myself from Failure to Success in Selling* by Frank Bettger; *The Sale Begins when the Customer Says No* by Elmer Leterman or *How to Make Your Sales Sizzle in 17 Days* by Elmer Wheeler. Such books tended to be hortatory and inspirational and endlessly reiterated the importance of believing in yourself. But most of the authors had other gimmicks too. Wheeler, for example, put great stock in getting salesmen to see the importance of showmanship in their presentations, and recommended that they practise in front of a mirror by repeat-

ing "Oga, Oga, Boo, Boo" with different facial expressions.

The current counterpart of the selling book is the management book. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman demonstrated six years ago that either managers read books or ordinary readers yearned for insights about management quite a lot more than previously postulated. So the publishers have been frenziedly churning out such works, many with 'excellence' in the title. This can go to absurd lengths as when Harvard psychiatrist William S. Appleton says in his *It Takes More Than Excellence* that it is important for a manager to believe in himself.

Tom Peters, co-author of the

book, opines that perhaps five million people have bought copies of *In Search of Excellence*, including 15 translations, since its publication in mid-October 1982. If history is any guide, two or three million probably opened the book. Four or five hundred thousand read as much as four or five chapters. A hundred thousand or so read it cover to cover. Twenty-five thousand took notes. Five thousand took detailed notes.

Many of the management books have, as planned, made it to best-sellerdom. One prodigious seller was the breezy and anecdotal *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School* by consultant Mark H. McCormack, who leans hard on the insight that 'street smarts' can do more for you than academic knowledge. Even breezier was *The One-minute Manager* by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, which sold more than four million copies and was on the (US) *Publishers' Weekly* bestseller list for more than two years. Among the various snappy insights vouchsafed by the one-minutemen is that self-confidence is important for managers ("People who feel good about themselves produce good results."). Emboldened by their sales, the authors have brought out several sequels, such as *Leadership and the One-minute Manager*, *The One-minute Manager Gets Fit* and recently produced some software for one-minute managers who own IBM personal computers.

Since E.F. Brech first came out in 1953 with his excellent and still pertinent *The Principles and Practice of Management*, there has been substantial advancement in management practice, and a vast extension in the range, scope and depth of management studies. Yet curiously enough, there still seems to be no accepted understanding of the nature of the management role or of the skill it entails. There is no authorised version of management principles or of the essential themes in the gospel that is preached. This is not to imply that the nature of management is not

understood. On the contrary, a clear analysis has been available for a long time. There is no accepted, universally adopted definition in the sense in which the scientist knows that all his confreres accept one meaning for one particular term. This does not seriously matter. The differences are superficial rather than substantial, and in the event, most managers appear to be doing much the same things in practice, whatever their theoretical understanding of their role. The drawback in this situation lies in the obstacles it creates to the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of systematic studies.

BRECH HAS POINTED OUT that management suffers from the drawback inherent in its own setting. It is an employment undertaken and a skill practised by many thousands of persons in many different industrial and commercial communities within organisations of widely differing character and size, with numerous differences of objective and varieties of personal composition. It has evolved numerous techniques for more effective performance, yet these are 'tools' for carrying out a skill of which the real character is still imperfectly recognised. That there should be many controversies about the relative importance of various aspects of management is but a natural consequence of such a situation. Among the many persons who are occupationally engaged in management, most have qualified earlier in their industrial or commercial careers in specialised technical or professional fields — as engineers, chemists, accountants, company secretaries, etc. They have risen to higher executive positions through years spent in the specialised practice of their profession or technology. Therefore they tend, naturally enough, to have a bias or inclination to see management from a certain standpoint, and often lack the capacity to see it as a whole.

To the engineer, for instance, management is primarily a matter of the design of product and the design of

tools associated with the layout of production flows and the field of production engineering. From these it is but a small step to questions of planning, rate-fixing, piece rates, bonus systems and other techniques that link up the technical operations with the daily activities of the operatives. To the accountant, management looms largely as a matter of figures; he is interested in the statistical data that record progress, usually couched in money terms; his interest is accordingly centred on procedures which enable him to 'control' expenditure and to identify the expenditure with its outcome, and which show themselves in summary form in the profit and loss accounts and the balance sheets. Newer lines of thought are less concerned with the recording of past financial history, the comparison of this year's progress with last year's, than with routines for the 'control' of current expenditure against appropriate pre-determined standards.

No writer of management has achieved the wide readership and following of almost 'cult' proportions as Peter Drucker. Drucker has been called the Father of modern management for his pioneering studies at General Motors Corporation back in the 1940s. In the 1950s, working with Harold Smiddy, a vice-president at General Electric Co, Drucker formulated the so-called management by objectives, a method of redesigning an organisation to allow managers to set their own goals. He also argued that innovation can be fostered within an organisation and recommended continual "organised abandonment" of worn out products and activities. He claims to have been the first to apply the military concept of strategy to business.

Drucker's books, 22 of them — including *Concept of the Corporation and Management: tasks, responsibilities and practices* — have sold millions of copies and made his name a household word. "Drucker really was instrumental in creating or making legitimate a lot of things that are part and parcel of standard management prac-

tice today," says Alan Kantrov, editor of a quarterly published by consultants McKinsey and Co. Contrary to popular belief, some of Drucker's suggestions on management problems read more like Will Rogers than management thought. He details his cure for know-it-all managers. "A sharp kick below the belt. In front or in

The Top Twelve

- 1) The Principles and Practice of Management edited by E.E.L. Brech, Longman.
- 2) Management by Peter Drucker, Heinemann.
- 3) The Concept of the Corporation by Peter F. Drucker.
- 4) Managing by Harold S. Geneen, Grafton Book.
- 5) Classic Advice on Aspects of Organisational Life, Harvard Series.
- 6) Classic Advice on Managing Systems, Harvard Series.
- 7) Classic Advice on Handling the Manager's Job, Harvard Series.
- 8) Classic Advice on Leadership, Harvard Series.
- 9) The IBM Way by Buck Rodgers.
- 10) Letters to Thinkers by Edward de Bono, Harrap.
- 11) Company Rescue by O.P. Kharbanda and E.A. Stallworthy, Heinemann.
- 12) Thriving on Chaos: handbook for a management revolution, Knopf.

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back." To his group of advanced management students at Claremont, he offers the following insight, "There are very few bad situations that can't be solved by firing a passel of vice-presidents."

In the late sixties, American management was touted by many, at home and abroad, as the primary asset

America could export to the world. And then came reality — OPEC, the Japanese, social and political unrest, and an emerging workforce with needs that were substantially different from those of the past. The vaunted American management mystique quickly turned out to be largely just that — mystique. The battering American business took in the 1970s, and during the 1981-1983 recession, humbled the American manager.

OUT OF THE FAILURE of these organisations, emerged the beginning of a fundamental re-examination of managing *per se*. The landmark *Harvard Business Review* article by Bob Hayes and Bill Abernathy, "Managing Our Way to Economic Decline", became the cornerstone of the corporate revolution. It attacked the MBA/numbers-only mentality of American managers and the lack of concern in American corporations for such basics as manufacturing. Several other works would qualify as first alarms, including David Halberstam's examination of Vietnam in *The Best and The Brightest* and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's analysis of Great Society failures, *Maximum Feasibility Misunderstanding*. All these books put the knock on mindless systems analysis and began the examination of a misplaced emphasis on paper rather than on people. More recent business books, aside from *In Search of Excellence*, that come to mind are Bill Ouchi's *Theory Z*, Richard Pascale and Tony Athos' *The Art of Japanese Management*, Terry Deal and Allan Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures*, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *The Change Masters*, Ken Auletta's *The Art of Corporate Success* and *A Passion for Excellence* by Tom Peters and Nancy Austin.

What are the basics of managerial success? Two of the most important are pride in one's organisation and enthusiasm for its works. A quick check of several leading text books on management finds neither in any index. Nor does one find much about such concepts as 'naive customer listening', customer perception of

service/quality, employee commitment and ownership, internal corporate entrepreneurship (sometimes called intrapreneurship), championing of innovation, trust, vision or leadership.

Peters feels that the concept of leadership is crucial to the revolution now underway — so crucial that Peters feels the words 'managing' and 'management' should be discarded. 'Management', with its attendant images — cop, referee, devil's advocate, dispassionate analyst, naysayer, pronouncer — connotes controlling and arranging and demeaning and reducing. 'Leadership' connotes unleashing energy, building, freeing and growing.

MOST MANAGEMENT THEORIES seem to have been plotted as scrupulously as a moon shot. Others see a wobblier trajectory, perhaps because they aim at constantly shifting targets. One such sacred idol that has been recently dislodged from the management temple is that of "excellence". Its original guru, Tom Peters, has given up on excellence. The co-author of *In Search of Excellence* now writes in his latest book, that there is no such thing as a 'solid' or even substantial lead over one's competitors anymore. Companies go from "Champ to Chump" and back with ridiculous rapidity. IBM, supposedly dead in 1979, is rated the world's best in 1982 (by none other than Peters), then looks dead again in 1986. "There are no excellent companies," avers Peters, "sustainable excellence has become impossible. As a result of increased competition and faster change, no firm can take anything in its market for granted. Well-run companies today don't believe in excellence — only in constant improvement and constant change. They cherish impermanence — and thrive on chaos."

Thriving on chaos is something Indian managers have been doing for a long time what with governmental controls, raw material shortages, militant labour, bureaucratic red tape and a miasma of mindless laws and regulations. It would therefore seem

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that not many of the men and women at the helm of managerial affairs, take time off to read management books, much less implement their ideas. Several sample surveys of the reading habits of chief executives and managing directors in India have confirmed that apart from their mandatory reading in connection with their work (reports, memoranda, correspondence, etc) they have little time or inclination for reading books on management unless it is the latest bestseller and likely to be talked about on the cocktail circuit.

But those who market management books aver otherwise. "The Indian market for good management books — local or imported — is a steadily expanding one. The difficulty is in getting across to the potential buyers both in industry and the professions," says N. Mohan Rao, marketing director of Dass Media Pvt Ltd. Dass Media are the agents for several foreign publishers who lead in management titles such as Gower Press, Heinemann, Basil Blackwell, Harrap, etc. Mohan Rao says that his office also promotes management books through mail order and finds eager takers for good management books, irrespective of the price. "The most cost-effective method of reaching the potential reader," says Mohan Rao, "is through the medium of book reviews in the financial newspapers and magazines. But nowadays many papers and magazines do not devote sufficient space to such reviews. Or they farm them out to mere tyros who do not understand the subject."

Rao recalls that his office has sold hundreds of copies of many highly-priced management books, thanks to a good review in a national newspaper or magazine. He cites just one instance where a Gower handbook, *How to Use Management Ratios* by C.A. Westwick, priced at Rs 150, sold more than 500 copies. The book still sells, ten years later, now in its revised edition, although in the meantime, its price has gone up to Rs 1,000.

Mail-order booksellers identify the middle and senior levels of managers

as the largest readers of management books, apart, of course, from professionals in various disciplines. These managers in both the private and public sectors, are highly qualified, specialised professionals who are ever seeking to widen their horizons. They constitute the major institutional buyers of books on management. Despite the growing library of Indian authors on management, the bias is still strongly in favour of foreign management books.

NO INDIAN BOOK HAS HAD the wild success of Sharu Rangnekar's *In the Wonderland of Indian Managers*, which is said to have sold over 1,00,000 copies to date. M.K. Rustamjee's series of simplified and humorous books on different aspects of management have also been immensely popular with Indian readers as have the series on marketing and salesmanship by Walter E. Vieira. An Indian writer on management who has attained international recognition is Dr O.P. Kharbanda whose series on Project Management, in collaboration with E.A. Stallworthy has been published by Gower Press, England. It is not so much the dearth of talent as a lack of interest on the part of Indian managers to devote time to writing books. Lucid writers like S.K. Bhattacharya, Krish Pennathur, K.S. Menon, Yezdi Malegam, Bansi S. Mehta and others, cannot find the time from their busy professional schedule to write a book or two.

Peter Drucker, the *numero uno* of management gurus, says, in an article in the *Harvard Business Review*, that information technology will force the successful company of the future to become like a symphony orchestra. It will have lots of specialists conducted by one generalist — or, at most, a few generalists. "Whole layers of management," writes Drucker, "neither make decisions nor lead. Instead their main, if not their only function, is to serve as 'relays' — human boosters for the faint, unfocused signals that pass for communication, in traditional pre-information organisation."

Tom Peters takes the same approach in his latest book *Thriving on Chaos: handbook for a management revolution*. He exhorts companies to learn to love change — because they will have to live with a lot more of it. What both Drucker and Peters foresee is a drastic slimming of ranks of corporate middle management — those people, often at the head office, who fill out the pyramid between the directors and line managers.

Business practice has, to some extent, been running ahead of the management pundits. But Drucker had argued as far back as 1954, that seven layers of management were the most that any organisation needed. The ratio of white collar workers to production workers in the American manufacturing industry is declining. Many of today's most admired businesses have sloughed off layers of head-office staff and have pushed decision-making closer to the people on the factory floor.

Peters' book is a strong indication of the way management thought is heading, and may cause a flutter in the dovecotes of government bureaucracy in our country. Be obsessive about making your customers happy, Peters counsels. Differentiate your product, find market niches, stress quality, listen to the marketplace and make your salespeople company heroes. Spend lavishly on quality labour and use it to add lots of value. Make your factories flexible and innovative. Make every employee feel involved in the company's mission and fate. No more than five layers of management. End layoffs, have a performance-based incentive pay system for everyone (and don't cut it when business is down), fire 90 per cent of your middle managers and turn the few you keep into trouble shooters. Set absurdly high standards of ethical integrity and insist on them.

If the middle managers face extinction, one wonders who will buy and read all those new management books which keep arriving in droves at the bookshops. ♦

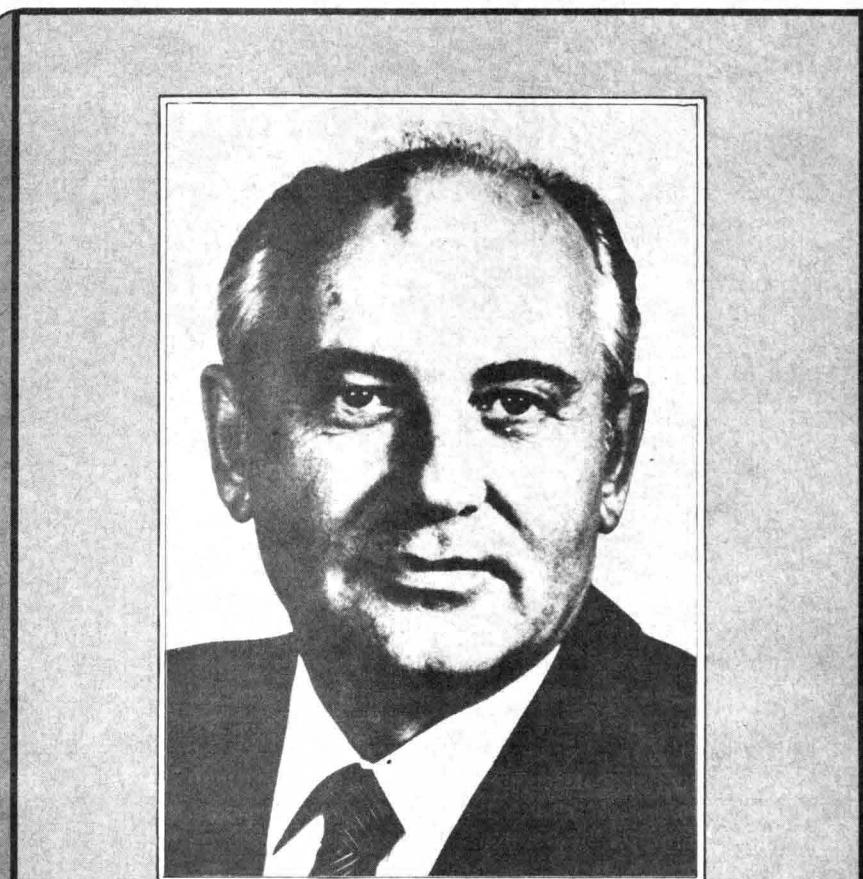
EXTRACT

'POLITICHESKY TEYTL S tinamis-mom i kharizmoy' (a dynamic and charismatic politician) or so Russia hails Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR. To the world, he is more approachable, less dogmatic and equipped with immense personal charm – almost an antithesis to the ponderous and stolid image of his predecessors. Offering hope for the 'disinvention' of nuclear arms with the recent treaty scrapping intermediate-range missiles, he is also a symbol of hope for a new USSR, promising glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) in the years to come. And, most importantly, expressing concern for the welfare of his country's citizens rather than the spread of her ideology.

Perhaps because Russia, when Gorbachev was born in 1931, was witness to an era of bloodshed and terror. Stalin's obsessive drive for collective farming had those who resisted deported or dead, and cattle destroyed by peasants who did not wish them to be confiscated by the collectives. Their slaughter and the government's oppressive requisition of grain let loose a ferocious famine. And millions died when Gorbachev was born on March 2, 1931, at Privolnoye, a microscopic village in Southern Russia.

The second trauma affecting Gorbachev's boyhood was the Nazi invasion, shortly after the turmoil of collectivisation. He was 11 when the Nazis stormed nearby Stavropol. His father Sergei was conscripted and fought at the front for four years, while Mikhail Gorbachev managed the family's farm with mother Maria Penteleyevna. At 14, he was driving a combine after school, braving intensely hot summers and bitterly cold winters. He weathered it well enough to win the Order of the Red Banner of Labour at 18.

This award, his intelligence and strenuous efforts to succeed – he graduated second from high school – combined with a strictly Communist family background, won Gorbachev further honours. He entered Moscow



Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev: THE GRANDMASTER

Excerpted from 'Perestroika' by Mikhail Gorbachev. Published by William Collins Sons & Co Ltd and distributed by Rupa & Co, Bombay. Price Rs 300/-

State University in 1950 as a Law student, though he later admitted to being interested in history, literature and mathematics. Like all other Soviet students, he was drilled in Marxism, Leninism and the detailed biography of Stalin. But in pursuing Law he also imbibed Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke and Machiavelli. Even in his student days, he is supposed to have displayed an extraordinary veneration for Lenin's doctrines, which were to stand him in good stead later.

Hostel life, however, was far from exciting. Gorbachev lived in a shabby, eighteenth century barrack – 10,000 students, crammed eight or more in a room. As there were no proper bathing facilities they were forced to use a public bath twice a month. 'Student tea' consisted of a cheap brew of hot water laced with sugar. Foreign films were a favourite diversion, Johnny Weismuller's Tarzan films proving most popular.

At the university, 'Misha' (as Gor-

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bachev was nicknamed), also found time to pursue romance. He met Raisa Maximovna Titorenko and married her in 1954, celebrating the occasion with 30 well-wishers in a corner of their dormitory's eating hall. Due to exigencies of space, however, they could not live together for the next several months.

Gorbachev graduated in 1955 when Nikita Krushchev was attempting to alleviate the trauma of the Stalinist regime. Inexplicably however, Gorbachev and Raisa left Moscow and returned to Stavropol, where he remained in virtual oblivion for the next 23 years. The Stavropol period appears to be the most obscure of Gorbachev's life. All that is known is that he rose fast, from a minor job in the local komsomol to its first secretary through a variety of komsomol and party jobs to promoting party members in Stavropol Krai. In 1970, he became a specialist in farming and First Secretary of the region (inhabited by 2.4 million people).

Open and accessible to his constituents, Gorbachev began his now famous walkabouts (informal chats with the populace). He also began travelling — mainly through Western Europe. Mystery surrounds his rise from provincial obscurity, though many attribute his swift elevation to powerful patrons like Fyodor Kulakov (Stavropol's Party boss and later, Russia's agriculture secretary), Mikhail Suslov (party ideologue) and the then KGB Chief, Yuri Andropov. The latter two were spa guests in Gorbachev's domain (Stavropol), and favourably impressed by both his reputation for incorruptibility and his quiet personal charm. When Kulakov died in 1978, Gorbachev filled his post, to the approval of his godfathers, Suslov and Andropov, and on the direct recommendation of the then General Secretary, Leonid Brezhnev. The rest is Gorbachev history.

At 47, Gorbachev became a member of the national hierarchy, ranking 20th among all Soviet leaders. Despite an unimpressive performance as agriculture secretary — the grain harvest



"We are not going to change Soviet power, of course, or abandon its fundamental principle, but we acknowledge the need for changes that will strengthen socialism and make it more dynamic."

fell from a record 230 million tonnes in 1978 to 155 million tonnes in 1981 — Gorbachev was elected a candidate member of the Politburo, and in the next year, became the youngest full member.

His rapid and astonishing entry into the corridors of power at the Kremlin has been attributed to the need for fresh, new talent. Brezhnev was dying and his 18-year regime seemed steeped in stagnation. Once Andropov stepped in, Gorbachev became his right-hand man in the clean-up campaign.

After Andropov's death in 1984, Gorbachev bided his time, even delivering Chernenko's nominating speech. The 72-year old, ailing General Secretary delegated considerable responsibility to his principal deputy, Mikhail Gorbachev. Following Chernenko's death, Gorbachev's ascension to the summit of political power in Russia, met with only half-hearted dissension. Andrei Gromyko, then Foreign Secretary, carried the day, delivering Gorbachev's nominating speech with the now celebrated remark, "This man has a nice smile, but iron teeth."

Very little is known of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's private life, except that he has one 28-year old daughter, Irina, a physician,

married to Anatoli, also a doctor. Gorbachev also has two grandchildren. Though he has an apartment in Central Moscow, he lives mostly in a closed area on the western outskirts of the city, and drives downtown daily in a four-car motorcade. He normally puts in a 9-hour day at his main office in the Kremlin, staying late only for special functions or Politburo meetings.

Presenting General Secretary Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev on Perestroika:

Perestroika is a Revolution

Perestroika is a word with many meanings. But if we are to choose from its many possible synonyms the key one which expresses its essence most accurately, then we can say thus: perestroika is a revolution. A decisive acceleration of the socio-economic and cultural development of Soviet society which involves radical changes on the way to a qualitatively new state is undoubtedly a revolutionary task.

I think we had every reason to declare at the January 1987 Plenary Meeting: in its essence, in its Bolshevik daring and in its humane social thrust the present course is a direct sequel to the great accomplishments started by the Leninist Party in the October days of 1917. And not merely a sequel, but an extension and a development of the main ideas of the Revolution. We must impart new dynamism to the October Revolution's historical impulse and further advance all that was commenced by it in our society.

Of course, we do not equate perestroika with the October Revolution, an event that was a turning point in the thousand-year history of our state and is unparalleled in force of impact on mankind's development. And yet, why in the seventieth year of the October Revolution do we speak of a new revolution?

Historical analogy may be helpful in answering this question. Lenin once noted that in the country of the classical bourgeois revolution, France,

after its Great Revolution of 1789-1793, it took another three revolutions (1830, 1848 and 1871) to carry through its aims. The same applies to Britain where, after the Cromwellian Revolution of 1649, came the "glorious" Revolution of 1688-1689, and then the 1832 reform was necessary to finally establish the new class in power — the bourgeoisie. In Germany there were two bourgeois-democratic revolutions (1848 and 1918), and in between them the drastic reforms of the 1860s, which Bismarck carried out by "iron and blood".

"Never in history," wrote Lenin, "has there been a revolution in which it was possible to lay down one's arms and rest on one's laurels after the victory." Why then should not socialism, called upon to carry out even more profound socio-political and cultural changes in society's development than capitalism, go through several revolutionary stages in order to reveal its full potential and finally crystallise as a radically new formation? Lenin repeated the following thought more than once: socialism would consist of many attempts. Each attempt would in a certain sense be one-sided, each would have its own specifics. And this applies to all countries.

Historical experience has shown that socialist society is not insured against the emergence and accumulation of stagnant tendencies and even against major socio-political crises. And it is precisely measures of a revolutionary character that are necessary for overcoming a crisis or pre-crisis situation. The most important thing here is that socialism is capable of revolutionary changes, because it is, by its very nature, dynamic.

In the spring of 1985, the Party put this task on the agenda. The gravity of accumulated and emerging problems, and the delay in their understanding and solution necessitated acting in a revolutionary way and proclaiming a revolutionary overhaul of society.

Perestroika is a revolutionary process for it is a jump forward in the development of socialism, in the rea-



"The atmosphere in our society has grown tense as the perestroika effort has gone deeper. We have heard some people say: was there any point in starting all this at all?"

lisation of its essential characteristics. From the outset we realised that we had no time to lose. It is very important not to stay too long on the starting line, to overcome the lag, to get out of the quagmire of conservatism, and to break the inertia of stagnation. This cannot be done in an evolutionary way, by timid, creeping reforms. We simply have no right to relax, even for a day. On the contrary, day after day we must add to our effort, build up its pace and its intensity. We must withstand the stresses, what cosmonauts call big overloads, at the initial phase of restructuring.

A revolution should be constantly developed. There must be no marking time. Our own past illustrates this. We still feel the aftermath of slowing down. Therefore we now need redoubled courage and boldness. Should we again get stuck, we are in for trouble. Therefore — only forward!

Of course, acting in a revolutionary way does not imply a headlong dash. Cavalry attacks are far from being always appropriate. A revolution is governed by the laws of politics, by the art of the possible. Bypassing its stages and getting ahead of ourselves must be avoided. Now the main task is to create a basis for advance to qualitatively new frontiers. Otherwise, you may make a mess of the whole

thing and discredit the great cause.

In accordance with our theory, revolution means construction, but it also always implies demolition. Revolution requires the demolition of all that is obsolete, stagnant and hinders fast progress. Without demolition, you cannot clear the site for new construction. Perestroika also means a resolute and radical elimination of obstacles hindering social and economic development, of outdated methods of managing the economy and of dogmatic stereotype mentality. Perestroika affects the interests of many people, the whole of society. And, of course, demolition provokes conflicts and sometimes fierce clashes between the old and the new. There are no bombs exploding or bullets flying, of course, but those who are in the way resist. And inaction, indifference, laziness, irresponsibility and mismanagement are also resistance.

That's understandable. The atmosphere in our society has grown tense as the perestroika effort has gone deeper. We have heard some people say: was there any point in starting all this at all?

Some people do not even accept the word "revolution" as applied to this effort. Some are scared even by the term "reform". But Lenin was not afraid to use this word and even taught the Bolsheviks themselves to go in for "reformism" whenever that was required to carry forward the cause of the Revolution in the new conditions. Today we need radical reforms for revolutionary change.

One of the signs of a revolutionary period is a more or less pronounced discrepancy between vital interests of society whose front ranks are ready for major changes, and the immediate, day-to-day interests of people. Perestroika hits hardest those who are used to working in the old way. We have no political opposition, but this does not mean there is no confrontation with those who, for various reasons, do not accept perestroika. Everyone will probably have to make sacrifices at the first stage of perestroika, but some will have to give up for good the

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privileges and prerogatives they do not deserve and which they have acquired illegitimately, and the rights which have impeded our progress.

The question of interests has always been a key issue for the Party at crucial moments. It would be appropriate to recall how Lenin fought for the Brest Peace Treaty in the troubled year of 1918. The Civil War was raging, and at that moment came a most serious threat from Germany. So Lenin suggested signing a peace treaty with it.

The terms of peace that Germany peremptorily laid down for us were, as Lenin put it, "disgraceful, dirty". They meant annexing a vast tract of territory with a population of 56 million. It seemed impossible to accept them. Yet Lenin insisted on a peace treaty. Even some members of the Central Committee objected, saying that the workers, too, were demanding that the German invaders be rebuffed. Lenin, however, kept calling for peace because he was guided by vital, not immediate, interests, the interests of the working class as a whole, of the Revolution and the future of socialism. To safeguard them, the country needed respite before going ahead. Few realised that at the time. Only later was it easy to say confidently and unambiguously that Lenin was right. And right he was, because he was looking far ahead; he did not put what was transitory above what was essential. The Revolution was saved.

It is the same with perestroika. It meets the vital interests of Soviet people. It is designed to bring society to new frontiers and raise it to a qualitatively new level. We shall have to make sacrifices, which will not be easy. The established habits and ideas are disintegrating before our eyes. The disappearance of something customary provokes protest. Conservatism does not want to give way, but all this can and must be overcome if we want to meet the long-term interests of society and every individual.

We actually faced the issue of the relationship between immediate and long-term interests when we began



"The Soviet Union and India represent an example of good inter-state relations: we see a world order where peaceful co-existence and co-operation will be universal norms."

introducing state quality inspection. To improve the quality of products we instituted an independent body for ensuring that products met existing standards. At first many workers' earnings dropped, but the improved quality was needed by society and workers regarded the new measure with understanding. There were no protests from them. On the contrary, workers now say: "It is shameful to get what you have not earned." At the same time, they want managers, engineers and technical personnel to assume the same attitude. So state quality inspection has become a good testing ground for perestroika. It revealed people's attitudes to work and human reserves which could be utilised for perestroika. State quality inspection has become a litmus test confirming once again that the Soviet working class as a whole totally supports the restructuring.

Like revolution, perestroika is not something you can toy with. You must carry things through to the end and make progress every day so that the masses can feel its results and the process can continue gathering momentum both materially and spiritually.

When we call our measures revolutionary, we mean that they are far-reaching, radical and uncompromising, and affect the whole of society

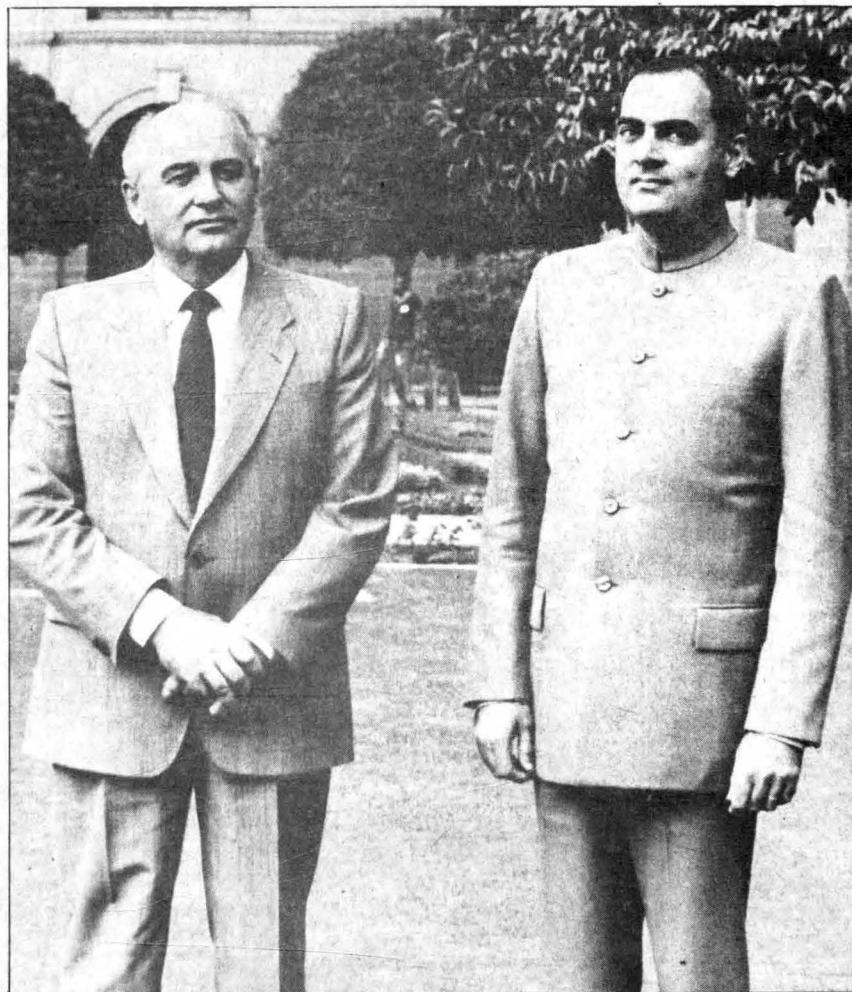
from top to bottom. They affect all spheres of life and do so in a comprehensive way. This is not putting new paint on our society or dressing up its sores, but involves its complete recovery and renewal.

Politics is undoubtedly the most important thing in any revolutionary process. This is equally true of perestroika. Therefore we attach priority to political measures, broad and genuine democratisation, the resolute struggle against red tape and violations of law, and the active involvement of the masses in managing the country's affairs. All this is directly linked with the main question of any revolution, the question of power.

We are not going to change Soviet power, of course, or abandon its fundamental principles, but we acknowledge the need for changes that will strengthen socialism and make it more dynamic and politically meaningful. That is why we have every reason to characterise our plans for the full-scale democratisation of Soviet society as a programme for changes in our political system.

Hence we must — if we want perestroika to succeed — gear all our work to the political tasks and methods of leadership. The most important element in the activities of Party organisations and Party personnel is political work among the masses, political education of the working people and the raising of the level of people's political activity. The original meaning of the concept of "socialism", above all, as an ideological and political movement of the masses, a grass-roots movement whose strength lies primarily in man's consciousness and activity, has again come to the fore.

Revolution is an unparalleled phenomenon. And like a revolution, our day-to-day activities must be unparalleled, revolutionary. Perestroika requires Party leaders who are very close to Lenin's ideal of a revolutionary Bolshevik. Officialdom, red tape, patronising attitudes and careerism are incompatible with this ideal. On the other hand, courage, initiative, high ideological standards and moral



Gorbachev and Gandhi: forging closer ties?

purity, a constant urge to discuss things with people and an ability to firmly uphold the humane values of socialism are greatly honoured. The revolutionary situation requires enthusiasm, dedication and self-sacrifice. This particularly applies to the leaders. We still have a long way to go to achieve this ideal. Too many people are still "in the state of evolution", or, to put it plainly, have adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

Soviet-Indian Relations

India, a southern neighbour of ours with a population of 800 million, is a great power. It enjoys major influence in the non-aligned movement and the

entire world, and is a crucial factor for Asian and global peace.

Soviet-Indian relations have steadily developed over many years. I have met Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, several times, both in Moscow and in Delhi. My visit to India in 1986 left an indelible impression on me. We adopted the now famous Delhi Declaration during that visit.

The global interest in the document is natural. The Delhi Declaration is unprecedented. It demonstrates an entirely new, philosophical-political approach to inter-state relations. The recognition of the priority of universal human values in this space and nuclear age forms the philosophical and ethical foundation. Though the document was elaborated by two

countries, its significance goes far beyond both bilateral and regional boundaries.

The very appearance of the Delhi Declaration reflects the unique nature of Soviet-Indian relations. We have different social systems, but this does not prevent the kind of co-operation between us that spiritually enriches both sides and leads to a broad concurrence of views on the fundamental questions of the day. Each country has arrived at the outlooks we share in its own way, and has its own motives for those attitudes.

Soviet-Indian relations are exemplary in many respects: in their diverse political, economic, scientific, technical and cultural content, in the deep respect and the liking our nations have for each other, and in the general tone of our ties which reflects our mutual confidence and our heartfelt desire for friendship. How is it possible that India and the Soviet Union, two states with different social and political systems, have managed to develop relations of such a high quality? Because both of them base their policies – not in word but in deed – on the principles of sovereignty, equality, non-interference in others' internal affairs, and co-operation. Both recognise every nation's right to choose its own political system and pattern of social development.

So we have every reason to say with rightful pride that the Soviet Union and India represent an example of good inter-state relations, an example for others to emulate. In our relations, we see a budding world order where peaceful co-existence and mutually beneficial co-operation based on goodwill will be universal norms.

The "Enemy Image"

We certainly do not need an "enemy image" of America, neither for domestic nor for foreign-policy interests. An imaginary or real enemy is needed only if one is bent on maintaining tension, on confrontation with far-reaching and, I might add,

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unpredictable consequences. Ours is a different orientation.

For our part the Soviet Union has no propaganda of hatred towards Americans or disregard for America. In our country you will not find this anywhere, neither in politics nor in education. We criticise a policy we do not agree with. But that is a different matter. It does not mean that we show disrespect for the Americans.

In the summer of 1987 I met with a group of Russian teachers from the US who had taken a two-month training course in Leningrad. It was a good conversation — frank and warm. I shall cite one brief excerpt from the verbatim report:

Mikhail Gorbachev: Have you encountered even one instance of a disrespectful attitude toward Americans during your stay?

D Padula: No, though a man in the street once asked me, when would there be peace? I told him I hoped peace would come soon.

Mikhail Gorbachev: This is very interesting information. I am convinced, friends, that, wherever you may go in the Soviet Union, you will not encounter a disrespectful attitude towards Americans. Not anywhere. You can also read our press. You will find there criticism, analysis, judgement and assessments of government policy, of statements and actions by particular groups, but never any disrespectful mention of America or Americans. So that, if "the Reds are coming", they are coming together with you along the common road of mankind.

Yet some people in the United States, it turns out, "need" the Soviet Union as an enemy image. Otherwise it is hard to understand some films, the inflammatory American broadcasts from Munich, the spate of articles and programmes full of insults and hatred towards the Soviet people. All this dates back to the forties, if not earlier.

I would not idealise each step in Soviet foreign policy over the past several decades. Mistakes also occurred. But very often they were the consequence of an improvident reaction to



The Big Two: what lies behind the smiles?

American actions, to a policy geared by its own architects to "roll back communism".

We are sensitive and, frankly, cautious about the efforts to give the Soviet Union the image of an enemy, especially as they do not just involve ideological exercises along the lines of the usual fantastic stories about a "Soviet military threat", "the hand of Moscow", "the Kremlin's designs", and an absolutely negative portrayal of our internal affairs. I do not even want to point out the absurdity of such assertions, but neither can we ignore the fact that everything in politics has its own aim. It is thus a question of a political practice with certain intentions and plans behind it. We must get rid of any presence of chauvinism in our countries, especially considering the power they both possess. Chauvinism can bring into politics elements that are inadmissible.

It is a sad, tragic fact that Soviet-American relations have been slipping downhill a long time. Short periods of improvement gave way to protracted spells of tension and a build-up in hostility. I am convinced that we have every opportunity to rectify the situation, and it appears that things are

moving that way. We are prepared to do everything to bring about changes for the better.

Who Needs the Arms Race and Why?

Pondering the question of what stands in the way of good Soviet-American relations, one arrives at the conclusion that, for the most part, it is the arms race. I am not going to describe its history. Let me just note once again that at almost all its stages the Soviet Union has been the party catching up. By the beginning of the seventies we had reached approximate military-strategic parity, but on a level that is really frightening. Both the Soviet Union and the United States now have the capacity to destroy each other many times over.

It would seem logical, in the face of a strategic stalemate, to halt the arms race and get down to disarmament. But the reality is different. Armories already overflowing, continue to be filled with sophisticated new types of weapons, and new areas of military technology are being developed. The US sets the tone in this

dangerous, if not fatal pursuit.

I shall not disclose any secret if I tell you that the Soviet Union is doing all that is necessary to maintain up-to-date and reliable defenses. This is our duty to our own people and our allies. At the same time I wish to say quite definitely that this is not our choice. It has been imposed upon us.

All kinds of doubts are being spread among Americans about Soviet intentions in the field of disarmament. But history shows that we can keep the word we gave and that we honour the obligations assumed. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the United States. The administration is conditioning public opinion, intimidating it with a Soviet threat, and does so with particular stubbornness when a new military budget has to be passed through Congress. We have to ask ourselves why all this is being done and what aim the US pursues.

It is crystal-clear that in the world we live in, the world of nuclear weapons, any attempt to use them to solve Soviet-American problems would spell suicide. This is a fact. I do not think that US politicians are unaware of it. Moreover, a truly paradoxical situation has now developed. Even if one country engages in a steady arms build-up while the other does nothing, the side that arms itself will all the same gain nothing. The weak side may simply explode all its nuclear charges, even on its own territory, and that would mean suicide for it and a slow death for the enemy. This is why any striving for military superiority means chasing one's own tail. It cannot be used in real politics.

Nor is the US in any hurry to part with another illusion. I mean its immoral intention to bleed the Soviet Union white economically, to prevent us from carrying out our plans of construction by dragging us ever deeper into the quagmire of the arms race.

I ask the reader to take a look at the experience of postwar decades. The Soviet Union emerged from the Second World War in a very difficult condition. Yes, we had won the struggle against fascism, won together with



"The Soviet Union has no propaganda or hatred towards Americans. In our country you will not find this anywhere, neither in politics nor in education. We criticise a policy we do not agree with."

the US and other anti-Hitler coalition participants. But whereas not a single enemy bomb was dropped and not a single enemy shot was heard on the US mainland, a large part of the territory of our country was an arena for the fiercest battles. Our losses – both human and material – were enormous. Nevertheless, we succeeded in restoring what had been destroyed, in building up our economic potential and in confidently tackling our defensive tasks. Is this not a lesson for the future?

It is inadmissible that states should base their policies on mistaken views. We know that there is an opinion current in the US and the West generally that the threat from the Soviet Union comes not because it possesses nuclear weapons. They reason as follows, as I have already mentioned in another connection: the Soviets well know that if they attack the US, they cannot escape retaliation. The US is equally well aware that retaliation will follow an attack on the USSR. Therefore only a madman would unleash nuclear war. The real threat, according to these people, will arise if the Soviet Union accomplishes its plans of accelerating socio-economic development and shows its new econ-

omic and political potential. Hence the desire to exhaust the Soviet Union economically.

We sincerely advise Americans: try to get rid of such an approach to our country. Hopes of using any advantages in technology or advanced equipment so as to gain superiority over our country are futile. To act on the assumption that the Soviet Union is in a "hopeless position" and that it is necessary just to press it harder to squeeze out everything the US wants is to err profoundly. Nothing will come of these plans. In real politics there can be no wishful thinking. If the Soviet Union, when it was much weaker than now, was in a position to meet all the challenges that it faced, then indeed only a blind person would be unable to see that our capacity to maintain strong defenses and simultaneously resolve social and other tasks has enormously increased.

I shall repeat that as far as United States' foreign policy is concerned, it is based on at least two delusions. The first is the belief that the economic system of the Soviet Union is about to crumble and that the USSR will not succeed in restructuring. The second is calculated on Western superiority in equipment and technology and, eventually, in the military field. These illusions nourish a policy geared towards exhausting socialism through the arms race, so as to dictate terms later. Such is the scheme; it is naive.

Current Western policies are not responsible enough, and lack the new mode of thinking. I am outspoken about this. If we do not stop now and start practical disarmament, we may all find ourselves on the edge of a precipice. Today, as never before, the Soviet Union and the United States need responsible policies. Both countries have their political, social and economic problems: a vast field for activities. Meanwhile, many brain trusts work at strategic plans and juggle millions of lives. Their recommendations boil down to this: the Soviet Union is the most horrible threat for the United States and the world. I repeat: it is high time this

EXTRACT

caveman mentality was given up. Of course, many political leaders and diplomats have engaged in just such policies based on just such a mentality for decades. But their time is past. A new outlook is necessary in a nuclear age. The United States and the Soviet Union need it most in their bilateral relations.

We are realists. So we take into consideration the fact that in a foreign policy all countries, even the smallest, have their own interests. It is high time great powers realised that they can no longer reshape the world according to their own patterns. That era has receded or, at least is receding into the past.

Alienation is Evil

We often hear that the Soviet Union and the United States can well do without each other. To tell the truth, I sometimes say it too. Well, it is true from the economic viewpoint, considering our negligible economic contacts today. Contacts or no contacts, we live on, and learn the lessons Americans teach us.

Our fodder-grain imports were a sensitive issue. Now we have secured our position by making import contracts with many countries and introducing intensive agricultural technologies to boost grain yields at home. Our present task is to start exporting grain in the near future.

The West has set up COCOM. The United States is on guard lest its limitations are violated and sees to it that the lists of goods not open for sale to the Soviet Union are enlarged. America does not hesitate to interfere in the domestic affairs of the participants in the prohibitive programme.

The Soviet Union reacted promptly by elaborating the corresponding programme, named Program 100 because it dealt with one hundred materials. We put it through in less than three years. Some ninety per cent of the materials we use are home-made. So we can say that we have coped with the task in the main.



It would seem logical, in the face of a strategic stalemate, to halt the arms race and get down to disarmament. But the reality is different. Armouries already overflowing, continue to be filled with sophisticated, new types of weapons, and new areas of military technology are being developed. The US sets the tone in this dangerous, if not fatal pursuit.

We said right out that it was time to get over our inferiority complex. Ours is a vast country with immense resources and a tremendous scientific potential. Our capitalist partners abroad are not always reliable and sometimes use trade for political blackmail and intimidation. The measures we have taken are already bearing fruit. Pioneering developments have been made in computer and supercomputer technologies, superconductivity and other fields. The United States hopes that it will always lead the world: a futile hope, as many American scientists realise.

Our countries have been alienated from each other for years, and both the Soviet and the American economies have lost many brilliant opportunities. We have failed to do many good things together because of suspicion and lack of confidence. Alienation is an evil. Besides, economic contacts provide the material basis for political *rapprochement*. "Economic contacts create mutual interests help-

ful in politics. If we boost our trade and economic relations and continue the cultural process currently going on, even if it is slower than we would like, we shall be able to build confidence between our countries. But the United States has created many obstacles in the economic field.

We do still import grain – but rather to keep up trade. It may die otherwise. But we may soon need no grain imports at all, as I have said. And Soviet-American trade in other goods is practically non-existent. As soon as some Soviet goods penetrated the American market, the United States anxiously started to take measures to prohibit or at least limit trade. There are legal acts galore in America which prevent trade with the Soviet Union from developing.

America manages without the Soviet Union and we, too, manage without America as far as trade goes. But as soon as we come to think of how much the world depends on our two countries and on understanding between them, we realise that our mutual understanding must develop. So, our trade must develop too. That would be only normal, even exacting.

Certain groups in the United States are not especially forthcoming and show no desire to reciprocate. They lack the capacity to be open. "If something can be obtained from the Soviet Union, America's here. But when it comes to mutual profit, forget it."

Something depends on the Soviet Union, too: much, in fact. We may be bad traders. Or we may fail to make the necessary effort because we manage without it. Both sides must work to remove the obstacles.

That is the right approach to the confidence issue. Incantations do not work here. Confidence comes as the result of practical action, including common efforts to develop trade, economic, scientific, technological, cultural and other ties. Both sides must work to stop the arms race and go over to disarmament. If we work together to settle regional conflicts, our mutual confidence will gain. ♦

HER INSTRUMENTS look exotic but the music sounds hauntingly familiar. H S Anasuya of Bangalore is a musician — with a difference. She collects an assortment of musical instruments from Third World countries and has learnt to play the rudiments of different kinds of music on them. Her collection, stored in a room in her home, now runs to 50 instruments and is the outcome of almost 20 years of dedicated pursuit. Curiously enough, Anasuya was not an instrumentalist to begin with; she used to sing Hindustani classical music but could not play any musical instrument whatsoever. It was only following her marriage to Narayan Kulkarni, who worked for the United Nations, that Anasuya embarked on a lifetime of globe-trotting — and instrument collecting.

The longest stint that she has spent in any one country in the past 23 years was at her husband's first posting when the Kulkarni couple lived in Afghanistan for almost a decade. It was in Kabul that Anasuya heard a boy — her neighbour — playing the *rebab* each morning. Anasuya found the plaintive music enthralling and set out to learn more about the simple instrument that produced such haunting melodies. She bought herself a *rebab*, and just about learnt to handle it before leaving Afghanistan.

Their next destination was Mongolia, where they spent about three-and-a-half years. Here Anasuya saw the *shanse* being played by a local musician on television. She decided that she had to have one. However, she discovered that it was not so easy for a foreigner like herself to obtain the instrument of her choice, and friends suggested that she could try approaching the local university. Astutely realising that music was prob-

ably the best mode of communication with which to cross political and religious barriers, Anasuya literally sang for her instrument at the university. And acquired the *shanse* just before she left Mongolia.

By then, Anasuya had certainly been bitten by the collector's bug. En route to their next destination, she visited China briefly and bought four instruments, two of which were rhythm instruments — the *moi* and the Chinese drum. The third was an *arhoo*, a string instrument that consists of a long rod balanced by two

oriental xylophone and is struck with a huge wooden mallet, while the *paking* is a smaller version of the same instrument.

Indonesia is famous for its bamboo percussion instruments, and Anasuya also acquired a *bamboo moorching*, an instrument played rather like a mouth organ, and a *chanung*, which consists of suspended pieces of bamboo pipe. She also bought a zither, a huge brass gong, and an Indonesian *rebab* — a two-stringed violin.

All this time, Anasuya hoarded her musical instruments and only displayed them on her visits to India, much like a philatelist would exhibit a fascinating collection. The only instrument that she could actually play was the *Kabuli rebab*. Nevertheless, she compiled information about the instruments, recorded music played on them by accomplished musicians, and began a private music library of sorts.

The turning point came at a concert organised by the Madras Music Academy. Anasuya arranged her instruments on the stage and launched into her practised patter, when she was suddenly interrupted by a voice from the audience: "Why don't you play the instruments for us?" Other voices echoed the request. Anasuya was



MUSICAL MAVERICK

H S Anasuya has an unusual hobby — she collects musical instruments. Drums from Papua New Guinea, two-stringed violins from Indonesia, wooden pipes from Thailand... they are all part of her exotic ensemble. M D RITI profiles this musician with a difference.

barrel-like objects, and the fourth, a *chinko*. Anasuya, however, never learnt to play any of these.

During the first two years of her sojourn at her next halt, Indonesia, she went on her now customary shopping spree and acquired a whole range of instruments: the *bonang*, which now stands in a corner of her music room, has inverted hollow brass pots arranged on a wooden stand; the *gender* has huge flat plates that are struck by a series of wooden hammers; the *sarong* looks like an

plainly quite embarrassed. Deciding that honesty was her only option, she looked straight at the expectant audience and confessed that she had not learnt to play any of them. However, she promised that she would start taking lessons right away and would play for them on her next visit to India.

She kept her word and found that she had opened the doors to a world of grandeur and beauty. For the remainder of her five-year stay in Indonesia, she enrolled herself at a few

schools of music and learnt the basic techniques of Indonesian music and familiarised herself with the instruments in the Indonesian gamelan orchestra. "It was difficult, but fascinating," she recollects. "I wanted to learn everything in the correct manner. It was not just for fun or to keep my word to my Madras audience."

Some of the instruments were sizeable, and each of them seemed to exercise a new set of muscles. Muscular pain became Anasuya's constant companion. But she did not give up. One particular bamboo instrument, the *angklung*, captured her interest more than the others and Anasuya today carries the instrument around wherever she goes. It is about three feet high and consists of what look like hollow bamboo pipes slotted into a wooden stand. She unpacked it from a padded suitcase designed specially to transport the instrument without damaging it, and played it for me, sitting down, in her music room.

The *angklung* actually contains three octaves and is played by three people. Anasuya began playing on the middle octave and found that she could play the instrument well enough if she tied parts of it with rope. This innovative woman has even devised ways of playing Carnatic classical music on it! When UN Day was being celebrated in Indonesia, she was invited to perform at a show. "I decided to make it an international instrument concert," smiles Anasuya. "I played the *angklung*, one of my sons played the organ, and the other the *mridangam*."

The *angklung* became Anasuya's forte. The Central Sangeet Akademi recorded a 45-minute-long per-

formance for their archives; the Indonesian government sent her to Perth to demonstrate how the instrument should be played.

Her growing collection was almost doubled at the next country that she moved to — Papua New Guinea. By this time, she had established a *modus operandi*. The first thing that she did was enrol in the National Arts School. She found herself playing the dual role of teacher and pupil as the other teachers and students at the school were eager to learn Indian classical music. A two-way inter-

action developed and Anasuya did not have to buy her set of instruments — the school gifted them to her instead! That was how she was able to obtain instruments that she would otherwise never have been able to find in the bazaars, like the *sepec* flute and the *sepec* drum, both of which are sacred instruments played only by high priests.

Some of the instruments she acquired at Papua New Guinea are quite exotic: the *bull roarer* is a flat wooden piece attached to a rope that is whirled above the head to make a whistling sound; the *kua kumba* flute is more or less what the name suggests, a wooden cylinder, about two feet long, which has a single hole and is blown in various ways to imitate the noises made by different animals. Additionally, there is the *tidir*, a small, flat rhythm instrument, and the *kundhu* and the *garamuth* drums, both traditional percussion instruments of that country. Another curious instrument is the pig horn which is shaped like a pig's face and is actually a wind instrument with two holes. Wooden jingles made of seeds that rattle are used for much the same effect as Indian dancers wear metal jingles around their ankles. In addition to these unusual instruments, Anasuya's collection from that country contains *pan pipes*, a *moorching*, and wooden variations of the traditional mouth organ and conch shell.

By now it had become a habit for Anasuya to visit other countries specifically to buy more instruments to add to her strange orchestra! In Thailand, she found that the instruments were similar to those in her Indonesian collection, so she



Strumming a melody on the African lyre.

Can Indian styles of music be played on these instruments? "No," she says regretfully. "Most of them could provide a pleasant background for our music."

bought only the *kaan*, a wind instrument that looks like a series of uneven wooden pipes arranged haphazardly. A brief stop-over at Manila resulted in the acquisition of *pan pipes* and a hollow, bamboo rhythm instrument that is thwacked on the palm of the hand to produce a twanging sound.

"I noticed that music plays a major role in the lives of people everywhere," she muses. "Nothing in the life cycle — from birth to death — really occurs in the absence of music in any of the countries I visited!" Can Indian styles of music be played on these instruments? "No," she says regretfully. "Most of them could provide a pleasant background for our music. Only the *angklung* can actually be used to play Indian classical music. But any of the percussion instruments I have here can be used to maintain our rhythms."

At present, Mr Kulkarni has been posted to Uganda. Over the year and a half that she has spent there, Anasuya has learnt to play the *adangu*, which is akin to a combination of the harp and the guitar; the African lyre, which is a string instrument that calls for the perfect synchronisation of both hands moving simultaneously; the thumb piano which has flat metal strips held in place by a hinge-like mechanism on a wooden plank; the one-string lyre, which is played by plucking a single jute fibre strengthened by resin; and a four-holed flute of about one inch diameter with a V-shaped mouthpiece. Most of the wooden instruments are covered with animal hide.

The forms of music that she has learnt over the years

are vastly different from one another. "If I had not been a musician to start with, I would have found it very difficult to manage," she says. "Basic rhythmic discipline is important in all the forms I have learnt. But none of these have the grace or fluidity of our own classical music. By sharing the various kinds of music I have learnt elsewhere with people in India, I hope that I am enriching their minds and musical sensibilities in some way."

Another unusual and totally unrelated hobby that Anasuya has pursued along the way is collecting mini-

ature footwear! The 400 styles of shoes and slippers that she now owns are stored in a cupboard designed to resemble a huge shoe. These tiny exhibits are made of all kinds of material, including metals like gold and silver, and assume myriad shapes including those of beer mugs and salt shakers.

After almost a quarter of a century of being constantly on the move, Anasuya has still not tired of her almost nomadic existence. The fact that she has never been able to put down roots anywhere does not seem

to disturb her, neither does the difficulty of setting up house in a different country ever so often, as she knows that there will be an entire vista of music for her to explore wherever she goes. Packing her instruments is not so easy, though. She hires professional packers to handle her delicate, wooden instruments and does not carry the whole lot around the world with her.

Maintenance of the instruments poses something of a problem. Most of them are made entirely or largely out of wood; an attack of termites could just be the end of her entire collection. Consequently, she has to get the wood treated regularly. The string instruments could deteriorate if they are not tuned frequently. Anasuya's interest in her instruments goes beyond the enthusiasm of a collector to that of the dedication of a true musician. Music, in one form or another, plays a major role in the lives of the Kulkarni family.

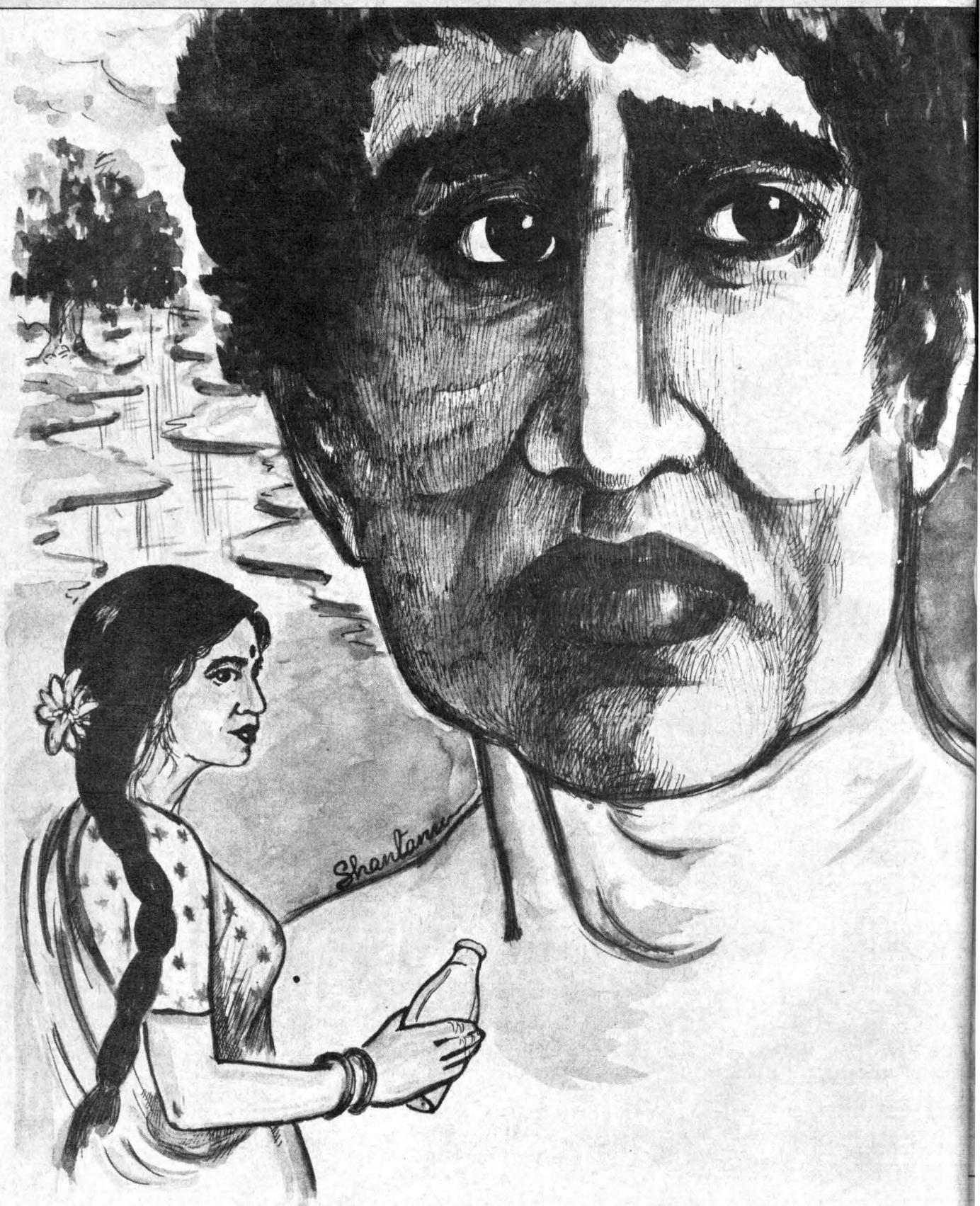
"It is time for us to move from Uganda," she says happily and adds, "I wonder where we will go next and what musical instruments that country will have..." ♦



Playing the sepec drum from Papua New Guinea.

**"I noticed that music plays a major role in the lives of people everywhere," she muses.
"Nothing in the life cycle — from birth to death — really occurs in the absence of music!"**

FICTION





THE SERVANT

TWAS HIS COUSIN who persuaded him to come to the city. "It's a good life," he had said, patting his ample girth, "you'll make money."

For a while, he was fascinated, enthralled by everything: the majestic electric stove, the gleaming refrigerator, the cars and buses that sped along the roads. But he found it difficult to believe that these were all just machines — lifeless. Experience had taught him that all moving things were animate; how, then, did that explain cars? Or buses? Or scooters? An appropriate slot had not been found for them in his mind.

Yes. It was a new life, a different life. Each day had lessons to teach; surprises in store. There was a lot to eat; flavours and textures his palate had not encountered before. But sometimes, as he ate new dishes, he would think of the ghee his mother cooked in, rich and delicious. He could almost smell it. He would inhale deeply, afraid that the aroma might drift away. He grew nostalgic as he remembered the dark, fertile soil the corn grew in, the tree he used to sit under with his friends, smoking *bidis* . . . the relaxed, easy existence . . .

At night, he would wake, sweating profusely, wondering where the sky had gone. The tiny room he slept in made him claustrophobic — he was used to sleeping under the stars . . .

He began having vivid dreams. His brothers and sisters were playing, their faces bright and animated. They formed a circle around him and kept running around and around and around. Dizziness overcame him. At other times, he was cutting corn, cob after cob. He cut and cut until his

hands ached and his throat was parched. These images were so clear that they brought him close to his family, his home — familiar things.

He settled into a routine — cooking, cleaning, shopping. Most Sunday evenings were spent in front of the television, watching his favourite actors and actresses singing, dancing, running around trees. During the fighting scenes, when Amitabh won, he longed to stand up and clap. When memsahib was in a good mood, she would even allow him to watch *Chayageet* on Tuesdays. Whenever a familiar tune came on, he wanted to sing, to dance along. But, how could he, with memsahib sitting right there?

The sight of Rekha gyrating her loins made the heat surge in his own. Bahadur imagined himself climbing into the box and taking the hero's place, holding Rekha's hand, touching her, protecting her from the villain. He turned feverish after these sessions.

EVENTUALLY, HE MADE A FRIEND. Ramu, from next door, came over in the afternoons. They sat together and discussed the frustrations of being a servant. Ramu gave lively accounts of his memsahib: how she took off her shoe and threatened to beat him every once in a while; how many cigarettes she smoked; the wild parties she had when sahib was away. . . . His tales were so entertaining that Bahadur began making up his own, hoping they were as dramatic.

"The other night, there were four chickens for dinner. *Four* chickens! And can you guess what she did with the left-overs? Gave them to the dog! The dog, can you be-

lieve it! She considers the dog more important than *me*!" He paused, for effect. "Today, she locked the fridge. Can you imagine! I haven't eaten a thing all day. No, not even a slice."

He was so carried away by his own story that tears filled his eyes. Ramu looked horrified: "Really? My God! Maybe I can sneak out some food for you, a *roti* or something." He patted Bahadur's arm in sympathy.

Soon, it became a healthy competition — whose imagination, whose story-telling capacity, was better.

The memsahib rarely came into the kitchen. Usually, she sent for him. "Bahadur, Bahadur, come quickly." He scuttled forward nervously, and stood in front of her, like a prisoner awaiting his sentence, head bent, eyes averted. He never, never met her eyes.

BUT HE WATCHED HER CONSTANTLY when she was least aware of it. He watched her when she dusted things; the way her clothes strained against her breast when she stretched her arms. Once, she wanted a book from the top-most shelf of the cabinet: "Bahadur, Bahadur, get the stool." He stood there while she climbed the stool, reached up for the book, her *kurta* stretching tight over her hips, making them seem like overstuffed pillows. For a moment he thought they would come looming down on him; he was transfixed. But, it was over all too soon. She was on the ground again, ordering him to take away the stool.

Thinking about it, he realised he did not like the memsahib very much. She was — well, Bahadur supposed she was like any other memsahib. She treated him with the same cool contempt she did the driver or the *dhabhi*. She discouraged any attempts he made at conversation; she rapped out the orders and he obeyed them. At times, overcome with loneliness, he wanted to talk to her — she may very well have been his sister after all. But her cold, indifferent attitude — he could have been the brass horse in the drawing-room as far as she was concerned — put him off.

The sahib, however, was really very generous. It was he, not memsahib, who patted Bahadur on the back, gave him a drink once in a while and money to see a movie. He had never, not once, heard sahib raise his voice. He is a god, Bahadur thought, I am a servant of a god.

Once a week, Bahadur was made to clean out the cobwebs in the corners of the rooms. Standing at the top of the ladder, armed with a long stick, the cobwebs grew into twigs; branches spread around him. He was sitting on the limbs of a *peepul* tree, gazing at the sun peeping through the leaves. Rays filtered through, gently stroking his skin. He climbed up slowly, using the closest branches for support. Squirrels scampered up and down the woody bark; a parrot screeched in his ear, deafening him. He climbed up and up and up. When he reached the top, the huge ball of fire began smouldering and sparking; vermillion tongues of heat lashed out at him, setting him ablaze. He tried to move



down, into the cool green below, but just as his blood started cooling, the sun became a gleaming metallic orb; a powerful magnet drawing him closer and closer until he was plunged into the bubbling, boiling sea of orange. . .

IN THE MORNINGS, when he served them tea, Bahadur would look to see what the memsahib wore. Some days it was a pink gown, other days it was blue. His favourite was the blue; it was made from a soft clinging fabric. Ramu said it was called nylon. When she wore it, Bahadur found it especially difficult to keep his eyes off her. He wondered whether she was deliberately taunting him, goading him to see how far he would go.

Her husband often told her that she should not wear the blue gown outside the bedroom. "Don't you think that thing is a bit provocative? The servants do look, you know."

She laughed. "Servants? You mean HIM! Come off it!" She was amused that her husband could even imagine the servant viewing her as a sex object. The servant was, after all, just a servant — inanimate.

Bahadur had been surrounded by women all his life — his mother, sisters, aunts! The village, too, had plenty of girls. But, unlike the girls in the city, they had been taught to hide their femininity. They seemed almost shapeless, genderless, in comparison. And, it was only after his arrival in the city that he actually became aware of those hidden female attributes. The constant visual assault — memsahib, the girls on the road, television — played havoc with his senses. It amazed him, yet pleased him that women here were so brazen, and flaunted themselves. His awareness added a new dimension to his life; an unexplored, exciting dimension that filled him with trepidation.

Sometimes he felt ashamed of himself. What would his father say? Wouldn't he feel distressed that his eldest son had stooped so low? So Bahadur would make up to his memsahib by working extra hard. He scrubbed the utensils until they shone, even cleaned under the carpets (a task he generally avoided), and cooked sumptuous meals. These acts cleansed his system of guilt and pleased his employers.

"Bahadur, you are a genius," the sahib would say, after eating a particularly good curry.

IT WAS IN THE MILK QUEUE that he saw his dream-girl. She was small and dark, and came for milk at 4:30 every evening. He made sure he was there. Standing behind her in the line, he watched her pert behind as she inched forward. She talked to the men in the market, moving her head this way and that, arching her body. Kohled eyes flashed, white teeth sparkled as she opened her mouth to laugh. She was like an exotic flower. Her name was Durga.

"Ramu, do you have a woman?" Bahadur asked his friend, half afraid of the reply.

"A woman. *One* woman? Never!" Ramu replied with aplomb. "I have two. Every man needs at least two women to keep him happy, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. At least two. I have one, of course. But, how do you manage the second?" he asked, nonchalantly.

"I don't even try, my dear Bahadur. They all come running. In fact, there was this long line outside my quarter, and I had to pick and choose. Memsaib came running out, wondering what all the commotion was about. I think she has actually begun to respect me after that. She doesn't treat me in the same off-hand manner."

Bahadur was shaken after this conversation with Ramu. What was so special about Ramu that he could have two women, while he, Bahadur, had none? Perhaps it was his haircut — Bahadur would find out where Ramu got his done...

Night after night, Bahadur stood in the shadows opposite Durga's room. Most of the time, a piece of cloth was pulled across the little window. On some nights, however, the cloth was not stretched out fully, and he would see fragments of her. A leg, and an arm, and a nose. He ached to see the whole.

HE TOOK TO FOLLOWING GIRLS. Perched on a bicycle, he remained a respectable distance behind his victim. When the coast was clear, he darted forward, like a lizard catching a fly, and muttered obscenities. The startled look of fright he received, thrilled him, giving him a feeling of immense power. But even these incidents could not relieve him of his pent-up longing or his immense frustration.

Work bored him. Each day merged into the next, like raindrops on a window-pane. Was he going to continue this way day after day? Always alone? Was he never going to enjoy the pleasures of female company? These questions preyed on his mind constantly, haunting him at night. He became distracted and withdrawn. Nothing else mattered.

The urge to go back to his village to restore his sanity increased. The turmoil in his mind was, to him, no different from the dirt on the plates; something that could be washed away, that would flow down the drain with the running water. Only the thought of the money he sent home and his parents' disappointment kept him from leaving; even

though the demons in his mind began brandishing knives, threatening to destroy him. As they danced around, their horns prodded and jabbed, sending pinpricks of pain down his spine.

All the memsaib's little idiosyncrasies began bothering him. Her passion for cleanliness — a habit that had earlier amused him — now irked him. She followed him around while he cleaned, looking for areas that might have been missed. "Here Bahadur, here," she pointed her finger at an imaginary spot of dust. He dusted the same spot twice, trying to steady himself and control his resentment; afraid he may do or say something regrettable. His emotions became as turbulent as the milk he boiled every day, simmering at the surface, ready to overflow at the slightest provocation.

All this time he had done what she asked him to, obediently, unquestioningly. Even when she had inspected each fork, each plate, for smears of grease, he had only watched her patiently, always aware of his position. In the past, her humiliating capacity for remembering every *chappati*, every potato that was left over, and asking for them if they were missing, had irritated him. But never had his reactions been so violent, so completely out of proportion.

THEY BEGAN HAVING CONSTANT ROWS. Her husband often returned in the evening to be greeted by raised voices; hers harsh and threatening, and his, whining and pleading. He often cautioned her to bend her standards a little, but she continued to pick at every small thing, looking for an opportunity to pull the servant up.

There were times when Bahadur hoped she had noticed him, his intensity. Instead, she looked at him scornfully, with disdain. A pain started spreading in his chest, slowly penetrating towards his heart, tying the arteries and veins into minute knots...

Durga and he were together. Strange, she was thinner than he had imagined. And one leg was slightly shorter than the other, like his. He decided that this was no accident of nature. It was *kismet*, fate. Fate had brought them together. They were beautifully tuned to each other; she was kind and considerate of his needs, and he, of hers. At some stage, he noticed Durga had exchanged places with another woman. He strained to see who it was. Why! Memsaib!

His body started melting. Bones turned into a gelatinous mass; joints slackened, separated, and remained loosely suspended, dangling oddly. He became a shapeless, sliding blob, like an amoeba. He slithered and slipped towards a big black crevice in the ground. The protoplasm slid down the hole, gliding along, splattering the walls.

The bell was ringing. It was time to awaken, to splash water in his eyes and begin the day's work. Set sahib and memsaib's tea-tray. He knew they were sitting in the verandah right now, waiting. But today, Bahadur could not wake up. The thought of being polite to his employers, behaving as if he was happy, was unbearable. He ignored

the bell. Pulling the sheet over his head, he curled up into a tight ball, shutting out the world. The minutes ticked by. Eventually, memsahib's shrill voice shattered the silence. He lay still, motionless.

A LOUD BANGING shook the door — sahib was ordering him to get up. The stern authoritative voice made Bahadur nervous. He dragged himself out of bed and opened the door — sahib stood there in his dressing-gown looking exasperated. I am ill, he told sahib, I have a stomach-ache. Sahib was sympathetic. I'll give you some medicine, he said. Bahadur cursed under his breath. He imagined himself, knife in hand, threatening sahib. Sahib was against the wall, at his mercy, begging Bahadur to put the knife down: I'll increase your salary. I'll do anything, anything at all. Bahadur made a mental list of all the things he needed — a comb, a tooth-brush, maybe a pen.

When he went inside, memsahib was sullenly carrying the tray. He rushed forward to take it from her but she just looked at him as if he were a piece of dirt.

She began feeling a bit tense in the servant's presence. This man was different from the raw and subservient chap who had arrived from the village six months ago, eager to please. He even looked at her differently — almost insolently, she thought. The other day, when she had accused him of eating an orange he had actually denied it, looking her straight in the eye! His resentment, his hostility, had thrown her off balance. She was beginning to feel the situation getting out of control. This morning's incident really was the limit. She could not understand it; they paid him well, he had enough to eat, a roof over his head, so, what was his problem?

SOME WEEKS LATER they were throwing a big party — 30 people or so. She was busy organising the food and drinks, the seating arrangements, the flowers. They hired a bartender, but he let them down at the last moment. She was desperate. Bahadur would have to serve the drinks. What choice was there?

He felt proud in his white shirt and trousers, like a real waiter. People came and went: Make me a whisky! Give me a soft drink! Can you mix a good gin and lime?

He mixed glass after glass, adding ice, water, soda, lime juice, orange juice. When no one was looking, he would take a quick swig. One swig, two swigs, three swigs, four . . . He began to feel peculiar, almost as if he was floating. His hands shook. The guests began getting double measures — rum, whisky, gin — whatever they wanted. Soon, the party was roaring with drunken laughter. They like my drinks, he thought with glee, I make good drinks.

Memsahib came to him looking murderous. "What are you doing, you idiot?" she hissed.

Blood rushed to his head, he felt so hot, steam seemed to be seeping out of his pores. She stood there, the witch, calling *him* names?! How dare she! Her bloated face came nearer and nearer, her eyes darting fire, burning him. Her

features dispersed; the nose and mouth floating into the air, the eyes almost inside him. He leant on the table, unable to support himself.

A loud banging woke him. Sahib was shouting. Bahadur looked around, disoriented. Where was she? Had she gone away? He stumbled to the door. There stood sahib. A sahib Bahadur did not know or recognise. Red and angry, breathing hard, "Get out. Do you hear? Out."

Get out? Him? For what? He was sure he had not heard right. A shadow crossed his mind. He clutched his legs to make sure they were still there. He rubbed them, afraid that they might dissolve, slip away. He saw that he had to save himself; protect himself from those hands reaching out to grab him . . .

STANDING OUTSIDE THE DOOR, he could hear the running water. Footsteps pattered to and fro; she hummed to herself. He visualised her removing her clothes, stepping under the water, washing her sins away. Suddenly, he realised how quiet the house was. They were alone, his memsahib and he. Completely alone. Like a robot, whose actions are programmed, he put his eye to the keyhole. She was rubbing soap on her arms, working up a creamy white lather. Water cascaded over her, over the creaminess, carrying it away. She was enjoying the sensation, unaware of the eyes watching her. Eyes steaming with conflicting emotions — desire . . . hate . . .

From a great distance he watched himself contracting, becoming smaller and smaller, thinner and thinner, until he was miles below the keyhole, face to face with a wall, the door. He got down on all fours and tried to clamber up the wall. But it was too smooth and he kept slithering back to the ground, with a thud. With horror he watched his hands and feet changing into suckers that latched on to the wall, carrying him higher and higher . . .

There was a thump; his head hit the door-handle. He searched desperately for a foothold: it was right there, below, in the keyhole. Inch by inch, his body slid through the hole, bringing him to the other side of the wall.

Water flowed, screams flooded the bathroom.

He sat huddled in the corner of the little cell, surrounded by spitting men. A powerful stench arose from the floor and walls, filling him with nausea. He shuddered and put his hand over his nose.

Like magic, the smell of wet earth overpowered the stench, permeating his nostrils, infusing his body. It was the earth in his village, his fields. Invisible hands were plastering it over his limbs. It was so cool, so soothing. Bit by bit, it covered his entire body, comforting his tormented brain. A cocoon began forming around his body. A thick, heavy cocoon that weighed him down.

Down, down and down, until he was deeply immersed in the earth, eye to eye with the corn seedlings sown last season. He watched them germinating, elongating and stretching until they reached the sun . . .

Why, he hadn't realised it took so long! ♦

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